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The Gingerbread Man

*with an Interlude featuring Aesop's fable of
the City Mouse and the Country Mouse*

By PATRICK RAINVILLE DORN



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(THE GINGERBREAD MAN)

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About the Play

Every child's favorite talking cookie leaps off the picture book pages and onto the stage in this action-packed, fun-filled children's theatre adaptation of "The Gingerbread Man." Sally is a city girl, and very unhappy about staying on her aunt and uncle's farm while her parents are on vacation. To cheer her up, Sally's aunt makes her a gingerbread cookie man, which promptly leaps out of the oven and takes her on a merry adventure to see the travelling players who are performing Aesop's "The City Mouse and the Country Mouse" in a nearby town. Along the way, the intrepid duo encounter a karate-kicking donkey with a scrambled vocabulary, a fashionable skunk with a nose for rare fragrances, and a sly fox who tries to put the bite on the Gingerbread Man. The hilarious play-within-a-play prompts Sally to consider whether a life on the road is really as right for her as it is for the Gingerbread Man. Ultimately, she decides she belongs with her family, and bids her magical cookie friend farewell. Designed especially for low-budget and touring productions, "The Gingerbread Man" is chock full of silly characters, funny puns, and slapstick comedy. There's even a valuable lesson to be learned about finding one's place in the world. The extremely flexible ensemble casting and simple cut-out set pieces make mounting the show a piece of cake, even with inexperienced actors and limited resources.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(full cast version)

SALLY a city girl
AUNT MABEL Sally's aunt, a country homemaker
UNCLE DUDLEY Sally's uncle, a farmer
NEIGHBOR (GLADYS or RUFUS) Lives on the farm next door
GINGERBREAD MAN a magical cookie
DONKEY not too terribly bright
SKUNK fastidiously fashionable
FOX a clever beast
ACTOR/CITY MOUSE loves the fast-paced, city life
ACTOR/COUNTRY MOUSE loves the simple, country life
ACTOR/CAT loves mice, especially at tea time

Extras as desired, especially as townspeople for the interlude.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(touring ensemble version)

SALLY a city girl
ENSEMBLE 1 (male) plays Uncle Dudley, Donkey,
..... Actor/Country Mouse
ENSEMBLE 2 (female) plays Aunt Mabel, Skunk, Actor/City Mouse
ENSEMBLE 3 (flexible) plays Neighbor, Fox, Actor/Cat
GINGERBREAD MAN (flexible) a magical cookie

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action is continuous and may be performed on a bare stage with the following locales suggested by simple cutouts, props and furniture: Farmyard, Farmhouse Kitchen, Crossroads, Town Square. A raised platform for the City Mouse/Country Mouse sequence would be helpful, but is not necessary. Additional scenery and backdrops may be added as desired.

The Gingerbread Man

*with an Interlude featuring Aesop's fable of
The City Mouse and the Country Mouse*

By PATRICK RAINVILLE DORN

[SETTING: Stage Right is a farmyard. A trough [may be a cardboard cutout] is Down Right. To the left of the trough is a bucket. At Center is an imaginary door to the farmhouse. Stage Left is the farmhouse kitchen. At Left Center is a table. At Up Left and facing the audience is a large cut out oven with a hinged door. Right of the oven is a stool. Any other details can be suggested on an optional backdrop. See Production Notes at rear of playbook for suggestions on the backdrops.

AT RISE: UNCLE DUDLEY is discovered at Down Right pouring imaginary "slop" from the bucket into the trough. SALLY stands next to him, bored and disgusted]

UNCLE DUDLEY. See how I'm pouring the slop into the trough? It's got to go in just so. Spread it out so's all the hogs can get some.

SALLY. *[Unimpressed]* Whoopee.

UNCLE DUDLEY. Yep. It takes a steady hand and plenty of wrist action to get it just right.

SALLY. And you call this "slopping the hogs"?

UNCLE DUDLEY. Yep. Fascinatn', ain't it?

SALLY. *[Looks into trough]* This stuff looks like garbage.

UNCLE DUDLEY. Garbage to you, but sweet ambrosia to the hogs.

SALLY. If you say so, Uncle Dudley. *[Changing the subject]* What time is it, anyway?

UNCLE DUDLEY. *[Looks up at sky]* Oh, I'd say about quarter past six.

SALLY. Is that it? How long have we been awake?

UNCLE DUDLEY. Since a quarter to five. I let you sleep in for your first day on the farm.

SALLY. Gee, thanks.

UNCLE DUDLEY. Yep. Up with the sun, to bed with the chickens. That's the way it is around here.

SALLY. I want to go home.

UNCLE DUDLEY. We went through all that last night coming back

from the airport. You've got to stay with us until your folks get home from their Hawaiian vacation.

SALLY. I want to go back to the city. I can stay with friends.

UNCLE DUDLEY. Too late for that. Your parents thought a couple of weeks on our farm would do you good.

SALLY. Farms are boring.

UNCLE DUDLEY. Not once you get the feel for it. Sure, the pace is slower, and there's always chores to do, but we have our share of delightment.

SALLY. I'll bet. A real knee slappin', hog sloppin', hoe down good time.

UNCLE DUDLEY. Give it a try. You'll find something to keep you busy.

SALLY. I doubt it. [*AUNT MABEL enters from Up Left, crosses to Center, calls out the "door"*]

AUNT MABEL. How's it going out there?

UNCLE DUDLEY. The hogs're slopped.

SALLY. [*Sarcastically*] Yep, they're slopped real good, too. It's all in the wrist action.

UNCLE DUDLEY. We're fixin' to milk the cows next, and collect some eggs.

SALLY. [*Dejectedly*] Yeehaw.

AUNT MABEL. Fine and dandy. [*Steps "out" of the house, looks out Down Right*] Any sign of Gladys? [*Or if played by a male, "Rufus"*]

SALLY. Who's Gladys? The donkey?

UNCLE DUDLEY. Naw. She's [he's] our neighbor. What do you want with Gladys, Mabel?

AUNT MABEL. She's supposed to bring me some flour. I plan to do a little baking this morning.

UNCLE DUDLEY. [*To Sally*] Mabel makes the best gingerbread in the county. Wins the blue ribbon at the fair every year.

AUNT MABEL. Oh, hush now, Dudley.

UNCLE DUDLEY. It's true. There's something down right magical about what she can do with gingerbread.

SALLY. I'd rather have a cheeseburger. [*NEIGHBOR Enters from Down Right, or through the audience, carrying a flour sack*]

AUNT MABEL. Well, wouldn't you know it, here she [he] is now.

UNCLE DUDLEY. Howdy, Gladys/Rufus.

NEIGHBOR. Mornin', all. [*Looks at SALLY*] This the city girl come out for a few weeks of hard work and fresh air?

UNCLE DUDLEY. Yep. My sister's little girl. Name's Sally.

NEIGHBOR. How do you like country life so far, Sally?

SALLY. Everything smells like manure.

NEIGHBOR. [*Laughing*] You'll get used to it. Just watch where you step. [*To Aunt Mabel*] Here's the flour you wanted.

AUNT MABEL. [*Taking the sack*] Thanks, Gladys/Rufus. How much do I owe you?

NEIGHBOR. How about sending some gingerbread my way and calling it even?

AUNT MABEL. That's right friendly of you.

NEIGHBOR. Sure thing. What are neighbors for?

UNCLE DUDLEY. So, what do you think of country-style friendliness, Sally?

SALLY. I still want to go home.

NEIGHBOR. Well, I'd better get back to my turnips. Don't forget that gingerbread, Mabel.

AUNT MABEL. I'll send Sally over with a plateful straight out of the oven.

NEIGHBOR. Looking forward to it. 'Bye now. [*NEIGHBOR exits Down Right or through audience*]

UNCLE DUDLEY. I guess we'd better get back to the chores, Sally.

SALLY. Do I have to? I'm tired.

UNCLE DUDLEY. But it's only half past six.

AUNT MABEL. Sally, why don't you come into the kitchen with me? Dudley can finish the morning chores. [*AUNT MABEL leads SALLY Left to the "kitchen."* UNCLE DUDLEY exits Up Right]

SALLY. What is there to do inside?

AUNT MABEL. Do you like to bake?

SALLY. I don't know. I've never tried. I usually just throw a couple of pop tarts into the toaster.

AUNT MABEL. You can help me make the gingerbread. [*AUNT MABEL stands upstage of the table. SALLY mimes washing her hands in the "sink", then stands to the right of the table*]

SALLY. It's sure to smell better than the hog pen.

AUNT MABEL. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised. [*Opening the sack on the table, AUNT MABEL mimes using a measuring spoon to put flour into a bowl, mimes adding milk, eggs, etc., then begins mixing the "ingredients" with a wooden spoon*] First you mix up the flour with some ginger, cinnamon, molasses, and sugar, not to mention a few of my own special ingredients. [*She mimes pulling the dough out, kneading it*

on the table] Then you knead it into a ball and roll it out flat. [*Uses a rolling pin to flatten the "dough"*]

SALLY. [*Showing interest*] Can I try it?

AUNT MABEL. Of course, honey. Make sure it's the same thickness all over.

SALLY. I've never heard of flat bread before.

AUNT MABEL. It's a little surprise for you, Sally. We're making a gingerbread man cookie.

SALLY. A cookie?

AUNT MABEL. That's right. And this first one is yours. There, that looks about right. [*SALLY sets the rolling pin down*]

SALLY. Now what?

AUNT MABEL. [*Picks up a paring knife*] See this paring knife? I just cut out the shape of the gingerbread man, decorate him up special, then lay him out on the cookie sheet. [*She does so*]

SALLY. You don't use a cookie cutter?

AUNT MABEL. Sure, if I want to mass produce them. But this is a one-of-a-kind gingerbread cookie man. There. And a right smart looking fellow he is, if I do say so myself. [*Optional. She holds up the cookie sheet to reveal a large gingerbread figure which may be made of construction paper or cardboard*]

SALLY. He looks funny, and awfully flat.

AUNT MABEL. He'll puff out some in the oven. [*Puts tray into oven, mimes turning it on*] Now I want you to sit here at this stool and wait until the gingerbread man is ready.

SALLY. How long will it take?

AUNT MABEL. Not too long. But don't start daydreaming. Keep alert and when he's done, give a holler.

SALLY. Where are you going?

AUNT MABEL. I'm just stepping out to help your Uncle Dudley collect the eggs. We're going to need more for the next batch of gingerbread. [*She starts to exit out the "door" Center*]

SALLY. How will I know when it's done?

AUNT MABEL. Let your nose be your guide. It'll just smell done. And whatever you do, don't open the oven door, no matter what.

SALLY. Why not?

AUNT MABEL. Just don't. [*Exiting Up Right*] No telling what might happen if you open the door too soon. Call me. [*She's gone. Obediently, SALLY sits on the stool Right of the oven. She plays with the oven mitt*]

SALLY. Six forty-five in the morning, and I'm stuck out here in the

middle of nowhere, waiting for a gingerbread man. What does a gingerbread man smell like when it's done? How should I know? I know what burning pop tarts smell like, that's about it. That cookie looked awfully flat. Aunt Mabel said it would puff out, but I'd have to see it to be sure. Maybe this oven has a window and light inside. *[She gets off the stool, kneels by the oven]* Can't see a thing. *[Frustrated]* How am I supposed to know when the stupid gingerbread man is ready?

GINGERBREAD MAN. *[From inside the oven]* Depends.

SALLY. *[Jumping back]* What? *[Looks around the table]* Who said that?

GINGERBREAD MAN. I did.

SALLY. *[Still can't place the voice]* Where are you?

GINGERBREAD MAN. In here.

SALLY. In where? The oven?

GINGERBREAD MAN. Sure. That's where you put me.

SALLY. *[To herself]* Somebody's playing a trick on me. *[Speaks to the "room" in general]* Very funny, you guys.

GINGERBREAD MAN. It's no trick. I'm the Gingerbread Man.

SALLY. What are you doing in there?

GINGERBREAD MAN. Baking.

SALLY. Are you done yet?

GINGERBREAD MAN. Why don't you see for yourself?

SALLY. I can't. Aunt Mabel said not to open the oven door.

GINGERBREAD MAN. Then how will you know if I'm ready to come out?

SALLY. She said I should call her when you smell done.

GINGERBREAD MAN. She's out collecting eggs. Just a little peek won't hurt anything.

SALLY. I don't know.

GINGERBREAD MAN. Please? My toes are toasting.

SALLY. But you don't smell done yet, whatever that means.

GINGERBREAD MAN. Listen kid, I'm roasting. By the time your Aunt Mabel gets here, I'll be a crispy critter. What a waste of perfectly good dough.

SALLY. How about if I just turn off the oven? *[She turns the oven off]*

GINGERBREAD MAN. That helps a little, but it's still awfully hot in here. You don't want me to burn, do you?

SALLY. Are you sure you're done?

GINGERBREAD MAN. It may be too late already. *[Melodramatically]* Oh, woe is me, such a short, undistinguished career for such a smart

cookie.

SALLY. [*Putting on the oven mitt*] Hold on, Gingerbread Man, I'll get you out. [*She opens the oven door. Out pops the GINGERBREAD MAN. He/she is energetic, cocky, self-centered*] Hey!

GINGERBREAD MAN. Hay is for horses, and donkeys like you.

SALLY. You're not burning up. You're not even done yet.

GINGERBREAD MAN. True, how true. You don't know much about cookies, do you?

SALLY. No.

GINGERBREAD MAN. First bit of advice, kid. Never open the oven door until the cookies *smell* ready. If the dough is still soft, they can hop right off the cookie sheet and you'll never get them back in there.

SALLY. I've never done this before. I'm a city kid.

GINGERBREAD MAN. Second bit of advice: the bigger the cookie, the smarter it is. These mass produced, cookie cutter clones haven't got a brain between them. They'll march one right after another straight into your mouth and that's the end of them. But me, I'm one of a kind. Unique. And I aim to be around for awhile. This is one cookie no one's going to crunch. Got that?

SALLY. Fine with me. I prefer pop tarts anyway. And I've got a rule never to eat anything that talks to me.

GINGERBREAD MAN. Then we'll be partners.

SALLY. Okay. What do you want to do?

GINGERBREAD MAN. First thing we need to do is break out of this kitchen. There's no telling when your Aunt Mabel will come back.

SALLY. I want to go back home, to the city.

GINGERBREAD MAN. Don't like country life, huh, kid?

SALLY. You said it.

GINGERBREAD MAN. I've got an idea.

SALLY. What is it?

GINGERBREAD MAN. I can't stay around here. People will want to put the bite on me. And you don't like it here, either.

SALLY. I'm being eaten up by boredom.

GINGERBREAD MAN. So what do you say we have a little adventure?

SALLY. Sounds good to me, partner.

GINGERBREAD. There's a town not too far from here. We could take in the sights.

SALLY. I know the town you mean. When Uncle Dudley brought me here from the airport, we passed through it. There were posters advertising a troupe of travelling actors.

GINGERBREAD MAN. That's perfect! We could go see a play. Maybe they'd even give me a job.

SALLY. Let's go, right now! [*AUNT MABEL and UNCLE DUDLEY enter from Up Right. They mime carrying eggs in their apron and hat, crossing into the "kitchen"*]

AUNT MABEL. We're back with the eggs. Is the Gingerbread Man ready yet?

GINGERBREAD MAN. I'm ready, all right — to high-tail it out of here!

UNCLE DUDLEY. Sally! You opened the door too soon. I should have warned you about Aunt Mabel's magical gingerbread.

AUNT MABEL. [*To Gingerbread Man*] All right, you, back into the oven you go.

GINGERBREAD MAN. No way!

AUNT MABEL. Sally, catch him! If he gets out of this kitchen, he'll never come back.

GINGERBREAD MAN. Now's our chance, Sally. Let's go!

SALLY. [*To Aunt Mabel*] We're going to town to see the travelling players. [*SALLY and GINGERBREAD MAN dodge around UNCLE DUDLEY and AUNT MABEL, who try to capture them. SALLY blocks UNCLE DUDLEY and AUNT MABEL*] Go for the door, Gingerbread Man!

AUNT MABEL. Dudley, stop them!

UNCLE DUDLEY. I'm trying!

GINGERBREAD MAN. [*At the "door," gesturing to Sally*] Let's get out of here! [*The chase extends to the farm yard, with UNCLE DUDLEY and AUNT MABEL, still juggling eggs, in hot pursuit*]

SALLY. We've got them on the run!

AUNT MABEL. You can't just take off, child.

UNCLE DUDLEY. You're supposed to stay with us! [*UNCLE DUDLEY and AUNT MABEL have Sally and the Gingerbread Man "cornered" between them, and begin to slowly move in. GINGERBREAD MAN and SALLY are back to back*]

GINGERBREAD MAN. Looks like this is the end of me, Sally.

AUNT MABEL. Sally, think about what you're doing. You've been hoodwinked by this crumb!

SALLY. I'm getting off this farm one way or another, Aunt Mabel.

GINGERBREAD MAN. We're just not "cut out" for farm life. [*UNCLE DUDLEY and AUNT MABEL are about to pounce*] Ready, Sally?

SALLY. Ready.

GINGERBREAD MAN. Duck! *[They duck, just as AUNT MABEL and UNCLE DUDLEY lunge. The adults collide, crushing the "eggs" they've been carrying. They sit in a heap, sticky with egg goo]*

UNCLE DUDLEY. Oooh.

AUNT MABEL. Yuck.

GINGERBREAD MAN. That'll teach you to try to capture me! Run, run, as fast as you can, you can't catch me! I'm the Gingerbread Man! *[GINGERBREAD MAN and SALLY exit Down Left]*

AUNT MABEL. Dudley, do something!

UNCLE DUDLEY. What do you want me to do?

AUNT MABEL. First we're going to get cleaned up. We can't go after them covered in egg.

UNCLE DUDLEY. Then what?

AUNT MABEL. We'll take the truck to town and bring her back. She said something about going to see the travelling players.

UNCLE DUDLEY. Okay. I wouldn't mind seeing a show myself. But what about the Gingerbread Man?

AUNT MABEL. He'll just have to fend for himself. Let's get moving. *[UNCLE DUDLEY and AUNT MABEL help each other up, and walk uncomfortably into the "kitchen" and Off, Up Left. LIGHTS black out. The trough, bucket, oven, stool, and kitchen table are removed. A free standing signpost is placed Center. It points Down Left and reads "Town, 3 miles." A rock, stump or log is placed in front of it, Center. The actors playing GINGERBREAD MAN and SALLY can help with the simple set change during the blackout, finishing Up Right, or they can circle around the playing area while others change the setting in full view of the audience]*

Scene Two

[AT RISE: A crossroads on the way to town. As the LIGHTS COME Up, GINGERBREAD MAN enters from Up Right, crosses Down Right to the signpost, then Left CENTER]

GINGERBREAD MAN. *[Calling Off Up Right to Sally]* I think we're almost there. *[SALLY enters feebly from Up Right, out of breath. She plops down on the rock/stump/log center]*

SALLY. Whew. I'm not used to getting this much exercise.

GINGERBREADMAN. The fresh air is good for you.

SALLY. I just wish I could catch a breath of it!

GINGERBREAD MAN. [*Pointing at sign*] See that sign?

SALLY. What, that one?

GINGERBREAD MAN. Yes. What does it say?

SALLY. Can't you read?

GINGERBREAD MAN. [*Jogging in place*] I haven't got time to learn things like that. I'm an athlete. I'm in training.

SALLY. For what?

GINGERBREAD MAN. To be a runner. I'll become so fast, no one will ever catch me.

SALLY. But if you don't learn to read, you'll go nowhere at all.

GINGERBREAD MAN. What do you mean?

SALLY. Take that signpost, for example. You can't read it, so you don't know where it's pointing, or how far the distance is.

GINGERBREAD MAN. Fine. You sit there breathing and reading signposts. I've got places to go, things to see. I'm in a hurry. [*Pause*] So what does the sign say?

SALLY. It says "Town, three miles."

GINGERBREAD MAN. And all we have to do is run in that direction [*pointing Down Left*] for three miles, and we're there, right?

SALLY. Right.

GINGERBREAD MAN. So what are we waiting for? Let's go!

SALLY. Just give me a minute.

GINGERBREAD MAN. I don't have a minute. Gotta keep moving.

SALLY. [*Stands*] I'll try and keep up. [*GINGERBREAD MAN dashes off Down Left*] Wow, he really is fast. [*Calling*] Hey, Gingerbread Man, wait up! [*Looks around*] And I'm alone. He ditched me. It figures. [*Looks around*] Ditched next to a ditch. [*A DONKEY enters from Up Right*]

DONKEY. Greetings and salivations. [*SALLY spins around. DONKEY, startled, assumes a karate stance*]

SALLY. What?

DONKEY. Whoa!

SALLY. You snuck up on me.

DONKEY. Watch it! These hooves are sanctified as lethargic weapons.

SALLY. [*Circling around Donkey*] What are you?

DONKEY. [*Circling with her, "on guard"*] I'm dangerous, so squeeze and resist!

SALLY. You're a donkey!

DONKEY. So?

SALLY. Donkeys aren't dangerous.

DONKEY. [*Defensive*] Oh yeah?

SALLY. Of course not. The donkeys on my uncle's farm are just stubborn and stupid.

DONKEY. [*Definitively*] I am not stubborn.

SALLY. Sure you are.

DONKEY. Am not.

SALLY. Are.

DONKEY. Not.

SALLY. Are.

DONKEY. Not.

SALLY. Aren't.

DONKEY. Am.

SALLY. Aren't.

DONKEY. Am, am, am. I AM stubborn. So there.

SALLY. But not stupid.

DONKEY. I don't think so. [*Thinks for a moment, resumes karate stance*] Anyway, I'm not your everyday jackass.

SALLY. No? Whose are you?

DONKEY. I have descended my palpitations.

SALLY. You have, huh? How?

DONKEY. [*Letting his guard down*] It wasn't easy. You see, there I was, aboding in my abide — uh, abiding in my abode — a regular beast of boredom, you might say.

SALLY. I might. Then again, I might not.

DONKEY. I walked over to the fence, and suddenly it hit me.

SALLY. The fence hit you?

DONKEY. No, I had a revision. [*Performs a few martial arts poses*] I was questioned to become a recycle of the partial arts. [*Kicks the air*] Heehaw!

SALLY. A what?

DONKEY. [*Stops*] I wanted to learn to kick real good.

SALLY. Oh. [*Pause*] Why?

DONKEY. I'd had it up to here [*kicks his back leg up*] with taking orders. I dejected to strike out on my own. [*Chops the air*]

SALLY. And you've been striking out ever since.

DONKEY. Abstractly! [*More silly poses and movements*] Through diffident practice, I became so inept that I kicked the fence to Smithereens—

SALLY. Pulverized it, huh?

DONKEY. No, I kicked it down the road to Farmer Smithereen's house.

SALLY. I should have known.

DONKEY. And thrust began my blustrious arrear.

SALLY. You nourished your mind as well, I gather.

DONKEY. You betcha. I ate an entire dictionary, page by page. I have the most offensive constabulary in the entire predicament.

SALLY. So now what?

DONKEY. Now what, what?

SALLY. What do you do now?

DONKEY. I live in ditches and eat the garbage that falls off passing wagons.

SALLY. Wow. Sounds inspiring.

DONKEY. A lot more perspiring than strife on the implantation, that's for sure.

SALLY. And to think you gave up fresh hay, a warm stall, and a steady job for all this.

DONKEY. [*Proudly*] Yep. And what is your provocation?

SALLY. I'm running away.

DONKEY. Good idea. Smartest thing I ever did.

SALLY. That's debatable.

DONKEY. But you'll have to find your own ditch. This particulate conjunction of surveillances is precipitous of redundant refuge.

SALLY. Run that by me again.

DONKEY. A lot of good stuff falls off wagons here at the crossroad.

SALLY. I wouldn't think of crowding you. [*GINGERBREAD MAN enters from Down Left*]

GINGERBREAD MAN. [*To Sally*] Hey, I thought you were going to be right behind me.

DONKEY. [*Assumes karate stance*] Another delegate! [*Looks Gingerbread Man over*]

SALLY. I was going to catch up, but I ran into this — uh, well —

GINGERBREAD MAN. Jackass.

DONKEY. A gingerbread man. Gingerbread is credible, and it's been weeks since I've festooned on such a detestable morsel. [*Prepares to attack*] Heehaw!

GINGERBREAD MAN. Uh oh. I recognize that look. He means to make a meal of me.

SALLY. Watch out for his hooves. [*DONKEY advances on Gingerbread Man*]

GINGERBREAD MAN. I can handle him. I ran away from a farmer and his wife, and I can run circles around you, Sally. [*To Donkey*] And I