
10-14-2021

Malice in Wonder-How-This-Happened Land: Falling Down the Political Rabid Hole of Academia

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Recommended APA Citation

McDonald, D. (2021). Malice in Wonder-How-This-Happened Land: Falling Down the Political Rabid Hole of Academia. *The Qualitative Report*, 26(10), 3144-3170. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.4913>

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Abstract

Spiritedly inspired by the well-known, nonsensical children's stories *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, this satirical narrative describes common academic experiences within a fictitious frame. Many children's stories present a foundational basis for the early life lessons of justice, truth, fairness, and how power corrupts. Therefore, regression to a simpler understanding of complex social interactions potentially frees one's thinking, which frequently becomes muddled in adult-acquired ego, hubris, and sense of status. So, when adults act illogically (or like children), sense can be made of unreasonable juvenile actions by re-storying irrational episodes through the logical lens of adolescent literature and satire; thereby, establishing a safe distance for examining emotional issues and tapping into imagination for making meaning of taxing experiences. This deliberately playful narrative explores how in academia, the projection of privilege and power often generates troublesome challenges that lead down a political rabid hole of unsolvable riddles.

Keywords

narrative, satire, fiction, academia, power

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Malice in Wonder-How-This-Happened Land: Falling Down the Political Rabid Hole of Academia

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Spiritedly inspired by the well-known, nonsensical children's stories *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, this satirical narrative describes common academic experiences within a fictitious frame. Many children's stories present a foundational basis for the early life lessons of justice, truth, fairness, and how power corrupts. Therefore, regression to a simpler understanding of complex social interactions potentially frees one's thinking, which frequently becomes muddled in adult-acquired ego, hubris, and sense of status. So, when adults act illogically (or like children), sense can be made of unreasonable juvenile actions by re-storying irrational episodes through the logical lens of adolescent literature and satire; thereby, establishing a safe distance for examining emotional issues and tapping into imagination for making meaning of taxing experiences. This deliberately playful narrative explores how in academia, the projection of privilege and power often generates troublesome challenges that lead down a political rabid hole of unsolvable riddles.

Keywords: narrative, satire, fiction, academia, power

Introduction

Alice said, "It would be so nice if something made sense for a change."
(Geronimi et al., 1951)

Spiritedly inspired by the well-known, nonsensical children's stories *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* (See Carroll, 2015) and the analogous animated film *Alice in Wonderland* (Geronimi et al., 1951), this satirical narrative describes common academic experiences within a fictitious frame. Many children's stories present a foundational basis for early life lessons of justice, truth, fairness, and how power corrupts. Therefore, regression to a simpler understanding of complex social interactions potentially frees one's thinking, which frequently becomes muddled in adult-acquired ego, hubris, and sense of status. So, when adults act illogically (or like children), sense can be made of unreasonable juvenile actions by re-storying irrational episodes through the logical lens of adolescent literature. This deliberately playful narrative explores how in academia, projection of privilege and power often generates troublesome challenges that lead down a political rabid hole of unsolvable riddles.

Purpose

"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. (Carroll, 2015, pp. 64-65)

This narrative is not written in a traditional format. Rather, the story explores use of a creatively roguish expression of experiences through fiction (safely couched within a commonly known children’s story). Selection of this approach and style may seem counterintuitive to scholarly writing or academic endeavors but, based on observations of how truth and power collide in academia (as well as current-day politics), it is no more ridiculous than the make-believe method and manner by which some intellectual arguments are divisively posed and played out. Additionally, in this narrative, a fictitious frame helps – protect identities (i.e., inspirational muses), establish safe distance for examining emotional issues, and tap into imaginative writing through creation of illusory settings for analyzing and making meaning of taxing experiences (See Caine et al., 2017). A secondary purpose of this piece is to test the boundaries of narrative writing in unfolding a sardonic story. Is satire welcome to the fold? Lastly, as a fictitious narrative, this is a stand-alone story where no prior knowledge of *Alice in Wonderland* is required for understanding the story line or inherent constructs presented; however, if the reader is familiar with the children’s story, an added layer of meaning can possibly provide a chortle or two.

Literature

“Speak English!” said the Eaglet. “I don’t know the meaning of half those long words, and I don’t believe you do either!” (Carroll, 2015, p. 26)

Hegemony

Invariably, in organizations, privileged dominate groups exist and exert influence on decision-making processes that benefit that group’s goals and agenda and diminish subordinate or minority factions (Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Humphreys & Brown, 2002). Unfortunately, resistance from non-dominate groups becomes difficult to establish and maintain the longer the power-seeking group retains authority (Sue, 2015). Academic environments are afflicted with hegemonic challenges, where underserved parties’ opinions are suppressed through intimidation and their ideological views are infested as dominant groups become stealthily legitimized in the social system and steeped in organizational values (Baumeister & Dwall, 2005; Zerubavel, 2006). Historically, hegemony reproduces expected outcomes including self-interests and status, social structures, and in-group membership of an organization, constructed alliances, and blocks to resistance or the voicing of concerns from out-groups.

Furthermore, power groups corrupt through the twisting of truths and faulting of fairness processes; thereby, subordinate ideologies are often discredited, silenced, or excluded where “true” justice is jeopardized (and rarely realized). Essentially, hegemony and injustice are co-morbidities in a toxic organizational environment. Proviso – In this paper, there is no dense Foucauldian discussion of truth, power, and knowledge as related to institutional hegemony (although he is referenced later in this paper). However, the author acknowledges that power is political; and therefore, produces “truths” which reinforce and valorize creation, establishment, and circulation of power groups’ ideologies and political relations within a system.

Imagining Justice

Justice is difficult to imagine and execute when the vision of justice is blurred within an environment imbued in hegemonic branding. This phenomenon is most evident through power groups' covertly crafted complicity of subordinate members; and more strangely, how some disenfranchised individuals unwittingly consent to their own disparity and oppression (baited by some nominal or token "acceptance" or feigned recognition by power groups). Individuals in any social group desire inclusion, a sense of belonging, recognition, and fairness. Exclusion from the social group removes fair representation and entitlement for rendering justice claims (Fraser, 2005). Basically, in-groups of an organization set the stage for establishing the standards of social acceptance (i.e., who is included or excluded); and therefore, foundationally create a monological stance for justice where no dialogical and democratic means for fairness and claims of injustices can be vetted. Through in-groups' recognized and accepted privileged knowledge, their power determines the who, what, and how of policy formation and the undertaking of justice issues. The marginalized have no voice, no right to due process, and are relatively powerless for initiating intervention or launching resistance. Imagining justice and enacting just measures necessitate a collective vision of critical clarity, commitment to inclusivity, and valuing of pluralistic principles.

Leadership and Ethical Decision Making

To counter systemic hegemony and resulting injustices, leaders in academia must ensure fairness through sound, prudent, and ethical decisions as well as principled decision-making processes (Cropanzano et al., 2001; Hassan et al., 2013). This is a challenging task considering "authentic and productive leadership requires a capacity to deal with situational complexities as well as an aptitude for harmonizing conflicts amongst unique personalities" (McDonald, 2020a, p. 151). Additionally, "established organizational norms that advantage some over others, often defy and challenge authentic leaders' good intentions" (McDonald, 2020a, p. 156). The complexity of institutional environments imbued with faulty processes and power players who promote toxic work climates poses significant problems for leaders when facing multiple parties who consider their stance to be "correct."

In sum, virtuous leadership involves ethical and moral constructs and actions of integrity, trust, and honorable relational connections with others (Xu et al., 2016). Not all leaders possess these characteristics or value and enact these skills for invoking fairness. The absence of authentic leadership forms the juncture where decency often descends into the problematic rabid hole of discrimination and wrongdoing toward others. Moral constructs of leadership and ethical decision making are implanted in the storyline.

Methods

"Come, we shall have some fun now!" thought Alice. "I'm glad they've begun asking riddles—I believe I can guess that," she added aloud. "Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?" said the March Hare. "Exactly so," said Alice. "Then you should say what you mean," the March Hare went on. "I do," Alice hastily replied: "at least—at least I mean what I say—that's the same thing, you know." (Carroll, 2015, pp. 98-99)

The mode of investigation for this piece is fictitious narrative inquiry, which allows for free expression and reporting of unique phenomena within a fictional story frame.

Fictitious Narrative Inquiry

Storytelling welcomes others into one's world. In this fictionalized narrative, the reader is drawn to hear a counter story of marginalized "others" that differs from the dominant narrative of a university setting (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Smith & Sparkes, 2008; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Fictitious narratives serve as creative catalysts for exploring ostracizing experiences in academia; particularly, when events unfurl in illogical and formidable fashions (Bochner, 2001; Caine & Steeves, 2009; Gabriel, 2000; McDonald, 2016). Fiction also allows the writer to problematize what is commonly accepted and rarely questioned or contested (Barone, 2001). Fictitious narratives present potential to dismantle microaggressions and confront or defy oppressive majoritarian stories. For a writer, fictitious narratives can be emotionally and intellectually liberating through a veiled act of insubordination and defiance toward an established ideology; especially, when truth has been suppressed or erased by power. Lastly, "Perhaps truth is no stranger to fiction" (McDonald, 2016, p. 4) where fictitious writing arouses alethurgy (i.e., truth production, truth telling; See Foucault, 2011). Through fictitious narrative, a more profound and panoramic interpretation of life experiences potentially incites and delivers "truth" through poetic exposure and enlightenment of political power issues and injustices (Barone, 2001, 2007).

Creative Literary Elements

Fictitious writing lends well to use of rhetorical literary devices such as: allegory, metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; McDonald et al., 2016; Pollio, 1996), alliteration, imagery, humor (especially, satire), and word play (such as puns, anagrams, rhymes, double entendres, etc.). Lewis Carroll (pen name Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) was a master at utilizing these creative components in his writing. This parody attempts to honor his work (shabbily, but happily) through similar artistic literary tactics and by featuring quirky characters, mischievous teasing with words, and prickly humor. Use of innovative literary elements (i.e., playing with words and concepts) releases imaginative thinking and potentially generates freedom to explore and develop new perspectives (Harris, 2006; Pellegrini, 2009). Caveat – In this piece, extensive use of alliteration was anticipated to amplify the absurd but may be awfully annoying or aggravating to some readers.

Spoofing Through Satire

Most forms of humor are innocuous and provide levity for readers to enjoy. Although playfully staged in this piece, satire as a literary tool is more than an element of harmless amusement; it is intended to stimulate critical inquiry through multiple perspectives and promote agency for transforming thinking beyond established norms and unquestioned conditions of an organization (Caron, 2002; Deen, 2018; Dwyer, 1991; Goldman, 2013). As a harsher form of humor, satire IS socially subversive, scorching, sensational, sharply shrewd, subjective, seriously silly, sarcastic, sordid, seditious, starkly scrupulous, scandalous, sneeringly scalding, and salacious! Historically renowned to thrive on highlighting incongruencies, exposing hypocrisies, condemning moral injustices, illuminating discrepancies, subverting authority, panning pompous and prideful power players, and urging ethical actions; satire is uniquely equipped to right societal wrongs and serve as a political corrective (Combs & Nimmo, 1996; Morreall, 2014). Therefore, it is the most formidable form of comedy to affectively and effectively mock or discredit unjust elements of organizational politics and ills of society (Deen, 2018; Goldman, 2013; Ziv, 1988). Moreover, satire poignantly offers readers perspective and connection regarding abusive, anxiety-producing, or

oppressive life experiences (Deen, 2018; Dwyer, 1991; Goldman, 2013). For some individuals, satire diffuses tensions, breaches biases of divisive differences, and supplies comfort and transcendence from life injustices through a cathartic release of exasperation with societal vices, social limitations, and political shenanigans. For more aggressive others, satire is used to assertively spit on searing societal issues. And although spitting may not extinguish the raging fires of injustice, the associated ridicule foils follies and dismantles power sources, which cleaves space for change. For the author, truth-telling involves sharing fictitious satirical stories, where proof is evident in the spoof (See McDonald, 2016, 2019, 2020b, 2021). In this fictitious narrative, satire is used to unmask maniacal measures within organizations and the malicious and manipulative manners in which dominance is maintained. Satire can be morosely maddening, but maddening in a virtuous and agentive fashion when targeted actions against power abuses and abusers result in hopeful and gratifying punchlines (bada bing!; Roberts, 1988).

Data Sources

Data sources include the researcher's journal notes, observations in the field of academia, and collected stories or narrated storied events shared by colleagues and academics over the course of several years. These sources deliver richness and depth of experience across multiple universities and disciplines; however, the highly personal aspects of specific events and observed actions are difficult to simply apply anonymity through pseudonyms and other concealing methods. Therefore, multiple data sources were triangulated (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Patton, 2001) and then melded into one fictitious story to provide sufficient obscurity of participants and events in their academic world (Caine et al., 2017). Fiction eliminates negative consequences and potential repercussions for those who willingly share their stories.

Data Analysis

Analysis involved multiple, complex steps across differing data sources. First, all shared stories were transcribed and served as the main data source. Initial analysis of the stories involved an inductive constant comparison, open coding process (Gall et al., 2007) to broadly identify themes and categories of the events of each shared story and character traits of individuals in those stories (Berg, 2009; Creswell, 2007). Main categories of storied experiences (i.e., regarding experiences in academia, identified as betrayal, alienation, oppression, polarizing powers, to name a few) were identified through "saturation" evidence (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) when "no new information seems to emerge during coding" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 136). All stories analyzed were related or parallel in experiences of oppression and power assertion over marginalized individuals. A similar analysis process was used for identifying characteristics of individual personalities in the stories (such as, altruistic, arrogant, pragmatic, aggressive, and others). Observation data were analyzed as well for related and complementary themes. At one point during analysis, an idea emerged, as a heuristic process, to creatively combine the stories and meld character traits within a fictional frame of a commonly known children's fantasy (Browse et al., 2019; Sparkes, 2003). The fantasy, *Alice in Wonderland* (Geronimi et al., 1951), would be used as a template to represent analysis of data through themes, storyline (events), as well as characters, motives, and dialogue (Riessman, 2008). This non-conventional approach of fictionalizing data and utilizing a fictional children's story to "re-story" events is a backhanded approach to customary narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000); nevertheless, the method seamlessly and persuasively captures the moral dilemmas and distinctive characters of the collected stories through a meaning-making process (Leavy, 2012). The intent with fictionalization was to move beyond pure description to

illuminate common challenges related to power forces experienced in organizational setting and rouse imaginings that expand understanding of the phenomenon regarding situated social realities.

Themes across all stories shared (triangulated with journal notes and observations) were used as referential points. Writing the story was the most challenging aspect of the analysis process for lucidly representing the findings. Fictionalization involved playfulness in expressing ideas and portraying characters; conversely, serious satire was brazenly applied to the plotline and characters for rhetorical effect and to teasingly capture the allusion of truth. In sum, through fictionalization of representative data findings, the created story would be “artfully ambiguous and socially conscientious” (Barone, 2007, p. 358).

Self-as-a-Researcher and Storyteller

As a researcher-storyteller of this fictitious script, liberties were taken to temporally suspend readers’ disbelief long enough to propose other possibilities and capture core elements of experiential hardships and social challenges in academia (e.g., systemic hegemony and marginalization). Bias is acknowledged as a challenge for addressing validity concerns in fiction-based research (Leavy, 2015; Polkinghorne, 2007); most notably, regarding subjectivity, persuasiveness, interpretation, and positional privilege of the researcher as the storyteller. Triangulation of multiple data and methodological sources (i.e., researcher’s journal notes, field observations, and multiple collected stories from many academics across several institutions) serves as one strategy used to support validity through convergence of various data sources (Denzin, 2006; Tashakkori & Teddle, 2003). Additionally, participants who shared their stories provided input through a member-checking process (Birt et al., 2016; Creswell, 2007) in which they confirmed that salient aspects of their angst-ridden stories were captured through the fictitious version and truth claims were evident in the moral dilemmas described. Additionally, several colleagues with expertise in narrative inquiry served as impartial reviewers to examine trustworthiness of the story and alignment with the identified themes. Ongoing member checks and collegial reviews resulted in multiple iterations and revisions of the story.

Lastly, to methodology purists, the researcher-storyteller acknowledges that fiction hampers validity as subjectivity runs rampant through use of fictionalized representation as the medium for reporting results; however, all stories present biases and limitations. Moreover, fiction, often steeped in truth and referential data, best serves to problematize assumptions, explore critical perspectives, challenge conventional thinking, generate new alternatives, and imagine myriad future possibilities. The stories shared in this study summoned satirical expression of oppressive experiences that directly countered dominant narratives; therefore, a fictionalized story served that purpose (Leavy, 2012).

Context

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

“Oh, you can’t help that,” said the Cat; “we’re all mad 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 here.” (Carroll, 2015, p. 65)

The narrator of the story is an observer and not represented in any of the characters; therefore, it is narrated in third-person omniscient. Based on observations of academics (at

several institutional settings), the story is fictitiously morphed to represent unsocial, ill-mannered eccentrics (apart from the protagonist, Alysha, who is rational and rather normal; and Kevan, the victimized colleague whom she advocates for justice).

Alysha finds herself in a university setting that seems surreal, where through a series of unbelievable committee episodes, power ruthlessly trumps truth at every turn. She feels feeble and incapable (amongst her idiosyncratic peers) of championing righteous purposes and impacting *real* change; like she has unwittingly fallen down a political rabbit hole of which she may be unable to scramble out. Searching for reasonable answers, Alysha initially succumbs to a maddening self-induced process where she begins to question if she's lost her head. Ultimately, through an experiential revelation, she accepts an imperfect resolution that perhaps there are no solutions to absurd situations; rather, one must accept and endure unending rumination of life's riddles.

Characters

"I don't think they play at all fairly," Alice began, in rather a complaining tone, "and they all quarrel so dreadfully one can't hear oneself speak-and they don't seem to have any rules in particular: at least, if there are, nobody attends to them-and you've no idea how confusing it is..." (Carroll, 2015, pp. 87-88)

Alysha Diddle

Dr. Alysha Diddle is a pragmatic dreamer (sounds oxymoronic but strangely true). She is non-judgmental, trusting, broadminded, courageous (and when inspired, down-right feisty), curious, intelligent, and a somewhat naively hopeful academic. She has focused her entire professional career on critical inquiry and social justice. As protagonist of the story, she struggles with obstinate colleagues and the incongruity of university policy and procedures but grows more assertive with each illogical and inequitable event as she attempts to make sense of nonsense. Through Dr. Diddle's diplomatic (although at times defiant or disobedient) deeds, a glimmer of agency for justice and transformative change emerges as emancipation from established systemic restraints.

Blanco Hare

Dr. Hare, although rather unassuming, is an extremely busy academic who serves on too many committees, becoming totally ineffective on any one of them as he is stretched thin of his time and energy. He is also easily distracted (most likely, a little Attention Deficit), and chronically late for meetings. Somehow, springing from one meeting to the next, he manages to pull others within his proximity into activities for assistance and support.

Chester Katz

Chester, full professor who is full of himself and his perceived acquired knowledge, performs as the undisputed and unchallenged know-it-all theorist extraordinaire. His vague and endless philosophical pontifications and grandiloquence lulls everyone into catnaps or child-like slumber. With a mischievous grin, he materializes in and fades out of committee meetings at will.

Catherine “Cat” Pilár

In general, Dr. Pilár is terse, indifferent to social norms, and will sarcastically contradict most points shared in discussions just to heckle others and humor herself (if no one else). As an agnostic dissident, Cat realizes she has no sense of direction for navigating the academic milieu’s maze of misperceptions, misunderstandings, mistakes, management muscle, and messes. However, she freely and randomly offers advice to others with little expectation her insight or guidance will be heeded. Basically, she is a playfully rebellious, iconoclast, not really understood by most peers.

Maude Haughtier

Communicatively challenged, Maude Haughtier often imparts double-meanings in her responses to queries as an apparent masterful spin-doctor (although some claim it is not determinable if this is a deliberate tactic or just serendipity through her ongoing, oblivious ignorance – could be both). She strives to be part of every important university venture and key player in crucial decision-making processes but fails to contribute or deliver anything of substance during committee discussions (other than supporting the central person in power at the time). Maude Haughtier also complains and cries on others’ shoulders from a “woe is me” stance at every opportunity to get her way if other strategies fail or fall short. Maude is mad, sad, haughty, and naughty!

Quinna Hartz

Dr. Hartz has no heart. As the main petty, pretentious, power-mongering antagonist of the story, she is rude, crude, crass, demanding, and an uncompromising colleague. Any slight provocation (from anyone or any situation) will cause an explosive outburst of anger and royal rage through vitriolic verbiage spouted publicly and through all subsequent actions she takes, orders, or demands. As a controlling narcissist, she often uses others by stealing credit from their ideas or planting them on committees to control outcomes. In a significant position of power at this campus, her tyrannical supremacy has resulted in the axing of many faculty heads (usually undeserving victims, but directed decapitations always serve some purpose for promoting Quinna’s power).

Kevan Shaftero

Dr. Kevan Shaftero is accused of incompetence by Dr. Hartz (who is fully committed to giving him the shaft by making his tenure, untenable). He attempts complicity to the powers-to-be, to no avail. Alysha defends him and advocates on his behalf as she believes he has been wrongly blamed and unjustly treated by his colleagues. Kevan, a poetic soul, enjoys speaking in riddles and rhymes.

Redd Nyet

Minor player, Dr. Nyet is stubborn as a mule, comes in at the tail-end of every meeting, and always acts like the backend of a horse.

Kätcha Brake

Kätcha is Dean of the college who converses through gibberish, jibber-jabber, and empty speech. She is a minor co-antagonist of the story with mis-led power, but mostly spouts a lot of hot air rather than undertaking any direct actions.

May Hem & Kay Haws

May and Kay are two faculty members mentioned in the story but not directly part of any plot interactions. Both share similar controlling styles regarding policy and procedures. As a behind-the-scenes socially-sordid duo, they doubly rouse troublesome trials and tribulations for subordinates through pencil-pushing tactics in the system. Essentially, they operate within the university structure as the power gatekeepers of the college.

Dutch Hess

Dutch chronically displays a series of irrational and child-like temper tantrums (which includes wailing) when he does not get his way during committee meetings or interactions with colleagues. As a seasoned and well-established member of the institution, his history of privilege bolsters his spoiled sense of entitlement (most evident during his foot-stomping tirades). He is a close colleague of Maude Haughtier. Together they orchestrate their “wah, wah, wah,” wailings of woe to get their way. Most colleagues cave in or become complicit to their demands just to close or confine their constant complaining.

Dr. Griffin

Griffin is an intimidating, bold figure who often serves as mediator in contentious meetings by posing critical questions and citing policy. He is sympathetic to Alysha’s positions and occasionally defends her arguments and stances.

Doc Mortal

Doc Mortal is a faker, academic imposter, but a benign, benevolent buddy to Alysha (see Appendix A for Character Alignment with *Alice in Wonderland*).

The Story: Morbid Morals Impact Morale amongst Mortals and Immutable Minions

“You’re thinking about something, my dear, and that makes you forget to talk. I can’t tell you just now, what the moral of that is, but I shall remember it in a bit.”

“Perhaps it hasn’t one,” Alice ventured to remark.

“Tut, tut, child!” said the Duchess. “Everything’s got a moral, if only you can find it.” (Carroll, 2015, pp. 93-94)

Following (but not “Following”) Blanco

Scurrying down the hallway, Blanco called to Alysha, “Follow me. I need you at this meeting!” Alysha replied, “What meeting?” Blanco said, “I’ll fill you in later, just follow and don’t dawdle, Dr. Diddle.” Confused, but compliant and somewhat curious, Alysha half-jogged, half-tumbled behind Blanco, her mind racing with random thoughts of what was going

on and why she was beckoned by Blanco to this apparent impromptu meeting. “Where are we going again?” Alysha asked. Blanco answered, “The Mush Room, where most meetings of a mushy sort are sorted out to either make the situation larger or smaller.” Out of breath from racing behind Blanco, Alysha asked, “Wh...what do you mean by mushy...?” And then there they were, at the meeting with most faculty frowning unfavorably at them (but not all).

Upon entrance, Alysha noted that Dr. Katz was grinning widely (a look not uncommon to him when he perceived a potential platform to impress others with his dogmatic speals). Seated next to him were Cat Pilár, Maude Haughtier, and Quinna Hartz (postured indignantly, and emitting a searing, laser-like look of disapproval for their late entry). Across the room sat Kevan Shaftero, isolated in a corner with his head down staring at the floor, hands clasped in a prayer-like fashion. He timidly looked up to give Alysha a slight nod of appreciation (probably for her being there). Blanco and Alysha marched in, quickly crossed the room, and sat down near Kevan, at which time Blanco turned and muttered to Alysha, “Just follow my lead and drink the Kool-Aid if you want to grow in status at this institution.”

With no context provided, Quinna curtly began the meeting by claiming there were multiple “issues” regarding Kevan’s standing as a faculty member. Alysha gently interrupted and asked, “Respectfully Dr. Hartz, what is the purpose of this meeting? What are our roles as members? And what are we charged with delivering?” Obviously annoyed, Quinna snippily snapped “Alysha, your unnecessary and inane questions are a nuisance!” Upon which Cat Pilár sarcastically commented, “I agree, she brings ‘new sense’ to the committee’s discussions.” This seemingly clever comment deliberately disrupted Quinna’s attempt to censure and censor Alysha, and with a grave glare, instantly transferred all Quinna’s annoyance to Pilár (who by the way, appeared indifferent to any of Quinna’s condemnation towards her or anyone else). Quinna retorted “Dr. Diddle piddles with unnecessary particulars of this proceeding. We will move on!”

Through a clearly kiss-up compliment, Dr. Haughtier complementarily interjected her clichéd comment “Dr. Hartz’s suggestion to move *onward* rather than *off*-topic and to move *ahead* rather than *headed in the wrong direction* is sensible and sound. We don’t want to backassward or move rearward in our *assessment* actions. If we get behind, it will show our behinds. As *five* wards of the committee, we should move *fourwards*!” Alysha internally thought “Maude really doesn’t make *any* sense and just likes to hear herself talk or wants recognition from others!” It was as if Maude could read her mind because with a swift scowl and stare of strife, Maude added, “You make us all *mad* Alysha by adding annoying annotations to our assembly assignment!” Careful to not display any discernable expression of incredulity or ‘shock and huh?’ Alysha quietly thought to herself “I didn’t cause this! You are all maniacally *mad* to begin with!!!”

Quinna then quickly shifted her attention to who she believed would support her cruel and calculated attack on Kevan’s work, integrity, and overall productivity in the department. Quinna queried, “Dr. Hare (slight pause as she waited for him to look directly at her), what is your opinion on this matter?” Blanco inaudibly cursed as he cursorily glanced at his watch and said, “Sorry to say, but I need to be at another meeting with the Dean. Must leave now. Alysha can share in my absence.” At which, upon standing to exit, Blanco leaned over to Alysha with his back to the others and mouthed ‘don’t lose your head!’ and then dashed out of the room. Puzzled, Alysha responded in her nature, the only way she knew how, “But I am uncertain of too many things! I do not exactly follow what Dr. Hare expected me to communicate as I am still not clear what this meeting is about other than it involves Kevan.” Quinna snootily asked “Do you play the fiddle Dr. Diddle?” Bewildered, Alysha responded, “Why no, I do not.” Condescendingly, Quinna shrieked at a high pitch, “Then stop stringing us along with all of your questions...they are *not* music to our ears!” Shocked, Alysha sat there in silence, physically as well as mentally immobilized, trying to collect her thoughts. Taking advantage

of this moment, Chester Katz began to drone on about dull and petty points of policy as other committee members continued muffled exchanges; of which, in her disoriented state, Alysha could not comprehend one syllable. Suddenly and unexpectedly, Redd Nyet entered the room as committee members began to leave and asked, “Hay *neighbors*, what did I miss?” Everyone ignored him as they ambled around and left the room. Unacknowledged, he turned and trotted out without saying another word. Alysha sat there still in confused contemplation of the circumstances surrounding the committee’s charge. She was unaware the meeting had ended until roused from her reeling reverie by Kevan who warily whispered, “You’ve raised in Quinna, a higher dire ire. To avoid her reeking and retaliatory wrath, stay out of her pathetic and poisonous path!”

Muddled in a Puddle of Tears

Dazed and emotionally disheveled, Alysha mindlessly returned to her office and collapsed into uncontrollable weeping. “What just happened? *What* just happened? What *just* happened? *WHAT JUST HAPPENED?!?*” she asked herself repeatedly, emphasizing different words with each repetition as if this process would force clarity to emerge from her confusion. As she perseverated over the perversity of the committee meeting and Quinna’s blatant abuse of power over colleagues, other questions and queries invaded her thinking. “Why did Blanco invite me to that meeting? Why did I just follow him into that piteous and pitiless pit of pythons? And why did he leave me to fend for myself? Is Maude *mad*? She just doesn’t make any sense!!! What exactly made Maude mad anyway? And what was Quinna’s bout about? She scares the bejeebers out of me!!! How can I remove myself from this committee? Wait, *should* I remove myself? Why is Kevan being attacked? Why was he even at that meeting? And why did Kevan prophetically warn me about Quinna as the meeting ended? None of this seems reasonable! And now I am in the middle of it!!!” Thrown into a tizzy of conflicting thoughts and bombarded by a barrage of ceaseless self-questions, Alysha felt she was losing her head and must compose herself to make prudent decisions and promote impartial actions regarding all committee meetings in which she is a member and interacts with colleagues. Alysha was baffled, bemused, bewildered, and befuddled (as well as beleaguered by other polysyllabic synonyms for *confusion* not beginning with “b” such as: flabbergasted, flummoxed, mystified, perplexed, stumped, and troubled). She needed advice to advance. But who could or *should* she call on for counsel? Who could mentor her through this malady? Who could serve as a sage for suggesting solutions to this snagging, sorrowful, and sour-full situational setback? She just wasn’t sure.

Circumlocution and Checkmate

After a plethora of perpetual ponderings and profuse perseveration on the puzzling problem, Alysha decided to schedule a meeting with Dean Brake (who at this point she had never met as a faculty member, i.e., individually). There was no intention of tattle-tailing on tenured and titled teammates, Alysha just wanted some transparency for how she should handle interactions with Quinna Hartz and others. And in the chain-of-command at this institution, Dean Brake was the next in line as an upper-level administrator over Quinna Hartz. Alysha hoped the Dean would provide confidential and sound advice, wisdom, and tailored mentoring on the situation.

Upon request, the meeting was confirmed for the next morning when Dean Brake met Alysha outside her office door and called out “Don’t dilly dally in the hallway Dr. Diddle, come into my office and have a seat.” Alysha reached out for an introductory handshake while offering a traditional greeting, “It is so nice to meet you Dean Break!” Upon which she received

no returning handshake extension; instead, she faced Kätcha's knitted brow expression and boorish response: "It is pronounced *Brake* dear, not *Break*." "Oh, I am sincerely sorry! Sounds so similar, I must pay closer attention to details," Alysha sheepishly responded. Dean Brake barked back, "As you should since you are one of *my* faculty and must always present and represent *me* in the best light." Alysha quickly (and quietly) realized that perhaps this meeting would not yield hopeful advice and guidance. Perhaps she was falling further down this political hole and problematizing the situation to a greater degree through this requested consultation. Intuitively, she wanted to scuttle the meeting, but was now trapped deep in the hole.

As they seated for the meeting, Dean Brake asked, "So, what is going on that you need *my* assistance?" Alysha rapidly realized she now had to be cautious with sharing her concern (as it probably would not be well received as a complaint), so she paused to gather her thoughts in *how* she would phrase the situation and explain the issues she had experienced during the committee meeting. Basically, Alysha felt she could not favorably function without knowing the rules as they mattered to fairness of any committee review process. So, she said, "Well, I was recently invited to a meeting of which I received no information on the purpose and charge of committee members." Dean Brake interrupted, "Are you competent to serve as a committee member?" she asked. Slightly startled by the question, Alysha replied, "Why yes, I am competent, but..." Dean Brake interrupted, "Well if you are competent, then why do you need *me*?" Alysha sensed the meeting was going nowhere fast. Without waiting for Alysha's response, Dean Brake added, "You do understand Alysha that these committee meetings are conducted like child's play, the one who wields the biggest croquet mallet, wins... metaphorically speaking that is!" Bewildered, Alysha wondered, was the Dean suggesting she participate in meetings like a game and play like a child? That seemed silly and unprofessional. Hastily recovering her thoughts, Alysha countered, "But, that is part of the problem, as this process does not allow for dialogue and discussion on the issue...it is all one sided or dominated by the loudest voice." Without even catching her breath, Alysha continued, "There seems to be a lack of professional protocol. And the rules of the game are not given and therefore cannot be followed." Dean Brake bluntly and boisterously barked, "Wait one elongated second Alysha, are you mocking my mockery?!? If you can't win at croquet, then play chess where the chess board is clearly marked with black and white squares. You are either on one spot or the other and being on the right spot at the right time, even if you must sacrifice pawns, will help you win the game. In this game Alysha, players' moves are strategic and privately planned, rather than forceful swings of a stick." There was no break in, or brake to Dean Brake's admonishment of Alysha as she unrelentingly continued "You need to know Alysha that all committee games present protocol and rules, spoken or unspoken. Years ago, Drs. May Hem and Kay Haws co-chaired the House of Cards Committee, which was responsible for creating the policy and procedures doctrine followed by our college for conducting all committee meetings. Are you claiming that you will NOT follow our established guidelines?" Alysha silently thought but did not share with Dean Brake "well that makes sense, Drs. Hem and Haws are both cards to begin with and May and Kay are always hemming and hawing around." She then regathered her thoughts to reply, "What I am concerned about is...no one appears to follow *any* rules or guidelines. There was no order to the meeting." After a pithy pause, Kätcha Brake retorted, "Perhaps there IS order to disorder that you do not understand Dr. Diddle!!! From my perspective, everything is the reverse, where *your* thinking is the OPPOSITE of how things *really* are!" In the faint hope of gaining a little leverage in the discussion, Alysha shrewdly admitted, "I am confused, that is apparent." After a slight hesitation she strategically added, "Perhaps I could gain clarity of our guidelines if provided an opportunity to serve on the House of Cards Committee which updates and modifies the set rules...possibly some haven't been updated or changed in recent years." Dean Brake countered, "Au contraire, contrary one, Drs.

Hem and Haws change and update these rules all the time! An added comma here, a deleted semi-colon there, multiple changes are ongoing constantly!” Desperate, Alysha then provided a pleading and protracted petition, “But I haven’t heard of any rules, let alone any changes, and if Drs. Hem and Haws are the only two who have voice and decision in the manner, then they control everything; and therefore, there is no inclusivity of other faculty voices and opinions...it is...not a pluralist process.”

Finalizing the meeting with a fatal blow, Dean Brake boisterously bellowed, “You are in the middle of this mess Dr. Diddle, which YOU solely shaped through your riddle of ridicule regarding our rituals! You perplex me with your piddling, Dr. Diddle!!! Please desist, stop, halt, rest, discontinue, end, bring to a close, standstill, finish, cease, pause, and don’t bother me again!” Alysha had lost ALL ground with this last round of repartee as the Dean’s slippery slope soliloquy increased Alysha’s decline during their back-and-forth brutal banter; so, she stayed silent staring straight ahead as she felt herself falling deeper and deeper down the hole of eternal doom. Crazy Kätcha caught her with this closing Catch-22 crack! The macabre meeting was over, period (punctuated with a perverse and piercingly prominent, purposeful punch). Dean Brake broke Diddle down through domination of undisputed despotism. Alysha had no other move; thus, Kätcha triumphantly tipped over Alysha’s king (as well as her *asking* for clarifications) and claimed checkmate!

Advice from Cat Pilár

In a suspended stupor, Alysha exited Dean Brake’s office and was listlessly returning to her suite when she crossed paths with Pilár in the passageway. Cat coyly drew Alysha aside, wistfully (and wit-fully) whispering in her ear, “In this Wonderland, there is a butterfly effect, where everyone is potentially affected by everything that happens.” Alysha asked, “OK, if that is so, why aren’t more colleagues up in arms to make positive changes that will impact us all?” Cat surreptitiously shared, “Well, for one, I have many arms to swing but no significant reach; thus, no real impact in most situations other than a slight flutter. For others, most conceal themselves in cocoons to circumvent caustic colleagues’ barrage of battering bangs and blows.” Alysha realized this was evidently true, as she observed the bullies bullying vulnerable colleagues like Kevan where others were self-protective by either deferring to the bully or ignoring bullying actions. She wondered why others were complicit and how they did not realize that they could never truly develop their potential through protective isolation and passivity.

Cat continued, “Dr. Diddle, your moral compass will direct you in your decision-making process for positive resolutions in all situations. It may also lead you in several different directions from which you may have difficulty choosing the best route, but at least you will have multiple options. Just know that whatever YOU do *will* affect everyone else regardless of the type of action taken.” Cat added, “Also, some peers may appreciate your actions, where others may resent them as there is always good with the bad, and heaven with hell.”

Alysha already had concerns about repercussions and possible misunderstandings of her actions by others as she experienced firsthand how Quinna and Dean Brake reacted to her simple questions. Cat Pilár probably did not realize (or maybe she did) that through imparting prudent advice, she caused a butterfly effect in Alysha’s thinking. Dr. Diddle decided, then and there, she would discuss the situation with other committee members to gain insight on their thinking and perhaps this new information would provide direction for appropriate and effective future actions.

Riddle for Dr. Diddle

Alysha thought she should meet with Kevan first and get some background information (from his perspective) on the committee scenario and why he was now apparently on Quinna's chopping block of faculty heads to axe. That afternoon they met at the public pub for tea and Alysha asked Kevan to explain what he knew about the situation. Kevan hemmed and hawed for a bit, and then proposed, "Well, how about I pose the circumstances like a riddle and see if you can solve it." Alysha responded, "I am game for any new game, since I surely haven't mastered croquet *or* chess!" Kevan responded, "Huh? What are you talking about?" Alysha demurely shared, "That is in reference to a previous conversation with Dean Brake who doggedly declared I should carry a big stick, hit the ball hard, and have a ruthless strategy for trumping others." Somewhat discombobulated, Kevan responded, "I don't get it." Alysha demurely stated, "Never mind, just not important at this time." Kevan replied, "Or perhaps, at *any* time!" He then chanted the riddle:

Hey Dr. Diddle, with Cat in the middle,
Mad Maude looking like a loon!
Chester grinned to see the smarmy sort.

"OK Alysha, now you must add the last line of this nursery rhyme to solve the riddle!" Alysha paused and then asked "What does smarmy mean? Is it a made-up word?" Kevan shared, "Basically, it means, creepy, kiss ups!" Alysha confirmed "Oh, I totally see that! Great choice of words!" She then refocused on the riddle, quietly repeating the rhyme again in her head and then said out loud, "How about this?"

Hey Dr. Diddle, with Cat in the middle...
Mad Maude looking like a loon!
Chester grinned to see the smarmy sort...
Inflate problems like a balloon!!!

Kevan quipped, "Fitting last line, since most committee members *are* full of hot air!" Suddenly inspired as she softly chuckled, Alysha added, "Or wait, what about..."

Hey Dr. Diddle, with Cat in the middle...
Mad Maude looking like a loon!
Chester grinned to see the smarmy sort...
Cast policies all a strewn!

Before Kevan could comment on the second response, Alysha promptly followed, "Wait, I've got another one, hopefully better..."

Hey Dr. Diddle, with Cat in the middle...
Mad Maude looking like a loon!
Chester grinned to see the smarmy sort...
As Quinna whistled a happy tune!

Kevan said, "OK, so you are pretty good at filling in multiple last lines to this rhyme Alysha, but is the riddle *solved* with any of your responses?" Alysha replied, "No, not really, but this assault on your value and contribution as a faculty member is a surreal problem and there will be no one single real solution, rather multiple illogical ones! And from what I have

observed, illogical solutions occur all the time here...for example, incompetent colleagues earn promotions instead of being reprimanded for foul and dirty deeds.” Kevan then retorted, “Actually Alysha, that action is quite logical. Promotion of a problematic peer to a new role and different department retains the status quo and obviously is the safest way to move or *remove* someone from one program area where predicaments are brewing.” He added, “And for those viewed as pesky problems such as me, they are swept under a rug like dirt. Removed from sight, but still there forming a lump where everyone steps. See how this is a logical resolution, although lazy, for any messy clean up?” Alysha retorted, “But that just isn’t right! And, nothing is really cleaned up, just shifted around, or hidden from sight, if you are nearsighted that is.” Kevan responded, “It doesn’t have to be *right*, to be logical...and, it doesn’t have to be logical, to be *right*. AND image is more important than substance to most in power, who are ALL conceptually myopic!”

Alysha was concerned with Kevan’s apparent complicity of the circumstances. He seemed to negatively identify himself as a lump of dirt, stepped on by others. Alysha then courageously chimed:

Hey Dr. Diddle, with Cat in the middle...
 Mad Maude looking like a loon!
 Chester grinned to see the smarmy sort...
 Of evil doers we should lampoon!

Kevan responded, “I appreciate your advocacy Alysha, but how could this be done? If I want to stay at this institution, I can’t reasonably fight the existing power, even with you by my side. I have several options. I can accept irrational consequences, attempt to talk my way out of reprimands OR wander away to another potentially ludicrous academic ‘wonder’land. Alysha, I am more nimble than noble and neither a contemptible coward nor an honorable hero. In this situation, I just don’t want to be a victim. I simply want to be a survivor. The way I see it, in the big picture perspective of my professional looking glass, there are many possibilities both here or elsewhere.” Alysha thought intensely on Kevan’s emotionally disengaged comment and realized there was no normal definitive fight or flight action that he would take; rather, he would play out all possible options as they occurred. And, if nothing else, he would make light amusement of the situation through ridiculous nursery rhymes and riddles. She asked him one last question. “So Kevan, what is the issue with Quinna that started this whole mess?” Kevan grudgingly responded in cryptic rhyme about his situation:

Kevan Shaftero sat on a wall,
 Attempting to avoid a tenure fall,
 He thwarted career remorse, through his publishing Zen,
 But others were threatened by his prolific pen!

From his response, Alysha surmised that Quinna and possibly others on the committee saw Kevan as advancing past them in recognition with his writing productivity. His extensive publication efforts exposed idle veteran faculty members to looming critique in comparison to a junior member’s output. Unfortunately, the unjust action against Kevan was a typical tamp down of talent in an institutional environment steeped in the safety of mediocrity. As Kevan mentioned earlier regarding institutional actions, “It doesn’t have to be *right*, to be logical and it doesn’t have to be logical, to be *right*. So, what does one do when things are neither right nor logical?”

Ultimately, Dr. Diddle did little to unravel the riddle. After leaving their meeting, she silently thought of another line that was the most plausible response to the unsolvable situation:

Hey Dr. Diddle, with Cat in the middle...
 Mad Maude looking like a loon!
 Chester grinned to see the smarmy sort...
 As Kevan steps aside with a boon!

Depending upon opportunity, Kevan would likely leave the university, resolved on his own terms. Realistically, why would he stick around for an inevitable execution? Regrettably, his leaving would be disappointing on two levels: loss of an exemplary peer, and a lost opportunity for confronting ongoing injustices within the system that would linger and regenerate. There is a persnickety persistence in prejudicial procedures, which are imposingly problematic and professionally patchy.

Hand Dealt and Cards Played

After meeting with Kevan, Alysha was ready to play her hand in the committee's card game. She may not be good with a croquet mallet ("metaphorically" speaking that is), or strategic in chess (stalemates aren't proactive options) but decided that she could shuffle the deck and deal a new hand by sending a message to Dr. Hartz asking about the scheduling of the next meeting. Included with this message would be a respectful request to meet with Quinna individually beforehand. This would be Alysha's preemptive attempt for proactive action and preparation for future committee interactions and expectations. She sent a meeting request message to Quinna and received the following response:

Dr. Diddle,
 Our next committee meeting will be scheduled after the committee membership is re-configured by the Dean. I can meet with you tomorrow. Arrive punctually, 3:00 pm, my office.
 QH

Alysha was intrigued by Quinna's response as thoughts ran rampant in her head. "Why was committee membership being reconfigured? Why was Dean Brake involved and why now? Did Alysha's concerns about the committee shared with cranky Kätcha cause this involvement? Most likely! Who would be added to the committee and who would be removed? Does this change by an administrator follow policy and procedures or was it improvised for some unknown reason? Would Quinna continue to serve as chair? Probably, as it was highly doubtful, she would be removed from that position of power or bow out gracefully...an utterly unlikely change! But one never knows...not in this place anyway. Will a rationale for the changes be provided? Was Quinna showing her hand by telling Alysha about the committee membership changes? Perhaps this committee change was Quinna's ace in the hole." All these thoughts and questions made Alysha curious about meeting with Quinna. She decided right then that no rational thinking process would help ahead of time. She had to wait until the meeting to get the full picture of the hand dealt and cards played... or at least, what Quinna would share about what was going on, which would *never* place all her cards on the table.

The next afternoon, Alysha arrived exactly at 3:00 pm by Quinna's open door (which curiously was usually closed). Without looking up, Quinna waved her hand haphazardly as if to cue Alysha to enter and snapped, "Sit wherever you want." Alysha silently noted that there was only *one* chair, so she couldn't just sit anywhere. She sat in that one chair and stared at Quinna who still had not looked up at her, rather was continuing to face downward at what appeared to be notes on her desk. While apparently still reading her notes, Quinna asked, "What's the *deal* Alysha?" With this opening in the discussion, Alysha queried, "Well first,

may I ask *why* the committee is being restructured?” Still not making eye contact, Quinna, outside her normal dismissive manner provided a calmly cool, clear, and simple response, “Dean Brake decided that this committee needed TWO faculty representatives from each Department.” Alysha thought this sounded like a sound idea as this action would be inclusive of more voices for a comprehensive review of the issues brought against Kevan. Alysha then pushed for more information, asking “So, who may I ask will be added to the committee?” Quinna insipidly responded, “I just received word from the Dean that Drs. Mortal, Griffin, and Hess will be added to the committee composition.” After a brief pause, Quinna immediately continued with more details, “Therefore, the committee will now be comprised of Blanco Hare and you from the Generalist Department, Chester Katz and Doc Mortal from the Philosophy Department, Cat Pilár and Redd Nyet from the Foundations Department, Maude Haughtier and Griffin from the Specialist Department, and Dutch Hess and myself from the Leadership Department.” Alysha wondered, “Is this Quinna’s poker face?” From what she could surmise regarding the information shared, this committee membership change seemed appropriate and equitable (as well as atypical for how Quinna normally stacked the deck). Then Quinna slipped in, “With two representatives from each college, one will be a voting member, and the other a non-voting member.” That last line sounded peculiar and since Quinna had surprisingly acted civil so far, Alysha quickly posed a key follow-up question. “How will the voting versus non-voting membership be determined?” Quinna’s pitch elevated as she imparted, “Why the most senior member from each department will be voting, of course! Although as chair, I do not vote, so Dr. Hess will have that privilege.” Alysha immediately comprehended that the cards had been dealt, Quinna had a full house and was playing her hand. The senior faculty from each Department included Blanco Hare (complicit to Quinna’s demands), Chester Katz (a blowhard who always sided with power players), Redd Nyet (who never invested himself in any committee meetings and ultimately would be harnessed and follow Quinna’s lead), Maude Haughtier (a long-time compatriot to and perilous partner with Quinna), and Dutch Hess (another close colleague to both Maude and Quinna, who acted condescendingly to all untenured faculty). In comparison, junior faculty such as Alysha, Doc, Cat, and Griffin would raise more stakes in committee meetings through objective comments, but now had no substantive hand to play in this game. Alysha then realized that Quinna had not looked up to face her because she didn’t want her “tell” revealed, which would potentially provide clues to her hand. Not facing Alysha was Quinna’s passive-aggressive “poker face” power play at this meeting. Alysha wanted to press Quinna to face her so she could call her on her actions and force her to lay all the cards down. Alysha therefore protested and poked, “Well, that doesn’t seem fair! The senior members will all fold with your final decision Dr. Hartz as you hold all the cards in this hand.” Alysha then took a deep breath, exhaled slowly, and waited for Quinna’s retaliatory comeback.

Gazing up from the notes on her desk for the first time, Quinna odiously glared at Alysha and in a formal, patronizing tone snarled, “Dr. Diddle, do you whittle?” Perplexed and somewhat paralyzed by this question, Alysha replied “Uh, why no...” Quinna sneered, “Well it sure feels like it, your sharp, slicing comments and pointed accusations are cutting me to the core like a carving knife.” Quinna had just decked Alysha! Apologetically, Alysha quickly defended herself by declaring “Quinna, that was not my intent, truly!” Quinna rudely replied, “Dr. Diddle, I do not believe that you have the *mettle* to *meddle* in this situation. And you will surely earn NO *medal* by your actions! So, put the pedal to the *metal* and leave, now!!!” Game over, Alysha left the table, unstable, with all her chips lost, except now Quinna had a bigger chip on her shoulder!

Obstacle Course, of Course...

Of course, this meeting set up Quinna's contrived obstacle course to further stifle and suppress Alysha's seeking of sensible, stable, and impartial decision-making processes. Quinna could now coarsely counter (with no remorse, of course) that Alysha's questioning of fairness regarding the committee selection process places her own membership at questionable odds (as she *appears* biased from the power-playing peers' perspectives). Of course, there would be no mention of how voting membership status was weighted to give Quinna (from her vantage point) the advantage. And of course, scared of the sacred cow, committee members would unquestionably kowtow to Quinna's lead and directives. It was sacrilegious to defy sovereign power, challenge Dr. Hartz's hallowed authority or doubt her actions and motives as being anything other than self-sacrificing adherence to ordained policies and procedures! Of course, Alysha's defiance, challenge, and doubt against Quinna would now be considered violations worthy of her *own* execution. And of course, as a diversionary tactic by Quinna, Alysha would now be spun as the corruptible one, the one who perhaps poses a more significant threat to the established power base. Therefore, assaults against Alysha were now inevitable where any arising course of action could be twisted and twirled in a different direction *away* from Quinna's selfish intentions, unethical control, and unjust actions. Alysha found herself in an uncontrollable calamitous forced course of falling even further and farther into the political rabid hole. How could she change this cataclysmic course of catastrophe as her conviction became convoluted and complicated by a contentious and combative colleague of unconscionable conduct?

Another Trial by Error

Alysha faced a tough, troublesome, tangled, and taxing task...a miserable mission, an unappealing undertaking, a daunting, difficult, and dreadful duty...a challenging chore and charge, an alarming assignment; consequently, a formidable fate fraught with fractious feuds! Let's just say, she was rapidly rolling deeper down the rabid, dead-end political hole. The newly formed committee would meet, and Alysha now not only had to stand her ground, but she also had to neutralize the negative persecution about her that Quinna would spin or had already surreptitiously spun (as there were always unknowns thrown into every meeting).

All previous and newly assigned committee members arrived at the Mush Room on time (including Redd Nyet). This time, Kevan was not invited. Quinna, in her notoriously severe style, started the session straightaway with a series of sullies and smears against Shafero. New members, Drs. Mortal, Griffin, and even Dutch Hess appeared confounded and clouded in confusion. Doc Mortal leaned over and mindfully murmured to Alysha "What a mess!" Alysha obliquely observed Dutch Hess make direct eye contact with Quinna to covertly confirm her standing on the situation (seemingly, so he could support her stance). Griffin just grinned at the grim group (imagining the gripping griping that will engross the gathering and thought "how grand"). He then inquired, "May we see the evidence?"

Quinna noticeably quivered and quickly darted a look to Dutch, directing him to divert discussion. He picked up on her cue and spewed, "Informal data sets help committees contextualize situations when making decisions." Griffin asked, "So, are you saying Dutch that subjective views of faculty serve as informal data to guide our discussion and decisions?" Dutch Hess hesitated and before he could answer, highbrow Haughtier huffed, "Simply put, Shafero is a slacker, who wears slacks, not pants!" Alysha rolled her eyes in disbelief and wondered, "Is Maude messing with everyone or indisputably, completely, and menacingly mad?" Ignoring Haughtier's idiocy, Chester chimed in and claimed that Kevan's work was limited in scope and was not representative of comprehensive work expected for tenure.

Excessively chatty, Chester continued to churn out and excrete incessant and inconsequential communicative compost (i.e., caca). Conversely, Blanco blandly refuted that Dr. Shaftero did *not* have a defined research agenda and his work was all over the place. Alysha contemplated how Chester's and Blanco's comments remarkably reflected their own research ranges.

Alysha then shared, "We all need to impart and provide valid evidence, not rabid rumors."

Griffin realized he had pushed certain committee members' buttons and gloriously gleamed and glowed in gleeful grandeur! So, he followed up with a provocative proclamation of providence. "Testimonials can be temperamental, testy, touchy and tetchy," Griffin touted. "They spawn ethical conflicts" he added. With no one noticing, Chester mysteriously left the room (possibly to avoid confrontation with Griffin). Griffin's statement supported Alysha's stance, but sparked scuffles and skirmishes amongst others as Hess, Haughtier, and Hartz simultaneously became harshly hot-headed. They *needlessly* started shouting (as this was a small conference room) and squabbling amongst the three of them. At times yelling in tandem and other times screaming over one another, all of which *seemed* counterproductive and counterintuitive to their allegiance on the issue. But these three had used this rowdy ruse before, where colleagues would yield to their tantrums just to be done with them.

As they sensed colleagues conceding out of sheer exhaustion, Dutch Hess loudly stated, "I agree with everything that Quinna has shared!" Haughtier declared, "Double-ditto!!!" But Alysha, wanting to hear Dr. Redd Nyet share his opinion, asked "Do you support Kevan as a colleague?" Dr. Nyet negatively whined and whinnied, "No, never, nicht, neigh, and nada!" "Can you explain why?" she asked. He simply stated, "Not really." That's when Cat Pilár, known as the pillar of plain-spoken points during polemical parlays, became petulant and peevish. She scorned her prickly peers, "Stop being naughty in this knotty situation." Quinna continued to quarrel. She failed to acknowledge Pilár's plea for propriety and impetuously persisted with her flailing flagrant foolishness. It was convolutedly clear, Quinna had an agenda and would do whatever it took to *get her way!* From Alysha's perspective, all assaulting and attacking accusations against Kevan were unattached to any authenticity or accuracy. Surely, voting members would see the injustice in the unfair and discriminatory claims against Kevan, which had no validity or basis for his dismissal.

Hardly happenstance, Chester Katz invisibly returned to the meeting just as Quinna called for a vote. Chester Katz, Maude Haughtier, Dutch Hess, and Redd Nyet all supported Shaftero's expulsion from the university. Quinna then called on and requested Blanco Hare's vote. Appearing surprised he asked, "What? I am sorry, I wasn't paying attention." Then, turning white in fear, Blanco Hare unexpectedly relinquished his vote to Alysha. Everyone was stunned (although many ventured Blanco Hare could be the wild hair in this scenario). Cat Pilár derisively declared, "What a delightful dilemma!" Quinna quipped, "That is not acceptable!" Griffin courageously corrected her, "Actually, it is in policy that department colleagues can forfeit votes to each other." Without even asking for Alysha's vote, querulous Quinna quickly carped, "We all know that Alysha is sympathetic to Kevan and possesses partiality on his case; regardless, majority vote will stand!"

Too Hot for One's Taste

Stewing over attempted injustices to Kevan and now Quinna's vocalization of critical charges against Alysha's own integrity and capacity as an impartial committee member made her boil!!! The setting just turned up the heat up to a higher degree! Alysha would not lose herself in this regime of wrongdoings! Thus, she scorchingly asserted, "I vote *against* expulsion of Kevan Shaftero, as well as any other future reprimands or unfounded critiques of his reputation!"

Not wasting one moment, Quinna skewered and grilled Alysha, “Dr. Diddle, do you use a griddle when you cook?” Alysha thought she was ready this time for Quinna’s seemingly senseless and silly question, and with self-assurance replied, “Why yes, yes I do!” With a smirk, Quinna responded, “Well that’s what I thought because you just got burned! A majority vote trumps any dissenting departments!” All Alysha could do was silently cogitate and stew “she’s a shrewd shrew, that Quinna!” Boldly barging in, Griffin gallantly gruffed, “According to policy, there must be a consensus of all voting members. A majority vote in this case is not applicable.”

Alysha saw her opportunity to stir the pot and pepper the situation, so she jestingly jostled Quinna with an equally caustic query, “Dr. Hartz, do you play darts?” Dumbfounded Quinna responded, “Huh, why are you asking...oh...” Alysha quickly replied, “Because, you have surely missed the point, target, and bullseye of this committee’s deliberation, democratic discussion, and duty for ensuring due diligence!” Jubilantly, Alysha added “That smarts, huh, Dr. Hartz?” Alysha irrevocably relished and reveled in roasting Quinna.

The voting process resulted in no consensus; therefore, demand for Kevan’s dismissal dissolved and was decidedly dropped. Defeated, but compelled to control for confidentiality, Quinna quickly gauged members’ mood for confirming committee decision results as moot so she could direct a “gag order” to mute their voices (which made Alysha gag). It was not that Quinna wanted to protect Kevan; conversely, she wanted to silence what committee members would share so others would not learn about her intended failed efforts. So, the “gag order” would guarantee that NO information regarding this committee would be publicly shared or openly revealed. As a repulsive result, Quinna’s botched blitz on Kevan would leave no unfavorable aftermath on her reputation or diminish her convoluted clout.

Parity Party

Post committee meeting, Cat, Doc, and Griffin wanted to conduct a covert congregation at the pub to celebrate Kevan’s pardon. Afterall, although outnumbered, collectively they were somewhat successful in achieving the constructive committee conclusion. What could have resulted in a potential pity party, was transformed into a parity party. Astonishingly, Alysha declined the invitation. In a chastising tone, Cat called her out: “Really Alysha, so *now* you are going to desert the dessert when this is your opportunity to place the icing and cherry on the justice cake you just baked?!?” Doc added, “We can brew on our brand-new bond over a few brews!” Griffin growled, “Hey, we shoved sacrilege off the ledge! And, more importantly, the beast is deceased! Let’s rejoice for justice and revel in righteousness!” Downtrodden, Alysha responded, “I am no savior of the unsalvageable. There are no more morals amongst the mortal or minions! Nothing was really solved, only temporarily shoved out of the way.” After her dejectedly tart remark, Kevan countered by paying tribute to Alysha’s efforts of equanimity. He poignantly and poetically professed:

Alysha, you have...
 Woefully wept,
 At the insane, inane, and inept.
 You have...
 Fought the fraught-full fight,
 And brought fairness with all your might!
 So please...
 Enjoy this liminal moment of glory,
 By savoring our short-term success story!

Acquiescing to his articulacy, Alysha alerted everyone to one stipulation, “OK, but you know we have a faculty meeting following this get-together, so we need to stay sober.” Griffin guardedly grumbled, “I’d rather *not* be sober at that somber and suffocating setting.” Everyone laughed. Alysha tossed back two (or a few) tonics (eventually, she lost track). Everyone enjoyed their new-found esprit de corps (no doubt, amply influenced by liquid spirits). Things were looking more hopeful at the bottom of everyone’s glass.

Beyond the Looking Glass

Kevan gently nudged Alysha. Apparently, induced from drinks ingested, she had fallen asleep at the faculty meeting during one of Chester Katz’s harrowing harangues. He softly shared, “I know these meetings are dreadfully dull and dismal and I hated to wake you, but you were in a very deep dream state!” She drowsily replied, “That was no dream Kevan, it was a nightmare!!!” She then began to quietly fill him in on her horrendous hallucination about Quinna, Maude, Kätcha, and others, detailing the shameless shenanigans she suffered in her strange escapade of slumber. She shared, “Kevan, these surreal events from an alternate-universe were more unreal than you can imagine!” He stayed silent with a staid look on his face as she shared her story and then sadly Kevan stated, “Unfortunately, I must confirm Alysha, what you dreamt really happened and is not some bad dream.” Kevan cautiously continued to soften the shock of this jarring jolt of reality, “In fact, this meeting, in which you fell asleep, Quinna’s newest promotion was announced. She will now be serving in a university-level administrative post.” Stunned, Alysha softly sobbed “Are you kidding me? Say it isn’t so!” Kevan countered, “Well, at least we will have one feral rodent out of our way. Most likely, she will burrow in another academic rabid hole, away from us!” Distressed, Alysha lamented, “But, now I no longer know what is real or make-believe. In my academic looking glass, reality and fiction mirror each other!”

So, although Quinna’s promotion ensured Alysha would have nearly no direct interactions with her in the future, Quinna would now gain even more power within the system and continue to execute injustices on a broader scale. In Alysha’s eyes, Quinna’s promotion was neither logical nor right, but revealed the systemic stupidity, short comings, sightlessness, and stalling for summoning righteousness and progressive change. Ironically, Alysha’s *dream* maximized her consciousness of the situation because at this point, she realized that many faculty adversaries believed “the more there is of mine, the less there is of yours” (Carroll, 2015, p. 130) and their conduct complemented their convictions and creed. Clearly, she could neither change nor control the complexly corrupt consciousness of colleagues. Moreover, she “had got so much into the way of expecting nothing but out-of-the-way things to happen that it seemed quite dull and stupid for life to go on in the common way” (Carroll, 2015, p. 24). Therefore, although Alysha couldn’t believe in impossible things, and “generally gave herself very good advice (though she very seldom followed it)” (Carroll, 2015, p. 23), she resolved that she could be most proactive and productive by continuing to take pragmatic, ethical actions, and follow her moral compass. What she would no longer do is waste her time and energy “asking riddles that have no answers” (p. 101). So, she would stop “wondering how this happened” (as her perseverations were time-intensive, oppressive, relatively unproductive, and dispiriting). Also, she would no longer rashly respond to illogical actions of idiosyncratic individuals (as many events played out to make little difference in eventual endings anyway, although unexpected effects would ensue). She would conduct herself to the best of her ability (as always), through baby steps (which made sense in this childish environment). Alysha astutely realized that since nothing is what it appears to be and so many irrational barriers impede interventions and prevent progress, there would always be a mismatch between what

she expected and wondered about in this wonderland awash in the imperfections of social and political realities. If nothing else, she could always hum some hope...

Hey Dr. Diddle, with Cat in the middle...
 Mad Maude looking like a loon!
 Chester grinned to see the smarmy sort...
 Dry up like pitted prunes

Discussion

I almost wish I hadn't gone down the rabbit-hole—and yet—and yet—...
 (Carroll, 2015, p. 34)

As in any fantasy, readers must suspend disbelief to appreciate the story's message. In the original *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, anthropomorphism was applied as an artistic device to delight children. The narrative of this story removed the engaging silliness of animals and replaced it with the absurdity of some unevolved aspects of human nature (equally infantile). It is doubtful this maneuver in the manuscript stirred any endearment in the readers, but there is an ironic parallel in this twisted tactic for sparking interest or perhaps igniting affinity with others who share similar counter stories. Hope prevails readers can look through and perhaps beyond the *Looking Glass* for truth and fairness within an unjust institutional environment, thwarted by power imbalances. Unfortunately, hope rarely conquers injustices alone as advocates and agents must enact fairness by confronting and halting oppressors to reverse wrong doings. Quite a disheartening challenge, since power is often padded with insulation from judgment, unfavorable critique, and any form of restitution for responsibility of egregious errors. Humor helps. Satire satisfies and assuages insanity. Voices are often victorious (through the telling of tales). But fantasies of fairness frequently fail without a full-force fight.

Summary

“Speak when you are spoken to!” the Queen sharply interrupted her. “But if everybody obeyed that rule,” said Alice, who was always ready for a little argument, “and if you only spoke when you were spoken to, and the other person always waited for you to begin, you see, nobody would every say anything...” (Carroll, 2015, p. 342)

In conclusion, this fictitious satirical story, as a comedic commentary on academic life (i.e., the anxieties of injustices and power imbalances), may pose an unsolvable riddle, but not one that does not provoke fascination or a certain appeal of the unknown, which make us “curiouser and curiouser” of what's down that political rabid hole of academia. What can be learned? From that learning, what can be applied, changed, and improved regarding fair and appropriate decision-making processes and the impartial inclusion of multiple perspectives and voices?

Unfortunately, for the author, experiences in academia continue to feel like “it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!” (Carroll, 2015, p. 169). Adding to that adversity, running on an unlevel playing field, with multiple political holes in which one may stumble or fall, delivers no real winners. Additionally, many of us in academia have experienced a system where “They're dreadfully fond of beheading people here; the great wonder is, that there's anyone

left alive!” (Carroll, 2015, p. 120). Despite this sad state of instability, satirical stabs at sorrowful situations can help level the power-playing field with provocative punchlines and provide victorious feelings of satisfaction and gratification (as fleeting as they may be). And, since satire spotlights social and political shortcomings, which reveal existing hypocritical rhetoric and foolish folly, it ultimately provides keener insight to issues that largely resonate with others. In truly transformative conditions, satire reframes, supplants or displaces majoritarian narratives as an equalizing process. Lastly, satire is a moral measure for revealing human injustice at its worse, warts and all; thus, wholly warranted in a world of wrongful warring and weary, wounded warriors.

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Appendix A

Character Alignment with the *Alice in Wonderland* Story

Alysha Diddle – Alice Liddell (*modification of name and partial anagram*)

Blanco Hare – White Rabbit (*play on words with use of synonyms, including reference in Spanish*)

Maude Haughtier – Mad Hatter (*modified homophone and humorous play on words*)

Quinna Hartz – Queen of Hearts (*homophone*)

Kevan Shaftero – Knave of Hearts (*anagram*)

Chester Katz – Cheshire Cat (*play on words and pluralized homophone*)

Catherine “Cat” Pilár – Caterpillar (*modified homophone*)

Redd Nyet – Red Knight (*play on words through homophones, including reference in Russian*)

Kätcha Brake – Reference to Jabberwocky (*humorous phrase, descriptive name of silly character actions*)

May Hem & Kay Haws – Dim reference to Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum (*homophones mayhem, chaos*)

Dutch Hess – Duchess (*homophone*)

Griffin – Gryphon (*homophone*)

Doc Mortal – Mock Turtle (*rhyme*)

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Article Citation

McDonald, D. (2021). Malice in wonder-how-this-happened land: Falling down the political rabid hole of academia. *The Qualitative Report*, 26(10), 3144-3170. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.4913>
