

## **Chapter IV - Mrs. Woodchuck and Her Family**

BUT Mister Woodchuck had no need to call his family, for just as he spoke a chatter of voices was heard and Mrs. Woodchuck came walking down a path of the garden with several young woodchucks following after her.

The lady animal was very fussily dressed, with puffs and ruffles and laces all over her silk gown, and perched upon her head was a broad white hat with long ostrich plumes. She was exceedingly fat, even for a woodchuck, and her head fitted close to her body, without any neck whatever to separate them. Although it was shady in the garden, she held a lace parasol over her head, and her walk was so mincing and airy that Twinkle almost laughed in her face.

The young woodchucks were of several sizes and kinds. One little woodchuck girl rolled before her a doll's baby-cab, in which lay a woodchuck doll made of cloth, in quite a perfect imitation of a real woodchuck. It was stuffed with something soft to make it round and fat, and its eyes were two glass beads sewn upon the face. A big boy woodchuck wore knickerbockers and a Tam o' Shanter cap and rolled a hoop; and there were several smaller boy and girl woodchucks, dressed quite as absurdly, who followed after their mother in a long train.

"My dear," said Mister Woodchuck to his wife, "here is a human creature that I captured just outside our front door."

"Huh!" sneered the lady woodchuck, looking at Twinkle in a very haughty way; "why will you bring such an animal into our garden, Leander? It makes me shiver just to look at the horrid thing!"

"Oh, mommer!" yelled one of the children, "see how skinny the beast is!"

"Hasn't any hair on its face at all," said another, "or on its paws!"

"And no sign of a tail!" cried the little woodchuck girl with the doll.

"Yes, it's a very strange and remarkable creature," said the mother. "Don't touch it, my precious darlings. It might bite."

"You needn't worry," said Twinkle, rather provoked at these speeches. "I wouldn't bite a dirty, greasy woodchuck on any account!"

"Whoo! did you hear what she called us, mommer? She says we're greasy and dirty!" shouted the children, and some of them grabbed pebbles from the path in their paws, as if to throw them at Twinkle.

"Tut, tut! don't be cruel," said Mister Woodchuck. "Remember the poor creature is a prisoner, and isn't used to good society; and besides that, she's dreaming."

"Really?" exclaimed Mrs. Woodchuck, looking at the girl curiously.

"To be sure," he answered. "Otherwise she wouldn't see us dressed in such fancy clothes, nor would we be bigger than she is. The whole thing is unnatural, my dear, as you must admit."

"But we're not dreaming; are we, Daddy?" anxiously asked the boy with the hoop.

"Certainly not," Mister Woodchuck answered; "so this is a fine opportunity for you to study one of those human animals who have always been our worst enemies. You will notice they are very curiously made. Aside from their lack of hair in any place except the top of the head, their paws are formed in a strange manner. Those long slits in them make what are called fingers, and their claws are flat and dull--not at all sharp and strong like ours."

"I think the beast is ugly," said Mrs. Woodchuck. "It would give me the shivers to touch its skinny flesh."

"I'm glad of that," said Twinkle, indignantly. "You wouldn't have all the shivers, I can tell you! And you're a disagreeable, ign'rant creature! If you had any manners at all, you'd treat strangers more politely."

"Just listen to the thing!" said Mrs. Woodchuck, in a horrified tone. "Isn't it wild, though!"