

## Alice Joins the Lobster Quadrille

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The artist poises above her sketchpad, pencil in hand. Working left to right, she fills the paper with sea creatures, mythological images, and landscape details. Some pencil lines are continuous, one image to the next; others are broken, stark, alone. The Mock Turtle and the Gryphon, two porpoises, a whiting, and two starfish appear with their lobster partners along the edge of the sea between England and France, advancing and waving forepaws and claws, marking time to strains of music floating just off canvas to the right. Arching her pencil, she draws circle upon circle, connecting the layers of the lobsters' armor. What first appears as coiled rope becomes two snails; their mounted eyes stare back at her. She adds a touch of graceful contrapposto to the dancers, suggesting rhythm and movement. An upward swell to the waves, sloping toward us, sweeps the creatures forward off the pad as they dance along the shore.

The artist adds seals to the shingle along the distant water's edge. Quick puffs of circles form a row of trees. She leans into the pencil strokes; outlines of buildings, a park gate, and a church appear, and the central monument of a city square rises. Potted plants and awnings line the left edge of the sketch, while spirals to the right of the porpoises form a sandy floor for the dancers.

Pencil stopped, the artist surveys the page—has she left anything out? She sketches additional details in the upper right corner: a street lamp, more awnings, and a curved stone wall. She pauses. Satisfied, she readies her color palette, then stops. The space between the Mock Turtle and the whiting is too large. Who else belongs in the Lobster Quadrille? Ah! Where's Alice?

The artist hesitates, deciding how to represent the child as part of the dance troupe. She must protect her toes; flippers will help that. A dancer's diaphanous costume alleviates any constraint on movement. Tie the hair back with a large bow. Emphasize the curvature of her legs, the muscles, the sinew.

The artist steps back, surveys her handiwork, and smiles. Alice epitomizes the drawing's surrealism, blending human with near-fish features, portraying a mermaid on land. Ready for paint, the artist decides upon the opaque watercolor of gouache. She layers strokes of yellow and blue, blends in hints of red and green. She wants her pencil lines to show. She wants her characters to exude their storybook nature. She wants her representation to illustrate the absurdities and satire within Lewis Carroll's immortal classic. One by one, she enlivens the figures, enhances feathers with a touch of shadow, and augments solidarity with outline. Splotches of dark green dotted into the clump of distant trees suggest the grove's deciduous nature. Pale blue skies with faint, airy clouds tell us the sun is shining. The artist fits the awnings with red stripes. Tiny red figures atop the roof of the building next to the trees hint that the Red Queen's army watches from afar.

"Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, will you join the dance?" All heads tilt, flippers and legs slipping along the sand. Alice links arms with the Mock Turtle and whiting, tosses her head back, chin out, and sways her hips and legs with the crowd. Toes safe, she's joined the quadrille today. Excitement mounts; it's almost time to throw the lobsters into the sea, to somersault, change partners, and return to land for the next figure. "Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, won't you join the dance?"