

Chapter V

Advice from a Caterpillar

The Caterpillar and Alice looked at each other for some time in silence; at last the Caterpillar took the hookah out of its mouth and addressed her in a languid, sleepy voice.

Caterpillar: Who are you?

Alice: I - I hardly know, sir, just at present - at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.

Caterpillar: 'What do you mean by that? Explain yourself!

Alice: I can't explain myself, I'm afraid, sir, because I'm not myself, you see.

Caterpillar: I don't see,

Alice: I'm afraid I can't put it more clearly, for I can't understand it myself to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing.

Caterpillar: It isn't.

Alice: Well, perhaps you haven't found it so yet, but when you have to turn into a chrysalis - you will some day, you know - and then after that into a butterfly, I should think you'll feel it a little queer, won't you?

Caterpillar: Not a bit.

Alice: Well, perhaps your feelings may be different, all I know is, it would feel very queer to me.

Caterpillar: You! Who are you?

Alice: I think, you ought to tell me who you are, first.

Caterpillar: Why?

Alice turns away.

Caterpillar: Come back! I've something important to say!

Alice turns and comes back again.

Caterpillar: Keep your temper.

Alice: Is that all?

Caterpillar: No.

For some minutes the Caterpillar puffed away without speaking, but at last it unfolded its arms, took the hookah out of its mouth.

Caterpillar: So you think you're changed, do you?

Alice: I'm afraid I am, sir. I can't remember things as I used - and I don't keep the same size for ten minutes together!

Caterpillar: Can't remember what things?

Alice: Well, I've tried to say "HOW DOTHTHE LITTLE BUSY BEE," but it all came different!

Caterpillar: Repeat "YOU ARE OLD, FATHER WILLIAM."

Alice:

'You are old, Father William,' the young man said,
'And your hair has become very white;
And yet you incessantly stand on your head -
Do you think, at your age, it is right?'

'In my youth,' Father William replied to his son,
'I feared it might injure the brain;
But, now that I'm perfectly sure I have none,
Why, I do it again and again.

"You are old," said the youth, 'as I mentioned before,
And have grown most uncommonly fat;

Yet you turned a back-somersault in at the door -
Pray, what is the reason of that?'
'In my youth,' said the sage, as he shook his grey locks,
'I kept all my limbs very supple
By the use of this ointment - one shilling the box -
Allow me to sell you a couple?'

'You are old,' said the youth, 'and your jaws are too weak
For anything tougher than suet;
Yet you finished the goose, with the bones and the beak -
Pray how did you manage to do it?'

'In my youth,' said his father, 'I took to the law,
And argued each case with my wife;
And the muscular strength, which it gave to my jaw,
Has lasted the rest of my life.'

'You are old,' said the youth, 'one would hardly suppose
That your eye was as steady as ever;
Yet you balanced an eel on the end of your nose -
What made you so awfully clever?'

'I have answered three questions, and that is enough,'
Said his father; 'don't give yourself airs!
Do you think I can listen all day to such stuff?
Be off, or I'll kick you down stairs!'

Caterpillar: That is not said right.

Alice: Not quite right, I'm afraid, some of the words have got altered.

Caterpillar: It is wrong from beginning to end.

Silence for some minutes.

Caterpillar: What size do you want to be?

Alice: Oh, I'm not particular as to size, only one doesn't like changing so often, you know.

Caterpillar: I don't know. *(pause)* Are you content now?

Alice: Well, I should like to be a *little* larger, sir, if you wouldn't mind, three inches is such a wretched height to be.

Caterpillar: It is a very good height indeed!

Alice: But I'm not used to it!

Caterpillar: You'll get used to it in time.

Caterpillar smokes hooka for some minutes, yawns once or twice and shakes itself. Gets down off the mushroom and crawls away in the grass.

Caterpillar: One side will make you grow taller and the other side will make you grow shorter.

Alice: (to herself) One side of what? *The other side of what?*

Caterpillar: Of the mushroom.

Caterpillar exits.

Alice looks carefully at the mushroom trying to make out which were the two sides of it; and as it was perfectly round, she found this a very difficult question. She then breaks off a bit of the edge with each hand.

Alice: And now which is which?

She nibbles a little from the right-hand bit. The next moment she felt a violent blow underneath her chin: it had struck her foot! She was a good deal frightened by this very sudden change, but she felt that there was no time to be lost, as she was shrinking rapidly; so she set to work at once to eat some of the other bit. Her chin was pressed so closely against her foot, that there was hardly room to open her mouth; but she did it at last and managed to swallow a morsel of the left hand bit.

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