

Chapter III - Some Queer Acquaintances

"WAIT a minute!" implored a small voice, and the girl noticed a yellow butterfly that had just settled down upon the stone. "Aren't you the child from the farm?"

"To be sure," she answered, much amused to hear the butterfly speak.

"Then can you tell me if your mother expects to churn to-day," said the pretty creature, slowly folding and unfolding its dainty wings.

"Why do you want to know?"

"If she churns to-day, I'll fly over to the house and try to steal some butter. But if your mother isn't going to churn, I'll fly down into the gulch and rob a bees' nest I know of."

"Why do you rob and steal?" inquired Twinkle.

"It's the only way I can get my living," said the butterfly. "Nobody ever gives me anything, and so I have to take what I want."

"Do you like butter?"

"Of course I do! That's why we are called butterflies, you know. I prefer butter to anything else, and I have heard that in some countries the children always leave a little dish of butter on the window-sill, so that we may help ourselves whenever we are hungry. I wish I had been born in such a country."

"Mother won't churn until Saturday," said Twinkle. "I know, 'cause I've got to help her, and I just hate butter-making!"

"Then I won't go to the farm to-day," replied the butterfly. "Good-bye, little girl. If you think of it, leave a dish of butter around where I can get at it."

"All right," said Twinkle, and the butterfly waved its wings and fluttered through the air into the gulch below.

Then the girl started up the hill and the Stone rolled slowly beside her, groaning and grumbling because the ground was so rough.

Presently she noticed running across the path a tiny Book, not much bigger than a postage-stamp. It had two slender legs, like those of a bumble-bee, and

upon these it ran so fast that all the leaves fluttered wildly, the covers being half open.

"What's that?" asked Twinkle, looking after the book in surprise.

"That is a little Learning," answered the Stone. "Look out for it, for they say it's a dangerous thing."

"It's gone already," said Twinkle.

"Let it go. Nobody wants it, that I know of. Just help me over this bump, will you?"

So she rolled the Stone over the little hillock, and just as she did so her attention was attracted by a curious noise that sounded like "Pop! pop! pop!"

"What's that?" she inquired, hesitating to advance.

"Only a weasel," answered the Stone. "Stand still a minute, and you'll see him. Whenever he thinks he's alone, and there's no one to hear, 'pop' goes the weasel."

Sure enough, a little animal soon crossed their path, making the funny noise at every step. But as soon as he saw that Twinkle was staring at him he stopped popping and rushed into a bunch of tall grass and hid himself.

And now they were almost at the berry-bushes, and Twinkle trotted so fast that the Rolling Stone had hard work to keep up with her. But when she got to the bushes she found a flock of strange birds sitting upon them and eating up the berries as fast as they could. The birds were not much bigger than robins, and were covered with a soft, velvety skin instead of with feathers, and they had merry black eyes and long, slender beaks curving downward from their noses, which gave to their faces a saucy expression. The lack of usual feathers might not have surprised Twinkle so much had she not noticed upon the tail of each bird one single, solitary feather of great length, which was certainly a remarkable thing.

"I know what they are," she said, nodding her head wisely; "they're birds of a feather."

At this the birds burst into a chorus of laughter, and one of them said:

"Perhaps you think that's why we flock together."

"Well, isn't that the reason?" she asked.

"Not a bit of it," declared the bird. "The reason we flock together is because we're too proud to mix with common birds, who have feathers all over them."

"I should think you'd be ashamed, 'cause you're so naked," she returned.

"The fact is, Twinkle," said another bird, as he pecked at a blueberry and swallowed it, "the common things in this world don't amount to much. There are millions of birds on earth, but only a few of us that have but one feather. In my opinion, if you had but one hair upon your head you'd be much prettier."

"I'd be more 'strord'nary, I'm sure," said Twinkle, using the biggest word she could think of.

"There's no accounting for tastes," remarked the Rolling Stone, which had just arrived at Twinkle's side after a hard roll up the path. "For my part, I haven't either hair or feathers, and I'm glad of it."

The birds laughed again, at this, and as they had eaten all the berries they cared for, they now flew into the air and disappeared.