

Chapter IV - To the King's Palace

"WHAT, allow me to ask, is your grade of sugar?" inquired the Captain, with much politeness. "You do not seem to be the best loaf, but I suppose that of course you are solid."

"Solid what?" asked Chubbins.

"Solid sugar," replied the Captain.

"We're not sugar at all," explained Twinkle. "We're just meat."

"Meat! And what is that?"

"Haven't you any meat in your city?"

"No," he replied, shaking his head. "Well, I can't explain exactly what meat is," she said; "but it isn't sugar, anyway."

At this the Captain looked solemn.

"It isn't any of my business, after all," he told them. "The king must decide about you, for that's his business. But since you are not made of sugar you must excuse me if I decline to converse with you any longer. It is beneath my dignity."

"Oh, that's all right," said Twinkle.

"Where we came from," said Chubbins, "meat costs more a pound than sugar does; so I guess we're just as good as you are."

But the Captain made no reply to this statement, and before long they stopped in front of a big sugar building, while a crowd of sugar people quickly gathered.

"Stand back!" cried the Captain, and the sugar soldiers formed a row between the children and the sugar citizens, and kept the crowd from getting too near. Then the Captain led Twinkle and Chubbins through a high sugar gateway and up a broad sugar walk to the entrance of the building.

"Must be the king's castle," said Chubbins.

"The king's palace," corrected the Captain, stiffly.

"What's the difference?" asked Twinkle.

But the sugar officer did not care to explain.

Brown sugar servants in plum-colored sugar coats stood at the entrance to the palace, and their eyes stuck out like lozenges from their sugar faces when they saw the strangers the Captain was escorting.

But every one bowed low, and stood aside for them to pass, and they walked through beautiful halls and reception rooms where the sugar was cut into panels and scrolls and carved to represent all kinds of fruit and flowers.

"Isn't it sweet!" said Twinkle.

"Sure it is," answered Chubbins.

And now they were ushered into a magnificent room, where a stout little sugar man was sitting near the window playing upon a fiddle, while a group of sugar men and women stood before him in respectful attitudes and listened to the music.

Twinkle knew at once that the fiddler was the king, because he had a sugar crown upon his head. His Majesty was made of very white and sparkling cut loaf-sugar, and his clothing was formed of the same pure material. The only color about him was the pink sugar in his cheeks and the brown sugar in his eyes. His fiddle was also of white sugar, and the strings were of spun sugar and had an excellent tone.

When the king saw the strange children enter the room he jumped up and exclaimed:

"Bless my beets! What have we here?"

"Mortals, Most Granular and Solidified Majesty," answered the Captain, bowing so low that his forehead touched the floor. "They came in by the ancient tunnel."

"Well, I declare," said the king. "I thought that tunnel had been stopped up for good and all."

"The stone above the door slipped," said Twinkle, "so we came down to see what we could find."

"You must never do it again," said his Majesty, sternly. "This is our own kingdom, a peaceful and retired nation of extra refined and substantial citizens, and we don't wish to mix with mortals, or any other folks."

"We'll go back, pretty soon," said Twinkle.

"Now, that's very nice of you," declared the king, "and I appreciate your kindness. Are you extra refined, my dear?"

"I hope so," said the girl, a little doubtfully.

"Then there's no harm in our being friendly while you're here. And as you've promised to go back to your own world soon, I have no objection to showing you around the town. You'd like to see how we live, wouldn't you?"

"Very much," said Twinkle.

"Order my chariot, Captain Brittle," said his Majesty; and the Captain again made one of his lowly bows and strutted from the room to execute the command.

The king now introduced Chubbins and Twinkle to the sugar ladies and gentlemen who were present, and all of them treated the children very respectfully.