

TWINKLE'S ENCHANTMENT

Chapter I - Twinkle Enters the Big Gulch

ONE afternoon Twinkle decided to go into the big gulch and pick some blueberries for papa's supper. She had on her blue gingham dress and her blue sun-bonnet, and there were stout shoes upon her feet. So she took her tin pail and started out.

"Be back in time for supper," called mamma from the kitchen porch.

"Course," said Twinkle, as she trotted away. "I'm not hungry now, but I'll be hungry 'nough when supper-time comes. 'Course I'll be back!"

The side of the gulch was but a little way from the house. It was like a big ditch, only the sides were not too steep to crawl down; and in the middle of the gulch were rolling hills and deep gullies, all covered with wild bushes and vines and a few flowering plants--very rare in this part of the country.

Twinkle hadn't lived very long in this section of Dakota, for her father had just bought the new farm that lay beside the gulch. So the big ditch was a great delight to her, and she loved to wander through it and pick the berries and flowers that never grew on the plains above.

To-day she crept carefully down the path back of the house and soon reached the bottom of the gulch. Then she began to search for the berries; but all were gone in the places where she had picked them before; so she found she must go further along.

She sat down to rest for a time, and by and by she happened to look up at the other side and saw a big cluster of bushes hanging full of ripe blueberries--just about half way up the opposite bank.

She had never gone so far before, but if she wanted the berries for papa's supper she knew she must climb up the slope and get them; so she rose to her feet and began to walk in that direction. It was all new to the little girl, and seemed to her like a beautiful fairyland; but she had no idea that the gulch was enchanted. Soon a beetle crawled across her path, and as she stopped to let it go by, she heard it say:

"Look out for the line of enchantment! You'll soon cross it, if you don't watch out."

"What line of enchantment?" asked Twinkle.

"It's almost under your nose," replied the little creature.

"I don't see anything at all," she said, after looking closely.

"Of course you don't," said the beetle. "It isn't a mark, you know, that any one can see with their eyes; but it's a line of enchantment, just the same, and whoever steps over it is sure to see strange things and have strange adventures."

"I don't mind that," said Twinkle.

"Well, I don't mind if you don't," returned the beetle, and by that time he had crept across the path and disappeared underneath a big rock.

Twinkle went on, without being at all afraid. If the beetle spoke truly, and there really was an invisible line that divided the common, real world from an enchanted country, she was very eager to cross it, as any little girl might well be. And then it occurred to her that she must have crossed the enchanted line before she met the beetle, for otherwise she wouldn't have understood his language, or known what he was talking about. Children don't talk with beetles in the real world, as Twinkle knew very well, and she was walking along soberly, thinking this over, when suddenly a voice cried out to her:

"Be careful!"