

## **PRINCE MUD-TURTLE**

### **Chapter I Twinkle Captures the Turtle**

ONE hot summer day Twinkle went down into the meadow to where the brook ran tinkling over its stones or rushed and whirled around the curves of the banks or floated lazily through the more wide and shallow parts. It wasn't much of a brook, to tell the facts, for there were many places where an active child could leap across it. But it was the only brook for miles around, and to Twinkle it was a never-ending source of delight. Nothing amused or refreshed the little girl more than to go wading on the pebbly bottom and let the little waves wash around her slim ankles.

There was one place, just below the pasture lot, where it was deeper; and here there were real fishes swimming about, such as "horned aces" and "chubs" and "shiners"; and once in a while you could catch a mud-turtle under the edges of the flat stones or in hollows beneath the banks. The deep part was not very big, being merely a pool, but Twinkle never waded in it, because the water would come quite up to her waist, and then she would be sure to get her skirts wet, which would mean a good scolding from mamma.

To-day she climbed the fence in the lane, just where the rickety wooden bridge crossed the brook, and at once sat down upon the grassy bank and took off her shoes and stockings. Then, wearing her sun-bonnet to shield her face from the sun, she stepped softly into the brook and stood watching the cool water rush by her legs.

It was very nice and pleasant; but Twinkle never could stand still for very long, so she began to wade slowly down the stream, keeping in the middle of the brook, and being able to see through the clear water all the best places to put her feet.

Pretty soon she had to duck her head to pass under the fence that separated the meadow from the pasture lot; but she got through all right, and then kept on down the stream, until she came close to the deep pool. She couldn't wade through this, as I have explained; so she got on dry land and crept on her hands and knees up to the edge of the bank, so as not to scare the fishes, if any were swimming in the pool.

By good luck there were several fishes in the pool to-day, and they didn't seem to notice that Twinkle was looking at them, so quiet had she been. One little fellow shone like silver when the sunshine caught his glossy sides, and the little girl watched him wiggling here and there with much delight. There was also a big, mud-colored fish that lay a long time upon the bottom without moving anything except his fins and the tip of his tail, and Twinkle also discovered a group of several small fishes not over an inch long, that always swam together in a bunch, as if they belonged to one family.

The girl watched these little creatures long and earnestly. The pool was all of the world these simple fishes would ever know. They were born here, and would die here, without ever getting away from the place, or even knowing there was a much bigger world outside of it.

After a time the child noticed that the water had become a little muddy near the edge of the bank where she lay, and as it slowly grew clear again she saw a beautiful turtle lying just under her head and against the side of the bank. It was a little bigger around than a silver dollar, and instead of its shell being of a dull brown color, like that of all other mud-turtles she had seen, this one's back was streaked with brilliant patches of yellow and red.

"I must get that lovely turtle!" thought Twinkle; and as the water was shallow where it lay she suddenly plunged in her hand, grabbed the turtle, and flung it out of the water on to the bank, where it fell upon its back, wiggling its four fat legs desperately in an attempt to turn over.