

Chapter IV - The Dancing Bear

"REALLY," said Twinkle, as she began picking the berries and putting them into her pail, "I didn't know so many things could talk."

"It's because you are in the part of the gulch that's enchanted," answered the Rolling Stone. "When you get home again, you'll think this is all a dream."

"I wonder if it isn't!" she suddenly cried, stopping to look around, and then feeling of herself carefully. "It's usually the way in all the fairy stories that papa reads to me. I don't remember going to sleep any time; but perhaps I did, after all."

"Don't let it worry you," said the Stone, making a queer noise that Twinkle thought was meant for a laugh. "If you wake up, you'll be sorry you didn't dream longer; and if you find you haven't been asleep, this will be a wonderful adventure."

"That's true enough," the girl answered, and again began filling her pail with the berries. "When I tell mama all this, she won't believe a word of it. And papa will laugh and pinch my cheek, and say I'm like Alice in Wonderland, or Dorothy in the Land of Oz."

Just then she noticed something big and black coming around the bushes from the other side, and her heart beat a good deal faster when she saw before her a great bear standing upon his rear legs beside her.

He had a little red cap on his head that was kept in place by a band of rubber elastic. His eyes were small, but round and sparkling, and there seemed to be a smile upon his face, for his white teeth showed in two long rows.

"Don't be afraid," called out the Rolling Stone; "it's only the Dancing Bear."

"Why should the child be afraid?" asked the bear, speaking in a low, soft tone that reminded her of the purring of a kitten. "No one ever heard of a Dancing Bear hurting anybody. We're about the most harmless things in the world."

"Are you really a Dancing Bear?" asked Twinkle, curiously.

"I am, my dear," he replied, bowing low and then folding his arms proudly as he leaned against a big rock that was near. "I wish there was some one here who could tell you what a fine dancer I am. It wouldn't be modest for me to praise myself, you know."

"I s'pose not," said Twinkle. "But if you're a Dancing Bear, why don't you dance?"

"There it is again!" cried the Rolling Stone. "This girl Twinkle wants to keep everybody moving. She wouldn't believe, at first, that I was a Rolling Stone, because I was lying quiet just then. And now she won't believe you're a Dancing Bear, because you don't eternally keep dancing."

"Well, there's some sense in that, after all," declared the Bear. "I'm only a Dancing Bear while I'm dancing, to speak the exact truth; and you're only a Rolling Stone while you're rolling."

"I beg to disagree with you," returned the Stone, in a cold voice.

"Well, don't let us quarrel, on any account," said the Bear. "I invite you both to come to my cave and see me dance. Then Twinkle will be sure I'm a Dancing Bear."

"I haven't filled my pail yet," said the little girl, "and I've got to get enough berries for papa's supper."

"I'll help you," replied the Bear, politely; and at once he began to pick berries and to put them into Twinkle's pail. His big paws looked very clumsy and awkward, but it was astonishing how many blueberries the bear could pick with them. Twinkle had hard work to keep up with him, and almost before she realized how fast they had worked, the little pail was full and overflowing with fine, plump berries.

"And now," said the Bear, "I will show you the way to my cave."

He took her hand in his soft paw and began leading her along the side of the steep hill, while the Stone rolled busily along just behind them. But they had not gone far before Twinkle's foot slipped, and in trying to save herself from falling she pushed hard against the Stone and tumbled it from the pathway.

"Now you've done it!" growled the Stone, excitedly, as it whirled around. "Here I go, for I've lost my balance and I can't help myself!"

Even as he spoke the big round stone was flying down the side of the gulch, bumping against the hillocks and bits of rock--sometimes leaping into the air and then clinging close to the ground, but going faster and faster every minute.

"Dear me," said Twinkle, looking after it; "I'm afraid the Rolling Stone will get hurt."

"No danger of that," replied the Bear. "It's as hard as a rock, and not a thing in the gulch could hurt it a bit. But our friend would have to roll a long time to get back here again, so we won't wait. Come along, my dear."

He held out his paw again, and Twinkle took it with one of her hands while she carried the pail with the other, and so managed to get over the rough ground very easily.