

Baum Lyman Frank

Prairie-Dog Town



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Содержание

Chapter I	5
Chapter II	7
Chapter III	8
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	9

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Prairie-Dog Town

Chapter I

The Picnic

On the great western prairies of Dakota is a little town called Edgeley, because it is on the edge of civilization – a very big word which means some folks have found a better way to live than other folks. The Edgeley people have a good way to live, for there are almost seventeen wooden houses there, and among them is a school-house, a church, a store and a blacksmith-shop. If people walked out their front doors they were upon the little street; if they walked out the back doors they were on the broad prairies. That was why Twinkle, who was a farmer's little girl, lived so near the town that she could easily walk to school.

She was a pretty, rosy-cheeked little thing, with long, fluffy hair, and big round eyes that everybody smiled into when they saw them. It was hard to keep that fluffy hair from getting tangled; so mamma used to tie it in the back with a big, broad ribbon. And Twinkle wore calico slips for school days and gingham dresses when she wanted to "dress up" or look especially nice. And to keep the sun from spotting her face with freckles, she wore sunbonnets made of the same goods as her dresses.

Twinkle's best chum was a little boy[Pg 7][Pg 8] called Chubbins, who was the only child of the tired-faced school-teacher. Chubbins was about as old as Twinkle; but he wasn't so tall and slender for his age as she was, being short and rather fat. The hair on his little round head was cut close, and he usually wore a shirt-waist and "knickers," with a wide straw hat on the back of his head. Chubbins's face was very solemn. He never said many words when grown folks were around, but he could talk fast enough when he and Twinkle were playing together alone.

Well, one Saturday the school had a picnic, and Twinkle and Chubbins both went. On the Dakota prairies there are no shade-trees at all, and very little water except what they get by boring deep holes in the ground; so you may wonder where the people could possibly have a picnic. But about three miles from the town a little stream of water (which they called a "river," but we would call only a brook) ran slow and muddy across the prairie; and where the road crossed it a flat bridge had been built. If you climbed down the banks of the river you would find a nice shady place under the wooden bridge; and so here it was that the picnics were held.

All the village went to the picnic, and they started bright and early in the morning, with horses and farm-wagons, and baskets full of good things to eat, and soon arrived at the bridge.

There was room enough in its shade for all to be comfortable; so they unhitched the horses and carried the baskets to the river bank, and began to laugh and be as merry as they could.

Twinkle and Chubbins, however, didn't care much for the shade of the bridge. This was a strange place to them, so they decided to explore it and see if it was any different from any other part of the prairie. Without telling anybody where they were going, they took hold of hands and trotted across the bridge and away into the plains on the other side.

The ground here wasn't flat, but had long rolls to it, like big waves on the ocean, so that as soon as the little girl and boy had climbed over the top of the first wave, or hill, those by the river lost sight of them.

They saw nothing but grass in the first hollow, but there was another hill just beyond, so they kept going, and climbed over that too. And now they found, lying in the second hollow, one of the most curious sights that the western prairies afford.

"What is it?" asked Chubbins, wonderingly.

"Why, it's a Prairie-Dog Town," said Twinkle.

Chapter II

Prairie-Dog Town

Lying in every direction, and quite filling the little hollow, were round mounds of earth, each one having a hole in the center. The mounds were about two feet high and as big around as a wash-tub, and the edges of the holes were pounded hard and smooth by the pattering feet of the little creatures that lived within.

"Isn't it funny!" said Chubbins, staring at the mounds.

"Awful," replied Twinkle, staring too. "Do you know, Chub, there are an'mals living in every single one of those holes?"

"What kind?" asked Chubbins.

"Well, they're something like squirrels, only they *aren't* squirrels," she explained. "They're prairie-dogs."

"Don't like dogs," said the boy, looking a bit uneasy.

"Oh, they're not dogs at all," said Twinkle; "they're soft and fluffy, and gentle."

"Do they bark?" he asked.

"Yes; but they don't bite."

"How d' you know, Twink?"

"Papa has told me about them, lots of times. He says they're so shy that they run into their holes when anybody's around; but if you keep quiet and watch, they'll stick their heads out in a few minutes."

"Let's watch," said Chubbins.

"All right," she agreed.

Very near to some of the mounds was a raised bank, covered with soft grass; so the children stole softly up to this bank and lay down upon it in such a way that their heads just stuck over the top of it, while their bodies were hidden from the eyes of any of the folks of Prairie-Dog Town.

"Are you comferble, Chub?" asked the little girl.

"Yes."

"Then lie still and don't talk, and keep your eyes open, and perhaps the an'mals will stick their heads up."

"All right," says Chubbins.

So they kept quiet and waited, and it seemed a long time to both the boy and the girl before a soft, furry head popped out of a near-by hole, and two big, gentle brown eyes looked at them curiously.

Chapter III

Mr. Bowko, the Mayor

"Dear me!" said the prairie-dog, speaking almost in a whisper; "here are some of those queer humans from the village."

"Let me see! Let me see!" cried two shrill little voices, and the wee heads of two small creatures popped out of the hole and fixed their bright eyes upon the heads of Twinkle and Chubbins.

"Go down at once!" said the mother prairie-dog. "Do you want to get hurt, you naughty little things?"

"Oh, they won't get hurt," said another deeper voice, and the children turned their eyes toward a second mound, on top of which sat a plump prairie-dog whose reddish fur was tipped with white on the end of each hair. He seemed to be quite old, or at least well along in years, and he had a wise and thoughtful look on his face.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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