

Chapter III - Mister Woodchuck Scolds Twinkle

TWINKLE was much pleased with her surroundings, and soon discovered several gold-fishes swimming in the water at the foot of the fountain.

"Well, how does it strike you?" asked the woodchuck, strutting up and down the gravel walk before her and swinging his gold-headed cane rather gracefully.

"It seems like a dream," said Twinkle.

"To be sure," he answered, nodding. "You'd no business to fall asleep in the clover."

"Did I?" she asked, rather startled at the suggestion.

"It stands to reason you did," he replied. "You don't for a moment think this is real, do you?"

"It seems real," she answered. "Aren't you the woodchuck?"

"Mister Woodchuck, if you please. Address me properly, young lady, or you'll make me angry."

"Well, then, aren't you Mister Woodchuck?"

"At present I am; but when you wake up, I won't be," he said.

"Then you think I'm dreaming?"

"You must figure that out for yourself," said Mister Woodchuck.

"What do you suppose made me dream?"

"I don't know."

"Do you think it's something I've eaten?" she asked anxiously.

"I hardly think so. This isn't any nightmare, you know, because there's nothing at all horrible about it so far. You've probably been reading some of those creepy, sensational story-books."

"I haven't read a book in a long time," said Twinkle.

"Dreams," remarked Mister Woodchuck, thoughtfully, "are not always to be accounted for. But this conversation is all wrong. When one is dreaming one doesn't talk about it, or even know it's a dream. So let's speak of something else."

"It's very pleasant in this garden," said Twinkle. "I don't mind being here a bit."

"But you can't stay here," replied Mister Woodchuck, "and you ought to be very uncomfortable in my presence. You see, you're one of the deadliest enemies of my race. All you human beings live for or think of is how to torture and destroy woodchucks."

"Oh, no!" she answered. "We have many more important things than that to think of. But when a woodchuck gets eating our clover and the vegetables, and spoils a lot, we just have to do something to stop it. That's why my papa set the trap."

"You're selfish," said Mister Woodchuck, "and you're cruel to poor little animals that can't help themselves, and have to eat what they can find, or starve. There's enough for all of us growing in the broad fields."

Twinkle felt a little ashamed.

"We have to sell the clover and the vegetables to earn our living," she explained; "and if the animals eat them up we can't sell them."

"We don't eat enough to rob you," said the woodchuck, "and the land belonged to the wild creatures long before you people came here and began to farm. And really, there is no reason why you should be so cruel. It hurts dreadfully to be caught in a trap, and an animal captured in that way sometimes has to suffer for many hours before the man comes to kill it. We don't mind the killing so much. Death doesn't last but an instant. But every minute of suffering seems to be an hour."

"That's true," said Twinkle, feeling sorry and repentant. "I'll ask papa never to set another trap."

"That will be some help," returned Mister Woodchuck, more cheerfully, "and I hope you'll not forget the promise when you wake up. But that isn't enough to settle the account for all our past sufferings, I assure you; so I am trying to think of a suitable way to punish you for the past wickedness of your father, and of all other men that have set traps."

"Why, if you feel that way," said the little girl, "you're just as bad as we are!"

"How's that?" asked Mister Woodchuck, pausing in his walk to look at her.

"It's as naughty to want revenge as it is to be selfish and cruel," she said.

"I believe you are right about that," answered the animal, taking off his silk hat and rubbing the fur smooth with his elbow. "But woodchucks are not perfect, any more than men are, so you'll have to take us as you find us. And now I'll call my family, and exhibit you to them. The children, especially, will enjoy seeing the wild human girl I've had the luck to capture."

"Wild!" she cried, indignantly.

"If you're not wild now, you will be before you wake up," he said.