

Chapter III - Mr. Bowko, the Mayor

"DEAR me!" said the prairie-dog, speaking almost in a whisper; "here are some of those queer humans from the village."

"Let me see! Let me see!" cried two shrill little voices, and the wee heads of two small creatures popped out of the hole and fixed their bright eyes upon the heads of Twinkle and Chubbins.

"Go down at once!" said the mother prairie-dog. "Do you want to get hurt, you naughty little things?"

"Oh, they won't get hurt," said another deeper voice, and the children turned their eyes toward a second mound, on top of which sat a plump prairie-dog whose reddish fur was tipped with white on the end of each hair. He seemed to be quite old, or at least well along in years, and he had a wise and thoughtful look on his face.

"They're humans," said the mother.

"True enough; but they're only human children, and wouldn't hurt your little ones for the world," the old one said.

"That's so!" called Twinkle. "All we want, is to get acquainted."

"Why, in that case," replied the old prairie-dog, "you are very welcome in our town, and we're glad to see you."

"Thank you," said Twinkle, gratefully. It didn't occur to her just then that it was wonderful to be talking to the little prairie-dogs just as if they were people. It seemed very natural they should speak with each other and be friendly.

As if attracted by the sound of voices, little heads began to pop out of the other mounds--one here and one there--until the town was alive with the pretty creatures, all squatting near the edges of their holes and eyeing Chubbins and Twinkle with grave and curious looks.

"Let me introduce myself," said the old one that had first proved friendly. "My name is Bowko, and I'm the Mayor and High Chief of Prairie-Dog Town."

"Don't you have a king?" asked Twinkle.

"Not in this town," he answered. "There seems to be no place for kings in this free United States. And a Mayor and High Chief is just as good as a king, any day."

"I think so, too," answered the girl.

"Better!" declared Chubbins.

The Mayor smiled, as if pleased.

"I see you've been properly brought up," he continued; "and now let me introduce to you some of my fellow-citizens. This," pointing with one little paw to the hole where the mother and her two children were sitting, "is Mrs. Puff-Pudgy and her family--Teenty and Weenty. Mr. Puff-Pudgy, I regret to say, was recently chased out of town for saying his prayers backwards."

"How could he?" asked Chubbins, much surprised.

"He was always contrary," answered the Mayor, with a sigh, "and wouldn't do things the same way that others did. His good wife, Mrs. Puff-Pudgy, had to scold him all day long; so we finally made him leave the town, and I don't know where he's gone to."

"Won't he be sorry not to have his little children any more?" asked Twinkle, regretfully.

"I suppose so; but if people are contrary, and won't behave, they must take the consequences. This is Mr. Chuckledorf," continued the Mayor, and a very fat prairie-dog bowed to them most politely; "and here is Mrs. Fuzcum; and Mrs. Chatterby; and Mr. Sneezeley, and Doctor Dosem."

All these folks bowed gravely and politely, and Chubbins and Twinkle bobbed their heads in return until their necks ached, for it seemed as if the Mayor would never get through introducing the hundreds of prairie-dogs that were squatting around.

"I'll never be able to tell one from the other," whispered the girl; "'cause they all look exactly alike."

"Some of 'em's fatter," observed Chubbins; "but I don't know which."