

Chapter VII - The Grasshoppers' Hop

TWINKLE now began to fear she wouldn't get home to supper, for the sun started to sink into the big prairie, and in the golden glow it left behind, the girl beheld most beautiful palaces and castles suspended in the air just above the hollow in which she stood. Splendid banners floated from the peaks and spires of these magnificent buildings, and all the windows seemed of silver and all the roofs of gold.

"What city is that?" she asked, standing still, in amazement.

"That isn't any city," replied the grasshopper. "They are only Castles in the Air--very pretty to look at, but out of everybody's reach. Come along, my little friend; we're almost at Hoptown."

So Twinkle walked on, and before long Prince Nimble paused on the stem of a hollyhock and said:

"Now, sit down carefully, right where you are, and you will be able to watch my people. It is the night of our regular hop--if you listen you can hear the orchestra tuning up."

She sat down, as he bade her, and tried to listen, but only heard a low whirr and rattle like the noise of a beetle's wings.

"That's the drummer," said Prince Nimble. "He is very clever, indeed."

"Good gracious! It's night," said Twinkle, with a start. "I ought to be at home and in bed this very minute!"

"Never mind," said the grasshopper; "you can sleep any time, but this is our annual ball, and it's a great privilege to witness it."

Suddenly the grass all around them became brilliantly lighted, as if from a thousand tiny electric lamps. Twinkle looked closely, and saw that a vast number of fireflies had formed a circle around them, and were illuminating the scene of the ball.

In the center of the circle were assembled hundreds of grasshoppers, of all sizes. The small ones were of a delicate green color, and the middle-sized ones of a deeper green, while the biggest ones were a yellowish brown.

But the members of the orchestra interested Twinkle more than anything else. They were seated upon the broad top of a big toadstool at one side, and the musicians were all beetles and big-bugs. A fat water-beetle played a bass fiddle as big and fat as himself, and two pretty ladybugs played the violins. A scarab, brightly colored with scarlet and black, tooted upon a long horn, and a sand-beetle made the sound of a drum with its wings. Then there was a coleopto, making shrill sounds like a flute--only of course Twinkle didn't know the names of these beetles, and thought they were all just "bugs."

When the orchestra began to play, the music was more pleasing than you might suppose; anyway, the grasshoppers liked it, for they commenced at once to dance.

The antics of the grasshoppers made Twinkle laugh more than once, for the way they danced was to hop around in a circle, and jump over each other, and then a lady grasshopper and a gentleman grasshopper would take hold of hands and stand on their long rear legs and swing partners until it made the girl dizzy just to watch them.

Sometimes two of them would leap at once, and knock against each other in the air, and then go tumbling to the ground, where the other dancers tripped over them. She saw Prince Nimble dancing away with the others, and his partner was a lovely green grasshopper with sparkling black eyes and wings that were like velvet. They didn't bump into as many of the others as some did, and Twinkle thought they danced very gracefully indeed.

And now, while the merriment was at its height, and waiter-grasshoppers were passing around refreshments that looked like grass seeds covered with thick molasses, a big cat suddenly jumped into the circle.

At once all the lights went out, for the fire-flies fled in every direction; but in the darkness Twinkle thought she could still hear the drone of the big bass fiddle and the flute-like trill of the ladybugs.

The next thing Twinkle knew, some one was shaking her shoulder.

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"Wake up, dear," said her mother's voice. "It's nearly supper-time, and papa's waiting for you. And I see you haven't picked a single blueberry."