

Advice from a Caterpillar

by **Lewis Carroll** *from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was written by Lewis Carroll in 1865. Alice, the main character, has gone into a strange world after she followed a rabbit down a hole. Alice spends a lot of time in this world becoming tiny and then growing very large. In this passage, a caterpillar has told Alice how she can make herself very tall or very small. She has followed the advice and made herself very, very tall.

'Come, my head's free at last!' said Alice in a tone of delight, which changed into alarm in another moment, when she found that her shoulders were nowhere to be found: all she could see, when she looked down, was an immense length of neck, which seemed to rise like a stalk out of a sea of green leaves that lay far below her.

'What can all that green stuff be?' said Alice. 'And where have my shoulders got to? And oh, my poor hands, how is it I can't see you?' She was moving them about as she spoke, but no result seemed to follow, except a little shaking among the distant green leaves.

As there seemed to be no chance of getting her hands up to her head, she tried to get her head down to them, and was delighted to find that her neck would bend about easily in any direction, like a serpent. She had just succeeded in curving it down into a graceful zigzag, and was going to dive in among the leaves, which she found to be nothing but the tops of the trees under which she had been wandering, when a sharp hiss made her draw back in a hurry: a large pigeon had flown into her face, and was beating her violently with its wings.

'Serpent!' screamed the Pigeon.

'I'm not a serpent!' said Alice indignantly. 'Let me alone!'

'Serpent, I say again!' repeated the Pigeon, but in a more subdued tone, and added with a kind of sob, 'I've tried every way, and nothing seems to suit them!'

'I haven't the least idea what you're talking about,' said Alice.

'I've tried the roots of trees, and I've tried banks, and I've tried hedges,' the Pigeon went on, without attending to her; 'but those serpents! There's no pleasing them!'

Alice was more and more puzzled, but she thought there was no use in saying anything more till the Pigeon had finished.

'As if it wasn't trouble enough hatching the eggs,' said the Pigeon; 'but I must be on the look-out for serpents night and day! Why, I haven't had a wink of sleep these three weeks!'

'I'm very sorry you've been annoyed,' said Alice, who was beginning to see its meaning.

'And just as I'd taken the highest tree in the wood,' continued the Pigeon, raising its voice to a shriek, 'and just as I was thinking I should be free of them at last, they must needs come wriggling down from the sky! Ugh, Serpent!'

'But I'm not a serpent, I tell you!' said Alice. 'I'm a--I'm a--'

'Well! what are you?' said the Pigeon. 'I can see you're trying to invent something!'

'I--I'm a little girl,' said Alice, rather doubtfully, as she remembered the number of changes she had gone through that day.

'A likely story indeed!' said the Pigeon in a tone of the deepest contempt. 'I've seen a good many little girls in my time, but never one with such a neck as that! No, no! You're a serpent; and there's no use denying it. I suppose you'll be telling me next that you never tasted an egg!'

'I have tasted eggs, certainly,' said Alice, who was a very truthful child; 'but little girls eat eggs quite as much as serpents do, you know.'

'I don't believe it,' said the Pigeon; 'but if they do, why then they're a kind of serpent, that's all I can say.'

Questions

1. What part of Alice grew very tall?
2. Why was the Pigeon so worried about serpents?
3. What had the Pigeon tried to put in the roots of the trees, the banks, and the hedges?
4. Why did the Pigeon think Alice was a serpent?

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. immense
2. serpent
3. subdued
4. attending
5. contempt

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) “all she could see, when she looked down, was an **immense** length of neck”

a. scaly; fish-like b. huge; gigantic c. decorated; striped d. dark purple; violet

2) “her neck would bend about easily in any direction, like a **serpent**”

a. snake b. rubber band c. cooked noodle d. worm

3) “‘Serpent, I say again!’ repeated the Pigeon, but in a more **subdued** tone”

a. musical b. excited or upset c. confused; uncertain d. quiet or softened

4) “the Pigeon went on, without **attending** to her”

a. addressing; talking b. looking or seeing c. listening or hearing d. explaining; describing

5) “‘A likely story indeed!’ said the Pigeon in a tone of the deepest **contempt**.”

a. scorn; disrespect b. amusement or delight c. respect or honor d. concern; sympathy