

Chapter VII - Twinkle is Condemned

"COME in!" called a voice.

Mister Woodchuck pushed open the door and entered, drawing Tinkle after him by the chain.

In the middle of the room sat a woodchuck whose hair was grizzled with old age. He wore big spectacles upon his nose, and a round knitted cap, with a tassel dangling from the top, upon his head. His only garment was an old and faded dressing-gown.

When they entered, the old woodchuck was busy playing a game with a number of baked-clay dominoes, which he shuffled and arranged upon a baked-mud table; nor did he look up for a long time, but continued to match the dominoes and to study their arrangement with intense interest.

Finally, however, he finished the game, and then he raised his head and looked sharply at his visitors.

"Good afternoon, Judge," said Mister Woodchuck, taking off his silk hat and bowing respectfully.

The judge did not answer him, but continued to stare at Twinkle.

"I have called to ask your advice," continued Mister Woodchuck. "By good chance I have been able to capture one of those fierce humans that are the greatest enemies of peaceful woodchucks."

The judge nodded his gray head wisely, but still answered nothing.

"But now that I've captured the creature, I don't know what to do with her," went on Mister Woodchuck; "although I believe, of course, she should be punished in some way, and made to feel as unhappy as her people have made us feel. Yet I realize that it's a dreadful thing to hurt any living creature, and as far as I'm concerned I'm quite willing to forgive her." With these words he wiped his face with a red silk handkerchief, as if really distressed.

"She's dreaming," said the judge, in a sharp, quick voice.

"Am I?" asked Twinkle.

"Of course. You were probably lying on the wrong side when you went to sleep."

"Oh!" she said. "I wondered what made it."

"Very disagreeable dream, isn't it?" continued the judge.

"Not so very," she answered. "It's interesting to see and hear woodchucks in their own homes, and Mister Woodchuck has shown me how cruel it is for us to set traps for you."

"Good!" said the judge. "But some dreams are easily forgotten, so I'll teach you a lesson you'll be likely to remember. You shall be caught in a trap yourself."

"Me!" cried Twinkle, in dismay.

"Yes, you. When you find how dreadfully it hurts you'll bear the traps in mind forever afterward. People don't remember dreams unless the dreams are unusually horrible. But I guess you'll remember this one."

He got up and opened a mud cupboard, from which he took a big steel trap. Twinkle could see that it was just like the trap papa had set to catch the woodchucks, only it seemed much bigger and stronger.

The judge got a mallet and with it pounded a stake into the mud floor. Then he fastened the chain of the trap to the stake, and afterward opened the iron jaws of the cruel-looking thing and set them with a lever, so that the slightest touch would spring the trap and make the strong jaws snap together.

"Now, little girl," said he, "you must step in the trap and get caught."

"Why, it would break my leg!" cried Twinkle.

"Did your father care whether a woodchuck got its leg broken or not?" asked the judge.

"No," she answered, beginning to be greatly frightened.

"Step!" cried the judge, sternly.

"It will hurt awfully," said Mister Woodchuck; "but that can't be helped. Traps are cruel things, at the best."

Twinkle was now trembling with nervousness and fear.

"Step!" called the judge, again.

"Dear me!" said Mister Woodchuck, just then, as he looked earnestly into Twinkle's face, "I believe she's going to wake up!"

"That's too bad," said the judge.

"No, I'm glad of it," replied Mister Woodchuck.

And just then the girl gave a start and opened her eyes.

She was lying in the clover, and before her was the opening of the woodchuck's hole, with the trap still set before it. Chapter VIII Twinkle Remembers

"PAPA," said Twinkle, when supper was over and she was nestled snugly in his lap, "I wish you wouldn't set any more traps for the woodchucks."

"Why not, my darling?" he asked in surprise.

"They're cruel," she answered. "It must hurt the poor animals dreadfully to be caught in them."

"I suppose it does," said her father, thoughtfully. "But if I don't trap the woodchucks they eat our clover and vegetables."

"Never mind that," said Twinkle, earnestly. "Let's divide with them. God made the woodchucks, you know, just as He made us, and they can't plant and grow things as we do; so they have to take what they can get, or starve to death. And surely, papa, there's enough to eat in this big and beautiful world, for all of God's creatures."

Papa whistled softly, although his face was grave; and then he bent down and kissed his little girl's forehead.

"I won't set any more traps, dear," he said.

And that evening, after Twinkle had been tucked snugly away in bed, her father walked slowly through the sweet-smelling fields to the woodchuck's hole; there lay the trap, showing plainly in the bright moonlight. He picked it up and carried it back to the barn. It was never used again.

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