

Chapter VII - The Mayor Gives a Luncheon

"DON'T we have to go upstairs and out of doors?" asked Twinkle.

"Oh, no," replied the prairie-dog, "we have halls connecting all the different houses of importance. Just follow me, and you can't get lost."

They might easily have been lost without their guide, the little girl thought, after they had gone through several winding passages. They turned this way and that, in quite a bewildering manner, and there were so many underground tunnels going in every direction that it was a wonder Mrs. Puff-Pudgy knew which way to go.

"You ought to have sign-posts," said Chubbins, who had once been in a city.

"Why, as for that, every one in the town knows which way to go," answered their guide; "and it isn't often we have visitors. Last week a gray owl stopped with us for a couple of days, and we had a fine ball in her honor. But you are the first humans that have ever been entertained in our town, so it's quite an event with us." A few minutes later she said: "Here we are, at the Mayor's house," and as they passed under a broad archway she blew out her candle, because the Mayor's house was so brilliantly lighted.

"Welcome!" said Mr. Bowko, greeting the children with polite bows. "You are just in time, for luncheon is about ready and my guests are waiting for you."

He led them at once into a big dining-room that was so magnificently painted with colored clays that the walls were as bright as a June rainbow.

"How pretty!" cried Twinkle, clapping her hands together in delight.

"I'm glad you like it," said the Mayor, much pleased. "Some people, who are lacking in good taste, think it's a little overdone, but a Mayor's house should be gorgeous, I think, so as to be a credit to the community. My grandfather, who designed and painted this house, was a very fine artist. But luncheon is ready, so pray be seated."

They sat down on little clay chairs that were placed at the round table. The Mayor sat on one side of Twinkle and Mrs. Puff-Pudgy on the other, and Chubbins was between the skinny old magician and Mr. Sneezeley. Also, in other chairs sat Dr. Dosem, and Mrs. Chatterby, and Mrs. Fuzcum, and

several others. It was a large company, indeed, which showed that the Mayor considered this a very important occasion.

They were waited upon by several sleek prairie-dog maids in white aprons and white caps, who looked neat and respectable, and were very graceful in their motions.

Neither Twinkle nor Chubbins was very hungry, but they were curious to know what kind of food the prairie-dogs ate, so they watched carefully when the different dishes were passed around. Only grains and vegetables were used, for prairie-dogs do not eat meat. There was a milk-weed soup at first; and then yellow corn, boiled and sliced thin. Afterward they had a salad of thistle leaves, and some bread made of barley. The dessert was a dish of the sweet, dark honey made by prairie-bees, and some cakes flavored with sweet and spicy roots that only prairie-dogs know how to find.

The children tasted of several dishes, just to show their politeness; but they couldn't eat much. Chubbins spent most of his time watching Mr. Presto Digi, who ate up everything that was near him and seemed to be as hungry after the luncheon as he had been before.

Mrs. Puff-Pudgy talked so much about the social standing and dignity of the Puff-Pudgys that she couldn't find time to eat much, although she asked for the recipe of the milk-weed soup. But most of the others present paid strict attention to the meal and ate with very good appetites.