

Baum Lyman Frank

John Dough and the Cherub



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L. Frank Baum

John Dough and the Cherub

The Great Elixir

Over the door appeared a weather-worn sign that read: "JULES GROGRANDE, BAKER." In one of the windows, painted upon a sheet of cardboard, was another sign: "Home-made Bread by the Best Modern Machinery." There was a third sign in the window beyond the doorway, and this was marked upon a bit of wrapping-paper, and said: "Fresh Gingerbread Every Day."

When you opened the door, the top of it struck a brass bell suspended from the ceiling and made it tinkle merrily. Hearing the sound, Madame Leontine Grogrande would come from her little room back of the shop and stand behind the counter and ask you what you would like to purchase.

Madame Leontine – or Madame Tina, as the children called her – was quite short and quite fat; and she had a round, pleasant face that was good to look upon. She moved somewhat slowly, for the rheumatism troubled her more or less; but no one minded if Madame was a bit slow in tying up her parcels. For surely no cakes or buns in all the town were so delicious or fresh as those she sold, and she had a way of giving the biggest cakes to the

smallest girls and boys who came into her shop, that proved she was fond of children and had a generous heart.

People loved to come to the Grogrande Bakery. When one opened the door an exquisite fragrance of newly baked bread and cakes greeted the nostrils; and, if you were not hungry when you entered, you were sure to become so when you examined and smelled the delicious pies and doughnuts and gingerbread and buns with which the shelves and show-cases were stocked. There were trays of French candies, too; and because all the goods were fresh and wholesome the bakery was well patronized and did a thriving business.

The reason no one saw Monsieur Jules in the shop was because his time was always occupied in the bakery in the rear – a long, low room filled with ovens and tables covered with pots and pans and dishes (which the skillful baker used for mixing and stirring) and long shelves bearing sugars and spices and baking-powders and sweet-smelling extracts that made his wares taste so sweet and agreeable.

The bake-room was three times as big as the shop; but Monsieur Jules needed all the space in the preparation of the great variety of goods required by his patrons, and he prided himself on the fact that his edibles were fresh-made each day. In order to have the bread and rolls ready at breakfast time he was obliged to get up at three o'clock every morning, and so he went to bed about sundown.

On a certain forenoon the door of the shop opened so abruptly

that the little brass bell made a furious jingling.

An Arab dashed into the room, stopped short, looked around with a bewildered air, and then rushed away again and banged the door after him.

Madame looked surprised, but said nothing. She recognized the Arab to be a certain Ali Dubh, living in the neighborhood, who was accustomed to purchase a loaf from her every morning. Perhaps he had forgotten his money, Madame thought.

When the afternoon was half over he entered again, running as if fiends were at his heels. In the center of the room he paused, slapped his forehead despairingly with both palms, and said in a wailing voice:

"They're after me!"

Next moment he dashed away at full speed, even forgetting to close the door; so Madame came from behind the counter and did it herself. She delayed a moment to gaze at the figure of Ali Dubh racing up the street. Then he turned the corner of an alley and disappeared from view.

Things did not startle Madame easily; but the Arab's queer behavior aroused in her a mild curiosity, and while she stood looking through the glass of the door, and wondering what had excited the man, she saw two strange forms glide past her shop with a stealthy motion and proceed in the same direction Ali Dubh had taken.

They were also Arabs, without a doubt; for although their forms were muffled in long cloaks, the turbans they wore and

the glint of their dark, beady eyes proclaimed them children of the desert.

When they came to the alley where Ali Dubh had disappeared, the two strangers were joined by a third, who crept up to them with the sly, cat-like tread Madame had noted, and seemed to confer with them. Afterward one turned to the east, a second continued up the street, and the third stole into the alley.

"Yes," thought Madame, "they are after Ali Dubh, sure enough. But if they move so slowly they are not likely to catch the poor fellow at all."

Now, Madame knew very little of her queer customer; for although he made a daily visit to the bakery for a loaf and a few cakes, he was of a gloomy disposition, and never stopped for a chat or a bit of gossip. It was his custom to silently make his simple purchases and then steal softly away.

Therefore his excited actions upon this eventful day were really remarkable, and the good lady was puzzled how to explain them.

She sat late in the shop that evening, burning a dingy oil lamp that swung in the center of the room. For her rheumatism was more painful than usual, and she dreaded to go to bed and waken Monsieur Jules with her moanings. The good man was slumbering peacefully upstairs – she could hear his lusty snores even where she sat – and it was a shame to disturb him when he must rise so early.

So she sat in her little room at the end of the counter, trying

to knit by the light of a flickering candle, and rocking back and forth in her chair with a monotonous motion.

Suddenly the little bell tinkled and a gust of air entered the shop, sending the mingled odors of baked stuff whirling and scurrying about the room in a most fragrant manner. Then the door closed, and Madame laid down her knitting and turned to greet the new-comer.

To her astonishment, it proved to be Ali Dubh. His brown cheeks were flushed, and his glittering black eyes roamed swiftly over the shop before they turned full upon the Madame's calm face.

"Good!" he exclaimed, "you are alone."

"It is too late for trade. I am going to bed presently," said Madame.

"I am in great trouble, and you must help me," returned the Arab, hastily. "Lock your door and come with me into your little room, so that no one can see us through the street windows."

Madame hesitated. The request was unusual, and she knew nothing of the Arab's history. But she reflected that if the man attempted robbery or other mischief she could summon Monsieur Jules with a cry. Also, her interest had been aroused by Ali Dubh's queer behavior during the day.

While she thought the matter over the Arab himself locked the street door and hurried into the little room, where Madame composedly joined him a moment later.

"How can I help you?" she asked, picking up her knitting

again.

"Listen!" said the Arab. "I must tell you all. You must know the truth!" He put his hand in a pocket of his loose robe and drew out a small flask. It was no bigger than two fingers and was made of pure gold, upon which strange characters had been richly engraved.

"This," said the Arab, in a low, impressive voice, "is the Great Elixir!"

"What does that mean?" asked Madame, glancing at the flask doubtfully.

"The Great Elixir? Ah, it is the Essence of Vitality, the Water of Life – the Greatest Thing in all the World!"

"I don't understand," said Madame.

"Not understand? Why, a drop of the priceless liquid which this Golden Flask contains, if placed upon your tongue, would send new life coursing through your veins. It would give you power, strength, vitality greater than youth itself! You could do anything – accomplish wonders – perform miracles – if you but tasted this precious liquid!"

"How odd!" exclaimed Madame, beginning to feel bewildered. And then she asked: "Where did you get it?"

"Ah! that is the story. That is what you must know," answered Ali Dubh. "It is centuries old, the Great Elixir. There is no more of it in all the world. The contents of this flask came into the keeping of the Ancestor of the Chief of my Tribe – whom we call a Shiek – and has been handed down from father to son

as an heirloom more priceless than diamonds. The Chief of my Tribe, its last owner, carried the flask always hidden in his breast. But one day, when he and I were hunting together, a mad camel trampled the Shiek to his death, and with his last breath he gave the Great Elixir into my keeping. The Shiek had no son, and the flask was really mine. But many other Arab Shieks longed for the treasure and sought to gain it. So I escaped and wandered over the world. I came here, thinking I was safe from pursuit. But they have followed me!"

"All the way from Arabia?" asked Madame.

"Yes. To-day I saw them. They know my lodgings. They are secretly hidden near, and before morning I know they plot to kill me and secure the Great Elixir. But for a time I have escaped them. I came here unseen. You must help me. You must take charge of the Great Elixir and keep it safely for me."

"Nonsense!" cried Madame, becoming aroused at last.

"Do not say that, I beg of you," exclaimed the eager Arab. "You are honest – I know you are! And they will never suspect you of having the Golden Flask."

"Perhaps not," said Madame, "and then, again, they may. My business is to tend the shop, and I am not going to get myself killed by a lot of desperate foreigners just to oblige *you*, Monsieur Ali Dubh! Take your Great Elixir to some one else. I don't want it."

For a minute the Arab seemed in despair. Then his face suddenly brightened.

"You suffer from rheumatism, do you not?" he asked.

"Yes, it's pretty bad to-night," she replied.

"Then I will cure it! I will cure your pains forever if you will keep my precious Elixir in secret until I come to reclaim it."

Madame hesitated, for just then she had a very bad twinge indeed.

"You think you can cure my pains?" she asked.

"I know it!" declared the Arab. He put his hand in a pocket and drew out another flask – a mate to the one containing the Great Elixir; only this was made of solid silver instead of gold.

"This flask," said Ali Dubh, "contains a positive cure for rheumatism. It will not fail. It never has failed. Take it and use it to make yourself well. Five drops in a bowl of water are enough. Bathe well the limbs that ache, and all pain will be gone forever. Accept it, gracious Madame, and keep for me the other flask in safe hiding until my enemies have gone away."

Madame was a practical woman, and it seemed an easy thing to do as the Arab desired. If she could get relief from those dreadful pains it would be well worth while to undertake a little trouble and responsibility by caring for Ali Dubh's other and more precious flask.

"Very well," said she. "I agree."

The Arab's face flushed with joy.

"Good," he cried; "I am saved! Guard well my precious flask – the one of gold. Show it to no one – not even to your good husband. Remember that diamonds and rubies could not buy

the Great Elixir – the marvelous Essence of Vitality. As for the silver flask, I give it to you freely. Its contents will cure all your ailments. And now, good night, and may Allah bless you!"

Swiftly he stole from the room, unlocked the street door and vanished into the darkness. And Madame sat looking thoughtfully at the flasks.

The Two Flasks

Presently she remembered that the front door was yet unlocked. So she trotted out into the shop, bolted the door securely, drew down the curtains, and put out the dim light that had burned over the counter. Then Madame returned to the little room and looked at the two flasks again.

Aside from her rheumatism the good lady had one other physical weakness; she was color-blind. That is, she could seldom distinguish one color from another, and was quite liable to think blue was green and green was yellow. Many people have this trouble with their eyes; but it never had bothered Madame especially in waiting upon her customers.

Now, however, when she came back into her room and gazed at the two flasks upon her table, she had no idea which one was of gold and which of silver, for the weakness of her eyes prevented her from telling them apart by means of their color.

"Let me see," she murmured; "this must be the flask which the Arab first drew from his pocket. No – I think *this* was the one." But the more she hesitated the more confused she became, and in the end she told herself honestly that she had not the faintest clue to guide her in knowing which flask contained the Essence of Vitality and which the cure for rheumatism.

And the pains were now so bad that she was anxious to cure them without a moment's delay.

The engraving on the two flasks was nearly the same; and if some of those queer foreign characters really differed, Madame did not know it. Also in size and shape the flasks were exactly alike. Truly Madame was in a fine quandary, and there seemed no way of getting out of it with safety.

She had almost decided to hide both flasks until the Arab returned, when several sharp twinges of pain caught her and made her long most earnestly for relief. If she went to bed now she would be sure to suffer all night, and in one of the flasks was a sure cure.

"I'll guess at it, and take the chances!" declared Madame, firmly. And then, choosing at haphazard, she hid the silver flask behind the mirror and put the gold one in her pocket. Afterward she picked up the lamp and walked as silently as possible through the short passage that led to Monsieur Jules' bake-room.

The big place was still and dark, and the little lamp only brightened a small part of it. But Madame did not care for that. Those pains were getting extremely hard to bear, and she had even ceased to care whether or not she had selected the right flask.

Taking a brown bowl from the shelf she drew it nearly full of water and then placed it upon a corner of the long, white mixing-table, beside the lamp. Next she took the golden flask from her pocket.

"How much did the Arab say to put in the water?" she wondered, pausing in perplexed thought. "I declare, I've actually

forgotten! But he said it was sure to cure me, so I may as well use all the flask contains. For, after I am cured, I shall not need any more of it."

Reasoning thus, Madame removed the stopper and poured into the bowl every drop of that precious Elixir which Ali Dubh had prized more than life itself, and which his wild countrymen had come all the way from Arabia to America to possess. For generation after generation the priceless liquor had been preserved with jealous care, and now the baker's wife was rubbing it upon her limbs in an endeavor to cure the pangs of rheumatism!

She used very little of the contents of the bowl, after all. The touch of the Elixir upon her skin, although it was diluted with so much water, sent a glow of exhilaration throughout all her stout body.

The pains were suddenly eased, and Madame began to feel as light and airy as a fairy, in spite of her great mass of flesh.

It occurred to her that she would like to dance; to run and shout, to caper about as she used to do as a girl. But soon her shrewd common sense returned, and she told herself this was but the effect of the wonderful medicine, and that the wisest thing she could do was to go to bed and sleep soundly while she might.

Being still somewhat bewildered, the good woman picked up the lamp, and, leaving the bowl containing the Elixir standing upon the table, mounted the stairs with lighter steps than she had known in years.

Five minutes later she was in bed, snoring as loudly as Monsieur Jules himself.

The Gingerbread Man

The baker awoke at three o'clock, and soon afterward came downstairs yawning and rubbing his eyes in his accustomed manner. For it is a real hardship to arise in the middle of the night and go to work, and Monsieur Jules sometimes regretted he was such a skillful baker; for any other profession would have allowed him to sleep until daylight. But the bread and rolls and gingerbread must be fresh and warm by breakfast time, or the people would be sadly disappointed; and the only possible way to get them ready was to start the work at three o'clock.

First, he lighted the big swinging lamps, which made the room bright as day, and then he built the fires in the great furnaces. Presently these last were roaring in a very business-like manner, and as soon as he heard the roar Monsieur Jules began to whistle. It was his custom, and kept him from getting lonesome while he worked.

Next he kneaded the bread, formed it into loaves, and placed them in long rows upon the slabs – ready for the oven. The rolls were then mixed and kneaded, and it took a longer time to get them ready than it had the bread, for they were small and quite daintily shaped. But at last the important task was completed, and while they were rising and the ovens heating, Monsieur mixed his gingerbread and cakes.

Somehow, the work progressed very swiftly this morning, and

after a time the baker found he had a good hour to spare before the ovens would be ready.

Then a sudden idea struck him.

"Why, to-day is the Fourth of July," he thought, "and that is a National Holiday. I think I will make a fine gingerbread man, such as I used to make in Paris, and put it in the shop window to attract attention. These Americans like enterprise, and they have never seen a gingerbread man, for I have not made one since I came to this country."

With Monsieur Jules, to think was to act, and scarcely had he spoken these words when he began to gather his material together for a great batch of gingerbread dough. For he resolved that the man he was about to make should be big enough and fine enough to arouse the wonder of all beholders.

He began by filling a great bowl with flour, and then rubbed into the flour some butter and lard. "That will make it short," said Monsieur, "although it is to be a tall man." Then he added some molasses. "He will be a sweet fellow," thought the baker, smiling at his own pleasantries. Then he shook in the ginger and several fragrant spices, and began mixing the dough into one great mass.

"It is too stiff," reflected the baker, a few moments later. "My man must not be stiff, for that would render him disagreeable." He laughed at the whimsical thought, and glancing around, saw the brown bowl that Madame had left sitting upon a corner of the table. It was nearly full of the precious liquid, and Monsieur Jules, with his mind intent upon his work, never stopped to wonder how

it came there. Perhaps he thought he had himself unconsciously filled the bowl with water. Anyway, he dumped all of the Essence of Vitality – the Great Elixir which could never be duplicated in all the world – into the mass of dough he was preparing for his gingerbread man!

Monsieur merely noticed that the dough had now become the proper consistency, and mixed easily.

Whistling merrily, he presently spread the huge batch of dough upon the big table and began rolling it and working it into the shape he desired.

Ah, but Monsieur Jules Grogrande was a true artist, although a baker! Under his skillful hands the gingerbread man slowly but surely took form; and the form was fully as large as that of a well-grown fourteen-year-old boy. But it was by no means a boy that Monsieur was forming with such care; it was, rather, the figure of a typical French gentleman, such as may seldom be met with elsewhere than on the boulevards of Paris. It was interesting to watch the figure grow: interesting, of course, to Monsieur Jules, as there was no one else in the bake-room to see.

The man appeared to be dressed in excellent fashion. Monsieur made him a collar and shirt-front of white bread dough, which looked very beautiful in contrast to the brown gingerbread-dough of his clothes. Then with a lump of dough, carefully kneaded, he formed the man's necktie, making a very artistic bow indeed. A waistcoat of fashionable cut was next added. The buttons on the man's coat were white lozenges, and

to represent shoes the baker mixed his dough with licorice, until the shoes seemed as black and shiny as if freshly polished.

You would have loved to see, could you have been present, the delicate skill with which the clever baker carved the hands and fingers of his man, using a small but sharp knife, and patting and rounding each dough finger into proper shape. He even clipped from a sheet of transparent celluloid the fingernails, and pressed them carefully into the dough at the ends of the fingers. Who but Monsieur would ever have thought of such a thing?

But, after all, it was upon the face that the baker exercised his best skill. As a sculptor forms his models out of clay, so Monsieur pressed and squeezed and molded his pliant dough, until every feature of the gingerbread man became wonderfully lifelike. Of course the face was made of the white dough, with just a trifle of the pink coloring mixed into it to make it resemble real flesh. But the wavy hair that surrounded the face was of gingerbread-dough, as its brown color, after it had been baked, would be quite natural and lifelike.

Among the things brought from Paris by the Grograndes was a pair of excellent glass eyes, and Monsieur Jules rummaged in a drawer until he found them, and then pressed them into the dough face. And now it positively seemed that the gingerbread man was looking at you, and the eyes lent its face a gentle and kindly expression.

"There's something lacking, however," murmured the baker, looking at his work critically. "Ah, I know – it's the teeth!"

Teeth for a gingerbread man! But nothing was easier to represent, once their absence was noted. Between the lips of the man our baker pressed two rows of small white candies, and it was wonderful to remark the pleasant smile that now lent its charm to the face.

With a sigh of satisfaction in the result of his work, the baker at last declared his gingerbread man ready for the oven.

"And it is my masterpiece!" cried Monsieur Jules, proudly. "Never, even in Paris, have I seen so perfect a man of dough. He is well worthy to have a name, and I will call him John Dough, which will be appropriate, indeed!"

But the great ovens were now glowing brightly, so Monsieur filled them with bread and rolls, and watched them carefully until the big and little loaves were all done to a turn. The cakes and cookies came next, and by the time that dawn arrived the front shop was stocked with heaps of the warm, fresh-smelling loaves and rolls, and trays of delicious cakes and buns, hot from the ovens.

Then the baker came back to his gingerbread man, which he first placed gently upon a great iron slab, and then slid it all into the open door of a perfectly heated oven.

With great anxiety Monsieur watched the oven. The dough was properly mixed, the workmanship was most excellent. Would the baking turn out to be as perfect as the rest? Much good dough may be spoiled in the baking. None knew that better than Jules Grogrande.

So he tended the oven with nervous care, and finally, at exactly the right moment, the baker threw open the oven door and drew out the sheet of iron upon which the great and grand gingerbread man rested.

He was baked to perfection!

Filled with pride and satisfaction, Monsieur bent admiringly over his great creation; and as he did so, the gingerbread man moved, bent his back, sat up, and looked about him with his glass eyes, while a wondering expression crept over his face.

"Dear me!" said he, "isn't it very warm and close in this room?"

The Great Elixir had accomplished its purpose. The wonderful Essence of Vitality, prized for centuries and closely guarded, had lent its marvelous powers of energy, strength, and life to a gingerbread man! And all through the stupidity of a baker's wife who was color-blind and could not distinguish a golden flask from a silver one!

Monsieur Jules, who knew nothing of the Arab's flasks, or of the Great Elixir, glared wildly into the glass eyes of the gingerbread man. He was at first sure that his own eyes, and also his ears, had played him a trick.

"John Dough – John Dough!" he cried, "did you speak? Merciful heavens! Did you speak, John Dough?"

"I did," said the gingerbread man, struggling to rise from the slab, "and I declare that it *is* warm and close in this room!"

Monsieur Jules gave a scream of terror. Then he turned and

fled.

A moment later he staggered into the shop, tossed his hands above his head, and fell in a heap upon the floor – being overcome by a fainting spell.

Madame, who had just come downstairs and opened the shop, gazed upon her husband's terrified actions with an amazement that prevented her from moving a limb or uttering a sound.

What in the world could have happened to Jules?

Then she received the greatest shock of her life.

From out the door of the bake-room came a gingerbread man, so fresh from the oven that the odor of hot gingerbread surrounded him like a cloud. He looked neither to right nor left, but picked Monsieur's tall silk hat from off a peg and placed it carelessly upon his own head. Next he caught up a large candy cane from a show-case, stepped over the prostrate body of the baker, and so left the shop, closing the front door behind him.

Madame saw him passing the windows, stepping along briskly and swinging the cane in his left hand.

Then the good lady imitated her husband's example. She gave a shrill scream, threw up her hands, and tumbled over unconscious.

John Dough Begins his Adventures

Now, when John Dough left Madame Grogrande's shop and wandered up the street, he was reeking with the delightful odor of fresh gingerbread. Indeed, he was still so hot from the oven that I am positive you could not have held your hand against him for more than a second. The Great Elixir had brought him to life, and given him a certain standing in the world; but during the first half-hour of his existence John Dough was very hot-headed. Also he was hot-footed, for he discovered that, by walking fast, the contact with the fresh morning air drew the heat from his body and made him feel much more comfortable.

One virtue lent by the Great Elixir was knowledge, and while John Dough felt that he possessed unlimited knowledge (having had an overdose of the Elixir), he could not very well apply it to his surroundings because he lacked experience with the world, which alone renders knowledge of any value to mankind. John Dough could speak all languages – modern and classic. He had a logical and clear mind – what is called a "level head," you know; and this was coupled with good sense, fair judgment, and a tangled mass of wisdom that had been dumped into him in a haphazard fashion. But these rare qualities were as yet of no use to our man because he had acquired no experience. It was like putting tools into a scholar's hands and asking him to make a watch. John Dough might accomplish wonders in time, if he

did not grow stale and crumble; but just now he was the freshest individual that ever came out of a bake-room.

It was still early morning, and most folks were in bed. A prowling dog smelled the gingerbread and came trotting up with the intention of having a bite of it; but John Dough raised his candy cane and hit the dog a clip on the end of its nose that sent the animal in another direction with its tail between its legs. Then, whistling merrily, the gingerbread man walked on. He knew no tune whatever, but he could whistle, and so he managed to express an erratic mixture of notes that would have made Herr Wagner very proud.

His flesh (or bread, rather) was cooling off beautifully now. He was growing hard and crisp and felt much more substantial than at first. The baker had made him light and the Elixir had made him strong and vigorous. A great future lay before John Dough, if no accident happened to him.

Presently some one said, "Hello!" John stopped short, for in front of him stood a bright-eyed boy with a piece of lighted punk in one hand and a bunch of firecrackers in the other. It was Ned Robbins, who had been up since daybreak celebrating the Glorious Fourth.

"You skeered me at first," said the boy, with a look of amazement that he tried to cover with a laugh.

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure," returned John Dough, politely.

"Been to a masquerade?" asked Ned, staring hard at the gingerbread man.

"No, indeed," replied the other. "I am not disguised, I assure you. You see me as I am."

"G'wan!" exclaimed Ned. But he could smell the gingerbread, and he began to grow frightened. So he touched the punk to the fuse of his biggest firecracker, dropped it on the ground at the feet of John Dough, and then turned and scampered up an alley as fast as he could go.

The gingerbread man stood still and looked after Ned until the cracker suddenly exploded with a bang that caused John's candy teeth to chatter. His whole body was terribly jarred and he nearly fell backward in the shock of surprise. Then he, also, started to run. It was not fear, so much as ignorance of what might happen next, that caused him to fly from the spot; but he ran with a speed that was simply wonderful, considering that his limbs were of gingerbread. Truly, that Arabian Elixir was a marvelous thing!

Bang! He had run plump into another group of boys, knocking two of them over before they could get out of his way. His silk hat was jammed over his eyes and the candy cane struck the wheel of a toy cannon and broke off a good two inches from its end.

As he pulled off his hat he heard a shout and saw the boys all scrambling for the broken end of the candy cane. One of them grabbed it and ran away, and the others followed in a mad chase and were soon out of sight.

John Dough looked after them wonderingly. Then he drew himself up, pulled down his fine vest, sighed at discovering a slight crack in his shirt-front, and walked slowly along the street

again. His first experience of life was not altogether pleasant.

"Good gracious!" said a voice.

He paused, and saw a woman leaning over a gate beside him and glaring at him in mingled surprise and terror. She held a broom in her hand, for she had been sweeping the walk. John lifted his hat politely.

"Good morning, madam," said he.

"Why, it's really alive!" gasped the woman.

"Is a live person so very unusual?" asked John, curiously.

"Surely, when he's made of cake!" answered the woman, still staring as if she could not believe her eyes.

"Pardon me; I am not cake, but gingerbread," he answered, in a rather dignified way.

"It's all the same," she answered. "You haven't any right to be alive. There's no excuse for it."

"But how can I help it?" he asked, somewhat puzzled by this remark.

"Oh, I don't suppose it's your fault. But it isn't right, you know. Who made you?"

"Jules Grogrande, the baker," he said, for he had read the name over the door.

"I always knew there was something wrong with those Frenchies," she declared. "Are you done?"

Before he could reply she had drawn a large straw from the broom and stuck it several inches into his side.

"Don't do that!" he cried, indignantly, as she drew out the bit

of broom again.

"I was only tryin' you," she remarked. "You're done to a turn, and ought to make good eating while you're fresh."

John gazed at her in horror.

"Good eating!" he cried; "woman, would you murder me?"

"I can't say it would be exactly murder," she replied, looking at him hungrily.

"To destroy life is murder?" he said, sternly.

"But to destroy gingerbread isn't," she rejoined. "And I can't see that it's cannibalism to eat a man if he happens to be cake, and fresh baked. And that frosting looks good. Come inside while I get a knife."

She opened the gate and tried to grab John Dough by an arm. But he gave a sudden backward leap and then sped down the street at a furious run, looking neither to right nor left in his eager flight.

Luckily, he was not in the center of the town, but near the outskirts, and the houses were few and scattered.

By and by he saw a deserted barn near the roadside. The door was half open and sagged on its hinges, so it could not be closed.

John darted into the barn and hid behind some hay in the far side. He was thoroughly frightened, and believed he must avoid mingling with the people of the town if he would escape instant destruction.

A knife! A knife! The word kept ringing in his ears and filled him with horror. A knife could slice him into pieces easily. He

imagined himself sliced and lying on a plate ready for hungry folks to eat, and the picture made him groan aloud.

All through the day he kept securely hidden behind the hay. Toward evening he decided to revisit the bakery. It was a difficult task, for he had passed through many streets and lanes without noticing where he was going, and it grew darker every minute. But at last, just as he was beginning to despair, he saw a dim light in a window and read over the door the sign: "Jules Grogrande, Baker."

He opened the door so softly that the little bell scarcely tinkled. But no one would have heard it had it rung loudly, for there was a confused murmur of fierce voices coming from the little room Madame usually occupied.

John Dough skipped behind the counter, where he could see into the room without being seen himself.

Around the little table stood the Arab, Monsieur Jules, and Madame, and they were all staring angrily into each other's faces.

"But the flask!" cried Ali Dubh. "Where is my precious flask?"

"It is here," said Madame, reaching behind the mirror and drawing forth something that glittered in the lamplight.

"But this is the silver flask – the cure for rheumatism," exclaimed the Arab. "Where my Golden Flask – containing the priceless Elixir of Life?"

"I must have made a mistake," said Madame, honestly; "for my eyes are so queer that I cannot tell gold from silver. Anyway,

the contents of the other flask I emptied into a bowl of water, and rubbed my limbs with it."

The Arab shouted a despairing cry in his native tongue and then glared wildly at the woman.

"Was it the brown bowl, Leontine?" asked Monsieur Jules, trembling with excitement.

"Yes," she answered.

"Where is it? Where is it?" demanded the Arab, in a hoarse voice. "The precious liquor may yet be saved."

"Too late, Monsieur," said the baker, shaking his head, sadly. "I used the contents of the bowl to mix the dough for my gingerbread man."

"A gingerbread man! What do you mean?" asked Ali Dubh.

"I baked a man out of gingerbread this morning," said Monsieur Jules, "and to my horror he came alive, and spoke to me, and walked out of the shop while he was still smoking hot."

"It is no wonder," said the Arab, dolefully; "for within him was enough of the Great Elixir to bring a dozen men to life, and give them strength and energy for many years. Ah, Monsieur and Madame, think of what your stupidity has cost the world!"

"I do not comprehend," said Madame, firmly, "how the world has ever yet been benefited by the Great Elixir, which you and your selfish countrymen have kept for centuries corked up in a golden flask."

"Bismillah!" shouted the Arab, striking himself fiercely across the forehead with his clinched fist. "Cannot you

understand, you stupid one, that it was mine —*mine!*— this Wonderful Water of Life? I had planned to use it myself — drop by drop — that I might live forever."

"I'm sorry," said Monsieur; "but it is your own fault. You forced my wife to care for the flask, and you would not let her tell me about it. So, through your own stupidity, I used it in the gingerbread man."

"Ah!" said Ali Dubh, an eager gleam in his eyes, "where, then, is that same gingerbread man? If I can find him, and eat him, a bit at a time, I shall get the benefit of the Great Elixir after all! It would not be so powerful, perhaps, as in its natural state; but it would enable me to live for many, many years!"

John Dough heard this speech with a thrill of horror. Also he now began to understand how he happened to be alive.

"I do not know where the gingerbread man is," said Monsieur. "He walked out of my shop while he was quite hot."

"But he can be found," said the Arab. "It is impossible for a gingerbread man, who is alive, to escape notice. Come, let us search for him at once! I must find him and eat him."

He fairly dragged Monsieur and Madame from the room in his desperation, and John Dough crouched out of sight behind the counter until he heard them pass through the door and their footsteps die away up the street.

The talk he had overheard made the gingerbread man very sad indeed. The bakery was no safe home for him, after all. Evidently it was the Arab's intention to find him and insist upon eating him;

and John Dough did not want to be eaten at all.

Therefore his enemies must not find him. They were no safer to meet with than the awful woman who wanted to cut him into slices; and he was learning, by degrees, that all men were dangerous enemies to him, although he had himself the form of a man.

He left the bakery and stole out into the street once more, walking now in the opposite direction from that taken by the Arab and the Grograndes.

As he hurried along he met with few people on the streets; and these, in the dark, paid little attention to the gingerbread man; so gradually his spirits rose and his confidence in his future returned.

By and by he heard a strange popping and hissing coming from the direction of the square in the center of the town, and then he saw red and green lights illuminating the houses, and fiery comets go sailing into the sky to break into dozens of beautiful colored stars.

The people were having their Fourth of July fireworks, and John Dough became curious to witness the display from near by. So, forgetting his fears, he ran through the streets until he came to a big crowd of people, who were too busy watching the fireworks to notice that a gingerbread man stood beside them.

John Dough pressed forward until he was quite in the front row, and just behind the men who were firing the rockets.

For a time he watched the rush of the colored fires with much

pleasure, and thoroughly enjoyed the sputtering of a big wheel that refused to go around, merely sending out weak and listless spurts of green and red sparks, as is the manner of such wheels.

But now the event of the evening was to occur. Two men brought out an enormous rocket, fully fifteen feet tall and filled with a tremendous charge of powder. This they leaned against a wooden trough that stood upright; but the rocket was too tall to stay in place, and swayed from side to side awkwardly.

"Here! Hold that stick!" cried one of the men, and John Dough stepped forward and grasped the stick of the big rocket firmly, not knowing there was any danger in doing so.

Then the man ran to get a piece of rope to tie the rocket in place; but the other man, being excited and thinking the rocket was ready to fire, touched off the fuse without noticing that John Dough was clinging fast to the stick.

There was a sudden shriek, a rush of fire, and then – slowly at first, but with ever-increasing speed – the huge rocket mounted far into the sky, carrying with it the form of the gingerbread man!

Chick, the Cherub

The rocket continued to send out fiery sparks of burning powder as it plunged higher and higher into the black vault of the heavens; but few of these came in contact with John Dough, who clung to the far side of the stick and so escaped being seriously damaged. Also the rocket curved, and presently sped miles away over land and sea, impelled by the terrible force of the powder it contained. John fully expected that it would burst presently, and blow him to bits amid a cloud of colored stars. But the giant rocket was not made in the same way as the other and smaller ones that had been fired, the intention being merely to make it go as high and as far as possible. So it finally burned itself out; but so great was the speed it had attained that it continued to fly for many minutes after the last spark had died away.

Then the rocket began to take a downward course; but it was so high up, by that time, that the stick and the empty shell flew onward hour after hour, gradually nearing the ground, until finally, just as a new day began to break, the huge stick, with John Dough still holding fast to its end, fell lightly upon an island washed on all sides by the waves of a mighty sea.

John fell on a soft bush, and thence bounded to the ground, where for a time he lay quite still and tried to recover his thoughts.

He had not done much thinking, it seems, while he was in

the air. The rush of wind past his ears had dazed him, and he only realized he must cling fast to the stick and await what might happen. Indeed, that was the only thing to be done in such an emergency.

The shock of the fall had for a moment dazed the gingerbread man; and as he lay upon the ground he heard a voice cry:

"Get off from me! Will you? Get off, I say."

John rolled over and sat up, and then another person – a little man with a large head – also sat up and faced him.

"What do you mean by it?" asked the little man, glaring upon John Dough angrily. "Can't you see where you're falling?"

"No," answered John.

It was growing lighter every minute, and the gray mists of morning were fading away before the rising sun. John looked around him and saw he was upon a broad, sandy beach which the waves of a great sea lapped peacefully. Behind was a green meadow, and then mountains that rose high into the air.

"How did you happen to be where I fell?" he asked, turning to the little man again.

"I always sleep on the sands," replied the other, wagging his head solemnly. "It's my fad. Fresh air, you know. I'm called the 'Fresh-Air Fiend.' I suppose you're a new inhabitant. You seem rather queer."

"I'm made of gingerbread," said John.

"Well, that certainly is unusual, so I've no doubt you will be warmly welcomed in our Island," replied the man.

"But where am I?" asked John, looking around again with a puzzled expression.

"This is the Isle of Phreex," answered the other, "and it is inhabited by unusual people. I'm one, and you're another."

He made such a droll face as he said this that the gingerbread man could not resist smiling, but it startled him to hear another laugh at his back – a sound merry and sweet, such as a bird trills. He swung around quickly and saw a child standing upon the sands, where the rays of the sun fell brightly upon its little form. And then the glass eyes of the gingerbread man grew big, and stood out from his cake face in a way that fully expressed his astonishment.

"It's a Vision!" he exclaimed.

"No, it's the Cherub – whom we call Chick," answered the big-headed man, carelessly.

The child had fair hair, falling in fleecy waves to its shoulders, but more or less tangled and neglected. It had delicate features, rosy cheeks, and round blue eyes. When these eyes were grave – which was seldom – there were questions in them; when they smiled – which was often – sunbeams rippled over their blue surfaces. For clothing the child wore garments of pure white, which reached from the neck to the ankles, and had wide flowing sleeves and legs, like those of a youngster's pajamas. The little one's head and feet were bare, but the pink soles were protected by sandals fastened with straps across the toes and ankles.

"Good morning," said John, again smiling and hoping he had

not stared too rudely. "It gives me great pleasure to meet you."

"My name's Chick," replied the child, laughing in sweet trills, while the blue eyes regarded the gingerbread man with evident wonder.

"That's a funny name," said John.

"Yes, it *is* funny," the child agreed, with a friendly nod. "Chick means a chicken, you know. But I'm not a chicken."

"Of course not," returned John. "A chicken is covered with feathers. And you are not."

At this Chick laughed merrily, and said, as if it were the simplest thing in the world: "I'm the Incubator Baby, you know."

"Dear me, I hadn't the least idea of it," John answered gravely. "May I ask what an Incubator Baby is?"

The child squatted down in the sand, hugged its chubby knees, and uttered peal after peal of joyous laughter.

"How funny!" it gurgled; "how funny that you don't know what the Incubator Baby is! Really, you must be fresh-baked!"

"I am," said John, feeling rather ashamed to acknowledge the fact, but resolving to be truthful.

"Then, of course, you are very ignorant," remarked the Fresh-Air Fiend, rubbing his big head complacently.

"Oh, as for that," said John, "I acquired, in course of manufacture, a vast deal of ancient learning, which I got from an Arabian Elixir with which the baker mixed me. I am well posted in all events down to the last century, but I cannot recall any knowledge of an Incubator Baby."

"No, they're a recent invention," declared the big-headed man, patting tenderly the child's golden curls. "Were you, by any chance, at the Pan-American Exposition? Or the Louisiana Purchase Exposition?"

"No," answered John. "My knowledge was corked up about then."

"Well," continued the man, "there were a good many Incubator Babies at both those expositions, and lots of people saw them. But Chick is the first and only Original Incubator Baby, and so Chick properly belongs in the Isle of Phreex."

Chick jumped up, made a stiff bow, and with eyes sparkling with mischief exclaimed: "I'm six years old and quite strong and well."

"Tut-tut, Chick!" remonstrated the big-headed man; "it was more than two years ago you were taught to make that speech. You can't be always six years old, you know."

The little sprite enjoyed the joke so much that John was forced to laugh in sympathy. But just then a thought struck him, and he asked, a little nervously:

"Do you like gingerbread?"

"I don't know," replied Chick. "Are you gingerbread?"

"I am," said John, bravely.

"Then I like gingerbread," the child declared; "for you smell sweet and look kind and gentle."

John didn't know whether to accept this as a compliment or not. He was sorry to learn that he smelled sweet, although to be

called kind and gentle was grateful praise.

"Some folks," he remarked, timidly, "have an idea they like to *eat* gingerbread."

"I couldn't eat you," the child said, seriously, "because, being the Incubator Baby, I have to be very careful of my diet. You might not agree with me."

"I'm sure I couldn't agree with any one who ate me," John declared. "For, although as yet I have had no experience of that sort, it seems to me a very undesirable fate."

"Very true," remarked the big-headed man.

"Let's be friends!" exclaimed Chick, coming close to John and taking his soft brown hand in a firm clasp. "I'll take care of you."

John looked down at the merry little elf in positive wonder.

"We'll be friends, all right," said he; "but instead of your taking care of me, Chick, I'll take care of you."

"Oh, there you are entirely wrong," broke in the big-headed man. "Chick's a privileged character in the Isle of Phreex, and the only one of us who dares defy our awful kinglet. And in case of danger – "

"Danger!" cried John, with a start. "Is there danger here, too?"

Chick's laughter rang out at the foolish question, but the man replied seriously:

"There is danger everywhere, to those who are unusual, and especially in the Isle of Phreex, where we are at the mercy of a horrid kinglet. But come; we must go and report your arrival to that same graceless ruler, or we shall all be punished."

"Very well," said John, meekly.

But as he took Chick's hand and turned to depart the Fresh-Air Fiend uttered an exclamation of annoyance, and said:

"Here's bad luck already! The Failings are coming this way."

As he spoke a noise of shouting and chattering reached their ears, and presently several people came around a corner of rock and stood before John and his newly found friends.

"It's the Brotherhood of Failings," whispered the big-headed man. "Look out for them, or they'll do you a mischief."

"Don't worry; I'll take care of you," said Chick, pressing the dough hand.

John stared at the new-comers, and they returned the compliment by staring at him. A queerer lot of folks could seldom have been seen together.

"This is the Blunderer," said the Fresh-Air Fiend, indicating a short, fat man who was clothed in glittering armor and bore a lance over his shoulder. The Blunderer acknowledged the introduction by bowing. "And here is the Thoughtless One," continued the man, pointing to a tall, lean man who was clothed in chamois-leather and carried a wide-mouthed blunderbuss under his arm.

"Look out for the gun," said Chick; "he never knows whether or not it is loaded."

"And here are the Disagreeable, and the Unlucky, and the Sorrowful, and the Ugly, and the Awkward," continued the big-headed man, pointing out each Failing in turn. "Their

peculiarities you will have no trouble to discover. Indeed, on all the Isle of Phreex, there is no one more unpleasant to meet with than this same lot of Failings."

At this the Brothers all bowed, saying at the same time:
"We are proud of ourselves!"

At that instant the Awkward tripped over his own toes and fell against the Blunderer, who tumbled headlong and thrust his slim lance straight through the body of John Dough.

"Oh!" cried Chick, greatly horrified.

"I told you so!" growled the Fresh-Air Fiend, pulling out the lance hastily. "Tell me, John Dough, are you dead, or are you just dying?"

"Neither one," said John, ruefully pushing together the hole that the lance had made; "but it doesn't add to my personal appearance to be prodded in that fashion. I'm made of gingerbread," he explained, turning to the man in armor.

"I beg your pardon! I really beg your pardon!" said the Blunderer, greatly distressed at what he had done. "I had no intention of hurting you."

"He means well," said the Incubator Baby; "but that doesn't help much."

"He won't last long in this Island," grunted the Bad-Tempered, referring to John Dough.

"Being made of gingerbread, he can't be expected to last," remarked the Disagreeable, smiling in a way that made John shudder.

"He shall have my protection," said the Blunderer. "It's the least I can do to make amends. Here – put on this armour!"

He hastily began stripping off the plates of metal, and placed the steel helmet over the head of the gingerbread man.

"No, no!" exclaimed John. "I don't want to wear all that hardware."

"But you must!" cried the Blunderer. "It's the only way you can escape accident in this awful Island."

"That's true enough," agreed the big-headed man. "I advise you to wear the armor, my gingerbread friend."

So John submitted to being dressed in the armor, and no sooner had the plates been strapped upon him than the wisdom of the act was apparent. For there came a rush and whirl of sound, and suddenly a great monster swept over the sands at the very spot where they stood. It sent the Brotherhood of Failings sprawling in every direction, while the Incubator Baby flew to the water's edge, and John Dough's armor-clad body was knocked down and pressed into the soft sand until it was level with the surface.

But presently Chick came back and made the others dig him out and set him upon his feet again, and then it was seen that no one had been seriously injured.

"What was it?" asked John, gazing in amazement at the place where the monster had disappeared in the distance.

"It's the one-wheeled automobile," answered the Sorrowful, "and unless it gets smashed mighty soon the Isle of Phreex will be an Isle of Cripples. I don't understand why they license the

thing."

"Why, to make room for new arrivals, of course," declared the Disagreeable. "But it was lucky for the Pudding Man that he happened to be dressed in steel."

"I am not pudding, if you please," said John, indignantly. "I beg you to remember that I am gingerbread."

"It's all one," remarked the Thoughtless, "your cake is dough, anyhow."

"Let us return to the castle," the Ugly said. "Our kinglet should be introduced to his new subject."

So they all started off across the green, Chick leading the gingerbread man, until they came to a path leading upward through the rocks, along which they began to ascend. John had much difficulty in keeping out of the way of the Awkward, who tripped and stumbled constantly, while the Blunderer insisted upon taking the wrong path, and the Bad-Tempered stopped twice to fight with the Disagreeable and the Thoughtless. At last, however, they reached the top, which proved to be a broad plain of rock, upon which stood a great castle with many tall spires and grim towers and glittering minarets.

While they paused for John Dough to admire the view, and that they all might get breath, a sharp voice said near them:

"You're late, you lot of Failings, and the kinglet will scold."

John looked around, and saw perched upon a point of rock beside the path a most curious looking creature.

"Don't stare!" it said, with a laugh. "I don't, and I've got a

dozen eyes to your one. Let me introduce myself. I'm the Prize Potato from the Centerville Fair."

Indeed, John now noticed a big blue ribbon twined around the middle of the potato, and on the ribbon was printed in gold letters: "First Prize."

"Some day you'll sprout," said the Disagreeable, "and then you won't have so many eyes."

The Prize Potato winked its numerous eyes, one after the other, in a droll fashion, and answered:

"Some day you'll meet with an accident, my dear Failing; but when you're planted in the ground you'll not sprout at all. That's where I'm your superior, for I'm perpetual. Every one of my eyes is good for a half-peck of potatoes, at least."

"Unless you're boiled with your jacket on," remarked the Ugly, with a sour smile.

"Come, come! Let us on," interrupted the little man with the big head. "Our kinglest doubtless awaits us."

When they had gone a few steps farther the Incubator Baby paused to say: "Some one is following us, and it's a stranger."

This remark caused John to look around, and immediately he stopped short with an expression of horror upon his frosted face. For there, turning the corner of the rocky path, was Ali Dubh the Arab. The fellow at once uttered a yell of joy and triumph, and drawing his gleaming knife he rushed upon John Dough with great eagerness.

The gingerbread man had given up all hope of escape and

stood tremblingly awaiting his foe when, Chick suddenly grasped the Blunderer's lance and tripped the Arab so neatly with it that Ali Dubh fell his full length upon the path and broke his knife-blade into a dozen pieces. But he squirmed forward and was about to bite into John's leg when the big-headed man came to the rescue and threw a handful of pebbles into the Arab's open mouth, and so prevented him from doing the gingerbread man any damage.

"He seems dangerous," remarked the Blunderer. "Let's tie him up, before he hurts someone."

So while the Arab was coughing the pebbles out of his mouth, the Brotherhood of Failings bound his hands and feet with strong cords, so that he could not move.

"He's mine!" shouted the Arab, as soon as he could speak. "He belongs to me. I claim him for my own."

"There's no harm in that," replied the Fresh-Air Fiend. "But one of the laws of this Isle is that no person shall be injured by any one except the kinglet. And every one here must obey the laws. So, unless you promise not to carve or to eat this man of gingerbread, who is now a subject of our kinglet, we must lock you up in prison."

"I'll eat him as soon as I have the chance. I have a right to do so," cried the Arab.

"You're a bad man!" said Chick, stamping one small foot indignantly.

"I'm not," answered Ali Dubh; "I'm a good man. And I paid

Jules Grogrande fifty cents for this gingerbread imitation of a man, who is mixed with my own magic Elixir. Also I paid a witch nine dollars to transport me to wherever the gingerbread man might be – which is right here – that I might take possession of my own property. So I've got him, and he's paid for, and he's mine, and I claim the right to eat him whenever I please."

"You'll do no such thing," declared Chick. "Why, John Dough is alive, and no one has a right to make him dead and then eat him – even if he *is* paid for!"

"Don't worry, my Cherub," said the big-headed man, soothingly; "we'll go at once and lock this Arab in a strong room of the castle, so that he can't possibly escape."

Chick smiled sweetly at this promise; but the Arab scowled and said, grimly:

"Never mind. My time will come. Some day I shall surely eat that gingerbread man, in spite of this Cherub and all the rest of you."

This defiance made the Brotherhood of Failings and the big-headed man so angry that they at once dragged Ali Dubh away to the castle, and John Dough and Chick followed after, hand in hand, and feeling quite safe.

Presently they came to a great archway that led into the courtyard of the castle. Having passed through this arch, the gingerbread man saw groups of the most astonishing people, who were busying themselves over extraordinary tasks, such as building machines, boiling strange-smelling chemicals in queer

pots, drawing curious designs, and like occupations. A sudden crash announced that the Blunderer had fallen into the middle of a delicate machine and smashed it into bits. Before they could pull him out the Unlucky One ran against the whirling arm of a windmill and was tossed half-way across the courtyard, while the Awkward One upset a boiling kettle and set every one to coughing who inhaled the odor of the compound that was spilled upon the ground.

To John's surprise no one seemed much worried over these accidents. Even the victims joined in Chick's merry laughter, and those of the Failings who had escaped disaster calmly proceeded to lock up the Arab in a cell that had a strong iron grating for a door, and fastened with a huge padlock.

Afterward they all entered through a second arch into the great hall of the castle.

This was a long, wide room with a tiled floor, and walls that were covered with many trophies, such as armor, spears, battle-axes, and swords of ancient design.

At the farther end was a raised platform upon which stood a gorgeous throne. Back of the throne was an electric sign, flashing one letter at a time, and reading: "What is Home without a kinglet?" Over the throne was suspended an enormous crown – big enough for a giant – which sparkled with gems. Beside the throne a very fat man sat in a chair so low that his knees nearly touched his chin. He wore a short red coat, a wide white vest, and blue knee-breeches, and all were embroidered in gold. The

fat man's eyes were closed and he seemed asleep.

Within the throne sat the kinglet, propped upon purple cushions, so that he would fit it better. For the kinglet was a small boy with a long, freckled face, blue eyes, a pug nose, and black hair banged across his forehead, and hanging in lank, straight locks far down over his shoulders. He wore an ermine cloak lined with purple, and bore in his hand a sceptre with a jewelled ball at one end, while beyond the ball projected a small golden knob. The kinglet's slim legs were crossed under him like those of a Turk, and he seemed very frail and delicate.

However, when the Failings and the Fresh-Air Fiend and Chick and John Dough entered, the kinglet's brow was puckered into a frown, and his blue eyes fairly flashed fire.

"Odds Zooks!" he cried, as they all knelt before the throne, "why have you dared to wait until this hour to pay me your devoirs?"

Then he leaned down and prodded the fat man with the knob of his sceptre, so that the sleeper started and opened his eyes. "Is that right, Nebbie? Is 'devoir' a kingly word?" he demanded.

"Absolutely kingly, your Majesty," said the fat man, yawning. "It was used by King Arthur and Richard Cœur de Leon."

"Very well!" said the kinglet, proudly. Then he turned again to the kneeling group before him. "Why don't you answer me?" he exclaimed. "Why are you so late in paying me your boudoirs?"

"Devoirs, your Majesty!" said the fat man, hastily.

"I said 'devoirs'!" returned the kinglet, turning upon him in

anger.

"We are late because we did not get here sooner," said the Awkward; "and we could not get here sooner because we were late."

"So!" shrieked his Majesty, with blazing eyes. "Now by my halidom – " he paused suddenly, and turned to the fat man, prodding him so fiercely that he jumped several feet into the air. "Is 'halidom' the right word, Nebbie?"

"Sure," said the fat man, nodding emphatically.

"What does it mean?" asked the kinglet.

"What does halidom mean?"

"Yes."

"Why, a halidom is a halidom," said the fat man, thoughtfully; "and belongs to kings."

"But what *is* it?" persisted the kinglet, impatiently.

"It's a – a – a sort of a royal prerogative, and is usually painted red," returned the fat man, and immediately resumed his seat and closed his eyes again.

The kinglet sighed, and turned anew to the Failings.

"Let me see," he remarked; "where was I?"

"You were by your halidom, your Majesty," suggested the Blunderer.

"Oh, yes." Again the long freckled face took on a frown. "By my halidom, churl – " He stopped to glance at the fat man.

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