

THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY

by Margaret T. Raymond & Carl O. Mohr



PRAIRIE DOG TOWN

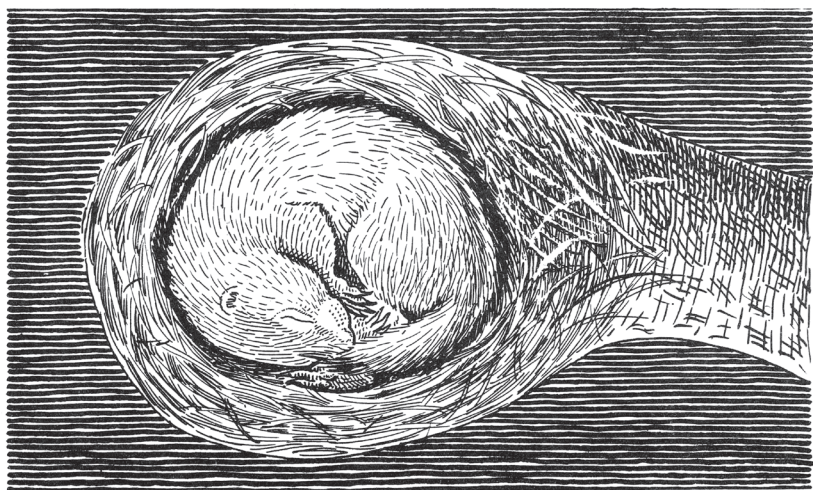
The late February snow lies in great patches across the high, windswept plains of Colorado. The drifts linger beside the fencerows and in the roadside ditches. Yet, day by day, the sun is climbing higher up the noonday sky, and the days are growing longer. It is still much too soon for boys and girls to think of springtime and much too early in the morning for them to do more than turn and snuggle deeper amongst their quilts and blankets, their eyes fast closed with sleep.

But deep underground, Mr. Prairie Dog knows that winter is nearly over and that spring is on the way. Beneath his heavy winter coat, his skin prickles with the mildness of the morning. Even the thick, fuzzy tip of his tail curled over his nose is not enough to shut out that first faint promise of warmer weather that even human beings can sense on a thawing day in February. He twitches his nose and begins to stir in his nest of grasses, uncurling his tail and then himself. He sits up and rubs the sleep from his beady eyes with his forepaws. Then he begins to comb bits of hay and dried leaves out of his coarse overcoat and the softer furry vest. He likes to be smooth and tidy and clean.

Mr. Prairie Dog is a kind of chunky ground squirrel, just big enough to sprawl comfortably between a person's two hands.

He looks like a small woodchuck or a very plump tree squirrel without its bushy tail. When fully grown, he measures between twelve and fifteen inches, plus a three-inch tail. In the spring, he weighs about two and a half pounds, though by fall he may weigh as much as three. His coat is reddish gray or grayish brown, depending on the earth color of the country where he lives. He generally has a black tip at the end of his tail, though one kind of mountain prairie dog has a white-tipped tail.

The eyes and ears are small, but apparently they have not been dulled by the prairie dog's underground habits, for he can see and hear, as well as smell, his approaching



enemies at some distance. Which sense is the keenest, no one but a prairie dog knows. Two sets of self-grown tools are tremendously important to a prairie dog, and those are his sharp, chisel-like teeth and his long, strong digging claws.

This warm February morning is not the first time Mr. Prairie Dog has been awake since bitter weather began. He is no snake or lizard to lie quiet and motionless in a long winter sleep. There is too much business in the world for him to attend to for that! Whenever the winter day was mild, he stirred in his sleeping chamber, as he is stirring now, and clambered to the top of his burrow for a nibble at a nearby sagebrush poking above the snow. This is too strong-flavored a plant for warm weather when other food is plentiful, but it tasted very good during the long, hungry winter.

Should he meet another prairie dog out on a similar errand, he would pause to greet him, rubbing nose to nose with a chirrup, as if to say, "Good morning. Pleasant day—for wintertime." The nip of the cold, however, would soon send him popping down his plunge hole and into his warm nest. There, he would curl and nap with his paws tucked under his chin and his tail tucked over his nose until the next warm, bright morning called him outdoors again.

Today, however, is different. He is not only wider awake but more restless than he has felt all winter long. It is not just hunger that is making him wakeful, though

he feels hungry enough for six prairie dogs, hungry and thin and a bit wobbly on his legs. It is much more than hunger that draws him up into Prairie Dog Town, where he is likely to find little to eat but winter-brown buffalo grass and spiny cactus shoots and the too-tangy fronds of sagebrush. Something that happens each spring, that happened last spring and the spring before that, is calling him outside. Not that he remembers exactly what it is. Yet he has in his blood many old memories that stir him strangely and make him move warily and keep him alive in the dangerous and exciting world up above. Mr. Prairie Dog is three years old—and quite middle-aged for a prairie dog.





YOUNG MR. PRAIRIE DOG

This yapping sound, like the bark of a toy poodle, was what the early explorers of America heard as they passed the prairie dog towns on their long journeys over the plains, and so they gave these small earth-dwelling animals the name “prairie dogs.” A better name would have been “barking ground squirrel,” for that is what they really are.



BURROWING OWL

Dog was aroused by the clicking sound of bird talons on the packed earth of their runway and the smothery smell of owl feathers. He yapped in his feeble baby voice. The four yapped in fear with him. Smell and sound came closer. Then, happily for them, their mother returned.

She flew at Mrs. Burrowing Owl and ordered her out, nipping and barking. Up the plunge hole fled Mrs. Owl in a fluttering, squawking flight. Perhaps she went to some other burrow for a meal of tender young animals to carry home to her baby owlets, but she never bothered this nest again.

BABY BURROWING OWLS





PRAIRIE DOG TOWN

Surprisingly enough, comparatively little has been written about that most social and comical of our native animals, the prairie dog. A prairie dog town is laid out skillfully and carefully, with an eye to safety and comfort. Mostly underground, its tunnels and rooms are amazing to explore. Here we have a chance to see prairie dogs going about their business with their curious neighbors, including jackrabbits, owls, ferrets, and antelope.



The
Good AND THE Beautiful
goodandbeautiful.com

ISBN 978-1-951097-59-2 \$6.99
50699>



9 781951 097592

SKU 704