

## *A Helico-Spherical Cocktail Party*

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: What follows is an excerpt from that well-known whimsy, *Alice in the Land of Gotham*, published under the author's pen name of "A. Vorpall Penn." It took us several readings of the excerpt to figure out how the Mad Hatter divined the newcomer's identity. Can you do it the first time around?)

The March Hare and the Mad Hatter were sipping their eggnog and watching the crowd when Alice happened to glance in the hare's direction and ask, "Why are you giving me such an angry look?"

"I'm not *giving* it to you, I'm giving it *back*," replied the Hare.

"I didn't look crossly at you."

"Well, *somebody* did," the Hare said, turning to glare at the Hatter.

Just then, someone came up from behind and put his hands over the Hatter's eyes.

"Guess who!", said the newcomer.

The Hatter froze for a moment and declared, rather coldly, "I have no use for practical jokers."

"Ha! Neither have I," retorted the stranger, still keeping his hands over the Hatter's eyes.

At that, the Hatter seemed to accept the challenge of the game and started asking a series of questions in a manner that mingled hope with care.

Question. "Ahem. Would you, by chance, be in a black suit this evening?"

Answer: "I would, but not by chance, by design."

Q. "I presume you're a member of all the posh clubs?"

A. "Afraid not. Never even been invited."

Q. "Surely you're better than average?"

A. "Yes, indeed!"

Q. "Not spotted, I hope?"

A. "Knock wood."

Q. "Married?"

A. "No, happy."

"Then you must be the *Jack of Spades!*", shouted the triumphant Hatter,

whirling about, and he and the newcomer competed at laughing and whooping and dancing and clapping backs.

"What a card!", chortled the Hare.

At that point, Alice's Footman (oh, yes, he was there, too—to make notes\*) broke in to explain the Hatter's method to Alice. "He guessed that Jack was a card because of his thin, flat voice, you see. That hypothesis excluded chessmen, humans, animals, vegetables, and minerals as possibilities. After *that*, it was easy as black and white . . ."

"Easy as peeling a balloon," interrupted the Hatter. (Alice noted that the tag in his hatband read, "1/3 off.")

"Once he guessed it was cards with which he was dealing," the Footman continued pedantically, "he discarded the Joker and eliminated, in turn, the Hearts and Diamonds, the Clubs, cards of numbers One through Seven, the remaining numbered cards, and finally the King and Queen."

"Just call me Jack," said the Spade to Alice, when they were properly introduced. Alice was very glad to have that point settled, as she had heard it so much discussed, one way and another . . .

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#### IMPOSSIBLE HOMONYMS

Perennial favorites among the word-wise are homonyms (words pronounced alike) that do not have even a single letter in common. A striking but short example of such a homonymic pair is provided by YOU and EWE.

We have been searching for longer pairs, and have dug up one 6-6 combination, COFFEE and KAUPHY, and one 5-7 combination, ISAAC and EYEZUKH.

Are there even longer specimens in English?

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#### SOME SIBILANT TONGUE TWISTERS

- (1) Shrewd Si soon shooed Sue's shorn sheep swiftly.
- (2) Shapely Selma Schnell's surly sister Shirley surely shall sell sharp scissors to shingled siugle Shebas.
- (3) Shabby Sam Shaw saw Sim Shea sell Shaw's Sue some shoes she surely should show Shaw.
- (4) Should six sick shell-shocked soldier shoe sole stitchers stitch shoe soles solely?
- (5) Saul C. Shaw saws seesaws, but, pshaw! as Esau Shaw sees Saul C. Shaw saw seesaws, saucy Esau Shaw seesaws on seesaws Saul C. Shaw saws.
- (6) Sheba's silly shimmy shocked Sammy's shameless soul, so slyly shamming Sammy simulated sleep; so shameless seemed shamming Sammy's sleep, Sheba simply shouted, shattering Sammy's sickly sham.

\* Footnotes, of course.