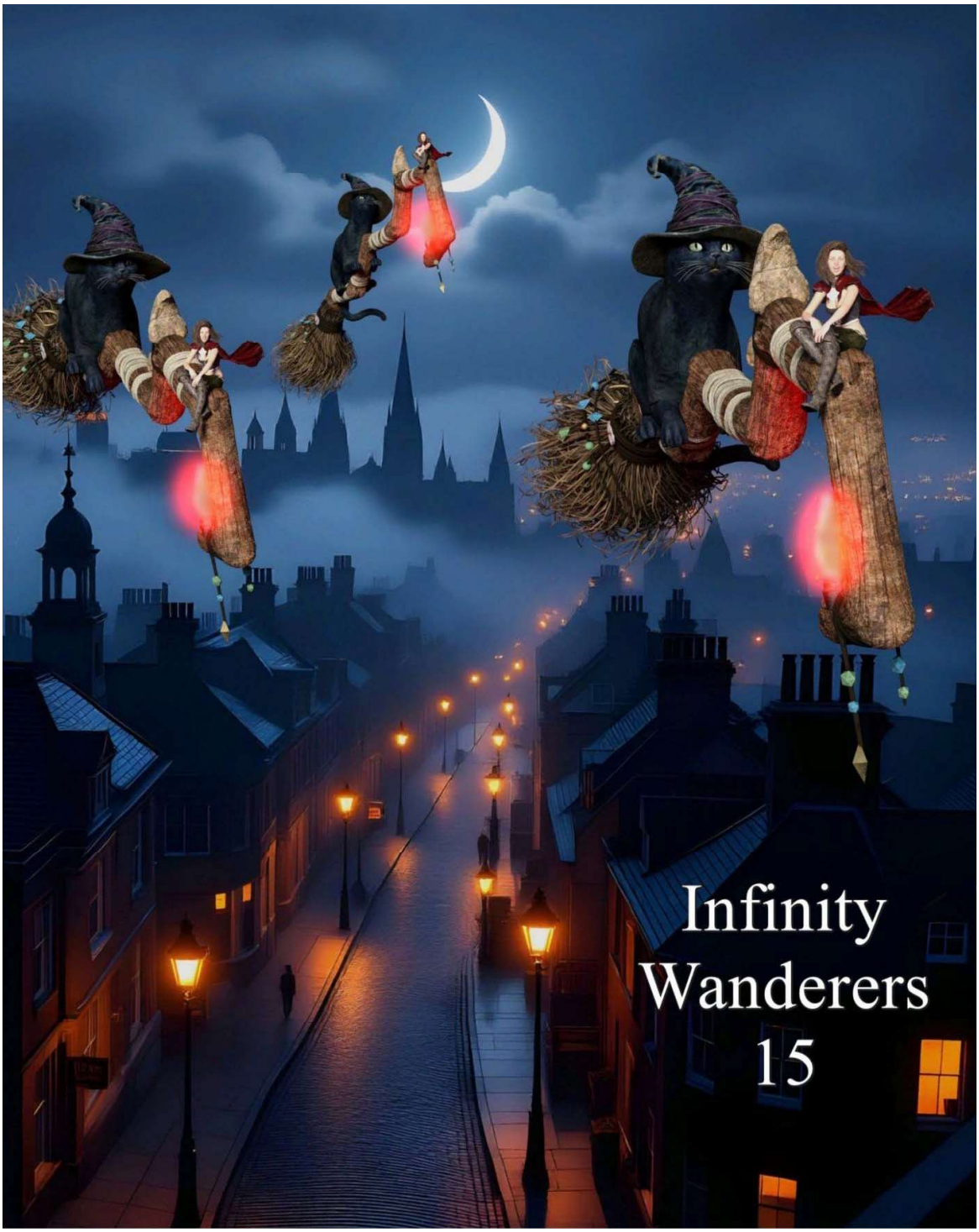
Infinity
Wanderers
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Alice's Adventure in Neverland

by Matias Travieso-Diaz

Let the jury consider their verdict." the King said, for about the twentieth time that day.
"No, no!" said the Queen. "Sentence first—verdict afterwards."
Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

One hot and sunny afternoon, little Alice sat morosely by the river bank. She was listless and ill at ease, for she had not eaten in two days and her stomach was growling. All of a sudden, a chubby white rabbit darted across the lawn in front of her. It was formally attired, wore a round red hat with some white writing on it, and was muttering: "I'm late, I'm late, for a glorious dinner date!" To Alice's wonderment, the rabbit extracted an expensive watch from its waistcoat and repeated its lament.

"That's quite peculiar" wondered Alice, but then the rabbit plunged into a large hole under a nearby hedge. Alice paused, but then the word "dinner" flashed back into her memory. Her family was dirt poor and she could not remember ever having been to a "glorious dinner" in all her seven years. She followed the rabbit's lead and plunged into the hole feet first. She should have remembered she was brown instead of white and a little girl, not a fat rabbit, so she might not have been welcomed wherever the rabbit was going, but she went down nonetheless.

It was a very long, difficult descent down a narrow tunnel, made harder by darkness and the roughness of the stones that brushed against her naked arms and feet. She was starting to despair from ever touching the ground when her feet suddenly went thump! thump! and she came upon a heap of sticks and dry leaves, and the fall was over.

Where am I? she wondered, for she found herself in a long corridor with a multitude of locked doors on both sides. Finally, she came upon a table upon which rested a little golden key and a bottle bearing the label "DRINK ME." She picked up the key and started trying all doors in turn. The key did not fit on any of the locks, and she soon tired and got thirsty. She returned to the table, picked up the flask and took a sip. The beverage was delicious but, before she could quite savor it, the table got progressively larger and the bottle grew in her hand until she could no longer hold it and let it fall into the ground. The key also had grown, and now she could only grasp it with difficulty.

She turned around and, as she continued to amble through the corridor, Alice came upon a door, smaller and narrower than the rest. She tried to open it with her key and, lo and behold, the complex lock mechanism worked and she was able to peek beyond the door: it opened into a beautiful garden full of multicolored flowers and bright green blades of grass. There was a very large mushroom growing nearby, and on the top of it sat a blue caterpillar, arms folded, quietly

smoking a long hookah. Eventually, the caterpillar took the hookah out of its mouth, yawned, and shook itself. Then it got down off the mushroom and crawled away in the grass, remarking as it went, “One side will make you grow taller, and the other side will make you grow shorter.”

“One side of what? The other side of what?” shouted Alice.

“Of the mushroom,” said the caterpillar and, in another moment, was out of sight.

Alice stretched her arms round the mushroom as far as they would go, and broke off bits of its edge with each hand. After some experiments with shrinking and booming, she felt she had it right and could control her size to fit her desires. She walked for a bit through the garden and came upon a Cheshire cat sitting on a bough of a tree a few yards off.

“Cheshire Puss,” she began, rather timidly. “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”

“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.

“I don’t much care where—” said Alice.

“Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” said the Cat.

Alice tried another question. “What sort of people live around here?”

“In that direction,” the Cat said, waving its right paw round, “lives a Hatter: and in that direction,” waving the other paw, “lives a March Hare. Visit either if you like: they’re both mad.”

“But I don’t want to be among mad people,” Alice remarked.

“Oh, you can’t help that,” said the Cat: “we’re all mad around here. I’m mad. You’re mad.”

“How do you know I’m mad?” said Alice.

“You must be,” said the Cat, “or you wouldn’t have come to this land.”

Alice proceeded with her walk and came upon a large rose bush near the entrance of the garden. The roses growing on it were white, but there were three gardeners around it, busily painting them red. “Would you please tell me,” Alice said a little timidly, “why are you painting those roses red?”

One of the gardeners replied in a low voice, “Miss, this here was ordered to be a red rose bush, but it insists on being white; if the Queen finds out, we should all have our heads cut off. As they say, ‘whatever Lola wants, Lola gets.’” At this moment another gardener, who had been anxiously looking out, called out “The Queen! The Queen!” and the three of them instantly threw themselves flat upon their faces.

First came ten soldiers carrying clubs; these were all shaped like the gardeners, oblong and flat, with their hands and feet at the corners. Next came ten courtiers; these were ornamented all over with diamonds. Following were the guests, mostly kings and queens, and among them Alice recognized the White Rabbit: it was talking in a hurried, nervous manner, smiling at everything that was said; he went by without noticing her. Then followed the Knave of Hearts, carrying the King’s crown on a crimson velvet cushion; and, last came the King and his consort, an old, chubby, and homely Queen of Hearts.

When the procession came opposite to Alice, they all stopped and looked at her, and the Queen said severely: “What’s your name, child?”

“My name is Alice, so please your Majesty,” said Alice politely; but she added, to herself, “Why, they’re only a pack of flimsy cards, after all. I needn’t be afraid of them!”

“And who are these?” said the Queen, pointing to the three gardeners who were lying round the rose bush. “How should I know?” said Alice, surprised at her own courage. “It’s no business of mine.”

The Queen turned crimson with fury, and, after glaring at her for a moment like a wild beast, screamed “Off with her head! Off—”

The King laid his hand upon her arm, and timidly said: “My dear, she is only a child!” The Queen turned to the gardeners and ordered: “Get up!” in a shrill, loud voice. The three gardeners instantly jumped up, and began bowing to the King, the Queen, and everybody else.

“Leave off that!” screamed the Queen. “You make me giddy.” And then she went on, “What have you been doing here?”

“May it please your Majesty,” said one of them, in a very humble tone, going down on one knee as he spoke, “we were trying—”

“I see!” the Queen cut him off. After examining the half-painted roses, she exploded: “Off with their heads!” and the procession moved on.

The King and Queen of Hearts then returned to their quarters. They sat on their thrones and a great crowd assembled about them—all sorts of little birds and beasts, as well as the whole pack of cards. The Knave was standing before them, in chains, with a soldier on each side to guard him; and near the King was the White Rabbit, with a trumpet in one hand, and a scroll of parchment in the other. In the very middle of the court was a table, with a dish of strawberry tarts upon it.

Alice had never been in a court of justice before, but she had read about them in books, and she was quite pleased to find that she knew the name of nearly everything there. “That’s the judge,” she said to herself, “because of his great wig.” The judge, who was the King, did not look at all comfortable.

“And that’s the jury-box,” thought Alice, “and those twelve squirming creatures I suppose are the jurors.”

The White Rabbit then cried out, “Silence in the court!” and the King put on his spectacles and said: “Herald, read the indictment!”

On this the White Rabbit blew three blasts on the trumpet, unrolled the parchment scroll, and read as follows: “The Queen of Hearts, she made some tarts, all on a summer day; the Knave of Hearts, he stole those tarts, and took them quite away!”

“Consider your verdict,” the King said to the jury.

“Not yet, not yet!” the rabbit interrupted. “There’s a great deal to come before that!”

“Call the first witness,” said the King; and the rabbit blew three blasts on the trumpet, and called out, “First witness!”

The first witness was the Hatter. He came in with a teacup in one hand and a piece of bread-and-butter in the other. “I beg pardon, your Majesty,” he began, “for bringing these in: but I hadn’t quite finished my tea when I was sent for.”

“Take off your hat,” the King said to the Hatter.

“It isn’t mine,” said the Hatter.

“Stolen!” the King exclaimed, turning to the jury, who instantly made a memorandum of the fact.

“I keep them to sell,” the Hatter added as an explanation; “I’ve none of my own. I’m a hatter.”

Here the Queen put on her spectacles, and began glaring at the Hatter, who turned pale and fidgeted.

“Give your evidence,” said the King; “and don’t be nervous, or I’ll have you executed on the spot.” The Hatter dropped his teacup and bread-and-butter, and went down on one knee. “I’m a poor man, your Majesty,” he began, and then stopped.

“You’re a very poor speaker,” said the King. The Hatter remained silent.

“You may go,” said the King, and the Hatter hurriedly left the court.

“Call the next witness!” said the King.

“Dormouse!” summoned the rabbit.

“Collar that Dormouse,” the Queen shrieked out. “I hate him! Behead him! Turn that Dormouse out of court! Suppress him! Pinch him! Off with his whiskers!”

“Never mind!” said the King, with an air of great relief. “Call the next witness.”

Alice watched the White Rabbit as he fumbled over the list, feeling very curious to see who the next witness would be, when the White Rabbit read out, at the top of his shrill little voice, the name “Alice!”

“Here!” cried Alice.

“What do you know about this business?” the King said to Alice.

“Nothing,” said Alice.

“Nothing whatsoever?” persisted the King.

“Nothing whatsoever,” said Alice.

“That’s very important,” the King said, turning to the jury. They were just beginning to write this down on their slates, when the White Rabbit interrupted: “Unimportant, your Majesty means, of course,” he said in a very respectful tone, but frowning and making faces at him as he spoke.

“Unimportant, of course, I meant,” the King hastily said, and shut his notebook. “Consider your verdict,” he said to the jury, in a low, trembling voice.

“There’s more evidence to come yet, please your Majesty,” said the White Rabbit, jumping up in a great hurry; “this paper has just been picked up.”

“What’s in it?” said the Queen.

“I haven’t opened it yet,” said the White Rabbit, “but it seems to be a letter, written by the prisoner to—to somebody.”

“Who is it directed to?” said one of the jurymen.

“It isn’t directed at all,” said the White Rabbit; “in fact, there’s nothing written on the outside.” He unfolded the paper as he spoke, and added “It isn’t a letter, after all: it’s a set of verses.”

“Are they in the prisoner’s handwriting?” asked another of the jurymen.

“No, they’re not,” said the White Rabbit, “and that’s the queerest thing about it.”

“Please your Majesty,” said the Knave, “I didn’t write it, and they can’t prove I did: there’s no name signed at the end.”

“If you didn’t sign it,” said the King, “that only makes the matter worse. You must have meant some mischief, or else you’d have signed your name like an honest man.”

“That proves his guilt,” said the Queen with a sneer. “Read it,” said the King.

These were the verses the White Rabbit read:

“They told me you had been to her,
And mentioned me to him:
She gave me a good character,
But said I could not swim.

He sent them word I had not gone
(We know it to be true):
If she should push the matter on,
What would become of you?

I gave her one, they gave him two,
You gave us three or more;
They all returned from him to you,
Though they were mine before.

If I or she should chance to be
Involved in this affair,
He trusts to you to set them free,
Exactly as we were.

My notion was that you had been
(Before she was this fat)
An obstacle that came between
Him, and ourselves, and that.

Don't let him know she liked them best,
For this must ever be
A secret, kept from all the rest,
Between yourself and me."

"That's the most important piece of evidence we've heard yet," said the King, rubbing his hands; "so now let the jury—"

"I don't believe," said Alice, "there's an atom of meaning in it."

"If there's no meaning in it," said the King, "that saves a world of trouble, you know, as we needn't try to find any. And yet I don't know," he went on, spreading out the verses on his knee, and looking at them with one eye; "I seem to see some meaning in them, after all. "—said I could not swim—" you can't swim, can you?" he added, turning to the Knave.

The Knave shook his head sadly. "Do I look like it?" he said. (Which he certainly did not, being made entirely of cardboard.)

"All right, so far," said the King, and he went on muttering over the verses to himself: "'We know it to be true—' that's the jury, of course—'I gave her one, they gave him two—' why, that must be what he did with the tarts, you know—"

"But, it goes on 'they all returned from him to you,'" said Alice.

“Why, there they are!” said the King triumphantly, pointing to the tarts on the table. “Nothing can be clearer than that. Then again—‘before she became this fat —’ you never have been fat, my dear, I think?” he said to the Queen.

“Never!” said the Queen furiously.

The King added in a peremptory tone: “Let the jury consider their verdict.”

“No, no!” said the Queen. “Sentence first—verdict afterwards.”

“Ridiculous!” protested Alice. “The idea of having the sentence first!”

“Hold your tongue!” said the Queen, turning purple.

“I won’t!” said Alice.

“Off with her head!” the Queen shouted at the top of her voice.

“Who cares for you?” said Alice. “You’re nothing but a pack of cards and soon will fall all over the place!”

At this the whole pack rose up into the air, and came flying down upon her: she gave a little scream, half of fright and half of anger, tried to beat them off, and found herself lying on the river bank, with her head in the lap of her sister, who was gently brushing away some dead leaves that had fluttered down from the trees upon her face.

“Wake up, Alice!” said her sister. “Why, what a long sleep you’ve had!”

“Oh, I’ve had such a curious dream!” said Alice, “but I am so glad to be home and never to have gone there.”

END

With thanks and apologies to Lewis Carroll

Matias Travieso-Diaz

Born in Cuba, Matias Travieso-Diaz migrated to the United States as a young man. He became an engineer and lawyer and practiced for nearly fifty years. After retirement, he took up creative writing. Over one hundred and eighty of his short stories have been published or accepted for publication in a wide range of story anthologies, magazines, blogs, audio books and podcasts. A novel, an autobiography entitled “Cuban Transplant,” and four anthologies of his stories have also been published.