The Project Gutenberg eBook of Pelle the Conqueror — Complete, by Martin Andersen Nexø

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: Pelle the Conqueror — Complete

Author: Martin Andersen Nexø
Translator: Bernard Miall
Translator: Jessie Muir

Release date: March 1, 2005 [EBook #7795]
Most recently updated: July 7, 2021

Language: English

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PELLE THE CONQUEROR — COMPLETE ***

Pelle the Conqueror

by Martin Andersen Nexö

Translated from the Danish by Jessie Muir and Bernard Miall

Contents

NOTE
PELLE THE CONQUEROR

I. BOYHOOD
I.
II.
III.
IV.
V.
VI.
VII.
VIII.
IX.
X.
XI.
XII.
XIII.

XIV.
XV.
XVI.
XVII.
XVIII.
XIX.
XX.
XXI.
XXII.
XXIII.
XXIV.

II. APPRENTICESHIP

I.
II.
III.
IV.
V.
VI.
VII.
VIII.
IX.
X.
XI.
XII.
XIII.
XIV.
XV.
XVI.
XVII.
XVIII.
XIX.
XX.
XXI.
XXII.
XXIII.
XXIV.
XXV.
XXVI.

III. THE GREAT STRUGGLE

I.
II.
III.
IV.
V.
VI.
VII.
VIII.
IX.
X.
XI.
XII.
XIII.
XIV.
XV.
XVI.
XVII.
XVIII.
XIX.
XX.
XXI.

XXII.
XXIII.
XXIV.
XXV.
XXVI.
XXVII.
XXVIII.
XXIX.
XXX.
XXXI.
XXXII.
XXXIII.
XXXIV.
XXXV.
XXXVI.
XXXVII.

IV. DAYBREAK
I.
II.
III.
IV.
V.
VI.
VII.
VIII.
IX.
X.
XI.
XII.
XIII.
XIV.
XV.
XVI.
XVII.
XVIII.
XIX.
XX.
XXI.
XXII.
XXIII.

NOTE

When the first part of “Pelle Erobreren” (Pelle the Conqueror) appeared in 1906, its author, Martin Andersen Nexö, was practically unknown even in his native country, save to a few literary people who knew that he had written some volumes of stories and a book full of sunshiny reminiscences from Spain. And even now, after his great success with “Pelle,” very little is known about the writer. He was born in 1869 in one of the poorest quarters of Copenhagen, but spent his boyhood in his beloved island Bornholm, in the Baltic, in or near the town, Nexö, from which his final name is derived. There, too, he was a shoemaker’s apprentice, like Pelle in the second part of the book, which resembles many great novels in being largely autobiographical. Later, he gained his livelihood as a bricklayer, until he somehow managed to get to one of the most renowned of our “people’s high-schools,” where he studied so effectually that he was enabled to become a teacher, first at a provincial school, and later in Copenhagen.

“Pelle” consists of four parts, each, except perhaps the last, a complete story in itself. First we have the open-air life of the boy in country surroundings in Bornholm; then the lad’s apprenticeship in a small provincial town not yet invaded by modern industrialism and still innocent of socialism; next the youth’s struggles in Copenhagen against employers and authorities; and last the man’s final victory in laying the foundation of a garden-city for the benefit of his fellow-workers. The background everywhere is the rapid growth of the labor movement; but social problems are never obtruded, except, again, in the last part, and the purely human interest is always kept well before the reader’s eye through variety of situation and vividness of characterization. The great charm of the book seems to me to lie in the fact that the writer knows the poor from within; he has not studied them as an outsider may, but has lived with them and felt with them, at once a participant and a keen-eyed spectator. He is no sentimentalist, and so rich is his imagination that he passes on rapidly from one scene to the next, sketching often in a few pages what another novelist would be content to work out into long chapters or whole volumes. His sympathy is of the widest, and he makes us see tragedies behind the little comedies, and comedies behind the little tragedies, of the seemingly sordid lives of the working people whom he loves. “Pelle” has conquered the hearts of the reading public of Denmark; there is that in the book which should conquer also the hearts of a wider public than that of the little country in which its author was born.

OTTO JESPERSEN,
Professor of English in the University of Copenhagen.

GENTOFTE, COPENHAGEN.
April, 1913.

I. BOYHOOD

I

It was dawn on the first of May, 1877. From the sea the mist came sweeping in, in a gray trail that lay heavily on the water. Here and there there was a movement in it; it seemed about to lift, but closed in again, leaving only a strip of shore with two old boats lying keel uppermost upon it. The prow of a third boat and a bit of breakwater showed dimly in the mist a few paces off. At definite intervals a smooth, gray wave came gliding out of the mist up over the rustling shingle, and then withdrew again; it was as if some great animal lay hidden out there in the fog, and lapped at the land.

A couple of hungry crows were busy with a black, inflated object down there, probably the carcass of a dog. Each time a wave glided in, they rose and hovered a few feet up in the air with their legs extended straight down toward their booty, as if held by some invisible attachment. When the water retreated, they dropped down and buried their heads in the carrion, but kept their wings spread, ready to rise before the next advancing wave. This was repeated with the regularity of clock-work.

A shout came vibrating in from the harbor, and a little while after the heavy sound of oars working over the edge of a boat. The sound grew more distant and at last ceased; but then a bell began to ring—it must have been at the end of the mole—and out of the distance, into which the beat of the oars had disappeared, came the answering sound of a horn. They continued to answer one another for a couple of minutes.

The town was invisible, but now and then the silence there was broken by the iron tramp of a quarryman upon the stone paving. For a long time the regular beat of his footsteps could be heard, until it suddenly ceased as he turned some corner or other. Then a door was opened, followed by the sound of a loud morning yawn; and someone began to sweep the pavement. Windows were opened here and there, out of which floated various sounds to greet the gray day. A woman's sharp voice was heard scolding, then short, smart slaps and the crying of a child. A shoemaker began beating leather, and as he worked fell to singing a hymn—

> "But One is worthy of our hymn, O brothers:
> The Lamb on Whom the sins of all men lay."

The tune was one of Mendelssohn's "Songs without Words."

Upon the bench under the church wall sat a boat's crew with their gaze turned seaward. They were leaning forward and smoking, with hands clasped between their knees. All three wore ear-rings as a preventive of colds and other evils, and all sat in exactly the same position, as if the one were afraid of making himself in the very least different from the others.

A traveller came sauntering down from the hotel, and approached the fishermen. He had his coat-collar turned up, and shivered in the chill morning air. "Is anything the matter?" he asked civilly, raising his cap. His voice sounded gruff.

One of the fishermen moved his hand slightly in the direction of his head-gear. He was the head man of the boat's crew. The others gazed straight before them without moving a muscle.

"I mean, as the bell's ringing and the pilot-boat's out blowing her horn," the traveller went on. "Are they expecting a ship?"

"May be. You never can tell!" answered the head man unapproachably.

The stranger looked as if he were deeply insulted, but restrained himself. It was only their usual secretiveness, their inveterate distrust of every one who did not speak their dialect and look exactly like themselves. They sat there inwardly uneasy in spite of their wooden exterior, stealing glances at him when he was not looking, and wishing him at Jericho. He felt tempted to tease them a little.

"Dear me! Perhaps it's a secret?" he said, laughing.

"Not that I know of," answered the fisherman cautiously.

"Well, of course I don't expect anything for nothing! And besides it wears out your talking-apparatus to be continually opening and shutting it. How much do you generally get?" He took out his purse; it was his intention to insult them now.

The other fishermen threw stolen glances at their leader. If only he did not run them aground!

The head man took his pipe out of his mouth and turned to his companions: "No, as I was saying, there are some folks that have nothing to do but go about and be clever." He warned them with his eyes, the expression of his face was wooden. His companions nodded. They enjoyed the situation, as the commercial traveller could see from their doltish looks.

He was enraged. Here he was, being treated as if he were air and made fun of! "Confound you fellows! Haven't you even learnt as much as to give a civil answer to a civil question?" he said angrily.

The fishermen looked backward and forward at one another, taking mute counsel.

"No, but I tell you what it is! She must come some time," said the head man at last.

"What 'she'?"

"The steamer, of course. And she generally comes about this time. Now you've got it!"

"Naturally—of course! But isn't it a little unwise to speak so loud about it?" jeered the traveller.

The fishermen had turned their backs on him, and were scraping out their pipes.

"We're not quite so free with our speech here as some people, and yet we make our living," said the head man to the others. They growled their approval.

As the stranger wandered on down the harbor hill, the fishermen looked after him with a feeling of relief. "What a talker!" said one. "He wanted to show off a bit, but you gave him what he won't forget in a hurry."

"Yes, I think it touched him on the raw, all right," answered the man, with pride. "It's these fine gentlemen you need to be most careful of."

Half-way down the harbor hill, an inn-keeper stood at his door yawning. The morning stroller repeated his question to him, and received an immediate answer, the man being a Copenhagener.

"Well, you see we're expecting the steamer from Ystad today, with a big cargo of slaves—cheap Swedish laborers, that's to say, who live on black bread and salt herrings, and do the work of three. They ought to be flogged with red-hot icicles, that sort, and the brutes of farmers, too! You won't take a little early morning glass of something, I suppose?"

"No, thank you, I think not—so early."

"Very well, please yourself."

Down at the harbor a number of farmers' carts were already standing, and fresh ones arrived at full gallop every minute. The newcomers guided their teams as far to the front as possible, examined their neighbors' horses with a critical eye, and settled themselves into a half-doze, with their fur collars turned up about their ears. Custom-house men in uniform, and pilots, looking like monster penguins, wandered restlessly about, peering out to sea and listening. Every moment the bell at the end of the mole rang, and was answered by the pilot-boat's horn somewhere out in the fog over the sea, with a long, dreary hoot, like the howl of some suffering animal.

"What was that noise?" asked a farmer who had just come, catching up the reins in fear. His fear communicated itself to his horses, and they stood trembling with heads raised listening in the direction of the sea, with questioning terror in their eyes.

"It was only the sea-serpent," answered a custom-house officer. "He always suffers from wind in this foggy weather. He's a wind-sucker, you see." And the custom-house men put their heads together and grinned.

Merry sailors dressed in blue with white handkerchiefs round their necks went about patting the horses, or pricking their nostrils with a straw to make them rear. When the farmers woke up and scolded, they laughed with delight, and sang—

> "A sailor he must go through
> A deal more bad than good, good, good!"

A big pilot, in an Iceland vest and woollen gloves, was rushing anxiously about with a megaphone in his hand, growling like an uneasy bear. Now and then he climbed up on the molehead, put the megaphone to his mouth, and roared out over the water: "Do—you—hear—any—thing?" The roar went on for a long time out upon the long swells, up and down, leaving behind it an oppressive silence, until it suddenly returned from the town above, in the shape of a confused babble that made people laugh.

"N-o-o!" was heard a little while after in a thin and long-drawn-out cry from the sea; and again the horn was heard, a long, hoarse sound that came rocking in on the waves, and burst gurgling in the splash under the wharf and on the slips.

The farmers were out of it all. They dozed a little or sat flicking their whips to pass the time. But every one else was in a state of suspense. A number of people had gradually gathered about the harbor —fishermen, sailors waiting to be hired, and master-artisans who were too restless to stay in their workshop. They came down in their leather aprons, and began at once to discuss the situation; they used nautical expressions, most of them having been at sea in their youth. The coming of the steamer was always an event that brought people to the harbor; but to-day she had a great many people on board, and she was already an hour behind time. The dangerous fog kept the suspense at high pressure; but as the time passed, the excitement gave place to a feeling of dull oppression. Fog is the seaman's worst enemy, and there were many unpleasant possibilities. On the best supposition the ship had gone inshore too far north or south, and now lay somewhere out at sea hooting and heaving the lead, without daring to move. One could imagine the captain storming and the sailors hurrying here and there, lithe and agile as cats. Stop!—Half-speed ahead! Stop!—Half-speed astern! The first engineer would be at the engine himself, gray with nervous excitement. Down in the engine-room, where they knew nothing at all, they would strain their ears painfully for any sound, and all to no purpose. But up on deck every man would be on the alert for his life; the helmsman wet with the sweat of his anxiety to watch every movement of the captain's directing hand, and the look-out on the forecastle peering and listening into the fog until he could hear his own heart beat, while the suspense held every man on deck on tenterhooks, and the fog-horn hooted its warning. But perhaps the ship had already gone to the bottom!

Every one knew it all; every man had in some way or other been through this overcharged suspense—as cabin-boy, stoker, captain, cook —and felt something of it again now. Only the farmers were unaffected by it; they dozed, woke up with a jerk, and yawned audibly.

The seafarers and the peasants always had a difficulty in keeping on peaceable terms with one another; they were as different as land and sea. But to-day the indifferent attitude of the peasants made the sea-folk eye them with suppressed rage. The fat pilot had already had several altercations with them for being in his way; and when one of them laid himself open to criticism, he was down upon him in an instant. It was an elderly farmer, who woke from his nap with a start, as his head fell forward, and impatiently took out his watch and looked at it.

"It's getting rather late," he said. "The captain can't find his stall to-day."

"More likely he's dropped into an inn on the way!" said the pilot, his eyes gleaming with malice.

"Very likely," answered the farmer, without for the moment realizing the nature of the paths of the sea. His auditors laughed exultingly, and passed the mistake on to their neighbors, and people crowded round the unfortunate man, while some one cried: "How many inns are there between this and Sweden?"

"Yes, it's too easy to get hold of liquids out there, that's the worst of it," the pilot went on. "But for that any booby could manage a ship. He's only got to keep well to the right of Mads Hansen's farm, and he's got a straight road before him. And the deuce of a fine road! Telegraph-wires and ditches and a row of poplars on each side—just improved by the local board. You've just got to wipe the porridge off your mustache, kiss the old woman, and climb up on to the bridge, and there you are! Has the engine been oiled, Hans? Right away, then, off we go; hand me my best whip!" He imitated the peasants' manner of speech. "Be careful about the inns, Dad!" he added in a shrill falsetto. There were peals of laughter, that had an evil sound in the prevailing depression.

The farmer sat quite still under the deluge, only lowering his head a little. When the laughter had almost died away, he pointed at the pilot with his whip, and remarked to the bystanders—

"That's a wonderful clever kid for his age! Whose father art thou, my boy?" he went on, turning to the pilot.

This raised a laugh, and the thick-necked pilot swelled with rage. He seized hold of the body of the cart and shook it so that the farmer had a difficulty in keeping his seat. "You miserable old clodhopper, you pig-breeder, you dung-carter!" he roared. "What do you mean by coming here and saying ‘thou’ to grown-up people and calling them ‘boy’? And giving your opinions on navigation into the bargain! Eh! you lousy old money-grubber! No, if you ever take off your greasy night-cap to anybody but your parish clerk, then take it off to the captain who can find his harbor in a fog like this. You can give him my kind regards and say I said so.” And he let go of the cart so suddenly that it swung over to the other side.

“I may as well take it off to you, as the other doesn’t seem able to find us to-day,” said the farmer with a grin, and took off his fur cap, disclosing a large bald head.

“Cover up that great bald pumpkin, or upon my word I’ll give it something!” cried the pilot, blind with rage, and beginning to clamber up into the cart.

At that moment, like the thin metallic voice of a telephone, there came faintly from the sea the words: “We—hear—a—steam—whistle!”

The pilot ran off on to the breakwater, hitting out as he passed at the farmer’s horse, and making it rear. Men cleared a space round the mooring-posts, and dragged up the gangways with frantic speed. Carts that had hay in them, as if they were come to fetch cattle, began to move without having anywhere to drive to. Everything was in motion. Labor-hirers with red noses and cunning eyes, came hurrying down from the sailors’ tavern where they had been keeping themselves warm.

Then as if a huge hand had been laid upon the movement, everything suddenly stood still again, in strained effort to hear. A far-off, tiny echo of a steam whistle whined somewhere a long way off. Men stole together into groups and stood motionless, listening and sending angry glances at the restless carts. Was it real, or was it a creation of the heart-felt wishes of so many?

Perhaps a warning to every one that at that moment the ship had gone to the bottom? The sea always sends word of its evil doings; when the bread-winner is taken his family hear a shutter creak, or three taps on the windows that look on to the sea—there are so many ways.

But now it sounded again, and this time the sound come in little waves over the water, the same vibrating, subdued whistle that long-tailed ducks make when they rise; it seemed alive. The fog-horn answered it out in the fairway, and the bell in at the mole-head; then the horn once more, and the steam-whistle in the distance. So it went on, a guiding line of sound being spun between the land and the indefinite gray out there, backward and forward. Here on terra firma one could distinctly feel how out there they were groping their way by the sound. The hoarse whistle slowly increased in volume, sounding now a little to the south, now to the north, but growing steadily louder. Then other sounds made themselves heard, the heavy scraping of iron against iron, the noise of the screw when it was reversed or went on again.

The pilot-boat glided slowly out of the fog, keeping to the middle of the fairway, and moving slowly inward hooting incessantly. It towed by the sound an invisible world behind it, in which hundreds of voices murmured thickly amidst shouting and clanging, and tramping of feet—a world that floated blindly in space close by. Then a shadow began to form in the fog where no one had expected it, and the little steamer made its appearance—looking enormous in the first moment of surprise—in the middle of the harbor entrance.

At this the last remnants of suspense burst and scattered, and every one had to do something or other to work off the oppression. They seized the heads of the farmers’ horses and pushed them back, clapped their hands, attempted jokes, or only laughed noisily while they stamped on the stone paving.

“Good voyage?” asked a score of voices at once.

“All well!” answered the captain cheerfully.

And now he, too, has got rid of his incubus, and rolls forth words of command; the propeller churns up the water behind, hawsers fly through the air, and the steam winch starts with a ringing metallic clang, while the vessel works herself broadside in to the wharf.

Between the forecastle and the bridge, in under the upper deck and the after, there is a swarm of people, a curiously stupid swarm, like sheep that get up on to one another’s backs and look foolish. “What a cargo of cattle!” cries the fat pilot up to the captain, tramping delightedly on the breakwater with his wooden-soled boots. There are sheepskin caps, old military caps, disreputable old rusty hats, and the women’s tidy black handkerchiefs. The faces are as different as old, wrinkled pigskin and young, ripening fruit; but want, and expectancy, and a certain animal greed are visible in all of them. The unfamiliarity of the moment brings a touch of stupidity into them, as they press forward, or climb up to get a view over their neighbors' heads and stare open-mouthed at the land where the wages are said to be so high, and the brandy so uncommonly strong. They see the fat, fur-clad farmers and the men come down to engage laborers.

They do not know what to do with themselves, and are always getting in the way; and the sailors chase them with oaths from side to side of the vessel, or throw hatches and packages without warning at their feet. "Look out, you Swedish devil!" cries a sailor who has to open the iron doors. The Swede backs in bewilderment, but his hand involuntarily flies to his pocket and fingers nervously his big pocket-knife.

The gangway is down, and the two hundred and fifty passengers stream down it—stone-masons, navvies, maid-servants, male and female day-laborers, stablemen, herdsmen, here and there a solitary little cowherd, and tailors in smart clothes, who keep far away from the rest. There are young men straighter and better built than any that the island produces, and poor old men more worn with toil and want than they ever become here. There are also faces among them that bear an expression of malice, others sparkling with energy, and others disfigured with great scars.

Most of them are in working-clothes and only possess what they stand in. Here and there is a man with some tool upon his shoulder—a shovel or a crowbar. Those that have any luggage, get it turned inside out by the custom-house officers: woven goods are so cheap in Sweden. Now and then some girl with an inclination to plumpness has to put up with the officers' coarse witticisms. There, for instance, is Handsome Sara from Cimrishamn, whom everybody knows. Every autumn she goes home, and comes again every spring with a figure that at once makes her the butt of their wit; but Sara, who generally has a quick temper and a ready tongue, to-day drops her eyes in modest confusion: she has fourteen yards of cloth wrapped round her under her dress.

The farmers are wide awake now. Those who dare, leave their horses and go among the crowd; the others choose their laborers with their eyes, and call them up. Each one takes his man's measure—width of chest, modest manner, wretchedness; but they are afraid of the scarred and malicious faces, and leave them to the bailiffs on the large farms. Offers are made and conditions fixed, and every minute one or two Swedes climb up into the hay in the back of some cart, and are driven off.

A little on one side stood an elderly, bent little man with a sack upon his back, holding a boy of eight or nine by the hand; beside them lay a green chest. They eagerly watched the proceedings, and each time a cart drove off with some of their countrymen, the boy pulled impatiently at the hand of the old man, who answered by a reassuring word. The old man examined the farmers one by one with an anxious air, moving his lips as he did so: he was thinking. His red, lashless eyes kept watering with the prolonged staring, and he wiped them with the mouth of the coarse dirty sack.

"Do you see that one there?" he suddenly asked the boy, pointing to a fat little farmer with apple-cheeks. "I should think he'd be kind to children. Shall we try him, laddie?"

The boy nodded gravely, and they made straight for the farmer. But when he had heard that they were to go together, he would not take them; the boy was far too little to earn his keep. And it was the same thing every time.

It was Lasse Karlsson from Tommelilla in the Ystad district, and his son Pelle.

It was not altogether strange to Lasse, for he had been on the island once before, about ten years ago; but he had been younger then, in full vigor it might be said, and had no little boy by the hand, from whom he would not be separated for all the world; that was the difference. It was the year that the cow had been drowned in the marl-pit, and Bengta was preparing for her confinement. Things looked bad, but Lasse staked his all on one cast, and used the couple of krones he got for the hide of the cow to go to Bornholm. When he came back in the autumn, there were three mouths to fill; but then he had a hundred krones to meet the winter with.

At that time Lasse had been equal to the situation, and he would still straighten his bowed shoulders whenever he thought of that exploit. Afterward, whenever there were short commons, he would talk of selling the whole affair and going to Bornholm for good. But Bengta's health failed after her late child-bearing, and nothing came of it, until she died after eight years of suffering, this very spring. Then Lasse sold their bit of furniture, and made nearly a hundred krones on it; it went in paying the expenses of the long illness, and the house and land belonged to the landlord. A green chest, that had been part of Bengta's wedding outfit, was the only thing he kept. In it he packed their belongings and a few little things of Bengta's, and sent it on in advance to the port with a horse-dealer who was driving there. Some of the rubbish for which no one would bid he stuffed into a sack, and with it on his back and the boy's hand clasped in his, he set out to walk to Ystad, where the steamer for Rönne lay. The few coins he had would just pay their passage.

He had been so sure of himself on the way, and had talked in loud tones to Pelle about the country where the wages were so incomprehensibly high, and where in some places you got meat or cheese to eat with your bread, and always beer, so that the water-cart in the autumn did not come round for the laborers, but only for the cattle. And—why, if you liked you could drink gin like water, it was so cheap; but it was so strong that it knocked you down at the third pull. They made it from real grain, and not from diseased potatoes; and they drank it at every meal. And laddie would never feel cold there, for they wore wool next their skin, and not this poor linen that the wind blew right through; and a laborer who kept himself could easily make his two krones a day. That was something different from their master's miserable eighty öres and finding themselves in everything.

Pelle had heard the same thing often before—from his father, from Ole and Anders, from Karna and a hundred others who had been there. In the winter, when the air was thick with frost and snow and the needs of the poor, there was nothing else talked about in the little villages at home; and in the minds of those who had not been on the island themselves, but had only heard the tales about it, the ideas produced were as fantastic as the frost-tracery upon the window-panes. Pelle was perfectly well aware that even the poorest boys there always wore their best clothes, and ate bread-and-dripping with sugar on it as often as they liked. There money lay like dirt by the roadside, and the Bornholmers did not even take the trouble to stoop and pick it up; but Pelle meant to pick it up, so that Father Lasse would have to empty the odds and ends out of the sack and clear out the locked compartment in the green chest to make room for it; and even that would be hardly enough. If only they could begin! He shook his father's hand impatiently.

"Yes, yes," said Lasse, almost in tears. "You mustn't be impatient." He looked about him irresolutely. Here he was in the midst of all this splendor, and could not even find a humble situation for himself and the boy. He could not understand it. Had the whole world changed since his time? He trembled to his very finger-tips when the last cart drove off. For a few minutes he stood staring helplessly after it, and then he and the boy together carried the green chest up to a wall, and trudged hand in hand up toward the town.

Lasse's lips moved as he walked; he was thinking. In an ordinary way he thought best when he talked out loud to himself, but to-day all his faculties were alert, and it was enough only to move his lips.

As he trudged along, his mental excuses became audible. "Confound it!" he exclaimed, as he jerked the sack higher up his back. "It doesn't do to take the first thing that comes. Lasse's responsible for two, and he knows what he wants—so there! It isn't the first time he's been abroad! And the best always comes last, you know, laddie."

Pelle was not paying much attention. He was already consoled, and his father's words about the best being in store for them, were to him only a feeble expression for a great truth, namely, that the whole world would become theirs, with all that it contained in the way of wonders. He was already engaged in taking possession of it, open-mouthed.

He looked as if he would like to swallow the harbor with all its ships and boats, and the great stacks of timber, where it looked as if there would be holes. This would be a fine place to play in, but there were no boys! He wondered whether the boys were like those at home; he had seen none yet. Perhaps they had quite a different way of fighting, but he would manage all right if only they would come one at a time. There was a big ship right up on land, and they were skinning it. So ships have ribs, just like cows!

At the wooden shed in the middle of the harbor square, Lasse put down the sack, and giving the boy a piece of bread and telling him to stay and mind the sack, he went farther up and disappeared. Pelle was very hungry, and holding the bread with both hands he munched at it greedily.

When he had picked the last crumbs off his jacket, he set himself to examine his surroundings. That black stuff in that big pot was tar. He knew it quite well, but had never seen so much at once. My word! If you fell into that while it was boiling, it would be worse even than the brimstone pit in hell. And there lay some enormous fish-hooks, just like those that were hanging on thick iron chains from the ships' nostrils. He wondered whether there still lived giants who could fish with such hooks. Strong John couldn't manage them!

He satisfied himself with his own eyes that the stacks of boards were really hollow, and that he could easily get down to the bottom of them, if only he had not had the sack to drag about. His father had said he was to mind the sack, and he never let it out of his hands for a moment; as it was too heavy to carry, he had to drag it after him from place to place.

He discovered a little ship, only just big enough for a man to lie down in, and full of holes bored in the bottom and sides. He investigated the ship-builders' big grind-stone, which was nearly as tall as a man. There were bent planks lying there, with nails in them as big as the parish constable's new tether-peg at home. And the thing that ship was tethered to—wasn't it a real cannon that they had planted?

Pelle saw everything, and examined every single object in the appropriate manner, now only spitting appraisingly upon it, now kicking it or scratching it with his penknife. If he came across some strange wonder or other, that he could not get into his little brain in any other way, he set himself astride on it.

This was a new world altogether, and Pelle was engaged in making it his own. Not a shred of it would he leave. If he had had his playfellows from Tommelilla here, he would have explained it all to them. My word, how they would stare! But when he went home to Sweden again, he would tell them about it, and then he hoped they would call him a liar.

He was sitting astride an enormous mast that lay along the timber-yard upon some oak trestles. He kicked his feet together under the mast, as he had heard of knights doing in olden days under their horses, and imagined himself seizing hold of a ring and lifting himself, horse and all. He sat on horseback in the midst of his newly discovered world, glowing with the pride of conquest, struck the horse's loins with the flat of his hand, and dug his heels into its sides, while he shouted a song at the top of his voice. He had been obliged to let go the sack to get up.

"Far away in Smaaland the little imps were dancing
With ready-loaded pistol and rifle-barrelled gun;
All the little devils they played upon the fiddle,
But for the grand piano Old Harry was the one."

In the middle of his noisy joy, he looked up, and immediately burst into a roar of terror and dropped down on to the wood-shavings. On the top of the shed at the place where his father had left him stood a black man and two black, open-mouthed hell-hounds; the man leaned half out over the ridge of the roof in a menacing attitude. It was an old figure-head, but Pelle thought it was Old Harry himself, come to punish him for his bold song, and he set off at a run up the hill. A little way up he remembered the sack and stopped. He didn't care about the sack; and he wouldn't get a thrashing if he did leave it behind, for Father Lasse never beat him. And that horrid devil would eat him up at the very least, if he ventured down there again; he could distinctly see how red the nostrils shone, both the devil's and the dogs'.

But Pelle still hesitated. His father was so careful of that sack, that he would be sure to be sorry if he lost it—he might even cry as he did when he lost Mother Bengta. For perhaps the first time, the boy was being subjected to one of life's serious tests, and stood—as so many had stood before him—with the choice between sacrificing himself and sacrificing others. His love for his father, boyish pride, the sense of duty that is the social dower of the poor—the one thing with the other—determined his choice. He stood the test, but not bravely; he howled loudly the whole time, while, with his eyes fixed immovably upon the Evil One and his hell-hounds, he crept back for the sack and then dragged it after him at a quick run up the street.

No one is perhaps a hero until the danger is over. But even then Pelle had no opportunity of shuddering at his own courage; for no sooner was he out of the reach of the black man, than his terror took a new form. What had become of his father? He had said he would be back again directly! Supposing he never came back at all! Perhaps he had gone away so as to get rid of his little boy, who was only a trouble and made it difficult for him to get a situation.

Pelle felt despairingly convinced that it must be so, as, crying, he went off with the sack. The same thing had happened to other children with whom he was well acquainted; but they came to the pancake cottage and were quite happy, and Pelle himself would be sure to—perhaps find the king and be taken in there and have the little princes for his playmates, and his own little palace to live in. But Father Lasse shouldn't have a thing, for now Pelle was angry and vindictive, although he was crying just as unrestrainedly. He would let him stand and knock at the door and beg to come in for three days, and only when he began to cry—no, he would have to let him in at once, for to see Father Lasse cry hurt him more than anything else in the world. But he shouldn't have a single one of the nails Pelle had filled his pockets with down in the timber-yard; and when the king's wife brought them coffee in the morning before they were up——

But here both his tears and his happy imaginings ceased, for out of a tavern at the top of the street came Father Lasse's own living self. He looked in excellent spirits and held a bottle in his hand.

"Danish brandy, laddie!" he cried, waving the bottle. "Hats off to the Danish brandy! But what have you been crying for? Oh, you were afraid? And why were you afraid? Isn't your father's name Lasse—Lasse Karlsson from Kungstorp? And he's not one to quarrel with; he hits hard, he does, when he's provoked. To come and frighten good little boys! They'd better look out! Even if the whole wide world were full of naming devils, Lasse's here and you needn't be afraid!"

During all this fierce talk he was tenderly wiping the boy's tear-stained cheeks and nose with his rough hand, and taking the sack upon his back again. There was something touchingly feeble about his stooping figure, as, boasting and comforting, he trudged down again to the harbor holding the boy by the hand. He tottered along in his big waterproof boots, the tabs of which stuck out at the side and bore an astonishing resemblance to Pelle's ears; out of the gaping pockets of his old winter coat protruded on one side his red pocket-handkerchief, on the other the bottle. He had become a little looser in his knee-joints now, and the sack threatened momentarily to get the upper hand of him, pushing him forward and forcing him to go at a trot down the hill. He looked decrepit, and perhaps his boastful words helped to produce this effect; but his eyes beamed confidently, and he smiled down at the boy, who ran along beside him.

They drew near to the shed, and Pelle turned cold with fear, for the black man was still standing there. He went round to the other side of his father, and tried to pull him out in a wide curve over the harbor square. "There he is again," he whimpered.

"So that's what was after you, is it?" said Lasse, laughing heartily; "and he's made of wood, too! Well, you really are the bravest laddie I ever knew! I should almost think you might be sent out to fight a trussed chicken, if you had a stick in your hand!" Lasse went on laughing, and shook the boy goodnaturedly. But Pelle was ready to sink into the ground with shame.

Down by the custom-house they met a bailiff who had come too late for the steamer and had engaged no laborers. He stopped his cart and asked Lasse if he was looking for a place.

"Yes, we both want one," answered Lasse, briskly. "We want to be at the same farm—as the fox said to the goose."

The bailiff was a big, strong man, and Pelle shuddered in admiration of his father who could dare to speak to him so boldly.

But the great man laughed good-humoredly. "Then I suppose he's to be foreman?" he said, flicking at Pelle with his whip.

"Yes, he certainly will be some day," said Lasse, with conviction.

"He'll probably eat a few bushels of salt first. Well, I'm in want of a herdsman, and will give you a hundred krones for a year—although it'll be confounded hard for you to earn them from what I can see. There'll always be a crust of bread for the boy, but of course he'll have to do what little he can. You're his grandfather, I suppose?"

"I'm his father—in the sight of God and man," answered Lasse, proudly.

"Oh, indeed! Then you must still be fit for something, if you've come by him honestly. But climb up, if you know what's for your own good, for I haven't time to stand here. You won't get such an offer every day."

Pelle thought a hundred krones was a fearful amount of money; Lasse, on the contrary, as the older and more sensible, had a feeling that it was far too little. But, though he was not aware of it yet, the experiences of the morning had considerably dimmed the brightness of his outlook on life. On the other hand, the dram had made him reckless and generously-minded.

"All right then," he said with a wave of the hand. "But the master must understand that we won't have salt herring and porridge three times a day. We must have a proper bedroom too—and be free on Sundays." He lifted the sack and the boy up into the cart, and then climbed up himself.

The bailiff laughed. "I see you've been here before, old man. But I think we shall be able to manage all that. You shall have roast pork stuffed with raisins and rhubarb jelly with pepper on it, just as often as you like to open your mouth."

They drove down to the quay for the chest, and then out toward the country again. Lasse, who recognized one thing and another, explained it all in full to the boy, taking a pull at the bottle between whiles; but the bailiff must not see this. Pelle was cold and burrowed into the straw, where he crept close up to his father.

"You take a mouthful," whispered Lasse, passing the bottle to him cautiously. "But take care that he doesn't see, for he's a sly one. He's a Jute."

Pelle would not have a dram. "What's a Jute?" he asked in a whisper.

"A Jute? Good gracious me, laddie, don't you know that? It was the Jutes that crucified Christ. That's why they have to wander all over the world now, and sell flannel and needles, and such-like; and they always cheat wherever they go. Don't you remember the one that cheated Mother Bengta of her beautiful hair? Ah, no, that was before your time. That was a Jute too. He came one day when I wasn't at home, and unpacked all his fine wares—combs and pins with blue glass heads, and the finest head-kerchiefs. Women can't resist such trash; they're like what we others are when some one holds a brandy-bottle to our nose. Mother Bengta had no money, but that sly devil said he would give her the finest handkerchief if she would let him cut off just the end of her plait. And then he went and cut it off close up to her head. My goodness, but she was like flint and steel when she was angry! She chased him out of the house with a rake. But he took the plait with him, and the handkerchief was rubbish, as might have been expected. For the Jutes are cunning devils, who crucified——" Lasse began at the beginning again.

Pelle did not pay much attention to his father's soft murmuring. It was something about Mother Bengta, but she was dead now and lay in the black earth; she no longer buttoned his under-vest down the back, or warmed his hands when they were cold. So they put raisins into roast pork in this country, did they? Money must be as common as dirt! There was none lying about in the road, and the houses and farms were not so very fine either. But the strangest thing was that the earth here was of the same color as that at home, although it was a foreign country. He had seen a map in Tommelilla, in which each country had a different color. So that was a lie!

Lasse had long since talked himself out, and slept with his head upon the boy's back. He had forgotten to hide the bottle.

Pelle was just going to push it down into the straw when the bailiff —who as a matter of fact was not a Jute, but a Zeelander—happened to turn round and caught sight of it. He told the boy to throw it into the ditch.

By midday they reached their destination. Lasse awoke as they drove on to the stone paving of the large yard, and groped mechanically in the straw. But suddenly he recollected where he was, and was sober in an instant. So this was their new home, the only place they had to stay in and expect anything of on this earth! And as he looked out over the big yard, where the dinner-bell was just sounding and calling servants and day-laborers out of all the doors, all his self-confidence vanished. A despairing feeling of helplessness overwhelmed him, and made his face tremble with impotent concern for his son.

His hands shook as he clambered down from the wagon; he stood irresolute and at the mercy of all the inquiring glances from the steps down to the basement of the big house. They were talking about him and the boy, and laughing already. In his confusion he determined to make as favorable a first impression as possible, and began to take off his cap to each one separately; and the boy stood beside him and did the same. They were rather like the clowns at a fair, and the men round the basement steps laughed aloud and bowed in imitation, and then began to call to them; but the bailiff came out again to the cart, and they quickly disappeared down the steps. From the house itself there came a far-off, monotonous sound that never left off, and insensibly added to their feeling of depression.

“Don’t stand there playing the fool!” said the bailiff sharply. “Be off down to the others and get something to eat! You’ll have plenty of time to show off your monkey-tricks to them afterwards.”

At these encouraging words, the old man took the boy’s hand and went across to the basement steps with despair in his heart, mourning inwardly for Tommelilla and Kungstorp. Pelle clung close to him in fear. The unknown had suddenly become an evil monster in the imagination of both of them.

Down in the basement passage the strange, persistent sound was louder, and they both knew that it was that of a woman weeping.

II

Stone Farm, which for the future was to be Lasse and Pelle’s home, was one of the largest farms on the island. But old people knew that when their grandparents were children, it had been a crofter’s cottage where only two horses were kept, and belonged to a certain Vevest Köller, a grandson of Jens Kofod, the liberator of Bornholm. During his time, the cottage became a farm. He worked himself to death on it, and grudged food both for himself and the others. And these two things—poor living and land-grabbing—became hereditary in that family.

The fields in this part of the island had been rock and heather not many generations since. Poor people had broken up the ground, and worn themselves out, one set after another, to keep it in cultivation. Round about Stone Farm lived only cottagers and men owning two horses, who had bought their land with toil and hunger, and would as soon have thought of selling their parents’ grave as their little property; they stuck to it until they died or some misfortune overtook them.

But the Stone Farm family were always wanting to buy and extend their property, and their chance only came through their neighbors’ misfortunes. Wherever a bad harvest or sickness or ill luck with his beasts hit a man hard enough to make him reel, the Köllers bought. Thus Stone Farm grew, and acquired numerous buildings and much importance; it became as hard a neighbor as the sea is, when it eats up the farmer’s land, field by field, and nothing can be done to check it. First one was eaten up and then another. Every one knew that his turn would come sooner or later. No one goes to law with the sea; but all the ills and discomfort that brooded over the poor man’s life came from Stone Farm. The powers of darkness dwelt there, and frightened souls pointed to it always. “That’s well-manured land,” the people of the district would say, with a peculiar intonation that held a curse; but they ventured no further.

The Köller family was not sentimental; it throve capitally in the sinister light that fell upon the farm from so many frightened minds, and felt it as power. The men were hard drinkers and card-players; but they never drank so much as to lose sight and feeling; and if they played away a horse early in the evening, they very likely won two in the course of the night.

When Lasse and Pelle came to Stone Farm, the older cottagers still remembered the farmer of their childhood, Janus Köller, the one who did more to improve things than any one else. In his youth he once, at midnight, fought with the devil up in the church-tower, and overcame him; and after that everything succeeded with him. Whatever might or might not have been the reason, it is certain that in his time one after another of his neighbors was ruined, and Janus went round and took over their holdings. If he needed another horse, he played for and won it at loo; and it was the same with everything. His greatest pleasure was to break in wild horses, and those who happened to have been born at midnight on Christmas Eve could distinctly see the Evil One sitting on the box beside him and holding the reins. He came to a bad end, as might have been expected. One morning early, the horses came galloping home to the farm, and he was found lying by the roadside with his head smashed against a tree.

His son was the last master of Stone Farm of that family. He was a wild devil, with much that was good in him. If any one differed from him, he knocked him down; but he always helped those who got into trouble. In this way no one ever left house and home; and as he had the family fondness for adding to the farm, he bought land up among the rocks and heather. But he wisely let it lie as it was. He attached many to the farm by his assistance, and made them so dependent that they never became free again. His tenants had to leave their own work when he sent for them, and he was never at a loss for cheap labor. The food he provided was scarcely fit for human beings, but he always ate of the same dish himself. And the priest was with him at the last; so there was no fault to find with his departure from this life.

He had married twice, but his only child was a daughter by the second wife, and there was something not quite right about her. She was a woman at the age of eleven, and made up to any one she met; but no one dared so much as look at her, for they were afraid of the farmer’s gun. Later on she went to the other extreme, and dressed herself up like a man, and went about out on the rocks instead of busying herself with something at home; and she let no one come near her.

Kongstrup, the present master of Stone Farm, had come to the island about twenty years before, and even now no one could quite make him out. When he first came he used to wander about on the heath and do nothing, just as she did; so it was hardly to be wondered at that he got into trouble and had to marry her. But it was dreadful!

He was a queer fellow; but perhaps that was what people were like where he came from? He first had one idea and then another, raised wages when no one had asked him to, and started stone-quarrying with contract work. And so he went on with his foolish tricks to begin with, and let his cottagers do as they liked about coming to work at the farm. He even went so far as to send them home in wet weather to get in their corn, and let his own stand and be ruined. But things went all wrong of course, as might well be imagined, and gradually he had to give in, and abandon all his foolish ideas.

The people of the district submitted to this condition of dependence without a murmur. They had been accustomed, from father to son, to go in and out of the gates of Stone Farm, and do what was required of them, as dutifully as if they had been serfs of the land. As a set-off they allowed all their leaning toward the tragic, all the terrors of life and gloomy mysticism, to center round Stone Farm. They let the devil roam about there, play loo with the men for their souls, and ravish the women; and they took off their caps more respectfully to the Stone Farm people than to any one else.

All this had changed a little as years went on; the sharp points of the superstition had been blunted a little. But the bad atmosphere that hangs over large estates—over all great accumulations of what should belong to the many—also hung heavy over Stone Farm. It was the judgment passed by the people, their only revenge for themselves and theirs.

Lasse and Pelle were quickly aware of the oppressive atmosphere, and began to see with the half-frightened eyes of the others, even before they themselves had heard very much. Lasse especially thought he could never be quite happy here, because of the heaviness that always seemed to surround them. And then that weeping that no one could quite account for!

All through the long, bright day, the sound of weeping came from the rooms of Stone Farm, like the refrain of some sad folk-song. Now at last it had stopped. Lasse was busying himself with little things in the lower yard, and he still seemed to have the sound in his ears. It was sad, so sad, with this continual sound of a woman weeping, as if a child were dead, or as if she were left alone with her shame. And what could there be to weep for, when you had a farm of several hundred acres, and lived in a high house with twenty windows!

> “Riches are nought but a gift from the Lord,
> But poverty, that is in truth a reward.
> They who wealth do possess
> Never know happiness,
> While the poor man’s heart is ever contented!”

So sang Karna over in the dairy, and indeed it was true! If only Lasse knew where he was to get the money for a new smock-frock for the little lad, he would never envy any one on this earth; though it would be nice to have money for tobacco and a dram now and then, if it was not unfair to any one else.

Lasse was tidying up the dung-heap. He had finished his midday work in the stable, and was taking his time about it; it was only a job he did between whiles. Now and then he glanced furtively up at the high windows and put a little more energy into his work; but weariness had the upper hand. He would have liked to take a little afternoon nap, but did not dare. All was quiet on the farm. Pelle had been sent on an errand to the village shop for the kitchen-folk, and all the men were in the fields covering up the last spring corn. Stone Farm was late with this.

The agricultural pupil now came out of the stable, which he had entered from the other side, so as to come upon Lasse unexpectedly. The bailiff had sent him. “Is that you, you nasty spy!” muttered Lasse when he saw him. “Some day I’ll kill you!” But he took off his cap with the deepest respect. The tall pupil went up the yard without looking at him, and began to talk nonsense with the maids down in the wash-house. He wouldn’t do that if the men were at home, the scarecrow!

Kongstrup came out on to the steps, and stood for a little while looking at the weather; then he went down to the cow-stable. How big he was! He quite filled the stable doorway. Lasse put down his fork and hastened in in case he was wanted.

“Well, how are you getting on, old man?” asked the farmer kindly. “Can you manage the work?”

“Oh, yes, I get through it,” answered Lasse; “but that’s about all. It’s a lot of animals for one man.”

Kongstrup stood feeling the hind quarters of a cow. “You’ve got the boy to help you, Lasse. Where is he, by the by? I don’t see him.”

“He’s gone to the village shop for the women-folk.”

“Indeed? Who told him to go?”

“I think it was the mistress herself.”

“H’m. Is it long since he went?”

“Yes, some time. He ought soon to be back now.”

“Get hold of him when he comes, and send him up to me with the things, will you?”

Pelle was rather frightened at having to go up to the office, and besides the mistress had told him to keep the bottle well hidden under his smock. The room was very high, and on the walls hung splendid guns; and up upon a shelf stood cigar-boxes, one upon another, right up to the ceiling, just as if it were a tobacco-shop. But the strangest thing of all was that there was a fire in the stove, now, in the middle of May, and with the window open! It must be that they didn’t know how to get rid of all their money. But wherever were the money-chests?

All this and much more Pelle observed while he stood just inside the door upon his bare feet, not daring from sheer nervousness to raise his eyes. Then the farmer turned round in his chair, and drew him toward him by the collar. “Now let’s see what you’ve got there under your smock, my little man!” he said kindly.

“It’s brandy,” said Pelle, drawing forth the bottle. “The mistress said I wasn’t to let any one see it.”

“You’re a clever boy,” said Kongstrup, patting him on the cheek. “You’ll get on in the world one of these days. Now give me the bottle and I’ll take it out to your mistress without letting any one see.” He laughed heartily.

Pelle handed him the bottle—*there* stood money in piles on the writing-table, thick round two-krone pieces one upon another! Then why didn’t Father Lasse get the money in advance that he had begged for?

The mistress now came in, and the farmer at once went and shut the window. Pelle wanted to go, but she stopped him. “You’ve got some things for me, haven’t you?” she said.

“I’ve received the *things,*” said Kongstrup. “You shall have them—when the boy’s gone.”

But she remained at the door. She would keep the boy there to be a witness that her husband withheld from her things that were to be used in the kitchen; every one should know it.

Kongstrup walked up and down and said nothing. Pelle expected he would strike her, for she called him bad names—much worse than Mother Bengta when Lasse came home merry from Tommelilla. But he only laughed. “Now that’ll do,” he said, leading her away from the door, and letting the boy out.

Lasse did not like it. He had thought the farmer was interfering to prevent them all from making use of the boy, when he so much needed his help with the cattle; and now it had taken this unfortunate turn!

“And so it was brandy!” he repeated. “Then I can understand it. But I wonder how she dares set upon him like that when it’s with *her* the fault lies. He must be a good sort of fellow.”

“He’s fond of drink himself,” said Pelle, who had heard a little about the farmer’s doings.

“Yes, but a woman! That’s quite another thing. Remember they’re fine folk. Well, well, it doesn’t become us to find fault with our betters; we have enough to do in looking after ourselves. But I only hope she won’t send you on any more of her errands, or we may fall between two stools.”

Lasse went to his work. He sighed and shook his head while he dragged the fodder out. He was not at all happy.

III

There was something exhilarating in the wealth of sunshine that filled all space without the accompaniment of corresponding heat. The spring moisture was gone from the air, and the warm haze of summer had not yet come. There was only light—light over the green fields and the sea beyond, light that drew the landscape in clear lines against the blue atmosphere, and breathed a gentle, pleasant warmth.

It was a day in the beginning of June—the first real summer day; and it was Sunday.

Stone Farm lay bathed in sunshine. The clear golden light penetrated everywhere; and where it could not reach, dark colors trembled like a hot, secret breath out into the light. Open windows and doors looked like veiled eyes in the midst of the light, and where the roof lay in shadow, it had the appearance of velvet.

It was quiet up in the big house to-day; it was a day of rest from wrangling too.

The large yard was divided into two by a fence, the lower part consisting in the main of a large, steaming midden, crossed by planks in various directions, and at the top a few inverted wheelbarrows. A couple of pigs lay half buried in the manure, asleep, and a busy flock of hens were eagerly scattering the pile of horse-dung from the last morning clearance. A large cock stood in the middle of the flock, directing the work like a bailiff.

In the upper yard a flock of white pigeons were pecking corn off the clean stone paving. Outside the open coach-house door, a groom was examining the dog-cart, while inside stood another groom, polishing the best harness.

The man at the dog-cart was in shirt-sleeves and newly-polished top-boots; he had a youthful, elastic frame, which assumed graceful attitudes as he worked. He wore his cap on the back of his head, and whistled softly while he cleaned the wheels outside and in, and sent stolen glances down to the wash-house, where, below the window, one of the maids was going through her Sunday ablutions, with shoulders and arms bare, and her chemise pushed down below her bosom.

The big dairymaid, Karna, went past him to the pump with two large buckets. As she returned, she splashed some water on to one of his boots, and he looked up with an oath. She took this as an invitation to stop, and put down her pails with a cautious glance up at the windows of the big house.

“You’ve not had all the sleep you ought to have had, Gustav,” she said teasingly, and laughed.

“Then it isn’t your fault, at any rate,” he answered roughly. “Can you patch my everyday trousers for me to-day?”

“No, thank you! I don’t mend for another to get all the pleasant words!”

“Then you can leave it alone! There are plenty who’ll mend for me without you!” And he bent again to his work.

“I’ll see if I can get time,” said the big woman meekly. “But I’ve got all the work in the place to do by myself this afternoon; the others are all going out.”

“Yes, I see Bodil’s washing herself,” said Gustav, sending a squirt of tobacco-juice out of his mouth in the direction of the wash-house window. “I suppose she’s going to meeting, as she’s doing it so thoroughly.”

Karna looked cunning. “She asked to be free because she wanted to go to church. She go to church! I should just like to see her! No, she’s going down to the tailor’s in the village, and there I suppose she’ll meet Malmberg, a townsman of hers. I wonder she isn’t above having anything to do with a married man.”

“She can go on the spree with any one she likes, for all I care,” answered Gustav, kicking the last wheel into place with his foot, while Karna stood looking at him kindly. But the next moment she spied a face behind the curtains up in one of the windows, and hurried off with her pails. Gustav spat contemptuously between his teeth after her. She was really too old for his seventeen years; she must be at least forty; and casting another long look at Bodil, he went across to the coachhouse with oil-can and keys.

The high white house that closed the yard at its upper end, had not been built right among the other buildings, but stood proudly aloof, unconnected with them except by two strips of wooden paling. It had gables on both sides, and a high basement, in which were the servants' hall, the maids' bedrooms, the wash-house, the mangling-room, and the large storerooms. On the gable looking on to the yard was a clock that did not go. Pelle called the building the Palace, and was not a little proud of being allowed to enter the basement. The other people on the farm did not give it such a nice name.

He was the only one whose awe of the House had nothing sinister about it; others regarded it in the light of a hostile fortress. Every one who crossed the paved upper yard, glanced involuntarily up at the high veiled windows, behind which an eye might secretly be kept upon all that went on below. It was, a little like passing a row of cannons' mouths—it made one a little unsteady on one's feet; and no one crossed the clean pavement unless he was obliged. On the other hand they went freely about the other half of the yard, which was just as much overlooked by the House.

Down there two of the lads were playing. One of them had seized the other's cap and run off with it, and a wild chase ensued, in at one barn-door and out at another all round the yard, to the accompaniment of mischievous laughter and breathless exclamations. The yard-dog barked with delight and tumbled madly about on its chain in its desire to join in the game. Up by the fence the robber was overtaken and thrown to the ground; but he managed to toss the cap up into the air, and it descended right in front of the high stone steps of the House.

"Oh, you mean beast!" exclaimed the owner of the cap, in a voice of despairing reproach, belaboring the other with the toes of his boots. "Oh, you wretched bailiff's sneak!" He suddenly stopped and measured the distance with an appraising eye. "Will you stand me half a pint if I dare go up and fetch the cap?" he asked in a whisper. The other nodded and sat up quickly to see what would come of it. "Swear? You won't try and back out of it?" he said, lifting his hand adjuringly. His companion solemnly drew his finger across his throat, as if cutting it, and the oath was taken. The one who had lost the cap, hitched up his trousers and pulled himself together, his whole figure stiffening with determination; then he put his hands upon the fence, vaulted it, and walked with bent head and firm step across the yard, looking like one who had staked his all upon one card. When he had secured the cap, and turned his back upon the House, he sent a horrible grimace down the yard.

Bodil now came up from the basement in her best Sunday clothes, with a black silk handkerchief on her head and a hymn-book in her hand. How pretty she was! And brave! She went along the whole length of the House and out! But then she could get a kiss from the farmer any day she liked.

Outside the farm proper lay a number of large and small outbuildings—the calves' stable, the pigsties, the tool-shed, the cart-shed and a smithy that was no longer used. They were all like so many mysteries, with trap-doors that led down to pitch-dark, underground beet and potato cellars, from which, of course, you could get by secret passages to the strangest places underground, and other trap-doors that led up to dark lofts, where the most wonderful treasures were preserved in the form of old lumber.

But Pelle unfortunately had little time to go into all this. Every day he had to help his father to look after the cattle, and with so large a herd, the work was almost beyond their power. If he had a moment's breathing-space, some one was sure to be after him. He had to fetch water for the laundry girls, to grease the pupil's boots and run to the village shop for spirits or chewing-tobacco for the men. There was plenty to play with, but no one could bear to see him playing; they were always whistling for him as if he were a dog.

He tried to make up for it by turning his work into a game, and in many instances this was possible. Watering the cattle, for instance, was more fun than any real game, when his father stood out in the yard and pumped, and the boy only had to guide the water from manger to manger. When thus occupied, he always felt something like a great engineer. But on the other hand, much of the other work was too hard to be amusing.

At this moment the boy was wandering about among the outbuildings, where there was no one to hunt him about. The door to the cow-stable stood open, and he could hear the continual munching of the cows, now and then interrupted by a snuff of contentment or the regular rattle of a chain up and down when a cow rubbed its neck upon the post. There was a sense of security in the sound of his father's wooden shoes up and down the foddering-passage.

Out of the open half-doors of the smaller outbuildings there came a steamy warmth that smelt pleasantly of calves and pigs. The pigs were hard at work. All through the long sty there was munching and smacking. One old sow supped up the liquid through the corners of her mouth, another snuffed and bubbled with her snout along the bottom of the trough to find the rotten potatoes under the liquid. Here and there two pigs were fighting over the trough, and emitting piercing squeals. The calves put their slobbering noses out at the doors, gazing into the sunny air and lowing feelingly. One little fellow, after snuffing up air from the cow-stable in a peculiarly thorough way, turned up his lip in a foolish grin: it was a bull- calf. He laid his chin upon the half-door, and tried to jump over, but Pelle drove him down again. Then he kicked up his hind legs, looked at Pelle out of the corner of his eye, and stood with arched back, lifting his fore and hindquarters alternately with the action of a rocking-horse. He was light-headed with the sun.

Down on the pond, ducks and geese stood upon their heads in the water, flourishing their red legs in the air. And all at once the whole flock would have an attack of giddy delight in the sunshine, and splash screaming from bank to bank, the last part of the way sliding along the top of the water with a comical wagging of the tail.

Pelle had promised himself much from this couple of hours that were to be entirely his own, as his father had given him a holiday until the time came for the midday work. But now he stood in bewilderment, overwhelmed by the wealth of possibilities. Would it be the best fun to sail upon the pond on two tail-boards laid one across the other? There was a manure-cart lying there now to be washed. Or should he go in and have a game with the tiny calves? Or shoot with the old bellows in the smithy? If he filled the nozzle with wet earth, and blew hard, quite a nice shot could come out of it.

Pelle started and tried to make himself invisible. The farmer himself had come round the corner, and was now standing shading his eyes with his hand and looking down over the sloping land and the sea. When he caught sight of Pelle, he nodded without changing his expression, and said: “Good day, my boy! How are you getting on?” He gazed on, and probably hardly knew that he had said it and patted the boy on the shoulder with the end of his stick; the farmer often went about half asleep.

But Pelle felt it as a caress of a divine nature, and immediately ran across to the stable to tell his father what had happened to him. He had an elevating sensation in his shoulder as if he had been knighted; and he still felt the stick there. An intoxicating warmth flowed from the place through his little body, sent the adventure mounting to his head and made him swell with pride. His imagination rose and soared into the air with some vague, dizzy idea about the farmer adopting him as his son.

He soon came down again, for in the stable he ran straight into the arms of the Sunday scrubbing. The Sunday wash was the only great objection he had to make to life; everything else came and was forgotten again, but it was always coming again. He detested it, especially that part of it which had to do with the interior of his ears. But there was no kind mother to help; Lasse stood ready with a bucket of cold water, and some soft soap on a piece of broken pot, and the boy had to divest himself of his clothes. And as if the scrubbing were not enough, he afterwards had to put on a clean shirt—though, fortunately, only every other Sunday. The whole thing was nice enough to look back upon afterwards—like something gone through with, and not to happen again for a little while.

Pelle stood at the stable door into the yard with a consequential air, with bristling hair and clean shirt-sleeves, his hands buried in his trouser pockets. Over his forehead his hair waved in what is called a “cow’s lick,” said to betoken good fortune; and his face, all screwed up as it turned towards the bright light, looked the oddest piece of topsy-turvydom, with not a single feature in its proper place. Pelle bent the calves of his legs out backwards, and stood gently rocking himself to and fro as he saw Gustav doing, up on the front-door steps, where he stood holding the reins, waiting for his master and mistress.

The mistress now appeared, with the farmer, and a maid ran down in front to the carriage with a little stepladder, and helped her in. The farmer stood at the top of the steps until she was seated: she had difficulty in walking. But what a pair of eyes she had! Pelle hastily looked away when she turned her face down towards the yard. It was whispered among the men that she could bring misfortune upon any one by looking at him if she liked. Now Gustav unchained the dog, which bounded about, barking, in front of the horses as they drove out of the courtyard.

Anyhow the sun did not shine like this on a week-day. It was quite dazzling when the white pigeons flew in one flock over the yard, turning as regularly as if they were a large white sheet flapping in the sunshine; the reflection from their wings flashed over the dung-heap and made the pigs lift their heads with an inquiring grunt. Above, in their rooms the men sat playing “Sixty-six,” or tipping wooden shoes, and Gustav began to play “Old Noah” on his concertina.

Pelle picked his way across the upper part of the yard to the big dog-kennel, which could be turned on a pivot according to the direction of the wind. He seated himself upon the angle of the roof, and made a merry-go-round of it by pushing off with his foot every time he passed the fence. Suddenly it occurred to him that he himself was everybody’s dog, and had better hide himself; so he dropped down, crept into the kennel, and curled himself up on the straw with his head between his fore-paws. There he lay for a little while, staring at the fence and panting with his tongue hanging out of his mouth. Then an idea came into his head so suddenly as to make him forget all caution; and the next moment he was sliding full tilt down the railing of the front-door steps.

He had done this seventeen times and was deeply engrossed in the thought of reaching fifty, when he heard a sharp whistle from the big coach-house door. The farm pupil stood there beckoning him. Pelle, crestfallen, obeyed the call, bitterly regretting his thoughtlessness. He was most likely wanted now to grease boots again, perhaps for them all.

The pupil drew him inside the door, which he shut. It was dark, and the boy, coming in out of the bright daylight, could distinguish nothing; what he made out little by little assumed shapeless outlines to his frightened imagination. Voices laughed and growled confusedly in his ears, and hands that seemed to him enormous pulled him about. Terror seized him, and with it came crazy, disconnected recollections of stories of robbery and murder, and he began to scream with fright. A big hand covered the whole of his face, and in the silence that followed his stifled scream, he heard a voice out in the yard, calling to the maids to come and see something funny.

He was too paralyzed with terror to know what was being done with him, and only wondered faintly what there was funny out there in the sunshine. Would he ever see the sun again, he wondered?

As if in answer to his thought, the door was at that moment thrown open. The light poured in and he recognized the faces about him, and found himself standing half naked in the full daylight, his trousers down about his heels and his shirt tucked up under his waistcoat. The pupil stood at one side with a carriage-whip, with which he flicked at the boy’s naked body, crying in a tone of command: “Run!” Pelle, wild with terror and confusion, dashed into the yard, but there stood the maids, and at sight of him they screamed with laughter, and he turned to fly back into the coach-house. But he was met by the whip, and forced to return into the daylight, leaping like a kangaroo and calling forth renewed shouts of laughter. Then he stood still, crying helplessly, under a shower of coarse remarks, especially from the maids. He no longer noticed the whip, but only crouched down, trying to hide himself, until at last he sank in a heap upon the stone paving, sobbing convulsively.

Karna, large of limb, came rushing up from the basement and forced her way through the crowd, crimson with rage and scolding as she went. On her freckled neck and arms were brown marks left by the cows’ tails at the last milking, looking like a sort of clumsy tattooing. She flung her slipper in the pupil’s face, and going up to Pelle, wrapped him in her coarse apron and carried him down to the basement.

When Lasse heard what had happened to the boy, he took a hammer and went round to kill the farm pupil; and the look in the old man’s eyes was such that no one desired to get in his way. The pupil had thought his wisest course was to disappear; and when Lasse found no vent for his wrath, he fell into a fit of trembling and weeping, and became so really ill that the men had to administer a good mouthful of spirits to revive him. This took instant effect, and Lasse was himself again and able to nod consolingly to the frightened, sobbing Pelle.

“Never mind, laddie!” he said comfortingly. “Never mind! No one has ever yet got off without being punished, and Lasse’ll break that long limb of Satan’s head and make his brains spurt out of his nose; you take my word for it!”

Pelle’s face brightened at the prospect of this forcible redress, and he crept up into the loft to throw down the hay for the cattle’s midday meal. Lasse, who was not so fond of climbing, went down the long passage between the stalls distributing the hay. He was cogitating over something, and Pelle could hear him talking to himself all the time. When they had finished, Lasse went to the green chest and brought out a black silk handkerchief that had been Bengta's Sunday best. His expression was solemn as he called Pelle.

"Run over to Karna with this and ask her to accept it. We're not so poor that we should let kindness itself go from us empty-handed. But you mustn't let any one see it, in case they didn't like it. Mother Bengta in her grave won't be offended; she'd have proposed it herself, if she could have spoken; but her mouth's full of earth, poor thing!" Lasse sighed deeply.

Even then he stood for a little while with the handkerchief in his hand before giving it to Pelle to run with. He was by no means as sure of Bengta as his words made out; but the old man liked to beautify her memory, both in his own and in the boy's mind. It could not be denied that she had generally been a little difficult in a case of this kind, having been particularly jealous; and she might take it into her head to haunt them because of that handkerchief. Still she had had a heart for both him and the boy, and it was generally in the right place—they must say that of her! And for the rest, the Lord must judge her as kindly as He could.

During the afternoon it was quiet on the farm. Most of the men were out somewhere, either at the inn or with the quarry-men at the stone-quarry. The master and mistress were out too; the farmer had ordered the carriage directly after dinner and had driven to the town, and half an hour later his wife set off in the pony-carriage —to keep an eye on him, people said.

Old Lasse was sitting in an empty cow-stall, mending Pelle's clothes, while the boy played up and down the foddering passage. He had found in the herdsman's room an old boot-jack, which he placed under his knee, pretending it was a wooden leg, and all the time he was chattering happily, but not quite so loudly as usual, to his father. The morning's experience was still fresh in his mind, and had a subduing effect; it was as if he had performed some great deed, and was now nervous about it. There was another circumstance, too, that helped to make him serious. The bailiff had been over to say that the animals were to go out the next day. Pelle was to mind the young cattle, so this would be his last free day, perhaps for the whole summer.

He paused outside the stall where his father sat. "What are you going to kill him with, father?"

"With the hammer, I suppose."

"Will you kill him quite dead, as dead as a dog?"

Lasse's nod boded ill to the pupil. "Yes, indeed I shall!"

"But who'll read the names for us then?"

The old man shook his head pensively. "That's true enough!" he exclaimed, scratching himself first in one place and then in another. The name of each cow was written in chalk above its stall, but neither Lasse nor Pelle could read. The bailiff had, indeed, gone through the names with them once, but it was impossible to remember half a hundred names after hearing them once—even for the boy, who had such an uncommon good memory. If Lasse now killed the pupil, then who *would* help them to make out the names? The bailiff would never stand their going to him and asking him a second time.

"I suppose we shall have to content ourselves with thrashing him," said Lasse meditatively.

The boy went on playing for a little while, and then once more came up to Lasse.

"Don't you think the Swedes can thrash all the people in the world, father?"

The old man looked thoughtful. "Ye-es—yes, I should think so."

"Yes, because Sweden's much bigger than the whole world, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's big," said Lasse, trying to imagine its extent. There were twenty-four provinces, of which Malmohus was only one, and Ystad district a small part of that again; and then in one corner of Ystad district lay Tommelilla, and his holding that he had once thought so big with its five acres of land, was a tiny little piece of Tommelilla! Ah, yes, Sweden was big—not bigger than the whole world, of course, for that was only childish nonsense—but still bigger than all the rest of the world put together. "Yes, it's big! But what are you doing, laddie?"

"Why, can't you see I'm a soldier that's had one leg shot off?"

"Oh, you're an old crippled pensioner, are you? But you shouldn't do that, for God doesn't like things like that. You might become a real cripple, and that would be dreadful.”

“Oh, He doesn’t see, because He’s in the churches to-day!” answered the boy; but for safety’s sake he thought it better to leave off. He stationed himself at the stable-door, whistling, but suddenly came running in with great eagerness: “Father, there’s the Agricultural! Shall I run and fetch the whip?”

“No, I expect we’d better leave him alone. It might be the death of him; fine gentlemen scamps like that can’t stand a licking. The fright alone might kill him.” Lasse glanced doubtfully at the boy.

Pelle looked very much disappointed. “But suppose he does it again?”

“Oh, no, we won’t let him off without a good fright. I shall pick him up and hold him out at arm’s length dangling in the air until he begs for mercy; and then I shall put him down again just as quietly. For Lasse doesn’t like being angry. Lasse’s a decent fellow.”

“Then you must pretend to let him go while you’re holding him high up in the air; and then he’ll scream and think he’s going to die, and the others’ll come and laugh at him.”

“No, no; you mustn’t tempt your father! It might come into my mind to throw him down, and that would be murder and penal servitude for life, that would! No, I’ll just give him a good scolding; that’s what a classy scoundrel like that’ll feel most.”

“Yes, and then you must call him a spindle-shanked clodhopper. That’s what the bailiff calls him when he’s angry with him.”

“No, I don’t think that would do either; but I’ll speak so seriously with him that he won’t be likely to forget it in a hurry.”

Pelle was quite satisfied. There was no one like his father, and of course he would be as good at blowing people up as at everything else. He had never heard him do it, and he was looking forward to it immensely while he hobbled along with the boot-jack. He was not using it as a wooden leg now, for fear of tempting Providence; but he held it under his arm like a crutch, supporting it on the edge of the foundation wall, because it was too short. How splendid it would be to go on two crutches like the parson’s son at home! He could jump over the very longest puddles.

There was a sudden movement of light and shadow up under the roof, and when Pelle turned round, he saw a strange boy standing in the doorway out to the field. He was of the same height as Pelle, but his head was almost as large as that of a grown man. At first sight it appeared to be bald all over; but when the boy moved in the sun, his bare head shone as if covered with silver scales. It was covered with fine, whitish hair, which was thinly and fairly evenly distributed over the face and everywhere else; and his skin was pink, as were the whites of his eyes. His face was all drawn into wrinkles in the strong light, and the back of his head projected unduly and looked as if it were much too heavy.

Pelle put his hands in his trouser pockets and went up to him. “What’s your name?” he said, and tried to expectorate between his front teeth as Gustav was in the habit of doing. The attempt was a failure, unfortunately, and the saliva only ran down his chin. The strange boy grinned.

“Rud,” he said, indistinctly, as if his tongue were thick and unmanageable. He was staring enviously at Pelle’s trouser pockets. “Is that your father?” he asked, pointing at Lasse.

“Of course!” said Pelle, consequentially. “And he can thrash everybody.”

“But my father can buy everybody, because he lives up there.” And Rud pointed toward the big house.

“Oh, does he really?” said Pelle, incredulously. “Why don’t you live there with him, then?”

“Why, I’m a bastard-child; mother says so herself.”

“The deuce she does!” said Pelle, stealing a glance at his father on account of the little oath.

“Yes, when she’s cross. And then she beats me, but then I run away from her.”

“Oh, you do, do you!” said a voice outside. The boys started and retreated farther into the stable, as a big, fat woman appeared in the doorway, and looked angrily round in the dim light. When she caught sight of Rud, she continued her scolding. Her accent was Swedish.

“So you run away, do you, you cabbage-head! If you’d only run so far that you couldn’t find your way back again, a body wouldn’t need to wear herself out thrashing a misbegotten imp like you! You'll go to the devil anyhow, so don't worry yourself about that! So that's the boy's father, is it?" she said, suddenly breaking off as she caught sight of Lasse.

"Yes, it is," said Lasse, quietly. "And surely you must be schoolmaster Johan Pihl's Johanna from Tommelilla, who left the country nearly twenty years ago?"

"And surely you must be the smith's tom-cat from Sulitjelma, who had twins out of an old wooden shoe the year before last?" retorted the big woman, imitating his tone of voice.

"Very well; it doesn't matter to me who you are!" said the old man in an offended tone. "I'm not a police spy."

"One would think you were from the way you question. Do you know when the cattle are to go out?"

"To-morrow, if all's well. Is it your little boy who's going to show Pelle how things go? The bailiff spoke of some one who'd go out with him and show him the grazing-ground."

"Yes, it's that Tom Noddy there. Here, come out so that we can see you properly, you calf! Oh, the boy's gone. Very well. Does your boy often get a thrashing?"

"Oh yes, sometimes," answered Lasse, who was ashamed to confess that he never chastised the boy.

"I don't spare mine either. It'll take something to make a man of such rubbish; punishment's half what he lives on. Then I'll send him up here first thing to-morrow morning; but take care he doesn't show himself in the yard, or there'll be no end of a row!"

"The mistress can't bear to see him, I suppose?" said Lasse.

"You're just about right. She's had nothing to do with the making of that scarecrow. Though you wouldn't think there was much there to be jealous about! But I might have been a farmer's wife at this moment and had a nice husband too, if that high and mighty peacock up there hadn't seduced me. Would you believe that, you cracked old piece of shoe-leather?" she asked with a laugh, slapping his knee with her hand.

"I can believe it very well," said Lasse. "For you were as pretty a girl as might be when you left home."

"Oh, you and your 'home'," she said, mimicking him.

"Well, I can see that you don't want to leave any footmarks behind you, and I can quite well pretend to be a stranger, even if I have held you upon my knee more than once when you were a little thing. But do you know that your mother's lying on her deathbed?"

"Oh no! Oh no!" she exclaimed, turning to him a face that was becoming more and more distorted.

"I went to say good-bye to her before I left home rather more than a month ago, and she was very ill. 'Good-bye, Lasse,' she said, 'and thank you for your neighborliness all these years. And if you meet Johanna over there,' she said, 'give her my love. Things have gone terribly badly with her, from what I've heard; but give her my love, all the same. Johanna child, little child! She was nearest her mother's heart, and so she happened to tread upon it. Perhaps it was our fault. You'll give her her mother's love, won't you, Lasse?' Those were her very words, and now she's most likely dead, so poorly as she was then."

Johanna Pihl had no command over her feelings. It was evident that she was not accustomed to weep, for her sobs seemed to tear her to pieces. No tears came, but her agony was like the throes of child-birth. "Little mother! Poor little mother!" she said every now and again, as she sat rocking herself upon the edge of the manger.

"There, there, there!" said Lasse, patting her on the head. "I told them they had been too hard with you. But what did you want to creep through that window for—a child of sixteen and in the middle of the night? You can hardly wonder that they forgot themselves a little, all the more that he was earning no wages beyond his keep and clothes, and was a bad fellow at that, who was always losing his place."

"I was fond of him," said Johanna, weeping. "He's the only one I've ever cared for. And I was so stupid that I thought he was fond of me too, though he'd never seen me."

"Ah, yes; you were only a child! I said so to your parents. But that you could think of doing anything so indecent!"

"I didn't mean to do anything wrong. I only thought that we two ought to be together as we loved one another. No, I didn't even think that then. I only crept in to him, without thinking about it at all. Would you believe that I was so innocent in those days? And nothing bad happened either."

"And nothing happened even?" said Lasse. "But it's terribly sad to think how things have turned out. It was the death of your father."

The big woman began to cry helplessly, and Lasse was almost in tears himself.

"Perhaps I ought never to have told you," he said in despair. "But I thought you must have heard about it. I suppose he thought that he, as schoolmaster, bore the responsibility for so many, and that you'd thrown yourself at any one in that way, and a poor farm-servant into the bargain, cut him to the quick. It's true enough that he mixed with us poor folks as if we'd been his equals, but the honor was there all the same; and he took it hardly when the fine folk wouldn't look at him any more. And after all it was nothing at all—nothing happened? But why didn't you tell them so?"

Johanna had stopped crying, and now sat with tear-stained, quivering face, and eyes turned away.

"I did tell them, but they wouldn't listen. I was found there of course. I screamed for help when I found out he didn't even know me, but was only flattered at my coming, and wanted to take hold of me. And then the others came running in and found me there. They laughed and said that I'd screamed because I'd lost my innocence; and I could see that my parents thought the same. Even they wouldn't hear of nothing having happened, so what could the other rabble think? And then they paid him to come over here, and sent me away to relations."

"Yes, and then you added to their sorrow by running away."

"I went after him. I thought he'd get to be fond of me, if only I was near him. He'd taken service here at Stone Farm, and I took a place here as housemaid; but there was only one thing he wanted me for, and that I wouldn't have if he wasn't fond of me. So he went about boasting that I'd run away from home for his sake, and the other thing that was a lie; so they all thought they could do what they liked with me. Kongstrup was just married then, but he was no better than the others. I'd got the place quite by chance, because the other housemaid had had to go away somewhere to lie in; so I was awfully careful. He got her married afterwards to a quarryman at the quarries."

"So that's the sort of man he is!" exclaimed Lasse. "I had my doubts about him. But what became of the other fellow?"

"He went to work in the quarry when we'd been at the farm a couple of years and he'd done me all the harm he could. While he was there, he drank and quarreled most of the time. I often went to see him, for I couldn't get him out of my head; but he was always drunk. At last he couldn't stay there any longer, and disappeared, and then we heard that he was in Nordland, playing Hell among the rocks at Blaaholt. He helped himself to whatever he wanted at the nearest place he could find it, and knocked people down for nothing at all. And one day they said that he'd been declared an outlaw, so that any one that liked could kill him. I had great confidence in the master, who, after all, was the only person that wished me well; and he comforted me by saying that it would be all right: Knut would know how to take care of himself."

"Knut? Was it Knut Engström?" asked Lasse. "Well, then, I've heard about him. He was breaking out as wild as the devil the last time I was in this country, and assaulted people on the high-road in broad daylight. He killed one man with a hammer, and when they caught him, he'd made a long gash on his neck from the back right up to his eye. The other man had done that, he said; he'd only defended himself. So they couldn't do anything to him. So that was the man, was it! But who was it he was living with, then? They said he lived in a shed on the heath that summer, and had a woman with him."

"I ran away from service, and pretended to the others that I was going home. I'd heard what a wretched state he was in. They said he was gashed all over his head. So I went up and took care of him."

"Then you gave in at last," said Lasse, with a roguish wink.

"He beat me every day," she answered hoarsely. "And when he couldn't get his way, he drove me away at last. I'd set my mind on his being fond of me first." Her voice had grown coarse and hard again.

"Then you deserved a good whipping for taking a fancy to such a ruffian! And you may be glad your mother didn't get to know anything about that, for she'd never have survived it."

At the word "mother" Johanna started. "Every one must look after themselves," she said in a hard voice. "I've had more to look to than mother, and see how fat I've grown."

Lasse shook his head. "I shouldn't care to fight with you now. But what happened to you afterwards?”

“I came back to Stone Farm again at Martinmas, but the mistress wouldn’t take me on again, for she preferred my room to my company. But Kongstrup got his way by making me dairymaid. He was as kind to me as ever, for all that I’d stood out against him for nine years. But at last the magistrate got tired of having Knut going about loose; he made too much disturbance. So they had a hunt for him up on the heath. They didn’t catch him, but he must have come back to the quarry to hide himself, for one day when they were blasting there, his body came out among the bits of rock, all smashed up. They drove the pieces down here to the farm, and it made me so ill to see him come to me like that, that I had to go to bed. There I lay shivering day and night, for it seemed as if he’d come to me in his sorest need. Kongstrup sat with me and comforted me when the others were at work, and he took advantage of my misery to get his way.

“There was a younger brother of the farmer on the hill who liked me. He’d been in America in his early days, and had plenty of money. He didn’t care a rap what people said, and every single year he proposed to me, always on New Year’s Day. He came that year too, and now that Knut was dead, I couldn’t have done better than have taken him and been mistress of a farm; but I had to refuse him after all, and I can tell you it was hard when I made the discovery. Kongstrup wanted to send me away when I told him about it; but that I would not have. I meant to stay and have my child born here on the farm to which it belonged. He didn’t care a bit about me any longer, the mistress looked at me with her evil eyes every day, and there was no one that was kind to me. I wasn’t so hard then as I am now, and it was all I could do to keep from crying always. I became hard then. When anything was the matter, I clenched my teeth so that no one should deride me. I was working in the field the very day it happened, too. The boy was born in the middle of a beet-field, and I carried him back to the farm myself in my apron. He was deformed even then: the mistress’s evil eyes had done it. I said to myself that she should always have the changeling in her sight, and refused to go away. The farmer couldn’t quite bring himself to turn me out by force, and so he put me into the house down by the shore.”

“Then perhaps you work on the farm here in the busy seasons?” asked Lasse.

She sniffed contemptuously. “Work! So you think I need do that? Kongstrup has to pay me for bringing up his son, and then there are friends that come to me, now one and now another, and bring a little with them—when they haven’t spent it all in drink. You may come down and see me this evening. I’ll be good to you too.”

“No, thank you!” said Lasse, gravely. “I am a human being too, but I won’t go to one who’s sat on my knee as if she’d been my own child.”

“Have you any gin, then?” she asked, giving him a sharp nudge.

Lasse thought there was some, and went to see. “No, not a drop,” he said, returning with the bottle. “But I’ve got something for you here that your mother asked me to give you as a keepsake. It was lucky I happened to remember it.” And he handed her a packet, and looked on happily while she opened it, feeling pleased on her account. It was a hymn-book. “Isn’t it a beauty?” he said. “With a gold cross and clasp—and then, it’s your mother’s.”

“What’s the good of that to me?” asked Johanna. “I don’t sing hymns.”

“Don’t you?” said Lasse, hurt. “But your mother has never known but that you’ve kept the faith you had as a child, so you must forgive her this once.”

“Is that all you’ve got for me?” she asked, pushing the book off her lap.

“Yes, it is,” said Lasse, his voice trembling; and he picked up the book.

“Who’s going to have the rest, then?”

“Well, the house was leased, and there weren’t many things left, for it’s a long time since your father died, remember. Where you should have been, strangers have filled the daughter’s place; and I suppose those who’ve looked after her will get what there is. But perhaps you’d still be in time, if you took the first steamer.”

“No, thank you! Go home and be stared at and play the penitent—no, thank you! I’d rather the strangers got what’s left. And mother— well, if she’s lived without my help, I suppose she can die without it too. Well, I must be getting home. I wonder what’s become of the future master of Stone Farm?” She laughed loudly.

Lasse would have taken his oath that she had been quite sober, and yet she walked unsteadily as she went behind the calves’ stables to look for her son. It was on his lips to ask whether she would not take the hymn-book with her, but he refrained. She was not in the mood for it now, and she might mock God; so he carefully wrapped up the book and put it away in the green chest.

* * *

At the far end of the cow-stable a space was divided off with boards. It had no door, and the boards were an inch apart, so that it resembled a crate. This was the herdsman’s room. Most of the space was occupied by a wide legless bedstead made of rough boards knocked together, with nothing but the stone floor to rest on. Upon a deep layer of rye straw the bed-clothes lay in a disordered heap, and the thick striped blankets were stiff with dried cow-dung, to which feathers and bits of straw had adhered.

Pelle lay curled up in the middle of the bed with the down quilt up to his chin, while Lasse sat on the edge, turning over the things in the green chest and talking to himself. He was going through his Sunday devotions, taking out slowly, one after another, all the little things he had brought from the broken-up home. They were all purely useful things—balls of cotton, scraps of stuff, and such-like, that were to be used to keep his own and the boy’s clothes in order; but to him each thing was a relic to be handled with care, and his heart bled every time one of them came to an end. With each article he laid down, he slowly repeated what Bengta had said it was for when she lay dying and was trying to arrange everything for him and the boy: “Wool for the boy’s gray socks. Pieces to lengthen the sleeves of his Sunday jacket. Mind you don’t wear your stockings too long before you mend them.” They were the last wishes of the dying woman, and they were followed in the smallest detail. Lasse remembered them word for word, in spite of his bad memory.

Then there were little things that had belonged to Bengta herself, cheap finery that all had its happy memory of fairs and holidays, which he recalled in his muttered reverie.

Pelle liked this subdued murmur that he did not need to listen to or answer, and that was so pleasant to doze off in. He lay looking out sleepily at the bright sky, tired and with a vague feeling of something unpleasant that was past.

Suddenly he started. He had heard the door of the cow-stable open, and steps upon the long foddering-passage. It was the pupil. He recognized the hated step at once.

He thrilled with delight. Now that fellow would be made to understand that he mustn’t do anything to boys with fathers who could hold a man out at arm’s length and scold! oh, much worse than the bailiff. He sat up and looked eagerly at his father.

“Lasse!” came a voice from the end of the tables.

The old man growled sullenly, stirred uneasily, but did not rise.

“Las-se!” came again, after a little, impatiently and in a tone of command.

“Yes,” said Lasse slowly, rising and going out.

“Can’t you answer when you’re called, you old Swedish rascal? Are you deaf?”

“Oh, I can answer well enough,” said Lasse, in a trembling voice. “But Mr. Pupil oughtn’t to—I’m a father, let me tell you—and a father’s heart ——”

“You may be a monthly nurse for all I care, but you’ve got to answer when you’re called, or else I’ll get the bailiff to give you a talking-to. Do you understand?”

“Yes, oh yes!—Mr. Pupil must excuse me, but I didn’t hear.”

“Well, will you please remember that Aspasia’s not to go out to pasture to-morrow.”

“Is she going to calve?”

“Yes, of course! Did you think she was going to foal?”

Lasse laughed, as in duty bound, and followed the pupil back through the stable. Now it would come, thought Pelle, and sat listening intently; but he only heard his father make another excuse, close the half-door, and come back with slow, tottering steps. Then he burst into tears, and crept far in under the quilt.

Lasse went about for some time, grumbling to himself, and at last came and gently drew the quilt down from the boy’s head. But Pelle buried his face in the clothes, and when his father turned it up toward him, he met a despairing, uncomprehending gaze that made his own wander restlessly round the room.

"Yes," he said, with an attempt at being cross. "It's all very well for you to cry! But when you don't know where Aspasia stands, you've got to be civil, I'm thinking."

"I know Aspasia quite well," sobbed the boy. "She's the third from the door here."

Lasse was going to give a cross answer, but broke down, touched and disarmed by the boy's grief. He surrendered unconditionally, stooped down until his forehead touched the boy's, and said helplessly, "Yes, Lasse's a poor thing—old and poor! Any one can make a fool of him. He can't be angry any more, and there's no strength in his fist, so what's the good of clenching it! He has to put up with everything, and let himself be hustled about—and say thank you into the bargain—that's how it is with old Lasse. But you must remember that it's for your sake he lets himself be put upon. If it wasn't for you, he'd shoulder his pack and go—old though he is. But you can grow on where your father rusts. And now you must leave off crying!" And he dried the boy's wet eyes with the quilt.

Pelle did not understand his father's words, but they quieted him nevertheless, and he soon fell asleep; but for a long time he sobbed as he lay.

Lasse sat still upon the edge of the bed and watched the boy as he slept, and when he had become quieter, crept away through the stable and out. It had been a poor Sunday, and now he would go and see if any of the men were at home and had visitors, for then there would be spirits going round. Lasse could not find it in his heart to take any of his wages to buy a dram with; that money would have quite enough to do to buy bare necessaries.

On one of the beds lay a man asleep, fully dressed, and with his boots on. He was dead drunk. All the others were out, so Lasse had to give up all thoughts of a dram, and went across to the basement to see if there was any gaiety going among the maids. He was not at all averse to enjoyment of one sort or another, now that he was free and his own master as he had been in the days of his youth.

Up by the dairy stood the three farm-laborers' wives who used to do the milking for the girls on Sunday evening. They were thick-set, small, and bent with toil. They were all talking together and spoke of illnesses and other sad things in plaintive tones. Lasse at once felt a desire to join them, for the subject found an echo in his being like the tones of a well-known song, and he could join in the refrain with the experience of a lifetime. But he resisted the temptation, and went past them down the basement steps. "Ah, yes, death will come to us all!" said one of the women, and Lasse said the words after her to himself as he went down.

Down there Karna was sitting mending Gustav's moleskin trousers, while Gustav lay upon the bench asleep with his cap over his face. He had put his feet up on Karna's lap, without so much as taking off his shoes; and she had accommodated her lap, so that they should not slide off.

Lasse sat down beside her and tried to make himself agreeable. He wanted some one to be nice to him. But Karna was unapproachable; those dirty feet had quite turned her head. And either Lasse had forgotten how to do it, or he was wanting in assurance, for every time he attempted a pleasant speech, she turned it off.

"We might have such a comfortable time, we two elderly folk," he said hopelessly.

"Yes, and I could contribute what was wanting," said Gustav, peeping out from under his cap. Insolent puppy, lying there and boasting of his seventeen years! Lasse had a good mind to go for him then and there and chance yet one more trial of strength. But he contented himself with sitting and looking at him until his red, lashless eyes grew watery. Then he got up.

"Well, well, I see you want young people this evening!" he said bitterly to Karna. "But you can't get rid of your years, all the same! Perhaps you'll only get the spoon to lick after the others."

He went across to the cow-stable and began to talk to the three farm-laborers' wives, who were still speaking of illness and misery and death, as if nothing else existed in the world. Lasse nodded and said: "Yes, yes, that's true." He could heartily endorse it all, and could add much to what they said. It brought warmth to his old body, and made him feel quite comfortable—so easy in his joints.

But when he lay on his back in bed, all the sad thoughts came back and he could not sleep. Generally he slept like a log as soon as he lay down, but to-day was Sunday, and he was tormented with the thought that life had passed him by. He had promised himself so much from the island, and it was nothing but worry and toil and trouble —nothing else at all.

“Yes, Lasse’s old!” he suddenly said aloud, and he kept on repeating the words with a little variation until he fell asleep: “He’s old, poor man —and played out! Ah, so old!” Those words expressed it all.

He was awakened again by singing and shouting up on the high-road.

“And now the boy you gave me
With the black and curly hair,
He is no longer little,
No longer, no longer,
But a fine, tall strapping youth.”

It was some of the men and girls of the farm on their way home from some entertainment. When they turned into the farm road they became silent. It was just beginning to grow light; it must have been about two o’clock.

IV

At four, Lasse and Pelle were dressed and were opening the cow-stable doors on the field side. The earth was rolling off its white covering of night mist, and the morning rose prophetically. Lasse stood still in the doorway, yawning, and making up his mind about the weather for the day; but Pelle let the soft tones of the wind and the song of the lark—all that was stirring—beat upon his little heart. With open mouth and doubtful eyes he gazed into the incomprehensible as represented by each new day with all its unimagined possibilities. “To-day you must take your coat with you, for we shall have rain about midday,” Lasse would then say; and Pelle peered into the sky to find out where his father got his knowledge from. For it generally came true.

They then set about cleaning out the dung in the cow-stable, Pelle scraping the floor under the cows and sweeping it up, Lasse filling the wheelbarrow and wheeling it out. At half-past five they ate their morning meal of salt herring and porridge.

After that Pelle set out with the young cattle, his dinner basket on his arm, and his whip wound several times round his neck. His father had made him a short, thick stick with rings on it, that he could rattle admonishingly and throw at the animals; but Pelle preferred the whip, because he was not yet strong enough to use it.

He was little, and at first he had some difficulty in making an impression upon the great forces over which he was placed. He could not get his voice to sound sufficiently terrifying, and on the way out from the farm he had hard work, especially up near the farm, where the corn stood high on both sides of the field-road. The animals were hungry in the morning, and the big bullocks did not trouble to move when once they had their noses buried in the corn and he stood belaboring them with the short handle of the cattle- whip. The twelve-foot lash, which, in a practised hand, left little triangular marks in the animal’s hide, he could not manage at all; and if he kicked the bullock on the head with his wooden shoe, it only closed its eyes good-naturedly, and browsed on sedately with its back to him. Then he would break into a despairing roar, or into little fits of rage in which he attacked the animal blindly and tried to get at its eyes; but it was all equally useless. He could always make the calves move by twisting their tails, but the bullocks’ tails were too strong.

He did not cry, however, for long at a time over the failure of his resources. One evening he got his father to put a spike into the toe of one of his wooden shoes, and after that his kick was respected. Partly by himself, and partly through Rud, he also learned where to find the places on the animals where it hurt most. The cow-calves and the two bull-calves all had their particular tender spot, and a well-directed blow upon a horn could make even the large bullocks bellow with pain.

The driving out was hard work, but the herding itself was easy. When once the cattle were quietly grazing, he felt like a general, and made his voice sound out incessantly over the meadow, while his little body swelled with pride and a sense of power.

Being away from his father was a trouble to him. He did not go home to dinner, and often in the middle of his play, despair would come over him and he would imagine that something had happened to his father, that the great bull had tossed him or something else; and he would leave everything, and start running homeward crying, but would remember in time the bailiff’s whip, and trudge back again. He found a remedy for his longing by stationing himself so that he could keep a lookout on the fields up there, and see his father when he went out to move the dairy-cows.

He taught himself to whittle boats and little rakes and hoes and decorate sticks with patterns cut upon the bark. He was clever with his knife and made diligent use of it. He would also stand for hours on the top of a monolith—he thought it was a gate-post—and try to crack his cattle-whip like a pistol-shot. He had to climb to a height to get the lash off the ground at all.

When the animals lay down in the middle of the morning, he was often tired too, and then he would seat himself upon the head of one of the big bullocks, and hold on to the points of its horns; and while the animal lay chewing with a gentle vibration like a machine, he sat upon its head and shouted at the top of his voice songs about blighted affections and horrible massacres.

Toward midday Rud came running up, as hungry as a hunter. His mother sent him out of the house when the hour for a meal drew near.

Pelle shared the contents of his basket with him, but required him to bring the animals together a certain number of times for every portion of food. The two boys could not exist apart for a whole day together. They tumbled about in the field like two puppies, fought and made it up again twenty times a day, swore the most fearful threats of vengeance that should come in the shape of this or that grown-up person, and the next moment had their arms round one another's necks.

About half-a-mile of sand-dunes separated the Stone Farm fields from the sea. Within this belt of sand the land was stony and afforded poor grazing; but on both sides of the brook a strip of green meadow-land ran down among the dunes, which were covered with dwarf firs and grass-wrack to bind the sand. The best grazing was on this meadow-land, but it was hard work minding both sides of it, as the brook ran between; and it had been impressed upon the boy with severe threats, that no animal must set its foot upon the dune-land, as the smallest opening might cause a sand-drift. Pelle took the matter quite literally, and all that summer imagined something like an explosion that would make everything fly into the air the instant an animal trod upon it; and this possibility hung like a fate at the back of everything when he herded down there. When Rud came and they wanted to play, he drove the cattle up on to the poor pasture where there was plenty of room for them.

When the sun shone the boys ran about naked. They dared not venture down to the sea for fear of the bailiff, who, they were sure, always stood up in the attic of the big house, and watched Pelle through his telescope; but they bathed in the brook—in and out of the water continually for hours together.

After heavy rain it became swollen, and was then quite milky from the china clay that it washed away from the banks farther up. The boys thought it was milk from an enormous farm far up in the island. At high water the sea ran up and filled the brook with decaying seaweed that colored the water crimson; and this was the blood of all the people drowned out in the sea.

Between their bathes they lay under the dunes and let the sun dry them. They made a minute examination of their bodies, and discussed the use and intention of the various parts. Upon this head Rud's knowledge was superior, and he took the part of instructor. They often quarrelled as to which of them was the best equipped in one way or another—in other words, had the largest. Pelle, for instance, envied Rud his disproportionately large head.

Pelle was a well-built little fellow, and had put on flesh since he had come to Stone Farm. His glossy skin was stretched smoothly over his body, and was of a warm, sunburnt color. Rud had a thin neck in proportion to his head, and his forehead was angular and covered with scars, the results of innumerable falls. He had not full command of all his limbs, and was always knocking and bruising himself; there were blue, livid patches all over him that were slow to disappear, for he had flesh that did not heal easily. But he was not so open in his envy as Pelle. He asserted himself by boasting of his defects until he made them out to be sheer achievements; so that Pelle ended by envying him everything from the bottom of his heart.

Rud had not Pelle's quick perception of things, but he had more instinct, and on certain points possessed quite a talent in anticipating what Pelle only learned by experience. He was already avaricious to a certain extent, and suspicious without connecting any definite thoughts with it. He ate the lion's share of the food, and had a variety of ways of getting out of doing the work.

Behind their play there lay, clothed in the most childish forms, a struggle for the supremacy, and for the present Pelle was the one who came off second best. In an emergency, Rud always knew how to appeal to his good qualities and turn them to his own advantage.

And through all this they were the best friends in the world, and were quite inseparable. Pelle was always looking toward "the Sow's" cottage when he was alone, and Rud ran off from home as soon as he saw his opportunity.

It had rained hard in the course of the morning, in spite of Lasse, and Pelle was wet through. Now the blue-black cloud was drawing away over the sea, and the boats lay in the middle of it with all their red sails set, and yet motionless. The sunlight flashed and glittered on wet surfaces, making everything look bright; and Pelle hung his clothes on a dwarf fir to dry.

He was cold, and crept close up to Peter, the biggest of the bullocks, as he lay chewing the cud. The animal was steaming, but Pelle could not bring warmth into his extremities, where the cold had taken hold. His teeth chattered, too, and he was shivering.

And even now there was one of the cows that would not let him have any peace. Every time he had snuggled right in under the bullock and was beginning to get a little warmer, the cow strayed away over the northern boundary. There was nothing but sand there, but when it was a calf there had been a patch of mixed crops, and it still remembered that.

It was one of two cows that had been turned out of the dairy-herd on account of their dryness. They were ill-tempered creatures, always discontented and doing some mischief or other; and Pelle detested them heartily. They were two regular termagants, upon which even thrashing made no impression. The one was a savage beast, that would suddenly begin stamping and bellowing like a mad bull in the middle of grazing, and, if Pelle went toward it, wanted to toss him; and when it saw its opportunity, it would eat up the cloth in which Pelle's dinner was wrapped. The other was old and had crumpled horns that pointed in toward its eyes, one of which had a white pupil.

It was the noisy one that was now at its tricks. Every other minute Pelle had to get up and shout: "Hi, Blakka, you villainous beast! Just you come back!" He was hoarse with anger, and at last his patience gave way, and he caught up a big stick and began to chase the cow. As soon as it saw his intention, it set off at a run up toward the farm, and Pelle had to make a wide circle to turn it down to the herd again. Then it ran at full gallop in and out among the other animals, the herd became confused and ran hither and thither, and Pelle had to relinquish his pursuit for a time while he gathered them together. But then he began again at once. He was boiling with rage, and leaped about like an indiarubber ball, his naked body flashing in loops and curves upon the green grass. He was only a few yards from the cow, but the distance remained the same; he could not catch her up to-day.

He stopped up by the rye-field, and the cow stood still almost at the same moment. It snapped at a few ears, and moved its head slowly to choose its direction. In a couple of leaps Pelle was up to it and had hold of its tail. He hit it over the nose with his cudgel, it turned quickly away from the rye, and set off at a flying pace down toward the others, while blows rained down upon its bony prominences. Every stroke echoed back from the dunes like blows upon the trunk of a tree, and made Pelle swell with pride. The cow tried to shake Pelle off as it ran, but he was not to be got rid of; it crossed the brook in long bounds, backward and forward, with Pelle almost floating through the air; but the blows continued to rain down upon it. Then it grew tired and began to slacken its pace; and at last it came to a standstill, coughed, and resigned itself to the thrashing.

Pelle threw himself flat upon his face, and panted. Ha, ha! *That* had made him warm! Now that beast should—He rolled suddenly over on to his side with a start. The bailiff! But it was a strange man with a beard who stood over him, looking at him with serious eyes. The stranger went on gazing at him for a long time without saying anything, and Pelle grew more and more uneasy under his scrutiny; he had the sun right in his eyes too, if he tried to return the man's gaze, and the cow still stood there coughing.

"What do you think the bailiff will say?" asked the man at last, quietly.

"I don't think he's seen it," whispered Pelle, looking timidly round.

"But God has seen it, for He sees everything. And He has led me here to stop the evil in you while there's still time. Wouldn't you like to be God's child?" The man sat down beside him and took his hand.

Pelle sat tugging at the grass and wishing he had had his clothes on.

"And you must never forget that God sees everything you do; even in the darkest night He sees. We are always walking in God's sight. But come now, it's unseemly to run about naked!" And the man took him by the hand and led him to his clothes, and then, going across to the north side, he gathered the herd together while Pelle dressed himself. The wicked cow was over there again already, and had drawn a few of the others after it. Pelle watched the man in surprise; he drove the animals back quite quietly, neither using stones nor shouting. Before he got back, Blakka had once more crossed the boundary; but he turned and brought her back again just as gently as before.

"That's not an easy cow to manage," he said kindly, when he returned; "but you've got young legs. Shan't we agree to burn that?" he asked, picking up the thick cudgel, "and do what we have to do with just our hands? God will always help you when you’re in difficulties. And if you want to be a true child of God, you must tell the bailiff this evening what you did—and take your punishment.” He placed his hand upon Pelle’s head, and looked at him with that unendurable gaze; and then he left him, taking the stick with him.

For a long time Pelle followed him with his eyes. So that was what a man looked like, who was sent by God to warn you! Now he knew, and it would be some time before he chased a cow like that again. But go to the bailiff, and tell of himself, and get the whip-lash on his bare legs? Not if he knew it! Rather than that, God would have to be angry—if it was really true that He could see everything? It couldn’t be worse than the bailiff, anyhow.

All that morning he was very quiet. He felt the man’s eyes upon him in everything he did, and it robbed him of his confidence. He silently tested things, and saw everything in a new light; it was best not to make a noise, if you were always walking in the sight of God. He did not go on cracking his cattle-whip, but meditated a little on whether he should burn that too.

But a little before midday Rud appeared, and the whole incident was forgotten. Rud was smoking a bit of cane that he had cut off the piece his mother used for cleaning the stove-pipes, and Pelle bartered some of his dinner for a few pulls at it. First they seated themselves astride the bullock Cupid, which was lying chewing the cud. It went on calmly chewing with closed eyes, until Rud put the glowing cane to the root of its tail, when it rose hastily, both boys rolling over its head. They laughed and boasted to one another of the somersault they had turned, as they went up on to the high ground to look for blackberries. Thence they went to some birds’ nests in the small firs, and last of all they set about their best game—digging up mice-nests.

Pelle knew every mouse-hole in the meadow, and they lay down and examined them carefully. “Here’s one that has mice in it,” said Rud. “Look, here’s their dunghill!”

“Yes, that smells of mouse,” said Pelle, putting his nose to the hole. “And the blades of grass turn outward, so the old ones must be out.”

With Pelle’s knife they cut away the turf, and set to work eagerly to dig with two pieces of pot. The soil flew about their heads as they talked and laughed.

“My word, how fast we’re getting on!”

“Yes; Ström couldn’t work as fast!” Ström was a famous worker who got twenty-five öres a day more than other autumn farm-hands, and his example was used as an incentive to coax work out of the laborers.

“We shall soon get right into the inside of the earth.”

“Well, but it’s burning hot in there.”

“Oh, nonsense: is it?” Pelle paused doubtfully in his digging.

“Yes, the schoolmaster says so.”

The boys hesitated and put their hands down into the hole. Yes, it was warm at the bottom—so warm that Pelle found it necessary to pull out his hand and say: “Oh, my word!” They considered a little, and then went on scraping out the hole as carefully as if their lives depended on it. In a little while straw appeared in the passage, and in a moment the internal heat of the earth was forgotten. In less than a minute they had uncovered the nest, and laid the little pink, new-born mice out on the grass. They looked like half-hatched birds.

“They *are* ugly,” said Pelle, who did not quite like taking hold of them, but was ashamed not to do so. “They’re much nastier to touch than toads. I believe they’re poisonous.”

Rud lay pinching them between his fingers.

“Poisonous! Don’t be silly! Why, they haven’t any teeth! There are no bones in them at all; I’m sure you could eat them quite well.”

“Pah! Beastly!” Pelle spat on the ground.

“I shouldn’t be at all afraid of biting one; would you?” Rud lifted a little mouse up toward his mouth.

“Afraid? Of course I’m not afraid—but—” Pelle hesitated.

“No, you’re afraid, because you’re a blue-bag!”

Now this nickname really only applied to boys who were afraid of water, but Pelle quickly seized one of the little mice, and held it up to his mouth, at exactly the same distance from his lips that Rud was from his. “You can see for yourself!” he cried, in an offended tone.

Rud went on talking, with many gestures.

“You’re afraid,” he said, “and it’s because you’re Swedish. But when you're afraid, you should just shut your eyes—so—and open your mouth. Then you pretend to put the mouse right into your mouth, and then—" Rud had his mouth wide open, and held his hand close to his mouth; Pelle was under his influence, and imitated his movements—"and then—" Pelle received a blow that sent the little mouse halfway down his throat. He retched and spat; and then his hands fumbled in the grass and got hold of a stone. But by the time he was on his feet and was going to throw it, Rud was far away up the fields. "I must go home now!" he shouted innocently. "There's something I've got to help mother with."

Pelle did not love solitude, and the prospect of a blockade determined him at once for negotiations. He dropped the stone to show his serious wish for a reconciliation, and had to swear solemnly that he would not bear malice. Then at last Rud came back, tittering.

"I was going to show you something funny with the mouse," he said by way of diversion; "but you held on to it like an idiot." He did not venture to come quite close up to Pelle, but stood watching his movements.

Pelle was acquainted with the little white lie when the danger of a thrashing was imminent, but the lie as an attack was still unknown to him. If Rud, now that the whole thing was over, said that he only wanted to have shown him something funny, it must be true. But then why was he mistrustful? Pelle tried, as he had so often done before, to bend his little brain round the possible tricks of his playmate, but failed.

"You may just as well come up close," he said stoutly. "For if I wanted to, I could easily catch you up."

Rud came. "Now we'll catch big mice." he said. "That's better fun."

They emptied Pelle's milk-bottle, and hunted up a mouse's nest that appeared to have only two exits, one up in the meadow, the other halfway down the bank of the stream. Here they pushed in the mouth of the bottle, and widened the hole in the meadow into a funnel; and they took it in turns to keep an eye on the bottle, and to carry water up to the other hole in their caps. It was not long before a mouse popped out into the bottle, which they then corked.

What should they do with it? Pelle proposed that they should tame it and train it to draw their little agricultural implements; but Rud, as usual, got his way—it was to go out sailing.

Where the stream turned, and had hollowed out its bed into a hole as big as a cauldron, they made an inclined plane and let the bottle slide down into the water head foremost, like a ship being launched. They could follow it as it curved under the water until it came up slantingly, and stood bobbing up and down on the water like a buoy, with its neck up. The mouse made the funniest leaps up toward the cork to get out; and the boys jumped up and down on the grass with delight.

"It knows the way it got in quite well!" They imitated its unsuccessful leaps, lay down again and rolled about in exuberant mirth. At last, however, the joke became stale.

"Let's take out the cork!" suggested Rud.

"Yes—oh, yes!" Pelle waded quickly in, and was going to set the mouse at liberty.

"Wait a minute, you donkey!" Rud snatched the bottle from him, and holding his hand over the mouth, put it back, into the water. "Now we'll see some fun!" he cried, hastening up the bank.

It was a little while before the mouse discovered that the way was open, but then it leaped. The leap was unsuccessful, and made the bottle rock, so that the second leap was slanting and rebounded sideways. But then followed with lightning rapidity a number of leaps—a perfect bombardment; and suddenly the mouse flew right out of the bottle, head foremost into the water.

"That was a leap and a half!" cried Pelle, jumping straight up and down in the grass, with his arms at his sides. "It could just squeeze its body through, just exactly!" And he jumped again, squeezing himself together.

The mouse swam to land, but Rud was there, and pushed it out again with his foot. "It swam well," he said, laughing. It made for the opposite bank. "Look out for the fellow!" Rud roared, and Pelle sprang forward and turned it away from the shore with a good kick. It swam helplessly backward and forward in the middle of the pool, seeing one of the two dancing figures every time it approached a bank, and turning and turning endlessly. It sank deeper and deeper, its fur becoming wet and dragging it down, until at last it swam right under water. Suddenly it stretched out its body convulsively, and sank to the bottom, with all four legs outspread like a wide embrace.

Pelle had all at once comprehended the perplexity and helplessness — perhaps was familiar with it. At the animal's final struggle, he burst into tears with a little scream, and ran, crying loudly, up the meadow toward the fir-plantation. In a little while he came back again. "I really thought Cupid had run away," he said repeatedly, and carefully avoided looking Rud in the face. Quietly he waded into the water, and fished up the dead mouse with his foot.

They laid it upon a stone in the sun, so that it might come to life again. When that failed, Pelle remembered a story about some people who were drowned in a lake at home, and who came to themselves again when cannons were fired over them. They clapped their hollowed hands over the mouse, and when that too brought about no result, they decided to bury it.

Rud happened to remember that his grandmother in Sweden was being buried just now, and this made them go about the matter with a certain amount of solemnity. They made a coffin out of a matchbox, and ornamented it with moss; and then they lay on their faces and lowered the coffin into the grave with twine, taking every possible care that it should not land upon its head. A rope might give way; such things did sometimes happen, and the illusion did not permit of their correcting the position of the coffin afterward with their hands. When this was done, Pelle looked down into his cap, while Rud prayed over the deceased and cast earth upon the coffin; and then they made up the grave.

"I only hope it's not in a trance and going to wake up again!" exclaimed Pelle suddenly. They had both heard many unpleasant stories of such cases, and went over all the possibilities—how they woke up and couldn't get any air, and knocked upon the lid, and began to eat their own hands—until Pelle could distinctly hear a knocking on the lid below. They had the coffin up in a trice, and examined the mouse. It had not eaten its forepaws, at any rate, but it had most decidedly turned over on its side. They buried it again, putting a dead beetle beside it in the coffin for safety's sake, and sticking a straw down into the grave to supply it with air. Then they ornamented the mound, and set up a memorial stone.

"It's dead now!" said Pelle, gravely and with conviction.

"Yes, I should just think so—dead as a herring." Rud had put his ear to the straw and listened.

"And now it must be up with God in all His glory—right high, high up."

Rud sniffed contemptuously. "Oh, you silly! Do you think it can crawl up there?"

"Well, can't mice crawl, I should like to know?" Pelle was cross.

"Yes; but not through the air. Only birds can do that."

Pelle felt himself beaten off the field and wanted to be revenged.

"Then your grandmother isn't in heaven, either!" he declared emphatically. There was still a little rancor in his heart from the young mouse episode.

But this was more than Rud could stand. It had touched his family pride, and he gave Pelle a dig in the side with his elbow. The next moment they were rolling in the grass, holding one another by the hair, and making awkward attempts to hit one another on the nose with their clenched fists. They turned over and over like one lump, now one uppermost, now the other; they hissed hoarsely, groaned and made tremendous exertions. "I'll make you sneeze red," said Pelle angrily, as he rose above his adversary; but the next moment he was down again, with Rud hanging over him and uttering the most fearful threats about black eyes and seeing stars. Their voices were thick with passion.

And suddenly they were sitting opposite one another on the grass wondering whether they should set up a howl. Rud put out his tongue, Pelle went a step further and began to laugh, and they were once more the best of friends. They set up the memorial stone, which had been overturned in the heat of battle, and then sat down hand in hand, to rest after the storm, a little quieter than usual.

It was not because there was more evil in Pelle, but because the question had acquired for him an importance of its own, and he must understand it, that a meditative expression came into his eyes, and he said thoughtfully:

"Well, but you've told me yourself that she was paralyzed in her legs!"

"Well, what if she was?"

"Why, then she couldn't crawl up into heaven."

"Oh, you booby! It's her spirit, of course!"

"Then the mouse's spirit can very well be up there too."

“No, it can’t, for mice haven’t got any spirit.”

“Haven’t they? Then how is it they can breathe?”[1]

[1] In Danish, spirit = aand, and to breathe = aande.

That was one for Rud! And the tiresome part of it was that he attended Sunday-school. His fists would have come in handy again now, but his instinct told him that sooner or later Pelle would get the better of him in fighting. And anyhow his grandmother was saved.

“Yes,” he said, yielding; “and it certainly could breathe. Well, then, it was its spirit flying up that overturned the stone—that’s what it was!”

A distant sound reached them, and far off near the cottage they could see the figure of a fat woman, beckoning threateningly.

“The Sow’s calling you,” said Pelle. The two boys never called her anything but “the Sow” between themselves.

So Rud had to go. He was allowed to take the greater part of the contents of the dinner-basket with him, and ate as he ran. They had been too busy to eat.

Pelle sat down among the dunes and ate his dinner. As usual when Rud had been with him, he could not imagine what had become of the day. The birds had ceased singing, and not one of the cattle was still lying down, so it must be at least five o’clock.

Up at the farm they were busy driving in. It went at full gallop— out and in, out and in. The men stood up in the carts and thrashed away at the horses with the end of the reins, and the swaying loads were hurried along the field-roads, looking like little bristling, crawling things, that have been startled and are darting to their holes.

A one-horsed vehicle drove out from the farm, and took the high-road to the town at a quick trot. It was the farmer; he was driving so fast that he was evidently off to the town on the spree. So there was something gone wrong at home, and there would be crying at the farm that night.

Yes, there was Father Lasse driving out with the water-cart, so it was half-past five. He could tell that too by the birds beginning their pleasant evening twittering, that was soft and sparkling like the rays of the sun.

Far inland above the stone-quarry, where the cranes stood out against the sky, a cloud of smoke rose every now and then into the air, and burst in a fountain of pieces of rock. Long after came the explosion, bit by bit in a series of rattling reverberations. It sounded as if some one were running along and slapping his thigh with fingerless gloves.

The last few hours were always long—the sun was so slow about it. And there was nothing to fill up the time either. Pelle himself was tired, and the tranquillity of evening had the effect of subduing his voice. But now they were driving out for milking up there, and the cattle were beginning to graze along the edge of the meadow that turned toward the farm; so the time was drawing near.

At last the herd-boys began to jodel over at the neighboring farms, first one, and then several joining in:

“Oh, drive home, o-ho, o-o-ho!
O-ho, o-ho!
O-ho, o-ho!
Oh, drive home, o-o-ho!
O-ho!”

From all sides the soft tones vibrated over the sloping land, running out, like the sound of happy weeping, into the first glow of evening; and Pelle’s animals began to move farther after each pause to graze. But he did not dare to drive them home yet, for it only meant a thrashing from the bailiff or the pupil if he arrived too early.

He stood at the upper end of the meadow, and called his homeward-drifting flock together; and when the last tones of the call had died away, he began it himself, and stepped on one side. The animals ran with a peculiar little trot and heads extended. The shadow of the grass lay in long thin stripes across the ground, and the shadows of the animals were endless. Now and then a calf lowed slowly and broke into a gallop. They were yearning for home, and Pelle was yearning too.

From behind a hollow the sun darted long rays out into space, as if it had called all its powers home for the night, and now poured them forth in one great longing, from west to east. Everything pointed in long thin lines, and the eager longing of the cattle seemed visible in the air.

To the mind of the child there was nothing left out of doors now; everything was being taken in, and he longed for his father with a longing that was almost a pain. And when at last he turned the corner with the herd, and saw old Lasse standing there, smiling happily with his red-rimmed eyes, and opening the gate to the fold, the boy gave way and threw himself weeping into his father’s arms.

“What’s the matter, laddie? What’s the matter?” asked the old man, with concern in his voice, stroking the child’s face with a trembling hand. “Has any one been unkind to you? No? Well, that’s a good thing! They’d better take care, for happy children are in God’s own keeping. And Lasse would be an awkward customer if it came to that. So you were longing for me, were you? Then it’s good to be in your little heart, and it only makes Lasse happy. But go in now and get your supper, and don’t cry any more.” And he wiped the boy’s nose with his hard, crooked fingers, and pushed him gently away.

V

Pelle was not long in finding out all about the man who had been sent by God, and had the grave, reproachful eyes. He proved to be nothing but a little shoemaker down in the village, who spoke at the meeting-house on Sundays; and it was also said that his wife drank. Rud went to his Sunday-school, and he was poor; so he was nothing out of the ordinary.

Moreover, Gustav had got a cap which could turn out three different crowns—one of blue duffle, one of water-proof American cloth, and one of white canvas for use in sunny weather. It was an absorbingly interesting study that threw everything else into the background, and exercised Pelle's mind for many days; and he used this miraculous cap as a standard by which to measure everything great and desirable. But one day he gave Gustav a beautifully carved stick for permission to perform the trick of turning the crown inside out himself; and that set his mind at rest at last, and the cap had to take its place in his everyday world like everything else.

But what did it look like in Farmer Kongstrup's big rooms? Money lay upon the floor there, of course, the gold in one place and the silver in another; and in the middle of each heap stood a half-bushel measure. What did the word *"practical"* mean, which the bailiff used when he talked to the farmer? And why did the men call one another *"Swede"* as a term of abuse? Why, they were all Swedes! What was there away beyond the cliffs where the stone-quarry lay? The farm-lands extended as far as that on the one side. He had not been there yet, but was going with his father as soon as an opportunity presented itself. They had learnt quite by chance that Lasse had a brother who owned a house over there; so of course they knew the place comparatively well.

Down there lay the sea; he had sailed upon it himself! Ships both of iron and wood sailed upon it, though how iron could float when it was so heavy he did not know! The sea must be strong, for in the pond, iron went to the bottom at once. In the middle of the pond there was no bottom, so there you'd go on sinking forever! The old thatcher, when he was young, had had more than a hundred fathoms of rope down there with a drag, to fish up a bucket, but he never reached the bottom. And when he wanted to pull up the rope again, there was some one deep down who caught hold of the drag and tried to pull him down, so he had to let the whole thing go.

God ... well, He had a long white beard like the farmer at Kaase Farm; but who kept house for Him now He was old? Saint Peter was His bailiff, of course!... How could the old, dry cows have just as young calves as the young ones? And so on, and so on.

There was one subject about which, as a matter of course, there could be no question, nor any thought at all in that sense, because it was the very foundation of all existence—Father Lasse. He was there, simply, he stood like a safe wall behind everything that one did. He was the real Providence, the last great refuge in good and ill; he could do whatever he liked—Father Lasse was almighty.

Then there was one natural centre in the world—Pelle himself. Everything grouped itself about him, everything existed for him—for him to play with, to shudder at, or to put on one side for a great future. Even distant trees, houses and rocks in the landscape, that he had never been up to, assumed an attitude toward him, either friendly or hostile; and the relation had to be carefully decided in the case of each new thing that appeared upon his horizon.

His world was small; he had only just begun to create it. For a good arm's-length on all sides of him, there was more or less *terra firma*; but beyond that floated raw matter, chaos. But Pelle already found his world immense, and was quite willing to make it infinite. He attacked everything with insatiable appetite; his ready perceptions laid hold of all that came within their reach; they were like the mouth of a machine, into which matter was incessantly rushing in small, whirling particles. And in the draught they raised, came others and again others; the entire universe was on its way toward him.

Pelle shaped and set aside twenty new things in the course of a second. The earth grew out under him into a world that was rich in excitement and grotesque forms, discomfort and the most everyday things. He went about in it uncertainly, for there was always something that became displaced and had to be revalued or made over again; the most matter-of-fact things would change and all at once become terrifying marvels, or *vice versa*. He went about in a state of continual wonderment, and assumed an expectant attitude even with regard to the most familiar things; for who could tell what surprises they might give one?

As an instance; he had all his life had opportunities of verifying the fact that trouser-buttons were made of bone and had five holes, one large one in the middle and four smaller ones round it. And then one day, one of the men comes home from the town with a pair of new trousers, the buttons of which are made of bright metal and are no larger than a sixpenny-piece! They have only four holes, and the thread is to lie across them, not from the middle outward, as in the old ones.

Or take the great eclipse of the sun, that he had wondered so much about all the summer, and that all the old people said would bring about the destruction of the world. He had looked forward to it, especially the destruction part of it; it would be something of an adventure, and somewhere within him there was a little bit of confident assurance that it would all come right as far as he was concerned. The eclipse did come too, as it was meant to; it grew dark too, as if it were the Last Day, and the birds became so quiet, and the cattle bellowed and wanted to run home. But then it grew light again and it all came to nothing.

Then there were fearful terrors that all at once revealed themselves as tiny, tiny things—thank goodness! But there were also anticipated pleasures that made your heart beat, and when you got up to them they were dullness itself.

Far out in the misty mass, invisible worlds floated by that had nothing to do with his own. A sound coming out of the unknown created them in a twinkling. They came into existence in the same way that the land had done that morning he had stood upon the deck of the steamer, and heard voices and noise through the fog, thick and big, with forms that looked like huge gloves without fingers.

And inside one there was blood and a heart and a soul. The heart Pelle had found out about himself; it was a little bird shut up in there. But the soul bored its way like a serpent to whatever part of the body desire occupied. Old thatcher Holm had once drawn the soul like a thin thread out of the thumb of a man who couldn’t help stealing. Pelle’s own soul was good; it lay in the pupils of his eyes, and reflected Father Lasse’s image whenever he looked into them.

The blood was the worst, and so Father Lasse always let himself be bled when there was anything the matter with him; the bad humors had to be let out. Gustav thought a great deal about blood, and could tell the strangest things about it; and he cut his fingers only to see whether it was ripe. One evening he came over to the cow-stable and exhibited a bleeding finger. The blood was quite black. “Now I’m a man!” he said, and swore a great oath; but the maids only made fun of him, and said that he had not carried his four bushels of peas up into the loft yet.

Then there was hell and heaven, and the stone-quarry where they struck one another with heavy hammers when they were drunk. The men in the stone-quarry were the strongest men in the world. One of them had eaten ten poached eggs at one time without being ill; and there is nothing so strengthening as eggs.

Down in the meadow, will-o’-the-wisps hopped about looking for something in the deep summer nights. There was always one of them near the stream, and it stood and danced on the top of a little heap of stones that lay in the middle of the meadow. A couple of years ago a girl had one night given birth to a child out there among the dunes and as she did not know what to do about a father for it, she drowned it in one of the pools that the brook makes where it turns. Good people raised the little cairn, so that the place should not be forgotten; and over it the child’s soul used to burn at dead of night at the time of year at which it was born. Pelle believed that the child itself was buried beneath the stones, and now and then ornamented the mound with a branch of fir; but he never played at that part of the stream. The girl was sent across the sea, sentenced to penal servitude for many years, and people wondered at the father. She had not named any one, but every one knew who it was all the same. He was a young, well-to-do fisherman down in the village, and the girl was one of the poorest, so there could never have been any question of their marrying. The girl must have preferred this to begging help of him for the child, and living in the village with an illegitimate child, an object of universal derision. And he had certainly put a bold face on the matter, where many another would have been ashamed and gone away on a long voyage.

This summer, two years after the girl went to prison, the fisherman was going home one night along the shore toward the village with some nets on his back. He was of a callous nature, and did not hesitate to take the shortest way across the meadow; but when he got in among the dunes, he saw a will-o'-the-wisp following in his steps, grew frightened, and began to run. It began to gain upon him, and when he leaped across the brook to put water between himself and the spirit, it seized hold of the nets. At this he shouted the name of God, and fled like one bereft of his senses. The next morning at sunrise he and his father went to fetch the nets. They had caught on the cairn, and lay right across the stream.

Then the young man joined the Revivalists, and his father abandoned his riotous life and followed him. Early and late the young fisherman was to be found at their meetings, and at other times he went about like a malefactor with his head hanging down, only waiting for the girl to come out of prison, so that he could marry her.

Pelle was up in it all. The girls talked shudderingly about it as they sat upon the men's knees in the long summer evenings, and a lovesick fellow from inland had made up a ballad about it, which Gustav sang to his concertina. Then all the girls on the farm wept, and even Lively Sara's eyes filled with tears, and she began to talk to Mons about engagement rings.

One day when Pelle was lying on his face in the grass, singing and clapping his naked feet together in the clear air, he saw a young man standing by the cairn and putting on it stones which he took out of his pocket; after which he knelt down. Pelle went up to him.

"What are you doing?" he asked boldly, feeling that he was in his own domain. "Are you saying your prayers?"

The man did not answer, but remained in a kneeling posture. At last he rose, and spat out tobacco-juice.

"I'm praying to Him Who is to judge us all," he said, looking steadily at Pelle.

Pelle recognized that look. It was the same in expression as that of the man the other day—the one that had been sent by God. Only there was no reproach in it.

"Haven't you any bed to sleep in then?" asked Pelle. "I always say my prayers under the clothes. He hears them just as well! God knows everything."

The young man nodded, and began moving about the stones on the cairn.

"You mustn't hurt that," said Pelle firmly, "for there's a little baby buried there."

The young man turned upon him a strange look.

"That's not true!" he said thickly; "for the child lies up in the churchyard in consecrated earth."

"O—oh, inde—ed?" said Pelle, imitating his father's slow tones. "But I know it was the parents that drowned it—and buried it here." He was too proud of his knowledge to relinquish it without a word.

The man looked as if he were about to strike him, and Pelle retreated a little, and then, having confidence in his legs, he laughed openly. But the other seemed no longer aware of his presence, and stood looking dully past the cairn. Pelle drew nearer again.

The man started at Pelle's shadow, and heaved a deep sigh. "Is that you?" he said apathetically, without looking at Pelle. "Why can't you leave me alone?"

"It's *my* field," said Pelle, "because I herd here; but you may stay here if you won't hit me. And you mustn't touch the cairn, because there's a little baby buried there."

The young man looked gravely at Pelle. "It's not true what you say! How dare you tell such a lie? God hates a lie. But you're a simple-hearted child, and I'll tell you all about it without hiding anything, as truly as I only want to walk wholly in God's sight."

Pelle looked at him uncomprehendingly. "I should think I ought to know all about it," he said, "considering I know the whole song by heart. I can sing it to you, if you like. It goes like this." Pelle began to sing in a voice that was a little tremulous with shyness—

"So happy are we in our childhood's first years,
    Neither sorrow nor sin is our mead;
We play, and there's nought in our path to raise fears
    That it straight into prison doth lead.

Right many there are that with voice sorrowful
    Must oft for lost happiness long.

To make the time pass in this prison so dull,
I now will write down all my song.

I played with my father, with mother I played,
And childhood's days came to an end;
And when I had grown up into a young maid,
I played still, but now with my friend.

I gave him my day and I gave him my night,
And never once thought of deceit;
But when I him told of my sorrowful plight,
My trust I had cause to regret.

'I never have loved you,' he quickly did say;
'Begone! I'll ne'er see you again!'
He turned on his heel and went angry away.
'Twas then I a murd'ress became."

Here Pelle paused in astonishment, for the grown-up man had sunk forward as he sat, and he was sobbing. "Yes, it was wicked," he said. "For then she killed her child and had to go to prison." He spoke with a certain amount of contempt; he did not like men that cried. "But it's nothing that you need cry about," he added carelessly, after a little.

"Yes, it is; for she'd done nothing. It was the child's father that killed it; it was me that did the dreadful thing; yes, I confess that I'm a murderer! Haven't I openly enough acknowledged by wrongdoing?" He turned his face upward, as though he were speaking to God.

"Oh, was it you?" said Pelle, moving a little away from him. "Did you kill your own child? Father Lasse could never have done that! But then why aren't you in prison? Did you tell a lie, and say *she'd* done it?"

These words had a peculiar effect upon the fisherman. Pelle stood watching him for a little, and then exclaimed: "You do talk so queerly—'blop-blop-blop,' just as if you were from another country. And what do you scrabble in the air with your fingers for, and cry? Will you get a thrashing when you get home?"

At the word "cry," the man burst into a flood of tears. Pelle had never seen any one cry so unrestrainedly. His face seemed all blurred.

"Will you have a piece of my bread-and-butter?" he asked, by way of offering comfort. "I've got some with sausage on."

The fisherman shook his head.

Pelle looked at the cairn. He was obstinate, and determined not to give in.

"It *is* buried there," he said. "I've seen its soul myself, burning up on the top of the heap at night. That's because it can't get into heaven."

A horrible sound came from the fisherman's lips, a hollow groan that brought Pelle's little heart into his mouth. He began to jump up and down in fear, and when he recovered his senses and stopped, he saw the fisherman running with head bent low across the meadow, until he disappeared among the dunes.

Pelle gazed after him in astonishment, and then moved slowly toward his dinner-basket. The result of the encounter was, as far as it had gone, a disappointment. He had sung to a perfect stranger, and there was no denying that that was an achievement, considering how difficult it often was only to answer "yes" or "no" to somebody you'd never seen before. But he had hardly more than begun the verses, and what made the performance remarkable was that he knew the entire ballad by heart. He sang it now for his own benefit from beginning to end, keeping count of the verses on his fingers; and he found the most intense satisfaction in shouting it out at the top of his voice.

In the evening he as usual discussed the events of the day with his father, and he then understood one or two things that filled his mind with uncomfortable thoughts. Father Lasse's was as yet the only human voice that the boy wholly understood; a mere sigh or shake of the head from the old man had a more convincing power than words from any one else.

"Alas!" he said again and again. "Evil, evil everywhere; sorrow and trouble wherever you turn! He'd willingly give his life to go to prison in her stead, now it's too late! So he ran away when you said that to him? Well, well, it's not easy to resist the Word of God even from the lips of a child, when the conscience is sore; and trading in the happiness of others is a bad way of earning a living. But now see about getting your feet washed, laddie."

Life furnished enough to work at and struggle with, and a good deal to dread; but worse almost than all that would harm Pelle himself, were the glimpses he now and then had of the depths of humanity: in the face of these his child’s brain was powerless. Why did the mistress cry so much and drink secretly? What went on behind the windows in the big house? He could not comprehend it, and every time he puzzled his little brain over it, the uncomfortable feeling only seemed to stare out at him from all the window-panes, and sometimes enveloped him in all the horror of the incomprehensible.

But the sun rode high in the heavens, and the nights were light. The darkness lay crouching under the earth and had no power. And he possessed the child’s happy gift of forgetting instantly and completely.

VI

Pelle had a quick pulse and much energy, and there was always something that he was attempting to overtake in his restless onward rush—if nothing else, then time itself. Now the rye was all in, now the last stack disappeared from the field, the shadows grew longer every day. But one evening the darkness surprised him before his bedtime, and this made him serious. He no longer hastened on the time, but tried to hold it back by many small sun-signs.

One day the men's midday rest was taken off. They harnessed the horses again as soon as they had eaten their dinner, and the chaff-cutting was put off until the evening. The horse-way lay on the outer side of the stable, and none of the men cared to tramp round out there in the dark, driving for the chaff-cutter, so Pelle had to do it. Lasse protested and threatened to go to the farmer, but it was of no use; every evening Pelle had to be out there for a couple of hours. They were his nicest hours that they took from him, the hours when he and Father Lasse pottered about in the stable, and talked themselves happily through all the day's troubles into a common bright future; and Pelle cried. When the moon chased the clouds away and he could see everything round him distinctly, he allowed his tears to run freely; but on dark evenings he was quiet and held his breath. Sometimes when it rained it was so dark that the farm and everything disappeared; and then he saw hundreds of beings that at other times the light hid. They appeared out of the darkness, terribly big, or came sliding up to him upon their bellies. He grew rigid as he gazed, and could not take his eyes from them. He sought shelter under the wall, and encouraged the horse from there; and one evening he ran in. They chased him out again, and he submitted to be chased, for when it came to the point he was more afraid of the men inside than of the beings outside. But one pitch-dark evening he was in an unusually bad way, and when he discovered that the horse, his only comfort, was also afraid, he dropped everything and ran in for the second time. Threats were powerless to make him go out again, and blows equally so, and one of the men took him up and carried him out; but then Pelle forgot everything, and screamed till the house shook.

While they were struggling with him, the farmer came out. He was very angry when he heard what was the matter, and blew the foreman up sky high. Then he took Pelle by the hand, and went down with him to the cow-stable. "A man like you to be afraid of a little dark!" he said jokingly. "You must try to get the better of that. But if the men harm you, just you come to me."

The plough went up and down the fields all day long, and made the earth dark in color, the foliage became variegated, and there was often sleet. The coats of the cattle grew thicker, their hair grew long and stood up on their backs. Pelle had much to put up with, and existence as a whole became a shade more serious. His clothing did not become thicker and warmer with the cold weather like that of the cattle; but he could crack his whip so that it sounded, in the most successful attempts, like little shots; he could thrash Rud when there was no unfairness, and jump across the stream at its narrowest part. All that brought warmth to the body.

The flock now grazed all over the farm-lands, wherever the cows had been tethered; the dairy-cows being now indoors; or they went inland on the fens, where all the farms had each a piece of grass-land. Here Pelle made acquaintance with herd-boys from the other farms, and looked into quite another world that was not ruled by bailiff and farm-pupil and thrashings, but where all ate at the same table, and the mistress herself sat and spun wool for the herd-boys' stockings. But he could never get in there, for they did not take Swedes at the small farms, nor would the people of the island take service together with them. He was sorry for this.

As soon as the autumn ploughing was started up on the fields, the boys, according to old custom, took down the boundary-fences and let all the animals graze together. The first few days it gave them more to do, for the animals fought until they got to know one another. They were never wholly mingled; they always grazed in patches, each farm's flock by itself. The dinner-baskets were also put together, and one boy was appointed in turn to mind the whole herd. The other boys played at robbers up among the rocks, or ran about in the woods or on the shore. When it was really cold they lighted bonfires, or built fireplaces of flat stones, where they roasted apples and eggs which they stole from the farms.

It was a glorious life, and Pelle was happy. It was true he was the smallest of them all, and his being a Swede was a drawback to him. In the midst of their play, the others would sometimes begin to mimic his way of talking, and when he grew angry asked why he did not draw his knife. But on the other hand he was from the biggest farm, and was the only one that had bullocks in his herd; he was not behind them in physical accomplishments, and none of them could carve as he could. And it was his intention, when he grew big, to thrash them all.

In the meantime he had to accommodate himself to circumstances, ingratiate himself with the big ones, wherever he discovered there was a flaw in their relations to one another, and be obliging. He had to take his turn oftener than the others, and came off badly at mealtimes. He submitted to it as something unavoidable, and directed all his efforts toward getting the best that it was possible to get out of the circumstances; but he promised himself, as has been said, the fullest reparation when he grew big.

Once or twice it became too hot for him, and he left the community and kept by himself; but he soon returned to the others again. His little body was bursting with courage to live the life, and would not let him shirk it; he must take his chance—eat his way through.

One day there came two new boys, who herded cattle from two farms on the other side of the stone-quarry. They were twins, and their names were Alfred and Albinus. They were tall, thin lads, who looked as if they might have been half-starved when they were little; their skin had a bluish tinge, and stood the cold badly. They were quick and active, they could overtake the quickest calf, they could walk on their hands and smoke at the same time, and not only vault but really jump obstacles. They were not much good at fighting; they were lacking in courage, and their ability forsook them in an emergency.

There was something comical about the two brothers. “Here are the twins, the twelvins!” cried the whole flock in greeting, the first morning they appeared. “Well, how many times have you had a baby in your house since last year?” They belonged to a family of twelve, and among these there had twice been twins, and this of itself was an inexhaustible source of raillery; and moreover they were half Swedish. They shared the disadvantage with Pelle.

But nothing seemed to have any effect upon them; they grinned at everything, and gave themselves away still more. From all he saw and heard, Pelle could understand that there was something ridiculous about their home in the eyes of the parish; but they did not mind that. It was the fecundity of their parents that was the special subject of derision, and the two boys quite happily exposed them to ridicule, and would tell all about the most private home matters. One day when the flock had been most persistent in calling “Twelvins!” they said, grinning, that their mother would soon be having a thirteenth. They were incapable of being wounded.

Every time they exposed their parents to ridicule, it hurt Pelle, for his own feelings on this point were the most sacred that he had. Try as he would, he could not understand them; he had to go to his father with the matter one evening.

“So they mock and make fun of their own parents?” said Lasse. “Then they’ll never prosper in this world, for you’re to honor your father and mother. Good parents who have brought them into the world with pain, and must toil hard, perhaps hunger and put up with much themselves, to get food and clothing for them! Oh, it’s a shame! And you say their surname is Karlsson like ours, and that they live on the heath behind the stone-quarry? Then they must be brother Kalle’s sons! Why, bless my soul, if I don’t believe that’s it! You ask them tomorrow if their father hasn’t a notch in his right ear! I did it myself with a piece of a horse-shoe when we were little boys one day I was in a rage with him because he made fun of me before the others. He was just the same as those two, but he didn’t mean anything by it, there was nothing ill-natured about him.”

The boys’ father *had* a notch in his right ear. Pelle and they were thus cousins; and the way that both they and their parents were made fun of was a matter for both laughter and tears. In a way, Father Lasse too came in for a share of the ridicule, and that thought was hardly to be endured.

The other boys quickly discovered Pelle’s vulnerable point, and used it for their own advantage; and Pelle had to give way and put up with things in order to keep his father out of their conversation. He did not always succeed, however. When they were in the mood, they said quite absurd things about one another’s homes. They were not intended to be taken for more than they were worth, but Pelle did not understand jokes on that head. One day one of the biggest boys said to him: “Do you know, your father was the cause of his own mother’s having a child!” Pelle did not understand the play of words in this coarse joke, but he heard the laughter of the others, and becoming blind with rage, he flew at the big boy, and kicked him so hard in the stomach, that he had to keep his bed for several days.

During those days, Pelle went about in fear and trembling. He dared not tell his father what had happened, for then he would be obliged to repeat the boy’s ugly accusation, too; so he went about in dread of the fatal consequences. The other boys had withdrawn themselves from him, so as not to share the blame if anything came of it; the boy was a farmer’s son—the only one in the company—and they had visions of the magistrate at the back of the affair, and perhaps a caning at the town-hall. So Pelle went by himself with his cattle, and had plenty of time to think about the event, which, by the force of his lively imagination, grew larger and larger in its consequences, until at last it almost suffocated him with terror. Every cart he saw driving along the high-road sent a thrill through him; and if it turned up toward Stone Farm, he could distinctly see the policemen—three of them—with large handcuffs, just as they had come to fetch Erik Erikson for ill-treating his wife. He hardly dared drive the cattle home in the evening.

One morning the boy came herding over there with his cattle, and there was a grown-up man with him, whom, from his clothes and everything else about him, Pelle judged to be a farmer—was it the boy’s father? They stood over there for a little while, talking to the herd-boys, and then came across toward him, with the whole pack at their heels, the father holding his son by the hand.

The perspiration started from every pore of Pelle’s body; his fear prompted him to run away, but he stood his ground. Together the father and son made a movement with their hand, and Pelle raised both elbows to ward off a double box-on-the-ears.

But they only extended their hands. “I beg your pardon,” said the boy, taking one of Pelle’s hands; “I beg your pardon,” repeated the father, clasping his other hand in his. Pelle stood in bewilderment, looking from one to the other. At first he thought that the man was the same as the one sent by God; but it was only his eyes—those strange eyes. Then he suddenly burst into tears and forgot all else in the relief they brought from the terrible anxiety. The two spoke a few kind words to him, and quietly went away to let him be alone.

After this Pelle and Peter Kure became friends, and when Pelle learnt to know him better, he discovered that sometimes the boy had a little of the same look in his eyes as his father, and the young fisherman, and the man that was sent by God. The remarkable course that the event had taken occupied his mind for a long time. One day a chance comparison of his experiences brought him to the discovery of the connection between this mysterious expression in their eyes and their remarkable actions; the people who had looked at him with those eyes had all three done unexpected things. And another day it dawned upon him that these people were *religious*; the boys had quarrelled with Peter Kure that day, and had used the word as a term of abuse against his parents.

There was one thing that was apparent, and outweighed everything, even his victory. He had entered the lists with a boy who was bigger and stronger than he, and had held his own, because for the first time in his life he had struck out recklessly. If you wanted to fight, you had to kick wherever it hurt most. If you only did that, and had justice on your side, you might fight anybody, even a farmer’s son. These were two satisfactory discoveries, which for the present nothing could disturb.

Then he had defended his father; that was something quite new and important in his life. He required more space now.

At Michaelmas, the cattle were taken in, and the last of the day-laborers left. During the summer, several changes had been made among the regular servants at the farm, but now, at term-day, none were changed; it was not the habit of Stone Farm to change servants at the regular term-times.

So Pelle again helped his father with the foddering indoors. By rights he should have begun to go to school, and a mild representation of this fact was made to the farmer by the school authorities; but the boy was very useful at home, as the care of the cattle was too much for one man; and nothing more was heard about the matter. Pelle was glad it was put off. He had thought much about school in the course of the summer, and had invested it with so much that was unfamiliar and great that he was now quite afraid of it.

VII

Christmas Eve was a great disappointment. It was the custom for the herd-boys to come out and spend Christmas at the farms where they served in the summer, and Pelle's companions had told him of all the delights of Christmas—roast meat and sweet drinks, Christmas games and ginger-nuts and cakes; it was one endless eating and drinking and playing of Christmas games, from the evening before Christmas Eve until "Saint Knut carried Christmas out," on January 7th. That was what it was like at all the small farms, the only difference being that those who were religious did not play cards, but sang hymns instead. But what they had to eat was just as good.

The last few days before Christmas Pelle had to get up at two or half-past two to help the girls pluck poultry, and the old thatcher Holm to heat the oven. With this his connection with the delights of Christmas came to an end. There was dried cod and boiled rice on Christmas Eve, and it tasted good enough; but of all the rest there was nothing. There were a couple of bottles of brandy on the table for the men, that was all. The men were discontented and quarrelsome. They poured milk and boiled rice into the leg of the stocking that Karna was knitting, so that she was fuming the whole evening; and then sat each with his girl on his knee, and made ill-natured remarks about everything. The old farm-laborers and their wives, who had been invited to partake of the Christmas fare, talked about death and all the ills of the world.

Upstairs there was a large party. All the wife's relations were invited, and they were hard at work on the roast goose. The yard was full of conveyances, and the only one of the farm-servants who was in good spirits was the head man, who received all the tips. Gustav was in a thoroughly bad humor, for Bodil was upstairs helping to wait. He had brought his concertina over, and was playing love-songs. It was putting them into better spirits, and the evil expression was leaving their eyes; one after another they started singing, and it began to be quite comfortable down there. But just then a message came to say that they must make less noise, so the assembly broke up, the old people going home, and the young ones dispersing in couples according to the friendships of the moment.

Lasse and Pelle went to bed.

"What's Christmas really for?" asked Pelle.

Lasse rubbed his thigh reflectively.

"It has to be," he answered hesitatingly. "Yes, and then it's the time when the year turns round and goes upward, you see! And of course it's the night when the Child Jesus was born, too!" It took him a long time to produce this last reason, but when it did come it was with perfect assurance. "Taking one thing with another, you see," he added, after a short pause.

On the day after Christmas Day there was a kind of subscription merrymaking at an enterprising crofter's down in the village; it was to cost two and a half krones a couple for music, sandwiches, and spirits in the middle of the night, and coffee toward morning. Gustav and Bodil were going. Pelle at any rate saw a little of Christmas as it passed, and was as interested in it as if it concerned himself; and he gave Lasse no rest from his questions that day. So Bodil was still faithful to Gustav, after all!

When they got up the next morning, they found Gustav lying on the ground by the cow-stable door, quite helpless, and his good clothes in a sad state. Bodil was not with him. "Then she's deceived him," said Lasse, as they helped him in. "Poor boy! Only seventeen, and a wounded heart already! The women'll be his ruin one of these days, you'll see!"

At midday, when the farm-laborers' wives came to do the milking, Lasse's supposition was confirmed: Bodil had attached herself to a tailor's apprentice from the village, and had left with him in the middle of the night. They laughed pityingly at Gustav, and for some time after he had to put up with their gibes at his ill-success; but there was only one opinion about Bodil. She was at liberty to come and go with whomsoever she liked, but as long as Gustav was paying for her amusements, she ought to have kept to him. Who but the neighbor would keep the hens that ate their grain at home and laid their eggs at the neighbor's?

There had as yet been no opportunity to visit Lasse's brother beyond the stone-quarry, but it was to be done on the second day of the new year. Between Christmas and the New Year the men did nothing after dark, and it was the custom everywhere to help the herdsman with his evening occupations. There was nothing of that here; Lasse was too old to assert himself, and Pelle too little. They might think themselves lucky they did not have to do the foddering for the men who went out as well as their own.

But to-day it was to come off; Gustav and Long Ole had undertaken to do the evening work. Pelle began to look forward to it as soon as he was up—he was up every day by half-past three. But as Lasse used to say, if you sing before breakfast you'll weep before night.

After dinner, Gustav and Ole were standing grinding chopping knives down in the lower yard. The trough leaked, and Pelle had to pour water on the grindstone out of an old kettle. His happiness could be seen on his face.

"What are you so pleased about?" asked Gustav. "Your eyes are shining like the cat's in the dark."

Pelle told him.

"I'm afraid you won't get away!" said Ole, winking at Gustav. "We shan't get the chaff cut time enough to do the foddering. This grindstone's so confoundedly hard to turn, too. If only that handle-turner hadn't been broken!"

Pelle pricked up his ears. "Handle-turner? What's that?" he asked.

Gustav sprang round the grindstone, and slapped his thigh in enjoyment of the joke.

"My goodness, how stupid you are! Don't you even know what a handle-turner is? It's a thing you only need to put on to the grindstone, and it turns it by itself. They've got one by-the-way over at Kaase Farm," he said, turning to Ole; "if only it wasn't so far away."

"Is it heavy?" asked Pelle, in a low voice; everything depended upon the answer. "Can I lift it?" His voice trembled.

"Oh, no, not so awfully heavy. You could carry it quite well. But you'd have to be very careful."

"I can run over and fetch it; I'll carry it very carefully." Pelle looked at them with a face that could not but inspire confidence.

"Very well; but take a sack with you to put it in. And you'll have to be as careful as the very devil, for it's an expensive thing."

Pelle found a sack and ran off across the fields. He was as delighted as a young kid, plucking at himself and everything as he ran, and jumping aside to frighten the crows. He was overflowing with happiness. He was saving the expedition for himself and Father Lasse. Gustav and Ole were good men! He would get back as quickly as possible, so that they should not have to toil any more at the grindstone. "What, are you back already?" they would say, and open their eyes. "Then you must have smashed that precious machine on the way!" And they would take it carefully out of the sack, and it would be quite safe and sound. "Well, you are a wonder of a boy! a perfect prince!" they would say.

When he got to Kaase Farm, they wanted him to go in to a Christmas meal while they were putting the machine into the sack; but Pelle said "No" and held to it: he had not time. So they gave him a piece of cold apple out on the steps, so that he should not carry Christmas away. They all looked so pleasant, and every one came out when he hoisted the sack on his back and set off home. They too recommended him to be very careful, and seemed anxious, as if he could hardly realize what he was carrying.

It was a good mile between the farms, but it was an hour and a half before Pelle reached home, and then he was ready to drop. He dared not put down the sack to rest, but stumbled on step by step, only resting once by leaning against a stone fence. When at last he staggered into the yard, every one came up to see the neighbor's new handle-turner; and Pelle was conscious of his own importance when Ole carefully lifted the sack from his back. He leaned for a moment over toward the wall before he regained his balance; the ground was so strange to tread upon now he was rid of his burden; it pushed him away. But his face was radiant.

Gustav opened the sack, which was securely closed, and shook out its contents upon the stone pavement. They were pieces of brick, a couple of old ploughshares, and other similar things. Pelle stared in bewilderment and fear at the rubbish, looking as if he had just dropped from another planet; but when laughter broke out on all sides, he understood what it all meant, and, crouching down, hid his face in his hands. He would not cry—not for the world; they should not have that satisfaction. He was sobbing in his heart, but he kept his lips tightly closed. His body tingled with rage. The beasts! The wicked devils! Suddenly he kicked Gustav on the leg.

"Aha, so he kicks, does he?" exclaimed Gustav, lifting him up into the air. "Do you want to see a little imp from Smaaland?" Pelle covered his face with his arms and kicked to be let down; and he also made an attempt to bite. "Eh, and he bites, too, the little devil!" Gustav had to hold him firmly so as to manage him. He held him by the collar, pressing his knuckles against the boy's throat and making him gasp, while he spoke with derisive gentleness. "A clever youngster, this! He's scarcely out of long clothes, and wants to fight already!" Gustav went on tormenting him; it looked as if he were making a display of his superior strength.

"Well, now we've seen that you're the strongest," said the head man at last, "so let him go!" and when Gustav did not respond immediately, he received a blow from a clenched fist between his shoulder-blades. Then the boy was released, and went over to the stable to Lasse, who had seen the whole thing, but had not dared to approach. He could do nothing, and his presence would only have done harm.

"Yes, and then there's our outing, laddie," he explained, by way of excuse, while he was comforting the boy. "I could very well thrash a puppy like Gustav, but if I did we shouldn't get away this evening, for he wouldn't do our work. And none of the others, either, for they all stick together like burrs. But you can do it yourself! I verily believe you'd kick the devil himself, right on his club-foot! Well, well, it was well done; but you must be careful not to waste your powder and shot. It doesn't pay!"

The boy was not so easily comforted now. Deep down in his heart the remembrance of his injury lay and pained him, because he had acted in such good faith, and they had wounded him in his ready, cheerful confidence. What had happened had also stung his pride; he had walked into a trap, made a fool of himself for them. The incident burnt into his soul, and greatly influenced his subsequent development. He had already found out that a person's word was not always to be relied upon, and he had made awkward attempts to get behind it. Now he would trust nobody straight away any more; and he had discovered how the secret was to be found out. You only had to look at people's eyes when they said anything. Both here and at Kaase Farm the people had looked so strange about the handle-turner, as if they were laughing inside. And the bailiff had laughed that time when he promised them roast pork and stewed rhubarb every day. They hardly ever got anything but herring and porridge. People talked with two tongues; Father Lasse was the only one who did not do it.

Pelle began to be observant of his own face. It was the face that spoke, and that was why it went badly with him when he tried to escape a thrashing by telling a white lie. And to-day's misfortune had been the fault of his face; if you felt happy, you mustn't show it. He had discovered the danger of letting his mind lie open, and his small organism set to work diligently to grow hard skin to draw over its vital parts.

After supper they set off across the fields, hand in hand as usual. As a rule, Pelle chattered unceasingly when they were by themselves; but this evening he was quieter. The event of the afternoon was still in his mind, and the coming visit gave him a feeling of solemnity.

Lasse carried a red bundle in his hand, in which was a bottle of black-currant rum, which they had got Per Olsen to buy in the town the day before, when he had been in to swear himself free. It had cost sixty-six öres, and Pelle was turning something over in his mind, but did not know whether it would do.

"Father!" he said at last. "Mayn't I carry that a little way?"

"Gracious! Are you crazy, boy? It's an expensive article! And you might drop it."

"I wouldn't drop it. Well, only hold it for a little then? Mayn't I, father? Oh do, father!"

"Eh, what an idea! I don't know what you'll be like soon, if you aren't stopped! Upon my word, I think you must be ill, you're getting so tiresome!" And Lasse went on crossly for a little while, but then stopped and bent down over the boy.

"Hold it then, you little silly, but be very careful! And you mustn't move a single step while you've got it, mind!"

Pelle clasped the bottle to his body with his arms, for he dared not trust his hands, and pushed out his stomach as far as possible to support it. Lasse stood with his hands extended beneath the bottle, ready to catch it if it fell.

“There! That’ll do!” he said anxiously, and took the bottle.

“It *is* heavy!” said Pelle, admiringly, and went on contentedly, holding his father’s hand.

“But why had he to swear himself free?” he suddenly asked.

“Because he was accused by a girl of being the father of her child. Haven’t you heard about it?”

Pelle nodded. “Isn’t he, then? Everybody says he is.”

“I can hardly believe it; it would be certain damnation for Per Olsen. But, of course, the girl says it’s him and no one else. Ah me! Girls are dangerous playthings! You must take care when your time comes, for they can bring misfortune upon the best of men.”

“How do you swear, then? Do you say ‘Devil take me’?”

Lasse could not help laughing. “No, indeed! That wouldn’t be very good for those that swear false. No, you see, in the court all God’s highest ministers are sitting round a table that’s exactly like a horseshoe, and beyond that again there’s an altar with the crucified Christ Himself upon it. On the altar lies a big, big book that’s fastened to the wall with an iron chain, so that the devil can’t carry it off in the night, and that’s God’s Holy Word. When a man swears, he lays his left hand upon the book, and holds up his right hand with three fingers in the air; they’re God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. But if he swears false, the Governor can see it at once, because then there are red spots of blood on the leaves of the book.”

“And what then?” asked Pelle, with deep interest.

“Well, then his three fingers wither, and it goes on eating itself into his body. People like that suffer frightfully; they rot right away.”

“Don’t they go to hell, then?”

“Yes, they do that too, except when they give themselves up and take their punishment, and then they escape in the next life; but they can’t escape withering away.”

“Why doesn’t the Governor take them himself and punish them, when he can see in that book that they swore false?”

“Why, because then they’d get off going to hell, and there’s an agreement with Satan that he’s to have all those that don’t give themselves up, don’t you see?”

Pelle shuddered, and for a little while walked on in silence beside his father; but when he next spoke, he had forgotten all about it.

“I suppose Uncle Kalle’s rich, isn’t he?” he asked.

“He can’t be rich, but he’s a land-owner, and that’s not a little thing!” Lasse himself had never attained to more than renting land.

“When I grow up, I mean to have a great big farm,” said Pelle, with decision.

“Yes, I’ve no doubt you will,” said Lasse, laughing. Not that he also did not expect something great of the boy, if not exactly a large farmer. There was no saying, however. Perhaps some farmer’s daughter might fall in love with him; the men of his family generally had an attraction for women. Several of them had given proof of it—his brother, for instance, who had taken the fancy of a parson’s wife. Then Pelle would have to make the most of his opportunity so that the family would be ashamed to oppose the match. And Pelle was good enough. He had that “cow’s-lick” on his forehead, fine hair at the back of his neck, and a birth-mark on his hip; and that all betokened luck. Lasse went on talking to himself as he walked, calculating the boy’s future with large, round figures, that yielded a little for him too; for, however great his future might be, it would surely come in time to allow of Lasse’s sharing and enjoying it in his very old age.

They went across country toward the stone-quarry, following stone dikes and snow-filled ditches, and working their way through the thicket of blackthorn and juniper, behind which lay the rocks and “the Heath.” They made their way right into the quarry, and tried in the darkness to find the place where the dross was thrown, for that would be where the stone-breaking went on.

A sound of hammering came from the upper end of the ground, and they discovered lights in several places. Beneath a sloping straw screen, from which hung a lantern, sat a little, broad man, hammering away at the fragments. He worked with peculiar vivacity—struck three blows and pushed the stones to one side, another three blows, and again to one side; and while with one hand he pushed the pieces away, with the other he placed a fresh fragment in position on the stone. It went as busily and evenly as the ticking of a watch.

"Why, if that isn't Brother Kalle sitting there!" said Lasse, in a voice of surprise as great as if the meeting were a miracle from heaven. "Good evening, Kalle Karlsson! How are you?"

The stone-breaker looked up.

"Oh, there you are, brother!" he said, rising with difficulty; and the two greeted one another as if they had met only the day before. Kalle collected his tools and laid the screen down upon them while they talked.

"So you break stones too? Does that bring in anything?" asked Lasse.

"Oh, not very much. We get twelve krones a 'fathom' and when I work with a lantern morning and evening, I can break half a fathom in a week. It doesn't pay for beer, but we live anyhow. But it's awfully cold work; you can't keep warm at it, and you get so stiff with sitting fifteen hours on the cold stone—as stiff as if you were the father of the whole world." He was walking stiffly in front of the others across the heath toward a low, hump-backed cottage.

"Ah, there comes the moon, now there's no use for it!" said Kalle, whose spirits were beginning to rise. "And, my word, what a sight the old dormouse looks! He must have been at a New Year's feast in heaven."

"You're the same merry devil that you were in the old days," said Lasse.

"Well, good spirits'll soon be the only thing to be had without paying for."

The wall of the house stuck out in a large round lump on one side, and Pelle had to go up to it to feel it all over. It was most mysterious what there might be on the other side—perhaps a secret chamber? He pulled his father's hand inquiringly.

"That? That's the oven where they bake their bread," said Lasse. "It's put there to make more room."

After inviting them to enter, Kalle put his head in at a door that led from the kitchen to the cowshed. "Hi, Maria! You must put your best foot foremost!" he called in a low voice. "The midwife's here!"

"What in the world does she want? It's a story, you old fool!" And the sound of milk squirting into the pail began again.

"A story, is it? No, but you must come in and go to bed; she says it's high time you did. You are keeping up much too long this year. Mind what you say," he whispered into the cowshed, "for she is really here! And be quick!"

They went into the room, and Kalle went groping about to light a candle. Twice he took up the matches and dropped them again to light it at the fire, but the peat was burning badly. "Oh, bother!" he said, resolutely striking a match at last. "We don't have visitors every day."

"Your wife's Danish," said Lasse, admiringly. "And you've got a cow too?"

"Yes, it's a biggish place here," said Kalle, drawing himself up. "There's a cat belonging to the establishment too, and as many rats as it cares to eat."

His wife now appeared, breathless, and looking in astonishment at the visitors.

"Yes, the midwife's gone again," said Kalle. "She hadn't time to-day; we must put it off till another time. But these are important strangers, so you must blow your nose with your fingers before you give them your hand!"

"Oh, you old humbug! You can't take me in. It's Lasse, of course, and Pelle!" And she held out her hand. She was short, like her husband, was always smiling, and had bowed arms and legs just as he had. Hard work and their cheerful temperament gave them both a rotund appearance.

"There are no end of children here," said Lasse, looking about him. There were three in the turn-up bedstead under the window—two small ones at one end, and a long, twelve-year-old boy at the other, his black feet sticking out between the little girls' heads; and other beds were made up on chairs, in an old kneading-trough, and on the floor.

"Ye-es; we've managed to scrape together a few," said Kalle, running about in vain to get something for his visitors to sit upon; everything was being used as beds. "You'll have to spit on the floor and sit down on that," he said, laughing.

His wife came in, however, with a washing-bench and an empty beer-barrel.

"Sit you down and rest," she said, placing the seats round the table. "And you must really excuse it, but the children must be somewhere."

Kalle squeezed himself in and sat down upon the edge of the turn-up bedstead. “Yes, we’ve managed to scrape together a few,” he repeated. “You must provide for your old age while you have the strength. We’ve made up the dozen, and started on the next. It wasn’t exactly our intention, but mother’s gone and taken us in.” He scratched the back of his head, and looked the picture of despair.

His wife was standing in the middle of the room. “Let’s hope it won’t be twins this time too,” she said, laughing.

“Why, that would be a great saving, as we shall have to send for the midwife anyhow. People say of mother,” he went on, “that when she’s put the children to bed she has to count them to make sure they’re all there; but that’s not true, because she can’t count farther than ten.”

Here a baby in the alcove began to cry, and the mother took it up and seated herself on the edge of the turn-up bedstead to nurse it. “And this is the smallest,” he said, holding it out toward Lasse, who put a crooked finger down its neck.

“What a little fatty!” he said softly; he was fond of children. “And what’s its name?”

“She’s called Dozena Endina, because when she came we thought that was to be the last; and she was the twelfth too.”

“Dozena Endina! That’s a mighty fine name!” exclaimed Lasse. “It sounds exactly as if she might be a princess.”

“Yes, and the one before’s called Ellen—from eleven, of course. That’s her in the kneading-trough,” said Kalle. “The one before that again is Tentius, and then Nina, and Otto. The ones before that weren’t named in that way, for we hadn’t thought then that there’d be so many. But that’s all mother’s fault; if she only puts a patch on my working-trousers, things go wrong at once.”

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself, trying to get out of it like that,” said his wife, shaking her finger at him. “But as for that,” she went on, turning to Lasse, “I’m sure the others have nothing to complain of either, as far as their names are concerned. Albert, Anna, Alfred, Albinus, Anton, Alma and Alvilda—let me see, yes, that’s the lot. None of them can say they’ve not been treated fairly. Father was all for A at that time; they were all to rhyme with A. Poetry’s always come so easy to him.” She looked admiringly at her husband.

Kalle blinked his eyes in bashfulness. “No, but it’s the first letter, you see, and it sounds pretty,” he said modestly.

“Isn’t he clever to think of a thing like that? He ought to have been a student. Now *my* head would never have been any good for anything of that sort. He wanted, indeed, to have the names both begin and end with A, but that wouldn’t do with the boys, so he had to give that up. But then he hasn’t had any book-learning either.”

“Oh, that’s too bad, mother! I didn’t give it up. I’d made up a name for the first boy that had A at the end too; but then the priest and the clerk objected, and I had to let it go. They objected to Dozena Endina too, but I put my foot down; for I can be angry if I’m irritated too long. I’ve always liked to have some connection and meaning in everything; and it’s not a bad idea to have something that those who look deeper can find out. Now, have you noticed anything special about two of these names?”

“No,” answered Lasse hesitatingly, “I don’t know that I have. But I haven’t got a head for that sort of thing either.”

“Well, look here! Anna and Otto are exactly the same, whether you read them forward or backward—exactly the same. I’ll just show you.” He took down a child’s slate that was hanging on the wall with a stump of slate-pencil, and began laboriously to write the names. “Now, look at this, brother!”

“I can’t read,” said Lasse, shaking his head hopelessly. “Does it really give the same both ways? The deuce! That *is* remarkable!” He could not get over his astonishment.

“But now comes something that’s still more remarkable,” said Kalle, looking over the top of the slate at his brother with the gaze of a thinker surveying the universe. “Otto, which can be read from both ends, means, of course, eight; but if I draw the figure 8, it can be turned upside down, and still be the same. Look here!” He wrote the figure eight.

Lasse turned the slate up and down, and peered at it.

“Yes, upon my word, it is the same! Just look here, Pelle! It’s like the cat that always comes down upon its feet, no matter how you drop it. Lord bless my soul! how nice it must be to be able to spell! How did you learn it, brother?”

“Oh,” said Kalle, in a tone of superiority. “I’ve sat and looked on a little when mother's been teaching the children their ABC. It's nothing at all if your upper story's all right."

"Pelle'll be going to school soon," said Lasse reflectively. "And then perhaps *I* could—for it would be nice. But I don't suppose I've got the head for it, do you? No, I'm sure I haven't got the head for it," he repeated in quite a despairing tone.

Kalle did not seem inclined to contradict him, but Pelle made up his mind that some day he would teach his father to read and write—much better than Uncle Kalle could.

"But we're quite forgetting that we brought a Christmas bottle with us!" said Lasse, untying the handkerchief.

"You *are* a fellow!" exclaimed Kalle, walking delightedly round the table on which the bottle stood. "You couldn't have given us anything better, brother; it'll come in handy for the christening-party. 'Black Currant Rum'—and with a gold border—how grand!" He held the label up toward the light, and looked round with pleasure in his eyes. Then he hesitatingly opened the cupboard in the wall.

"The visitors ought to taste what they brought," said his wife.

"That's just what was bothering me!" said Kalle, turning round with a disconsolate laugh. "For they ought, of course. But if the cork's once drawn, you know how it disappears." He reached out slowly for the corkscrew which hung on a nail.

But Lasse would not hear of it; he would not taste the beverage for the world. Was black-currant rum a thing for a poor beggar like him to begin drinking—and on a weekday, too? No, indeed!

"Yes, and you'll be coming to the christening-party, you two, of course," said Kalle, relieved, putting the bottle into the cupboard. "But we'll have a 'cuckoo,' for there's a drop of spirits left from Christmas Eve, and I expect mother'll give us coffee."

"I've got the coffee on," answered his wife cheerfully.

"Did you ever know such a wife! You can never wish for anything but what it's there already!"

Pelle wondered where his two herding-comrades, Alfred and Albinus, were. They were away at their summer places, taking their share of the good Christmas fare, and would not be back before "Knut." "But this fellow here's not to be despised," said Kalle, pointing to the long boy in the turn-up bed. "Shall we have a look at him?" And, pulling out a straw, he tickled the boy's nose with it. "Get up, my good Anton, and harness the horses to the wheelbarrow! We're going to drive out in state."

The boy sat up and began to rub his eyes, to Kalle's great delight. At last he discovered that there were strangers present, and drew on his clothes, which had been doing duty as his pillow. Pelle and he became good friends at once, and began to play; and then Kalle hit upon the idea of letting the other children share in the merry-making, and he and the two boys went round and tickled them awake, all the six. His wife protested, but only faintly; she was laughing all the time, and herself helped them to dress, while she kept on saying: "Oh, what foolishness! Upon my word, I never knew the like of it! Then this one shan't be left out either!" she added suddenly, drawing the youngest out of the alcove.

"Then that's the eight," said Kalle, pointing to the flock. "They fill the room well, don't they? Alma and Alvilda are twins, as you can see. And so are Alfred and Albinus, who are away now for Christmas. They're going to be confirmed next summer, so they'll be off my hands."

"Then where are the two eldest?" asked Lasse.

"Anna's in service in the north, and Albert's at sea, out with a whaler just now. He's a fine fellow. He sent us his portrait in the autumn. Won't you show it us, Maria?"

His wife began slowly to look for it, but could not find it.

"I think I know where it is, mother," said one of the little girls over and over again; but as no one heard what she said, she climbed up on to the bench, and took down an old Bible from the shelf. The photograph was in it.

"He is a fine fellow, and no mistake!" said Lasse. "There's a pair of shoulders! He's not like our family; it must be from yours, Maria, that he's got that carriage."

"He's a Kongstrup," said Kalle, in a low tone.

"Oh, indeed, is he?" said Lasse hesitatingly, recollecting Johanna Pihl's story.

"Maria was housemaid at the farm, and he talked her over as he has done with so many. It was before my time, and he did what he ought."

Maria was standing looking from one to the other of them with a meaningless smile, but her forehead was flushed.

“There’s gentle blood in that boy,” said Kalle admiringly. “He holds his head differently from the others. And he’s good—so tremendously good.” Maria came slowly up to him, leaned her arm upon his shoulder, and looked at the picture with him. “He is good, isn’t he, mother?” said Kalle, stroking her face.

“And so well-dressed he is too!” exclaimed Lasse.

“Yes, he takes care of his money. He’s not dissipated, like his father; and he’s not afraid of parting with a ten-krone note when he’s at home here on a visit.”

There was a rustling at the inner door, and a little, wrinkled old woman crept out onto the threshold, feeling her way with her feet, and holding her hands before her face to protect it. “Is any one dead?” she asked as she faced the room.

“Why, there’s grandmother!” said Kalle. “I thought you’d be in your bed.”

“And so I was, but then I heard there were strangers here, and one likes to hear the news. Have there been any deaths in the parish?”

“No, grandmother, there haven’t. People have something better to do than to die. Here’s some one come to court you, and that’s much better. This is mother-in-law,” he said, turning to the others; “so you can guess what she’s like.”

“Just you come here, and I’ll mother-in-law you!” said the old lady, with a feeble attempt to enter into the gaiety. “Well, welcome to this house then,” she said, extending her hand.

Kalle stretched his out first, but as soon as she touched it, she pushed it aside, saying: “Do you think I don’t know you, you fool?” She felt Lasse’s and Pelle’s hands for a long time with her soft fingers before she let them go. “No, I don’t know you!” she said.

“It’s Brother Lasse and his son down from Stone Farm,” Kalle informed her at last.

“Aye, is it really? Well, I never! And you’ve come over the sea too! Well, here am I, an old body, going about here quite alone; and I’ve lost my sight too.”

“But you’re not *quite* alone, grandmother,” said Kalle, laughing. “There are two grown-ups and half a score of children about you all day long.”

“Ah yes, you can say what you like, but all those I was young with are dead now, and many others that I’ve seen grow up. Every week some one that I know dies, and here am I still living, only to be a burden to others.”

Kalle brought in the old lady’s arm-chair from her room, and made her sit down. “What’s all that nonsense about?” he said reproachfully. “Why, you pay for yourself!”

“Pay! Oh dear! They get twenty krones a year for keeping me,” said the old woman to the company in general.

The coffee came in, and Kalle poured brandy into the cups of all the elder people. “Now, grandmother, you must cheer up!” he said, touching her cup with his. “Where the pot boils for twelve, it boils for the thirteenth as well. Your health, grandmother, and may you still live many years to be a burden to us, as you call it!”

“Yes, I know it so well, I know it so well,” said the old woman, rocking backward and forward. “You mean so well by it all. But with so little wish to live, it’s hard that I should take the food out of the others’ mouths. The cow eats, and the cat eats, the children eat, we all eat; and where are you, poor things, to get it all from!”

“Say ‘poor thing’ to him who has no head, and pity him who has two,” said Kalle gaily.

“How much land have you?” asked Lasse.

“Five acres; but it’s most of it rock.”

“Can you manage to feed the cow on it then?”

“Last year it was pretty bad. We had to pull the roof off the outhouse, and use it for fodder last winter; and it’s thrown us back a little. But dear me, it made the loft all the higher.” Kalle laughed. “And now there’ll always be more and more of the children getting able to keep themselves.”

“Don’t those who are grown up give a hand too?” asked Lasse.

“How can they? When you’re young, you can use what you’ve got yourself. They must take their pleasures while there’s time; they hadn’t many while they were children, and once they’re married and settled they’ll have something else to think about. Albert is good enough when he's at home on a visit; last time he gave us ten krones and a krone to each of the children. But when they're out, you know how the money goes if they don't want to look mean beside their companions. Anna's one of those who can spend all they get on clothes. She's willing enough to do without, but she never has a farthing, and hardly a rag to her body, for all that she's for ever buying."

"No, she's the strangest creature," said her mother. "She never can make anything do."

The turn-up bedstead was shut to give room to sit round the table, and an old pack of cards was produced. Every one was to play except the two smallest, who were really too little to grasp a card; Kalle wanted, indeed, to have them too, but it could not be managed. They played beggar-my-neighbor and Black Peter. Grandmother's cards had to be read out to her.

The conversation still went on among the elder people.

"How do you like working for the farmer at Stone Farm?" asked Kalle.

"We don't see much of the farmer himself; he's pretty nearly always out, or sleeping after a night on the loose. But he's nice enough in other ways; and it's a house where they feed you properly."

"Well, there are places where the food's worse," said Kalle, "but there can't be many. Most of them, certainly, are better."

"Are they really?" asked Lasse, in surprise. "Well, I don't complain as far as the food's concerned; but there's a little too much for us two to do, and then it's so miserable to hear that woman crying nearly the whole time. I wonder if he ill-treats her; they say not."

"I'm sure he doesn't," said Kalle. "Even if he wanted to—as you can very well understand he might—he dursn't. He's afraid of her, for she's possessed by a devil, you know."

"They say she's a were-wolf at night," said Lasse, looking as if he expected to see a ghost in one of the corners.

"She's a poor body, who has her own troubles," said Maria, "and every woman knows a little what that means. And the farmer's not all kindness either, even if he doesn't beat her. She feels his unfaithfulness more than she'd feel anything else."

"Oh, you wives always take one another's part," said Kalle, "but other people have eyes too. What do *you* say, grandmother? You know that better than any one else."

"Well, I know something about it at any rate," said the old woman. "I remember the time when Kongstrup came to the island as well as if it had been yesterday. He owned nothing more than the clothes he wore, but he was a fine gentleman for all that, and lived in Copenhagen."

"What did he want over here?" asked Lasse.

"What did he want? To look for a young girl with money, I suppose. He wandered about on the heath here with his gun, but it wasn't foxes he was after. She was fooling about on the heath too, admiring the wild scenery, and nonsense like that, and behaving half like a man, instead of being kept at home and taught to spin and make porridge; but she was the only daughter, and was allowed to go on just as she liked. And then she meets this spark from the town, and they become friends. He was a curate or a pope, or something of the sort, so you can't wonder that the silly girl didn't know what she was doing."

"No, indeed!" said Lasse.

"There's always been something all wrong with the women of that family," the old woman continued. "They say one of them once gave herself to Satan, and since then he's had a claim upon them and ill-treats them whenever the moon's waning, whether they like it or not. He has no power over the pure, of course; but when these two had got to know one another, things went wrong with her too. He must have noticed it, and tried to get off, for they said that the old farmer of Stone Farm compelled him with his gun to take her for his wife; and he was a hard old dog, who'd have shot a man down as soon as look at him. But he was a peasant through and through, who wore home-woven clothes, and wasn't afraid of working from sunrise to sunset. It wasn't like what it is now, with debts and drinking and card-playing, so people had something then."

"Well, now they'd like to thresh the corn while it's still standing, and they sell the calves before they're born," said Kalle. "But I say, grandmother, you're Black Peter!"

"That comes of letting one's tongue run on and forgetting to look after one's self!" said the old lady.

"Grandmother's got to have her face blacked!" cried the children. She begged to be let off, as she was just washed for the night; but the children blacked a cork in the stove and surrounded her, and she was given a black streak down her nose. Every one laughed, both old and young, and grandmother laughed with them, saying it was a good thing she could not see it herself. “It’s an ill wind,” she said, “that blows nobody any good. But I should like to have my sight again,” she went on, “if it’s only for five minutes, before I die. It would be nice to see it all once more, now that the trees and everything have grown so, as Kalle says they have. The whole country must have changed. And I’ve never seen the youngest children at all.”

“They say that they can take blindness away over in Copenhagen,” said Kalle to his brother.

“It would cost a lot of money, wouldn’t it?” asked Lasse.

“It would cost a hundred krones at the very least,” the grandmother remarked.

Kalle looked thoughtful. “If we were to sell the whole blooming thing, it would be funny if there wasn’t a hundred krones over. And then grandmother could have her sight again.”

“Goodness gracious me!” exclaimed the old woman. “Sell your house and home! You must be out of your mind! Throw away a large capital upon an old, worn-out thing like me, that has one foot in the grave! I couldn’t wish for anything better than what I have!” She had tears in her eyes. “Pray God I mayn’t bring about such a misfortune in my old age!”

“Oh, rubbish! We’re still young,” said Kalle. “We could very well begin something new, Maria and me.”

“Have none of you heard how Jacob Kristian’s widow is?” asked the old lady by way of changing the subject. “I’ve got it into my head that she’ll go first, and then me. I heard the crow calling over there last night.”

“That’s our nearest neighbor on the heath,” explained Kalle. “Is she failing now? There’s been nothing the matter with her this winter that I know of.”

“Well, you may be sure there’s something,” said the old woman positively. “Let one of the children run over there in the morning.”

“Yes, if you’ve had warning. Jacob Kristian gave good enough warning himself when he went and died. But we were good friends for many years, he and me.”

“Did he show himself?” asked Lasse solemnly.

“No; but one night—nasty October weather it was—I was woke by a knocking at the outside door. That’s a good three years ago. Maria heard it too, and we lay and talked about whether I should get up. We got no further than talking, and we were just dropping off again, when the knocking began again. I jumped up, put on a pair of trousers, and opened the door a crack, but there was no one there. ‘That’s strange!’ I said to Maria, and got into bed again; but I’d scarcely got the clothes over me, when there was a knocking for the third time.

“I was cross then, and lighted the lantern and went round the house; but there was nothing either to be seen or heard. But in the morning there came word to say that Jacob Kristian had died in the night just at that time.”

Pelle, who had sat and listened to the conversation, pressed close up to his father in fear; but Lasse himself did not look particularly valiant. “It’s not always nice to have anything to do with the dead,” he said.

“Oh, nonsense! If you’ve done no harm to any one, and given everybody their due, what can they do to you?” said Kalle. The grandmother said nothing, but sat shaking her head very significantly.

Maria now placed upon the table a jar of dripping and a large loaf of rye-bread.

“That’s the goose,” said Kalle, merrily sticking his sheath-knife into the loaf. “We haven’t begun it yet. There are prunes inside. And that’s goose-fat. Help yourselves!”

After that Lasse and Pelle had to think about getting home, and began to tie handkerchiefs round their necks; but the others did not want to let them go yet. They went on talking, and Kalle made jokes to keep them a little longer. But suddenly he turned as grave as a judge; there was a low sound of crying out in the little passage, and some one took hold of the handle of the door and let go of it again. “Upon my word, it’s ghosts!” he exclaimed, looking fearfully from one to another.

The sound of crying was heard again, and Maria, clasping her hands together, exclaimed: “Why, it’s Anna!” and quickly opened the door. Anna entered in tears, and was attacked on all sides with surprised inquiries, to which her sobs were her only answer.

“And you’ve been given a holiday to come and see us at Christmas time, and you come home crying! You are a nice one!” said Kalle, laughing. “You must give her something to suck, mother!”

“I’ve lost my place,” the girl at last got out between her sobs.

“No, surely not!” exclaimed Kalle, in changed tones. “But what for? Have you been stealing? Or been impudent?”

“No, but the master accused me of being too thick with his son.”

In a flash the mother’s eyes darted from the girl’s face to her figure, and she too burst into tears.

Kalle could see nothing, but he caught his wife’s action and understood. “Oh!” he said quietly. “Is that it?” The little man was like a big child in the way the different expressions came and went upon his good-natured face. At last the smile triumphed again. “Well, well, that’s capital!” he exclaimed, laughing. “Shouldn’t good children take the work off their parents’ shoulders as they grow up and are able to do it? Take off your things, Anna, and sit down. I expect you’re hungry, aren’t you? And it couldn’t have happened at a better time, as we’ve got to have the midwife anyhow!”

Lasse and Pelle drew their neckerchiefs up over their mouths after taking leave of every one in the room, Kalle circling round them restlessly, and talking eagerly. “Come again soon, you two, and thanks for this visit and your present, Brother Lasse! Oh, yes!” he said suddenly at the outside door, and laughed delightedly; “it’ll be something grand—brother-in-law to the farmer in a way! Oh, fie, Kalle Karlsson! You and I’ll be giving ourselves airs now!” He went a little way along the path with them, talking all the time. Lasse was quite melancholy over it.

Pelle knew quite well that what had happened to Anna was looked upon as a great disgrace, and could not understand how Uncle Kalle could seem so happy. “Ah, yes,” said Lasse, as they stumbled along among the stones. “Kalle’s just like what he always was! He laughs where others would cry.”

It was too dark to go across the fields, so they took the quarry road south to get down to the high-road. At the cross-roads, the fourth arm of which led down to the village, stood the country-shop, which was also a hedge-alehouse.

As they approached the alehouse, they heard a great noise inside. Then the door burst open, and some men poured out, rolling the figure of a man before them on the ground. “The police have taken them by surprise!” said Lasse, and drew the boy with him out into the ploughed field, so as to get past without being seen. But at that moment some one placed a lamp in the window, and they were discovered.

“There’s the Stone Farm herdsman!” said a voice. “Hi, Lasse! Come here!” They went up and saw a man lying face downward on the ground, kicking; his hands were tied behind his back, and he could not keep his face out of the mud.

“Why, it’s Per Olsen!” exclaimed Lasse.

“Yes, of course!” said the shopkeeper. “Can’t you take him home with you? He’s not right in his head.”

Lasse looked hesitatingly at the boy, and then back again. “A raving man?” he said. “We two can’t alone.”

“Oh, his hands are tied. You’ve only got to hold the end of the rope and he’ll go along quietly with you,” said one of the men. They were quarrymen from the stone-quarry. “You’ll go with them quietly, won’t you?” he asked, giving the man a kick in the side with the toe of his wooden shoe.

“Oh dear! Oh dear!” groaned Per Olsen.

“What’s he done?” asked Lasse. “And why have you ill-used him so?”

“We had to thrash him a little, because he was going to chop off one of his thumbs. He tried it several times, the beast, and got it half off; and we had to beat him to make him stop.” And they showed Lasse the man’s thumb, which was bleeding. “Such an animal to begin cutting and hacking at himself because he’s drunk half a pint of gin! If he wanted to fight, there were men enough here without that!”

“It must be tied up, or he’ll bleed to death, poor fellow!” said Lasse, slowly drawing out his red pocket-handkerchief. It was his best handkerchief, and it had just been washed. The shopkeeper came with a bottle and poured spirit over the thumb, so that the cold should not get into it. The wounded man screamed and beat his face upon the ground.

“Won’t one of you come with us?” asked Lasse. But no one answered; they wanted to have nothing to do with it, in case it should come to the ears of the magistrate. “Well, then, we two must do it with God’s help,” he said, in a trembling voice, turning to Pelle. “But you can help him up at any rate, as you knocked him down.”

They lifted him up. His face was bruised and bleeding; in their eagerness to save his finger, they had handled him so roughly that he could scarcely stand.

“It’s Lasse and Pelle,” said the old man, trying to wipe his face. “You know us, don’t you, Per Olsen? We’ll go home with you if you’ll be good and not hurt us; we mean well by you, we two.”

Per Olsen stood and ground his teeth, trembling all over his body. “Oh dear, oh dear!” was all he said. There was white foam at the corners of his mouth.

Lasse gave Pelle the end of the rope to hold. “He’s grinding his teeth; the devil’s busy with him already,” he whispered. “But if he tries to do any harm, just you pull with all your might at the rope; and if the worst comes to the worst, we must jump over the ditch.”

They now set off homeward, Lasse holding Per Olsen under the arm, for he staggered and would have fallen at almost every step. He kept on murmuring to himself or grinding his teeth.

Pelle trudged behind, holding the rope. Cold shivers ran down his back, partly from fear, partly from secret satisfaction. He had now seen some one whom he knew to be doomed to perdition! So those who became devils in the next world looked like Per Olsen? But he wasn’t unkind! He was the nicest of the farm men to Pelle, and he had bought that bottle for them—yes, and had advanced the money out of his own pocket until May-day!

VIII

Oh! what a pace she was driving at! The farmer whipped up the gray stallion, and sat looking steadily out over the fields, as if he had no suspicion that any one was following him; but his wife certainly did not mind. She whipped the bay as hard as she could, and did not care who saw her.

And it was in broad daylight that they were playing the fool like this on the high-road, instead of keeping their quarrels within four walls as decent people did! It was true enough that gentle folks had no feeling of shame in them!

Then she called out and stood up in the trap to beat the horse—with the handle even! Couldn’t she let him drive out in peace to his fair charmer, whoever she was, and make it warm for him when he came home? How could she do the same thing over and over again for twenty years? Really women were persevering creatures!

And how *he* could be bothered! Having everlasting disturbances at home for the sake of some hotel landlady or some other woman, who could not be so very different to be with than his own wife! It would take a long-suffering nature to be a brute in that way; but that must be what they call love, properly speaking.

The threshing-machine had come to a standstill, and the people at Stone Farm were hanging out of the doors and windows, enjoying it royally. It was a race, and a sight for the gods to see the bay mare gaining upon the stallion; why, it was like having two Sundays in one week! Lasse had come round the corner, and was following the mad race, his hand shading his eyes. Never had he known such a woman; Bengta was a perfect lamb compared to her! The farmer at Kaase Farm, who was standing at his gate when they dashed past, was secretly of the same opinion; and the workers in the fields dropped their implements, stared and were scandalized at the sight.

At last, for very shame, he had to stop and turn round. She crawled over into his carriage, and the bay followed quietly with her empty vehicle. She put her arm about his shoulder, and looked happy and triumphant, exactly like the district policeman when he has had a successful chase; but he looked like a criminal of the worst kind. In this way they came driving back to the farm.

One day Kalle came to borrow ten krones and to invite Lasse and Pelle to the christening-party on the following Sunday. Lasse, with some difficulty, obtained the money from the bailiff up in the office, but to the invitation they had to say “No, thank you,” hard though it was; it was quite out of the question for them to get off again. Another day the head man had disappeared. He had gone in the night, and had taken his big chest with him, so some one must have helped him; but the other men in the room swore solemnly that they had noticed nothing, and the bailiff, fume as he might, was obliged to give up the attempt to solve the mystery.

One or two things of this kind happened that made a stir for a day or two, but with these exceptions the winter was hard to get through. Darkness ruled for the greater part of the twenty-four hours, and it was never quite light in the corners. The cold, too, was hard to bear, except when you were in the comfortable stable. In there it was always warm, and Pelle was not afraid of going about in the thickest darkness. In the servants’ room they sat moping through the long evenings without anything to occupy themselves with. They took very little notice of the girls, but sat playing cards for gin, or telling horrible stories that made it a most venturesome thing to run across the yard down to the stable when you had to go to bed.

Per Olsen, on account of his good behavior, was raised to the position of head man when the other ran away. Lasse and Pelle were glad of this, for he took their part when they were put upon by any one. He had become a decent fellow in every respect, hardly ever touched spirits, and kept his clothes in good order. He was a little too quiet even for the old day-laborers of the farm and their wives; but they knew the reason of it and liked him because he took the part of the weak and because of the fate that hung over him. They said he was always listening; and when he seemed to be listening within to the unknown, they avoided as far as possible disturbing him.

“You’ll see he’ll free himself; the Evil One’ll have no claim upon him,” was the opinion of both Lasse and the laborers’ wives when they discussed Per Olsen’s prospects at the Sunday milking. “There are some people that even the Almighty can’t find anything to blame for.”

Pelle listened to this, and tried every day to peep at the scar on Per Olsen’s thumb. It would surely disappear when God removed his judgment!

During most of the winter Pelle drove the horse for the threshing-machine. All day he trotted round upon the horse-way outside the farm, over his wooden shoes in trodden-down snow and manure. It was the most intolerable occupation that life had yet offered him. He could not even carve, it was too cold for his fingers; and he felt lonely. As a herd-boy he was his own master, and a thousand things called to him; but here he had to go round and round behind a bar, always round. His one diversion was to keep count of the times he drove round, but that was a fatiguing employment and made you even duller than the everlasting going round, and you could not leave off. Time held nothing of interest, and short as it was the day seemed endless.

As a rule, Pelle awoke happy, but now every morning when he woke he was weary of everything; it was to be that everlasting trudging round behind the bar. After a time doing this for about an hour used to make him fall into a state of half-sleep. The condition came of itself, and he longed for it before it came. It was a kind of vacuity, in which he wished for nothing and took no interest in anything, but only staggered along mechanically at the back of the bar. The machine buzzed unceasingly, and helped to maintain the condition; the dust kept pouring out at the window, and the time passed imperceptibly. Generally now dinner or evening surprised him, and sometimes it seemed to him that the horses had only just been harnessed when some one came out to help him in with them. He had arrived at the condition of torpor that is the only mercy that life vouchsafes to condemned prisoners and people who spend their lives beside a machine. But there was a sleepiness about him even in his free time; he was not so lively and eager to know about everything; Father Lasse missed his innumerable questions and little devices.

Now and again he was roused for a moment out of his condition by the appearance at the window of a black, perspiring face, that swore at him because he was not driving evenly. He knew then that Long Ole had taken the place of Per Olsen, whose business it was to feed the machine. It sometimes happened, too, that the lash of the whip caught on the axle and wound round it, so that the whole thing had to be stopped and drawn backward; and that day he did not fall into a doze again.

In March the larks appeared and brought a little life. Snow still lay in the hollows, but their singing reminded Pelle warmly of summer and grazing cattle. And one day he was wakened in his tramp round and round by seeing a starling on the roof of the house, whistling and preening its feathers in delight. On that day the sun shone brightly, and all heaviness was gone from the air; but the sea was still a pale gray down there.

Pelle began to be a human being again. It was spring, and then, too, in a couple of days the threshing would be finished. But after all, the chief thing was that waistcoat-pocket of his; that was enough to put life into its owner. He ran round in a trot behind the bar; he had to drive quickly now in order to get done, for every one else was in the middle of spring ploughing already. When he pressed his hand against his chest, he could distinctly feel the paper it was wrapped in. For it was still there, wasn’t it? It would not do to open the paper and look; he must find out by squeezing.

Pelle had become the owner of fifty öres—a perfectly genuine fifty-öre piece. It was the first time he had ever possessed anything more than two and one öre pieces, and he had earned it by his own cleverness.

It was on Sunday, when the men had had a visit from some quarrymen, and one of them had hit upon the idea of sending for some birch-fat to have with their dram. Pelle was to run to the village shop for it, and he was given a half-krone and injunctions to go in the back way, as it was Sunday. Pelle had not forgotten his experience at Christmas, and kept watch upon their faces. They were all doing their best to smooth them out and busy themselves with one thing and another; and Gustav, who gave him the money, kept turning his face away and looking at something out in the yard.

When he stated his errand, the shopman’s wife broke into a laugh. “I say, don’t you know better than that?” she exclaimed. “Why, wasn’t it you who fetched the handle-turner too? You’ve all found that very useful, haven’t you?”

Pelle turned crimson. “I thought they were making fun of me, but I didn’t dare say no,” he said in a low voice.

“No, one has to play the fool sometimes, whether one is it or not,” said the woman.

“What is birch-fat, then?” asked Pelle.

“Why, my gracious! You must have had it many a time, you little imp! But it shows how often you have to put up with things you don’t know the name of.”

A light dawned upon Pelle. “Does it mean a thrashing with a birch-rod?”

“Didn’t I say you knew it?”

“No, I’ve only had it with a whip—on my legs.”

“Well, well, you needn’t mind that; the one may be just as good as the other. But now sit down and drink a cup of coffee while I wrap up the article for them.” She pushed a cup of coffee with brown sugar toward him, and began ladling out soft soap on to a piece of paper. “Here,” she said. “You give them that: it’s the best birch-fat. And you can keep the money yourself.”

Pelle was not courageous enough for this arrangement.

“Very well, then,” she said. “I’ll keep the money for you. They shan’t make fools of us both. And then you can get it yourself. But now you must put on a bold face.”

Pelle did put on a bold face, but he was decidedly nervous. The men swore at the loss of the half-krone, and called him the “greatest idiot upon God’s green earth”; but he had the satisfaction of knowing that that was because he had not been stupid enough. And the half-krone was his!

A hundred times a day he felt it without wearing it out. Here at last was something the possession of which did not rob it of its lustre. There was no end to the purchases he made with it, now for Lasse, now for himself. He bought the dearest things, and when he lingered long enough over one purchase and was satiated with the possession of it, he set about buying something else. And all the while he kept the coin. At times he would be suddenly seized with an insane fear that the money was gone; and then when he felt it, he was doubly happy.

Pelle had suddenly become a capitalist, and by his own cleverness; and he made the most of his capital. He had already obtained every desirable thing that he knew of—he had it all, at any rate, in hand; and gradually as new things made their appearance in his world, he secured for himself the right to their purchase. Lasse was the only person who knew about his wealth, and he had reluctantly to allow himself to be drawn into the wildest of speculations.

He could hear by the sound that there was something wrong with the machine. The horses heard it too, and stopped even before some one cried “Stop!” Then one after another came the shouts: “Stop! Drive on! Stop! On again! Stop! Pull!” And Pelle pulled the bar back, drove on and pulled until the whole thing whizzed again. Then he knew that it was Long Ole feeding the machine while Per Olsen measured the grain: Ole was a duffer at feeding.

It was going smoothly again, and Pelle was keeping an eye on the corner by the cow-stable. When Lasse made his appearance there, and patted his stomach, it meant that it was nearly dinner-time.

Something stopped the bar, the horses had to pull hard, and with a jerk it cleared the invisible hindrance. There was a cry from the inside of the threshing-barn, and the sound of many voices shouting “Stop!” The horses stopped dead, and Pelle had to seize the bar to prevent it swinging forward against their legs. It was some time before any one came out and took the horses in, so that Pelle could go into the barn and see what was the matter.

He found Long Ole walking about and writhing over one of his hands. His blouse was wrapped about it, but the blood was dripping through on to the floor of the barn. He was bending forward and stumbling along, throwing his body from side to side and talking incoherently. The girls, pale and frightened, were standing gazing at him while the men were quarreling as to what was the best thing to do to stop the flow of blood, and one of them came sliding down from the loft with a handful of cobwebs.

Pelle went and peered into the machine to find out what there was so voracious about it. Between two of the teeth lay something like a peg, and when he moved the roller, the greater part of a finger dropped down on to the barn floor. He picked it up among some chaff, and took it to the others: it was a thumb! When Long Ole saw it, he fainted; it could hardly be wondered at, seeing that he was maimed for life. But Per Olsen had to own that he had left the machine at a fortunate moment.

There was no more threshing done that day. In the afternoon Pelle played in the stable, for he had nothing to do. While he played, he suggested plans for their future to his father: they were engrossed in it.

“Then we’ll go to America, and dig for gold!”

“Ye-es, that wouldn’t be a bad thing at all. But it would take a good many more half-krones to make that journey.”

“Then we can set up as stone-masons.”

Lasse stood still in the middle of the foddering-passage, and pondered with bent head. He was exceedingly dissatisfied with their position; there were two of them toiling to earn a hundred krones, and they could not make ends meet. There was never any liberty either; they were simply slaves. By himself he never got any farther than being discontented and disappointed with everything; he was too old. The mere search for ways to something new was insuperable labor, and everything looked so hopeless. But Pelle was restless, and whenever he was dissatisfied with anything, made plans by the score, some of the wildest, and some fairly sensible; and the old man was carried away by them.

“We might go to the town and work too,” said Lasse meditatively. “They earn one bright krone after another in there. But what’s to be done with you? You’re too little to use a tool.”

This stubborn fact put a stop for the moment to Pelle’s plans; but then his courage rose again. “I can quite well go with you to the town,” he said. “For I shall——” He nodded significantly.

“What?” asked Lasse, with interest.

“Well, perhaps I’ll go down to the harbor and be doing nothing, and a little girl’ll fall into the water and I shall save her. But the little girl will be a gentleman’s daughter, and so——” Pelle left the rest to Lasse’s imagination.

“Then you’d have to learn to swim first,” said Lasse gravely. “Or you’d only be drowned.”

Screams were heard from the men’s bedroom. It was Long Ole. The doctor had come and was busy with his maimed hand. “Just run across and find out what’ll happen to it!” said Lasse. “Nobody’ll pay any attention to you at such a time, if you make yourself small.”

In a little while Pelle came back and reported that three fingers were quite crushed and hanging in rags, and the doctor had cut them off.

“Was it these three?” asked Lasse, anxiously, holding up his thumb, forefinger, and middle finger. Truth to tell, Pelle had seen nothing, but his imagination ran away with him.

“Yes, it was his swearing-fingers,” he said, nodding emphatically.

“Then Per Olsen is set free,” said Lasse, heaving a deep sigh. “What a *good* thing it has been—quite providential!”

That was Pelle’s opinion too.

The farmer himself drove the doctor home, and a little while after he had gone, Pelle was sent for, to go on an errand for the mistress to the village-shop.

IX

It was nothing for Pelle; if he were vanquished on one point, he rose again on two others: he was invincible. And he had the child’s abundant capacity for forgiving; had he not he would have hated all grown-up people with the exception of Father Lasse. But disappointed he certainly was.

It was not easy to say who had expected most—the boy, whose childish imagination had built, unchecked, upon all that he had heard, or the old man, who had once been here himself.

But Pelle managed to fill his own existence with interest, and was so taken up on all sides that he only just had time to realize the disappointment in passing. His world was supersensual like that of the fakir; in the course of a few minutes a little seed could shoot up and grow into a huge tree that overshadowed everything else. Cause never answered to effect in it, and it was governed by another law of gravitation: events always bore him up.

However hard reality might press upon him, he always emerged from the tight place the richer in some way or other; and no danger could ever become overwhelmingly great as long as Father Lasse stood reassuringly over and behind everything.

But Lasse had failed him at the decisive moment more than once, and every time he used him as a threat, he was only laughed at. The old man’s omnipotence could not continue to exist side by side with his increasing decrepitude; in the boy’s eyes it crumbled away from day to day. Unwilling though he was, Pelle had to let go his providence, and seek the means of protection in himself. It was rather early, but he looked at circumstances in his own way. Distrust he had already acquired—and timidity! He daily made clumsy attempts to get behind what people said, and behind things. There was something more behind everything! It often led to confusion, but occasionally the result was conspicuously good.

There were some thrashings that you could run away from, because in the meantime the anger would pass away, and other thrashings where it answered best to shed as many tears as possible. Most people only beat until the tears came, but the bailiff could not endure a blubberer, so with him the thing was to set your teeth and make yourself hard. People said you should speak the truth, but most thrashings could be avoided by making up a white lie, if it was a good one and you took care of your face. If you told the truth, they thrashed you at once.

With regard to thrashing, the question had a subjective side as well as an objective one. He could beat Rud whenever he liked, but with bigger boys it was better to have right on his side, as, for instance, when his father was attacked. Then God helped him. This was a case in which the boy put the omnipotence quite aside, and felt himself to be the old man’s protector.

Lasse and Pelle were walking through life hand in hand, and yet each was going his own way. Lasse felt it to be so. “We’ve each got hold of an end,” he sometimes said to himself despondently, when the difference was all too marked. “He’s rising, the laddie!”

This was best seen in the others. In the long run they had to like the boy, it could not be otherwise. The men would sometimes give him things, and the girls were thoroughly kind to him. He was in the fairest period of budding youth; they would often take him on their knees as he passed, and kiss him.

“Ah, he’ll be a lady’s man, he will!” Lasse would say. “He’s got that from his father.” But they would laugh at that.

There was always laughter when Lasse wanted to join the elders. Last time—yes, then he was good enough. It was always “Where’s Lasse?” when gin was going round, or tricks were being played, or demonstrations made. “Call Lasse Karlsson!” He had no need to push himself forward; it was a matter of course that he was there. The girls were always on the look-out for him, married man though he was, and he had fun with them—all quite proper, of course, for Bengta was not good to quarrel with if she heard anything.

But now! Yes—well, yes—he might fetch the gin for the others and do their work for them when they had a holiday, without their doing anything in exchange! “Lasse! Where’s Lasse? Can you feed the horses for me this evening? Can you take my place at the chaff-cutting to-morrow evening?”

There was a difference between then and now, and Lasse had found out the reason for himself: he was getting old. The very discovery brought further proof of its correctness, laid infirmity upon him, and removed the tension from his mind, and what was left of it from his body. The hardest blow of all was when he discovered that he was of no importance to the girls, had no place at all in their thoughts of men. In Lasse's world there was no word that carried such weight as the word "man"; and in the end it was the girls who decided whether you were one or not. Lasse was not one; he was not dangerous! He was only a few poor relics of a man, a comical remnant of some by-gone thing; they laughed at him when he tried to pay them attention.

Their laughter crushed him, and he withdrew into his old-man's world, and despondently adapted himself to it. The only thing that kept life in him was his concern for the boy, and he clung despairingly to his position as his providence. There was little he could do for him, and therefore he talked all the bigger; and when anything went against the boy, he uttered still greater threats against the world than before. He also felt that the boy was in process of making himself independent, and fought a desperate battle to preserve the last appearance of power.

But Pelle could not afford to give support to his fancy, nor had he the understanding to do it. He was growing fast, and had a use for all that he possessed himself. Now that his father no longer stood behind to shield him, he was like a small plant that has been moved out into the open, and is fighting hard to comprehend the nature of its surroundings, and adapt itself to them. For every root-fibre that felt its way into the soil, there fell to the ground one of the tender leaves, and two strong ones pushed forth. One after another the feelings of the child's defencelessness dropped and gave place to the harder ones of the individual.

The boy was engaged in building himself up, in accordance with invisible laws. He assumed an attitude toward his surroundings at all points, but he did not imitate them. The farm men, for instance, were not kind to the animals. They often lashed the horses only as a vent for their ill-humor, and the girls were just the same to the smaller animals and the dairy-cows. From these considerations, Pelle taught himself sympathy. He could not bear cruelty to animals, and thrashed Rud for the first time when the latter had one day robbed a bird's nest.

Pelle was like a kid that makes a plaything of everything. In his play he took up, without suspecting it, many of the serious phenomena of life, and gambolled with them in frolicsome bounds. He exercised his small mind as he exercised his body, twisted himself into everything and out of everything, imitated work and fun and shirking, and learned how to puff himself up into a very devil of a fellow where his surroundings were yielding, and to make himself almost invisible with modesty when they were hard. He was training himself to be that little Jack-of-all-trades, man.

And it became more and more difficult to catch him unprepared. The first time he had to set about a thing in earnest, he was generally handy at it; he was as difficult to take unawares as a cat.

It was summer again. The heat stood still and played over the ground, sparkling, with indolent voluptuousness and soft movements like the fish in the stream. Far inland it quivered above the rocks that bounded the view, in a restless flicker of bluish white; below lay the fields beneath the broiling sun, with the pollen from the rye drifting over them like smoke. Up above the clover-field stood the cows of Stone Farm in long rows, their heads hanging heavily down, and their tails swinging regularly. Lasse was moving between their ranks, looking for the mallet, and now and then gazing anxiously down towards the meadow by the dunes, and beginning to count the young cattle and the bullocks. Most of them were lying down, but a few of them were standing with their heads close together, and munching with closed eyes. The boys were nowhere to be seen.

Lasse stood wondering whether he should give Pelle a warning call; there would he no end of a row if the bailiff were to come now. But then the sound of voices came from among the young firs on the dunes, a naked boy appeared, and then another. Their bodies were like golden flashes in the air as they ran over the grass-wrack and across the meadow, each with his cap held closed in his hand.

They sat down upon the edge of the stream with their feet in the water, and carefully uncovered their captives; they were dragon-flies. As the insects one by one crawled out at the narrow opening, the boys decapitated them and laid them in a row on the grass. They had caught nine, and nine times thirty-five—well, it would be more than three krones. The stupendous amount made Pelle skeptical.

"Now isn't that only a lie?" he said, and licked his shoulder where he had been bitten by a mosquito. It was said that the chemist gave thirty-five öres apiece for dragon-flies.

"A lie?" exclaimed Rud. "Yes, perhaps it is," he went on meekly. "It must be a lie, for anything like that always is. You might give me yours too!"

But Pelle would not do that.

"Then give me your half-krone, and I'll go to the town and sell them for you. They cost thirty-five öres, for Karl says so, and his mother washes the floor in the chemist's shop."

Pelle got up, not to fetch the half-krone—he would not part with that for all the world—but to assure himself that it still lay in his waistcoat pocket.

When he had gone a little way, Rud hastily lifted a piece of turf at the edge of the stream, pushed something in under it, and jumped into the water; and when Pelle came back with slow, ominous steps, he climbed up the other side and set off at a run.

Pelle ran too, in short, quick leaps. He knew he was the quicker, and the knowledge made him frolicsome. He flapped at his naked body as he ran, as if he had no joints, swayed from side to side like a balloon, pranced and stamped on the ground, and then darted on again. Then the young firs closed round them again, only the movement of their tops showing where the boys ran, farther and farther, until all was still.

In the meadow the cattle were munching with closed eyes and attentive ears. The heat played over the ground, flickering, gasping, like a fish in water. There was a heavy, stupefying humming in the air; the sound came from everywhere and nowhere.

Down across the cornfields came a big, stout woman. She wore a skirt, a chemise, and a handkerchief on her head, and she shaded her eyes with her hand and looked about. She crossed the meadow obliquely, found Pelle's dinner-basket, took out its contents and put them in under her chemise upon her bare, perspiring bosom, and then turned in the direction of the sea.

There was a sudden break in the edge of the fir-plantation, and out came Rud with Pelle hanging upon his back. Rud's inordinately large head hung forward and his knees gave way; his forehead, which receded above the eyes and projected just below the line of the hair, was a mass of bruises and scars, which became very visible now with his exertions. Both the boys had marks all over their bodies from the poison of the pine-needles. Pelle dropped on to the grass, and lay there on his face, while Rud went slowly to fetch the half-krone, and handed it reluctantly to its owner. He stooped like one vanquished, but in his eye the thought of a new battle lay awaiting its opportunity.

Pelle gazed lovingly at the coin. He had had it now ever since April, from the time when he was sent to buy birch-fat. He had purchased with it everything that was desirable, and he had lost it twice: he loved that piece of money. It made his fingers itch, his whole body; it was always urging him on to spend it, now in one way and now in another. Roll, roll! That was what it was longing to do; and it was because it was round, Father Lasse said. But to become rich—that meant stopping the money as it rolled. Oh, Pelle meant to be rich! And then he was always itching to spend it—spend it in such a way that he got everything for it, or something he could have all his life.

They sat upon the bank of the stream and wrangled in a small way. Rud did his best to inspire awe, and bragged to create an impression. He bent his fingers backward and moved his ears; he could move them forward in a listening position like a horse. All this irritated Pelle intensely.

Suddenly he stopped. "Won't you give me the half-krone, then? You shall have ten krones when I grow up." Rud collected money—he was avaricious already—and had a whole boxful of coins that he had stolen from his mother.

Pelle considered a little. "No," he said. "Because you'll never grow up; you're a dwarf!" The tone of his voice was one of sheer envy.

"That's what the Sow says too! But then I'll show myself for money at the fairs and on Midsummer Eve on the common. Then I shall get frightfully rich."

Pelle was inwardly troubled. Should he give him the whole fifty öres for nothing at all? He had never heard of any one doing such a thing. And perhaps some day, when Rud had become enormously rich, he would get half of it. “Will you have it?” he asked, but regretted it instantly.

Rud stretched out his hand eagerly, but Pelle spat into it. “It can wait until we’ve had our dinner anyhow,” he said, and went over to the basket. For a little while they stood gazing into the empty basket.

“The Sow’s been here,” said Rud, putting out his tongue.

Pelle nodded. “She *is* a beast!”

“A thief,” said Rud.

They took the sun’s measure. Rud declared that if you could see it when you bent down and looked between your legs, then it was five o’clock. Pelle began to put on his clothes.

Rud was circling about him. “I say!” he said suddenly. “If I may have it, I’ll let you whip me with nettles.”

“On your bare body?” asked Pelle.

Rud nodded.

In a second Pelle was out of his trousers again, and running to a patch of nettles. He pulled them up with the assistance of a dock-leak, as many as he could hold, and came back again. Rud lay down, face downwards, on a little mound, and the whipping began.

The agreement was a hundred strokes, but when Rud had received ten, he got up and refused to have any more.

“Then you won’t get the money,” said Pelle. “Will you or won’t you?” He was red with excitement and the exertion, and the perspiration already stood in beads down his slender back, for he had worked with a will. “Will you or won’t you? Seventy-five strokes then!” Pelle’s voice quivered with eagerness, and he had to dilate his nostrils to get air enough; his limbs began to tremble.

“No—only sixty—you hit so hard! And I must have the money first, or you may cheat me.”

“I don’t cheat,” said Pelle gloomily. But Rud held to his point.

Pelle’s body writhed; he was like a ferret that has tasted blood. With a jerk he threw the coin at Rud, and grumbling, pushed him down. He wept inwardly because he had let him off forty strokes; but he made up his mind to lay into him all the harder for it.

Then he beat, slowly and with all his might, while Rud burrowed with his head in the grass and clasped the money tightly to keep up his strength. There was hatred in every stroke that Pelle struck, and they went like shocks through his playmate’s body, but he never uttered a cry. No, there was no point in his crying, for the coin he held in his hand took away the pain. But about Pelle’s body the air burnt like fire, his arms began to give way with fatigue, and his inclination diminished with every stroke. It was toil, nothing but hard toil. And the money—the beautiful half-krone—was slipping farther and farther away, and he would be poor once more; and Rud was not even crying! At the forty-sixth stroke he turned his face and put out his tongue, whereat Pelle burst into a roar, threw down the frayed nettle-stalks, and ran away to the fir-plantation.

There he sat for the rest of the day under a dune, grieving over his loss, while Rud lay under the bank of the stream, bathing his blistered body with wet earth.

X

After all, Per Olsen was not the sort of man they had thought him. Now that he had been set free in that way, the thing would have been for him to have given a helping hand to that poor fellow, Long Ole; for after all it was for his sake that Ole's misfortune had come upon him. But did he do it? No, he began to amuse himself. It was drinking and dissipation and petticoats all the summer through; and now at Martinmas he left and took work at the quarry, so as to be more his own master. There was not sufficient liberty for him at Stone Farm. What good there was left in him would find something to do up there.

Long Ole could not, of course, remain at Stone Farm, crippled as he was. Through kindness on the part of the farmer, he was paid his half-wage; that was more than he had any claim to, and enough at any rate to take him home and let him try something or other. There were many kinds of work that at a pinch could be performed with one hand; and now while he had the money he ought to have got an iron hook; it could be strapped to the wrist, and was not bad to hold tools with.

But Ole had grown weak and had great difficulty in making up his mind. He continued to hang about the farm, notwithstanding all that the bailiff did to get him away. At last they had to put his things out, to the west of the farm; and there they lay most of the summer, while he himself slept among the stacks, and begged food of the workers in the fields. But this could not go on when the cold set in.

But then one day in the autumn, his things were gone. Johanna Pihl — commonly called the Sow—had taken him in. She felt the cold, too, in spite of her fat, and as the proverb says: It's easier for two to keep warm than one; but whatever was her reason for doing it, Long Ole might thank his Maker for her. There was always bacon hanging in her chimney.

Lasse and Pelle looked forward to term-day with anxiety. What changes would it bring this time for people? So much depended on that. Besides the head man, they were to have new second and third men and some new maids. They were always changing at Stone Farm when they could. Karna, poor soul, was bound to stay, as she had set her mind upon youth, and would absolutely be where Gustav was! Gustav stayed because Bodil stayed, so unnaturally fond was he of that girl, although she was not worth it. And Bodil herself knew well enough what she was doing! There must be more in it than met the eye when a girl dressed, as she did, in expensive, town-bought clothes.

Lasse and Pelle *remained*, simply because there was no other place in the world for them to go to. All through the year they made plans for making a change, but when the time for giving notice approached, Lasse became quiet and let it go past.

Of late he had given no little thought to the subject of marrying again. There was something God-forsaken about this solitary existence for a man of his age; you became old and worn out before your time, when you hadn't a wife and a house. On the heath near Brother Kalle's, there was a house that he could have without paying anything down. He often discussed it with Pelle, and the boy was ready for anything new.

It should be a wife who could look after everything and make the house comfortable; and above all she must be a hard-working woman. It would not come amiss either if she had a little of her own, but let that be as it might, if only she was good-natured. Karna would have suited in all respects, both Lasse and Pelle having always had a liking for her ever since the day she freed Pelle from the pupil's clutches; but it was nothing to offer her as long as she was so set upon Gustav. They must bide their time; perhaps she would come to her senses, or something else might turn up.

"Then there'd be coffee in bed on Sunday mornings!" said Pelle, with rapture.

"Yes, and perhaps we'd get a little horse, and invite Brother Kalle for a drive now and then," added Lasse solemnly.

At last it was really to be! In the evening Lasse and Pelle had been to the shop and bought a slate and pencil, and Pelle was now standing at the stable-door with a beating heart and the slate under his arm. It was a frosty October morning, but the boy was quite hot after his wash. He had on his best jacket, and his hair had been combed with water.

Lasse hovered about him, brushing him here and there with his sleeve, and was even more nervous than the boy. Pelle had been born to poor circumstances, had been christened, and had had to earn his bread from the time he was a little boy—all exactly as he had done himself. So far there was no difference to be seen; it might very well have been Lasse himself over again, from the big ears and the "cow's-lick" on the forehead, to the way the boy walked and wore out the bottoms of his trouser-legs. But this was something strikingly new. Neither Lasse nor any of his family had ever gone to school; it was something new that had come within the reach of his family, a blessing from Heaven that had fallen upon the boy and himself. It felt like a push upward; the impossible was within reach; what might not happen to a person who had book-learning! You might become master of a workshop, a clerk, perhaps even a schoolmaster.

"Now do take care of the slate, and see that you don't break it!" he said admonishingly. "And keep out of the way of the big boys until you can hold your own with them. But if any of them simply won't let you alone, mind you manage to hit first! That takes the inclination out of most of them, especially if you hit hard; he who hits first hits twice, as the old proverb says. And then you must listen well, and keep in mind all that your teacher says; and if anyone tries to entice you into playing and larking behind his back, don't do it. And remember that you've got a pocket-handkerchief, and don't use your fingers, for that isn't polite. If there's no one to see you, you can save the handkerchief, of course, and then it'll last all the longer. And take care of your nice jacket. And if the teacher's lady invites you in to coffee, you mustn't take more than one piece of cake, mind."

Lasse's hands trembled while he talked.

"She's sure not to do that," said Pelle, with a superior air.

"Well, well, now go, so that you don't get there too late—the very first day, too. And if there's some tool or other wanting, you must say we'll get it at once, for we aren't altogether paupers!" And Lasse slapped his pocket; but it did not make much noise, and Pelle knew quite well that they had no money; they had got the slate and pencil on credit.

Lasse stood looking after the boy as long as he was in sight, and then went to his work of crushing oilcakes. He put them into a vessel to soak, and poured water on them, all the while talking softly to himself.

There was a knock at the outside stable-door, and Lasse went to open it. It was Brother Kalle.

"Good-day, brother!" he said, with his cheerful smile. "Here comes his Majesty from the quarries!" He waddled in upon his bow legs, and the two exchanged hearty greetings. Lasse was delighted at the visit.

"What a pleasant time we had with you the other evening!" said Lasse, taking his brother by the hand.

"That's a long time ago now. But you must look in again one evening soon. Grandmother looks upon both of you with a favorable eye!" Kalle's eyes twinkled mischievously.

"How is she, poor body? Has she at all got over the hurt to her eye? Pelle came home the other day and told me that the children had been so unfortunate as to put a stick into her eye. It quite upset me. You had to have the doctor, too!"

"Well, it wasn't quite like that," said Kalle. "I had moved grandmother's spinning-wheel myself one morning when I was putting her room to rights, and then I forgot to put it back in its place. Then when she was going to stoop down to pick up something from the floor, the spindle went into her eye; of course she's used to have everything stand exactly in its place. So really the honor's due to me." He smiled all over his face.

Lasse shook his head sympathetically. "And she got over it fairly well?" he asked.

"No; it went altogether wrong, and she lost the sight of that eye."

Lasse looked at him with disapproval.

Kalle caught himself up, apparently very much horrified. "Eh, what nonsense I'm talking! She lost the *blindness* of that eye, I ought to have said. *Isn't* that all wrong, too? You put somebody's eye out, and she begins to see! Upon my word, I think I'll set up as an eye-doctor after this, for there's not much difficulty in it."

"What do you say? She's begun to—? Now you're too merry! You oughtn't to joke about everything."

"Well, well, joking apart, as the prophet said when his wife scratched him—she can really see with that eye now."

Lasse looked suspiciously at him for a little while before he yielded. "Why, it's quite a miracle!" he then said.

"Yes, that's what the doctor said. The point of the spindle had acted as a kind of operation. But it might just as easily have taken the other direction. Yes, we had the doctor to her three times; it was no use being niggardly." Kalle stood and tried to look important; he had stuck his thumbs into his waistcoat pockets.

"It cost a lot of money, I suppose?"

"That's what I thought, too, and I wasn't very happy when I asked the doctor how much it would be. Twenty-five krones, he said, and it didn't sound anything more than when any of us ask for a piece of bread-and-dripping. 'Will the doctor be so kind as to wait a few days so that I can get the cow properly sold?' I asked. 'What!' he says, and glares at me over his spectacles. 'You don't mean to sell the cow so as to pay me? You mustn't do that on any account; I'll wait till times are better.' 'We come off easily, even if we get rid of the cow,' I said. 'How so?' he asks, as we go out to the carriage —it was the farmer of Kaase Farm that was driving for me. So I told him that Maria and I had been thinking of selling everything so that grandmother might go over and be operated. He said nothing to that, but climbed up into the carriage; but while I was standing like this, buttoning up his foot-bag, he seizes me by the collar and says: 'Do you know, you little bow-legged creature!' (Kalle imitated the doctor's town speech), 'You're the best man I've ever met, and you don't owe me a brass farthing! For that matter, it was you yourself that performed the operation.' 'Then I ought almost to have had the money,' I said. Then he laughed and gave me a box on the ears with his fur cap. He's a fine man, that doctor, and fearfully clever; they say that he has one kind of mixture that he cures all kinds of illness with."

They were sitting in the herdsman's room upon the green chest, and Lasse had brought out a little gin. "Drink, brother!" he said again and again. "It takes something to keep out this October drizzle."

"Many thanks, but you must drink! But I was going to say, you should see grandmother! She goes round peeping at everything with her one eye; if it's only a button, she keeps on staring at it. So that's what that looks like, and that! She's forgotten what the things look like, and when she sees a thing, she goes to it to feel it afterward —to find out what it is, she actually says. She would have nothing to do with us the first few days; when she didn't hear us talk or walk, she thought we were strangers, even though she saw us there before her eyes."

"And the little ones?" asked Lasse.

"Thank you, Anna's is fat and well, but our own seems to have come to a standstill. After all, it's the young pigs you ought to breed with. By the bye"—Kalle took out his purse—"while we're at it, don't let me forget the ten krones I got from you for the christenings."

Lasse pushed it away. "Never mind that," he said. "You may have a lot to go through yet. How many mouths are there now? Fourteen or fifteen, I suppose?"

"Yes; but two take their mother's milk, like the parson's wife's chickens; so that's all saved. And if things became difficult, one's surely man enough to wring a few pence out of one's nose?" He seized his nose and gave it a rapid twist, and held out his hand. A folded ten-krone note lay in it.

Lasse laughed at the trick, but would not hear of taking the money; and for a time it passed backward and forward between them. "Well, well!" said Kalle at last, keeping the note; "thank you very much, then! And good-bye, brother! I must be going." Lasse went out with him, and sent many greetings.

"We shall come and look you up very soon," he called out after his brother.

When after a little while he returned to his room, the note lay upon the bed. Kalle must have seen his opportunity to put it there, conjurer that he was. Lasse put it aside to give to Kalle's wife, when an occasion presented itself.

Long before the time, Lasse was on the lookout for Pelle. He found the solitude wearisome, now that he was used to having the boy about him from morning till night. At last he came, out of breath with running, for he had longed to get home too.

Nothing either terrible or remarkable had happened at school. Pelle had to give a circumstantial account, point by point, "Well, what can you do?" the master had asked, taking him by the ear—quite kindly, of course. "I can pull the mad bull to the water without Father Lasse helping at all," Pelle had answered, and then the whole class had laughed.

"Yes, yes, but can you read?"

No, Pelle could not do that—“or else I shouldn’t have come here,” he was on the point of adding. “It was a good thing you didn’t answer that,” said Lasse; “but what more then?” Well, then Pelle was put upon the lowest bench, and the boy next him was set to teach him his letters.

“Do you know them, then?”

No, Pelle did not know them that day, but when a couple of weeks had passed, he knew most of them, and wrote them with chalk on the posts. He had not learned to write, but his hand could imitate anything he had seen, and he drew the letters just as they stood in print in the spelling-book.

Lasse went and looked at them during his work, and had them repeated to him endlessly; but they would not stick properly. “What’s that one there?” he was perpetually asking.

Pelle answered with a superior air: “That? Have you forgotten it already? I knew that after I’d only seen it once! That’s M.”

“Yes, of course it is! I can’t think where my head is to-day. M, yes—of course it’s M! Now what can that be used for, eh?”

“It’s the first letter in the word ‘empty,’ of course!” said Pelle consequentially.

“Yes, of course! But you didn’t find that out for yourself; the master told you.”

“No, I found it out by myself.”

“Did you, now? Well, you’ve become clever—if only you don’t become as clever as seven fools.”

Lasse was out of spirits; but very soon he gave in, and fell into whole-hearted admiration of his son. And the instruction was continued while they worked. It was fortunate for Pelle that his father was so slow, for he did not get on very fast himself, when once he had mastered all that was capable of being picked up spontaneously by a quick intelligence. The boy who had to teach him—Sloppy, he was called—was the dunce of the class and had always been bottom until now Pelle had come and taken his place.

Two weeks of school had greatly changed Pelle’s ideas on this subject. On the first few days he arrived in a state of anxious expectation, and all his courage forsook him as he crossed the threshold of the school. For the first time in his life he felt that he was good for nothing. Trembling with awe, he opened his perceptions to this new and unfamiliar thing that was to unveil for him all the mysteries of the world, if only he kept his ears open; and he did so. But there was no awe-inspiring man, who looked at them affectionately through gold-rimmed spectacles while he told them about the sun and the moon and all the wonders of the world. Up and down the middle passage walked a man in a dirty linen coat and with gray bristles projecting from his nostrils. As he walked he swung the cane and smoked his pipe; or he sat at the desk and read the newspaper. The children were noisy and restless, and when the noise broke out into open conflict, the man dashed down from his desk, and hit out indiscriminately with his cane. And Pelle himself, well he was coupled—for good, it appeared—to a dirty boy, covered with scrofulous sores, who pinched his arm every time he read his b-a—ba, b-e—be wrong. The only variation was an hour’s daily examination in the tedious observations in the class-book, and the Saturday’s uncouth hymn-repeating.

For a time Pelle swallowed everything whole, and passed it on faithfully to his father; but at last he tired of it. It was not his nature to remain long passive to his surroundings, and one fine day he had thrown aside all injunctions and intentions, and dived into the midst of the fun.

After this he had less information to impart, but on the other hand there were the thousands of knavish tricks to tell about. And father Lasse shook his head and comprehended nothing; but he could not help laughing.

XI

"A safe stronghold our God is still,
A trusty shield and wea—pon;
He'll help us clear from all the ill
That hath us now o'erta—ken.
  The ancient prince of hell
  Hath risen with purpose fell;
  Strong mail of craft and power
  He weareth in this hour;
On earth is not his fel—low."

The whole school sat swaying backward and forward in time to the rhythm, grinding out hymns in endless succession. Fris, the master, was walking up and down the middle passage, smoking his pipe; he was taking exercise after an hour's reading of the paper. He was using the cane to beat time with, now and then letting it descend upon the back of an offender, but always only at the end of a line—as a kind of note of admiration. Fris could not bear to have the rhythm broken. The children who did not know the hymn were carried along by the crowd, some of them contenting themselves with moving their lips, while others made up words of their own. When the latter were too dreadful, their neighbors laughed, and then the cane descended.

When one verse came to an end, Fris quickly started the next; for the mill was hard to set in motion again when once it had come to a standstill. "With for—!" and the half-hundred children carried it on—

"With force of arms we nothing can,
Full soon were we downrid—den;"

Then Fris had another breathing-space in which to enjoy his pipe and be lulled by this noise that spoke of great and industrious activity. When things went as they were now going, his exasperation calmed down for a time, and he could smile at his thoughts as he paced up and down, and, old though he was, look at the bright side of life. People in passing stopped to rejoice over the diligence displayed, and Fris beat more briskly with the cane, and felt a long-forgotten ideal stirring within him; he had this whole flock of children to educate for life, he was engaged in creating the coming generation.

When the hymn came to an end, he got them, without a pause, turned on to "Who puts his trust in God alone," and from that again to "We all, we all have faith in God." They had had them all three the whole winter through, and now at last, after tremendous labor, he had brought them so far that they could say them more or less together.

The hymn-book was the business of Fris's life, and his forty years as parish-clerk had led to his knowing the whole of it by heart. In addition to this he had a natural gift. As a child Fris had been intended for the ministry, and his studies as a young man were in accordance with that intention. Bible words came with effect from his lips, and his prospects were of the best, when an ill-natured bird came all the way from the Faroe Islands to bring trouble upon him. Fris fell down two flights from spiritual guide to parish-clerk and child-whipper. The latter office he looked upon as almost too transparent a punishment from Heaven, and arranged his school as a miniature clerical charge.

The whole village bore traces of his work. There was not much knowledge of reading and writing, but when it was a question of hymns and Bible texts, these fishermen and little artisans were bad to beat. Fris took to himself the credit for the fairly good circumstances of the adults, and the receipt of proper wages by the young men. He followed each one of them with something of a father's eyes, and considered them all to be practically a success. And he was on friendly terms with them once they had left school. They would come to the old bachelor and have a chat, and relieve their minds of some difficulty or other.

But it was always another matter with the confounded brood that sat upon the school benches for the time being; it resisted learning with might and main, and Fris prophesied it no good in the future.

Fris hated the children. But he loved these squarely built hymns, which seemed to wear out the whole class, while he himself could give them without relaxing a muscle. And when it went as it was doing to-day, he could quite forget that there were such things as children, and give himself up to this endless procession, in which column after column filed past him, in the foot-fall of the rhythm. It was not hymns, either; it was a mighty march-past of the strong things of life, in which there stretched, in one endless tone, all that Fris himself had failed to attain. That was why he nodded so happily, and why the loud tramp of feet rose around him like the acclamations of armies, an *Ave Cæsar*.

He was sitting with the third supplement of his newspaper before him, but was not reading; his eyes were closed, and his head moved gently to the rhythm.

The children babbled on ceaselessly, almost without stopping for breath; they were hypnotized by the monotonous flow of words. They were like the geese that had been given leave by the fox to say a prayer before they were eaten, and now went on praying and praying forever and ever. When they came to the end of the three hymns, they began again by themselves. The mill kept getting louder, they kept the time with their feet, and it was like the stroke of a mighty piston, a boom! Fris nodded with them, and a long tuft of hair flapped in his face; he fell into an ecstasy, and could not sit still upon his chair.

“And were this world all devils o’er,
   And watching to devour—us,
We lay it not to heart so sore;
   Not they can overpower us.”

It sounded like a stamping-mill; some were beating their slates upon the tables, and others thumping with their elbows. Fris did not hear it; he heard only the mighty tramp of advancing hosts.

“And let the prince of ill
Look grim as e’er he will,”—

Suddenly, at a preconcerted signal, the whole school stopped singing. Fris was brought to earth again with a shock. He opened his eyes, and saw that he had once more allowed himself to be taken by surprise. “You little devils! You confounded brats!” he roared, diving into their midst with his cane. In a moment the whole school was in a tumult, the boys fighting and the girls screaming. Fris began hitting about him.

He tried to bring them back to the patter. “Who puts his trust in God alone!” he shouted in a voice that drowned the clamor; but they did not take it up—the little devils! Then he hit indiscriminately. He knew quite well that one was just as good as another, and was not particular where the strokes fell. He took the long-haired ones by the hair and dragged them to the table, and thrashed them until the cane began to split. The boys had been waiting for this; they had themselves rubbed onion into the cane that morning, and the most defiant of them had on several pairs of trousers for the occasion.

When the cracked sound proclaimed that the cane was in process of disintegration, the whole school burst into deafening cheers. Fris had thrown up the game, and let them go on. He walked up and down the middle passage like a suffering animal, his gall rising. “You little devils!” he hissed; “You infernal brats!” And then, “Do sit still, children!” This last was so ridiculously touching in the midst of all the rest, that it had to be imitated.

Pelle sat farthest away, in the corner. He was fairly new at this sort of thing, but did his best. Suddenly he jumped on to the table, and danced there in his stockinged feet. Fris gazed at him so strangely, Pelle thought; he was like Father Lasse when everything went wrong; and he slid down, ashamed. Nobody had noticed his action, however; it was far too ordinary.

It was a deafening uproar, and now and then an ill-natured remark was hurled out of the seething tumult. Where they came from it was difficult to say; but every one of them hit Fris and made him cower. False steps made in his youth on the other side of the water fifty years ago, were brought up again here on the lips of these ignorant children, as well as some of his best actions, that had been so unselfish that the district put the very worst interpretation upon them. And as if that were not enough —but hush! He was sobbing.

“Sh—sh! Sh—sh!” It was Henry Bodker, the biggest boy in the school, and he was standing on a bench and sh—ing threateningly. The girls adored him, and became quiet directly; but some of the boys would not obey the order; but when Henry held his clenched fist up to one eye, they too became quiet.

Fris walked up and down the middle passage like a pardoned offender. He did not dare to raise his eyes, but they could all see that he was crying. “It’s a shame!” said a voice in an undertone. All eyes were turned upon him, and there was perfect silence in the room. “Play-time!” cried a boy’s voice in a tone of command: it was Nilen’s. Fris nodded feebly, and they rushed out.

Fris remained behind to collect himself. He walked up and down with his hands behind his back, swallowing hard. He was going to send in his resignation. Every time things went quite wrong, Fris sent in his resignation, and when he had come to himself a little, he put it off until the spring examinations were over. He would not leave in this way, as a kind of failure. This very winter he had worked as he had never done before, in order that his resignation might have somewhat the effect of a bomb, and that they might really feel it as a loss when he had gone. When the examination was held, he would take the hymn-book for repetition in chorus—right from the beginning. Some of the children would quickly drop behind, but there were some of them, into whom, in the course of time, he had hammered most of its contents. Long before they had run out, the clergyman would lift his hand to stop them, and say: “That’s enough, my dear clerk! That’s enough!” and would thank him in a voice of emotion; while the school committee and the parents would whisper together in awed admiration.

And then would be the time to resign!

The school lay on the outskirts of the fishing-village, and the playground was the shore. When the boys were let out after a few hours’ lessons, they were like young cattle out for the first time after the long winter. They darted, like flitting swallows, in all directions, threw themselves upon the fresh rampart of sea-wrack and beat one another about the ears with the salt wet weeds. Pelle was not fond of this game; the sharp weed stung, and sometimes there were stones hanging to it, grown right in.

But he dared not hold himself aloof, for that would attract attention at once. The thing was to join in it and yet not be in it, to make himself little and big according to the requirements of the moment, so as to be at one time unseen, and at another to exert a terrifying effect. He had his work cut out in twisting and turning, and slipping in and out.

The girls always kept together in one corner of the playground, told tittle-tattle and ate their lunch, but the boys ran all over the place like swallows in aimless flight. A big boy was standing crouching close to the gymnastic apparatus, with his arm hiding his face, and munching. They whirled about him excitedly, now one and now another making the circle narrower and narrower. Peter Kofod —Howling Peter—looked as if the world were sailing under him; he clung to the climbing-pole and hid his face. When they came close up to him, they kicked up behind with a roar, and the boy screamed with terror, turned up his face and broke into a long-drawn howl. Afterward he was given all the food that the others could not eat.

Howling Peter was always eating and always howling. He was a pauper child and an orphan; he was big for his age, but had a strangely blue and frozen look. His frightened eyes stood half out of his head, and beneath them the flesh was swollen and puffy with crying. He started at the least sound, and there was always an expression of fear on his face. The boys never really did him any harm, but they screamed and crouched down whenever they passed him—they could not resist it. Then he would scream too, and cower with fear. The girls would sometimes run up and tap him on the back, and then he screamed in terror. Afterward all the children gave him some of their food. He ate it all, roared, and was as famished as ever.

No one could understand what was wrong with him. Twice he had made an attempt to hang himself, and nobody could give any reason for it, not even he himself. And yet he was not altogether stupid. Lasse believed that he was a visionary, and saw things that others could not see, so that the very fact of living and drawing breath frightened him. But however that might be, Pelle must on no account do anything to him, not for all the world.

The crowd of boys had retired to the shore, and there, with little Nilen at their head, suddenly threw themselves upon Henry Bodker. He was knocked down and buried beneath the swarm, which lay in a sprawling heap upon the top of him, pounding down with clenched fists wherever there was an opening. But then a pair of fists began to push upward, tchew, tchew, like steam punches, the boys rolled off on all sides with their hands to their faces, and Henry Bodker emerged from the heap, kicking at random. Nilen was still hanging like a leech to the back of his neck, and Henry tore his blouse in getting him thrown off. To Pelle he seemed to be tremendously big as he stood there, only breathing a little quickly. And now the girls came up, and fastened his blouse together with pins, and gave him sweets; and he, by way of thanking them, seized them by their pigtails and tied them together, four or five of them, so that they could not get away from one another. They stood still and bore it patiently, only gazing at him with eyes of devotion.

Pelle had ventured into the battle and had received a kick, but he bore no malice. If he had had a sweet, he, like the girls, would have given it to Henry Bodker, and would have put up with ungentle treatment too. He worshipped him. But he measured himself by Nilen —the little bloodthirsty Nilen, who had no knowledge of fear, and attacked so recklessly that the others got out of his way! He was always in the thickest of the crowd, jumped right into the worst of everything, and came safely out of it all. Pelle examined himself critically to find points of resemblance, and found them—in his defence of Father Lasse the first summer, when he kicked a big boy, and in his relations with the mad bull, of which he was not in the least afraid. But in other points it failed. He was afraid of the dark, and he could not stand a thrashing, while Nilen could take his with his hands in his pockets. It was Pelle’s first attempt at obtaining a general survey of himself.

Fris had gone inland, probably to the church, so it would be a playtime of some hours. The boys began to look about for some more lasting ways of passing the time. The “bulls” went into the schoolroom, and began to play about on the tables and benches, but the “blennies” kept to the shore. “Bulls” and “blennies” were the land and the sea in conflict; the division came naturally on every more or less serious occasion, and sometimes gave rise to regular battles.

Pelle kept with the shore boys; Henry Bodker and Nilen were among them, and they were something new! They did not care about the land and animals, but the sea, of which he was afraid, was like a cradle to them. They played about on the water as they would in their mother’s parlor, and had much of its easy movement. They were quicker than Pelle, but not so enduring; and they had a freer manner, and made less of the spot to which they belonged. They spoke of England in the most ordinary way and brought things to school that their fathers and brothers had brought home with them from the other side of the world, from Africa and China. They spent nights on the sea on an open boat, and when they played truant it was always to go fishing. The cleverest of them had their own fishing-tackle and little flat-bottomed prams, that they had built themselves and caulked with oakum. They fished on their own account and caught pike, eels, and tench, which they sold to the wealthier people in the district.

Pelle thought he knew the stream thoroughly, but now he was brought to see it from a new side. Here were boys who in March and April—in the holidays—were up at three in the morning, wading barefoot at the mouth of the stream to catch the pike and perch that went up into the fresh water to spawn. And nobody told the boys to do it; they did it because they liked it!

They had strange pleasures! Now they were standing “before the sea” —in a long, jubilant row. They ran out with the receding wave to the larger stones out in the water, and then stood on the stones and jumped when the water came up again, like a flock of sea birds. The art consisted in keeping yourself dryshod, and yet it was the quickest boys who got wettest. There was of course a limit to the time you could keep yourself hovering. When wave followed wave in quick succession, you had to come down in the middle of it, and then sometimes it went over your head. Or an unusually large wave would come and catch all the legs as they were drawn up in the middle of the jump, when the whole row turned beautifully, and fell splash into the water. Then with, a deafening noise they went up to the schoolroom to turn the “bulls” away from the stove.

Farther along the shore, there were generally some boys sitting with a hammer and a large nail, boring holes in the stones there. They were sons of stone-masons from beyond the quarries. Pelle’s cousin Anton was among them. When the holes were deep enough, powder was pressed into them, and the whole school was present at the explosion.

In the morning, when they were waiting for the master, the big boys would stand up by the school wall with their hands in their pockets, discussing the amount of canvas and the home ports of vessels passing far out at sea. Pelle listened to them open-mouthed. It was always the sea and what belonged to the sea that they talked about, and most of it he did not understand. All these boys wanted the same thing when they were confirmed—to go to sea. But Pelle had had enough of it when he crossed from Sweden; he could not understand them.

How carefully he had always shut his eyes and put his fingers in his ears, so that his head should not get filled with water when he dived in the stream! But these boys swam down under the water like proper fish, and from what they said he understood that they could dive down in deep water and pick up stones from the bottom.

"Can you see down there, then?" he asked, in wonder.

"Yes, of course! How else would the fish be able to keep away from the nets? If it's only moonlight, they keep far outside, the whole shoal!"

"And the water doesn't run into your head when you take your fingers out of your ears?"

"Take your fingers out of your ears?"

"Yes, to pick up the stone."

A burst of scornful laughter greeted this remark, and they began to question him craftily; he was splendid—a regular country bumpkin! He had the funniest ideas about everything, and it very soon came out that he had never bathed in the sea. He was afraid of the water —a "blue-bag"; the stream could not do away with that.

After that he was called Blue-bag, notwithstanding that he one day took the cattle-whip to school with him and showed them how he could cut three-cornered holes in a pair of trousers with the long lash, hit a small stone so that it disappeared into the air, and make those loud reports. It was all excellent, but the name stuck to him all the same; and all his little personality smarted under it.

In the course of the winter, some strong young men came home to the village in blue clothes and white neck-cloths. They had laid up, as it was called, and some of them drew wages all through the winter without doing anything. They always came over to the school to see the master; they came in the middle of lessons, but it did not matter; Fris was joy personified. They generally brought something or other for him—a cigar of such fine quality that it was enclosed in glass, or some other remarkable thing. And they talked to Fris as they would to a comrade, told him what they had gone through, so that the listening youngsters hugged themselves with delight, and quite unconcernedly smoked their clay pipes in the class—with the bowl turned nonchalantly downward without losing its tobacco. They had been engaged as cook's boys and ordinary seamen, on the Spanish main and the Mediterranean and many other wonderful places. One of them had ridden up a fire-spouting mountain on a donkey. And they brought home with them lucifer matches that were as big, almost, as Pomeranian logs, and were to be struck on the teeth.

The boys worshipped them and talked of nothing else; it was a great honor to be seen in the company of such a man. For Pelle it was not to be thought of.

And then it came about that the village was awaiting the return of one such lad as this, and he did not come. And one day word came that bark so-and-so had gone to the bottom with all on board. It was the winter storms, said the boys, spitting like grown men. The brothers and sisters were kept away from school for a week, and when they came back Pelle eyed them curiously: it must be strange to have a brother lying at the bottom of the sea, quite young! "Then you won't want to go to sea?" he asked them. Oh, yes, they wanted to go to sea, too!

Another time Fris came back after an unusually long playtime in low spirits. He kept on blowing his nose hard, and now and then dried his eyes behind his spectacles. The boys nudged one another. He cleared his throat loudly, but could not make himself heard, and then beat a few strokes on his desk with the cane.

"Have you heard, children?" he asked, when they had become more or less quiet.

"No! Yes! What?" they cried in chorus; and one boy said: "That the sun's fallen into the sea and set it on fire!"

The master quietly took up his hymn-book. "Shall we sing 'How blessed are they'?" he said; and they knew that something must have happened, and sang the hymn seriously with him.

But at the fifth verse Fris stopped; he could not go on any longer. "Peter Funck is drowned!" he said, in a voice that broke on the last word. A horrified whisper passed through the class, and they looked at one another with uncomprehending eyes. Peter Funck was the most active boy in the village, the best swimmer, and the greatest scamp the school had ever had—and he was drowned!

Fris walked up and down, struggling to control himself. The children dropped into softly whispered conversation about Peter Funck, and all their faces had grown old with gravity. "Where did it happen?" asked a big boy.

Fris awoke with a sigh. He had been thinking about this boy, who had shirked everything, and had then become the best sailor in the village; about all the thrashings he had given him, and the pleasant hours they had spent together on winter evenings when the lad was home from a voyage and had looked in to see his old master. There had been much to correct, and things of grave importance that Fris had had to patch up for the lad in all secrecy, so that they should not affect his whole life, and—

"It was in the North Sea," he said. "I think they'd been in England."

"To Spain with dried fish," said a boy. "And from there they went to England with oranges, and were bringing a cargo of coal home."

"Yes, I think that was it," said Fris. "They were in the North Sea, and were surprised by a storm; and Peter had to go aloft."

"Yes, for the *Trokkadej* is such a crazy old hulk. As soon as there's a little wind, they have to go aloft and take in sail," said another boy.

"And he fell down," Fris went on, "and struck the rail and fell into the sea. There were the marks of his sea-boots on the rail. They braced—or whatever it's called—and managed to turn; but it took them half-an-hour to get up to the place. And just as they got there, he sank before their eyes. He had been struggling in the icy water for half-an-hour—with sea-boots and oilskins on—and yet—"

A long sigh passed through the class. "He was the best swimmer on the whole shore!" said Henry. "He dived backward off the gunwale of a bark that was lying in the roads here taking in water, and came up on the other side of the vessel. He got ten rye rusks from the captain himself for it."

"He must have suffered terribly," said Fris. "It would almost have been better for him if he hadn't been able to swim."

"That's what my father says!" said a little boy. "He can't swim, for he says it's better for a sailor not to be able to; it only keeps you in torture."

"My father can't swim, either!" exclaimed another. "Nor mine, either!" said a third. "He could easily learn, but he won't." And they went on in this way, holding up their hands. They could all swim themselves, but it appeared that hardly any of their fathers could; they had a superstitious feeling against it. "Father says you oughtn't to tempt Providence if you're wrecked," one boy added.

"Why, but then you'd not be doing your best!" objected a little faltering voice. Fris turned quickly toward the corner where Pelle sat blushing to the tips of his ears.

"Look at that little man!" said Fris, impressed. "And I declare if he isn't right and all the rest of us wrong! God helps those that help themselves!"

"Perhaps," said a voice. It was Henry Bodker's.

"Well, well, I know He didn't help here, but still we ought always to do what we can in all the circumstances of life. Peter did his best—and he was the cleverest boy I ever had."

The children smiled at one another, remembering various things. Peter Funck had once gone so far as to wrestle with the master himself, but they had not the heart to bring this up. One of the bigger boys, however, said, half for the purpose of teasing: "He never got any farther than the twenty-seventh hymn!"

"Didn't he, indeed?" snarled Fris. "Didn't he, indeed? And you think perhaps you're clever, do you? Let's see how far you've got, then!" And he took up the hymn-book with a trembling hand. He could not stand anything being said against boys that had left.

The name Blue-bag continued to stick to Pelle, and nothing had ever stung him so much; and there was no chance of his getting rid of it before the summer came, and that was a long way off.

One day the fisher-boys ran out on to the breakwater in playtime. A boat had just come in through the pack-ice with a gruesome cargo —five frozen men, one of whom was dead and lay in the fire-engine house, while the four others had been taken into various cottages, where they were being rubbed with ice to draw the frost out of them. The farmer-boys were allowed no share in all this excitement, for the fisher-boys, who went in and out and saw everything, drove them away if they approached—and sold meagre information at extortionate prices.

The boat had met a Finnish schooner drifting in the sea, covered with ice, and with frozen rudder. She was too heavily laden, so that the waves went right over her and froze; and the ice had made her sink still deeper. When she was found, her deck was just on a level with the water, ropes of the thickness of a finger had become as thick as an arm with ice, and the men who were lashed to the rigging were shapeless masses of ice. They were like knights in armor with closed visor when they were taken down, and their clothes had to be hacked off their bodies. Three boats had gone out now to try and save the vessel; there would be a large sum of money to divide if they were successful.

Pelle was determined not to be left out of all this, even if he got his shins kicked in, and so kept near and listened. The boys were talking gravely and looked gloomy. What those men had put up with! And perhaps their hands or feet would mortify and have to be cut off. Each boy behaved as if he were bearing his share of their sufferings, and they talked in a manly way and in gruff voices. “Be off with you, bull!” they called to Pelle. They were not fond of Blue-bags for the moment.

The tears came to Pelle’s eyes, but he would not give in, and wandered away along the wharf.

“Be off with you!” they shouted again, picking up stones in a menacing way. “Be off to the other bumpkins, will you!” They came up and hit at him. “What are you standing there and staring into the water for? You might turn giddy and fall in head first! Be off to the other yokels, will you! Blue-bag!”

Pelle turned literally giddy, with the strength of the determination that seized upon his little brain. “I’m no more a blue-bag than you are!” he said. “Why, you wouldn’t even dare to jump into the water!”

“Just listen to him! He thinks you jump into the water for fun in the middle of winter, and get cramp!”

Pelle just heard their exultant laughter as he sprang off the breakwater, and the water, thick with ground-up ice, closed above his head. The top of his head appeared again, he made two or three strokes with his arms like a dog, and sank.

The boys ran in confusion up and down and shouted, and one of them got hold of a boat-hook. Then Henry Bodker came running up, sprang in head first without stopping, and disappeared, while a piece of ice that he had struck with his forehead made ducks and drakes over the water. Twice his head appeared above the ice-filled water, to snatch a breath of air, and then he came up with Pelle. They got him hoisted up on to the breakwater, and Henry set to work to give him a good thrashing.

Pelle had lost consciousness, but the thrashing had the effect of bringing him to. He suddenly opened his eyes, was on his legs in a trice, and darted away like a sandpiper.

“Run home!” the boys roared after him. “Run as hard as ever you can, or you’ll be ill! Only tell your father you fell in!” And Pelle ran. He needed no persuasion. When he reached Stone Farm, his clothes were frozen quite stiff, and his trousers could stand alone when he got out of them; but he himself was as warm as a toast.

He would not lie to his father, but told him just what had happened. Lasse was angry, angrier than the boy had ever seen him before.

Lasse knew how to treat a horse to keep it from catching cold, and began to rub Pelle’s naked body with a wisp of straw, while the boy lay on the bed, tossing about under the rough handling. His father took no notice of his groans, but scolded him. “You mad little devil, to jump straight into the sea in the middle of winter like a lovesick woman! You ought to have a whipping, that’s what you ought to have—a good sound whipping! But I’ll let you off this time if you’ll go to sleep and try to sweat so that we can get that nasty salt water out of your body. I wonder if it wouldn’t be a good thing to bleed you.”

Pelle did not want to be bled; he was very comfortable lying there, now that he had been sick. But his thoughts were very serious. “Supposing I’d been drowned!” he said solemnly.

“If you had, I’d have thrashed you to within an inch of your life,” said Lasse angrily.

Pelle laughed.

“Oh, you may laugh, you word-catcher!” snapped Lasse. “But it’s no joke being father to a little ne’er-do-weel of a cub like you!” Saying which he went angrily out into the stable. He kept on listening, however, and coming up to peep in and see whether fever or any other devilry had come of it.

But Pelle slept quietly with his head under the quilt, and dreamed that he was no less a person than Henry Bodker.

Pelle did not learn to read much that winter, but he learned twenty and odd hymns by heart only by using his ears, and he got the name Blue-bag, as applied to himself, completely banished. He had gained ground, and strengthened his position by several bold strokes; and the school began to take account of him as a brave boy. And Henry, who as a rule took no notice of anybody, took him several times under his wing.

Now and then he had a bad conscience, especially when his father in his newly-awakened thirst for knowledge, came to him for the solution of some problem or other, and he was at a loss for an answer.

“But it’s you who ought to have the learning,” Lasse would then say reproachfully.

As the winter drew to an end, and the examination approached, Pelle became nervous. Many uncomfortable reports were current of the severity of the examination among the boys—of putting into lower classes and complete dismissal from the school.

Pelle had the misfortune not to be heard independently in a single hymn. He had to give an account of the Fall. The theft of the apple was easy to get through, but the curse—! “And God said unto the serpent: Upon thy belly shalt thou go, upon thy belly shalt thou go, upon thy belly shalt thou go!” He could get no further.

“Does it still do that, then?” asked the clergyman kindly.

“Yes—for it has no limbs.”

“And can you explain to me what a limb is?” The priest was known to be the best examiner on the island; he could begin in a gutter and end in heaven, people said.

“A limb is—is a hand.”

“Yes, that is one. But can’t you tell me something that distinguishes all limbs from other parts of the body? A limb is—well?—a?—a part of the body that can move by itself, for instance? Well!”

“The ears!” said Pelle, perhaps because his own were burning.

“O-oh? Can you move your ears, then?”

“Yes.” By dint of great perseverance, Pelle had acquired that art in the course of the previous summer, so as not to be outdone by Rud.

“Then, upon my word, I should like to see it!” exclaimed the clergyman.

So Pelle worked his ears industriously backward and forward, and the priest and the school committee and the parents all laughed. Pelle got “excellent” in religion.

“So it was your ears after all that saved you,” said Lasse, delighted. “Didn’t I tell you to use your ears well? Highest marks in religion only for moving your ears! Why, I should think you might become a parson if you liked!”

And he went on for a long time. But wasn’t he the devil of a laddie to be able to answer like that!

XII

“Come, cubby, cubby, cubby! Come on, you silly little chicken, there’s nothing to be afraid of!” Pelle was enticing his favorite calf with a wisp of green corn; but it was not quite sure of him to-day, for it had had a beating for bad behavior.

Pelle felt very much like a father whose child gives him sorrow and compels him to use severe measures. And now this misunderstanding — that the calf would have nothing to do with him, although it was for its own good that he had beaten it! But there was no help for it, and as long as Pelle had them to mind, he intended to be obeyed.

At last it let him come close up to it, so that he could stroke it. It stood still for a little and was sulky, but yielded at last, ate the green food and snuffed in his face by way of thanks.

“Will you be good, then?” said Pelle, shaking it by its stumps of horns. “Will you, eh?” It tossed its head mischievously. “Very well, then you shan’t carry my coat to-day.”

The strange thing about this calf was that the first day it was let out, it would not stir, and at last the boy left it behind for Lasse to take in again. But no sooner was it behind him than it followed of its own accord, with its forehead close to his back; and always after that it walked behind him when they went out and came home, and it carried his overcoat on its back when it looked as if there would be rain.

Pelle’s years were few in number, but to his animals he was a grown man. Formerly he had only been able to make them respect him sufficiently to obey him at close quarters; but this year he could hit a cow at a distance of a hundred paces with a stone, and that gave him power over the animals at a distance, especially when he thought of calling out the animal’s name as he hit it. In this way they realized that the pain came from him, and learned to obey the mere call.

For punishment to be effectual, it must follow immediately upon the misdeed. There was therefore no longer any such thing as lying in wait for an animal that had offended, and coming up behind it when later on it was grazing peacefully. That only caused confusion. To run an animal until it was tired out, hanging on to its tail and beating it all round the meadow only to revenge one’s self, was also stupid; it made the whole flock restless and difficult to manage for the rest of the day. Pelle weighed the end and the means against one another; he learned to quench his thirst for revenge with good practical reasons.

Pelle was a boy, and he was not an idle one. All day, from five in the morning until nine at night, he was busy with something or other, often most useless things. For hours he practiced walking on his hands, turning a somersault, and jumping the stream; he was always in motion. Hour after hour he would run unflaggingly round in a circle on the grass, like a tethered foal, leaning toward the center as he ran, so that his hand could pluck the grass, kicking up behind, and neighing and snorting. He was pouring forth energy from morning till night with open-handed profusion.

But minding the cattle was *work*, and here he husbanded his energy. Every step that could be saved here was like capital acquired; and Pelle took careful notice of everything, and was always improving his methods. He learned that punishment worked best when it only hung as a threat; for much beating made an animal callous. He also learned to see when it was absolutely necessary to interfere. If this could not be done in the very act, he controlled himself and endeavored upon the strength of his experience to bring about exactly the same situation once more, and then to be prepared. The little fellow, unknown to himself, was always engaged in adding cubits unto his stature.

He had obtained good results. The driving out and home again no longer gave him any difficulty; he had succeeded for a whole week in driving the flock along a narrow field road, with growing corn on both sides, without their having bitten off so much as a blade. And there was the still greater task of keeping them under control on a hot, close day—to hedge them in in full gallop, so that they stood in the middle of the meadow stamping on the ground with uplifted tails, in fear of the gad-flies. If he wanted to, he could make them tear home to the stable in wild flight, with their tails in the air, on the coldest October day, only by lying down in the grass and imitating the hum of gad-flies. But that was a tremendous secret, that even Father Lasse knew nothing about.

The amusing thing about the buzzing was that calves that were out for the first time, and had never made the acquaintance of a gad-fly, instantly set off running, with tail erect, when they heard its angry buzz.

Pelle had a remote ideal, which was to lie upon some elevated place and direct the whole flock by the sole means of his voice, and never need to resort to punishment. Father Lasse never beat either, no matter how wrong things went.

There were some days—well, what did become of them? Before he had any idea of it, it was time to drive home. Other days were long enough, but seemed to sing themselves away, in the ring of scythes, the lowing of cattle, and people's voices far away. Then the day itself went singing over the ground, and Pelle had to stop every now and then to listen. Hark! there was music! And he would run up on to the sandbanks and gaze out over the sea; but it was not there, and inland there was no merrymaking that he knew of, and there were no birds of passage flying through the air at this time of year. But hark! there was music again! far away in the distance, just such a sound of music as reaches the ear from so far off that one cannot distinguish the melody, or say what instruments are playing. Could it be the sun itself?

The song of light and life streamed through him, as though he were a fountain; and he would go about in a dreamy half-consciousness of melody and happiness.

When the rain poured down, he hung his coat over a briar and lay sheltered beneath it, carving or drawing with a lead button on paper—horses, and bulls lying down, but more often ships, ships that sailed across the sea upon their own soft melody, far away to foreign lands, to Negroland and China, for rare things. And when he was quite in the mood, he would bring out a broken knife and a piece of shale from a secret hiding-place, and set to work. There was a picture scratched on the stone, and he was now busy carving it in relief. He had worked at it on and off all through the summer, and now it was beginning to stand out. It was a bark in full sail, sailing over rippling water to Spain—yes, it was going to Spain, for grapes and oranges, and all the other delightful things that Pelle had never tasted yet.

On rainy days it was a difficult matter to keep count of the time, and required the utmost exertion. On other days it was easy enough, and Pelle could tell it best by the feeling. At certain times of the day there were signs at home on the farm that told him the time, and the cattle gave him other hours by their habits. At nine the first one lay down to chew the morning cud, and then all gradually lay down one by one; and there was always a moment at about ten when they all lay chewing. At eleven the last of them were upon their legs again. It was the same in the afternoon between three and five.

Midday was easy to determine when the sun was shining. Pelle could always feel it when it turned in its path. And there were a hundred other things in nature that gave him a connection with the times of day, such as the habits of the birds, and something about the fir-trees, and much besides that he could not lay his finger upon and say it was there, because it was only a feeling. The time to drive home was given by the cattle themselves. When it drew near, they grazed slowly around until their heads pointed in the direction of the farm; and there was a visible tension in their bodies, a homeward yearning.

Rud had not shown himself all the week, and no sooner had he come today than Pelle had to give him a blowing-up for some deceitfulness. Then he ran home, and Pelle lay down at the edge of the fir-plantation, on his face with the soles of his feet in the air, and sang. All round him there were marks of his knife on the tree-stems. On the earliest ships you saw the keel, the deck was perpendicular to the body. Those had been carved the first summer. There was also a collection of tiny fields here on the edge of the stream, properly ploughed, harrowed, and sown, each field about two feet square.

Pelle was resting now after the exertion with Rud, by making the air rock with his jubilant bawling. Up at the farm a man came out and went along the high-road with a bundle under his arm. It was Erik, who had to appear in court in answer to a summons for fighting. Then the farmer drove out at a good pace toward the town, so he was evidently off on the spree. Why couldn't the man have driven with him, as they were both going the same way? How quickly he drove, although she never followed him now. She consoled herself at home instead! Could it be true that he had spent five hundred krones in drinking and amusement in one evening?

“The war is raging, the red blood streams,
Among the mountains ring shouts and screams!
The Turk advances with cruel rage,
And sparing neither youth nor age.
They go—”

“Ho!” Pelle sprang to his feet and gazed up over the clover field. The dairy cows up there for the last quarter of an hour had been looking up at the farm every other moment, and now Aspasia lowed, so his father must soon be coming out to move them. There he came, waddling round the corner of the farm. It was not far to the lowest of the cows, so when his father was there, Pelle could seize the opportunity just to run across and say good-day to him.

He brought his animals nearer together and drove them slowly over to the other fence and up the fields. Lasse had moved the upper half, and was now crossing over diagonally to the bull, which stood a little apart from the others. The bull was growling and kicking up the earth; its tongue hung out at one side of its mouth, and it tossed its head quickly; it was angry. Then it advanced with short steps and all kinds of antics; and how it stamped! Pelle felt a desire to kick it on the nose as he had often done before; it had no business to threaten Lasse, even if it meant nothing by it.

Father Lasse took no notice of it, either. He stood hammering away at the big tether-peg, to loosen it. “Good-day!” shouted Pelle. Lasse turned his head and nodded, then bent down and hammered the peg into the ground. The bull was just behind him, stamping quickly, with open mouth and tongue hanging out; it looked as if it were vomiting, and the sound it made answered exactly to that. Pelle laughed as he slackened his pace. He was close by.

But suddenly Father Lasse turned a somersault, fell, and was in the air again, and then fell a little way off. Again the bull was about to toss him, but Pelle was at its head. He was not wearing wooden shoes, but he kicked it with his bare feet until he was giddy. The bull knew him and tried to go round him, but Pelle sprang at its head, shouting and kicking and almost beside himself, seized it by the horns. But it put him gently on one side and went forward toward Lasse, blowing along the ground so that the grass waved.

It took hold of him by the blouse and shook him a little, and then tried to get both his horns under him to send him up into the air; but Pelle was on his feet again, and as quick as lightning had drawn his knife and plunged it in between the bull’s hind legs. The bull uttered a short roar, turned Lasse over on one side, and dashed off over the fields at a gallop, tossing its head as it ran, and bellowing. Down by the stream it began to tear up the bank, filling the air with earth and grass.

Lasse lay groaning with his eyes closed, and Pelle stood pulling in vain at his arm to help him up, crying: “Father, little Father Lasse!” At last Lasse sat up.

“Who’s that singing?” he asked. “Oh, it’s you, is it, laddie? And you’re crying! Has any one done anything to you? Ah, yes, of course, it was the bull! It was just going to play fandango with me. But what did you do to it, that the devil took it so quickly? You saved your father’s life, little though you are. Oh, hang it! I think I’m going to be sick! Ah me!” he went on, when the sickness was past, as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead. “If only I could have had a dram. Oh, yes, he knew me, the fellow, or I shouldn’t have got off so easily. He only wanted to play with me a little, you know. He was a wee bit spiteful because I drove him away from a cow this morning; I’d noticed that. But who’d have thought he’d have turned on me? He wouldn’t have done so, either, if I hadn’t been so silly as to wear somebody else’s clothes. This is Mons’s blouse; I borrowed it of him while I washed my own. And Mr. Bull didn’t like the strange smell about me. Well, we’ll see what Mons’ll say to this here slit. I’m afraid he won’t be best pleased.”

Lasse talked on for a good while until he tried to rise, and stood up with Pelle’s assistance. As he stood leaning on the boy’s shoulder, he swayed backward and forward. “I should almost have said I was drunk, if it hadn’t been for the pains!” he said, laughing feebly. “Well, well, I suppose I must thank God for you, laddie. You always gladden my heart, and now you’ve saved my life, too.”

Lasse then stumbled homeward, and Pelle moved the rest of the cows on the road down to join his own. He was both proud and affected, but most proud. He had saved Father Lasse’s life, and from the big, angry bull that no one else on the farm dared have anything to do with. The next time Henry Bodker came out to see him, he should hear all about it.

He was a little vexed with himself for having drawn his knife. Every one here looked down upon that, and said it was Swedish. He wouldn’t have needed to do it either if there’d been time, or if only he had had on his wooden shoes to kick the bull in the eyes with. He had very often gone at it with the toes of his wooden shoes, when it had to be driven into its stall again after a covering; and it always took good care not to do anything to him. Perhaps he would put his finger in its eye and make it blind, or take it by the horns and twist its head round, like the man in the story, until its neck was wrung.

Pelle grew and swelled up until he overshadowed everything. There was no limit to his strength while he ran about bringing his animals together again. He passed like a storm over everything, tossed strong Erik and the bailiff about, and lifted—yes, lifted the whole of Stone Farm merely by putting his hand under the beam. It was quite a fit of berserker rage!

In the very middle of it all, it occurred to him how awkward it would be if the bailiff got to know that the bull was loose. It might mean a thrashing both for him and Lasse. He must go and look for it; and for safety’s sake he took his long whip with him and put on his wooden shoes.

The bull had made a terrible mess down on the bank of the stream, and had ploughed up a good piece of the meadow. It had left bloody traces along the bed of the stream and across the fields. Pelle followed these out toward the headland, where he found the bull. The huge animal had gone right in under the bushes, and was standing licking its wound. When it heard Pelle’s voice, it came out. “Turn round!” he cried, flicking its nose with the whip. It put its head to the ground, bellowed, and moved heavily backward. Pelle continued flicking it on the nose while he advanced step by step, shouting determinedly: “Turn round! Will you turn round!” At last it turned and set off at a run, Pelle seizing the tether-peg and running after. He kept it going with the whip, so that it should have no time for evil thoughts.

When this was accomplished, he was ready to drop with fatigue, and lay crouched up at the edge of the fir-plantation, thinking sadly of Father Lasse, who must be going about up there ill and with nobody to give him a helping hand with his work. At last the situation became unbearable: he had to go home!

Zzzz! Zzzz! Lying flat on the ground, Pelle crept over the grass, imitating the maddening buzz of the gad-fly. He forced the sound out between his teeth, rising and falling, as if it were flying hither and thither over the grass. The cattle stopped grazing and stood perfectly still with attentive ears. Then they began to grow nervous, kicking up their legs under their bodies, turning their heads to one side in little curves, and starting; and then up went their tails. He made the sound more persistently angry, and the whole flock, infecting one another, turned and began to stamp round in wild panic. Two calves broke out of the tumult, and made a bee-line for the farm, and the whole flock followed, over stock and stone. All Pelle had to do now was to run after them, making plenty of fuss, and craftily keep the buzzing going, so that the mood should last till they reached home.

The bailiff himself came running to open the gate into the enclosure, and helped to get the animals in. Pelle expected a box on the ears, and stood still; but the bailiff only looked at him with a peculiar smile, and said: “They’re beginning to get the upper hand of you, I think. Well, well,” he went on, “it’s all right as long as you can manage the bull!” He was making fun of him, and Pelle blushed up to the roots of his hair.

Father Lasse had crept into bed. “What a good thing you came!” he said. “I was just lying here and wondering how I was going to get the cows moved. I can scarcely move at all, much less get up.”

It was a week before Lasse was on his feet again, and during that time the field-cattle remained in the enclosure, and Pelle stayed at home and did his father’s work. He had his meals with the others, and slept his midday sleep in the barn as they did.

One day, in the middle of the day, the Sow came into the yard, drunk. She took her stand in the upper yard, where she was forbidden to go, and stood there calling for Kongstrup. The farmer was at home, but did not show himself, and not a soul was to be seen behind the high windows. “Kongstrup, Kongstrup! Come here for a little!” she called, with her eyes on the pavement, for she could not lift her head. The bailiff was not at home, and the men remained in hiding in the barn, hoping to see some fun. “I say, Kongstrup, come out a moment! I want to speak to you!” said the Sow indistinctly—and then went up the steps and tried to open the door. She hammered upon it a few times, and stood talking with her face close to the door; and when nobody came, she reeled down the steps and went away talking to herself and not looking round.

A little while after the sound of weeping began up there, and just as the men were going out to the fields, the farmer came rushing out and gave orders that the horse should be harnessed to the chaise. While it was being done, he walked about nervously, and then set off at full speed. As he turned the corner of the house, a window opened and a voice called to him imploringly: "Kongstrup, Kongstrup!" But he drove quickly on, the window closed, and the weeping began afresh.

In the afternoon Pelle was busying himself about the lower yard when Karna came to him and told him to go up to mistress. Pelle went up hesitatingly. He was not sure of her and all the men were out in the fields.

Fru Kongstrup lay upon the sofa in her husband's study, which she always occupied, day or night, when her husband was out. She had a wet towel over her forehead, and her whole face was red with weeping.

"Come here!" she said, in a low voice. "You aren't afraid of me, are you?"

Pelle had to go up to her and sit on the chair beside her. He did not know what to do with his eyes; and his nose began to run with the excitement, and he had no pocket-handkerchief.

"Are you afraid of me?" she asked again, and a bitter smile crossed her lips.

He had to look at her to show that he was not afraid, and to tell the truth, she was not like a witch at all, but only like a human being who cried and was unhappy.

"Come here!" she said, and she wiped his nose with her own fine handkerchief, and stroked his hair. "You haven't even a mother, poor little thing!" And she smoothed down his clumsily mended blouse.

"It's three years now since Mother Bengta died, and she's lying in the west corner of the churchyard."

"Do you miss her very much?"

"Oh, well, Father Lasse mends my clothes!"

"I'm sure she can't have been very good to you."

"Oh, yes!" said Pelle, nodding earnestly. "But she was so fretful, she was always ailing; and it's better they should go when they get like that. But now we're soon going to get married again—when Father Lasse's found somebody that'll do."

"And then I suppose you'll go away from here? I'm sure you aren't comfortable here, are you?"

Pelle had found his tongue, but now feared a trap, and became dumb. He only nodded. Nobody should come and accuse him afterward of having complained.

"No, you aren't comfortable," she said, in a plaintive tone. "No one is comfortable at Stone Farm. Everything turns to misfortune here."

"It's an old curse, that!" said Pelle.

"Do they say so? Yes, yes, I know they do! And they say of me that I'm a devil—only because I love a single man—and cannot put up with being trampled on." She wept and pressed his hand against her quivering face.

"I've got to go out and move the cows," said Pelle, wriggling about uneasily in an endeavor to get away.

"Now you're afraid of me again!" she said, and tried to smile. It was like a gleam of sunshine after rain.

"No—only I've got to go out and move the cows."

"There's still a whole hour before that. But why aren't you herding to-day? Is your father ill?"

Then Pelle had to tell her about the bull.

"You're a good boy!" said the mistress, patting his head. "If I had a son, I should like him to be like you. But now you shall have some jam, and then you must run to the shop for a bottle of black-currant rum, so that we can make a hot drink for your father. If you hurry, you can be back before moving-time."

Lasse had his hot drink, even before the boy returned; and every day while he kept his bed he had something strengthening—although there was no black-currant rum in it.

During this time Pelle went up to the mistress nearly every day. Kongstrup had gone on business to Copenhagen. She was kind to him and gave him nice things to eat; and while he ate, she talked without ceasing about Kongstrup, or asked him what people thought about her.

Pelle had to tell her, and then she was upset and began to cry. There was no end to her talk about the farmer, but she contradicted herself, and Pelle gave up trying to make anything of it. Besides, the good things she gave him were quite enough for him to think about.

Down in their room he repeated everything word for word, and Lasse lay and listened, and wondered at this little fellow who had the run of high places, and was in the mistress's confidence. Still he did not quite like it.

"… She could scarcely stand, and had to hold on to the table when she was going to fetch me the biscuits, she was so ill. It was only because he'd treated her badly, she said. Do you know she hates him, and would like to kill him, she says; and yet she says that he's the handsomest man in the world, and asked me if I've seen any one handsomer in all Sweden. And then she cries as if she was mad."

"Does she?" said Lasse thoughtfully. "I don't suppose she knows what she's saying, or else she says it for reasons of her own. But all the same, it's not true that he beats her! She's telling a lie, I'm sure."

"And why should she lie?"

"Because she wants to do him harm, I suppose. But it's true he's a fine man—and cares for everybody except just her; and that's the misfortune. I don't like your being so much up there; I'm so afraid you may come to some harm."

"How could I? She's so good, so very good."

"How am I to know that? No, she isn't good—her eyes aren't good, at any rate. She's brought more than one person into misfortune by looking at them. But there's nothing to be done about it; the poor man has to risk things."

Lasse was silent, and stumbled about for a little while. Then he came up to Pelle. "Now, see here! Here's a piece of steel I've found, and you must remember always to have it about you, especially when you go up *there*! And then—yes, then we must leave the rest in God's hand. He's the only one who perhaps looks after poor little boys."

Lasse was up for a short while that day. He was getting on quickly, thank God, and in two days they might be back in their old ways again. And next winter they must try to get away from it all!

On the last day that Pelle stayed at home, he went up to the mistress as usual, and ran her errand for her. And that day he saw something unpleasant that made him glad that this was over. She took her teeth, palate, and everything out of her mouth, and laid them on the table in front of her!

So she *was* a witch!

XIII

Pelle was coming home with his young cattle. As he came near the farm he issued his commands in a loud voice, so that his father might hear. “Hi! Spasianna! where are you going to? Dannebrog, you confounded old ram, will you turn round!” But Lasse did not come to open the gate of the enclosure.

When he had got the animals in, he ran into the cow-stable. His father was neither there nor in their room, and his Sunday wooden shoes and his woollen cap were gone. Then Pelle remembered that it was Saturday, and that probably the old man had gone to the shop to fetch spirits for the men.

Pelle went down into the servants’ room to get his supper. The men had come home late, and were still sitting at the table, which was covered with spilt milk and potato-skins. They were engrossed in a wager; Erik undertook to eat twenty salt herrings with potatoes after he had finished his meal. The stakes were a bottle of spirits, and the others were to peel the potatoes for him.

Pelle got out his pocket-knife and peeled himself a pile of potatoes. He left the skin on the herring, but scraped it carefully and cut off the head and tail; then he cut it in pieces and ate it without taking out the bones, with the potatoes and the sauce. While he did so, he looked at Erik—the giant Erik, who was so strong and was not afraid of anything between heaven and earth. Erik had children all over the place! Erik could put his finger into the barrel of a gun, and hold the gun straight out at arm’s length! Erik could drink as much as three others!

And now Erik was sitting and eating twenty salt herrings after his hunger was satisfied. He took the herring by the head, drew it once between his legs, and then ate it as it was; and he ate potatoes to them, quite as quickly as the others could peel them. In between whiles he swore because the bailiff had refused him permission to go out that evening; there was going to be the devil to pay about that: he’d teach them to keep Erik at home when he wanted to go out!

Pelle quickly swallowed his herring and porridge, and set off again to run to meet his father; he was longing immensely to see him. Out at the pump the girls were busy scouring the milkpails and kitchen pans; and Gustav was standing in the lower yard with his arms on the fence, talking to them. He was really watching Bodil, whose eyes were always following the new pupil, who was strutting up and down and showing off his long boots with patent-leather tops.

Pelle was stopped as he ran past, and set to pump water. The men now came up and went across to the barn, perhaps to try their strength. Since Erik had come, they always tried their strength in their free time. There was nothing Pelle found so exciting as trials of strength, and he worked hard so as to get done and go over there.

Gustav, who was generally the most eager, continued to stand and vent his ill-nature upon the pupil.

“There must be money there!” said Bodil, thoughtfully.

“Yes, you should try him; perhaps you might become a farmer’s wife. The bailiff won’t anyhow; and the farmer—well, you saw the Sow the other day; it must be nice to have that in prospect.”

“Who told you that the bailiff won’t?” answered Bodil sharply. “Don’t imagine that we need you to hold the candle for us! Little children aren’t allowed to see everything.”

Gustav turned red. “Oh, hold your jaw, you hussy!” he muttered, and sauntered down to the barn.

> “Oh, goodness gracious, my poor old mother,
> Who’s up on deck and can’t stand!”

sang Mons over at the stable door, where he was standing hammering at a cracked wooden shoe. Pelle and the girls were quarreling, and up in the attic the bailiff could be heard going about; he was busy putting pipes in order. Now and then a long-drawn sound came from the high house, like the distant howling of some animal, making the people shudder with dreariness.

A man dressed in his best clothes, and with a bundle under his arm, slipped out of the door from the men’s rooms, and crept along by the building in the lower yard. It was Erik.

“Hi, there! Where the devil are you going?” thundered a voice from the bailiff’s window. The man ducked his head a little and pretended not to hear. “Do you hear, you confounded Kabyle! *Erik*!” This time Erik turned and darted in at a barn-door.

Directly after the bailiff came down and went across the yard. In the chaff-cutting barn the men were standing laughing at Erik’s bad luck. “He’s a devil for keeping watch!” said Gustav. “You must be up early to get the better of *him*.”

“Oh, I’ll manage to dish him!” said Erik. “I wasn’t born yesterday. And if he doesn’t mind his own business, we shall come to blows.”

There was a sudden silence as the bailiff’s well-known step was heard upon the stone paving. Erik stole away.

The form of the bailiff filled the doorway. “Who sent Lasse for gin?” he asked sternly.

They looked at one another as if not understanding. “Is Lasse out?” asked Mons then, with the most innocent look in the world. “Ay, the old man’s fond of spirits,” said Anders, in explanation.

“Oh, yes; you’re good comrades!” said the bailiff. “First you make the old man go, and then you leave him in the lurch. You deserve a thrashing, all of you.”

“No, we don’t deserve a thrashing, and don’t mean to submit to one either,” said the head man, going a step forward. “Let me tell you—”

“Hold your tongue, man!” cried the bailiff, going close up to him, and Karl Johan drew back.

“Where’s Erik?”

“He must be in his room.”

The bailiff went in through the horse-stable, something in his carriage showing that he was not altogether unprepared for an attack from behind. Erik was in bed, with the quilt drawn up to his eyes.

“What’s the meaning of this? Are you ill?” asked the bailiff.

“Yes, I think I’ve caught cold, I’m shivering so.” He tried to make his teeth chatter.

“It isn’t the rot, I hope?” said the bailiff sympathetically. “Let’s look at you a little, poor fellow.” He whipped off the quilt. “Oho, so you’re in bed with your best things on—and top-boots! It’s your grave-clothes, perhaps? And I suppose you were going out to order a pauper’s grave for yourself, weren’t you? It’s time we got you put underground, too; seems to me you’re beginning to smell already!” He sniffed at him once or twice.

But Erik sprang out of bed as if shot by a spring, and stood erect close to him. “I’m not dead yet, and perhaps I don’t smell any more than some other people!” he said, his eyes flashing and looking about for a weapon.

The bailiff felt his hot breath upon his face, and knew it would not do to draw back. He planted his fist in the man’s stomach, so that he fell back upon the bed and gasped for breath; and then held him down with a hand upon his chest. He was burning with a desire to do more, to drive his fist into the face of this rascal, who grumbled whenever one’s back was turned, and had to be driven to every little task. Here was all the servant-worry that embittered his existence —dissatisfaction with the fare, cantankerousness in work, threats of leaving when things were at their busiest—difficulties without end. Here was the slave of many years of worry and ignominy, and all he wanted was one little pretext—a blow from this big fellow who never used his strength for work, but only to take the lead in all disturbances.

But Erik lay quite still and looked at his enemy with watchful eye. “You may hit me, if you like. There is such a thing as a magistrate in the country,” he said, with irritating calm. The bailiff’s muscles burned, but he was obliged to let the man go for fear of being summoned. “Then remember another time not to be fractious!” he said, letting go his hold, “or I’ll show you that there is a magistrate.”

“When Lasse comes, send him up to me with the gin!” he said to the men as he passed through the barn.

“The devil we will!” said Mons, in an undertone.

Pelle had gone to meet his father. The old man had tasted the purchase, and was in good spirits. “There were seven men in the boat, and they were all called Ole except one, and he was called Ole Olsen!” he said solemnly, when he saw the boy. “Yes, wasn’t it a strange thing, Pelle, boy, that they should every one of them be called Ole—except the one, of course; for his name was Ole Olsen.” Then he laughed, and nudged the boy mysteriously; and Pelle laughed too, for he liked to see his father in good spirits.

The men came up to them, and took the bottles from the herdsman.

"He's been tasting it!" said Anders, holding the bottle up to the light. "Oh, the old drunkard! He's had a taste at the bottles."

"No, the bottles must leak at the bottom!" said Lasse, whom the dram had made quite bold. "For I've done nothing but just smell. You've got to make sure, you know, that you get the genuine thing and not just water."

They moved on down the enclosure, Gustav going in front and playing on his concertina. A kind of excited merriment reigned over the party. First one and then another would leap into the air as they went; they uttered short, shrill cries and disconnected oaths at random. The consciousness of the full bottles, Saturday evening with the day of rest in prospect, and above all the row with the bailiff, had roused their tempers.

They settled down below the cow-stable, in the grass close to the pond. The sun had long since gone down, but the evening sky was bright, and cast a flaming light upon their faces turned westward; while the white farms inland looked dazzling in the twilight.

Now the girls came sauntering over the grass, with their hands under their aprons, looking like silhouettes against the brilliant sky. They were humming a soft folk-song, and one by one sank on to the grass beside the men; the evening twilight was in their hearts, and made their figures and voices as soft as a caress. But the men's mood was not a gentle one, and they preferred the bottle.

Gustav walked about extemporizing on his concertina. He was looking for a place to sit down, and at last threw himself into Karna's lap, and began to play a dance. Erik was the first upon his feet. He led on account of his difference with the bailiff, and pulled Bengta up from the grass with a jerk. They danced a Swedish polka, and always at a certain place in the melody, he tossed her up into the air with a shout. She shrieked every time, and her heavy skirts stood out round her like the tail of a turkey-cock, so that every one could see how long it was till Sunday.

In the middle of a whirl he let go of her, so that she stumbled over the grass and fell. The bailiff's window was visible from where they sat, and a light patch had appeared at it. "He's staring! Lord, how he's staring! I say, can you see this?" Erik called out, holding up a gin-bottle. Then, as he drank: "Your health! Old Nick's health! He smells, the pig! Bah!" The others laughed, and the face at the window disappeared.

In between the dances they played, drank, and wrestled. Their actions became more and more wild, they uttered sudden yells that made the girls scream, threw themselves flat upon the ground in the middle of a dance, groaned as if they were dying, and sprang up again suddenly with wild gestures and kicked the legs of those nearest to them. Once or twice the bailiff sent the pupil to tell them to be quiet, but that only made the noise worse. "Tell him to go his own dog's errands!" Erik shouted after the pupil.

Lasse nudged Pelle and they gradually drew farther and farther away. "We'd better go to bed now," Lasse said, when they had slipped away unnoticed. "One never knows what this may lead to. They all of them see red; I should think they'll soon begin to dance the dance of blood. Ah me, if I'd been young I wouldn't have stolen away like a thief; I'd have stayed and taken whatever might have come. There was a time when Lasse could put both hands on the ground and kick his man in the face with the heels of his boots so that he went down like a blade of grass; but that time's gone, and it's wisest to take care of one's self. This may end in the police and much more, not to mention the bailiff. They've been irritating him all the summer with that Erik at their head; but if once he gets downright angry, Erik may go home to his mother."

Pelle wanted to stay up for a little and look at them. "If I creep along behind the fence and lie down—oh, do let me, father!" he begged.

"Eh, what a silly idea! They might treat you badly if they got hold of you. They're in the very worst of moods. Well, you must take the consequences, and for goodness' sake take care they don't see you!"

So Lasse went to bed, but Pelle crawled along on the ground behind the fence until he came close up to them and could see everything.

Gustav was still sitting on Karna's open lap and playing, and she was holding him fast in her arms. But Anders had put his arm around Bodil's waist. Gustav discovered it, and with an oath flung away his concertina, sending it rolling over the grass, and sprang up. The others threw themselves down in a circle on the grass, breathing hard. They expected something.

Gustav was like a savage dancing a war-dance. His mouth was open and his eyes bright and staring. He was the only man on the grass, and jumped up and down like a ball, hopped upon his heels, and kicked up his legs alternately to the height of his head, uttering a shrill cry with each kick. Then he shot up into the air, turning round as he did so, and came down on one heel and went on turning round like a top, making himself smaller and smaller as he turned, and then exploded in a leap and landed in the lap of Bodil, who threw her arms about him in delight.

In an instant Anders had both hands on his shoulders from behind, set his feet against his back, and sent him rolling over the grass. It all happened without a pause, and Gustav himself gave impetus to his course, rolling along in jolts like an uneven ball. But suddenly he stopped and rose to his feet with a bound, stared straight in front of him, turned round with a jerk, and moved slowly toward Anders. Anders rose quickly, pushed his cap on one side, clicked with his tongue, and advanced. Bodil spread herself out more comfortably on the ground, and looked proudly round the circle, eagerly noting the envy of the others.

The two antagonists stood face to face, feeling their way to a good grasp. They stroked one another affectionately, pinched one another in the side, and made little jesting remarks.

“My goodness me, how fat you are, brother!” This was Anders.

“And what breasts you’ve got! You might quite well be a woman,” answered Gustav, feeling Anders’ chest. “Eeh, how soft you are!” Scorn gleamed in their faces, but their eyes followed every movement of their opponent. Each of them expected a sudden attack from the other.

The others lay stretched around them on the grass, and called out impatiently: “Have done with that and look sharp about it!”

The two men continued to stand and play as if they were afraid to really set to, or were spinning the thing out for its still greater enjoyment. But suddenly Gustav had seized Anders by the collar, thrown himself backward and flung Anders over his head. It was done so quickly that Anders got no hold of Gustav; but in swinging round he got a firm grasp of Gustav’s hair, and they both fell on their backs with their heads together and their bodies stretched in opposite directions.

Anders had fallen heavily, and lay half unconscious, but without loosening his hold on Gustav’s hair. Gustav twisted round and tried to get upon his feet, but could not free his head. Then he wriggled back into this position again as quickly as a cat, turned a backward somersault over his antagonist, and fell down upon him with his face toward the other’s. Anders tried to raise his feet to receive him, but was too late.

Anders threw himself about in violent jerks, lay still and strained again with sudden strength to turn Gustav off, but Gustav held on. He let himself fall heavily upon his adversary, and sticking out his legs and arms to support him on the ground, raised himself suddenly and sat down again, catching Anders in the wind. All the time the thoughts of both were directed toward getting out their knives, and Anders, who had now fully recovered his senses, remembered distinctly that he had not got his. “Ah!” he said aloud. “What a fool I am!”

“You’re whining, are you?” said Gustav, bending his face him. “Do you want to ask for mercy?”

At that moment Anders felt Gustav’s knife pressing against his thigh, and in an instant had his hand down there and wrenched it free. Gustav tried to take it from him, but gave up the attempt for fear of being thrown off. He then confined himself to taking possession of one of Anders’ hands, so that he could not open the knife, and began sitting upon him in the region of his stomach.

Anders lay in half surrender, and bore the blows without trying to defend himself, only gasping at each one. With his left hand he was working eagerly to get the knife opened against the ground, and suddenly plunged it into Gustav just as the latter had risen to let himself fall heavily upon his opponent’s body.

Gustav seized Anders by the wrist, his face distorted. “What the devil are you up to now, you swine?” he said, spitting down into Anders’ face. “He’s trying to sneak out by the back door!” he said, looking round the circle with a face wrinkled like that of a young bull.

They fought desperately for the knife, using hands and teeth and head; and when Gustav found that he could not get possession of the weapon, he set to work so to guide Anders’ hand that he should plunge it into his own body. He succeeded, but the blow was not straight, and the blade closed upon Anders’ fingers, making him throw the knife from him with an oath.

Meanwhile Erik was growing angry at no longer being the hero of the evening. “Will you soon be finished, you two cockerels, or must I have a bite too?” he said, trying to separate them. They took firm hold of one another, but then Erik grew angry, and did something for which he was ever after renowned. He took hold of them and set them both upon their feet.

Gustav looked as if he were going to throw himself into the battle again, and a sullen expression overspread his face; but then he began to sway like a tree chopped at the roots, and sank to the ground. Bodil was the first to come to his assistance. With a cry she ran to him and threw her arms about him.

He was carried in and laid upon his bed, Karl Johan poured spirit into the deep cut to clean it, and held it together while Bodil basted it with needle and thread from one of the men’s lockers. Then they dispersed, in pairs, as friendship permitted, Bodil, however, remaining with Gustav. She was true to him after all.

Thus the summer passed, in continued war and friction with the bailiff, to whom, however, they dared do nothing when it came to the point. Then the disease struck inward, and they set upon one another. “It must come out somewhere,” said Lasse, who did not like this state of things, and vowed he would leave as soon as anything else offered, even if they had to run away from wages and clothes and everything.

“They’re discontented with their wages, their working-hours are too long, and the food isn’t good enough; they pitch it about and waste it until it makes one ill to see them, for anyhow it’s God’s gift, even if it might be better. And Erik’s at the bottom of it all! He’s forever boasting and bragging and stirring up the others the whole day long. But as soon as the bailiff is over him, he daren’t do anything any more than the others; so they all creep into their holes. Father Lasse is not such a cowardly wind-bag as any of them, old though he is.

“I suppose a good conscience is the best support. If you have it and have done your duty, you can look both the bailiff and the farmer —and God the Father, too—in the face. For you must always remember, laddie, not to set yourself up against those that are placed over you. Some of us have to be servants and others masters; how would everything go on if we who work didn’t do our duty? You can’t expect the gentlefolk to scrape up the dung in the cow-stable.”

All this Lasse expounded after they had gone to bed, but Pelle had something better to do than to listen to it. He was sound asleep and dreaming that he was Erik himself, and was thrashing the bailiff with a big stick.

XIV

In Pelle’s time, pickled herring was the Bornholmer’s most important article of food. It was the regular breakfast dish in all classes of society, and in the lower classes it predominated at the supper- table too—and sometimes appeared at dinner in a slightly altered form. “It’s a bad place for food,” people would say derisively of such-and-such a farm. “You only get herring there twenty-one times a week.”

When the elder was in flower, well-regulated people brought out their salt-boxes, according to old custom, and began to look out to sea; the herring is fattest then. From the sloping land, which nearly everywhere has a glimpse of the sea, people gazed out in the early summer mornings for the homeward-coming boats. The weather and the way the boats lay in the water were omens regarding the winter food. Then the report would come wandering up over the island, of large hauls and good bargains. The farmers drove to the town or the fishing-village with their largest wagons, and the herring-man worked his way up through the country from cottage to cottage with his horse, which was such a wretched animal that any one would have been legally justified in putting a bullet through its head.

In the morning, when Pelle opened the stable doors to the field, the mist lay in every hollow like a pale gray lake, and on the high land, where the smoke rose briskly from houses and farms, he saw men and women coming round the gable-ends, half-dressed, or in shirt or chemise only, gazing out to sea. He himself ran round the out-houses and peered out toward the sea which lay as white as silver and took its colors from the day. The red sails were hanging motionless, and looked like splashes of blood in the brightness of day; the boats lay deep in the water, and were slowly making their way homeward in response to the beat of the oars, dragging themselves along like cows that are near their time for bearing.

But all this had nothing to do with him and his. Stone Farm, like the poor of the parish, did not buy its herring until after the autumn, when it was as dry as sticks and cost almost nothing. At that time of year, herring was generally plentiful, and was sold for from twopence to twopence-halfpenny the fourscore as long as the demand continued. After that it was sold by the cartload as food for the pigs, or went on to the dungheap.

One Sunday morning late in the autumn, a messenger came running from the town to Stone Farm to say that now herring was to be had. The bailiff came down into the servants’ room while they were at breakfast, and gave orders that all the working teams were to be harnessed. “Then you’ll have to come too!” said Karl Johan to the two quarry drivers, who were married and lived up near the quarry, but came down for meals.

“No, our horses shan’t come out of the stable for that!” said the drivers. “They and we drive only stone and nothing else.” They sat for a little while and indulged in sarcasms at the expense of certain people who had not even Sunday at their own disposal, and one of them, as he stretched himself in a particularly irritating way, said: “Well, I think I’ll go home and have a nap. It’s nice to be one’s own master once a week, at any rate.” So they went home to wife and children, and kept Sunday holiday.

For a little while the men went about complaining; that was the regular thing. In itself they had no objection to make to the expedition, for it would naturally be something of a festivity. There were taverns enough in the town, and they would take care to arrange about that herring so that they did not get home much before evening. If the worst came to the worst, Erik could damage his cart in driving, and then they would be obliged to stay in town while it was being mended.

They stood out in the stable, and turned their purses inside out —big, solid, leather purses with steel locks that could only be opened by pressure on a secret mechanism; but they were empty.

“The deuce!” said Mons, peering disappointedly into his purse. “Not so much as the smell of a one-öre! There must be a leak!” He examined the seams, held it close up to his eyes, and at last put his ear to it. “Upon my word, I seem to hear a two-krone talking to itself. It must be witchcraft!” He sighed and put his purse into his pocket.

“You, you poor devil!” said Anders. “Have you ever spoken to a two-krone? No, I’m the man for you!” He hauled out a large purse. “I’ve still got the ten-krone that the bailiff cheated me out of on May Day, but I haven’t the heart to use it; I’m going to keep it until I grow old.” He put his hand into the empty purse and pretended to take something out and show it. The others laughed and joked, and all were in good spirits with the thought of the trip to town.

"But Erik's sure to have some money at the bottom of his chest!" said one. "He works for good wages and has a rich aunt down below."

"No, indeed!" whined Erik. "Why, I have to pay for half a score of young brats who can't father themselves upon any one else. But Karl Johan must get it, or what's the good of being head man?"

"That's no use," said Karl Johan doubtfully. "If I ask the bailiff for an advance now when we're going to town, he'll say 'no' straight out. I wonder whether the girls haven't wages lying by."

They were just coming up from the cow-stable with their milk-pails.

"I say, girls," Erik called out to them. "Can't one of you lend us ten krones? She shall have twins for it next Easter; the sow farrows then anyhow."

"You're a nice one to make promises!" said Bengta, standing still, and they all set down their milk-pails and talked it over. "I wonder whether Bodil hasn't?" said Karna. "No," answered Maria, "for she sent the ten krones she had by her to her mother the other day."

Mons dashed his cap to the floor and gave a leap. "I'll go up to the Old Gentleman himself," he said.

"Then you'll come head first down the stairs, you may be sure!"

"The deuce I will, with my old mother lying seriously ill in the town, without a copper to pay for doctor or medicine! I'm as good a child as Bodil, I hope." He turned and went toward the stone steps, and the others stood and watched him from the stable-door, until the bailiff came and they had to busy themselves with the carts. Gustav walked about in his Sunday clothes with a bundle under his arm, and looked on.

"Why don't you get to work?" asked the bailiff. "Get your horses put in."

"You said yourself I might be free to-day," said Gustav, making a grimace. He was going out with Bodil.

"Ah, so I did! But that'll be one cart less. You must have a holiday another day instead."

"I can't do that."

"What the de—— And why not, may I ask?"

"Well, because you gave me a holiday to-day."

"Yes; but, confound it, man, when I now tell you you can take another day instead!"

"No, I can't do that."

"But why not, man? Is there anything pressing you want to do?"

"No, but I have been given a holiday to-day." It looked as if Gustav were grinning slyly, but it was only that he was turning the quid in his mouth. The bailiff stamped with anger.

"But I can go altogether if you don't care to see me," said Gustav gently.

The bailiff did not hear, but turned quickly. Experience had taught him to be deaf to that kind of offer in the busy season. He looked up at his window as if he had suddenly thought of something, and sprang up the stairs. They could manage him when they touched upon that theme, but his turn came in the winter, and then they had to keep silence and put up with things, so as to keep a roof over their heads during the slack time.

Gustav went on strutting about with his bundle, without putting his hand to anything. The others laughed at him encouragingly.

The bailiff came down again and went up to him. "Then put in the horses before you go," he said shortly, "and I'll drive yours."

An angry growl passed from man to man. "We're to have the dog with us!" they said in undertones to one another, and then, so that the bailiff should hear: "Where's the dog? We're to have the dog with us."

Matters were not improved by Mons coming down the steps with a beautifully pious expression, and holding a ten-krone note over his chest. "It's all one now," said Erik; "for we've got to have the dog with us!" Mons' face underwent a sudden change, and he began to swear. They pulled the carts about without getting anything done, and their eyes gleamed with anger.

The bailiff came out upon the steps with his overcoat on. "Look sharp about getting the horses in!" he thundered.

The men of Stone Farm were just as strict about their order of precedence as the real inhabitants of the island, and it was just as complicated. The head man sat at the top of the table and helped himself first, he went first in mowing and reaping, and had the first girl to lay the load when the hay was taken in; he was the first man up, and went first when they set out for the fields, and no one might throw down his tools until he had done so. After him came the second man, the third, and so on, and lastly the day- laborers. When no great personal preference interfered, the head man was as a matter of course the sweetheart of the head girl, and so on downwards; and if one of them left, his successor took over the relation: it was a question of equilibrium. In this, however, the order of precedence was often broken, but never in the matter of the horses. Gustav's horses were the poorest, and no power in the world would have induced the head man or Erik to drive them, let alone the farmer himself.

The bailiff knew it, and saw how the men were enjoying themselves when Gustav's nags were put in. He concealed his irritation, but when they exultantly placed Gustav's cart hindmost in the row, it was too much for him, and he ordered it to be driven in front of the others.

"My horses aren't accustomed to go behind the tail-pullers!" said Karl Johan, throwing down his reins. It was the nickname for the last in the row. The others stood trying not to smile, and the bailiff was almost boiling over.

"If you're so bent upon being first, be it by all means," he said quietly. "I can very well drive behind you."

"No, my horses come after the head man's, not after the tail-puller's," said Erik.

This was really a term of abuse in the way in which they used it, one after the other, with covert glances. If he was going to put up with this from the whole row, his position on the farm would be untenable.

"Yes, and mine go behind Erik's," began Anders now, "not after— after Gustav's," he corrected himself quickly, for the bailiff had fixed his eyes upon him, and taken a step forward to knock him down.

The bailiff stood silent for a moment as if listening, the muscles of his arms quivering. Then he sprang into the cart.

"You're all out of your senses to-day," he said. "But now I'm going to drive first, and the man who dares to say a word against it shall have one between the eyes that will send him five days into next week!" So saying he swung out of the row, and Erik's horses, which wanted to turn, received a cut from his whip that made them rear. Erik stormed at them.

The men went about crestfallen, and gave the bailiff time to get well ahead. "Well, I suppose we'd better see about starting now," said Karl Johan at length, as he got into his wagon. The bailiff was already some way ahead; Gustav's nags were doing their very best to-day, and seemed to like being in front. But Karl Johan's horses were displeased, and hurried on; they did not approve of the new arrangement.

At the village shop they made a halt, and consoled themselves a little. When they started again, Karl Johan's horses were refractory, and had to be quieted.

The report of the catch had spread through the country, and carts from other farms caught them up or crossed them on their way to the fishing-villages. Those who lived nearer the town were already on their way home with swaying loads. "Shall we meet in the town for a drink?" cried one man to Karl Johan as he passed. "I'm coming in for another load."

"No, we're driving for the master to-day!" answered Karl Johan, pointing to the bailiff in front.

"Yes, I see him. He's driving a fine pair to-day! I thought it was King Lazarus!"

An acquaintance of Karl Johan's came toward them with a swaying load of herring. He was the only man on one of the small farms. "So you've been to the town too for winter food," said Karl Johan, reining in his horse.

"Yes, for the pigs!" answered the other. "It was laid in for the rest of us at the end of the summer. This isn't food for men!" And he took up a herring between his fingers, and pretended to break it in two.

"No, I suppose not for such fine gentlemen," answered Karl Johan snappishly. "Of course, you're in such a high station that you eat at the same table as your master and mistress, I've heard."

"Yes, that's the regular custom at our place," answered the other. "We know nothing about masters and dogs." And he drove on. The words rankled with Karl Johan, he could not help drawing comparisons.

They had caught up the bailiff, and now the horses became unruly. They kept trying to pass and took every unlooked-for opportunity of pushing on, so that Karl Johan nearly drove his team into the back of the bailiff’s cart. At last he grew tired of holding them in, and gave them the rein, when they pushed out over the border of the ditch and on in front of Gustav’s team, danced about a little on the high-road, and then became quiet. Now it was Erik’s horses that were mad.

At the farm all the laborers’ wives had been called in for the afternoon, the young cattle were in the enclosure, and Pelle ran from cottage to cottage with the message. He was to help the women together with Lasse, and was delighted with this break in the daily routine; it was a whole holiday for him.

At dinner-time the men came home with their heavy loads of herring, which were turned out upon the stone paving round the pump in the upper yard. There had been no opportunity for them to enjoy themselves in the town, and they were in a bad temper. Only Mons, the ape, went about grinning all over his face. He had been up to his sick mother with the money for the doctor and medicine, and came back at the last minute with a bundle under his arm in the best of spirits. “That was a medicine!” he said over and over again, smacking his lips, “a mighty strong medicine.”

He had had a hard time with the bailiff before he got leave to go on his errand. The bailiff was a suspicious man, but it was difficult to hold out against Mons’ trembling voice when he urged that it would be too hard on a poor man to deny him the right to help his sick mother. “Besides, she lives close by here, and perhaps I shall never see her again in this life,” said Mons mournfully. “And then there’s the money that the master advanced me for it. Shall I go and throw it away on drink, while she’s lying there without enough to buy bread with?”

“Well, how was your mother?” asked the bailiff, when Mons came hurrying up at the last moment.

“Oh, she can’t last much longer!” said Mons, with a quiver in his voice. But he was beaming all over his face.

The others threw him angry glances while they unloaded the herring. They would have liked to thrash him for his infernal good luck. But they recovered when they got into their room and he undid the bundle. “That’s to you all from my sick mother!” he said, and drew forth a keg of spirits. “And I was to give you her best respects, and thank you for being so good to her little son.”

“Where did you go?” asked Erik.

“I sat in the tavern on the harbor hill all the time, so as to keep an eye on you; I couldn’t resist looking at you, you looked so delightfully thirsty. I wonder you didn’t lie down flat and drink out of the sea, every man Jack of you!”

In the afternoon the cottagers’ wives and the farm-girls sat round the great heaps of herring by the pump, and cleaned the fish. Lasse and Pelle pumped water to rinse them in, and cleaned out the big salt-barrels that the men rolled up from the cellar; and two of the elder women were entrusted with the task of mixing. The bailiff walked up and down by the front steps and smoked his pipe.

As a general rule, the herring-pickling came under the category of pleasant work, but to-day there was dissatisfaction all along the line. The women chattered freely as they worked, but their talk was not quite innocuous—it was all carefully aimed; the men had made them malicious. When they laughed, there was the sound of a hidden meaning in their laughter. The men had to be called out and given orders about every single thing that had to be done; they went about it sullenly, and then at once withdrew to their rooms. But when there they were all the gayer, and sang and enjoyed themselves.

“They’re doing themselves proud in there,” said Lasse, with a sigh to Pelle. “They’ve got a whole keg of spirits that Mons had hidden in his herring. They say it’s so extra uncommon good.” Lasse had not tasted it himself.

The two kept out of the wrangling; they felt themselves too weak. The girls had not had the courage to refuse the extra Sunday work, but they were not afraid to pass little remarks, and tittered at nothing, to make the bailiff think it was at him. They kept on asking in a loud voice what the time was, or stopped working to listen to the ever-increasing gaiety in the men’s rooms. Now and then a man was thrown out from there into the yard, and shuffled in again, shamefaced and grinning.

One by one the men came sauntering out. They had their caps on the back of their heads now, and their gaze was fixed. They took up a position in the lower yard, and hung over the fence, looking at the girls, every now and then bursting into a laugh and stopping suddenly, with a frightened glance at the bailiff.

The bailiff was walking up and down by the steps. He had laid aside his pipe and become calmer; and when the men came out, he was cracking a whip and exercising himself in self-restraint.

“If I liked I could bend him until both ends met!” he heard Erik say aloud in the middle of a conversation. The bailiff earnestly wished that Erik would make the attempt. His muscles were burning under this unsatisfied desire to let himself go; but his brain was reveling in visions of fights, he was grappling with the whole flock and going through all the details of the battle. He had gone through these battles so often, especially of late; he had thought out all the difficult situations, and there was not a place in all Stone Farm in which the things that would serve as weapons were not known to him.

“What’s the time?” asked one of the girls aloud for at least the twentieth time.

“A little longer than your chemise,” answered Erik promptly.

The girls laughed. “Oh, nonsense! Tell us what it really is!” exclaimed another.

“A quarter to the miller’s girl,” answered Anders.

“Oh, what fools you are! Can’t you answer properly? You, Karl Johan!”

“It’s short!” said Karl Johan gravely.

“No, seriously now, I’ll tell you what it is,” exclaimed Mons innocently, drawing a great “turnip” out of his pocket. “It’s—” he looked carefully at the watch, and moved his lips as if calculating. “The deuce!” he exclaimed, bringing down his hand in amazement on the fence. “Why, it’s exactly the same time as it was this time yesterday.”

The jest was an old one, but the women screamed with laughter; for Mons was the jester.

“Never mind about the time,” said the bailiff, coming up. “But try and get through your work.”

“No, time’s for tailors and shoemakers, not for honest people!” said Anders in an undertone.

The bailiff turned upon him as quick as a cat, and Anders’ arm darted up above his head bent as if to ward off a blow. The bailiff merely expectorated with a scornful smile, and began his pacing up and down afresh, and Anders stood there, red to the roots of his hair, and not knowing what to do with his eyes. He scratched the back of his head once or twice, but that could not explain away that strange movement of his arm. The others were laughing at him, so he hitched up his trousers and sauntered down toward the men’s rooms, while the women screamed with laughter, and the men laid their heads upon the fence and shook with merriment.

So the day passed, with endless ill-natured jesting and spitefulness. In the evening the men wandered out to indulge in horse-play on the high-road and annoy the passersby. Lasse and Pelle were tired, and went early to bed.

“Thank God we’ve got through this day!” said Lasse, when he had got into bed. “It’s been a regular bad day. It’s a miracle that no blood’s been shed; there was a time when the bailiff looked as if he might do anything. But Erik must know far he can venture.”

Next morning everything seemed to be forgotten. The men attended to the horses as usual, and at six o’clock went out into the field for a third mowing of clover. They looked blear-eyed, heavy and dull. The keg lay outside the stable-door empty; and as they went past they kicked it.

Pelle helped with the herring to-day too, but he no longer found it amusing. He was longing already to be out in the open with his cattle; and here he had to be at everybody’s beck and call. As often as he dared, he made some pretext for going outside the farm, for that helped to make the time pass.

Later in the morning, while the men were mowing the thin clover, Erik flung down his scythe so that it rebounded with a ringing sound from the swaths. The others stopped their work.

“What’s the matter with you, Erik?” asked Karl Johan. “Have you got a bee in your bonnet?”

Erik stood with his knife in his hand, feeling its edge, and neither heard nor saw. Then he turned up his face and frowned at the sky; his eyes seemed to have sunk into his head and become blind, and his lips stood out thick. He muttered a few inarticulate sounds, and started up toward the farm.

The others stood still and followed him with staring eyes; then one after another they threw down their scythes and moved away, only Karl Johan remaining where he was.

Pelle had just come out to the enclosure to see that none of the young cattle had broken their way out. When he saw the men coming up toward the farm in a straggling file like a herd of cattle on the move, he suspected something was wrong and ran in.

“The men are coming up as fast as they can, father!” he whispered.

“They’re surely not going to do it?” said Lasse, beginning to tremble.

The bailiff was carrying things from his room down to the pony-carriage; he was going to drive to the town. He had his arms full when Erik appeared at the big, open gate below, with distorted face and a large, broad-bladed knife in his hand. “Where the devil is he?” he said aloud, and circled round once with bent head, like an angry bull, and then walked up through the fence straight toward the bailiff. The latter started when he saw him and, through the gate, the others coming up full speed behind him. He measured the distance to the steps, but changed his mind, and advanced toward Erik, keeping behind the wagon and watching every movement that Erik made, while he tried to find a weapon. Erik followed him round the wagon, grinding his teeth and turning his eyes obliquely up at his opponent.

The bailiff went round and round the wagon and made half movements; he could not decide what to do. But then the others came up and blocked his way. His face turned white with fear, and he tore a whiffletree from the wagon, which with a push he sent rolling into the thick of them, so that they fell back in confusion. This made an open space between him and Erik, and Erik sprang quickly over the pole, with his knife ready to strike; but as he sprang, the whiffletree descended upon his head. The knife-thrust fell upon the bailiff’s shoulder, but it was feeble, and the knife just grazed his side as Erik sank to the ground. The others stood staring in bewilderment.

“Carry him down to the mangling-cellar!” cried the bailiff in a commanding tone, and the men dropped their knives and obeyed.

The battle had stirred Pelle’s blood into a tumult, and he was standing by the pump, jumping up and down. Lasse had to take a firm hold of him, for it looked as if he would throw himself into the fight. Then when the great strong Erik sank to the ground insensible from a blow on the head, he began to jump as if he had St. Vitus’s Dance. He jumped into the air with drooping head, and let himself fall heavily, all the time uttering short, shrill bursts of laughter. Lasse spoke to him angrily, thinking it was unnecessarily foolish behavior on his part; and then he picked him up and held him firmly in his hands, while the little fellow trembled all over his body in his efforts to free himself and go on with his jumping.

“What can be wrong with him?” said Lasse tearfully to the cottagers’ wives. “Oh dear, what shall I do?” He carried him down to their room in a sad state of mind, because the moon was waning, and it would never pass off!

Down in the mangling-cellar they were busy with Erik, pouring brandy into his mouth and bathing his head with vinegar. Kongstrup was not at home, but the mistress herself was down there, wringing her hands and cursing Stone Farm—her own childhood’s home! Stone Farm had become a hell with its murder and debauchery! she said, without caring that they were all standing round her and heard every word.

The bailiff had driven quickly off in the pony-carriage to fetch a doctor and to report what he had done in defence of his life. The women stood round the pump and gossiped, while the men and girls wandered about in confusion; there was no one to issue orders. But then the mistress came out on to the steps and looked at them for a little, and they all found something to do. Hers were piercing eyes! The old women shook themselves and went back to their work. It reminded them so pleasantly of old times, when the master of the Stone Farm of their youth rushed up with anger in his eyes when they were idling.

Down in their room, Lasse sat watching Pelle, who lay talking and laughing in delirium, so that his father hardly knew whether to laugh or to cry.

XV

“She must have had right on her side, for he never said a cross word when she started off with her complaints and reproaches, and them so loud that you could hear them right through the walls and down in the servants’ room and all over the farm. But it was stupid of her all the same, for she only drove him distracted and sent him away. And how will it go with a farm in the long run, when the farmer spends all his time on the high-roads because he can’t stay at home? It’s a poor sort of affection that drives the man away from his home.”

Lasse was standing in the stable on Sunday evening talking to the women about it while they milked. Pelle was there too, busy with his own affairs, but listening to what was said.

“But she wasn’t altogether stupid either,” said Thatcher Holm’s wife. “For instance when she had Fair Maria in to do housemaid’s work, so that he could have a pretty face to look at at home. She knew that if you have food at home you don’t go out for it. But of course it all led to nothing when she couldn’t leave off frightening him out of the house with her crying and her drinking.”

“I’m sure he drinks too!” said Pelle shortly.

“Yes, of course he gets drunk now and then,” said Lasse in a reproving tone. “But he’s a man, you see, and may have his reasons besides. But it’s ill when a woman takes to drinking.” Lasse was cross. The boy was beginning to have opinions of his own pretty well on everything, and was always joining in when grown people were talking.

“I maintain”—he went on, turning again to the women—“that he’d be a good husband, if only he wasn’t worried with crying and a bad conscience. Things go very well too when he’s away. He’s at home pretty well every day, and looks after things himself, so that the bailiff’s quite upset, for *he* likes to be king of the castle. To all of us, the master’s like one of ourselves; he’s even forgotten the grudge he had against Gustav.”

“There can’t be very much to bear him a grudge for, unless it is that he’ll get a wife with money. They say Bodil’s saved more than a hundred krones from her two or three months as housemaid. Some people can—they get paid for what the rest of us have always had to do for nothing.” It was one of the old women who spoke.

“Well, we’ll just see whether he ever gets her for a wife. I doubt it myself. One oughtn’t to speak evil of one’s fellow-servant, but Bodil’s not a faithful girl. That matter with the master must go for what it was—as I once said to Gustav when he was raging about it; the master comes before his men! Bengta was a good wife to me in every way, but she too was very fond of laying herself out for the landlord at home. The greatest take first; that’s the way of the world! But Bodil’s never of the same mind for long together. Now she’s carrying on with the pupil, though he’s not sixteen yet, and takes presents from him. Gustav should get out of it in time; it always leads to misfortune when love gets into a person. We’ve got an example of that at the farm here.”

“I was talking to some one the other day who thought that the mistress hadn’t gone to Copenhagen at all, but was with relations in the south. She’s run away from him, you’ll see!”

“That’s the genteel thing to do nowadays, it seems!” said Lasse. “If only she’ll stay away! Things are much better as they are.”

An altogether different atmosphere seemed to fill Stone Farm. The dismal feeling was gone; no wailing tones came from the house and settled upon one like horse flies and black care. The change was most apparent in the farmer. He looked ten or twenty years younger, and joked good-humoredly like one freed from chains and fetters. He took an interest in the work of the farm, drove to the quarry two or three times a day in his gig, was present whenever a new piece of work was started, and would often throw off his coat and take a hand in it. Fair Maria laid his table and made his bed, and he was not afraid of showing his kindness for her. His good humor was infectious and made everything pleasanter.

But it could not be denied that Lasse had his own burden to bear. His anxiety to get married grew greater with the arrival of very cold weather as early as December; he longed to have his feet under his own table, and have a woman to himself who should be everything to him. He had not entirely given up thoughts of Karna yet, but he had promised Thatcher Holm’s wife ten krones down if she could find some one that would do for him.

He had really put the whole matter out of his head as an impossibility, and had passed into the land of old age; but what was the use of shutting yourself in, when you were all the time looking for doors through which to slip out again? Lasse looked out once more, and as usual it was Pelle who brought life and joy to the house.

Down in the outskirts of the fishing-village there lived a woman, whose husband had gone to sea and had not been heard of for a good many years. Two or three times on his way to and from school, Pelle had sought shelter from the weather in her porch, and they had gradually become good friends; he performed little services for her, and received a cup of hot coffee in return. When the cold was very bitter, she always called him in; and then she would tell him about the sea and about her good-for-nothing husband, who kept away and left her to toil for her living by mending nets for the fishermen. In return Pelle felt bound to tell her about Father Lasse, and Mother Bengta who lay at home in the churchyard at Tommelilla. The talk never came to much more, for she always returned to her husband who had gone away and left her a widow.

"I suppose he's drowned," Pelle would say.

"No, he isn't, for I've had no warning," she answered decidedly, always in the same words.

Pelle repeated it all to his father, who was very much interested. "Well, did you run in to Madam Olsen to-day?" was the first thing he said when the boy came in from school; and then Pelle had to tell him every detail several times over. It could never be too circumstantially told for Lasse.

"You've told her, I suppose, that Mother Bengta's dead? Yes, of course you have! Well, what did she ask about me to-day? Does she know about the legacy?" (Lasse had recently had twenty-five krones left him by an uncle.) "You might very well let fall a word or two about that, so that she shouldn't think we're quite paupers."

Pelle was the bearer of ambiguous messages backward and forward. From Lasse he took little things in return for her kindness to himself, such as embroidered handkerchiefs and a fine silk kerchief, the last remnants of Mother Bengta's effects. It would be hard to lose them if this new chance failed, for then there would be no memories to fall back upon. But Lasse staked everything upon one card.

One day Pelle brought word that warning had come to Madam Olsen. She had been awakened in the night by a big black dog that stood gasping at the head of her bed. Its eyes shone in the darkness, and she heard the water dripping from its fur. She understood that it must be the ship's dog with a message for her, and went to the window; and out in the moonlight on the sea she saw a ship sailing with all sail set. She stood high, and you could see the sea and sky right through her. Over the bulwark hung her husband and the others, and they were transparent; and the salt water was dripping from their hair and beards and running down the side of the ship.

In the evening Lasse put on his best clothes.

"Are we going out this evening?" asked Pelle in glad surprise.

"No—well, that's to say I am, just a little errand. If any one asks after me, you must say that I've gone to the smith about a new nose-ring for the bull."

"And mayn't I go with you?" asked Pelle on the verge of tears.

"No, you must be good and stay at home for this once." Lasse patted him on the head.

"Where are you going then?"

"I'm going—" Lasse was about to make up a lie about it, but had not the heart to do it. "You mustn't ask me!" he said.

"Shall I know another day, then, without asking?"

"Yes, you shall, for certain—sure!"

Lasse went out, but came back again. Pelle was sitting on the edge of the bed, crying; it was the first time Father Lasse had gone out without taking him with him.

"Now you must be a good boy and go to bed," he said gravely. "Or else I shall stay at home with you; but if I do, it may spoil things for us both."

So Pelle thought better of it and began to undress; and at last Lasse got off.

When Lasse reached Madam Olsen's house, it was shut up and in darkness. He recognized it easily from Pelle's descriptions, and walked round it two or three times to see how the walls stood. Both timber and plaster looked good, and there was a fair-sized piece of ground belonging to it, just big enough to allow of its being attended to on Sundays, so that one could work for a daily wage on weekdays.

Lasse knocked at the door, and a little while after a white form appeared at the window, and asked who was there.

“It’s Pelle’s father, Lasse Karlsson,” said Lasse, stepping out into the moonlight.

The door was unbolted, and a soft voice said: “Come inside! Don’t stand out there in the cold!” and Lasse stepped over the threshold. There was a smell of sleep in the room, and Lasse had an idea where the alcove was, but could see nothing. He heard the breathing as of a stout person drawing on stockings. Then she struck a match and lighted the lamp.

They shook hands, and looked at one another as they did so. She wore a skirt of striped bed-ticking, which kept her night-jacket together, and had a blue night-cap on her head. She had strong-looking limbs and a good bust, and her face gave a good impression. She was the kind of woman that would not hurt a fly if she were not put upon; but she was not a toiler—she was too soft for that.

“So this is Pelle’s father!” she said. “It’s a young son you’ve got. But do sit down!”

Lasse blinked his eyes a little. He had been afraid that she would think him old.

“Yes, he’s what you’d call a late-born child; but I’m still able to do a man’s work in more ways than one.”

She laughed while she busied herself in placing on the table cold bacon and pork sausage, a dram, bread and a saucer of dripping. “But now you must eat!” she said. “That’s what a man’s known by. And you’ve come a long way.”

It only now occurred to Lasse that he must give some excuse for his visit. “I ought really to be going again at once. I only wanted to come down and thank you for your kindness to the boy.” He even got up as if to go.

“Oh, but what nonsense!” she exclaimed, pushing him down into his chair again. “It’s very plain, but do take some.” She pressed the knife into his hand, and eagerly pushed the food in front of him. Her whole person radiated warmth and kind-heartedness as she stood close to him and attended to his wants; and Lasse enjoyed it all.

“You must have been a good wife to your husband,” he said.

“Yes, that’s true enough!” she said, as she sat down and looked frankly at him. “He got all that he could want, and almost more, when he was on shore. He stayed in bed until dinner, and I looked after him like a little child; but he never gave me a hand’s turn for it, and at last one gets tired.”

“That was wrong of him,” said Lasse; “for one good action deserves another. I don’t think Bengta would have anything like that to say of me if she was asked.”

“Well, there’s certainly plenty to do in a house, when there’s a man that has the will to help. I’ve only one cow, of course, for I can’t manage more; but two might very well be kept, and there’s no debt on the place.”

“I’m only a poor devil compared to you!” said Lasse despondently. “Altogether I’ve got fifty krones, and we both have decent clothes to put on; but beyond that I’ve only got a pair of good hands.”

“And I’m sure that’s worth a good deal! And I should fancy you’re not afraid of fetching a pail of water or that sort of thing, are you?”

“No, I’m not. And I’m not afraid of a cup of coffee in bed on a Sunday morning, either.”

She laughed. “Then I suppose I ought to have a kiss!” she said.

“Yes, I suppose you ought,” said Lasse delighted, and kissed her. “And now we may hope for happiness and a blessing for all three of us. I know you’re fond of the laddie.”

There still remained several things to discuss, there was coffee to be drunk, and Lasse had to see the cow and the way the house was arranged. In the meantime it had grown late.

“You’d better stay here for the night,” said Madam Olsen.

Lasse stood wavering. There was the boy sleeping alone, and he had to be at the farm by four o’clock; but it was cold outside, and here it was so warm and comfortable in every way.

“Yes, perhaps I’d better,” he said, laying down his hat and coat again.

When at about four he crept into the cow-stable from the back, the lantern was still burning in the herdsman’s room. Lasse thought he was discovered, and began to tremble; it was a criminal and unjustifiable action to be away from the herd a whole night. But it was only Pelle, who lay huddled up upon the chest asleep, with his clothes on. His face was black and swollen with crying.

All that day there was something reserved, almost hostile, about Pelle’s behavior, and Lasse suffered under it. There was nothing for it; he must speak out.

“It’s all settled now, Pelle,” he said at last. “We’re going to have a house and home, and a nice-looking mother into the bargain. It’s Madam Olsen. Are you satisfied now?”

Pelle had nothing against it. “Then may I come with you next time?” he asked, still a little sullen.

“Yes, next time you shall go with me. I think it’ll be on Sunday. We’ll ask leave to go out early, and pay her a visit.” Lasse said this with a peculiar flourish; he had become more erect.

Pelle went with him on Sunday; they were free from the middle of the afternoon. But after that it would not have done to ask for leave very soon again. Pelle saw his future mother nearly every day, but it was more difficult for Lasse. When the longing to see his sweetheart came over him too strongly, he fussed over Pelle until the boy fell asleep, and then changed his clothes and stole out.

After a wakeful night such as one of these, he was not up to his work, and went about stumbling over his own feet; but his eyes shone with a youthful light, as if he had concluded a secret treaty with life’s most powerful forces.

XVI

Erik was standing on the front steps, with stooping shoulders and face half turned toward the wall. He stationed himself there every morning at about four, and waited for the bailiff to come down. It was now six, and had just begun to grow light.

Lasse and Pelle had finished cleaning out the cow-stable and distributing the first feed, and they were hungry. They were standing at the door of the stable, waiting for the breakfast-bell to ring; and at the doors of the horse-stables, the men were doing the same. At a quarter-past the hour they went toward the basement, with Karl Johan at their head, and Lasse and Pelle also turned out and hurried to the servants' room, with every sign of a good appetite.

"Now, Erik, we're going down to breakfast!" shouted Karl Johan as they passed, and Erik came out of his corner by the steps, and shuffled along after them. There was nothing the matter with his digestive powers at any rate.

They ate their herring in silence; the food stopped their mouths completely. When they had finished, the head man knocked on the table with the handle of his knife, and Karna came in with two dishes of porridge and a pile of bread-and-dripping.

"Where's Bodil to-day?" asked Gustav.

"How should I know? Her bed was standing untouched this morning," answered Karna, with an exulting look.

"It's a lie!" cried Gustav, bringing down his spoon with a bang upon the table.

"You can go into her room and see for yourself; you know the way!" said Karna tartly.

"And what's become of the pupil to-day, as he hasn't rung?" said Karl Johan. "Have any of you girls seen him?"

"No, I expect he's overslept himself," cried Bengta from the wash-house. "And so he may! *I* don't want to run up and shake life into him every morning!"

"Don't you think you'd better go up and wake him, Gustav?" said Anders with a wink. "You might see something funny." The others laughed a little.

"If I wake him, it'll be with this rabbit-skinner," answered Gustav, exhibiting a large knife. "For then I think I should put him out of harm's way."

At this point the farmer himself came down. He held a piece of paper in his hand, and appeared to be in high good humor. "Have you heard the latest news, good people? At dead of night Hans Peter has eloped with Bodil!"

"My word! Are the babes and sucklings beginning now?" exclaimed Lasse with self-assurance. "I shall have to look after Pelle there, and see that he doesn't run away with Karna. She's fond of young people." Lasse felt himself to be the man of the company, and was not afraid of giving a hit at any one.

"Hans Peter is fifteen," said Kongstrup reprovingly, "and passion rages in his heart." He said this with such comical gravity that they all burst into laughter, except Gustav, who sat blinking his eyes and nodding his head like a drunken man.

"You shall hear what he says. This lay upon his bed." Kongstrup held the paper out in a theatrical attitude and read:

> "When you read this, I shall have gone forever. Bodil and I have agreed to run away to-night. My stern father will never give his consent to our union, and therefore we will enjoy the happiness of our love in a secret place where no one can find us. It will be doing a great wrong to look for us, for we have determined to die together rather than fall into the wicked hands of our enemies. I wet this paper with Bodil's and my own tears. But you must not condemn me for my last desperate step, as I can do nothing else for the sake of my great love.
>
> "HANS PETER."

"That fellow reads story-books," said Karl Johan. "He'll do great things some day."

"Yes, he knows exactly what's required for an elopement," answered

Kongstrup merrily. “Even to a ladder, which he’s dragged up to the girl’s window, although it’s on a level with the ground. I wish he were only half as thorough in his agriculture.”

“What’s to be done now? I suppose they must be searched for?” asked the head man.

“Well, I don’t know. It’s almost a shame to disturb their young happiness. They’ll come of their own accord when they get hungry. What do you think, Gustav? Shall we organize a battue?”

Gustav made no answer, but rose abruptly and went across to the men’s rooms. When the others followed him, they found him in bed.

All day he lay there and never uttered a syllable when any one came in to him. Meanwhile the work suffered, and the bailiff was angry. He did not at all like the new way Kongstrup was introducing—with liberty for every one to say and do exactly as they liked.

“Go in and pull Gustav out of bed!” he said, in the afternoon, when they were in the threshing-barn, winnowing grain. “And if he won’t put his own clothes on, dress him by force.”

But Kongstrup, who was there himself, entering the weight, interfered. “No, if he’s ill he must be allowed to keep his bed,” he said. “But it’s our duty to do something to cure him.”

“How about a mustard-plaster?” suggested Mons, with a defiant glance at the bailiff.

Kongstrup rubbed his hands with delight. “Yes, that’ll be splendid!” he said. “Go you across, Mons, and get the girls to make a mustard- plaster that we can stick on the pit of his stomach; that’s where the pain is.”

When Mons came back with the plaster, they went up in a procession to put it on, the farmer himself leading. Kongstrup was well aware of the bailiff’s angry looks, which plainly said, “Another waste of work for the sake of a foolish prank!” But he was inclined for a little fun, and the work would get done somehow.

Gustav had smelt a rat, for when they arrived he was dressed. For the rest of the day he did his work, but nothing could draw a smile out of him. He was like a man moonstruck.

A few days later a cart drove up to Stone Farm. In the driving-seat sat a broad-shouldered farmer in a fur coat, and beside him, wrapped up from head to foot, sat Hans Peter, while at the back, on the floor of the cart, lay the pretty Bodil on a little hay, shivering with cold. It was the pupil’s father who had brought back the two fugitives, whom he had found in lodgings in the town.

Up in the office Hans Peter received a thrashing that could be heard, and was then let out into the yard, where he wandered about crying and ashamed, until he began to play with Pelle behind the cow-stable.

Bodil was treated more severely. It must have been the strange farmer who required that she should be instantly dismissed, for Kongstrup was not usually a hard man. She had to pack her things, and after dinner was driven away. She looked good and gentle as she always did; one would have thought she was a perfect angel—if one had not known better.

Next morning Gustav’s bed was empty. He had vanished completely, with chest, wooden shoes and everything.

Lasse looked on at all this with a man’s indulgent smile—children’s tricks! All that was wanting now was that Karna should squeeze her fat body through the basement window one night, and she too disappear like smoke—on the hunt for Gustav.

This did not happen, however; and she became kindly disposed toward Lasse again, saw after his and Pelle’s clothes, and tried to make them comfortable.

Lasse was not blind; he saw very well which way the wind blew, and enjoyed the consciousness of his power. There were now two that he could have whenever he pleased; he only had to stretch out his hand, and the women-folk snatched at it. He went about all day in a state of joyful intoxication, and there were days in which he was in such an elevated condition of mind that he had inward promptings to make use of his opportunity. He had always trodden his path in this world so sedately, done his duty and lived his life in such unwavering decency. Why should not he too for once let things go, and try to leap through the fiery hoops? There was a tempting development of power in the thought.

But the uprightness in him triumphed. He had always kept to the one, as the Scriptures commanded, and he would continue to do so. The other thing was only for the great—Abraham, of whom Pelle had begun to tell him, and Kongstrup. Pelle, too, must never be able to say anything against his father in that way; he must be clean in his child’s eyes, and be able to look him in the face without shrinking. And then—well, the thought of how the two women would take it in the event of its being discovered, simply made Lasse blink his red eyes and hang his head.

Towards the middle of March, Fru Kongstrup returned unexpectedly. The farmer was getting along very comfortably without her, and her coming took him rather by surprise. Fair Maria was instantly turned out and sent down to the wash-house. Her not being sent away altogether was due to the fact that there was a shortage of maids at the farm now that Bodil had left. The mistress had brought a young relative with her, who was to keep her company and help her in the house.

They appeared to get on very well together. Kongstrup stayed at home upon the farm and was steady. The three drove out together, and the mistress was always hanging on his arm when they went about showing the place to the young lady. It was easy to see why she had come home; she could not live without him!

But Kongstrup did not seem to be nearly so pleased about it. He had put away his high spirits and retired into his shell once more. When he was going about like this, he often looked as if there was something invisible lying in ambush for him and he was afraid of being taken unawares.

This invisible something reached out after the others, too. Fru Kongstrup never interfered unkindly in anything, either directly or in a roundabout way; and yet everything became stricter. People no longer moved freely about the yard, but glanced up at the tall windows and hurried past. The atmosphere had once more that oppression about it that made one feel slack and upset and depressed.

Mystery once again hung heavy over the roof of Stone Farm. To many generations it had stood for prosperity or misfortune—these had been its foundations, and still it drew to itself the constant thoughts of many people. Dark things—terror, dreariness, vague suspicions of evil powers—gathered there naturally as in a churchyard.

And now it all centered round this woman, whose shadow was so heavy that everything brightened when she went away. Her unceasing, wailing protest against her wrongs spread darkness around and brought weariness with it. It was not even with the idea of submitting to the inevitable that she came back, but only to go on as before, with renewed strength. She could not do without him, but neither could she offer him anything good; she was like those beings who can live and breathe only in fire, and yet cry out when burnt. She writhed in the flames, and yet she herself fed them. Fair Maria was her own doing, and now she had brought this new relative into the house. Thus she herself made easy the path of his infidelity, and then shook the house above him with her complaining.

An affection such as this was not God’s work; powers of evil had their abode in her.

XVII

Oh, how bitterly cold it was! Pelle was on his way to school, leaning, in a jog-trot, against the wind. At the big thorn Rud was standing waiting for him; he fell in, and they ran side by side like two blown nags, breathing hard and with heads hanging low. Their coat-collars were turned up about their ears, and their hands pushed into the tops of their trousers to share in the warmth of their bodies. The sleeves of Pelle's jacket were too short, and his wrists were blue with cold.

They said little, but only ran; the wind snatched the words from their mouths and filled them with hail. It was hard to get enough breath to run with, or to keep an eye open. Every other minute they had to stop and turn their back to the wind while they filled their lungs and breathed warm breath up over their faces to bring feeling into them. The worst part of it was the turning back, before they got quite up against the wind and into step again.

The four miles came to an end, and the boys turned into the village. Down here by the shore it was almost sheltered; the rough sea broke the wind. There was not much of the sea to be seen; what did appear here and there through the rifts in the squalls came on like a moving wall and broke with a roar into whitish green foam. The wind tore the top off the waves in ill-tempered snatches, and carried salt rain in over the land.

The master had not yet arrived. Up at his desk stood Nilen, busily picking its lock to get at a pipe that Fris had confiscated during lessons. "Here's your knife!" he cried, throwing a sheath-knife to Pelle, who quickly pocketed it. Some peasant boys were pouring coal into the stove, which was already red-hot; by the windows sat a crowd of girls, hearing one another in hymns. Outside the waves broke without ceasing, and when their roar sank for a moment, the shrill voices of boys rose into the air. All the boys of the village were on the beach, running in and out under the breakers that looked as if they would crush them, and pulling driftwood upon shore.

Pelle had hardly thawed himself when Nilen made him go out with him. Most of the boys were wet through, but they were laughing and panting with eagerness. One of them had brought in the name-board of a ship. *The Simplicity* was painted on it. They stood round it and wrangled about what kind of vessel it was and what was its home-port.

"Then the ship's gone down," said Pelle gravely. The others did not answer; it was so self-evident.

"Well," said a boy hesitatingly, "the name-board may have been torn away by the waves; it's only been nailed on." They examined it carefully again; Pelle could not discover anything special about it.

"I rather think the crew have torn it off and thrown it into the sea. One of the nails has been pulled out," said Nilen, nodding with an air of mystery.

"But why should they do that?" asked Pelle, with incredulity.

"Because they've killed the captain and taken over the command themselves, you ass! Then all they've got to do is to christen the ship again, and sail as pirates." The other boys confirmed this with eyes that shone with the spirit of adventure; this one's father had told him about it, and that one's had even played a part in it. He did not want to, of course, but then he was tied to the mast while the mutiny was in progress.

On a day like this Pelle felt small in every way. The raging of the sea oppressed him and made him feel insecure, but the others were in their element. They possessed themselves of all the horror of the ocean, and represented it in an exaggerated form; they heaped up all the terrors of the sea in play upon the shore: ships went to the bottom with all on board or struck on the rocks; corpses lay rolling in the surf, and drowned men in sea-boots and sou'westers came up out of the sea at midnight, and walked right into the little cottages in the village to give warning of their departure. They dwelt upon it with a seriousness that was bright with inward joy, as though they were singing hymns of praise to the mighty ocean. But Pelle stood out side all this, and felt himself cowardly when listening to their tales. He kept behind the others, and wished he could bring down the big bull and let it loose among them. Then they would come to him for protection.

The boys had orders from their parents to take care of themselves, for Marta, the old skipper's widow, had three nights running heard the sea demand corpses with a short bark. They talked about that, too, and about when the fishermen would venture out again, while they ran about the beach. “A bottle, a bottle!” cried one of them suddenly, dashing off along the shore; he was quite sure he had seen a bottle bob up out of the surf a little way off, and disappear again. The whole swarm stood for a long time gazing eagerly out into the seething foam, and Kilen and another boy had thrown off their jackets to be ready to jump out when it appeared again.

The bottle did not appear again, but it had given a spur to the imagination, and every boy had his own solemn knowledge of such things. Just now, during the equinoctial storms, many a bottle went over a ship’s side with a last message to those on land. Really and truly, of course, that was why you learned to write—so as to be able to write your messages when your hour came. Then perhaps the bottle would be swallowed by a shark, or perhaps it would be fished up by stupid peasants who took it home with them to their wives to put drink into—this last a good-natured hit at Pelle. But it sometimes happened that it drifted ashore just at the place it was meant for; and, if not, it was the finder’s business to take it to the nearest magistrate, if he didn’t want to lose his right hand.

Out in the harbor the waves broke over the mole; the fishermen had drawn their boats up on shore. They could not rest indoors in their warm cottages; the sea and bad weather kept them on the beach night and day. They stood in shelter behind their boats, yawning heavily and gazing out to sea, where now and then a sail fluttered past like a storm-beaten bird.

“In, in!” cried the girls from the schoolroom door, and the boys sauntered slowly up. Fris was walking backward and forward in front of his desk, smoking his pipe with the picture of the king on it, and with the newspaper sticking out of his pocket. “To your places!” he shouted, striking his desk with the cane.

“Is there any news?” asked a boy, when they had taken their places. Fris sometimes read aloud the Shipping News to them.

“I don’t know,” answered Fris crossly. “You can get out your slates and arithmetics.”

“Oh, we’re going to do sums, oh, that’s fun!” The whole class was rejoicing audibly as they got out their things.

Fris did not share the children’s delight over arithmetic; his gifts, he was accustomed to say, were of a purely historical nature. But he accommodated himself to their needs, because long experience had taught him that a pandemonium might easily arise on a stormy day such as this; the weather had a remarkable influence upon the children. His own knowledge extended only as far as Christian Hansen’s Part I.; but there were two peasant boys who had worked on by themselves into Part III., and they helped the others.

The children were deep in their work, their long, regular breathing rising and falling in the room like a deep sleep. There was a continual passing backward and forward to the two arithmeticians, and the industry was only now and then interrupted by some little piece of mischief that came over one or another of the children as a reminder; but they soon fell into order again.

At the bottom of the class there was a sound of sniffing, growing more and more distinct. Fris laid down his newspaper impatiently.

“Peter’s crying,” said those nearest.

“Oh-o!” said Fris, peering over his spectacles. “What’s the matter now?”

“He says he can’t remember what twice two is.”

Fris forced the air through his nostrils and seized the cane, but thought better of it. “Twice two’s five!” he said quietly, at which there was a laugh at Peter’s expense, and work went on again.

For some time they worked diligently, and then Nilen rose. Fris saw it, but went on reading.

“Which is the lightest, a pound of feathers or a pound of lead? I can’t find it in the answers.”

Fris’s hands trembled as he held the paper up close to his face to see something or other better. It was his mediocrity as a teacher of arithmetic that the imps were always aiming at, but he would *not* be drawn into a discussion with them. Nilen repeated his question, while the others tittered; but Fris did not hear—he was too deep in his paper. So the whole thing dropped.

Fris looked at his watch; he could soon give them a quarter of an hour’s play, a good long quarter of an hour. Then there would only be one little hour’s worry left, and that school-day could be laid by as another trouble got through.

Pelle stood up in his place in the middle of the class. He had some trouble to keep his face in the proper folds, and had to pretend that his neighbors were disturbing him. At last he got out what he wanted to say, but his ears were a little red at the tips. “If a pound of flour costs twelve öres, what will half a quarter of coal cost?”

Fris sat for a little while and looked irresolutely at Pelle. It always hurt him more when Pelle was naughty than when it was one of the others, for he had an affection for the boy. “Very well!” he said bitterly, coming slowly down with the thick cane in his hand. “Very well!”

“Look out for yourself!” whispered the boys, preparing to put difficulties in the way of Fris’s approach.

But Pelle did one of those things that were directly opposed to all recognized rules, and yet gained him respect. Instead of shielding himself from the thrashing, he stepped forward and held out both hands with the palms turned upward. His face was crimson.

Fris looked at him in surprise, and was inclined to do anything but beat him; the look in Pelle’s eyes rejoiced his heart. He did not understand boys as boys, but with regard to human beings his perceptions were fine, and there was something human here; it would be wrong not to take it seriously. He gave Pelle a sharp stroke across his hands, and throwing down the cane, called shortly, “Playtime!” and turned away.

The spray was coming right up to the school wall. A little way out there was a vessel, looking very much battered and at the mercy of the storm; she moved quickly forward a little way, and stood still and staggered for a time before moving on again, like a drunken man. She was going in the direction of the southern reef.

The boys had collected behind the school to eat their dinner in shelter, but suddenly there was the hollow rattling sound of wooden-soled boots over on the shore side, and the coastguard and a couple of fishermen ran out. Then the life-saving apparatus came dashing up, the horses’ manes flying in the wind. There was something inspiriting in the pace, and the boys threw down everything and followed.

The vessel was now right down by the point. She lay tugging at her anchor, with her stern toward the reef, and the waves washing over her; she looked like an old horse kicking out viciously at some obstacle with its hind legs. The anchor was not holding, and she was drifting backward on to the reef.

There were a number of people on the shore, both from the coast and from inland. The country-people must have come down to see whether the water was wet! The vessel had gone aground and lay rolling on the reef; the people on board had managed her like asses, said the fishermen, but she was no Russian, but a Lap vessel. The waves went right over her from end to end, and the crew had climbed into the rigging, where they hung gesticulating with their arms. They must have been shouting something, but the noise of the waves drowned it.

Pelle’s eyes and ears were taking in all the preparations. He was quivering with excitement, and had to fight against his infirmity, which returned whenever anything stirred his blood. The men on the beach were busy driving stakes into the sand to hold the apparatus, and arranging ropes and hawsers so that everything should go smoothly. Special care was bestowed upon the long, fine line that the rocket was to carry out to the vessel; alterations were made in it at least twenty times.

The foreman of the trained Rescue Party stood and took aim with the rocket-apparatus; his glance darted out and back again to measure the distance with the sharpness of a claw. “Ready!” said the others, moving to one side. “Ready!” he answered gravely. For a moment all was still, while he placed it in another position and then back again.

Whe-e-e-e-ew! The thin line stood like a quivering snake in the air, with its runaway head boring through the sodden atmosphere over the sea and its body flying shrieking from the drum and riding out with deep humming tones to cut its way far out through the storm. The rocket had cleared the distance capitally; it was a good way beyond the wreck, but too far to leeward. It had run itself out and now stood wavering in the air like the restless head of a snake while it dropped.

“It’s going afore her,” said one fisherman. The others were silent, but from their looks it was evident that they were of the same opinion. “It may still get there,” said the foreman. The rocket had struck the water a good way to the north, but the line still stood in an arch in the air, held up by the stress. It dropped in long waves toward the south, made a couple of folds in the wind, and dropped gently across the fore part of the vessel. “That’s it! It got there, all right!” shouted the boys, and sprang on to the sand. The fishermen stamped about with delight, made a sideways movement with their heads toward the foreman and nodded appreciatively at one another. Out on the vessel a man crawled about in the rigging until he got hold of the line, and then crept down into the shrouds to the others again. Their strength could not be up to much, for except for that they did not move.

On shore there was activity. The roller was fixed more firmly to the ground and the cradle made ready; the thin line was knotted to a thicker rope, which again was to draw the heavy hawser on board: it was important that everything should hold. To the hawser was attached a pulley as large as a man's head for the drawing-ropes to run in, for one could not know what appliances they would have on board such an old tub. For safety's sake a board was attached to the line, upon which were instructions, in English, to haul it until a hawser of such-and-such a thickness came on board. This was unnecessary for ordinary people, but one never knew how stupid such Finn-Lapps could be.

"They may haul away now as soon as they like, and let us get done with it," said the foreman, beating his hands together.

"Perhaps they're too exhausted," said a young fisherman. "They must have been through a hard time!"

"They must surely be able to haul in a three-quarter-inch rope! Fasten an additional line to the rope, so that we can give them a hand in getting the hawser on board—when they get so far."

This was done. But out on the wreck they hung stupidly in the rigging without ever moving; what in the world were they thinking about? The line still lay, motionless on the sand, but it was not fast to the bottom, for it moved when it was tightened by the water; it must have been made fast to the rigging.

"They've made it fast, the blockheads," said the foreman. "I suppose they're waiting for us to haul the vessel up on land for them—with that bit of thread!" He laughed in despair.

"I suppose they don't know any better, poor things!" said "the Mormon."

No one spoke or moved. They were paralyzed by the incomprehensibility of it, and their eyes moved in dreadful suspense from the wreck down to the motionless line and back again. The dull horror that ensues when men have done their utmost and are beaten back by absolute stupidity, began to creep over them. The only thing the shipwrecked men did was to gesticulate with their arms. They must have thought that the men on shore could work miracles—in defiance of them.

"In an hour it'll be all up with them," said the foreman sadly. "It's hard to stand still and look on."

A young fisherman came forward. Pelle knew him well, for he had met him occasionally by the cairn where the baby's soul burned in the summer nights.

"If one of you'll go with me, I'll try to drift down upon them!" said Niels Köller quietly.

"It'll be certain death, Niels!" said the foreman, laying his hand upon the young man's shoulder. "You understand that, I suppose! I'm not one to be afraid, but I won't throw away my life. So you know what I think."

The others took the same view. A boat would be dashed to pieces against the moles. It would be impossible to get it out of the harbor in this weather, let alone work down to the wreck with wind and waves athwart! It might be that the sea had made a demand upon the village—no one would try to sneak out of his allotted share; but this was downright madness! With Niels Köller himself it must pass; his position was a peculiar one—with the murder of a child almost on his conscience and his sweetheart in prison. He had his own account to settle with the Almighty; no one ought to dissuade him!

"Then will none of you?" asked Niels, and looked down at the ground. "Well, then I must try it alone." He went slowly up the beach. How he was going to set about it no one knew, nor did he himself; but the spirit had evidently come over him.

They stood looking after him. Then a young sailor said slowly: "I suppose I'd better go with him and take the one oar. He can do nothing by himself." It was Nilen's brother.

"It wouldn't sound right if I stopped you from going, my son," said "the Mormon." "But can two of you do more than one?"

"Niels and I were at school together and have always been friends," answered the young man, looking into his father's face. Then he moved away, and a little farther off began to run to catch up Niels.

The fishermen looked after them in silence. “Youth and madness!” one of them then said. “One blessing is that they’ll never be able to get the boat out of the harbor.”

“If I know anything of Karl, they will get the boat out!” said “the Mormon” gloomily.

Some time passed, and then a boat appeared on the south side of the harbor, where there was a little shelter. They must have dragged it in over land with the women’s help. The harbor projected a little, so that the boat escaped the worst of the surf before emerging from its protection. They were working their way out; it was all they could do to keep the boat up against the wind, and they scarcely moved. Every other moment the whole of the inside of the boat was visible, as if it would take nothing to upset it; but that had one advantage, in that the water they shipped ran out again.

It was evident that they meant to work their way out so far that they could make use of the high sea and scud down upon the wreck—a desperate idea! But the whole thing was such sheer madness, one would never have thought they had been born and bred by the water. After half an hour’s rowing, it seemed they could do no more; and they were not more than a couple of good cable-lengths out from the harbor. They lay still, one of them holding the boat up to the waves with the oars, while the other struggled with something—a bit of sail as big as a sack. Yes, yes, of course! Now if they took in the oars and left themselves at the mercy of the weather—with wind and waves abaft and beam!—they would fill with water at once!

But they did not take in the oars. One of them sat and kept a frenzied watch while they ran before the wind. It looked very awkward, but it was evident that it gave greater command of the boat. Then they suddenly dropped the sail and rowed the boat hard up against the wind—when a sea was about to break. None of the fishermen could recollect ever having seen such navigation before; it was young blood, and they knew what they were about. Every instant one felt one must say Now! But the boat was like a living thing that understood how to meet everything; it always rose above every caprice. The sight made one warm, so that for a time one forgot it was a sail for life or death. Even if they managed to get down to the wreck, what then? Why, they would be dashed against the side of the vessel!

Old Ole Köller, Niels’s father, came down over the sandbanks. “Who’s that out there throwing themselves away?” he asked. The question sounded harsh as it broke in upon the silence and suspense. No one looked at him—Ole was rather garrulous. He glanced round the flock, as though he were looking for some particular person. “Niels—have any of you seen Niels?” he asked quietly. One man nodded toward the sea, and he was silent and overcome.

The waves must have broken their oars or carried them away, for they dropped the bit of sail, the boat burrowed aimlessly with its prow, and settled down lazily with its broadside to the wind. Then a great wave took them and carried them in one long sweep toward the wreck, and they disappeared in the breaking billow.

When the water sank to rest, the boat lay bottom upward, rolling in the lee of the vessel.

A man was working his way from the deck up into the rigging. “Isn’t that Niels?” said Ole, gazing until his eyes watered. “I wonder if that isn’t Niels?”

“No; it’s my brother Karl,” said Nilen.

“Then Niels is gone,” said Ole plaintively. “Then Niels is gone.”

The others had nothing to answer; it was a matter of course that Niels would be lost.

Ole stood for a little while shrinkingly, as if expecting that some one would say it was Niels. He dried his eyes, and tried to make it out for himself, but they only filled again. “Your eyes are young,” he said to Pelle, his head trembling. “Can’t you see that it’s Niels?”

“No, it’s Karl,” said Pelle softly.

And Ole went with bowed head through the crowd, without looking at any one or turning aside for anything. He moved as though he were alone in the world, and walked slowly out along the south shore. He was going to meet the dead body.

There was no time to think. The line began to be alive, glided out into the sea, and drew the rope after it. Yard after yard it unrolled itself and glided slowly into the sea like an awakened sea-animal, and the thick hawser began to move.

Karl fastened it high up on the mast, and it took all the men—and boys, too—to haul it taut. Even then it hung in a heavy curve from its own weight, and the cradle dragged through the crests of the waves when it went out empty. It was more under than above the water as they pulled it back again with the first of the crew, a funny little dark man, dressed in mangy gray fur. He was almost choked in the crossing, but when once they had emptied the water out of him he quite recovered and chattered incessantly in a curious language that no one understood. Five little fur-clad beings, one by one, were brought over by the cradle, and last of all came Karl with a little squealing pig in his arms.

"They *were* a poor lot of seamen!" said Karl, in the intervals of disgorging water. "Upon my word, they understood nothing. They'd made the rocket-line fast to the shrouds, and tied the loose end round the captain's waist! And you should just have seen the muddle on board!" He talked loudly, but his glance seemed to veil something.

The men now went home to the village with the shipwrecked sailors; the vessel looked as if it would still keep out the water for some time.

Just as the school-children were starting to go home, Ole came staggering along with his son's dead body on his back. He walked with loose knees bending low and moaning under his burden. Fris stopped him and helped him to lay the dead body in the schoolroom. There was a deep wound in the forehead. When Pelle saw the dead body with its gaping wound, he began to jump up and down, jumping quickly up, and letting himself drop like a dead bird. The girls drew away from him, screaming, and Fris bent over him and looked sorrowfully at him.

"It isn't from naughtiness," said the other boys. "He can't help it; he's taken that way sometimes. He got it once when he saw a man almost killed." And they carried him off to the pump to bring him to himself again.

Fris and Ole busied themselves over the dead body, placed something under the head, and washed away the sand that had got rubbed into the skin of the face. "He was my best boy," said Fris, stroking the dead man's head with a trembling hand. "Look well at him, children, and never forget him again; he was my best boy."

He stood silent, looking straight before him, with dimmed spectacles and hands hanging loosely. Ole was crying; he had suddenly grown pitiably old and decrepit. "I suppose I ought to get him home?" he said plaintively, trying to raise his son's shoulders; but he had not the strength.

"Just let him lie!" said Fris. "He's had a hard day, and he's resting now."

"Yes, he's had a hard day," said Ole, raising his son's hand to his mouth to breathe upon it. "And look how he's used the oar! The blood's burst out at his finger-tips!" Ole laughed through his tears. "He was a good lad. He was food to me, and light and heat too. There never came an unkind word out of his mouth to me that was a burden on him. And now I've got no son, Fris! I'm childless now! And I'm not able to do anything!"

"You shall have enough to live upon, Ole," said Fris.

"Without coming on the parish? I shouldn't like to come upon the parish."

"Yes, without coming on the parish, Ole."

"If only he can get peace now! He had so little peace in this world these last few years. There's been a song made about his misfortune, Fris, and every time he heard it he was like a new-born lamb in the cold. The children sing it, too." Ole looked round at them imploringly. "It was only a piece of boyish heedlessness, and now he's taken his punishment."

"Your son hasn't had any punishment, Ole, and neither has he deserved any," said Fris, putting his arm about the old man's shoulder. "But he's given a great gift as he lies there and cannot say anything. He gave five men their lives and gave up his own in return for the one offense that he committed in thoughtlessness! It was a generous son you had, Ole!" Fris looked at him with a bright smile.

"Yes," said Ole, with animation. "He saved five people—of course he did—yes, he did!" He had not thought of that before; it would probably never have occurred to him. But now some one else had given it form, and he clung to it. "He saved five lives, even if they were only Finn-Lapps; so perhaps God will not disown him."

Fris shook his head until his gray hair fell over his eyes. "Never forget him, children!" he said; "and now go quietly home." The children silently took up their things and went; at that moment they would have done anything that Fris told them: he had complete power over them.

Ole stood staring absently, and then took Fris by the sleeve and drew him up to the dead body. “He’s rowed well!” he said. “The blood’s come out at his finger-ends, look!” And he raised his son’s hands to the light. “And there’s a wrist, Fris! He could take up an old man like me and carry me like a little child.” Ole laughed feebly. “But I carried him; all the way from the south reef I carried him on my back. I’m too heavy for you, father! I could hear him say, for he was a good son; but I carried him, and now I can’t do anything more. If only they see that!”—he was looking again at the blood-stained fingers. “He did do his best. If only God Himself would give him his discharge!”

“Yes,” said Fris. “God will give him his discharge Himself, and he sees everything, you know, Ole.”

Some fishermen entered the room. They took off their caps, and one by one went quietly up and shook hands with Ole, and then, each passing his hand over his face, turned questioningly to the schoolmaster. Fris nodded, and they raised the dead body between them, and passed with heavy, cautious steps out through the entry and on toward the village, Ole following them, bowed down and moaning to himself.

XVIII

It was Pelle who, one day in his first year at school, when he was being questioned in Religion, and Fris asked him whether he could give the names of the three greatest festivals in the year, amused every one by answering: “Midsummer Eve, Harvest-home and—and——” There was a third, too, but when it came to the point, he was shy of mentioning it—his birthday! In certain ways it was the greatest of them all, even though no one but Father Lasse knew about it—and the people who wrote the almanac, of course; they knew about simply everything!

It came on the twenty-sixth of June and was called Pelagius in the calendar. In the morning his father kissed him and said: “Happiness and a blessing to you, laddie!” and then there was always something in his pocket when he came to pull on his trousers. His father was just as excited as he was himself, and waited by him while he dressed, to share in the surprise. But it was Pelle’s way to spin things out when something nice was coming; it made the pleasure all the greater. He purposely passed over the interesting pocket, while Father Lasse stood by fidgeting and not knowing what to do.

“I say, what’s the matter with that pocket? It looks to me so fat! You surely haven’t been out stealing hens’ eggs in the night?”

Then Pelle had to take it out—a large bundle of paper—and undo it, layer after layer. And Lasse would be amazed.

“Pooh, it’s nothing but paper! What rubbish to go and fill your pockets with!” But in the very inside of all there was a pocket- knife with two blades.

“Thank you!” whispered Pelle then, with tears in his eyes.

“Oh, nonsense! It’s a poor present, that!” said Lasse, blinking his red, lashless eyelids.

Beyond this the boy did not come in for anything better on that day than usual, but all the same he had a solemn feeling all day. The sun never failed to shine—was even unusually bright; and the animals looked meaningly at him while they lay munching. “It’s my birthday to-day!” he said, hanging with his arms round the neck of Nero, one of the bullocks. “Can you say ‘A happy birthday’?” And Nero breathed warm breath down his back, together with green juice from his chewing; and Pelle went about happy, and stole green corn to give to him and to his favorite calf, kept the new knife—or whatever it might have been—in his hand the whole day long, and dwelt in a peculiarly solemn way upon everything he did. He could make the whole of the long day swell with a festive feeling; and when he went to bed he tried to keep awake so as to make the day longer still.

Nevertheless, Midsummer Eve was in its way a greater day; it had at any rate the glamour of the unattainable over it. On that day everything that could creep and walk went up to the Common; there was not a servant on the whole island so poor-spirited as to submit to the refusal of a holiday on that day—none except just Lasse and Pelle.

Every year they had seen the day come and go without sharing in its pleasure. “Some one must stay at home, confound it!” said the bailiff always. “Or perhaps you think I can do it all for you?” They had too little power to assert themselves. Lasse helped to pack appetizing food and beverages into the carts, and see the others off, and then went about despondently—one man to all the work. Pelle watched from the field their merry departure and the white stripe of dust far away behind the rocks. And for half a year afterward, at meals, they heard reminiscences of drinking and fighting and love-making—the whole festivity.

But this was at an end. Lasse was not the man to continue to let himself be trifled with. He possessed a woman’s affection, and a house in the background. He could give notice any day he liked. The magistrate was presumably busy with the prescribed advertising for Madam Olsen’s husband, and as soon as the lawful respite was over, they would come together.

Lasse no longer sought to avoid the risk of dismissal. As long ago as the winter, he had driven the bailiff into a corner, and only agreed to be taken on again upon the express condition that they both took part in the Midsummer Eve outing; and he had witnesses to it. On the Common, where all lovers held tryst that day, Lasse and she were to meet too, but of this Pelle knew nothing.

“To-day we can say the day after to-morrow, and to-morrow we can say to-morrow,” Pelle went about repeating to his father two evenings before the day. He had kept an account of the time ever since May Day, by making strokes for all the days on the inside of the lid of the chest, and crossing them out one by one.

“Yes, and the day after to-morrow we shall say to-day,” said Lasse, with a juvenile fling.

They opened their eyes upon an incomprehensibly brilliant world, and did not at first remember that this was the day. Lasse had anticipated his wages to the amount of five krones, and had got an old cottager to do his work—for half a krone and his meals. “It’s not a big wage,” said the man; “but if I give you a hand, perhaps the Almighty’ll give me one in return.”

“Well, we’ve no one but Him to hold to, we poor creatures,” answered Lasse. “But I shall thank you in my grave.”

The cottager arrived by four o’clock, and Lasse was able to begin his holiday from that hour. Whenever he was about to take a hand in the work, the other said: “No, leave it alone! I’m sure you’ve not often had a holiday.”

“No; this is the first real holiday since I came to the farm,” said Lasse, drawing himself up with a lordly air.

Pelle was in his best clothes from the first thing in the morning, and went about smiling in his shirt-sleeves and with his hair plastered down with water; his best cap and jacket were not to be put on until they were going to start. When the sun shone upon his face, it sparkled like dewy grass. There was nothing to trouble about; the animals were in the enclosure and the bailiff was going to look after them himself.

He kept near his father, who had brought this about. Father Lasse was powerful! “What a good thing you threatened to leave!” he kept on exclaiming. And Lasse always gave the same answer: “Ay, you must carry things with a high hand if you want to gain anything in this world!”—and nodded with a consciousness of power.

They were to have started at eight o’clock, but the girls could not get the provisions ready in time. There were jars of stewed gooseberries, huge piles of pancakes, a hard-boiled egg apiece, cold veal and an endless supply of bread and butter. The carriage boxes could not nearly hold it all, so large baskets were pushed in under the seats. In the front was a small cask of beer, covered with green oats to keep the sun from it; and there was a whole keg of spirits and three bottles of cold punch. Almost the entire bottom of the large spring-wagon was covered, so that it was difficult to find room for one’s feet.

After all, Fru Kongstrup showed a proper feeling for her servants when she wanted to. She went about like a kind mistress and saw that everything was well packed and that nothing was wanting. She was not like Kongstrup, who always had to have a bailiff between himself and them. She even joked and did her best, and it was evident that whatever else there might be to say against her, she wanted them to have a merry day. That her face was a little sad was not to be wondered at, as the farmer had driven out that morning with her young relative.

At last the girls were ready, and every one got in—in high spirits. The men inadvertently sat upon the girls’ laps and jumped up in alarm. “Oh, oh! I must have gone too near a stove!” cried the rogue Mons, rubbing himself behind. Even the mistress could not help laughing.

“Isn’t Erik going with us?” asked his old sweetheart Bengta, who still had a warm spot in her heart for him.

The bailiff whistled shrilly twice, and Erik came slowly up from the barn, where he had been standing and keeping watch upon his master.

“Won’t you go with them to the woods to-day, Erik man?” asked the bailiff kindly. Erik stood twisting his big body and murmuring something that no one could understand, and then made an unwilling movement with one shoulder.

“You’d better go with them,” said the bailiff, pretending he was going to take him and put him into the cart. “Then I shall have to see whether I can get over the loss.”

Those in the cart laughed, but Erik shuffled off down through the yard, with his dog-like glance directed backward at the bailiff’s feet, and stationed himself at the corner of the stable, where he stood watching. He held his cap behind his back, as boys do when they play at “Robbers.”

“He’s a queer customer!” said Mons. Then Karl Johan guided the horses carefully through the gate, and they set off with a crack of the whip.

Along all the roads, vehicles were making their way toward the highest part of the island, filled to overflowing with merry people, who sat on one another’s laps and hung right over the sides. The dust rose behind the conveyances and hung white in the air in stripes miles in length, that showed how the roads lay like spokes in a wheel all pointing toward the middle of the island. The air hummed with merry voices and the strains of concertinas. They missed Gustav's playing now—yes, and Bodil's pretty face, that always shone so brightly on a day like this.

Pelle had the appetite of years of fasting for the great world, and devoured everything with his eyes. "Look there, father! Just look!" Nothing escaped him. It made the others cheerful to look at him—he was so rosy and pretty. He wore a newly-washed blue blouse under his waistcoat, which showed at the neck and wrists and did duty as collar and cuffs; but Fair Maria bent back from the box-seat, where she was sitting alone with Karl Johan, and tied a very white scarf round his neck, and Karna, who wanted to be motherly to him, went over his face with a corner of her pocket-handkerchief, which she moistened with her tongue. She was rather officious, but for that matter it was quite conceivable that the boy might have got dirty again since his thorough morning wash.

The side roads continued to pour their contents out on to the high-roads, and there was soon a whole river of conveyances, extending as far as the eye could see in both directions. One would hardly have believed that there were so many vehicles in the whole world! Karl Johan was a good driver to have; he was always pointing with his whip and telling them something. He knew all about every single house. They were beyond the farms and tillage by now; but on the heath, where self-sown birch and aspen trees stood fluttering restlessly in the summer air, there stood desolate new houses with bare, plastered walls, and not so much as a henbane in the window or a bit of curtain. The fields round them were as stony as a newly-mended road, and the crops were a sad sight; the corn was only two or three inches in height, and already in ear. The people here were all Swedish servants who had saved a little—and had now become land-owners. Karl Johan knew a good many of them.

"It looks very miserable," said Lasse, comparing in his own mind the stones here with Madam Olsen's fat land.

"Oh, well," answered the head man, "it's not of the very best, of course; but the land yields something, anyhow." And he pointed to the fine large heaps of road-metal and hewn stone that surrounded every cottage. "If it isn't exactly grain, it gives something to live on; and then it's the only land that'll suit poor people's purses." He and Fair Maria were thinking of settling down here themselves. Kongstrup had promised to help them to a farm with two horses when they married.

In the wood the birds were in the middle of their morning song; they were later with it here than in the sandbanks plantation, it seemed. The air sparkled brightly, and something invisible seemed to rise from the undergrowth; it was like being in a church with the sun shining down through tall windows and the organ playing. They drove round the foot of a steep cliff with overhanging trees, and into the wood.

It was almost impossible to thread your way through the crowd of unharnessed horses and vehicles. You had to have all your wits about you to keep from damaging your own and other people's things. Karl Johan sat watching both his fore wheels, and felt his way on step by step; he was like a cat in a thunderstorm, he was so wary. "Hold your jaw!" he said sharply, when any one in the cart opened his lips. At last they found room to unharness, and a rope was tied from tree to tree to form a square in which the horses were secured. Then they got out the curry-combs—goodness, how dusty it had been! And at last—well, no one said anything, but they all stood expectant, half turned in the direction of the head man.

"Well, I suppose we ought to go into the wood and look at the view," he said.

They turned it over as they wandered aimlessly round the cart, looking furtively at the provisions.

"If only it'll keep!" said Anders, lifting a basket.

"I don't know how it is, but I feel so strange in my inside to-day," Mons began. "It can't be consumption, can it?"

"Perhaps we ought to taste the good things first, then?" said Karl Johan.

Yes—oh, yes—it came at last!

Last year they had eaten their dinner on the grass. It was Bodil who had thought of that; she was always a little fantastic. This year nobody would be the one to make such a suggestion. They looked at one another a little expectant; and they then climbed up into the cart and settled themselves there just like other decent people. After all, the food was the same.

The pancakes were as large and thick as a saucepan-lid. It reminded them of Erik, who last year had eaten ten of them.

"It's a pity he's not here this year!" said Karl Johan. "He was a merry devil."

"He's not badly off," said Mons. "Gets his food and clothes given him, and does nothing but follow at the bailiff's heels and copy him. And he's always contented now. I wouldn't a bit mind changing with him."

"And run about like a dog with its nose to the ground sniffing at its master's footsteps? Oh no, not I!"

"Whatever you may say, you must remember that it's the Almighty Himself who's taken his wits into safekeeping," said Lasse admonishingly; and for a little while they were quite serious at the thought.

But seriousness could not claim more than was its due. Anders wanted to rub his leg, but made a mistake and caught hold of Lively Sara's, and made her scream; and this so flustered his hand that it could not find its way up, but went on making mistakes, and there was much laughter and merriment.

Karl Johan was not taking much part in the hilarity; he looked as if he were pondering something. Suddenly he roused himself and drew out his purse. "Here goes!" he said stoutly. "I'll stand beer! Bavarian beer, of course. Who'll go and fetch it?"

Mons leaped quickly from the cart. "How many?"

"Four." Karl Johan's eye ran calculating over the cart. "No; just bring five, will you? That'll be a half each," he said easily. "But make sure that it's real Bavarian beer they give you."

There was really no end to the things that Karl Johan knew about; and he said the name "Bavarian beer" with no more difficulty than others would have in turning a quid in their mouth. But of course he was a trusted man on the farm now and often drove on errands into the town.

This raised their spirits and awakened curiosity, for most of them had never tasted Bavarian beer before. Lasse and Pelle openly admitted their inexperience; but Anders pretended he had got drunk on it more than once, though every one knew it was untrue.

Mons returned, moving cautiously, with the beer in his arms; it was a precious commodity. They drank it out of the large dram-glasses that were meant for the punch. In the town, of course, they drank beer out of huge mugs, but Karl Johan considered that that was simply swilling. The girls refused to drink, but did it after all, and were delighted. "They're always like that," said Mons, "when you offer them something really good." They became flushed with the excitement of the occurrence, and thought they were drunk. Lasse took away the taste of his beer with a dram; he did not like it at all. "I'm too old," he said, in excuse.

The provisions were packed up again, and they set out in a body to see the view. They had to make their way through a perfect forest of carts to reach the pavilion. Horses were neighing and flinging up their hind legs, so that the bark flew off the trees. Men hurled themselves in among them, and tugged at their mouths until they quieted down again, while the women screamed and ran hither and thither like frightened hens, with skirts lifted.

From the top they could form some idea of the number of people. On the sides of the hill and in the wood beyond the roads—everywhere carts covered the ground; and down at the triangle where the two wide high-roads met, new loads were continually turning in. "There must be far more than a thousand pairs of horses in the wood to-day," said Karl Johan. Yes, far more! There were a million, if not more, thought Pelle. He was quite determined to get as much as possible out of everything to-day.

There stood the Bridge Farm cart, and there came the people from Hammersholm, right out at the extreme north of the island. Here were numbers of people from the shore farms at Dove Point and Rönne and Neksö—the whole island was there. But there was no time now to fall in with acquaintances. "We shall meet this afternoon!" was the general cry.

Karl Johan led the expedition; it was one of a head man's duties to know the way about the Common. Fair Maria kept faithfully by his side, and every one could see how proud she was of him. Mons walked hand in hand with Lively Sara, and they went swinging along like a couple of happy children. Bengta and Anders had some difficulty in agreeing; they quarrelled every other minute, but they did not mean much by it. And Karna made herself agreeable.

They descended into a swamp, and went up again by a steep ascent where the great trees stood with their feet in one another's necks. Pelle leaped about everywhere like a young kid. In under the firs there were anthills as big as haycocks, and the ants had broad trodden paths running like foothpaths between the trees, on and on endlessly; a multitude of hosts passed backward and forward upon those roads. Under some small fir-trees a hedgehog was busy attacking a wasps' nest; it poked its nose into the nest, drew it quickly back, and sneezed. It looked wonderfully funny, but Pelle had to go on after the others. And soon he was far ahead of them, lying on his face in a ditch where he had smelt wild strawberries.

Lasse could not keep pace with the younger people up the hill, and it was not much better with Karna. "We're getting old, we two," she said, as they toiled up, panting.

"Oh, are we?" was Lasse's answer. He felt quite young in spirit; it was only breath that he was short of.

"I expect you think very much as I do; when you've worked for others for so many years, you feel you want something of your own."

"Yes, perhaps," said Lasse evasively.

"One wouldn't come to it quite empty-handed, either—if it should happen."

"Oh, indeed!"

Karna continued in this way, but Lasse was always sparing with his words, until they arrived at the Rockingstone, where the others were standing waiting. That was a block and a half! Fifty tons it was said to weigh, and yet Mons and Anders could rock it by putting a stick under one end of it.

"And now we ought to go to the Robbers' Castle," said Karl Johan, and they trudged on, always up and down. Lasse did his utmost to keep beside the others, for he did not feel very brave when he was alone with Karna. What a fearful quantity of trees there were! And not all of one sort, as in other parts of the world. There were birches and firs, beech and larch and mountain ash all mixed together, and ever so many cherry-trees. The head man lead them across a little, dark lake that lay at the foot of the rock, staring up like an evil eye. "It was here that Little Anna drowned her baby —she that was betrayed by her master," he said lingeringly. They all knew the story, and stood silent over the lake; the girls had tears in their eyes.

As they stood there silent, thinking of Little Anna's sad fate, an unspeakably soft note came up to them, followed by a long, affecting sobbing. They moved nearer to one another. "Oh, Lord!" whispered Fair Maria, shivering. "That's the baby's soul crying!" Pelle stiffened as he listened, and cold waves seemed to flow down his back.

"Why, that's a nightingale," said Karl Johan, "Don't you even know that? There are hundreds of them in these woods, and they sing in the middle of the day." This was a relief to the older people, but Pelle's horror was not so easily thrown off. He had gazed into the depths of the other world, and every explanation glanced off him.

But then came the Robbers' Castle as a great disappointment. He had imagined it peopled with robbers, and it was only some old ruins that stood on a little hill in the middle of a bog. He went by himself all round the bottom of it to see if there were not a secret underground passage that led down to the water. If there were, he would get hold of his father without letting the others know, and make his way in and look for the chests of money; or else there would be too many to share in it. But this was forgotten as a peculiar scent arrested his attention, and he came upon a piece of ground that was green with lily-of-the-valley plants that still bore a few flowers, and where there were wild strawberries. There were so many that he had to go and call the others.

But this was also forgotten as he made his way through the underwood to get up. He had lost the path and gone astray in the damp, chilly darkness under the cliff. Creeping plants and thorns wove themselves in among the overhanging branches, and made a thick, low roof. He could not see an opening anywhere, and a strange green light came through the matted branches, the ground was slippery with moisture and decaying substances; from the cliff hung quivering fern-fronds with their points downward, and water dripping from them like wet hair. Huge tree-roots, like the naked bodies of black goblins writhing to get free, lay stretched across the rocks. A little further on, the sun made a patch of burning fire in the darkness, and beyond it rose a bluish vapor and a sound as of a distant threshing-machine.

Pelle stood still, and his terror grew until his knees trembled; then he set off running as if he were possessed. A thousand shadow- hands stretched out after him as he ran; and he pushed his way through briars and creepers with a low cry. The daylight met him with the force of a blow, and something behind him had a firm grasp on his clothes; he had to shout for Father Lasse with all his might before it let go.

And there he stood right out in the bog, while high up above his head the others sat, upon a point of rock all among the trees. From up there it looked as if the world were all tree-tops, rising and falling endlessly; there was foliage far down beneath your feet and out as far as the eye could see, up and down. You were almost tempted to throw yourself into it, it looked so invitingly soft. As a warning to the others, Karl Johan had to tell them about the tailor's apprentice, who jumped out from a projecting rock here, just because the foliage looked so temptingly soft, Strange to say, he escaped with his life; but the high tree he fell through stripped him of every stitch of clothing.

Mons had been teasing Sara by saying that he was going to jump down, but now he drew back cautiously. "I don't want to risk my confirmation clothes," he said, trying to look good.

After all, the most remarkable thing of all was the Horseman Hill with the royal monument. The tower alone! Not a bit of wood had been used in it, only granite; and you went round and round and round. "You're counting the steps, I suppose?" said Karl Johan admonishingly. Oh, yes, they were all counting to themselves.

It was clear weather, and the island lay spread out beneath them in all its luxuriance. The very first thing the men wanted to do was to try what it was like to spit down; but the girls were giddy and kept together in a cluster in the middle of the platform. The churches were counted under Karl Johan's able guidance, and all the well- known places pointed out. "There's Stone Farm, too," said Anders, pointing to something far off toward the sea. It was not Stone Farm, but Karl Johan could say to a nicety behind which hill it ought to lie, and then they recognized the quarries.

Lasse took no part in this. He stood quite still, gazing at the blue line of the Swedish coast that stood out far away upon the shining water. The sight of his native land made him feel weak and old; he would probably never go home again, although he would have dearly liked to see Bengta's grave once more. Ah yes, and the best that could happen to one would be to be allowed to rest by her side, when everything else was ended. At this moment he regretted that he had gone into exile in his old age. He wondered what Kungstorp looked like now, whether the new people kept the land cultivated at all. And all the old acquaintances—how were they getting on? His old-man's reminiscences came over him so strongly that for a time he forgot Madam Olsen and everything about her. He allowed himself to be lulled by past memories, and wept in his heart like a little child. Ah! it was dreary to live away from one's native place and everything in one's old age; but if it only brought a blessing on the laddie in some way or other, it was all as it should be.

"I suppose that's the King's Copenhagen[2] we see over there?" asked Anders.

"It's Sweden," said Lasse quietly.

"Sweden, is it? But it lay on that side last year, if I remember rightly."

"Yes, of course! What else should the world go round for?" exclaimed Mons.

Anders was just about to take this in all good faith when he caught a grimace that Mons made to the others. "Oh, you clever monkey!" he cried, and sprang at Mons, who dashed down the stone stairs; and the sound of their footsteps came up in a hollow rumble as out of a huge cask. The girls stood leaning against one another, rocking gently and gazing silently at the shining water that lay far away round the island. The giddiness had made them languid.

"Why, your eyes are quite dreamy!" said Karl Johan, trying to take them all into his embrace. "Aren't you coming down with us?"

They were all fairly tired now. No one said anything, for of course Karl Johan was leading; but the girls showed an inclination to sit down.

"Now there's only the Echo Valley left," he said encouragingly, "and that's on our way back. We must do that, for it's well worth it. You'll hear an echo there that hasn't its equal anywhere."

They went slowly, for their feet were tender with the leather boots and much aimless walking; but when they had come down the steep cliff into the valley and had drunk from the spring, they brightened up. Karl Johan stationed himself with legs astride, and called across to the cliff: “What’s Karl Johan’s greatest treat?” And the echo answered straight away: “Eat!” It was exceedingly funny, and they all had to try it, each with his or her name—even Pelle. When that was exhausted, Mons made up a question which made the echo give a rude answer.

---

[2] Country-people speak of Copenhagen as "the King's Copenhagen."

“You mustn’t teach it anything like that,” said Lasse. “Just suppose some fine ladies were to come here, and he started calling that out after them?” They almost killed themselves with laughing at the old man’s joke, and he was so delighted at the applause that he went on repeating it to himself on the way back. Ha, ha! he wasn’t quite fit for the scrap-heap yet.

When they got back to the cart they were ravenously hungry and settled down to another meal. “You must have something to keep you up when you’re wandering about like this,” said Mons.

“Now then,” said Karl Johan, when they had finished, “every one may do what they like; but at nine sharp we meet here again and drive home.”

Up on the open ground, Lasse gave Pelle a secret nudge, and they began to do business with a cake-seller until the others had got well ahead. “It’s not nice being third wheel in a carriage,” said Lasse. “We two’ll go about by ourselves for a little now.”

Lasse was craning his neck. “Are you looking for any one?” asked Pelle.

“No, no one in particular; but I was wondering where all these people come from. There are people from all over the country, but I haven’t seen any one from the village yet.”

“Don’t you think Madam Olsen’ll be here to-day?”

“Can’t say,” said Lasse; “but it would be nice to see her, and there’s something I want to say to her, too. Your eyes are young; you must keep a lookout.”

Pelle was given fifty öre to spend on whatever he liked. Round the ground sat the poor women of the Heath at little stalls, from which they sold colored sugar-sticks, gingerbread and two-öre cigars. In the meantime he went from woman to woman, and bought of each for one or two öre.

Away under the trees stood blind Hoyer, who had come straight from Copenhagen with new ballads. There was a crowd round him. He played the tune upon his concertina, his little withered wife sang to it, and the whole crowd sang carefully with her. Those who had learnt the tunes went away singing, and others pushed forward into their place and put down their five-öre piece.

Lasse and Pelle stood on the edge of the crowd listening. There was no use in paying money before you knew what you would get for it; and anyhow the songs would be all over the island by to-morrow, and going gratis from mouth to mouth. “A Man of Eighty—a new and pleasant ballad about how things go when a decrepit old man takes a young wife!” shouted Hoyer in a hoarse voice, before the song began. Lasse didn’t care very much about that ballad; but then came a terribly sad one about the sailor George Semon, who took a most tender farewell of his sweetheart—

“And said, When here I once more stand,
We to the church will go hand in hand.”

But he never did come back, for the storm was over them for forty-five days, provisions ran short, and the girl’s lover went mad. He drew his knife upon the captain, and demanded to be taken home to his bride; and the captain shot him down. Then the others threw themselves upon the corpse, carried it to the galley, and made soup of it.

“The girl still waits for her own true love,
Away from the shore she will not move.
Poor maid, she’s hoping she still may wed,
And does not know that her lad is dead.”

“That’s beautiful,” said Lasse, rummaging in his purse for a five-öre. “You must try to learn that; you’ve got an ear for that sort of thing.” They pushed through the crowd right up to the musician, and began cautiously to sing too, while the girls all round were sniffing.

They wandered up and down among the trees, Lasse rather fidgety. There was a whole street of dancing-booths, tents with conjurers and panorama-men, and drinking-booths. The criers were perspiring, the refreshment sellers were walking up and down in front of their tents like greedy beasts of prey. Things had not got into full swing yet, for most of the people were still out and about seeing the sights, or amusing themselves in all seemliness, exerting themselves in trials of strength or slipping in and out of the conjurers' tents. There was not a man unaccompanied by a woman. Many a one came to a stand at the refreshment-tents, but the woman pulled him past; then he would yawn and allow himself to be dragged up into a roundabout or a magic-lantern tent where the most beautiful pictures were shown of the way that cancer and other horrible things made havoc in people's insides.

"These are just the things for the women," said Lasse, breathing forth a sigh at haphazard after Madam Olsen. On a horse on Madvig's roundabout sat Gustav with his arm round Bodil's waist. "Hey, old man!" he cried, as they whizzed past, and flapped Lasse on the ear with his cap, which had the white side out. They were as radiant as the day and the sun, those two.

Pelle wanted to have a turn on a roundabout. "Then blest if I won't have something too, that'll make things go round!" said Lasse, and went in and had a "cuckoo"—coffee with brandy in it. "There are some people," he said, when he came out again, "that can go from one tavern to another without its making any difference in their purse. It would be nice to try—only for a year. Hush!" Over by Max Alexander's "Green House" stood Karna, quite alone and looking about her wistfully. Lasse drew Pelle round in a wide circle.

"There's Madam Olsen with a strange man!" said Pelle suddenly.

Lasse started. "Where?" Yes, there she stood, and had a man with her! And talking so busily! They went past her without stopping; she could choose for herself, then.

"Hi, can't you wait a little!" cried Madam Olsen, running after them so that her petticoats crackled round her. She was round and smiling as usual, and many layers of good home-woven material stood out about her; there was no scrimping anywhere.

They went on together, talking on indifferent matters and now and then exchanging glances about the boy who was in their way. They had to walk so sedately without venturing to touch one another. He did not like any nonsense.

It was black with people now up at the pavilion, and one could hardly move a step without meeting acquaintances. "It's even worse than a swarm of bees," said Lasse. "It's not worth trying to get in there." At one place the movement was outward, and by following it they found themselves in a valley, where a man stood shouting and beating his fists upon a platform. It was a missionary meeting. The audience lay encamped in small groups, up the slopes, and a man in long black clothes went quietly from group to group, selling leaflets. His face was white, and he had a very long, thin red beard.

"Do you see that man?" whispered Lasse, giving Pelle a nudge. "Upon my word, if it isn't Long Ole—and with a glove on his injured hand. It was him that had to take the sin upon him for Per Olsen's false swearing!" explained Lasse, turning to Madam Olsen. "He was standing at the machine at the time when Per Olsen ought to have paid the penalty with his three fingers, and so his went instead. He may be glad of the mistake after all, for they say he's risen to great things among the prayer-meeting folks. And his complexion's as fine as a young lady's—something different to what it was when he was carting manure at Stone Farm! It'll be fun to say good-day to him again."

Lasse was quite proud of having served together with this man, and stationed himself in front of the others, intending to make an impression upon his lady friend by saying a hearty: "Good-day, Ole!" Long Ole was at the next group, and now he came on to them and was going to hold out his tracts, when a glance at Lasse made him drop both hand and eyes; and with a deep sigh he passed on with bowed head to the next group.

"Did you see how he turned his eyes up?" said Lasse derisively. "When beggars come to court, they don't know how to behave! He'd got a watch in his pocket, too, and long clothes; and before he hadn't even a shirt to his body. And an ungodly devil he was too! But the old gentleman looks after his own, as the saying is; I expect it's him that helped him on by changing places at the machine. The way they've cheated the Almighty's enough to make Him weep!"

Madam Olsen tried to hush Lasse, but the "cuckoo" rose within him together with his wrath, and he continued: "So *he's* above recognizing decent people who get what they have in an honorable way, and not by lying and humbug! They do say he makes love to all the farmers' wives wherever he goes; but there was a time when he had to put up with the

Sow.”

People began to look at them, and Madam Olsen took Lasse firmly by the arm and drew him away.

The sun was now low in the sky. Up on the open ground the crowds tramped round and round as if in a tread-mill. Now and then a drunken man reeled along, making a broad path for himself through the crush. The noise came seething up from the tents—barrel-organs each grinding out a different tune, criers, the bands of the various dancing-booths, and the measured tread of a schottische or polka. The women wandered up and down in clusters, casting long looks into the refreshment-tents where their men were sitting; and some of them stopped at the tent-door and made coaxing signs to some one inside.

Under the trees stood a drunken man, pawing at a tree-trunk, and beside him stood a girl, crying with her black damask apron to her eyes. Pelle watched them for a long time. The man’s clothes were disordered, and he lurched against the girl with a foolish grin when she, in the midst of her tears, tried to put them straight. When Pelle turned away, Lasse and Madam Olsen had disappeared in the crowd.

They must have gone on a little, and he went down to the very end of the street. Then he turned despondingly and went up, burrowing this way and that in the stream of people, with eyes everywhere. “Haven’t you seen Father Lasse?” he asked pitifully, when he met any one he knew.

In the thickest of the crush, a tall man was moving along, holding forth blissfully at the top of his voice. He was a head taller than anybody else, and very broad; but he beamed with good-nature, and wanted to embrace everybody. People ran screaming out of his way, so that a broad path was left wherever he went. Pelle kept behind him, and thus succeeded in getting through the thickest crowds, where policemen and rangers were stationed with thick cudgels. Their eyes and ears were on the watch, but they did not interfere in anything. It was said that they had handcuffs in their pockets.

Pelle had reached the road in his despairing search. Cart after cart was carefully working its way out through the gloom under the trees, then rolling out into the dazzling evening light, and on to the high-road with much cracking of whips. They were the prayer-meeting people driving home.

He happened to think of the time, and asked a man what it was. Nine! Pelle had to run so as not to be too late in getting to the cart. In the cart sat Karl Johan and Fair Maria eating. “Get up and have something to eat!” they said, and as Pelle was ravenous, he forgot everything while he ate. But then Johan asked about Lasse, and his torment returned.

Karl Johan was cross; not one had returned to the cart, although it was the time agreed upon. “You’d better keep close to us now,” he said, as they went up, “or you might get killed.”

Up at the edge of the wood they met Gustav running. “Have none of you seen Bodil?” he asked, gasping. His clothes were torn and there was blood on the front of his shirt. He ran on groaning, and disappeared under the trees. It was quite dark there, but the open ground lay in a strange light that came from nowhere, but seemed to have been left behind by the day as it fled. Faces out there showed up, some in ghostly pallor, some black like holes in the light, until they suddenly burst forth, crimson with blood-red flame.

The people wandered about in confused groups, shouting and screaming at the top of their voices. Two men came along with arms twined affectionately round one another’s necks, and the next moment lay rolling on the ground in a fight. Others joined the fray and took sides without troubling to discover what it was all about, and the contest became one large struggling heap. Then the police came up, and hit about them with their sticks; and those who did not run away were handcuffed and thrown into an empty stable.

Pelle was quite upset, and kept close to Karl Johan; he jumped every time a band approached, and kept on saying in a whimpering tone: “Where’s Father Lasse? Let’s go and find him.”

“Oh, hold your tongue!” exclaimed the head man, who was standing and trying to catch sight of his fellow-servants. He was angry at this untrustworthiness. “Don’t stand there crying! You’d do much more good if you ran down to the cart and see whether any one’s come.”

Pelle had to go, little though he cared to venture in under the trees. The branches hung silently listening, but the noise from the open ground came down in bursts, and in the darkness under the bushes living things rustled about and spoke in voices of joy or sorrow. A sudden scream rang through the wood, and made his knees knock together.

Karna sat at the back of the cart asleep, and Bengta stood leaning against the front seat, weeping. “They’ve locked Anders up,” she sobbed. “He got wild, so they put handcuffs on him and locked him up.” She went back with Pelle.

Lasse was with Karl Johan and Fair Maria; he looked defiantly at Pelle, and in his half-closed eyes there was a little mutinous gleam.

“Then now there’s only Mons and Lively Sara,” said Karl Johan, as he ran his eye over them.

“But what about Anders?” sobbed Bengta. “You surely won’t drive away without Anders?”

“There’s nothing can he done about Anders!” said the head man. “He’ll come of his own accord when once he’s let out.”

They found out on inquiry that Mons and Lively Sara were down in one of the dancing-booths, and accordingly went down there. “Now you stay here!” said Karl Johan sternly, and went in to take a survey of the dancers. In there blood burnt hot, and faces were like balls of fire that made red circles in the blue mist of perspiring heat and dust. Dump! Dump! Dump! The measure fell booming like heavy blows; and in the middle of the floor stood a man and wrung the moisture out of his jacket.

Out of one of the dancing-tents pushed a big fellow with two girls. He had an arm about the neck of each, and they linked arms behind his back. His cap was on the back of his head, and his riotous mood would have found expression in leaping, if he had not felt himself too pleasantly encumbered; so he opened his mouth wide, and shouted joyfully, so that it rang again: “Devil take me! Deuce take me! Seven hundred devils take me!” and disappeared under the trees with his girls.

“That was Per Olsen himself,” said Lasse, looking after him. “What a man, to be sure! He certainly doesn’t look as if he bore any debt of sin to the Almighty.”

“His time may still come,” was the opinion of Karl Johan.

Quite by chance they found Mons and Lively Sara sitting asleep in one another’s arms upon a bench under the trees.

“Well, now, I suppose we ought to be getting home?” said Karl Johan slowly. He had been doing right for so long that his throat was quite dry. “I suppose none of you’ll stand a farewell glass?”

“I will!” said Mons, “if you’ll go up to the pavilion with me to drink it.” Mons had missed something by going to sleep and had a desire to go once round the ground. Every time a yell reached them he gave a leap as he walked beside Lively Sara, and answered with a long halloo. He tried to get away, but she clung to his arm; so he swung the heavy end of his loaded stick and shouted defiantly. Lasse kicked his old limbs and imitated Mons’s shouts, for he too was for anything rather than going home; but Karl Johan was determined—they *were* to go now! And in this he was supported by Pelle and the women.

Out on the open ground a roar made them stop, and the women got each behind her man. A man came running bareheaded and with a large wound in his temple, from which the blood flowed down over his face and collar. His features were distorted with fear. Behind him came a second, also bareheaded, and with a drawn knife. A ranger tried to bar his way, but received a wound in his shoulder and fell, and the pursuer ran on. As he passed them, Mons uttered a short yell and sprang straight up into the air, bringing down his loaded stick upon the back of the man’s neck. The man sank to the ground with a grunt, and Mons slipped in among the groups of people and disappeared; and the others found him waiting for them at the edge of the wood. He did not answer any more yells.

Karl Johan had to lead the horses until they got out onto the road, and then they all got in. Behind them the noise had become lost, and only one long cry for help rang through the air and dropped again.

Down by a little lake, some forgotten girls had gathered on the grass and were playing by themselves. The white mist lay over the grass like a shining lake, and only the upper part of the girls’ bodies rose above it. They were walking round in a ring, singing the mid-summer’s-night song. Pure and clear rose the merry song, and yet was so strangely sad to listen to, because they who sang it had been left in the lurch by sots and brawlers.

“We will dance upon hill and meadow,
We will wear out our shoes and stockings.
Heigh ho, my little sweetheart fair,
We shall dance till the sun has risen high.

Heigh ho, my queen!
Now we have danced upon the green.”

The tones fell so gently upon the ear and mind that memories and thoughts were purified of all that had been hideous, and the day itself could appear in its true colors as a joyful festival. For Lasse and Pelle, indeed, it had been a peerless day, making up for many years of neglect. The only pity was that it was over instead of about to begin.

The occupants of the cart were tired now, some nodding and all silent. Lasse sat working about in his pocket with one hand. He was trying to obtain an estimate of the money that remained. It was expensive to keep a sweetheart when you did not want to be outdone by younger men in any way. Pelle was asleep, and was slipping farther and farther down until Bengta took his head onto her lap. She herself was weeping bitterly about Anders.

The daylight was growing rapidly brighter as they drove in to Stone Farm.

XIX

The master and mistress of Stone Farm were almost always the subject of common talk, and were never quite out of the thoughts of the people. There was as much thought and said about Kongstrup and his wife as about all the rest of the parish put together; they were bread to so many, their Providence both in evil and good, that nothing that they did could be immaterial.

No one ever thought of weighing them by the same standards as they used for others; they were something apart, beings who were endowed with great possessions, and could do and be as they liked, disregarding all considerations and entertaining all passions. All that came from Stone Farm was too great for ordinary mortals to sit in judgment upon; it was difficult enough to explain what went on, even when at such close quarters with it all as were Lasse and Pelle. To them as to the others, the Stone Farm people were beings apart, who lived their life under greater conditions, beings, as it were, halfway between the human and the supernatural, in a world where such things as unquenchable passion and frenzied love wrought havoc.

What happened, therefore, at Stone Farm supplied more excitement than the other events of the parish. People listened with open- mouthed interest to the smallest utterance from the big house, and when the outbursts came, trembled and went about oppressed and uncomfortable. No matter how clearly Lasse, in the calm periods, might think he saw it all, the life up there would suddenly be dragged out of its ordinary recognized form again, and wrap itself around his and the boy’s world like a misty sphere in which capricious powers warred—just above their heads.

It was now Jomfru Köller’s second year at the farm, in spite of all evil prophecies; and indeed things had turned out in such a way that every one had to own that his prognostications had been wrong. She was always fonder of driving with Kongstrup to the town than of staying at home to cheer Fru Kongstrup up in her loneliness; but such is youth. She behaved properly enough otherwise, and it was well known that Kongstrup had returned to his old hotel-sweethearting in the town. Fru Kongstrup herself, moreover, showed no distrust of her young relative—if she had ever felt any. She was as kind to her as if she had been her own daughter; and very often it was she herself who got Jomfru Köller to go in the carriage to look after her husband.

Otherwise the days passed as usual, and Fru Kongstrup was continually giving herself up to little drinking-bouts and to grief. At such times she would weep over her wasted life; and if he were at home would follow him with her accusations from room to room, until he would order the carriage and take flight, even in the middle of the night. The walls were so saturated with her voice that it penetrated through everything like a sorrowful, dull droning. Those who happened to be up at night to look after animals or the like, could hear her talking incessantly up there, even if she were alone.

But then Jomfru Köller began to talk of going away. She suddenly got the idea that she wanted to go to Copenhagen and learn something, so that she could earn her own living. It sounded strange, as there was every prospect of her some day inheriting the farmer’s property. Fru Kongstrup was quite upset at the thought of losing her, and altogether forgot her other troubles in continually talking to her about it. Even when everything was settled, and they were standing in the mangling-room with the maids, getting Jomfru Köller’s things ready for her journey, she still kept on—to no earthly purpose. Like all the Stone Farm family, she could never let go anything she had once got hold of.

There was something strange about Jomfru Köller’s obstinacy of purpose; she was not even quite sure what she was going to do over there. “I suppose she’s going over to learn cooking,” said one and another with a covert smile.

Fru Kongstrup herself had no suspicion. She, who was always suspecting something, seemed to be blind here. It must have been because she had such complete trust in Jomfru Köller, and thought so much of her. She had not even time to sigh, so busy was she in putting everything into good order. Much need there was for it, too; Jomfru Köller must have had her head full of very different things, judging from the condition her clothes were in.

“I’m glad Kongstrup’s going over with her,” said Fru Kongstrup to Fair Maria one evening when they were sitting round the big darning-basket, mending the young lady’s stockings after the wash. “They say

Copenhagen's a bad town for inexperienced young people to come to. But Sina'll get on all right, for she's got the good stock of the Köllers in her." She said it all with such childish simplicity; you could tramp in and out of her heart with great wooden shoes on, suspicious though she was. "Perhaps we'll come over to see you at Christmas, Sina," she added in the goodness of her heart.

Jomfru Köller opened her mouth and caught her breath in terror, but did not answer. She bent over her work and did not look at any one all the evening. She never looked frankly at any one now. "She's ashamed of her deceitfulness!" they said. The judgment would fall upon her; she ought to have known what she was doing, and not gone between the bark and the wood, especially here where one of them trusted her entirely.

In the upper yard the new man Pær was busy getting the closed carriage ready. Erik stood beside him idle. He looked unhappy and troubled, poor fellow, as he always did when he was not near the bailiff. Each time a wheel had to come off or be put on, he had to put his giant's back under the big carriage and lift it. Every now and then Lasse came to the stable-door to get an idea of what was going on. Pelle was at school, it being the first day of the new half-year.

She was going away to-day, the false wretch who had let herself be drawn into deceiving one who had been a mother to her! Fru Kongstrup must be going with them down to the steamer, as the closed carriage was going.

Lasse went into the bedroom to arrange one or two things so that he could slip out in the evening without Pelle noticing it. He had given Pelle a little paper of sweets for Madam Olsen, and on the paper he had drawn a cross with a lead button; and the cross meant in all secrecy that he would come to her that evening.

While he took out his best clothes and hid them under some hay close to the outer door, he hummed:—

"Love's longing so strong
It helped me along,
And the way was made short with the nightingales' song."

He was looking forward so immensely to the evening; he had not been alone with her now for nearly a quarter of a year. He was proud, moreover, of having taken writing into his service, and that a writing that Pelle, quick reader of writing though he was, would not be able to make out.

While the others were taking their after-dinner nap, Lasse went out and tidied up the dung-heap. The carriage was standing up there with one large trunk strapped on behind, and another standing on one edge on the box. Lasse wondered what such a girl would do when she was alone out in the wide world and had to pay the price of her sin. He supposed there must be places where they took in such girls in return for good payment; everything could be got over there!

Johanna Pihl came waddling in at the gate up there. Lasse started when he saw her; she never came for any good. When she boldly exhibited herself here, she was always drunk, and then she stopped at nothing. It was sad to see how low misfortune could drag a woman. Lasse could not help thinking what a pretty girl she had been in her youth. And now all she thought of was making money out of her shame! He cautiously withdrew into the stable, so as not to be an eye-witness to anything, and peered out from there.

The Sow went up and down in front of the windows, and called in a thick voice, over which she had not full command: "Kongstrup, Kongstrup! Come out and let me speak to you. You must let me have some money, for your son and I haven't had any food for three days."

"That's a wicked lie!" said Lasse to himself indignantly, "for she has a good income. But she wastes God's gifts, and now she's out to do some evil." He would have liked to take the fork and chase her out through the gate, but it was not well to expose one's self to her venomous tongue.

She had her foot upon the step, but did not dare to mount. Fuddled though she was, there was something that kept her in check. She stood there groping at the handrail and mumbling to herself, and every now and then lifting her fat face and calling Kongstrup.

Jomfru Köller came inadvertently up from the basement, and went toward the steps; her eyes were on the ground, and she did not see the Sow until it was too late, and then she turned quickly. Johanna Pihl stood grinning.

"Come here, miss, and let me wish you good-day!" she cried. "You're too grand, are you? But the one may be just as good as the other! Perhaps it’s because you can drive away in a carriage and have yours on the other side of the sea, while I had mine in a beet-field! But is that anything to be proud of? I say, just go up and tell my fine gentleman that his eldest’s starving! I daren’t go myself because of the evil eye.”

Long before this Jomfru Köller was down in the basement again, but Johanna Pihl continued to stand and say the same thing over and over again, until the bailiff came dashing out toward her, when she retired, scolding, from the yard.

The men had been aroused before their time by her screaming, and stood drowsily watching behind the barn-doors. Lasse kept excited watch from the stable, and the girls had collected in the wash-house. What would happen now? They all expected some terrible outbreak.

But nothing happened. Now, when Fru Kongstrup had the right to shake heaven and earth—so faithlessly had they treated her—now she was silent. The farm was as peaceful as on the days when they had come to a sort of understanding, and Kongstrup kept himself quiet. Fru Kongstrup passed the windows up there, and looked just like anybody else. Nothing happened!

Something must have been said, however, for the young lady had a very tear-stained face when they got into the carriage, and Kongstrup wore his confused air. Then Karl Johan drove away with the two; and the mistress did not appear. She was probably ashamed for what concerned the others.

Nothing had happened to relieve the suspense; it oppressed every one. She must have accepted her unhappy lot, and given up standing out for her rights, now, just when every one would have supported her. This tranquillity was so unnatural, so unreasonable, that it made one melancholy and low-spirited. It was as though others were suffering on her behalf, and she herself had no heart.

But then it broke down, and the sound of weeping began to ooze out over the farm, quiet and regular like flowing heart’s blood. All the evening it flowed; the weeping had never sounded so despairing; it went to the hearts of all. She had taken in the poor child and treated her as her own, and the poor child had deceived her. Every one felt how she must suffer.

During the night the weeping rose to cries so heart-rending that they awakened even Pelle—wet with perspiration. “It sounds like some one in the last agonies!” said Lasse, and hastily drew on his trousers with trembling, clumsy hands. “She surely hasn’t laid hands upon herself?” He lighted the lantern and went out into the stable, Pelle following naked.

Then suddenly the cries ceased, as abruptly as if the sound had been cut off with an axe, and the silence that followed said dumbly that it was forever. The farm sank into the darkness of night like an extinguished world. “Our mistress is dead!” said Lasse, shivering and moving his fingers over his lips. “May God receive her kindly!” They crept fearfully into bed.

But when they got up the next morning, the farm looked as it always did, and the maids were chattering and making as much noise as usual in the wash-house. A little while after, the mistress’s voice was heard up there, giving directions about the work. “I don’t understand it,” said Lasse, shaking his head. “Nothing but death can stop anything so suddenly. She must have a tremendous power over herself!”

It now became apparent what a capable woman she was. She had not wasted anything in the long period of idleness; the maids became brisker and the fare better. One day she came to the cow-stable to see that the milking was done cleanly. She gave every one his due, too. One day they came from the quarry and complained that they had had no wages for three weeks. There was not enough money on the farm. “Then we must get some,” said the mistress, and they had to set about threshing at once. And one day when Karna raised too many objections she received a ringing box on the ear.

“It’s a new nature she’s got,” said Lasse. But the old workpeople recognized several things from their young days. “It’s her family’s nature,” they said. “She’s a regular Köller.”

The time passed without any change; she was as constant in her tranquillity as she had before been constant in her misery. It was not the habit of the Köllers to change their minds once they had made them up about anything. Then Kongstrup came home from his journey. She did not drive out to meet him, but was on the steps to greet him, gentle and kind. Everybody could see how pleased and surprised he was. He must have expected a very different reception.

But during the night, when they were all sound asleep, Karna came knocking at the men’s window. “Get up and fetch the doctor!” she cried, “and be quick!” The call sounded like one of life and death, and they turned out headlong. Lasse, who was in the habit of sleeping with one eye open, like the hens, was the first man on the spot, and had got the horses out of the stable; and in a few minutes Karl Johan was driving out at the gate. He had a man with him to hold the lantern. It was pitch-dark, but they could hear the carriage tearing along until the sound became very distant; then in another moment the sound changed, as the vehicle turned on to the metalled road a couple of miles off. Then it died away altogether.

On the farm they went about shaking themselves and unable to rest, wandering into their rooms and out again to gaze up at the tall windows, where people were running backward and forward with lights. What had happened? Some mishap to the farmer, evidently, for now and again the mistress’s commanding voice could be heard down in the kitchen—but what? The wash-house and the servants’ room were dark and locked.

Toward morning, when the doctor had come and had taken things into his own hands, a greater calm fell upon them all, and the maids took the opportunity of slipping out into the yard. They would not at once say what was the matter, but stood looking in an embarrassed way at one another, and laughing stupidly. At last they gradually got it out by first one telling a little and then another: in a fit of delirium or of madness Kongstrup had done violence to himself. Their faces were contorted with a mixture of fear and smothered laughter; and when Karl Johan said gravely to Fair Maria: “You’re not telling a lie, are you?” she burst into tears. There she stood laughing and crying by turns; and it made no difference that Karl Johan scolded her sharply.

But it was true, although it sounded like the craziest nonsense that a man could do such a thing to himself. It was a truth that struck one dumb!

It was some time before they could make it out at all, but when they did there were one or two things about it that seemed a little unnatural. It could not have happened during intoxication, for the farmer never drank at home, did not drink at all, as far as any one knew, but only took a glass in good company. It was more likely to have been remorse and contrition; it was not impossible considering the life he had led, although it was strange that a man of his nature should behave in such a desperate fashion.

But it was not satisfactory! And gradually, without it being possible to point to any origin, all thoughts turned toward her. She had changed of late, and the Köller blood had come out in her; and in that family they had never let themselves be trodden down unrevenged!

XX

Out in the shelter of the gable-wall of the House sat Kongstrup, well wrapped up, and gazing straight before him with expressionless eyes. The winter sun shone full upon him; it had lured forth signs of spring, and the sparrows were hopping gaily about him. His wife went backward and forward, busying herself about him; she wrapped his feet up better, and came with a shawl to put round his shoulders. She touched his chest and arms affectionately as she spread the shawl over him from behind; and he slowly raised his head and passed his hand over hers. She stood thus for a little while, leaning against his shoulder and looking down upon him like a mother, with eyes that were tranquil with the joy of possession.

Pelle came bounding down across the yard, licking his lips. He had taken advantage of his mistress's preoccupation to steal down into the dairy and get a drink of sour cream from the girls, and tease them a little. He was glowing with health, and moved along as carelessly happy as if the whole world were his.

It was quite dreadful the way he grew and wore out his things; it was almost impossible to keep him in clothes! His arms and legs stuck far out of every article of clothing he put on, and he wore things out as fast as Lasse could procure them. Something new was always being got for him, and before you could turn round, his arms and legs were out of that too. He was as strong as an oak-tree; and when it was a question of lifting or anything that did not require perseverence, Lasse had to allow himself to be superseded.

The boy had acquired independence, too, and every day it became more difficult for the old man to assert his parental authority; but that would come as soon as Lasse was master of his own house and could bring his fist down on his own table. But when would that be? As matters now stood, it looked as if the magistrate did not want him and Madam Olsen to be decently married. Seaman Olsen had given plain warning of his decease, and Lasse thought there was nothing to do but put up the banns; but the authorities continued to raise difficulties and ferret about, in the true lawyers' way. Now there was one question that had to be examined into, and now another; there were periods of grace allowed, and summonses to be issued to the dead man to make his appearance within such and such a time, and what not besides! It was all a put-up job, so that the pettifoggers could make something out of it.

He was thoroughly tired of Stone Farm. Every day he made the same complaint to Pelle: "It's nothing but toil, toil, from morning till night—one day just like another all the year round, as if you were in a convict-prison! And what you get for it is hardly enough to keep your body decently covered. You can't put anything by, and one day when you're worn out and good for nothing more, you can just go on the parish."

The worst of it all, however, was the desire to work once more for himself. He was always sighing for this, and his hands were sore with longing to feel what it was like to take hold of one's own. Of late he had meditated cutting the matter short and moving down to his sweetheart's, without regard to the law. She was quite willing, he knew; she badly needed a man's hand in the house. And they were being talked about, anyhow; it would not make much difference if he and the boy went as her lodgers, especially when they worked independently.

But the boy was not to be persuaded; he was jealous for his father's honor. Whenever Lasse touched upon the subject he became strangely sullen. Lasse pretended it was Madam Olsen's idea, and not his.

"I'm not particularly in favor of it, either," he said. "People are sure to believe the worst at once. But we can't go on here wearing ourselves to a thread for nothing. And you can't breathe freely on this farm—always tied!"

Pelle made no answer to this; he was not strong in reasons, but knew what he wanted.

"If I ran away from here one night, I guess you'd come trotting after me."

Pelle maintained a refractory silence.

"I think I'll do it, for this isn't to be borne. Now you've got to have new school-trousers, and where are they coming from?"

"Well, then, do it! Then you'll do what you say."

"It's easy for you to pooh-pooh everything," said Lasse despondingly, "for you've time and years before you. But I'm beginning to get old, and I've no one to trouble about me."

“Why, don’t I help you with everything?” asked Pelle reproachfully.

“Yes, yes, of course you do your very best to make things easier for me, and no one could say you didn’t. But, you see—there are certain things you don’t—there’s something—” Lasse came to a standstill. What was the use of explaining the longings of a man to a boy? “You shouldn’t be so obstinate, you know!” And Lasse stroked the boy’s arm imploringly.

But Pelle *was* obstinate. He had already put up with plenty of sarcastic remarks from his schoolfellows, and fought a good many battles since it had become known that his father and Madam Olsen were sweethearts. If they now started living together openly, it would become quite unbearable. Pelle was not afraid of fighting, but he needed to have right on his side, if he was to kick out properly.

“Move down to her, then, and I’ll go away!”

“Where’ll you go to?”

“Out into the world and get rich!”

Lasse raised his head, like an old war-horse that hears a signal; but then it dropped again.

“Out into the world and get rich! Yes, yes,” he said slowly; “that’s what I thought, too, when I was your age. But things don’t happen like that—if you aren’t born with a caul.”

Lasse was silent, and thoughtfully kicked the straw in under a cow. He was not altogether sure that the boy was not born with a caul, after all. He was a late-born child, and they were always meant for the worst or the best; and then he had that cow’s-lick on his forehead, which meant good fortune. He was merry and always singing, and neat-handed at everything; and his nature made him generally liked. It was very possible that good fortune lay waiting for him somewhere out there.

“But the very first thing you need for that is to be properly confirmed. You’d better take your books and learn your lesson for the priest, so that you don’t get refused! I’ll do the rest of the foddering.”

Pelle took his books and seated himself in the foddering-passage just in front of the big bull. He read in an undertone, and Lasse passed up and down at his work. For some time each minded his own; but then Lasse came up, drawn by the new lesson-books Pelle had got for his confirmation-classes.

“Is that Bible history, that one there?”

“Yes.”

“Is that about the man who drank himself drunk in there?”

Lasse had long since given up learning to read; he had not the head for it. But he was always interested in what the boy was doing, and the books exerted a peculiar magic effect upon him. “Now what does that stand for?” he would ask wonderingly, pointing to something printed; or “What wonderful thing have you got in your lesson to-day?” Pelle had to keep him informed from day to day. And the same questions often came again, for Lasse had not a good memory.

“You know—the one whose sons pulled off his trousers and shamed their own father?” Lasse continued, when Pelle did not answer.

“Oh, Noah!”

“Yes, of course! Old Noah—the one that Gustav had that song about. I wonder what he made himself drunk on, the old man?”

“Wine.”

“Was it wine?” Lasse raised his eyebrows. “Then that Noah must have been a fine gentleman! The owner of the estate at home drank wine, too, on grand occasions. I’ve heard that it takes a lot of that to make a man tipsy—and it’s expensive! Does the book tell you, too, about him that was such a terrible swindler? What was his name again?”

“Laban, do you mean?”

“Laban, yes of course! To think that I could forget it, too, for he was a regular Laban,[3] so the name suits him just right. It was him that let his son-in-law have both his daughters, and off their price on his daily wage too! If they’d been alive now, they’d have got hard labor, both him and his son-in-law; but in those days the police didn’t look so close at people’s papers. Now I should like to know whether a wife was allowed to have two husbands in those days. Does the book say anything about that?” Lasse moved his head inquisitively.

[3] An ordinary expression in Danish for a mean, deceitful person.

“No, I don’t think it does,” answered Pelle absently.

“Oh, well, I oughtn’t to disturb you,” said Lasse, and went to his work. But in a very short time he was back again. “Those two names have slipped my memory; I can't think where my head could have been at the moment. But I know the greater prophets well enough, if you like to hear me."

"Say them, then!" said Pelle, without raising his eyes from his book.

"But you must stop reading while I say them," said Lasse, "or you might go wrong." He did not approve of Pelle's wanting to treat it as food for babes.

"Well, I don't suppose I could go wrong in the four greater!" said Pelle, with an air of superiority, but nevertheless shutting the book.

Lasse took the quid out from his lower lip with his forefinger, and threw it on the ground so as to have his mouth clear, and then hitched up his trousers and stood for a little while with closed eyes while he moved his lips in inward repetition.

"Are they coming soon?" asked Pelle.

"I must first make sure that they're there!" answered Lasse, in vexation at the interruption, and beginning to go over them again. "Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel!" he said, dashing them off hastily, so as not to lose any of them on the way.

"Shall we take Jacob's twelve sons, too?"

"No, not to-day. It might be too much for me all at once. At my age you must go forward gently; I'm not as young as you, you know. But you might go through the twelve lesser prophets with me."

Pelle went through them slowly, and Lasse repeated them one by one. "What confounded names they did think of in those days!" he exclaimed, quite out of breath. "You can hardly get your tongue round them! But I shall manage them in time."

"What do you want to know them for, father?" asked Pelle suddenly.

"What do I want to know them for?" Lasse scratched one ear. "Why, of course I—er—what a terrible stupid question! What do *you* want to know them for? Learning's as good for the one to have as for the other, and in my youth they wouldn't let me get at anything fine like that. Do you want to keep it all to yourself?"

"No, for I wouldn't care a hang about all this prophet business if I didn't *have* to."

Lasse almost fainted with horror.

"Then you're the most wicked little cub I ever knew, and deserve never to have been born into the world! Is that all the respect you have for learning? You ought to be glad you were born in an age when the poor man's child shares in it all as well as the rich. It wasn't so in my time, or else—who knows—perhaps I shouldn't be going about here cleaning stables if I'd learned something when I was young. Take care you don't take pride in your own shame!"

Pelle half regretted his words now, and said, to clear himself: "I'm in the top form now!"

"Yes, I know that well enough, but that's no reason for your putting your hands in your trouser-pockets; while you're taking breath, the others eat the porridge. I hope you've not forgotten anything in the long Christmas holidays?"

"Oh, no, I'm sure I haven't!" said Pelle, with assurance.

Lasse did not doubt it either, but only made believe he did to take the boy in. He knew nothing more splendid than to listen to a rushing torrent of learning, but it was becoming more and more difficult to get the laddie to contribute it. "How can you be sure?" he went on. "Hadn't you better see? It would be such a comfort to know that you hadn't forgotten anything—so much as you must have in your head."

Pelle felt flattered and yielded. He stretched out his legs, closed his eyes, and began to rock backward and forward. And the Ten Commandments, the Patriarchs, the Judges, Joseph and his brethren, the four major and the twelve minor prophets—the whole learning of the world poured from his lips in one long breath. To Lasse it seemed as if the universe itself were whizzing round the white- bearded countenance of the Almighty. He had to bend his head and cross himself in awe at the amount that the boy's little head could contain.

"I wonder what it costs to be a student?" said Lasse, when he once more felt earth beneath his feet.

"It must be expensive—a thousand krones, I suppose, at least," Pelle thought. Neither of them connected any definite idea with the number; it merely meant the insurmountably great.

"I wonder if it would be so terrible dear," said Lasse. "I've been thinking that when we have something of our own—I suppose it'll come to something some day—you might go to Fris and learn the trade of him fairly cheap, and have your meals at home. We ought to be able to manage it that way.”

Pelle did not answer; he felt no desire to be apprenticed to the clerk. He had taken out his knife, and was cutting something on a post of one of the stalls. It represented the big bull with his head down to the ground, and its tongue hanging out of one corner of its mouth. One hoof right forward at its mouth indicated that the animal was pawing up the ground in anger. Lasse could not help stopping, for now it was beginning to be like something. “That’s meant to be a cow, isn’t it?” he said. He had been wondering every day, as it gradually grew.

“It’s Volmer that time he took you on his horns,” said Pelle.

Lasse could see at once that it was that, now that he had been told. “It’s really very like,” he said; “but he wasn’t so angry as you’ve made him! Well, well, you’d better get to work again; that there fooling can’t make a living for a man.”

Lasse did not like this defect in the boy—making drawings with chalk or his penknife all over; there would soon not be a beam or a wall in the place that did not bear marks of one or the other. It was useless nonsense, and the farmer would probably be angry if he came into the stable and happened to see them. Lasse had every now and then to throw cow-dung over the most conspicuous drawings, so that they should not catch the eye of people for whom they were not intended.

Up at the house, Kongstrup was just going in, leaning on his wife’s arm. He looked pale but by no means thin. “He’s still rather lame,” said Lasse, peeping out; “but it won’t be long before we have him down here, so you’d better not quite destroy the post.”

Pelle went on cutting.

“If you don’t leave off that silly nonsense, I’ll throw dirt over it!” said Lasse angrily.

“Then I’ll draw you and Madam Olsen on the big gate!” answered Pelle roguishly.

“You—you’d better! I should curse you before my face, and get the parson to send you away—if not something worse!” Lasse was quite upset, and went off down to the other end of the cow-stable and began the afternoon’s cleaning, knocking and pulling his implements about. In his anger he loaded the wheelbarrow too full, and then could neither go one way nor the other, as his feet slipped.

Pelle came down with the gentlest of faces. “Mayn’t I wheel the barrow out?” he said. “Your wooden shoes aren’t so firm on the stones.”

Lasse growled some reply, and let him take it. For a very short time he was cross, but it was no good; the boy could be irresistible when he liked.

XXI

Pelle had been to confirmation-class, and was now sitting in the servants' room eating his dinner—boiled herring and porridge. It was Saturday, and the bailiff had driven into the town, so Erik was sitting over the stove. He never said anything of his own accord, but always sat and stared; and his eyes followed Pelle's movements backward and forward between his mouth and his plate. He always kept his eyebrows raised, as if everything were new to him; they had almost grown into that position. In front of him stood a mug of beer in a large pool, for he drank constantly and spilt some every time.

Fair Maria was washing up, and looked in every now and then to see if Pelle were finished. When he licked his horn spoon clean and threw it into the drawer, she came in with something on a plate: they had had roast loin of pork for dinner upstairs.

"Here's a little taste for you," she said. "I expect you're still hungry. What'll you give me for it?" She kept the plate in her hand, and looked at him with a coaxing smile.

Pelle was still very hungry—ravenous; and he looked at the titbit until his mouth watered. Then he dutifully put up his lips and Maria kissed him. She glanced involuntarily at Erik, and a gleam of something passed over his foolish face, like a faint reminiscence.

"There sits that great gaby making a mess!" she said, scolding as she seized the beer-mug from him, held it under the edge of the table, and with her hand swept the spilt beer into it.

Pelle set to work upon the pork without troubling about anything else; but when she had gone out, he carefully spat down between his legs, and went through a small cleansing operation with the sleeve of his blouse.

When he was finished he went into the stable and cleaned out the mangers, while Lasse curried the cows; it was all to look nice for Sunday. While they worked, Pelle gave a full account of the day's happenings, and repeated all that the parson had said. Lasse listened attentively, with occasional little exclamations. "Think of that!" "Well, I never!" "So David was a buck like that, and yet he walked in the sight of God all the same! Well, God's long-suffering is great—there's no mistake about that!"

There was a knock at the outer door. It was one of Kalle's children with the message that grandmother would like to bid them good-bye before she passed away.

"Then she can't have long to live," exclaimed Lasse. "It'll be a great loss to them all, so happy as they've been together. But there'll be a little more food for the others, of course."

They agreed to wait until they were quite finished, and then steal away; for if they asked to be let off early, they would not be likely to get leave for the funeral. "And that'll be a day's feasting, with plenty of food and drink, if I know anything of Brother Kalle!" said Lasse.

When they had finished their work and had their supper, they stole out through the outside door into the field. Lasse had heaped up the quilt, and put an old woolly cap just sticking out at the pillow-end; in a hurry it could easily be mistaken for the hair of a sleeper, if any one came to see. When they had got a little way, Lasse had to go back once more to take precautions against fire.

It was snowing gently and silently, and the ground was frozen so that they could go straight on over everything. Now that they knew the way, it seemed no distance at all; and before they knew where they were, the fields came to an end and the rock began.

There was a light in the cottage. Kalle was sitting up waiting for them. "Grandmother hasn't long to live," he said, more seriously than Lasse ever remembered to have heard him speak before.

Kalle opened the door to grandmother's room, and whispered something, to which his wife answered softly out of the darkness.

"Oh, I'm awake," said the old woman, in a slow, monotonous voice. "You can speak out, for I am awake."

Lasse and Pelle took off their leather shoes and went in in their stockings. "Good evening, grandmother!" they both said solemnly, "and the peace of God!" Lasse added.

"Well, here I am," said the old woman, feebly patting the quilt. She had big woollen gloves on. "I took the liberty of sending for you for I haven't long to live now. How are things going on in the parish? Have there been any deaths?"

"No, not that I know of," answered Lasse. "But you look so well, grandmother, so fat and rosy! We shall see you going about again in two or three days."

"Oh, I dare say!" said the old woman, smiling indulgently. "I suppose I look like a young bride after her first baby, eh? But thank you for coming; it's as if you belonged to me. Well, now I've been sent for, and I shall depart in peace. I've had a good time in this world, and haven't anything to complain of. I had a good husband and a good daughter, not forgetting Kalle there. And I got my sight back, so that I saw the world once more."

"But you only saw it with one eye, like the birds, grandmother," said Kalle, trying to laugh.

"Yes, yes, but that was quite good enough; there was so much that was new since I lost my sight. The wood had grown bigger, and a whole family had grown up without my quite knowing it. Ah! yes, it has been good to live in my old age and have them all about me— Kalle and Maria and the children. And all of my own age have gone before me; it's been nice to see what became of them all."

"How old are you now, grandmother?" asked Lasse.

"Kalle has looked it up in the church-book, and from that I ought to be almost eighty; but that can scarcely be right."

"Yes, it's right enough," said Kalle, "for the parson looked it up for me himself."

"Well, well, then the time's gone quickly, and I shouldn't at all mind living a little longer, if it was God's will. But the grave's giving warning; I notice it in my eyelids." The old woman had a little difficulty in breathing, but kept on talking.

"You're talking far too much, mother!" said Maria.

"Yes, you ought to be resting and sleeping," said Lasse. "Hadn't we better say good-bye to you?"

"No, I really must talk, for it'll be the last time I see you and I shall have plenty of time to rest. My eyes are so light thank God, and I don't feel the least bit sleepy."

"Grandmother hasn't slept for a whole week, I think," said Kalle doubtfully.

"And why should I sleep away the last of the time I shall have here, when I shall get plenty of time for that afterward? At night when you others are asleep, I lie and listen to your breathing, and feel glad that you're all so well. Or I look at the heather-broom, and think of Anders and all the fun we had together."

She lay silent for a little while, getting her breath, while she gazed at a withered bunch of heather hanging from a beam.

"He gathered that for me the first time we lay in the flowering heather. He was so uncommonly fond of the heather, was Anders, and every year when it flowered, he took me out of my bed and carried me out there—every year until he was called away. I was always as new for him as on the first day, and so happiness and joy took up their abode in my heart."

"Now, mother, you ought to be quiet and not talk so much!" said Maria, smoothing the old woman's pillow. But she would not be silenced, though her thoughts shifted a little.

"Yes, my teeth were hard to get and hard to lose, and I brought my children into the world with pain, and laid them in the grave with sorrow, one after another. But except for that, I've never been ill, and I've had a good husband. He had an eye for God's creations, and we got up with the birds every summer morning, and went out onto the heath and saw the sun rise out of the sea before we set about our days work."

The old woman's slow voice died away, and it was as though a song ceased to sound in their ears. They sat up and sighed. "Ah, yes," said Lasse, "the voice of memory is pleasant!"

"What about you, Lasse?" said the old woman suddenly, "I hear you're looking about for a wife!"

"Am I?" exclaimed Lasse, in alarm. Pelle saw Kalle wink at Maria, so they knew about it too.

"Aren't you soon coming to show us your sweetheart?" asked Kalle. "I hear it's a good match."

"I don't in the least know what you're talking about," said Lasse, quite confused.

"Well, well, you might do worse than that!" said the grandmother. "She's good enough—from what I know. I hope you'll suit one another like Anders and me. It was a happy time—the days when we went about and each did our best, and the nights when the wind blew. It was good then to be two to keep one another warm."

"You've been very happy in everything, grandmother," exclaimed Lasse.

"Yes, and I'm departing in peace and can lie quiet in my grave. I've not been treated unfairly in any way, and I've got nothing to haunt any one for. If only Kalle takes care to have me carried out feet first, I don't expect I shall trouble you."

"Just you come and visit us now and then if you like! We shan't be afraid to welcome you, for we've been so happy together here," said Kalle.

"No, you never know what your nature may be in the next life. You must promise to have me carried out feet first! I don't want to disturb your night's rest, so hard as you two have to work all day. And, besides, you've had to put up with me long enough, and it'll be nice for you to be by yourselves for once; and there'll be a bit more for you to eat after this."

Maria began to cry.

"Now look here!" exclaimed Kalle testily. "I won't hear any more of that nonsense, for none of us have had to go short because of you. If you aren't good, I shall give a big party after you, for joy that you're gone!"

"No, you won't!" said the old woman quite sharply. "I won't hear of a three days' wake! Promise me now, Maria, that you won't go and ruin yourselves to make a fuss over a poor old soul like me! But you must ask the nearest neighbors in in the afternoon, with Lasse and Pelle, of course. And if you ask Hans Henrik, perhaps he'd bring his concertina with him, and you could have a dance in the barn."

Kalle scratched the back of his head. "Then, hang it, you must wait until I've finished threshing, for I can't clear the floor now. Couldn't we borrow Jens Kure's horse, and take a little drive over the heath in the afternoon?"

"You might do that, too, but the children are to have a share in whatever you settle to do. It'll be a comfort to think they'll have a happy day out of it, for they don't have too many holidays; and there's money for it, you know."

"Yes, would you believe it, Lasse—grandmother's got together fifty krones that none of us knew anything about, to go toward her funeral-party!"

"I've been putting by for it for twenty years now, for I'd like to leave the world in a decent way, and without pulling the clothes off my relations' backs. My grave-clothes are all ready, too, for I've got my wedding chemise lying by. It's only been used once, and more than that and my cap I don't want to have on."

"But that's so little," objected Maria. "Whatever will the neighbors say if we don't dress you properly?"

"I don't care!" answered the old woman decidedly. "That's how Anders liked me best, and it's all I've worn in bed these sixty years. So there!" And she turned her head to the wall.

"You shall have it all just as you like, mother!" said Maria.

The old woman turned round again, and felt for her daughter's hand on the quilt. "And you must make rather a soft pillow for my old head, for it's become so difficult to find rest for it."

"We can take one of the babies' pillows and cover it with white," said Maria.

"Thank you! And then I think you should send to Jacob Kristian's for the carpenter to-morrow—he's somewhere about, anyhow—and let him measure me for the coffin; then I could have my say as to what it's to be like. Kalle's so free with his money."

The old woman closed her eyes. She had tired herself out, after all.

"Now I think we'll creep out into the other room, and let her be quiet," whispered Kalle, getting up; but at that she opened her eyes.

"Are you going already?" she asked.

"We thought you were asleep, grandmother," said Lasse.

"No, I don't suppose I shall sleep any more in this life; my eyes are so light, so light! Well, good-bye to you, Lasse and Pelle! May you be very, very happy, as happy as I've been. Maria was the only one death spared, but she's been a good daughter to me; and Kalle's been as good and kind to me as if I'd been his sweetheart. I had a good husband, too, who chopped firewood for me on Sundays, and got up in the night to look after the babies when I was lying-in. We were really well off—lead weights in the clock and plenty of firing; and he promised me a trip to

Copenhagen. I churned my first butter in a bottle, for we had no churn to begin with; and I had to break the bottle to get it out, and then he laughed, for he always laughed when I did anything wrong. And how glad he was when each baby was born! Many a morning did he wake me up and we went out to see the sun come up out of the sea. ‘Come and see, Anna,’ he would say, ‘the heather’s come into bloom in the night.’ But it was only the sun that shed its red over it! It was more than two miles to our nearest neighbor, but he didn’t care for anything as long as he had me. He found his greatest pleasures in me, poor as I was; and the animals were fond of me too. Everything went well with us on the whole.”

She lay moving her head from side to side, and the tears were running down her cheeks. She no longer had difficulty in breathing, and one thing recalled another, and fell easily in one long tone from her lips. She probably did not now know what she was saying, but could not stop talking. She began at the beginning and repeated the words, evenly and monotonously, like one who is carried away and *must* talk.

“Mother!” said Maria anxiously, putting her hands on her mother’s shaking head. “Recollect yourself, mother!”

The old woman stopped and looked at her wonderingly. “Ah, yes!” she said. “Memories came upon me so fast! I almost think I could sleep a little now.”

Lasse rose and went up to the bed. “Good-bye, grandmother!” he said, “and a pleasant journey, in case we shouldn’t meet again!” Pelle followed him and repeated the words. The old woman looked at them inquiringly, but did not move. Then Lasse gently took her hand, and then Pelle, and they stole out into the other room.

“Her flame’s burning clear to the end!” said Lasse, when the door was shut. Pelle noticed how freely their voices rang again.

“Yes, she’ll be herself to the very end; there’s been extra good timber in her. The people about here don’t like our not having the doctor to her. What do you think? Shall we go to the expense?”

“I don’t suppose there’s anything more the matter with her than that she can’t live any longer,” said Lasse thoughtfully.

“No, and she herself won’t hear of it. If he could only keep life in her a little while longer!”

“Yes, times are hard!” said Lasse, and went round to look at the children. They were all asleep, and their room seemed heavy with their breathing. “The flock’s getting much smaller.”

“Yes; one or two fly away from the nest pretty well every year,” answered Kalle, “and now I suppose we shan’t have any more. It’s an unfortunate figure we’ve stopped at—a horrid figure; but Maria’s become deaf in that ear, and I can’t do anything alone.” Kalle had got back his roguish look.

“I’m sure we can do very well with what we’ve got,” said Maria. “When we take Anna’s too, it makes fourteen.”

“Oh, yes, count the others too, and you’ll get off all the easier!” said Kalle teasingly.

Lasse was looking at Anna’s child, which lay side by side with Kalle’s thirteenth. “She looks healthier than her aunt,” he said. “You’d scarcely think they were the same age. She’s just as red as the other’s pale.”

“Yes, there is a difference,” Kalle admitted, looking affectionately at the children. “It must be that Anna’s has come from young people, while *our* blood’s beginning to get old. And then the ones that come the wrong side of the blanket always thrive best—like our Albert, for instance. He carries himself quite differently from the others. Did you know, by-the-by, that he’s to get a ship of his own next spring?”

“No, surely not! Is he really going to be a captain?” said Lasse, in the utmost astonishment.

“It’s Kongstrup that’s at the back of that—that’s between ourselves, of course!”

“Does the father of Anna’s child still pay what he’s bound to?” asked Lasse.

“Yes, he’s honest enough! We get five krones a month for having the child, and that’s a good help toward expenses.”

Maria had placed a dram, bread and a saucer of dripping on the table, and invited them to take their places at it.

“You’re holding out a long time at Stone Farm,” said Kalle, when they were seated. “Are you going to stay there all your life?” he asked, with a mischievous wink.

“It’s not such a simple matter to strike out into the deep!” said Lasse evasively.

“Oh, we shall soon be hearing news from you, shan’t we?” asked Maria.

Lasse did not answer; he was struggling with a crust.

“Oh, but do cut off the crust if it’s too much for your teeth!” said Maria. Every now and then she listened at her mother’s door. “She’s dropped off, after all, poor old soul!” she said.

Kalle pretended to discover the bottle for the first time. “What! Why, we’ve got gin on the table, too, and not one of us has smelt it!” he exclaimed, and filled their glasses for the third time. Then Maria corked the bottle. “Do you even grudge us our food?” he said, making great eyes at her—what a rogue he was! And Maria stared at him with eyes that were just as big, and said: “Yah! you want to fight, do you?” It quite warmed Lasse’s heart to see their happiness.

“How’s the farmer at Stone Farm? I suppose he’s got over the worst now, hasn’t he?” said Kalle.

“Well, I think he’s as much a man as he’ll ever be. A thing like that leaves its mark upon any one,” answered Lasse. Maria was smiling, and as soon as they looked at her, she looked away.

“Yes, you may grin!” said Lasse; “but I think it’s sad!” Upon which Maria had to go out into the kitchen to have her laugh out.

“That’s what all the women do at the mere mention of his name,” said Kalle. “It’s a sad change. To-day red, to-morrow dead. Well, she’s got her own way in one thing, and that is that she keeps him to herself—in a way. But to think that he can live with her after that!”

“They seem fonder of one another than they ever were before; he can’t do without her for a single minute. But of course he wouldn’t find any one else to love him now. What a queer sort of devilment love is! But we must see about getting home.”

“Well, I’ll send you word when she’s to be buried,” said Kalle, when they got outside the house.

“Yes, do! And if you should be in want of a ten-krone note for the funeral, let me know. Good-bye, then!”

XXII

Grandmother's funeral was still like a bright light behind everything that one thought and did. It was like certain kinds of food, that leave a pleasant taste in the mouth long after they have been eaten and done with. Kalle had certainly done everything to make it a festive day; there was an abundance of good things to eat and drink, and no end to his comical tricks. And, sly dog that he was, he had found an excuse for asking Madam Olsen; it was really a nice way of making the relation a legitimate one.

It gave Lasse and Pelle enough to talk about for a whole month, and after the subject was quite talked out and laid on one side for other things, it remained in the background as a sense of well-being of which no one quite knew the origin.

But now spring was advancing, and with it came troubles—not the daily trifles that could be bad enough, but great troubles that darkened everything, even when one was not thinking about them. Pelle was to be confirmed at Easter, and Lasse was at his wits' end to know how he was going to get him all that he would need—new clothes, new cap, new shoes! The boy often spoke about it; he must have been afraid of being put to shame before the others that day in church.

"It'll be all right," said Lasse; but he himself saw no way at all out of the difficulty. At all the farms where the good old customs prevailed, the master and mistress provided it all; out here everything was so confoundedly new-fangled, with prompt payments that slipped away between one's fingers. A hundred krones a year in wages seemed a tremendous amount when one thought of it all in one; but you only got them gradually, a few öres at a time, without your being able to put your finger anywhere and say: You got a good round sum there! "Yes, yes, it'll be all right!" said Lasse aloud, when he had got himself entangled in absurd speculations; and Pelle had to be satisfied with this. There was only one way out of the difficulty—to borrow the money from Madam Olsen; and that Lasse would have to come to in the end, loth as he was to do it. But Pelle must not know anything about it.

Lasse refrained as long as he possibly could, hoping that something or other would turn up to free him from the necessity of so disgraceful a proceeding as borrowing from his sweetheart. But nothing happened, and time was passing. One morning he cut the matter short; Pelle was just setting out for school. "Will you run in to Madam Olsen's and give her this?" he said, handing the boy a packet. "It's something she's promised to mend for us." Inside on the paper, was the large cross that announced Lasse's coming in the evening.

From the hills Pelle saw that the ice had broken up in the night. It had filled the bay for nearly a month with a rough, compact mass, upon which you could play about as safely as on dry land. This was a new side of the sea, and Pelle had carefully felt his way forward with the tips of his wooden shoes, to the great amusement of the others. Afterward he learned to walk about freely on the ice without constantly shivering at the thought that the great fish of the sea were going about just under his wooden shoes, and perhaps were only waiting for him to drop through. Every day he went out to the high rampart of pack-ice that formed the boundary about a mile out, where the open water moved round in the sunshine like a green eye. He went out because he would do what the others did, but he never felt safe on the sea.

Now it was all broken up, and the bay was full of heaving ice-floes that rubbed against one another with a crackling sound; and the pieces farthest out, carrying bits of the rampart, were already on their way out to sea. Pelle had performed many exploits out there, but was really quite pleased that it was now packing up and taking its departure, so that it would once more be no crime to stay on dry land.

Old Fris was sitting in his place. He never left it now during a lesson, however badly things might go down in the class, but contented himself with beating on the desk with his cane. He was little more than a shadow of his former self, his head was always shaking, and his hands were often incapable of grasping an object. He still brought the newspaper with him, and opened it out at the beginning of the lesson, but he did not read. He would fall into a dream, sitting bolt upright, with his hands on the desk and his back against the wall. At such times the children could be as noisy as they liked, and he did not move; only a slight change in the expression of his eyes showed that he was alive at all.

It was quieter in school now. It was not worth while teasing the master, for he scarcely noticed it, and so the fun lost most of its attraction. A kind of court of justice had gradually formed among the bigger boys; they determined the order of the school-lessons, and disobedience and disputes as to authority were respectively punished and settled in the playground—with fists and tips of wooden shoes. The instruction was given as before, by the cleverer scholars teaching what they knew to the others; there was rather more arithmetic and reading than in Fris's time, but on the other hand the hymns suffered.

It still sometimes happened that Fris woke up and interfered in the instruction. "Hymns!" he would cry in his feeble voice, and strike the desk from habit; and the children would put aside what they were doing to please the old man, and begin repeating some hymn or other, taking their revenge by going through one verse over and over again for a whole hour. It was the only real trick they played the old man, and the joke was all on their side, for Fris noticed nothing.

Fris had so often talked of resigning his post, but now he did not even think of that. He shuffled to and from school at the regular times, probably without even knowing he did it. The authorities really had not the heart to dismiss him. Except in the hymns, which came off with rather short measure, there was nothing to say against him as teacher; for no one had ever yet left his school without being able both to write his name and to read a printed book—if it were in the old type. The new-fashioned printing with Latin letters Fris did not teach, although he had studied Latin in his youth.

Fris himself probably did not feel the change, for he had ceased to feel both for himself and for others. None now brought their human sorrows to him, and found comfort in a sympathetic mind; his mind was not there to consult. It floated outside him, half detached, as it were, like a bird that is unwilling to leave its old nest to set out on a flight to the unknown. It must have been the fluttering mind that his eyes were always following when they dully gazed about into vacancy. But the young men who came home to winter in the village, and went to Fris as to an old friend, felt the change. For them there was now an empty place at home; they missed the old growler, who, though he hated them all in the lump at school, loved them all afterward, and was always ready with his ridiculous "He was my best boy!" about each and all of them, good and bad alike.

The children took their playtime early, and rushed out before Pelle had given the signal; and Fris trotted off as usual into the village, where he would be absent the customary two hours. The girls gathered in a flock to eat their dinners, and the boys dashed about the playground like birds let loose from a cage.

Pelle was quite angry at the insubordination, and pondered over a way of making himself respected; for to-day he had had the other big boys against him. He dashed over the playground like a circling gull, his body inclined and his arms stretched out like a pair of wings. Most of them made room for him, and those who did not move willingly were made to do so. His position was threatened, and he kept moving incessantly, as if to keep the question undecided until a possibility of striking presented itself.

This went on for some time; he knocked some over and hit out at others in his flight, while his offended sense of power grew. He wanted to make enemies of them all. They began to gather up by the gymnastic apparatus, and suddenly he had the whole pack upon him. He tried to rise and shake them off, flinging them hither and thither, but all in vain; down through the heap came their remorseless knuckles and made him grin with pain. He worked away indefatigably but without effect until he lost patience and resorted to less scrupulous tactics—thrusting his fingers into eyes, or attacking noses, windpipes, and any vulnerable part he could get at. That thinned them out, and he was able to rise and fling a last little fellow across the playground.

Pelle was well bruised and quite out of breath, but contented. They all stood by, gaping, and let him brush himself down; he was the victor. He went across to the girls with his torn blouse, and they put it together with pins and gave him sweets; and in return he fastened two of them together by their plaits, and they screamed and let him pull them about without being cross; it was all just as it should be.

But he was not quite secure after his victory. He could not, like Henry Boker in his time, walk right through the whole flock with his hands in his pockets directly after a battle, and look as if they did not exist. He had to keep stealing glances at them while he strolled down to the beach, and tried with all his might to control his breathing; for next to crying, to be out of breath was the greatest disgrace that could happen to you.

Pelle walked along the beach, regretting that he had not leaped upon them again at once while the flush of victory was still upon him: it was too late now. If he had, it might perhaps have been said of him too that he could lick all the rest of the class together; and now he must be content with being the strongest boy in the school.

A wild war-whoop from the school made him start. The whole swarm of boys was coming round the end of the house with sticks and pieces of wood in their hands. Pelle knew what was at stake if he gave way, and therefore forced himself to stand quietly waiting although his legs twitched. But suddenly they made a wild rush at him, and with a spring he turned to fly. There lay the sea barring his way, closely packed with heaving ice. He ran out on to an ice-floe, leaped from it to the next, which was not large enough to bear him—had to go on.

The idea of flight possessed him and made the fear of what lay behind overpoweringly great. The lumps of ice gave way beneath him, and he had to leap from piece to piece; his feet moved as fast as fingers over the notes of a piano. He just noticed enough to take the direction toward the harbor breakwater. The others stood gaping on the beach while Pelle danced upon the water like a stone making ducks and drakes. The pieces of ice bobbed under as soon as he touched them, or turned up on edge; but Pelle came and slid by with a touch, flung himself to one side with lightning rapidity, and changed his aim in the middle of a leap like a cat. It was like a dance on red-hot iron, so quickly did he pick up his feet, and spring from one place to another. The water spurted up from the pieces of ice as he touched them, and behind him stretched a crooked track of disturbed ice and water right back to the place where the boys stood and held their breath. There was nobody like Pelle, not one of them could do what he had done there! When with a final leap he threw himself upon the breakwater, they cheered him. Pelle had triumphed in his flight!

He lay upon the breakwater, exhausted and gasping for breath, and gazed without interest at a brig that had cast anchor off the village. A boat was rowing in—perhaps with a sick man to be put in quarantine. The weather-beaten look of the vessel told of her having been out on a winter voyage, in ice and heavy seas.

Fishermen came down from the cottages and strolled out to the place where the boat would come in, and all the school-children followed. In the stern of the boat sat an elderly, weather-beaten man with a fringe of beard round his face; he was dressed in blue, and in front of him stood a sea-chest. “Why, it’s Boatswain Olsen!” Pelle heard one fisherman say. Then the man stepped ashore, and shook hands with them all; and the fisherman and the school-children closed round him in a dense circle.

Pelle made his way up, creeping along behind boats and sheds; and as soon as he was hidden by the school-building, he set off running straight across the fields to Stone Farm. His vexation burnt his throat, and a feeling of shame made him keep far away from houses and people. The parcel that he had had no opportunity of delivering in the morning was like a clear proof to everybody of his shame, and he threw it into a marl-pit as he ran.

He would not go through the farm, but thundered on the outside door to the stable. “Have you come home already?” exclaimed Lasse, pleased.

“Now—now Madam Olsen’s husband’s come home!” panted Pelle, and went past his father without looking at him.

To Lasse it was as if the world had burst and the falling fragments were piercing into his flesh. Everything was failing him. He moved about trembling and unable to grasp anything; he could not talk, everything in him seemed to have come to a standstill. He had picked up a piece of rope, and was going backward and forward, backward and forward, looking up.

Then Pelle went up to him. “What are you going to do with that?” he asked harshly.

Lasse let the rope fall from his hand and began to complain of the sadness and poverty of existence. One feather fell off here, and another there, until at last you stood trampling in the mud like a featherless bird—old and worn-out and robbed of every hope of a happy old age. He went on complaining in this way in an undertone, and it eased him.

Pelle made no response. He only thought of the wrong and the shame that had come upon them, and found no relief.

Next morning he took his dinner and went off as usual, but when he was halfway to school he lay down under a thorn. There he lay, fuming and half-frozen, until it was about the time when school would be over, when he went home. This he did for several days. Toward his father he was silent, almost angry. Lasse went about lamenting, and Pelle had enough with his own trouble; each moved in his own world, and there was no bridge between; neither of them had a kind word to say to the other.

But one day when Pelle came stealing home in this way, Lasse received him with a radiant face and weak knees. “What on earth’s the good of fretting?” he said, screwing up his face and turning his blinking eyes upon Pelle—for the first time since the bad news had come. “Look here at the new sweetheart I’ve found! Kiss her, laddie!” And Lasse drew from the straw a bottle of gin, and held it out toward him.

Pelle pushed it angrily from him.

“Oh, you’re too grand, are you?” exclaimed Lasse. “Well, well, it would be a sin and a shame to waste good things upon you.” He put the bottle to his lips and threw back his head.

“Father, you shan’t do that!” exclaimed Pelle, bursting into tears and shaking his father’s arm so that the liquid splashed out.

“Ho-ho!” said Lasse in astonishment, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. “She’s uncommonly lively, ho-ho!” He grasped the bottle with both hands and held it firmly, as if it had tried to get away from him. “So you’re obstreperous, are you?” Then his eye fell upon Pelle. “And you’re crying! Has any one hurt you? Don’t you know that your father’s called Lasse—Lasse Karlsson from Kungstorp? You needn’t he afraid, for Lasse’s here, and he’ll make the whole world answer for it.”

Pelle saw that his father was quickly becoming more fuddled, and ought to be put to bed for fear some one should come and find him lying there. “Come now, father!” he begged.

“Yes, I’ll go now. I’ll make him pay for it, if it’s old Beelzebub himself! You needn’t cry!” Lasse was making for the yard.

Pelle stood in front of him. “Now you must come with me, father! There’s no one to make pay for anything.”

“Isn’t there? And yet you’re crying! But the farmer shall answer to me for all these years. Yes, my fine landed gentleman, with your nose turned up at every one!”

This made Pelle afraid. “But father, father!” he cried. “Don’t go up there! He’ll be in such a rage, he’ll turn us out! Remember you’re drunk!”

“Yes, of course I’m drunk, but there’s no harm in me.” He stood fumbling with the hook that fastened the lower half of the door.

It was wrong to lay a hand upon one’s own father, but now Pelle was compelled to set aside all such scruples. He took a firm hold of the old man’s collar. “Now you come with me!” he said, and drew him along toward their room.

Lasse laughed and hiccupped and struggled; clutched hold of everything that he could lay hands on—the posts and the animals’ tails—while Pelle dragged him along. He had hold of him behind, and was half carrying him. In the doorway they stuck fast, as the old man held on with both hands; and Pelle had to leave go of him and knock his arms away so that he fell, and then drag him along and on to the bed.

Lasse laughed foolishly all the time, as if it were a game. Once or twice when Pelle’s back was turned, he tried to get up; his eyes had almost disappeared, but there was a cunning expression about his mouth, and he was like a naughty child. Suddenly he fell back in a heavy sleep.

The next day was a school holiday, so there was no need for Pelle to hide himself. Lasse was ashamed and crept about with an air of humility. He must have had quite a clear idea of what had happened the day before, for suddenly he touched Pelle’s arm. “You’re like Noah’s good son, that covered up his father’s shame!” he said; “but Lasse’s a beast. It’s been a hard blow on me, as you may well believe! But I know quite well that it doesn’t mend matters to drink one’s self silly. It’s a badly buried trouble that one has to lay with gin; and what’s hidden in the snow comes up in the thaw, as the saying is.”

Pelle made no answer.

“How do people take it?” asked Lasse cautiously. He had now got so far as to have a thought for the shameful side of the matter. “I don’t think they know about it yet here on the farm; but what do they say outside?”

“How should I know?” answered Pelle sulkily.

“Then you’ve heard nothing?”

“Do you suppose I’ll go to school to be jeered at by them all?” Pelle was almost crying again.

“Then you’ve been wandering about and let your father believe that you'd gone to school? That wasn't right of you, but I won't find fault with you, considering all the disgrace I've brought upon you. But suppose you get into trouble for playing truant, even if you don't deserve it? Misfortunes go hand in hand, and evils multiply like lice in a fur coat. We must think what we're about, we two; we mustn't let things go all to pieces!"

Lasse walked quickly into their room and returned with the bottle, took out the cork, and let the gin run slowly out into the gutter. Pelle looked wonderingly at him. "God forgive me for abusing his gifts!" said Lasse; "but it's a bad tempter to have at hand when you've a sore heart. And now if I give you my word that you shall never again see me as I was yesterday, won't you have a try at school again to-morrow, and try and get over it gradually? We might get into trouble with the magistrate himself if you keep on staying away; for there's a heavy punishment for that sort of thing in this country."

Pelle promised and kept his word; but he was prepared for the worst, and secretly slipped a knuckle-duster into his pocket that Erik had used in his palmy days when he went to open-air fetes and other places where one had to strike a blow for one's girl. It was not required, however, for the boys were entirely taken up with a ship that had had to be run aground to prevent her sinking, and now lay discharging her cargo of wheat into the boats of the village. The wheat already lay in the harbor in great piles, wet and swollen with the salt water.

And a few days later, when this had become stale, something happened which put a stop forever to Pelle's school attendance. The children were busy at arithmetic, chattering and clattering with their slates, and Fris was sitting as usual in his place, with his head against the wall and his hands resting on the desk. His dim eyes were somewhere out in space, and not a movement betrayed that he was alive. It was his usual position, and he had sat thus ever since playtime.

The children grew restless; it was nearly time for them to go home. A farmer's son who had a watch, held it up so that Pelle could see it, and said "Two" aloud. They noisily put away their slates and began to fight; but Fris, who generally awoke at this noise of departure, did not stir. Then they tramped out, and in passing, one of the girls out of mischief stroked the master's hand. She started back in fear. "He's quite cold!" she said, shuddering and drawing back behind the others.

They stood in a semicircle round the desk, and tried to see into Fris's half-closed eyes; and then Pelle went up the two steps and laid his hand upon his master's shoulder. "We're going home," he said, in an unnatural voice. Fris's arm dropped stiffly down from the desk, and Pelle had to support his body. "He's dead!" the words passed like a shiver over the children's lips.

Fris was dead—dead at his post, as the honest folks of the parish expressed it. Pelle had finished his schooling for good, and could breathe freely.

He helped his father at home, and they were happy together and drew together again now that there was no third person to stand between them. The gibes from the others on the farm were not worth taking notice of; Lasse had been a long time on the farm, and knew too much about each of them, so that he could talk back. He sunned himself in Pelle's gently childlike nature, and kept up a continual chatter. One thing he was always coming back to. "I ought to be glad I had you, for if you hadn't held back that time when I was bent upon moving down to Madam Olsen's, we should have been in the wrong box. I should think he'd have killed us in his anger. You were my good angel as you always have been."

Lasse's words had the pleasant effect of caresses on Pelle; he was happy in it all, and was more of a child than his years would have indicated.

But one Saturday he came home from the parson's altogether changed. He was as slow about everything as a dead herring, and did not go across to his dinner, but came straight in through the outer door, and threw himself face downward upon a bundle of hay.

"What's the matter now?" asked Lasse, coming up to him. "Has any one been unkind to you?"

Pelle did not answer, but lay plucking at the hay. Lasse was going to turn his face up to him, but Pelle buried it in the hay. "Won't you trust your own father? You know I've no other wish in the world but for your good!" Lasse's voice was sad.

"I'm to be turned out of the confirmation-class," Pelle managed to say, and then burrowed into the hay to keep back his tears.

“Oh, no, surely not!” Lasse began to tremble. “Whatever have you done?”

“I’ve half killed the parson’s son.”

“Oh, that’s about the worst thing you could have done—lift your hand against the parson’s son! I’m sure he must have deserved it, but—still you shouldn’t have done it. Unless he’s accused you of thieving, for no honest man need stand that from any one, not even the king himself.”

“He—he called you Madam Olsen’s concubine.” Pelle had some difficulty in getting this out.

Lasse’s mouth grew hard and he clenched his fists. “Oh, he did! Oh, did he! If I had him here, I’d kick his guts out, the young monkey! I hope you gave him something he’ll remember for a long time?”

“Oh, no, it wasn’t very much, for he wouldn’t stand up to me—he threw himself down and screamed. And then the parson came!”

For a little while Lasse’s face was disfigured with rage, and he kept uttering threats. Then he turned to Pelle. “And they’ve turned you out? Only because you stood up for your old father! I’m always to bring misfortune upon you, though I’m only thinking of your good! But what shall we do now?”

“I won’t stay here any longer,” said Pelle decidedly.

“No, let’s get away from here; nothing has ever grown on this farm for us two but wormwood. Perhaps there are new, happy days waiting for us out there; and there are parsons everywhere. If we two work together at some good work out there, we shall earn a peck of money. Then one day we’ll go up to a parson, and throw down half a hundred krones in front of his face, and it ’u’d be funny if he didn’t confirm you on the spot—and perhaps let himself be kicked into the bargain. Those kind of folk are very fond of money.”

Lasse had grown more erect in his anger, and had a keen look in his eyes. He walked quickly along the foddering passage, and threw the things about carelessly, for Pelle’s adventurous proposal had infected him with youth. In the intervals of their work, they collected all their little things and packed the green chest. “What a surprise it’ll be to-morrow morning when they come here and find the nest empty!” said Pelle gaily. Lasse chuckled.

Their plan was to take shelter with Kalle for a day or two, while they took a survey of what the world offered. When everything was done in the evening, they took the green chest between them, and stole out through the outside door into the field. The chest was heavy, and the darkness did not make walking easier. They moved on a little way, changed hands, and rested. “We’ve got the night before us!” said Lasse cheerfully.

He was quite animated, and while they sat resting upon the chest talked about everything that awaited them. When he came to a standstill Pelle began. Neither of them had made any distinct plans for their future; they simply expected a fairy-story itself with its inconceivable surprises. All the definite possibilities that they were capable of picturing to themselves fell so far short of that which must come, that they left it alone and abandoned themselves to what lay beyond their powers of foresight.

Lasse was not sure-footed in the dark, and had more and more frequently to put down his burden. He grew weary and breathless, and the cheerful words died away upon his lips. “Ah, how heavy it is!” he sighed. “What a lot of rubbish you do scrape together in the course of time!” Then he sat down upon the chest, quite out of breath. He could do no more. “If only we’d had something to pick us up a little!” he said faintly. “And it’s so dark and gloomy to-night.”

“Help me to get it on my back,” said Pelle, “and I’ll carry it a little way.”

Lasse would not at first, but gave in, and they went on again, he running on in front and giving warning of ditches and walls. “Suppose Brother Kalle can’t take us in!” he said suddenly.

“He’s sure to be able to. There’s grandmother’s bed; that’s big enough for two.”

“But suppose we can’t get anything to do, then we shall be a burden on him.”

“Oh, we shall get something to do. There’s a scarcity of laborers everywhere.”

“Yes, they’ll jump at you, but I’m really too old to offer myself out.” Lasse had lost all hope, and was undermining Pelle’s too.

“I can’t do any more!” said Pelle, letting the chest down. They stood with arms hanging, and stared into the darkness at nothing particular. Lasse showed no desire to take hold again, and Pelle was now tired out. The night lay dark around them, and its all- enveloping loneliness made it seem as if they two were floating alone in space.

“Well, we ought to be getting on,” exclaimed Pelle, taking a handle of the chest; but as Lasse did not move, he dropped it and sat down. They sat back to back, and neither could find the right words to utter, and the distance between them seemed to increase. Lasse shivered with the night cold. “If only we were at home in our good bed!” he sighed.

Pelle was almost wishing he had been alone, for then he would have gone on to the end. The old man was just as heavy to drag along as the chest.

“Do you know I think I’ll go back again!” said Lasse at last in crestfallen tone. “I’m afraid I’m not able to tread uncertain paths. And you’ll never be confirmed if we go on like this! Suppose we go back and get Kongstrup to put in a good word for us with the parson.” Lasse stood and held one handle of the chest.

Pelle sat on as if he had not heard, and then he silently took hold, and they toiled along on their weary way homeward across the fields. Every other minute Pelle was tired and had to rest; now that they were going home, Lasse was the more enduring. “I think I could carry it a little way alone, if you’d help me up with it,” he said; but Pelle would not hear of it.

“Pee-u-ah!” sighed Lasse with pleasure when they once more stood in the warmth of the cow-stable and heard the animals breathing in indolent well-being—“it’s comfortable here. It’s just like coming into one’s old home. I think I should know this stable again by the air, if they led me into it blindfold anywhere in the world.”

And now they were home again, Pelle too could not help thinking that it really was pleasant.

XXIII

On Sunday morning, between watering and midday feed, Lasse and Pelle ascended the high stone steps. They took off their wooden shoes in the passage, and stood and shook themselves outside the door of the office; their gray stocking-feet were full of chaff and earth. Lasse raised his hand to knock, but drew it back. “Have you wiped your nose properly?” he asked in a whisper, with a look of anxiety on his face. Pelle performed the operation once more, and gave a final polish with the sleeve of his blouse.

Lasse lifted his hand again; he looked greatly oppressed. “You might keep quiet then!” he said irritably to Pelle, who was standing as still as a mouse. Lasse’s knuckles were poised in the air two or three times before they fell upon the door; and then he stood with his forehead close to the panel and listened. “There’s no one there,” he whispered irresolutely.

“Just go in!” exclaimed Pelle. “We can’t stand here all day.”

“Then you can go first, if you think you know better how to behave!” said Lasse, offended.

Pelle quickly opened the door and went in. There was no one in the office, but the door was open into the drawing-room, and the sound of Kongstrup’s comfortable breathing came thence.

“Who’s there?” he asked.

“It’s Lasse and Pelle,” answered Lasse in a voice that did not sound altogether brave.

“Will you come in here?”

Kongstrup was lying on the sofa reading a magazine, and on the table beside him stood a pile of old magazines and a plateful of little cakes. He did not raise his eyes from his book, not even while his hand went out to the plate for something to put in his mouth. He lay nibbling and swallowing while he read, and never looked at Lasse and Pelle, or asked them what they wanted, or said anything to give them a start. It was like being sent out to plough without knowing where. He must have been in the middle of something very exciting.

“Well, what do you want?” asked Kongstrup at last in slow tones.

“Well—well, the master must excuse us for coming like this about something that doesn’t concern the farm; but as matters now stand, we’ve no one else to go to, and so I said to the laddie: ‘Master won’t be angry, I’m sure, for he’s many a time been kind to us poor beggars—and that.’ Now it’s so in this world that even if you’re a poor soul that’s only fit to do others’ dirty work, the Almighty’s nevertheless given you a father’s heart, and it hurts you to see the father’s sin standing in the son’s way.”

Lasse came to a standstill. He had thought it all out beforehand, and so arranged it that it should lead up, in a shrewd, dignified way, to the matter itself. But now it was all in a muddle like a slattern’s pocket-handkerchief, and the farmer did not look as if he had understood a single word of it. He lay there, taking a cake now and then, and looking helplessly toward the door.

“It sometimes happens too, that a man gets tired of the single state,” began Lasse once more, but at once gave up trying to go on. No matter how he began, he went round and round the thing and got no hold anywhere! And now Kongstrup began to read again. A tiny question from him might have led to the very middle of it; but he only filled his mouth full and began munching quite hard.

Lasse was outwardly disheartened and inwardly angry, as he stood there and prepared to go. Pelle was staring about at the pictures and the old mahogany furniture, making up his mind about each thing.

Suddenly energetic steps sounded through the rooms; the ear could follow their course right up from the kitchen. Kongstrup’s eyes brightened, and Lasse straightened himself up.

“Is that you two?” said Fru Kongstrup in her decided way that indicated the manager. “But do sit down! Why didn’t you offer them a seat, old man?”

Lasse and Pelle found seats, and the mistress seated herself beside her husband, with her arm leaning upon his pillow. “How are you getting on, Kongstrup? Have you been resting?” she asked sympathetically, patting his shoulder. Kongstrup gave a little grunt, that might have meant yes, or no, or nothing at all.

“And what about you two? Are you in need of money?”

“No, it’s the lad. He’s to be dismissed from the confirmation- class,” answered Lasse simply. With the mistress you couldn't help being decided.

"Are you to be dismissed?" she exclaimed, looking at Pelle as at an old acquaintance. "Then what have you been doing?"

"Oh, I kicked the parson's son."

"And what did you do that for?"

"Because he wouldn't fight, but threw himself down."

Fru Kongstrup laughed and nudged her husband. "Yes, of course. But what had he done to you?"

"He'd said bad things about Father Lasse."

"What were the things?"

Pelle looked hard at her; she meant to get to the bottom of everything. "I won't tell you!" he said firmly.

"Oh, very well! But then we can't do anything about it either."

"I may just as well tell you," Lasse interrupted. "He called me Madam Olsen's concubine—from the Bible story, I suppose."

Kongstrup tried to suppress a chuckle, as if some one had whispered a coarse joke in his ear, and he could not help it. The mistress herself was serious enough.

"I don't think I understand," she said, and laid a repressing hand upon her husband's arm. "Lasse must explain."

"It's because I was engaged to Madam Olsen in the village, who every one thought was a widow; and then her husband came home the other day. And so they've given me that nickname round about, I suppose."

Kongstrup began his suppressed laughter again, and Lasse blinked in distress at it.

"Help yourselves to a cake!" said Fru Kongstrup in a very loud voice, pushing the plate toward them. This silenced Kongstrup, and he lay and watched their assault upon the cake-plate with an attentive eye.

Fru Kongstrup sat tapping the table with her middle finger while they ate. "So that good boy Pelle got angry and kicked out, did he?" she said suddenly, her eyes flashing.

"Yes, that's what he never ought to have done!" answered Lasse plaintively.

Fru Kongstrup fixed her eyes upon him.

"No, for all that the poorer birds are for is to be pecked at! Well, I prefer the bird that pecks back again and defends its nest, no matter how poor it is. Well, well, we shall see! And is that boy going to be confirmed? Why, of course! To think that I should be so forgetful! Then we must begin to think about his clothes."

"That's two troubles got rid of!" said Lasse when they went down to the stable again. "And did you notice how nicely I let her know that you were going to be confirmed? It was almost as if she'd found it out for herself. Now you'll see, you'll be as fine as a shop-boy in your clothes; people like the master and mistress know what's needed when once they've opened their purse. Well, they got the whole truth straight, but confound it! they're no more than human beings. It's always best to speak out straight." Lasse could not forget how well it had turned out.

Pelle let the old man boast. "Do you think I shall get leather shoes of them too?" he asked.

"Yes, of course you will! And I shouldn't wonder if they made a confirmation-party for you too. I say *they*, but it's her that's doing it all, and we may be thankful for that. Did you notice that she said *we*—*we* shall, and so on—always? It's nice of her, for he only lies there and eats and leaves everything to her. But what a good time he has! I think she'd go through fire to please him; but upon my word, she's master there. Well, well, I suppose we oughtn't to speak evil of any one; to you she's like your own mother!"

Fru Kongstrup said nothing about the result of her drive to the parson; it was not her way to talk about things afterward. But Lasse and Pelle once more trod the earth with a feeling of security; when she took up a matter, it was as good as arranged.

One morning later in the week, the tailor came limping in with his scissors, tape-measure, and pressing-iron, and Pelle had to go down to the servants' room, and was measured in every direction as if he had been a prize animal. Up to the present, he had always had his clothes made by guess-work. It was something new to have itinerant artisans at Stone Farm; since Kongstrup had come into power, neither shoemaker nor tailor had ever set foot in the servants' room. This was a return to the good old farm-customs, and placed Stone Farm once more on a footing with the other farms. The people enjoyed it, and as often as they could went down into the servants' room for a change of air and to hear one of the tailor's yarns. "It's the mistress who's at the head of things now!" they said to one another. There was good peasant blood in her hands, and she brought things back into the good old ways. Pelle walked into the servants' room like a gentleman; he was fitted several times a day.

He was fitted for two whole suits, one of which was for Rud, who was to be confirmed too. It would probably be the last thing that Rud and his mother would get at the farm, for Fru Kongstrup had carried her point, and they were to leave the cottage in May. They would never venture to set foot again in Stone Farm. Fru Kongstrup herself saw that they received what they were to have, but she did not give money if she could help it.

Pelle and Rud were never together now, and they seldom went to the parson together. It was Pelle who had drawn back, as he had grown tired of being on the watch for Rud's continual little lies and treacheries. Pelle was taller and stronger than Rud, and his nature —perhaps because of his physical superiority—had taken more open ways. In ability to master a task or learn it by heart, Rud was also the inferior; but on the other hand he could bewilder Pelle and the other boys, if he only got a hold with his practical common sense.

On the great day itself, Karl Johan drove Pelle and Lasse in the little one-horse carriage. "We're fine folk to-day!" said Lasse, with a beaming face. He was quite confused, although he had not tasted anything strong. There was a bottle of gin lying in the chest to treat the men with when the sacred ceremony was over; but Lasse was not the man to drink anything before he went to church. Pelle had not *touched* food; God's Word would take best effect in that condition.

Pelle was radiant too, in spite of his hunger. He was in brand-new twill, so new that it crackled every time he moved. On his feet he wore elastic-sided shoes that had once belonged to Kongstrup himself. They were too large, but "there's no difficulty with a sausage that's too long," as Lasse said. He put in thick soles and paper in the toes, and Pelle put on two pairs of stockings; and then the shoes fitted as if they had been cast for his foot. On his head he wore a blue cap that he had chosen himself down at the shop. It allowed room for growing, and rested on his ears, which, for the occasion, were as red as two roses. Round the cap was a broad ribbon in which were woven rakes, scythes, and flails, interlaced with sheaves all the way round.

"It's a good thing you came," said Pelle, as they drove up to the church, and found themselves among so many people. Lasse had almost had to give up thought of coming, for the man who was going to look after the animals while he was away had to go off at the last moment for the veterinary surgeon; but Karna came and offered to water and give the midday feed, although neither could truthfully say that they had behaved as they ought to have done to her.

"Have you got that thing now?" whispered Lasse, when they were inside the church. Pelle felt in his pocket and nodded; the little round piece of lignum-vitae that was to carry him over the difficulties of the day lay there. "Then just answer loud and straight out," whispered Lasse, as he slipped into a pew in the background.

Pelle did answer straight out, and to Lasse his voice sounded really well through the spacious church. And the parson did absolutely nothing to revenge himself, but treated Pelle exactly as he did the others. At the most solemn part of the ceremony, Lasse thought of Karna, and how touching her devotion was. He scolded himself in an undertone, and made a solemn vow. She should not sigh any longer in vain.

For a whole month indeed, Lasse's thoughts had been occupied with Karna, now favorably, now unfavorably; but at this solemn moment when Pelle was just taking the great step into the future, and Lasse's feelings were touched in so many ways, the thought of Karna's devotion broke over him as something sad, like a song of slighted affection that at last, at last has justice done to it.

Lasse shook hands with Pelle. "Good luck and a blessing!" he said in a trembling voice. The wish also embraced his own vow and he had some difficulty in keeping silence respecting his determination, he was so moved. The words were heard on all sides, and Pelle went round and shook hands with his comrades. Then they drove home.

"It all went uncommonly well for you to-day," said Lasse proudly; "and now you’re a man, you know.”

“Yes, now you must begin to look about for a sweetheart,” said Karl Johan. Pelle only laughed.

In the afternoon they had a holiday. Pelle had first to go up to his master and mistress to thank them for his clothes and receive their congratulations. Fru Kongstrup gave him red-currant wine and cake, and the farmer gave him a two-krone piece.

Then they went up to Kalle’s by the quarry. Pelle was to exhibit himself in his new clothes, and say good-bye to them; there was only a fortnight to May Day. Lasse was going to take the opportunity of secretly obtaining information concerning a house that was for sale on the heath.

XXIV

They still talked about it every day for the short time that was left. Lasse, who had always had the thought of leaving in his mind, and had only stayed on and on, year after year, because the boy's welfare demanded it—was slow to move now that there was nothing to hold him back. He was unwilling to lose Pelle, and did all he could to keep him; but nothing would induce him to go out into the world again.

"Stay here!" he said persuasively, "and we'll talk to the mistress and she'll take you on for a proper wage. You're both strong and handy, and she's always looked upon you with a friendly eye."

But Pelle would not take service with the farmer; it gave no position and no prospects. He wanted to be something great, but there was no possibility of that in the country; he would be following cows all his days. He would go to the town—perhaps still farther, across the sea to Copenhagen.

"You'd better come too," he said, "and then we shall get rich all the quicker and be able to buy a big farm."

"Yes, yes," said Lasse, slowly nodding his head; "that's one for me and two for yourself! But what the parson preaches doesn't always come to pass. We might become penniless. Who knows what the future may bring?"

"Oh, I shall manage!" said Pelle, nodding confidently. "Do you mean to say I can't turn my hand to anything I like?"

"And I didn't give notice in time either," said Lasse to excuse himself.

"Then run away!"

But Lasse would not do that. "No, I'll stay and work toward getting something for myself about here," he said, a little evasively. "It would be nice for you too, to have a home that you could visit now and then; and if you didn't get on out there, it wouldn't be bad to have something to fall back upon. You might fall ill, or something else might happen; the world's not to be relied upon. You have to have a hard skin all over out there."

Pelle did not answer. That about the home sounded nice enough, and he understood quite well that it was Karna's person that weighed down the other end of the balance. Well, she'd put all his clothes in order for his going away, and she'd always been a good soul; he had nothing against that.

It would be hard to live apart from Father Lasse, but Pelle felt he must go. Away! The spring seemed to shout the word in his ears. He knew every rock in the landscape and every tree—yes, every twig on the trees as well; there was nothing more here that could fill his blue eyes and long ears, and satisfy his mind.

The day before May Day they packed Pelle's things. Lasse knelt before the green chest; every article was carefully folded and remarked upon, before it was placed in the canvas bag that was to serve Pelle as a traveling-trunk.

"Now remember not to wear your stockings too long before you mend them!" said Lasse, putting mending wool on one side. "He who mends his things in time, is spared half the work and all the disgrace."

"I shan't forget that," said Pelle quietly.

Lasse was holding a folded shirt in his hand. "The one you've got on's just been washed," he said reflectively. "But one can't tell. Two shirts'll almost be too little if you're away, won't they? You must take one of mine; I can always manage to get another by the time I want a change. And remember, you must never go longer than a fortnight! You who are young and healthy might easily get vermin, and be jeered at by the whole town; such a thing would never be tolerated in any one who wants to get on. At the worst you can do a little washing or yourself; you could go down to the shore in the evening, if that was all!"

"Do they wear wooden shoes in the town?" asked Pelle.

"Not people who want to get on! I think you'd better let me keep the wooden shoes and you take my boots instead; they always look nice even if they're old. You'd better wear them when you go to-morrow, and save your good shoes."

The new clothes were laid at the top of the bag, wrapped in an old blouse to keep them clean.

"Now I think we've got everything in," said Lasse, with a searching glance into the green chest. There was not much left in it. "Very well, then we'll tie it up in God's name, and pray that, you may arrive safely—

wherever you decide to go!" Lasse tied up the sack; he was anything but happy.

"You must say good-bye nicely to every one on the farm, so that they won't have anything to scratch my eyes out for afterward," said Lasse after a little. "And I should like you to thank Karna nicely for having put everything in such good order. It isn't every one who'd have bothered."

"Yes, I'll do that," said Pelle in a low voice. He did not seem to be able to speak out properly to-day.

Pelle was up and dressed at daybreak. Mist lay over the sea, and prophesied well for the day. He went about well scrubbed and combed, and looked at everything with wide-open eyes, and with his hands in his pockets. The blue clothes which he had gone to his confirmation- classes in, had been washed and newly mangled, and he still looked very well in them; and the tabs of the old leather boots, which were a relic of Lasse's prosperous days, stuck out almost as much as his ears.

He had said his "Good-bye and thank-you for all your kindness!" to everybody on the farm—even Erik; and he had had a good meal of bacon. Now he was going about the stable, collecting himself, shaking the bull by the horns, and letting the calves suck his fingers; it was a sort of farewell too! The cows put their noses close up to him, and breathed a long, comfortable breath when he passed, and the bull playfully tossed its head at him. And close behind him went Lasse; he did not say very much but he always kept near the boy.

It was so good to be here, and the feeling sank gently over Pelle every time a cow licked herself, or the warm vapor rose from freshly- falling dung. Every sound was like a mother's caress, and every thing was a familiar toy, with which a bright world could be built. Upon the posts all round there were pictures that he had cut upon them; Lasse had smeared them over with dirt again, in case the farmer should come and say that they were spoiling everything.

Pelle was not thinking, but went about in a dreamy state; it all sank so warmly and heavily into his child's mind. He had taken out his knife, and took hold of the bull's horn, as if he were going to carve something on it. "He won't let you do that," said Lasse, surprised. "Try one of the bullocks instead."

But Pelle returned his knife to his pocket; he had not intended to do anything. He strolled along the foddering-passage without aim or object. Lasse came up and took his hand.

"You'd better stay here a little longer," he said. "We're so comfortable."

But this put life into Pelle. He fixed his big, faithful eyes upon his father, and then went down to their room.

Lasse followed him. "In God's name then, if it has to be!" he said huskily, and took hold of the sack to help Pelle get it onto his back.

Pelle held out his hand. "Good-bye and thank you, father—for all your kindness!" he added gently.

"Yes, yes; yes, yes!" said Lasse, shaking his head. It was all he was able to say.

He went out with Pelle past the out-houses, and there stopped, while Pelle went on along the dikes with his sack on his back, up toward the high-road. Two or three times he turned and nodded; Lasse, overcome, stood gazing, with his hand shading his eyes. He had never looked so old before.

Out in the fields they were driving the seed-harrow; Stone Farm was early with it this year. Kongstrup and his wife were strolling along arm-in-arm beside a ditch; every now and then they stopped and she pointed: they must have been talking about the crop. She leaned against him when they walked; she had really found rest in her affection now!

Now Lasse turned and went in. How forlorn he looked! Pelle felt a quick desire to throw down the sack and run back and say something nice to him; but before he could do so the impulse had disappeared upon the fresh morning breeze. His feet carried him on upon the straight way, away, away! Up on a ridge the bailiff was stepping out a field, and close behind him walked Erik, imitating him with foolish gestures.

On a level with the edge of the rocks, Pelle came to the wide high-road. Here, he knew, Stone Farm and its lands would be lost to sight, and he put down his sack. *There* were the sand-banks by the sea, with every tree-top visible; *there* was the fir-tree that the yellowhammer always built in; the stream ran milk-white after the heavy thaw, and the meadow was beginning to grow green. But the cairn was gone; good people had removed it secretly when Niels Köller was drowned and the girl was expected out of prison.

And the farm stood out clearly in the morning light, with its high white dwelling-house, the long range of barns, and all the out-houses. Every spot down there shone so familiarly toward him; the hardships he had suffered were forgotten, or only showed up the comforts in stronger relief.

Pelle's childhood had been happy by virtue of everything; it had been a song mingled with weeping. Weeping falls into tones as well as joy, and heard from a distance it becomes a song. And as Pelle gazed down upon his childhood's world, they were only pleasant memories that gleamed toward him through the bright air. Nothing else existed, or ever had done so.

He had seen enough of hardship and misfortune, but had come well out of everything; nothing had harmed him. With a child's voracity he had found nourishment in it all; and now he stood here, healthy and strong—equipped with the Prophets, the Judges, the Apostles, the Ten Commandments and one hundred and twenty hymns! and turned an open, perspiring, victor's brow toward the world.

Before him lay the land sloping richly toward the south, bounded by the sea. Far below stood two tall black chimneys against the sea as background, and still farther south lay the Town! Away from it ran the paths of the sea to Sweden and Copenhagen! This was the world— the great wide world itself!

Pelle became ravenously hungry at the sight of the great world, and the first thing he did was to sit down upon the ridge of the hill with a view both backward and forward, and eat all the food Karna had given him for the whole day. So his stomach would have nothing more to trouble about!

He rose refreshed, got the sack onto his back, and set off downward to conquer the world, pouring forth a song at the top of his voice into the bright air as he went:—

"A stranger I must wander
Among the Englishmen;
With African black negroes
My lot it may be thrown.
And then upon this earth there
Are Portuguese found too,
And every kind of nation
Under heaven's sky so blue."

THE END

II. APPRENTICESHIP

I

On that windy May-day morning when Pelle tumbled out of the nest, it so happened that old Klaus Hermann was clattering into town with his manure-cart, in order to fetch a load of dung. And this trifling circumstance decided the boy’s position in life. There was no more pother than this about the question: What was Pelle to be?

He had never put that question to himself. He had simply gone onward at hazard, as the meaning of the radiant world unfolded itself. As to what he should make of himself when he was really out in the world —well, the matter was so incomprehensible that it was mere folly to think about it. So he just went on.

Now he had reached the further end of the ridge. He lay down in the ditch to recover his breath after his long walk; he was tired and hungry, but in excellent spirits. Down there at his feet, only half a mile distant, lay the town. There was a cheerful glitter about it; from its hundreds of fireplaces the smoke of midday fires curled upward into the blue sky, and the red roofs laughed roguishly into the beaming face of the day. Pelle immediately began to count the houses; not wishing to exaggerate, he had estimated them at a million only, and already he was well into the first hundred.

But in the midst of his counting he jumped up. What did the people down there get for dinner? They must surely live well there! And was it polite to go on eating until one was quite full, or should one lay down one’s spoon when one had only half finished, like the landowners when they attended a dinner? For one who was always hungry this was a very important question.

There was a great deal of traffic on the high-road. People were coming and going; some had their boxes behind them in a cart, and others carried their sole worldly possessions in a bag slung over their shoulders, just as he did. Pelle knew some of these people, and nodded to them benevolently; he knew something about all of them. There were people who were going to the town—his town—and some were going farther, far over the sea, to America, or even farther still, to serve the King there; one could see that by their equipment and the frozen look on their faces. Others were merely going into the town to make a hole in their wages, and to celebrate May-day. These came along the road in whole parties, humming or whistling, with empty hands and overflowing spirits. But the most interesting people were those who had put their boxes on a wheelbarrow, or were carrying them by both handles. These had flushed faces, and were feverish in their movements; they were people who had torn themselves away from their own country-side, and their accustomed way of life, and had chosen the town, as he himself had done.

There was one man, a cottager, with a little green chest on his wheelbarrow; this latter was broad in the beam, and it was neatly adorned with flowers painted by his own hand. Beside him walked his daughter; her cheeks were red, and her eyes were gazing into the unknown future. The father was speaking to her, but she did not look as though she heard him. “Yes—now you must take it on you to look out for yourself; you must think about it, and not throw yourself away. The town is quite a good place for those who go right ahead and think of their own advantage, but it thinks nothing of who gets trodden underfoot. So don’t be too trusting, for the people there are wonderful clever in all sorts of tricks to take you in and trip you up. At the same time you want to be soft-spoken and friendly.” She did not reply to this; she was apparently more taken up with the problem of putting down her feet in their new shoes so that the heels should not turn over.

There was a stream of people coming up from the town too. All the forenoon Pelle had been meeting Swedes who had come that morning in the steamer, and were now looking for a job on the land. There were old folk, worn out with labor, and little children; there were maidens as pretty as yellow-haired Marie, and young laborers who had the strength of the whole world in their loins and muscles. And this current of life was setting hither to fill up the gaps left by the swarms that were going away —but that did not concern Pelle. For seven years ago he had felt everything that made their faces look so troubled now; what they were just entering upon he had already put behind him. So there was no good in looking back.

Presently the old man from Neuendorf came along the road. He was got up quite like an American, with a portmanteau and a silk neckerchief, and the inside pockets of his open coat were stuffed full of papers. At last he had made up his mind, and was going out to his betrothed, who had already been three years away.

"Hullo!" cried Pelle, "so you are going away?"

The man came over to Pelle and set his portmanteau down by the side of the ditch.

"Well, yes; it's time to be going," he said. "Laura won't wait for me any longer. So the old people must see how they can get along without a son; I've done everything for them now for three years. Provided they can manage all by themselves—"

"They can do that all right," said Pelle, with an experienced air. "And they had to get help formerly. There is no future for young people at home." He had heard his elders say this. He struck at the grass with his stick, assuming a superior air.

"No," said the other, "and Laura refuses to be a cottager's wife. Well, good-bye!" He held out his hand to Pelle and tried to smile, but his features had it their own way; nothing but a rather twisted expression came over them. He stood there a minute, looking at his boots, his thumb groping over his face as though he wanted to wipe the tormented look away; then he picked up his portmanteau and went. He was evidently not very comfortable.

"I'll willingly take over the ticket and the bride," shouted Pelle merrily. He felt in the deuce of a good humor.

Everybody to-day was treading the road along which Pelle's own young blood had called him—every young fellow with a little pluck, every good-looking wench. Not for a moment was the road free of traffic; it was like a vast exodus, an army of people escaping from places where everyone had the feeling that he was condemned to live and die on the very spot where he was born; an army of people who had chosen the excitement of the unknown. Those little brick houses which lay scattered over the green, or stood drawn up in two straight rows where the high-road ran into the town—those were the cottages of the peasant folk who had renounced the outdoor life, and dressed themselves in townified clothes, and had then adventured hither; and down on the sea-front the houses stood all squeezed and heaped together round the church, so close that there looked to be no room between them; there were the crowds who had gone wandering, driven far afield by the longing in their hearts—and then the sea had set a limit to their journey.

Pelle had no intention of allowing anything whatever to set a limit to his journeying. Perhaps, if he had no luck in the town, he would go to sea. And then one day he would come to some coast that interested him, and he would land, and go to the gold-diggings. Over there the girls went mother-naked, with nothing but some blue tattoo-work to hide their shame; but Pelle had his girl sitting at home, true to him, waiting for his return. She was more beautiful even than Bodil and yellow-haired Marie put together, and whole crowds followed her footsteps, but she sat at home and was faithful, and she would sing the old love-song:

"I had a lad, but he went away
All over the false, false sea,
Three years they are gone, and now to-day
He writes no more to me!"

And while she sang the letter came to the door. But out of every letter that his father Lasse received fell ten-kroner banknotes, and one day a letter came with steamer-tickets for the two of them. The song would not serve him any further, for in the song they perished during the voyage, and the poor young man spent the rest of his days on the sea-shore, gazing, through the shadow of insanity, upon every rising sail. She and Lasse arrived safely—after all sorts of difficulties, that went without saying—and Pelle stood on the shore and welcomed them. He had dressed himself up like a savage, and he carried on as though he meant to eat them before he made himself known.

Houp la! Pelle jumped to his feet. Up the road there was a rattling and a clanking as though a thousand scythes were clashing together: an old cart with loose plank sides came slowly jolting along, drawn by the two most miserable moorland horses he had ever seen. On the driver's seat was an old peasant, who was bobbing about as though he would every moment fall in pieces, like all the rest of his equipment. Pelle did not at first feel sure whether it was the cart itself or the two bags of bones between the shafts that made such a frightful din whenever they moved, but as the vehicle at last drew level with him, and the old peasant drew up, he could not resist the invitation to get up and have a lift. His shoulders were still aching from carrying his sack.

“So you are going to town, after all?” said old Klaus, pointing to his goods and chattels.

To town, yes indeed! Something seemed to grip hold of Pelle’s bursting heart, and before he was aware of it he had delivered himself and his whole future into the old peasant’s hands.

“Yes, yes—yes indeed—why, naturally!” said Klaus, nodding as Pelle came forward. “Yes, of course! A man can’t do less. And what’s your idea about what you are going to be in the long run—councillor or king?” He looked up slowly. “Yes, goin’ to town; well, well, they all, take the road they feel something calling them to take…. Directly a young greyhound feels the marrow in his bones, or has got a shilling in his pocket, he’s got to go to town and leave it there. And what do you think comes back out the town? Just manure and nothing else! What else have I ever in my life been able to pick up there? And now I’m sixty-five. But what’s the good of talking? No more than if a man was to stick his tail out and blow against a gale. It comes over them just like the May-gripes takes the young calves— heigh-ho! and away they go, goin’ to do something big. Afterward, then old Klaus Hermann can come and clean up after them! They’ve no situation there, and no kinsfolk what could put them up—but they always expect something big. Why, down in the town there are beds made up in the streets, and the gutters are running over with food and money! But what do you mean to do? Let’s hear it now.”

Pelle turned crimson. He had not yet succeeded in making a beginning, and already he had been caught behaving like a blockhead.

“Well, well, well,” said Klaus, in a good-humored tone, “you are no bigger fool than all the rest. But if you’ll take my advice, you’ll go to shoemaker Jeppe Kofod as apprentice; I am going straight to his place to fetch manure, and I know he’s looking for an apprentice. Then you needn’t go floundering about uncertain-like, and you can drive right up to the door like the quality.”

Pelle winced all over. Never in his life had it entered his head that he could ever become a shoemaker. Even back there on the land, where people looked up to the handicrafts, they used always to say, if a boy had not turned out quite right: “Well, we can always make a cobbler or a tailor of him!” But Pelle was no cripple, that he must lead a sedentary life indoors in order to get on at all; he was strong and well-made. What he would be—well, that certainly lay in the hands of fortune; but he felt very strongly that it ought to be something active, something that needed courage and energy. And in any case he was quite sure as to what he did not want to be. But as they jolted through the town, and Pelle—so as to be beforehand with the great world—kept on taking off his cap to everybody, although no one returned his greeting, his spirits began to sink, and a sense of his own insignificance possessed him. The miserable cart, at which all the little town boys laughed and pointed with their fingers, had a great deal to do with this feeling.

“Take off your cap to a pack like that!” grumbled Klaus; “why, only look how puffed up they behave, and yet everything they’ve got they’ve stolen from us others. Or what do you suppose—can you see if they’ve got their summer seeds in the earth yet?” And he glared contemptuously down the street.

No, there was nothing growing on the stone pavements, and all these little houses, which stood so close that now and then they seemed to Pelle as if they must be squeezed out of the row—these gradually took his breath away. Here were thousands and thousands of people, if that made any difference; and all his blind confidence wavered at the question: where did all their food come from? For here he was once more at home in his needy, familiar world, where no amount of smoke will enable one to buy a pair of socks. All at once he felt thoroughly humble, and he decided that it would be all he could do here to hold his own, and find his daily bread among all these stones, for here people did not raise it naturally from the soil, but got it—well, how *did* they get it?

The streets were full of servants. The girls stood about in groups, their arms round one another’s waists, staring with burning eyes at the cotton-stuffs displayed in the shops; they rocked themselves gently to and fro as though they were dreaming. A ’prentice boy of about Pelle’s age, with a red, spotty face, was walking down the middle of the street, eating a great wheaten roll which he held with both hands; his ears were full of scabs and his hands swollen with the cold. Farm laborers went by, carrying red bundles in their hands, their overcoats flapping against their calves; they would stop suddenly at a turning, look cautiously round, and then hurry down a side street. In front of the shops the salesmen were walking up and down, bareheaded, and if any one stopped in front of their windows they would beg them, in the politest manner, to step nearer, and would secretly wink at one another across the street.

"The shopkeepers have arranged their things very neatly to-day," said Pelle.

Klaus nodded. "Yes, yes; to-day they've brought out everything they couldn't get rid of sooner. To-day the block-heads have come to market—the easy purses. Those"—and he pointed to a side street, "those are the publicans. They are looking this way so longingly, but the procession don't come as far as them. But you wait till this evening, and then take a turn along here, and ask the different people how much they've got left of their year's wages. Yes, the town's a fine place—the very deuce of a fine place!" And he spat disgustedly.

Pelle had quite lost all his blind courage. He saw not a single person doing anything by which he himself might earn his bread. And gladly as he would have belonged to this new world, yet he could not venture into anything where, perhaps without knowing it, he would be an associate of people who would tear the rags off his old comrades' backs. All the courage had gone out of him, and with a miserable feeling that even his only riches, his hands, were here useless, he sat irresolute, and allowed himself to be driven, rattling and jangling, to Master Jeppe Kofod's workshop.

II

The workshop stood over an entry which opened off the street. People came and went along this entry: Madame Rasmussen and old Captain Elleby; the old maid-servant of a Comptroller, an aged pensioner who wore a white cap, drew her money from the Court, and expended it here, and a feeble, gouty old sailor who had bidden the sea farewell. Out in the street, on the sharp-edged cobble-stones, the sparrows were clamoring loudly, lying there with puffed-out feathers, feasting among the horse-droppings, tugging at them and scattering them about to the accompaniment of a storm of chirping and scolding.

Everything overlooking the yard stood open. In the workshop all four windows were opened wide, and the green light sifted into the room and fell on the faces of those present. But that was no help. Not a breath of wind was blowing; moreover, Pelle's heat came from within. He was sweating with sheer anxiety.

For the rest, he pulled industriously at his cobbler's wax, unless, indeed, something outside captured his harassed mind, so that it wandered out into the sunshine.

Everything out there was splashed with vivid sunlight; seen from the stuffy workshop the light was like a golden river, streaming down between the two rows of houses, and always in the same direction, down to the sea. Then a speck of white down came floating on the air, followed by whitish-gray thistle-seeds, and a whole swarm of gnats, and a big broad bumble-bee swung to and fro. All these eddied, gleaming, in the open doorway, and they went on circling as though there was something there which attracted them all—doubtless an accident, or perhaps a festival.

"Are you asleep, booby?" asked the journeyman sharply. Pelle shrank into his shell and continued to work at the wax; he kneaded away at it, holding it in hot water.

Inside the court, at the baker's—the baker was the old master's brother—they were hoisting sacks of meal. The windlass squeaked horribly, and in between the squeaking one could hear Master Jörgen Kofod, in a high falsetto, disputing with his son. "You're a noodle, a pitiful simpleton—whatever will become of you? Do you think we've nothing more to do than to go running out to prayer-meetings on a working day? Perhaps that will get us our daily bread? Now you just stay here, or, God's mercy, I'll break every bone in your body!" Then the wife chimed in, and then of a sudden all was silent. And after a while the son stole like a phantom along the wall of the opposite house, a hymn-book in his hand. He was not unlike Howling Peter. He squeezed himself against the wall, and his knees gave under him if any one looked sharply at him. He was twenty-five years old, and he took beatings from his father without a murmur. But when matters of religion were in question he defied public opinion, the stick, and his father's anger.

"Are you asleep, booby? I shall really have to come over and teach you to hurry!"

For a time no one spoke in the workshop—the journeyman was silent, so the others had to hold their tongues. Each bent over his work, and Pelle pulled the pitch out to as great a length as possible, kneaded some grease into it, and pulled again. Outside, in the sunshine, some street urchins were playing, running to and fro. When they saw Pelle, they held their clenched fist under their noses, nodded to him in a provocative manner, and sang—

"The cobbler has a pitchy nose,
The more he wipes it the blacker it grows!"

Pelle pretended not to see them, but he secretly ticked them all off in his mind. It was his sincere intention to wipe them all off the face of the earth.

Suddenly they all ran into the street, where a tremendous, monotonous voice lifted itself and flowed abroad. This was the crazy watchmaker; he was standing on his high steps, crying damnation on the world at large.

Pelle knew perfectly well that the man was crazy, and in the words which he so ponderously hurled at the town there was not the slightest meaning. But they sounded wonderfully fine notwithstanding, and the "ordeal by wax" was hanging over him like a sort of last judgment. Involuntarily, he began to turn cold at the sound of this warning voice, which uttered such solemn words and had so little meaning, just as he did at the strong language in the Bible. It was just the voice that frightened him; it was such a terrible voice, such a voice as one might hear speaking out of the clouds; the sort of voice, in short, that made the knees of Moses and Paul give under them; a portentous voice, such as Pelle himself used to hear coming out of the darkness at Stone Farm when a quarrel was going on.

Only the knee-strap of little Nikas, the journeyman, kept him from jumping up then and there and throwing himself down like Paul. This knee-strap was a piece of undeniable reality in the midst of all his imaginings; in two months it had taught him never quite to forget who and where he was. He pulled himself together, and satisfied himself that all his miseries arose from his labors over this wretched cobbler's wax; besides, there was such a temptation to compare his puddle of cobbler's wax with the hell in which he was told he would be tormented. But then he heard the cheerful voice of the young shoemaker in the yard outside, and the whole trouble disappeared. The "ordeal by wax" could not really be so terrible, since all the others had undergone it—he had certainly seen tougher fellows than these in his lifetime!

Jens sat down and ducked his head, as though he was expecting a box on the ears;—that was the curse of the house which continually hung over him. He was so slow at his work that already Pelle could overtake him; there was something inside him that seemed to hamper his movements like a sort of spell. But Peter and Emil were smart fellows—only they were always wanting to thrash him.

Among the apple trees in the yard it was early summer, and close under the workshop windows the pig stood smacking at his food. This sound was like a warm breeze that blew over Pelle's heart. Since the day when Klaus Hermann had shaken the squeaking little porker out of his sack, Pelle had begun to take root. It had squealed at first in a most desolate manner, and something of Pelle's own feeling of loneliness was taken away from him by its cries. Now it complained simply because it was badly fed, and it made Pelle quite furious to see the nasty trash that was thrown to it—a young pig must eat well, that is half the battle. They ought not to go running out every few minute to throw something or other to the pig; when once the heat really set in it would get acidity of the stomach. But there was no sense in these town folk.

"Are you really asleep, booby? Why, you are snoring, deuce take me!"

The young master came limping in, took a drink, and buried himself in his book. As he read he whistled softly in time with the hammer- strokes of the others. Little Nikas began to whistle too, and the two older apprentices who were beating leather began to strike in time with the whistling, and they even kept double time, so that everything went like greased lightning. The journeyman's trills and quavers became more and more extraordinary, in order to catch up with the blows—the blows and the whistling seemed to be chasing one another—and Master Andres raised his head from his book to listen. He sat there staring into the far distance, as though the shadowy pictures evoked by his reading were hovering before his eyes. Then, with a start, he was present and among them all, his eyes running over them with a waggish expression; and then he stood up, placing his stick so that it supported his diseased hip. The master's hands danced loosely in the air, his head and his whole figure jerking crazily under the compulsion of the rhythm.

Swoop!—and the dancing hands fell upon the cutting-out knife, and the master fingered the notes on the sharp edge, his head on one side and his eyes closed—his whole appearance that of one absorbed in intent inward listening. But then suddenly his face beamed with felicity, his whole figure contracted in a frenzy of delight, one foot clutched at the air as though bewitched, as though he were playing a harp with his toes —Master Andres was all at once a musical idiot and a musical clown. And *smack!* the knife flew to the ground and he had the great tin cover in his hand— *chin-da-da-da chin-da-da-da!* Suddenly by a stroke of magic the flute had turned into a drum and cymbals!

Pelle was doubled up with laughter: then he looked in alarm at the knee-strap and again burst out laughing; but no one took any notice of him. The master's fingers and wrist were dancing a sort of devil's dance on the tin cover, and all of a sudden his elbows too were called into requisition, so that the cover banged against the master's left knee, bounced off again and quick as lightning struck against his wooden heel, which stuck out behind him; then against Pelle's head, and round about it went, striking the most improbable objects, *dum, dum, dum*, as though in wild, demoniacal obedience to the flute-like tones of the journeyman. There was no holding back. Emil, the oldest apprentice, began boldly to whistle too, cautiously at first, and then, as no one smacked his head, more forcefully. Then the next apprentice, Jens—the music-devil, as he was called, because anything would produce a note between his fingers —plucked so cleverly at his waxed-end that it straightway began to give out a buzzing undertone, rising and falling through two or three notes, as though an educated bumble-bee had been leading the whole orchestra. Out of doors the birds came hopping on to the apple-boughs; they twisted their heads inquisitively to one side, frantically fluffed out their feathers, and then they too joined in this orgy of jubilation, which was caused merely by a scrap of bright blue sky. But then the young master had an attack of coughing, and the whole business came to an end.

Pelle worked away at his cobbler's wax, kneading the pitch and mixing grease with it. When the black lump was on the point of stiffening, he had to plunge both hands into hot water, so that he got hangnails. Old Jeppe came tripping in from the yard, and Master Andres quickly laid the cutting-board over his book and diligently stropped his knife.

"That's right!" said Jeppe; "warm the wax, then it binds all the better."

Pelle had rolled the wax into balls, and had put them in the soaking-tub, and now stood silent; for he had not the courage of his own accord to say, "I am ready." The others had magnified the "ordeal by wax" into something positively terrible; all sorts of terrors lurked in the mystery that was now awaiting him; and if he himself had not known that he was a smart fellow—why—yes, he would have left them all in the lurch. But now he meant to submit to it, however bad it might be; he only wanted time to swallow first. Then at last he would have succeeded in shaking off the peasant, and the handicraft would be open to him, with its song and its wandering life and its smart journeyman's clothes. The workshop here was no better than a stuffy hole where one sat and slaved over smelly greasy boots, but he saw that one must go through with it in order to reach the great world, where journeymen wore patent-leather shoes on workdays and made footwear fit for kings. The little town had given Pelle a preliminary foreboding that the world was almost incredibly great, and this foreboding filled him with impatience. He meant to conquer it all!

"Now I am ready!" he said resolutely; now he would decide whether he and the handicraft were made for one another.

"Then you can pull a waxed end—but make it as long as a bad year!" said the journeyman.

The old master was all on fire at the idea. He went over and watched Pelle closely, his tongue hanging out of his mouth; he felt quite young again, and began to descant upon his own apprenticeship in Copenhagen, sixty years ago. Those were times! The apprentices didn't lie in bed and snore in those days till six o'clock in the morning, and throw down their work on the very stroke of eight, simply to go out and run about. No; up they got at four, and stuck at it as long as there was work to do. Then fellows *could* work—and then they still learned something; they were told things just once, and then—the knee-strap! Then, too, the manual crafts still enjoyed some reputation; even the kings had to learn a handicraft. It was very different to the present, with its bungling and cheap retailing and pinching and paring everywhere.

The apprentices winked at one another. Master Andres and the journeyman were silent. You might as well quarrel with the sewing-machine because it purred. Jeppe was allowed to spin his yarn alone.

"Are you waxing it well?" said little Nikas. "It's for pigskin."

The others laughed, but Pelle rubbed the thread with a feeling as though he were building his own scaffold.

"Now I am ready!" he said, in a low voice.

The largest pair of men's lasts was taken down from the shelf, and these were tied to one end of the waxed-end and were let right down to the pavement. People collected in the street outside, and stood there staring. Pelle had to lean right out of the window, and bend over as far as he could, while Emil, as the oldest apprentice, laid the waxed-end over his neck. They were all on their feet now, with the exception of the young master; he took no part in this diversion.

"Pull, then!" ordered the journeyman, who was directing the solemn business. "Pull them along till they're right under your feet!"

Pelle pulled, and the heavy lasts joggled over the pavement, but he paused with a sigh; the waxed-end was slipping over his warm neck. He stood there stamping, like an animal which stamps its feet on the ground, without knowing why; he lifted them cautiously and looked at them in torment.

"Pull, pull!" ordered Jeppe. "You must keep the thing moving or it sticks!" But it was too late; the wax had hardened in the hairs of his nape

—Father Lasse used to call them his “luck curls,” and prophesied a great future for him on their account—and there he stood, and could not remove the waxed-end, however hard he tried. He made droll grimaces, the pain was so bad, and the saliva ran out of his mouth.

“Huh! He can’t even manage a pair of lasts!” said Jeppe jeeringly. “He’d better go back to the land again and wash down the cows’ behinds!”

Then Pelle, boiling with rage, gave a jerk, closing his eyes and writhing as he loosed himself. Something sticky and slippery slipped through his fingers with the waxed-end; it was bloody hair, and across his neck the thread had bitten its way in a gutter of lymph and molten wax. But Pelle no longer felt the pain, his head was boiling so, and he felt a vague but tremendous longing to pick up a hammer and strike them all to the ground, and then to run through the street, banging at the skulls of all he met. But then the journeyman took the lasts off him, and the pain came back to him, and his whole miserable plight. He heard Jeppe’s squeaky voice, and looked at the young master, who sat there submissively, without having the courage to express his opinion, and all at once he felt terribly sorry for himself.

“That was right,” buzzed old Jeppe, “a shoemaker mustn’t be afraid to wax his hide a little. What? I believe it has actually brought the water to his eyes! No, when I was apprentice we had a real ordeal; we had to pass the waxed-end twice round our necks before we were allowed to pull. Our heads used to hang by a thread and dangle when we were done. Yes, those were times!”

Pelle stood there shuffling, in order to fight down his tears; but he had to snigger with mischievous delight at the idea of Jeppe’s dangling head.

“Then we must see whether he can stand a buzzing head,” said the journeyman, getting ready to strike him.

“No, you can wait until he deserves it,” said Master Andres hastily. “You will soon find an occasion.”

“Well, he’s done with the wax,” said Jeppe, “but the question is, can he sit? Because there are some who never learn the art of sitting.”

“That must be tested, too, before we can declare him to be useful,” said little Nikas, in deadly earnest.

“Are you done with your tomfoolery now?” said Master Andres angrily, and he went his way.

But Jeppe was altogether in his element; his head was full of the memories of his boyhood, a whole train of devilish tricks, which completed the ordination. “Then we used to brand them indelibly with their special branch, and they never took to their heels, but they considered it a great honor as long as they drew breath. But now these are weakly times and full of pretences; the one can’t do this and the other can’t do that; and there’s leather colic and sore behinds and God knows what. Every other day they come with certificates that they’re suffering from boils from sitting down, and then you can begin all over again. No, in my time we behaved very different—the booby got held naked over a three-legged stool and a couple of men used to go at him with knee-straps! That was leather on leather, and like that they learned, damn and blast it all! how to put up with sitting on a stool!”

The journeyman made a sign.

“Now, is the seat of the stool ready consecrated, and prayed over? Yes, then you can go over there and sit down.”

Pelle went stupidly across the room and sat down—it was all the same to him. But he leaped into the air with a yell of pain, looked malevolently about him, and in a moment he had a hammer in his hand. But he dropped it again, and now he cried—wept buckets of tears.

“What the devil are you doing to him now?”

The young master came out of the cutting-out room. “What dirty tricks are you hatching now?” He ran his hand over the seat of the stool; it was studded with broken awl-points. “You are barbarous devils; any one would think he was among a lot of savages!”

“What a weakling!” sneered Jeppe. “In these days a man can’t take a boy as apprentice and inoculate him a bit against boils! One ought to anoint the boobies back and front with honey, perhaps, like the kings of Israel? But you are a freethinker!”

“You get out of this, father!” shouted Master Andres, quite beside himself. “You get out of this, father!” He trembled, and his face was quite gray. And then he pushed the old man out of the room before he had struck Pelle on the shoulder and received him properly into the handicraft.

Pelle sat there and reflected. He was altogether disillusioned. All the covert allusions had evoked something terrifying, but at the same time impressive. In his imagination the ordeal had grown into something that constituted the great barrier of his life, so that one passed over to the other side as quite a different being; it was something after the fashion of the mysterious circumcision in the Bible, a consecration to new things. And now the whole thing was just a spitefully devised torture!

The young master threw him a pair of children's shoes, which had to be soled. So he was admitted to that department, and need no longer submit to preparing waxed-ends for the others! But the fact did not give him any pleasure. He sat there struggling with something irrational that seemed to keep on rising deep within him; when no one was looking he licked his fingers and drew them over his neck. He seemed to himself like a half-stupefied cat which had freed itself from the snare and sat there drying its fur.

Out of doors, under the apple-trees, the sunlight lay green and golden, and a long way off, in the skipper's garden, three brightly dressed girls were walking and playing; they seemed to Pelle like beings out of another world. "Fortune's children on the sunbright shore," as the song had it. From time to time a rat made its appearance behind the pigsty, and went clattering over the great heap of broken glass that lay there. The pig stood there gobbling down its spoiled potatoes with that despairing noise that put an end to all Pelle's proud dreams of the future, while it filled him with longing—oh, such a mad longing!

And everything that possibly could do so made its assault upon him at this moment when he was feeling particularly victorious; the miseries of his probation here in the workshop, the street urchins, the apprentices, who would not accept him as one of themselves, and all the sharp edges and corners which he was continually running up against in this unfamiliar world. And then the smelly workshop itself, where never a ray of sunlight entered. And no one here seemed to respect anything.

When the master was not present, little Nikas would sometimes indulge in tittle-tattle with the older apprentices. Remarks were made at such times which opened new spheres of thought to Pelle, and he had to ask questions; or they would talk of the country, which Pelle knew better than all of them put together, and he would chime in with some correction. *Smack!* came a box on his ears that would send him rolling into the corner; he was to hold his tongue until he was spoken to. But Pelle, who was all eyes and ears, and had been accustomed to discuss everything in heaven or earth with Father Lasse, could not learn to hold his tongue.

Each exacted with a strong hand his quantum of respect, from the apprentices to the old master, who was nearly bursting with professional pride in his handicraft; only Pelle had no claim to any respect whatever, but must pay tribute to all. The young master was the only one who did not press like a yoke on the youngster's neck. Easygoing as he was, he would disregard the journeyman and the rest, and at times he would plump himself down beside Pelle, who sat there feeling dreadfully small.

Outside, when the sun was shining through the trees in a particular way, and a peculiar note came into the twittering of the birds, Pelle knew it was about the time when the cows began to get on their feet after their midday chewing of the cud. And then a youngster would come out from among the little fir-trees, lustily cracking his whip; he was the general of the whole lot—Pelle, the youngster—who had no one set over him. And the figure that came stumbling across the arable yonder, in order to drive the cows home—why, that was Lasse!

Father Lasse!

He did not know why, but it wrung a sob from him; it took him so unawares. "Hold your row!" cried the journeyman threateningly. Pelle was greatly concerned; he had not once made the attempt to go over and see Lasse.

The young master came to get something off the shelf above his head, and leaned confidentially on Pelle's shoulder, his weak leg hanging free and dangling. He stood there loitering for a time, staring at the sky outside, and this warm hand on Pelle's shoulder quieted him.

But there could be no talk of enjoyment when he thought where good Father Lasse was. He had not seen his father since that sunny morning when he himself had gone away and left the old man to his loneliness. He had not heard of him; he had scarcely given a thought to him. He had to get through the day with a whole skin, and to adapt himself to the new life; a whole new world was before him, in which he had to find his feet. Pelle had simply had no time; the town had swallowed him.

But at this moment his conduct confronted him as the worst example of unfaithfulness the world had ever known. And his neck continued to hurt him—he must go somewhere or other where no one would look at him. He made a pretence of having to do something in the yard outside; he went behind the washhouse, and he crouched down by the woodpile beside the well.

There he lay, shrinking into himself, in the blackest despair at having left Father Lasse so shamelessly in the lurch, just for the sake of all these new strange surroundings. Yes, and then, when they used to work together, he had been neither as good nor as heedful as he should have been. It was really Lasse who, old as he was, had sacrificed himself for Pelle, in order to lighten his work and take the worst of the burden off him, although Pelle had the younger shoulders. And he had been a little hard at times, as over that business between his father and Madame Olsen; and he had not always been very patient with his good-humored elderly tittle-tattle, although if he could hear it now he would give his life to listen. He could remember only too plainly occasions when he had snapped at Lasse, so unkindly that Lasse had given a sigh and made off; for Lasse never snapped back—he was only silent and very sad.

But how dreadful that was! Pelle threw all his high-and-mighty airs to the winds and gave himself up to despair. What was he doing here, with Father Lasse wandering among strangers, and perhaps unable to find shelter? There was nothing with which he could console himself, no evasion or excuse was possible; Pelle howled at the thought of his faithlessness. And as he lay there despairing, worrying over the whole business and crying himself into a state of exhaustion, quite a manful resolve began to form within him; he must give up everything of his own —the future, and the great world, and all, and devote his days to making the old man's life happy. He must go back to Stone Farm! He forgot that he was only a child who could just earn his own keep. To protect the infirm old man at every point and make his life easy—that was just what he wanted. And Pelle was by no means disposed to doubt that he could do it. In the midst of his childish collapse he took upon himself all the duties of a strong man.

As he lay there, woe-begone, playing with a couple of bits of firewood, the elder-boughs behind the well parted, and a pair of big eyes stared at him wonderingly. It was only Manna.

"Did they beat you—or why are you crying?" she asked earnestly.

Pelle turned his face away.

Manna shook her hair back and looked at him fixedly. "Did they beat you? What? If they did, I shall go in and scold them hard!"

"What is it to you?"

"People who don't answer aren't well-behaved."

"Oh, hold your row!"

Then he was left in peace; over at the back of the garden Manna and her two younger sisters were scrambling about the trellis, hanging on it and gazing steadfastly across the yard at him. But that was nothing to him; he wanted to know nothing about them; he didn't want petticoats to pity him or intercede for him. They were saucy jades, even if their father had sailed on the wide ocean and earned a lot of money. If he had them here they would get the stick from him! Now he must content himself with putting out his tongue at them.

He heard their horrified outcry—but what then? He didn't want to go scrambling about with them any more, or to play with the great conch-shells and lumps of coral in their garden! He would go back to the land and look after his old father! Afterward, when that was done, he would go out into the world himself, and bring such things home with him—whole shiploads of them!

They were calling him from the workshop window. "Where in the world has that little blighter got to?" he heard them say. He started, shrinking; he had quite forgotten that he was serving his apprenticeship. He got on his feet and ran quickly indoors.

Pelle had soon tidied up after leaving off work. The others had run out in search of amusement; he was alone upstairs in the garret. He put his worldly possessions into his sack. There was a whole collection of wonderful things—tin steamboats, railway-trains, and horses that were hollow inside—as much of the irresistible wonders of the town as he had been able to obtain for five white krone pieces. They went in among the washing, so that they should not get damaged, and then he threw the bag out of the gable-window into the little alley. Now the question was how he himself should slip through the kitchen without arousing the suspicions of Jeppe's old woman; she had eyes like a witch, and Pelle had a feeling that every one who saw him would know what he was about.

But he went. He controlled himself, and sauntered along, so that the people should think he was taking washing to the laundrywoman; but he could only keep it up as far as the first turning; then he started off as fast as he could go. He was homesick. A few street-boys yelled and threw stones after him, but that didn't matter, so long as he only got away; he was insensible to everything but the remorse and homesickness that filled his heart.

It was past midnight when he at last reached the outbuildings of Stone Farm. He was breathless, and had a stitch in his side. He leaned against the ruined forge, and closed his eyes, the better to recover himself. As soon as he had recovered his breath, he entered the cowshed from the back and made for the herdsman's room. The floor of the cowshed felt familiar to his feet, and now he came in the darkness to the place where the big bull lay. He breathed in the scent of the creature's body and blew it out again—ah, didn't he remember it! But the scent of the cowherd's room was strange to him. "Father Lasse is neglecting himself," he thought, and he pulled the feather-bed from under the sleeper's head. A strange voice began to upbraid him. "Then isn't this Lasse?" said Pelle. His knees were shaking under him.

"Lasse?" cried the new cowherd, as he sat upright. "Do you say Lasse? Have you come to fetch that child of God, Mr. Devil? They've been here already from Hell and taken him with them—in the living body they've taken him there with them—he was too good for this world, d'ye see? Old Satan was here himself in the form of a woman and took him away. You'd better go there and look for him. Go straight on till you come to the devil's great-grandmother, and then you've only got to ask your way to the hairy one."

Pelle stood for a while in the yard below and considered. So Father Lasse had gone away! And wanted to marry, or was perhaps already married. And to Karna, of course. He stood bolt-upright, sunk in intimate memories. The great farm lay hushed in moonlight, in deepest slumber, and all about him rose memories from their sleep, speaking to him caressingly, with a voice like that contented purring, remembered from childhood, when the little kittens used to sleep upon his pillow, and he would lay his cheek against their soft, quivering bodies.

Pelle's memory had deep roots. Once, at Uncle Kalle's, he had laid himself in the big twins' cradle and had let the other children rock him—he was then fully nine years old—and as they rocked him a while the surroundings began to take hold of him, and he saw a smoky, raftered ceiling, which did not belong to Kalle's house, swaying high over his head, and he had a feeling that a muffled-up old woman, wrapped in a shawl, sat like a shadow at the head of the cradle, and rocked it with her foot. The cradle jolted with the over-vigorous rocking, and every time the rocking foot slipped from the footboard it struck on the floor with the sound of a sprung wooden shoe. Pelle jumped up—"she bumped so," he said, bewildered. "What? No, you certainly dreamed that!" Kalle looked, smiling, under the rockers. "Bumped!" said Lasse. "That ought to suit you first-rate! At one time, when you were little, you couldn't sleep if the cradle didn't bump, so we had to make the rockers all uneven. It was almost impossible to rock it. Bengta cracked many a good wooden shoe in trying to give you your fancy."

The farmyard here was like a great cradle, which swayed and swayed in the uncertain moonlight, and now that Pelle had once quite surrendered himself to the past, there was no end to the memories of childhood that rose within him. His whole existence passed before him, swaying above his head as before, and the earth itself seemed like a dark speck in the abysm of space.

And then the crying broke out from the house—big with destiny, to be heard all over the place, so that Kongstrup slunk away shamefaced, and the other grew angry and ungovernable. … And Lasse … yes, where was Father Lasse?

With one leap, Pelle was in the brew-house, knocking on the door of the maid's room.

"Is that you, Anders?" whispered a voice from within, and then the door opened, and a pair of arms fastened themselves about him and drew him in. Pelle felt about him, and his hands sank into a naked bosom —why, it was yellow-haired Marie!

"Is Karna still here?" he asked. "Can't I speak to Karna a moment?"

They were glad to see him again; and yellow-haired Marie patted his cheeks quite affectionately, and just before that she kissed him too. Karna could scarcely recover from her surprise; he had acquired such a townsman's air. "And now you are a shoemaker too, in the biggest workshop in the town! Yes, we've heard; Butcher Jensen heard about it on the market. And you have grown tall and townified. You do hold yourself well!" Karna was dressing herself.

"Where is Father Lasse?" said Pelle; he had a lump in his throat only from speaking of him.

"Give me time, and I'll come out with you. How fine you dress now! I should hardly have known you. Would you, Marie?"

"He's a darling boy—he always was," said Marie, and she pushed at him with her arched foot—she was now in bed again.

"It's the same suit as I always had," said Pelle.

"Yes, yes; but then you held yourself different—there in town they all look like lords. Well, shall we go?"

Pelle said good-by to Marie affectionately; it occurred to him that he had much to thank her for. She looked at him in a very odd way, and tried to draw his hand under the coverlet.

"What's the matter with father?" said Pelle impatiently, as soon as they were outside.

Well, Lasse had taken to his heels too! He couldn't stand it when Pelle had gone. And the work was too heavy for one. Where he was just at the moment Karna could not say. "He's now here, now there, considering farms and houses," she said proudly. "Some fine day he'll be able to take you in on his visit to town."

"And how are things going here?" inquired Pelle.

"Well, Erik has got his speech back and is beginning to be a man again—he can make himself understood. And Kongstrup and his wife, they drink one against the other."

"They drink together, do they, like the wooden shoemaker and his old woman?"

"Yes, and so much that they often lie in the room upstairs soaking, and can't see one another for the drink, they're that foggy. Everything goes crooked here, as you may suppose, with no master. 'Masterless, defenceless,' as the old proverb says. But what can you say about it—they haven't anything else in common! But it's all the same to me—as soon as Lasse finds something I'm off!"

Pelle could well believe that, and had nothing to say against it. Karna looked at him from head to foot in surprise as they walked on. "They feed you devilish well in the town there, don't they?"

"Yes—vinegary soup and rotten greaves. We were much better fed here."

She would not believe it—it sounded too foolish. "But where are all the things they have in the shop windows—all the meats and cakes and sweet things? What becomes of all them?"

"That I don't know," said Pelle grumpily; he himself had racked his brains over this very question. "I get all I can eat, but washing and clothes I have to see to myself."

Karna could scarcely conceal her amazement; she had supposed that Pelle had been, so to speak, caught up to Heaven while yet living. "But how do you manage?" she said anxiously. "You must find that difficult. Yes, yes, directly we set out feet under our own table we'll help you all we can."

They parted up on the high-road, and Pelle, tired and defeated, set out on his way back. It was broad daylight when he got back, and he crawled into bed without any one noticing anything of his attempted flight.

III

Little Nikas had washed the blacking from his face and had put on his best clothes; he wanted to go to the market with a bundle of washing, which the butcher from Aaker was to take home to his mother, and Pelle walked behind him, carrying the bundle. Little Nikas saluted many friendly maidservants in the houses of the neighborhood, and Pelle found it more amusing to walk beside him than to follow; two people who are together ought to walk abreast. But every time he walked beside the journeyman the latter pushed him into the gutter, and finally Pelle fell over a curbstone; then he gave it up.

Up the street the crazy watchmaker was standing on the edge of his high steps, swinging a weight; it was attached to the end of a long cord, and he followed the swinging of the pendulum with his fingers, as though he were timing the beats. This was very interesting, and Pelle feared it would escape the journeyman.

“The watchmaker’s making an experiment,” he said cheerfully.

“Stop your jaw!” said the journeyman sharply. Then it occurred to Pelle that he was not allowed to speak, so he closed his mouth tight.

He felt the bundle, in order to picture to himself what the contents were like. His eyes swept all the windows and the side streets, and every moment he carried his free hand to his mouth, as though he were yawning, and introduced a crumb of black bread, which he had picked up in the kitchen. His braces were broken, so he had continually to puff out his belly; there were hundreds of things to look at, and the coal-merchant’s dog to be kicked while, in all good faith, he snuffed at a curbstone.

A funeral procession came toward them, and the journeyman passed it with his head bared, so Pelle did the same. Eight at the back of the procession came Tailor Bjerregrav with his crutch; he always followed every funeral, and always walked light at the back because his method of progression called for plenty of room. He would stand still and look on the ground until the last of the other followers had gone a few steps in advance, then he would set his crutch in front of him, swing himself forward for a space, and then stand still again. Then he would swing forward again on his lame legs, and again stand still and watch the others, and again take a few paces, looking like a slowly wandering pair of compasses which was tracing the path followed by the procession.

But the funniest thing was that the tailor had forgotten to button up the flap of his black mourning-breeches, so that it hung over his knees like an apron. Pelle was not quite sure that the journeyman had noticed this.

“Bjerregrav has forgotten—”

“Hold your jaw.” Little Nikas made a movement backward, and Pelle ducked his head and pressed his hand tightly to his mouth.

Over in Staal Street there was a great uproar; an enormously fat woman was standing there quarrelling with two seamen. She was in her nightcap and petticoat, and Pelle knew her.

“That’s the Sow!” he began. “She’s a dreadful woman; up at Stone Farm——”

Smack! Little Nikas gave him such a box on the ear that he had to sit down on the woodcarver’s steps. “One, two, three, four— that’s it; now come on!” He counted ten steps forward and set off again. “But God help you if you don’t keep your distance!”

Pelle kept his distance religiously, but he instantly discovered that little Nikas, like old Jeppe, had too large a posterior. That certainly came of sitting too much—and it twisted one’s loins. He protruded his own buttocks as far as he could, smoothed down a crease in his jacket over his hips, raised himself elegantly upon the balls of his feet and marched proudly forward, one hand thrust into the breast of his coat. If the journeyman scratched himself, Pelle did the same—and he swayed his body in the same buoyant manner; his cheeks were burning, but he was highly pleased with himself.

Directly he was his own master he went the round of the country butchers, questioning them, in the hope of hearing some news of Lasse, but no one could tell him anything. He went from cart to cart, asking his questions. “Lasse Karlson?” said one. “Ah, he was cowherd up at Stone Farm!” Then he called to another, asking him about Lasse —the old cowherd at Stone Farm—and he again called to a third, and they all gathered about the carts, in order to talk the matter over. There were men here who travelled all over the island[1] in order to buy cattle; they knew everything and everybody, but they could tell him nothing of Lasse. "Then he's not in the island," said one, very decidedly. "You must get another father, my lad!"

[1] Bornholm

Pelle did not feel inclined for chaff, so he slipped away. Besides, he must go back and get to work; the young master, who was busily going from cart to cart, ordering meat, had called to him. They hung together like the halves of a pea-pod when it was a question of keeping the apprentices on the curb, although otherwise they were jealous enough of one another.

Bjerregrav's crutch stood behind the door, and he himself sat in stiff funereal state by the window; he held a folded white handkerchief in his folded hands, and was diligently mopping his eyes.

"Was he perhaps a relation of yours?" said the young master slyly.

"No; but it is so sad for those who are left—a wife and children. There is always some one to mourn and regret the dead. Man's life is a strange thing, Andres."

"Ah, and potatoes are bad this year, Bjerregrav!"

Neighbor Jörgen filled up the whole doorway. "Lord, here we have that blessed Bjerregrav!" he shouted; "and in state, too! What's on to-day then—going courting, are you?"

"I've been following!" answered Bjerregrav, in a hushed voice.

The big baker made an involuntary movement; he did not like being unexpectedly reminded of death. "You, Bjerregrav, you ought to be a hearse-driver; then at least you wouldn't work to no purpose!"

"It isn't to no purpose when they are dead," stammered Bjerregrav. "I am not so poor that I need much, and there is no one who stands near to me. No living person loses anything because I follow those who die. And then I know them all, and I've followed them all in thought since they were born," he added apologetically.

"If only you got invited to the funeral feast and got something of all the good things they have to eat," continued the baker, "I could understand it better."

"The poor widow, who sits there with her four little ones and doesn't know how she's to feed them—to take food from her—no, I couldn't do it! She's had to borrow three hundred kroner so that her man could have a respectable funeral party."

"That ought to be forbidden by law," said Master Andres; "any one with little children hasn't the right to throw away money on the dead."

"She is giving her husband the last honors," said Jeppe reprovingly. "That is the duty of every good wife."

"Of course," rejoined Master Andres. "God knows, something must be done. It's like the performances on the other side of the earth, where the widow throws herself on the funeral pyre when the husband dies, and has to be burned to death."

Baker Jörgen scratched his thighs and grimaced. "You are trying to get us to swallow one of your stinking lies, Andres. You'd never get a woman to do that, if I know anything of womankind."

But Bjerregrav knew that the shoemaker was not lying, and fluttered his thin hands in the air, as though he were trying to keep something invisible from touching his body. "God be thanked that we came into the world on this island here," he said, in a low voice. "Here only ordinary things happen, however wrongheaded they may be."

"What puzzles me is where she got all that money!" said the baker.

"She's borrowed it, of course," said Bjerregrav, in a tone of voice that made it clear that he wanted to terminate the conversation.

Jeppe retorted contemptuously, "Who's going to lend a poor mate's widow three hundred kroner? He might as well throw it into the sea right away."

But Baker Jörgen gave Bjerregrav a great smack on the back. "You've given her the money, it's you has done it; nobody else would he such a silly sheep!" he said threateningly.

"You let me be!" stammered Bjerregrav. "I've done nothing to you! And she has had one happy day in the midst of all her sorrow." His hands were trembling.

"You're a goat!" said Jeppe shortly.

"What is Bjerregrav really thinking about when he stands like this looking down into the grave?" asked the young master, in order to divert the conversation.

"I am thinking: Now you are lying there, where you are better off than here," said the old tailor simply.

"Yes, because Bjerregrav follows only poor people," said Jeppe, rather contemptuously.

"I can't help it, but I'm always thinking," continued Master Andres; "just supposing it were all a take-in! Suppose he follows them and enjoys the whole thing—and then there's nothing! That's why I never like to see a funeral."

"Ah, you see, that's the question—supposing there's nothing." Baker Jörgen turned his thick body. "Here we go about imagining a whole lot of things; but what if it's all just lies?"

"That's the mind of an unbeliever!" said Jeppe, and stamped violently on the floor.

"God preserve my mind from unbelief!" retorted brother Jörgen, and he stroked his face gravely. "But a man can't very well help thinking. And what does a man see round about him? Sickness and death and halleluiah! We live, and we live, I tell you, Brother Jeppe—and we live in order to live! But, good heavens! all the poor things that aren't born yet!"

He sank into thought again, as was usual with him when he thought of Little Jörgen, who refused to come into the world and assume his name and likeness, and carry on after him.... There lay his belief; there was nothing to be done about it. And the others began to speak in hushed voices, in order not to disturb his memories.

Pelle, who concerned himself with everything in heaven and earth, had been absorbing every word that was spoken with his protruding ears, but when the conversation turned upon death he yawned. He himself had never been seriously ill, and since Mother Bengta died, death had never encroached upon his world. And that was lucky for him, as it would have been a case of all or nothing, for he had only Father Lasse. For Pelle the cruel hands of death hardly existed, and he could not understand how people could lay themselves down with their noses in the air; there was so much to observe here below—the town alone kept one busy.

On the very first evening he had run out to look for the other boys, just where the crowd was thickest. There was no use in waiting; Pelle was accustomed to take the bull by the horns, and he longed to be taken into favor.

"What sort of brat is that?" they said, flocking round him.

"I'm Pelle," he said, standing confidently in the midst of the group, and looking at them all. "I have been at Stone Farm since I was eight, and that is the biggest farm in the north country." He had put his hands in his pockets, and spat coolly in front of him, for that was nothing to what he had in reserve.

"Oh, so you're a farmer chap, then!" said one, and the others laughed. Rud was among them.

"Yes," said Pelle; "and I've done a bit of ploughing, and mowing fodder for the calves."

They winked at one another. "Are you really a farmer chap?"

"Yes, truly," replied Pelle, perplexed; they had spoken the word in a tone which he now remarked.

They all burst out laughing: "He confesses it himself. And he comes from the biggest farm in the country. Then he's the biggest farmer in the country!"

"No, the farmer was called Kongstrup," said Pelle emphatically. "I was only the herd-boy."

They roared with laughter. "He doesn't see it now! Why, Lord, that's the biggest farmer's lout!"

Pelle had not yet lost his head, for he had heavier ammunition, and now he was about to play a trump. "And there at the farm there was a man called Erik, who was so strong that he could thrash three men, but the bailiff was stronger still; and he gave Erik such a blow that he lost his senses."

"Oh, indeed! How did he manage that? Can you hit a farmer chap so that he loses his senses? Who was it hit you like that?" The questions rained upon him.

Pelle pushed the boy who had asked the last question, and fixed his eyes upon his. But the rascal let fly at him again. "Take care of your best clothes," he said, laughing. "Don't crumple your cuffs!"

Pelle had put on a clean blue shirt, of which the neckband and wristbands had to serve as collar and cuffs. He knew well enough that he was clean and neat, and now they were being smart at his expense on that very account.

"And what sort of a pair of Elbe barges has he got on? Good Lord! Why, they'd fill half the harbor!" This was in reference to Kongstrup's shoes. Pelle had debated with himself as to whether he should wear them on a week-day. "When did you celebrate hiring-day?" asked a third. This was in reference to his fat red cheeks.

Now he was ready to jump out of his skin, and cast his eyes around to see if there was nothing with which he could lay about him, for this would infallibly end in an attack upon the whole party. Pelle already had them all against him.

But just then a long, thin lad came forward. "Have you a pretty sister?" he asked.

"I have no sisters at all," answered Pelle shortly.

"That's a shame. Well, can you play hide-and-seek?"

Of course Pelle could!

"Well, then, play!" The thin boy pushed Pelle's cap over his eyes, and turned him with his face against the plank fence. "Count to a hundred—and no cheating, I tell you!"

No, Pelle would not cheat—he would neither look nor count short— so much depended on this beginning. But he solemnly promised himself to use his legs to some purpose; they should all be caught, one after another! He finished his counting and took his cap from his eyes. No one was to be seen. "Say 'peep'!" he cried; but no one answered. For half an hour Pelle searched among timbers and warehouses, and at last he slipped away home and to bed. But he dreamed, that night, that he caught them all, and they elected him as their leader for all future time.

The town did not meet him with open arms, into which he could fall, with his childlike confidence, and be carried up the ladder. Here, apparently, one did not talk about the heroic deeds which elsewhere gave a man foothold; here such things merely aroused scornful laughter. He tried it again and again, always with something new, but the answer was always the same—"Farmer!" His whole little person was overflowing with good-will, and he became deplorably dejected.

Pelle soon perceived that his whole store of ammunition was crumbling between his hands, and any respect he had won at home, on the farm or in the village, by his courage and good nature, went for nothing here. Here other qualities counted; there was a different jargon, the clothes were different, and people went about things in a different way. Everything he had valued was turned to ridicule, even down to his pretty cap with its ear-flaps and its ribbon adorned with representations of harvest implements. He had come to town so calmly confident in himself—to make the painful discovery that he was a laughable object! Every time he tried to make one of a party, he was pushed to one side; he had no right to speak to others; he must take the hindmost rank!

Nothing remained to him but to sound the retreat all along the line until he had reached the lowest place of all. And hard as this was for a smart youngster who was burning to set his mark on everything, Pelle did it, and confidently prepared to scramble up again. However sore his defeat, he always retained an obstinate feeling of his own worth, which no one could take away from him. He was persuaded that the trouble lay not with himself but with all sorts of things about him, and he set himself restlessly to find out the new values and to conduct a war of elimination against himself. After every defeat he took himself unweariedly to task, and the next evening he would go forth once more, enriched by so many experiences, and would suffer defeat at a new point. He wanted to conquer—but what must he not sacrifice first? He knew of nothing more splendid than to march resoundingly through the streets, his legs thrust into Lasse's old boots—this was the essence of manliness. But he was man enough to abstain from so doing—for here such conduct would be regarded as boorish. It was harder for him to suppress his past; it was so inseparable from Father Lasse that he was obsessed by a sense of unfaithfulness. But there was no alternative; if he wanted to get on he must adapt himself in everything, in prejudices and opinions alike. But he promised himself to flout the lot of them so soon as he felt sufficiently high-spirited.

What distressed him most was the fact that his handicraft was so little regarded. However accomplished he might become, the cobbler was, and remained, a poor creature with a pitchy snout and a big behind! Personal performance counted for nothing; it was obvious that he must as soon as possible escape into some other walk of life.

But at least he was in the town, and as one of its inhabitants— there was no getting over that. And the town seemed still as great and as splendid, although it had lost the look of enchantment it once had, when Lasse and he had passed through it on their way to the country. Most of the people wore their Sunday clothes, and many sat still and earned lots of money, but no one knew how. All roads came hither, and the town swallowed everything: pigs and corn and men—everything sooner or later found its harbor here! The Sow lived here with Rud, who was now apprenticed to a painter, and the twins were here! And one day Pelle saw a tall boy leaning against a door and bellowing at the top of his voice, his arms over his face, while a couple of smaller boys were thrashing him; it was Howling Peter, who was cook’s boy on a vessel. Everything flowed into the town!

But Father Lasse—he was not here!

IV

There was something about the town that made it hard to go to bed and hard to get up. In the town there was no sunrise shining over the earth and waking everybody. The open face of morning could not be seen indoors. And the dying day poured no evening weariness into one's limbs, driving them to repose; life seemed here to flow in the reverse direction, for here people grew lively at night!

About half-past six in the morning the master, who slept downstairs, would strike the ceiling with his stick. Pelle, whose business it was to reply, would mechanically sit up and strike the side of the bedstead with his clenched fist. Then, still sleeping, he would fall back again. After a while the process was repeated. But then the master grew impatient. "Devil take it! aren't you going to get up to-day?" he would bellow. "Is this to end in my bringing you your coffee in bed?" Drunken with sleep, Pelle would tumble out of bed. "Get up, get up!" he would cry, shaking the others. Jens got nimbly on his feet; he always awoke with a cry of terror, guarding his head; but Emil and Peter, who were in the hobbledehoy stage, were terribly difficult to wake.

Pelle would hasten downstairs, and begin to set everything in order, filling the soaking-tub and laying a sand-heap by the window-bench for the master to spit into. He bothered no further about the others; he was in a morning temper himself. On the days when he had to settle right away into the cobbler's hunch, without first running a few early errands or doing a few odd tasks, it took hours to thaw him.

He used to look round to see whether on the preceding evening he had made a chalk-mark in any conspicuous place; for then there must be something that he had to remember. Memory was not his strong point, hence this ingenious device. Then it was only a matter of not forgetting what the mark stood for; if he forgot, he was no better off than before.

When the workshop was tidy, he would hurry downstairs and run out for Madame, to fetch morning rolls "for themselves." He himself was given a wheaten biscuit with his coffee, which he drank out in the kitchen, while the old woman went grumbling to and fro. She was dry as a mummy and moved about bent double, and when she was not using her hands she carried one forearm pressed against her midriff. She was discontented with everything, and was always talking of the grave. "My two eldest are overseas, in America and Australia; I shall never see them again. And here at home two menfolk go strutting about doing nothing and expecting to be waited on. Andres, poor fellow, isn't strong, and Jeppe's no use any longer; he can't even keep himself warm in bed nowadays. But they know how to ask for things, that they do, and they let me go running all over the place without any help; I have to do everything myself. I shall truly thank God when at last I lie in my grave. What are you standing there for with your mouth and your eyes wide open? Get away with you!" Thereupon Pelle would finish his coffee—it was sweetened with brown sugar—out of doors, by the workshop window.

In the mornings, before the master appeared, there was no great eagerness to work; they were all sleepy still, looking forward to a long, dreary day. The journeyman did not encourage them to work; he had a difficulty in finding enough for himself. So they sat there wool-gathering, striking a few blows with the hammer now and then for appearance's sake, and one or another would fall asleep again over the table. They all started when three blows were struck on the wall as a signal for Pelle.

"What are you doing? It seems to me you are very idle in there!" the master would say, staring suspiciously at Pelle. But Pelle had remarked what work each was supposed to have in hand, and would run over it all. "What day's this—Thursday? Damnation take it! Tell that Jens he's to put aside Manna's uppers and begin on the pilot's boots this moment—they were promised for last Monday." The master would struggle miserably to get his breath: "Ah, I've had a bad night, Pelle, a horrible night; I was so hot, with such a ringing in my ears. New blood is so devilishly unruly; it's all the time boiling in my head like soda-water. But it's a good thing I'm making it, God knows; I used to be so soon done up. Do you believe in Hell? Heaven, now, that's sheer nonsense; what happiness can we expect elsewhere if we can't be properly happy here? But do you believe in Hell? I dreamed I'd spat up the last bit of my lungs and that I went to Hell. 'What the devil d'you want here, Andres?' they asked me; 'your heart is still whole!' And they wouldn't have me. But what does that signify? I can't breathe with my heart, so I'm dying. And what becomes of me then? Will you tell me that?

"There's something that bids a man enter again into his mother's womb; now if only a man could do that, and come into the world again with two sound legs, you'd see me disappear oversea double-quick, whoop! I wouldn't stay messing about here any longer.… Well, have you seen your navel yet to-day? Yes, you ragamuffin, you laugh; but I'm in earnest. It would pay you well if you always began the day by contemplating your navel."

The master was half serious, half jesting. "Well, now, you can fetch me my port wine; it's on the shelf, behind the box with the laces in it. I'm deadly cold."

Pelle came back and announced that the bottle was empty. The master looked at him mildly.

"Then run along and get me another. I've no money—you must say—well, think it out for yourself; you've got a head." The master looked at him with an expression which went to Pelle's heart, so that he often felt like bursting into tears. Hitherto Pelle's life had been spent on the straight highway; he did not understand this combination of wit and misery, roguishness and deadly affliction. But he felt something of the presence of the good God, and trembled inwardly; he would have died for the young master.

When the weather was wet it was difficult for the sick man to get about; the cold pulled him down. If he came into the workshop, freshly washed and with his hair still wet, he would go over to the cold stove, and stand there, stamping his feet. His cheeks had quite fallen in. "I've so little blood for the moment," he said at such times, "but the new blood is on the way; it sings in my ears every night." Then he would be silent a while. "There, by my soul, we've got a piece of lung again," he said, and showed Pelle, who stood at the stove brushing shoes, a gelatinous lump. "But they grow again afterward!"

"The master will soon be in his thirtieth year," said the journeyman; "then the dangerous time is over."

"Yes, deuce take it—if only I can hang together so long—only another six months," said the master eagerly, and he looked at Pelle, as though Pelle had it in his power to help him; "only another six months! Then the whole body renews itself—new lungs—everything new. But new legs, God knows, I shall never get."

A peculiar, secret understanding grew up between Pelle and the master; it did not manifest itself in words, but in glances, in tones of the voice, and in the whole conduct of each. When Pelle stood behind him, it was as though even the master's leather jacket emitted a feeling of warmth, and Pelle followed him with his eyes whenever and wherever he could, and the master's behavior to Pelle was different from his behavior to the others.

When, on his return from running errands in the town, he came to the corner, he was delighted to see the young master standing in the doorway, tightly grasping his stick, with his lame leg in an easy position. He stood there, sweeping his eyes from side to side, gazing longingly into the distance. This was his place when he was not indoors, sitting over some book of adventure. But Pelle liked him to stand there, and as he slipped past he would hang his head shyly, for it often happened that the master would clutch his shoulder, so hard that it hurt, and shake him to and fro, and would say affectionately: "Oh, you limb of Satan!" This was the only endearment that life had vouchsafed Pelle, and he sunned himself in it.

Pelle could not understand the master, nor did he understand his sighs and groans. The master never went out, save as an exception, when he was feeling well; then he would hobble across to the beerhouse and make up a party, but as a rule his travels ended at the house door. There he would stand, looking about him a little, and then he would hobble indoors again, with that infectious good humor which transformed the dark workshop into a grove full of the twittering of birds. He had never been abroad, and he felt no craving to go; but in spite of this his mind and his speech roamed over the whole wide world, so that Pelle at times felt like falling sick from sheer longing. He demanded nothing more than health of the future, and adventures hovered all about him; one received the impression that happiness itself had fluttered to earth and settled upon him. Pelle idolized him, but did not understand him. The master, who at one moment would make sport of his lame leg and the next moment forget that he had one, or jest about his poverty as though he were flinging good gold pieces about him—this was a man Pelle could not fathom. He was no wiser when he secretly looked into the books which Master Andres read so breathlessly; he would have been content with a much more modest adventure than a journey to the North Pole or the center of the earth, if only he himself could have been of the party.

He had no opportunity to sit still and indulge in fancies. Every moment it was, “Pelle, run and do something or other!” Everything was purchased in small quantities, although it was obtained on credit. “Then it doesn’t run up so,” Jeppe used to say; it was all the same to Master Andres. The foreman’s young woman came running in; she absolutely must have her young lady’s shoes; they were promised for Monday. The master had quite forgotten them. “They are in hand now,” he said, undaunted. “To the devil with you, Jens!” And Jens had hastily thrust a pair of lasts into the shoes, while Master Andres went outside with the girl, and joked with her on the landing, in order to smooth her down. “Just a few nails, so that they’ll hang together,” said the master to Jens. And then, “Pelle, out you go, as quick as your legs will carry you! Say we’ll send for them early to-morrow morning and finish them properly! But run as though the devil were at your heels!”

Pelle ran, and when he returned, just as he was slipping into his leather apron, he had to go out again. “Pelle, run out and borrow a few brass nails—then we needn’t buy any to-day. Go to Klausen—no, go to Blom, rather; you’ve been to Klausen already this morning.”

“Blom’s are angry about the screw-block!” said Pelle.

“Death and all the devils! We must see about putting it in repair and returning it; remember that, and take it with you to the smith’s. Well, what in the world shall we do?” The young master stared helplessly from one to another.

“Shoemaker Marker,” suggested little Nikas.

“We don’t borrow from Marker,” and the master wrinkled his forehead. “Marker’s a louse!” Marker had succeeded in stealing one of the oldest customers of the workshop.

“There isn’t salt to eat an egg!”

“Well, what *shall* I do?” asked Pelle, somewhat impatiently.

The master sat for a while in silence. “Well, take it, then!” he cried, and threw a krone toward Pelle; “I have no peace from you so long as I’ve got a farthing in my pocket, you demon! Buy a packet and pay back Klausen and Blom what we’ve borrowed.”

“But then they’d see we’ve got a whole packet,” said Pelle.

“Besides, they owe us lots of other things that they’ve borrowed of us.” Pelle showed circumspection in his dealings.

“What a rogue!” said the master, and he settled himself to read. “Lord above us, what a gallows-bird!” He looked extremely contented.

And after a time it was once more, “Pelle, run out, etc.”

The day was largely passed in running errands, and Pelle was not one to curtail them; he had no liking for the smelly workshop and its wooden chairs. There was so much to be fetched and carried, and Pelle considered these errands to be his especial duty; when he had nothing else to do he roved about like a young puppy, and thrust his nose into everything. Already the town had no more secrets from him.

There was in Pelle an honorable streak which subdued the whole. But hitherto he had suffered only defeat; he had again and again sacrificed his qualities and accomplishments, without so far receiving anything in return. His timidity and distrust he had stripped from him indoors, where it was of importance that he should open his defences on all sides, and his solid qualities he was on the point of sacrificing on the altar of the town as boorish. But the less protection he possessed the more he gained in intrepidity, so he went about out-of-doors undauntedly—the town should be conquered. He was enticed out of the safe refuge of his shell, and might easily be gobbled up.

The town had lured him from the security of his lair, but in other matters he was the same good little fellow—most people would have seen no difference in him, except that he had grown taller. But Father Lasse would have wept tears of blood to see his boy as he now walked along the streets, full of uncertainty and uneasy imitativeness, wearing his best coat on a workday, and yet disorderly in his dress.

Yonder he goes, sauntering along with a pair of boots, his fingers thrust through the string of the parcel, whistling with an air of bravado. Now and again he makes a grimace and moves cautiously—when his trousers rub the sensitive spots of his body. He has had a bad day. In the morning he was passing a smithy, and allowed the splendid display of energy within, half in the firelight and half in the shadow, to detain him. The flames and the clanging of the metal, the whole lively uproar of real work, fascinated him, and he had to go in and ask whether there was an opening for an apprentice. He was not so stupid as to tell them where he came from, but when he got home, Jeppe had already been told of it! But that is soon forgotten, unless, indeed, his trousers rub against his sore places. Then he remembers it; remembers that in this world everything has to be paid for; there is no getting out of things; once one begins anything one has to eat one's way through it, like the boy in the fairy-tale. And this discovery is, in the abstract, not so strikingly novel to Pelle.

He has, as always, chosen the longest way, rummaging about back yards and side streets, where there is a possibility of adventure; and all at once he is suddenly accosted by Albinus, who is now employed by a tradesman. Albinus is not amusing. He has no right to play and loiter about the warehouse in the aimless fashion that is possible out-of-doors; nor to devote himself to making a ladder stand straight up in the air while he climbs up it. Not a word can be got out of him, although Pelle does his best; so he picks up a handful of raisins and absconds.

Down at the harbor he boards a Swedish vessel, which has just arrived with a cargo of timber. "Have you anything for us to do?" he asks, holding one hand behind him, where his trousers have a hole in them.

"Klausen's apprentice has just been here and got what there was," replied the skipper.

"That's a nuisance—you ought to have given it to us," says Pelle. "Have you got a clay pipe?"

"Yes—just you come here!" The skipper reaches for a rope's end, but Pelle escapes and runs ashore.

"Will you give me a thrashing now?" he cries, jeering.

"You shall have a clay pipe if you'll run and get me half a krone's worth of chewing 'bacca."

"What will it cost?" asks Pelle, with an air of simplicity. The skipper reaches for his rope's end again, but Pelle is off already.

"Five öre worth of chewing tobacco, the long kind," he cries, before he gets to the door even. "But it must be the very best, because it's for an invalid." He throws the money on the counter and puts on a cheeky expression.

Old Skipper Lau rises by the aid of his two sticks and hands Pelle the twist; his jaws are working like a mill, and all his limbs are twisted with gout. "Is it for some one lying-in?" he asks slyly.

Pelle breaks off the stem of the clay pipe, lest it should stick out of his pocket, boards the salvage steamer, and disappears forward. After a time he reappears from under the cabin hatchway, with a gigantic pair of sea-boots and a scrap of chewing tobacco. Behind the deck-house he bites a huge mouthful off the brown Cavendish, and begins to chew courageously, which makes him feel tremendously manly. But near the furnace where the ship's timbers are bent he has to unload his stomach; it seems as though all his inward parts are doing their very utmost to see how matters would be with them hanging out of his mouth. He drags himself along, sick as a cat, with thumping temples; but somewhere or other inside him a little feeling of satisfaction informs him that one has to undergo the most dreadful consequences in order to perform any really heroic deed.

In most respects the harbor, with its stacks of timber and its vessels on the slips, is just as fascinating as it was on the day when Pelle lay on the shavings and guarded Father Lasse's sack. The black man with the barking hounds still leans from the roof of the harbor warehouse, but the inexplicable thing is that one could ever have been frightened of him. But Pelle is in a hurry.

He runs a few yards, but he must of necessity stop when he comes to the old quay. There the "strong man," the "Great Power," is trimming some blocks of granite. He is tanned a coppery brown with wind and sun, and his thick black hair is full of splinters of granite; he wears only a shirt and canvas trousers, and the shirt is open on his powerful breast; but it lies close on his back, and reveals the play of his muscles. Every time he strikes a blow the air whistles— *whew!*—and the walls and timber-stacks echo the sound. People come hurrying by, stop short at a certain distance, and stand there looking on. A little group stands there all the time, newcomers taking the place of those that move on, like spectators in front of a cage of lions. It is as though they expect something to happen— something that will stagger everybody and give the bystanders a good fright.

Pelle goes right up to the "Great Power." The "strong man" is the father of Jens, the second youngest apprentice. "Good-day," he says boldly, and stands right in the giant's shadow. But the stonecutter pushes him to one side without looking to see who it is, and continues to hew at the granite: *whew! whew!*

"It is quite a long time now since he has properly used his strength," says an old townsman. "Is he quieting down, d'you think?"

"He must have quieted down for good," says another. "The town ought to see that he keeps quiet." And they move on, and Pelle must move on, too—anywhere, where no one can see him.

"Cobbler, wobbler, groats in your gruel,
Smack on your back goes the stick—how cruel!"

It is those accursed street-urchins. Pelle is by no means in a warlike humor; he pretends not to see them. But they come up close behind him and tread on his heels, and before he knows what is happening they are upon him. The first he knows about it is that he is lying in the gutter, on his back, with all three on top of him. He has fallen alongside of the curbstone and cannot move; he is faint, too, as a result of his indiscretion; the two biggest boys spread his arms wide open on the flagstones and press them down with all their might, while the third ventures to deal with his face. It is a carefully planned outrage, and all Pelle can do is to twist his head round under the blows—and for once he is thankful for his disgracefully fat cheeks.

Then, in his need, a dazzling apparition appears before him; standing in the doorway yonder is a white baker's boy, who is royally amused. It is no other than Nilen, the wonderful little devil Nilen, of his schooldays, who was always fighting everybody like a terrier and always came out of it with a whole skin. Pelle shuts his eyes and blushes for himself, although he knows perfectly well that this is only an apparition.

But then a wonderful thing happens; the apparition leaps down into the gutter, slings the boys to one side, and helps him to his feet. Pelle recognizes the grip of those fingers—even in his schooldays they were like claws of iron.

And soon he is sitting behind the oven, on Nilen's grimy bed. "So you've become a cobbler?" says Nilen, to begin with, compassionately, for he feels a deucedly smart fellow himself in his fine white clothes, with his bare arms crossed over his naked breast. Pelle feels remarkably comfortable; he has been given a slice of bread and cream, and he decides that the world is more interesting than ever. Nilen is chewing manfully, and spitting over the end of the bed.

"Do you chew?" asks Pelle, and hastens to offer him the leaf-tobacco.

"Yes, we all do; a fellow has to when he works all night."

Pelle cannot understand how people can keep going day and night.

"All the bakers in Copenhagen do—so that the people can get fresh bread in the morning—and our master wants to introduce it here. But it isn't every one can do it; the whole staff had to be reorganized. It's worst about midnight, when everything is turning round. Then it comes over you so that you keep on looking at the time, and the very moment the clock strikes twelve we all hold our breath, and then no one can come in or go out any more. The master himself can't stand the night shift; the 'baccy turns sour in his mouth and he has to lay it on the table. When he wakes up again he thinks it's a raisin and sticks it in the dough. What's the name of your girl?"

For a moment Pelle's thoughts caress the three daughters of old Skipper Elleby—but no, none of them shall be immolated. No, he has no girl.

"Well, you get one, then you needn't let them sit on you. I'm flirting a bit just now with the master's daughter—fine girl, she is, quite developed already—you know! But we have to look out when the old man's about!"

"Then are you going to marry her when you are a journeyman?" asks Pelle, with interest.

"And have a wife and kids on my back? You are a duffer, Pelle! No need to trouble about that! But a woman—well, that's only for when a man's bored. See?" He stretches himself, yawning.

Nilen has become quite a young man, but a little crude in his manner of expressing himself. He sits there and looks at Pelle with a curious expression in his eyes. "Cobbler's patch!" he says contemptuously, and thrusts his tongue into his cheek so as to make it bulge. Pelle says nothing; he knows he cannot thrash Nilen.

Nilen has lit his pipe and is lying on his back in bed—with his muddy shoes on—chattering. "What's your journeyman like? Ours is a conceited ass. The other day I had to fetch him a box on the ears, he was so saucy. I've learned the Copenhagen trick of doing it; it soon settles a man. Only you want to keep your head about it." A deuce of a fellow, this Nilen, he is so grown up! Pelle feels smaller and smaller.

But suddenly Nilen jumps up in the greatest hurry. Out in the bakery a sharp voice is calling. “Out of the window—to the devil with you!” he yelps—“the journeyman!” And Pelle has to get through the window, and is so slow about it that his boots go whizzing past him. While he is jumping down he hears the well-known sound of a ringing box on the ear.

When Pelle returned from his wanderings he was tired and languid; the stuffy workshop did not seem alluring. He was dispirited, too; for the watchmaker’s clock told him that he had been three hours away. He could not believe it.

The young master stood at the front door, peeping out, still in his leather jacket and apron of green baize; he was whistling softly to himself, and looked like a grown fledgling that did not dare to let itself tumble out of the nest. A whole world of amazement lay in his inquiring eyes.

“Have you been to the harbor again, you young devil?” he asked, sinking his claws into Pelle.

“Yes.” Pelle was properly ashamed.

“Well, what’s going on there? What’s the news?”

So Pelle had to tell it all on the stairs; how there was a Swedish timber ship whose skipper’s wife was taken with childbirth out at sea, and how the cook had to deliver her; of a Russian vessel which had run into port with a mutiny on board; and anything else that might have happened. To-day there were only these boots. “They are from the salvage steamer—they want soling.”

“H’m!” The master looked at them indifferently. “Is the schooner *Andreas* ready to sail?”

But that Pelle did not know.

“What sort of a sheep’s head have you got, then? Haven’t you any eyes in it? Well, well, go and get me three bottles of beer! Only stick them under your blouse so that father don’t see, you monster!” The master was quite good-tempered again.

Then Pelle got into his apron and buckled on the knee-strap. Everybody was bending over his work, and Master Andres was reading; no sound was to be heard but those produced by the workers, and now and again a word of reprimand from the journeyman.

Every second afternoon, about five o’clock, the workshop door would open slightly, and a naked, floury arm introduced the newspaper and laid it on the counter. This was the baker’s son, Sören, who never allowed himself to be seen; he moved about from choice like a thief in the night. If the master—as he occasionally did—seized him and pulled him into the workshop, he was like a scared faun strayed from his thickets; he would stand with hanging head, concealing his eyes, and no one could get a word from him; and when he saw an opportunity, he would slip away.

The arrival of the newspaper caused quite a small commotion in the workshop. When the master felt inclined, he would read aloud—of calves with two heads and four pairs of legs; of a pumpkin that weighed fifty pounds; of the fattest man in the world; of fatalities due to the careless handling of firearms, or of snakes in Martinique. The dazzling wonder of the whole world passed like a pageant, filling the dark workshop; the political news was ignored. If the master happened to be in one of his desperate humors, he would read the most damnable nonsense: of how the Atlantic Ocean had caught fire, so that the people were living on boiled codfish; or how the heavens had got torn over America, so that angels fell right on to somebody’s supper-tray. Things which one knew at once for lies—and blasphemous nonsense, too, which might at any time have got him into trouble. Rowing people was not in the master’s line, he was ill the moment there was any unpleasantness; but he had his own way of making himself respected. As he went on reading some one would discover that he was getting a wigging, and would give a jump, believing that all his failings were in the paper.

When the time drew near for leaving off work, a brisker note sounded in the workshop. The long working-day was coming to an end, and the day’s weariness and satiety were forgotten, and the mind looked forward—filling with thoughts of the sand-hills or the woods, wandering down a road that was bright with pleasure. Now and again a neighbor would step in, and while away the time with his gossip; something or other had happened, and Master Andres, who was so clever, must say what he thought about it. Sounds that had been confused during the day now entered the workshop, so that those within felt that they were participating in the life of the town; it was as though the walls had fallen.

About seven o’clock a peculiar sound was heard in the street without, approaching in very slowly *tempo;* there was a dull thump and then two clacking sounds; and then came the thump again, like the tread of a huge padded foot, and once more the clack-clack. This was old Bjerregrav, swinging toward the workshop on his crutches; Bjerregrav, who moved more slowly than anybody, and got forward more quickly. If Master Andres happened to be in one of his bad humors, he would limp away, in order not to remain in the same room with a cripple; at other times he was glad to see Bjerregrav.

“Well, you are a rare bird, aren’t you?” he would cry, when Bjerregrav reached the landing and swung himself sideways through the door; and the old man would laugh—he had paid this visit daily now for many years. The master took no further notice of him, but went on reading; and Bjerregrav sank into his dumb pondering; his pale hands feeling one thing after another, as though the most everyday objects were unknown to him. He took hold of things just as a newborn child might have done; one had to smile at him and leave him to sit there, grubbing about like the child he really was. It was quite impossible to hold a continuous conversation with him; for even if he did actually make an observation it was sure to be quite beside the mark; Bjerregrav was given to remarking attributes which no one else noticed, or which no one would have dwelt upon.

When he sat thus, pondering over and fingering some perfectly familiar object, people used to say, “Now Bjerregrav’s questioning fit is coming on!” For Bjerregrav was an inquirer; he would ask questions about the wind and the weather, and even the food that he ate. He would ask questions about the most laughable subjects— things that were self-evident to any one else—why a stone was hard, or why water extinguished fire. People did not answer him, but shrugged their shoulders compassionately. “He is quite all there,” they would say; “his head’s all right. But he takes everything the wrong way round!”

The young master looked up from his book. “Now, shall I inherit Bjerregrav’s money?” he asked mischievously.

“No—you’ve always been good to me; I don’t want to cause you any misfortune.”

“Worse things than that might befall me, don’t you think?”

“No, for you’ve got a fair competence. No one has a right to more, so long as the many suffer need.”

“Certain people have money in the bank themselves,” said Master Andres allusively.

“No, that’s all over,” answered the old man cheerfully. “I’m now exactly as rich as you.”

“The devil! Have you run through the lot?” The young master turned round on his chair.

“You and your ‘run through it all’! You always sit over me like a judge and accuse me of things! I’m not conscious of having done anything wrong; but it’s true that the need gets worse every winter. It’s a burden to have money, Andres, when men are hungry all about you; and if you help them then you learn afterward that you’ve done the man injury; they say it themselves, so it must be true. But now I’ve given the money to the Charity Organization Society, so now it will go to the right people.”

“Five thousand kroner!” said the master, musing. “Then there ought to be great rejoicing among the poor this winter.”

“Well, they won’t get it direct in food and firing,” said Bjerregrav, “but it will come to them just as well in other ways. For when I’d made my offer to the Society, Shipowner Monsen—you know him—came to me, and begged me to lend him the money at one year. He would have gone bankrupt if he hadn’t had it, and it was terrible to think of all the poor people who would have gone without bread if that great business of his had come to a standstill. Now the responsibility falls on me. But the money is safe enough, and in that way it does the poor twice as much good.”

Master Andres shook his head. “Suppose Bjerregrav has just sat himself down in the nettles?”

“Why? But what else could I have done?” said the old man uneasily.

“The devil knows it won’t be long before he’s bankrupt. He’s a frothy old rogue,” murmured the master. “Has Bjerregrav got a note of hand?”

The old man nodded; he was quite proud of himself.

“And interest? Five per cent.?”

“No, no interest. For money to stand out and receive interest—I don’t like that. It has to suck the interest somewhere or other, and of course it’s from the poor. Interest is blood-money, Andres —and it’s a new-fangled contrivance, too. When I was young we knew nothing about getting interest on our money.”

“Yes, yes:

> ‘Who gives to other folks his bread
> And after suffers in their stead,
> Why club him, club him, club him dead!’”

said the master, and went on reading.

Bjerregrav sat there sunk in his own thoughts. Suddenly he looked up.

“Can you, who are so well read, tell me what keeps the moon from falling? I lay overnight puzzling over it, so as I couldn’t sleep. She wanders and wanders through the sky, and you can see plainly there’s nothing but air under her.”

“The devil may know,” said Master Andres thoughtfully. “She must have strength of her own, so that she holds herself up.”

“I’ve thought that myself—for obligation isn’t enough. Now we can do that—we walk and walk where we are put down, but then we’ve the earth under us to support us. And you are always studying, aren’t you? I suppose you have read nearly all the books in the world?” Bjerregrav took the master’s book and felt it thoroughly. “That’s a good book,” he said, striking his knuckles against the cover and holding the book to his ear; “good material, that. Is it a lying story or a history book?”

“It’s a travel book. They go up to the North Pole, and they get frozen in, and they don’t know if they’ll ever get home alive again.”

“But that’s terrible—that people should risk their lives so. I’ve often thought about that—what it’s like at the end of the world—but to go and find out—no, I should never have had the courage. Never to get home again!” Bjerregrav, with an afflicted expression, looked first at one, then at another.

“And they get frost-bite in their feet—and their toes have to be amputated—in some cases, the whole foot.”

“No, be quiet! So they lose their health, poor fellows!—I don’t want to hear any more!” The old man sat rocking himself to and fro, as though he felt unwell. But a few moments later he asked inquisitively: “Did the king send them up there to make war?”

“No; they went to look for the Garden of Eden. One of the people who investigate writings has discovered that it is said to lie behind the ice,” declared the master solemnly.

“The Garden of Eden—or they call it Paradise, too—but that lies where the two rivers fall into a third, in the East! That is quite plainly written. Consequently what you read there is false teaching.”

“It’s at the North Pole, God’s truth it is!” said the master, who was inclined to be a free-thinker; “God’s truth, I tell you! The other’s just a silly superstition.”

Bjerregrav maintained an angry silence. He sat for some time bending low in his chair, his eyes roaming anywhere so that they did not meet another’s. “Yes, yes,” he said, in a low voice; “everybody thinks something new in order to make himself remarkable, but no one can alter the grave.”

Master Andres wriggled impatiently to and fro; he could change his mood like a woman. Bjerregrav’s presence began to distress him. “Now, I’ve learned to conjure up spirits; will Bjerregrav make the experiment?” he said suddenly.

“No, not at any price!” said the old man, smiling uneasily.

But the master pointed, with two fingers, at his blinking eyes, and gazed at him, while he uttered the conjuration.

“In the name of the Blood, in the name of the Sap, in the name of all the Humors of the Body, the good and the bad alike, and in the name of the Ocean,” he murmured, crouching like a tom-cat.

“Stop it, I tell you! Stop it! I won’t have it!” Bjerregrav was hanging helplessly between his crutches, swinging to and fro, with an eye to the door, but he could not wrest himself away from the enchantment. Then, desperately, he struck down the master’s conjuring hand, and profited by the interruption of the incantation to slip away.

The master sat there blowing upon his hand. “He struck out properly,” he said, in surprise, turning his reddened hand with the palm inward.

Little Nikas did not respond. He was not superstitious, but he did not like to hear ridicule cast upon the reality of things.

“What shall I do?” asked Peter.

“Are mate Jensen’s boots ready?” The master looked at the clock. “Then you can nibble your shin-bones.”

It was time to stop work. The master took his stick and hat and limped over to the beer-house to play a game of billiards; the journeyman dressed and went out; the older apprentices washed their necks in the soaking-tub. Presently they too would go out and have a proper time of it.

Pelle gazed after them. He too experienced a desperate need to shake off the oppressive day, and to escape out of doors, but his stockings were nothing but holes, and his working-blouse had to be washed so that it should be dry by the following morning. Yes, and his shirt—and he blushed up to his ears—was it a fortnight he had worn it, or was this the fourth week? The time had slipped past so…. He had meant to defer the disagreeable business of washing only for a few days—and now it had mounted up to fourteen! His body had a horrible crawling feeling; was his punishment come upon him because he had turned a deaf ear to the voice of conscience, and had ignored Father Lasse’s warning, that disgrace awaited those who did not keep themselves clean?

No, thank God! But Pelle had received a thorough fright, and his ears were still burning as he scrubbed his shirt and blouse downstairs in the yard. It would be well to take it as a timely warning from on high!

And then blouse and shirt were hanging on the fence, spreading themselves abroad as though they wanted to hug the heavens for joy in their cleanliness. But Pelle sat dejectedly upstairs, at the window of the apprentices’ garret, one leg outside, so that part of him at least was in the open air. The skillful darning which his father had taught him was not put into practice here; the holes were simply cobbled together, so that Father Lasse would have sunk into the earth for shame. Gradually he crept right out on to the roof; below, in the skipper’s garden, the three girls were wandering idly, looking over toward the workshop, and evidently feeling bored.

Then they caught sight of him, and at once became different beings. Manna came toward him, thrust her body impatiently against the stone wall, and motioned to him with her lips. She threw her head back imperiously, and stamped with her feet—but without making a sound. The other two were bent double with suppressed laughter.

Pelle understood perfectly what this silent speech intended, but for a time he courageously stood his ground. At last, however, he could endure it no longer; he threw everything aside and next moment was with the girls.

All Pelle’s dreams and unuttered longings hovered over those places where men disported themselves. To him nothing was more ridiculous than to run after petticoats. Women, for Pelle, were really rather contemptible; they had no strength, and very little intelligence; indeed, they understood nothing but the art of making themselves ornamental. But Manna and her sisters were something apart; he was still enough of a child to play, and they were excellent playmates.

Manna—the wild cat—was afraid of nothing; with her short skirts and her pigtail and her skipping movements she reminded him of a frolicsome, inquisitive young bird—Skip! out of the thicket and back again! She could climb like a boy, and could carry Pelle all round the garden on her back; it was really an oversight that she should have to wear skirts. Her clothes wouldn’t keep on her, and she was always tumbling into the workshop, having torn something or other off her shoes. Then she would turn everything upside down, take the master’s stick away, so that he could not move, and would even get her fingers among the journeyman’s American tools.

She was on good terms with Pelle the very first day.

“Whose new boy are you?” she asked him, smacking him on the back. And Pelle laughed, and returned her look frankly, with that immediate comprehension which is the secret of our early years. There was no trace of embarrassment between them; they had always known one another, and could at any time resume their play just where they had left off. In the evening Pelle used to station himself by the garden wall and wait for her; then in a moment he was over and in the middle of some game.

Manna was no ordinary cry-baby; not one who seeks to escape the consequences of her action by a display of tears. If she let herself in for a scuffle, she never sued for mercy, however hardly it went with her. But Pelle was to a certain extent restrained by the fact of her petticoats. And she, on one occasion, did not deny that she wished she could only be a little stronger!

But she had courage, and Pelle, like a good comrade, gave as good as he got, except in the workshop, where she bullied him. If she assailed him from behind, dropping something down his neck or pushing him off his wooden stool, he restrained himself, and was merely thankful that his bones were still unbroken.

All his best hours were spent in the skipper's garden, and this garden was a wonderful place, which might well hold his senses captive. The girls had strange outlandish names, which their father had brought home with him on his long voyages: Aina, Dolores, and Sjermanna! They wore heavy beads of red coral round their necks and in their ears. And about the garden lay gigantic conch-shells, in which one could hear the surging of the ocean, and tortoise-shells as big as a fifteen-pound loaf, and whole great lumps of coral.

All these things were new to Pelle, but he would not allow them to confound him; he enrolled them as quickly as possible among the things that were matters of course, and reserved himself the right to encounter, at any moment, something finer and more remarkable.

But on some evenings he would disappoint the girls, and would stroll about the town where he could see real life—or go down to the dunes or the harbor. Then they would stand dejectedly at the garden wall, bored and quarrelsome. But on Sundays, as soon as he had finished in the workshop, he would faithfully appear, and they would spin out their games, conscious of a long day in front of them. They played games innumerable, and Pelle was the center of them all; he could turn himself to anything; he became everything in turn—lawful husband, cannibal, or slave. He was like a tame bear in their hands; they would ride on him, trample all over him, and at times they would all three fall upon him and "murder" him. And he had to lie still, and allow them to bury his body and conceal all traces of it. The reality of the affair was enhanced by the fact that he was really covered with earth—all but his face, which was left bare only from necessity—they contented themselves with covering that with withered leaves. When he cried afterward over the state of his fine confirmation clothes, they brushed him with solicitous hands, and when he could scarcely be comforted they all three kissed him. With them he was always referred to as "Manna's husband."

So Pelle's days went by. He had a certain grim humor rather than a cheerful mind; he felt gloomy, and as though things were going badly with him; and he had no one to lean upon. But he continued his campaign against the town, undaunted; he thought of it night and day, and fought it in his sleep.

"If you're ever in a difficulty, you've always Alfred and Albinus to help you out," Uncle Kalle had said, when Pelle was bidding him good-bye; and he did not fail to look them up. But the twins were to-day the same slippery, evasive customers as they were among the pastures; they ventured their skins neither for themselves nor for anybody else.

In other respects they had considerably improved. They had come hither from the country in order to better their positions, and to that end had accepted situations which would serve them until they had saved sufficient to allow them to commence a more distinguished career. Albinus had advanced no further, as he had no inclination to any handicraft. He was a good-tempered youth, who was willing to give up everything else if only he could practise his acrobatic feats. He always went about balancing something or other, taking pains to put all sorts of objects to the most impossible uses. He had no respect for the order of nature; he would twist his limbs into all imaginable positions, and if he threw anything into the air he expected it to stay there while he did something else. "Things must be broken in as well as animals," he would say, and persevere indefatigably. Pelle laughed; he liked him, but he did not count on him any further.

Alfred had struck out in quite another direction. He no longer indulged in hand-springs, but walked decorously on his legs, had always much ado to pull down and straighten his collar and cuffs, and was in continual anxiety as to his clothes. He was now apprentice to a painter, but had a parting in his hair like a counter-jumper, and bought all sorts of things at the chemist's, which he smeared on his hair. If Pelle ran across him in the street, Alfred always made some excuse to shake him off; he preferred to associate with tradesmen's apprentices, and was continually greeting acquaintances right and left—people who were in a better position than himself. Alfred put on airs of importance which made Pelle long one fine day to cudgel him soundly.

The twins resembled one another in this—no one need look to them for assistance of any kind. They laughed comfortably at the very idea, and if any one made fun of Pelle they joined in the laughter.

It was not easy to get on. He had quite shaken off the farm-boy; it was his poverty that gave him trouble now. He had recklessly bound himself as apprentice for board and lodging; he had a few clothes on his body, and he had not thought other requisites necessary for one who did not stroll up and down and gad about with girls. But the town demanded that he should rig himself out. Sunday clothes were here not a bit too good for weekdays. He ought to see about getting himself a rubber collar—which had the advantage that one could wash it oneself; cuffs he regarded as a further desideratum. But that needed money, and the mighty sum of five kroner, with which he had set out to conquer the world, or, at the worst, to buy it—well, the town had enticed it out of his pocket before he was aware of it.

Hitherto Father Lasse had taken all very difficult matters upon himself; but now Pelle stood alone, and had only himself to rely on. Now he stood face to face with life, and he struggled courageously forward, like the excellent boy he was. But at times he broke down. And this struggle was a drag upon all his boyish doings and strivings.

In the workshop he made himself useful and tried to stand well with everybody. He won over little Nikas by drawing a somewhat extravagant representation of his betrothed from a photograph. The face would not come out quite right; it looked as though some one had trodden on it; but the clothes and the brooch at the throat were capital. The picture hung for a week in the workshop, and brought Pelle a wonderful piece of luck: Carlsen, who ran errands for the stone-workers, ordered two large pictures, one of himself and one of his wife, at the rate of twenty-five öre apiece. “But you must show a few curls in my hair,” he said, “for my mother’s always wished I had curls.”

Pelle could not promise the pictures in less than two months’ time; it was tedious work if they were to be accurate.

“Well, well; we can’t spare the money sooner. This month there’s the lottery, and next month the rent to pay.” Pelle could very well appreciate that, for Carlsen earned eight kroner a week and had nine children. But he felt that he could not well reduce the price. Truly, people weren’t rolling in money here! And when for once he actually had a shilling in hand, then it was sure to take to its heels under his very nose, directly he began to rack his brains to decide how it could most usefully be applied: on one such occasion, for example, he had seen, in a huckster’s window, a pipe in the form of a boot-leg, which was quite irresistible.

When the three girls called to him over the garden wall his childhood found companionship, and he forgot his cares and struggles. He was rather shy of anybody seeing him when he slipped across; he felt that his intercourse with the children was not to his credit; moreover, they were only “petticoats.” But he felt that he was lucky to be there, where there were curious things which were useful to play with—Chinese cups and saucers, and weapons from the South Sea Islands. Manna had a necklace of white teeth, sharp and irregular, strung together in a haphazard way, which she maintained were human teeth, and she had the courage to wear them round her bare neck. And the garden was full of wonderful plants; there were maize, and tobacco, and all sorts of other plants, which were said, in some parts of the world, to grow as thick as corn does at home.

They were finer of skin than other folk, and they were fragrant of the strange places of the world. And he played with them, and they regarded him with wonder and mended his clothes when he tore them; they made him the center of all their games—even when he was not present. There was a secret satisfaction in this—although he accepted it as a matter of course, it was a portion of all that fate and good fortune had reserved for him, a slight advance payment from the infinite fairy-tale of life. He longed to rule over them absolutely, and if they were obstinate he lectured them angrily, so that they suddenly gave in to him. He knew well enough that every proper man makes his wife behave submissively.

So passed the early summer; time was moving onward. The townsfolk had already, at Whitsuntide, provided themselves with what they needed for the summer, and out in the country people had other things to think about than trapesing into town with work for the artisans; the coming harvest occupied all their thoughts. Even in the poorest quarters, where no work was done for the peasants, one realized how utterly dependent the little town was upon the country. It was as though the town had in a moment forgotten its superiority; the manual workers no longer looked down on the peasants; they looked longingly toward the fields, spoke of the weather and the prospects of harvest, and had forgotten all their urban interests. If by exception a farmer's cart came through the streets, people ran to the window to look after it. And as the harvest stood almost at their doors, it seemed as though old memories were calling to them, and they raised their heads to listen; those who could gave up their town life and went into the country to help in the work of harvest. Both the journeyman and the two apprentices had left the workshop; Jens and Pelle could comfortably manage the work.

Pelle saw nothing of this stagnant mood; he was occupied on all sides in keeping a whole skin and getting the utmost out of life; there were thousands of impressions of good and evil which had to be assimilated, and which made a balanced whole—that remarkable thing, the town, of which Pelle never knew whether he felt inclined to bless it or curse it,—or it always held him in suspense.

And amidst all his activities, Lasse's face rose up before him and made him feel lonely in the midst of the bustle. Wherever could Father Lasse be? Would he ever hear of him again? Every day he had expected, in reliance on Karna's word, to see him blundering in at the door, and when anybody fumbled at the door-knocker he felt quite certain it was Lasse. It became a silent grief in the boy's mind, a note that sounded through all that he undertook.

V

One Sunday evening, as Pelle was running down East Street, a cart loaded with household goods came jolting in from the country. Pelle was in a great hurry, but was obliged to look at it. The driver sat in front, below the load, almost between the horses; he was tall and had ruddy cheeks, and was monstrously wrapped up, in spite of the heat. “Hallo!” Why, it was the worthy Due, Kalle’s son-in-law; and above him, in the midst of all the lumber, sat Anna and the children, swaying to and fro with the motion of the cart. “Hullo!” Pelle waved his cap, and with one spring he had his foot on the shaft and was sitting next to Due, who was laughing all over his face at the encounter.

“Yes, we’ve had enough of the farming country, and now we’ve come to see if things aren’t better here in town,” said Due, in his quiet manner. “And here you are, running about just like you did at home!” There was amazement in his voice.

Anna came crawling over the load, and smiled down upon him.

“Have you news of Father Lasse?” Pelle asked her. This was always his question when he met an acquaintance.

“Yes, that we have—he’s just going to buy a farm up on the heath. Now, you devil, are you goin’ to behave?” Anna crawled backward, and a child began to cry. Then she reappeared. “Yes, and we were to remember father to you, and mother, and all the rest.”

But Pelle had no thoughts to spare for Uncle Kalle.

“Is it up by Stone Farm?” he asked.

“No—farther to the east, by the Witch’s Cell,” said Due. “It is a big piece of land, but it’s not much more than stone. So long as he doesn’t ruin himself over it—two have gone smash there before him. He’s arranged it together with Karna.”

“Uncle Lasse will know what he’s about,” said Anna. “Karna has found the money for it; she has something saved.”

Pelle couldn’t sit still; his heart leaped in his body at this news. No more uncertainty—no more horrible possibilities: he had his father once more! And the dream of Lasse’s life was about to be fulfilled: he could now put his feet under his own table. He had become a landowner into the bargain, if one didn’t use the term too precisely; and Pelle himself—why, he was a landowner’s son!

By nine o’clock in the evening he had finished everything, and was able to get off; his blood was pulsing with excitement.... Would there be horses? Why, of course; but would there be laborers, too? Had Father Lasse become one of those farmers who pay wages on a quarter-day, and come into town on a Sunday afternoon, their fur-lined collars up to their ears? Pelle could see the men quite plainly going up the stairs, one after another, taking off their wooden shoes and knocking on the door of the office—yes, they wanted to see about an advance on their wages. And Lasse scratched the back of his head, looked at them thoughtfully, and said: “Not on any account, you’d only waste it on drink.” But he gave it to them finally, for all that. “One is much too good-natured,” he said to Pelle....

For Pelle had bidden farewell to cobbling, and was living at home as a landowner’s son. Really, Pelle managed the whole business—only it wouldn’t do to say so. And at the Christmas feast he danced with the buxom farmer’s daughters. There was whispering in the corners when Pelle made his appearance; but he went straight across the room and invited the Pastor’s daughter to a dance, so that she lost her breath, and more besides, and begged him on the spot to marry her....

He hurried onward, still dreaming; longing drew him onward, and before he knew it he had travelled some miles along the high-road. The road he now turned into led him by pine woods and heath-covered hills; the houses he passed were poorer, and the distance from one to another was increasing.

Pelle took a turning a little farther on, which, to the best of his knowledge, led in the required direction, and hurried forward with awakened senses. The landscape was only half revealed by the summer night, but it was all as familiar as the mends in the back of Father Lasse’s waistcoat, although he had never been here before. The poverty-stricken landscape spoke to him as with a mother’s voice. Among these clay-daubed huts, the homes of poor cultivators who waged war upon the rocky ground surrounding their handful of soil, he felt safe as he had never felt before. All this had been his through many generations, down to the rags thrust into the broken window-panes and the lumber piled upon the thatch to secure it. Here was nothing for any one to rack his brains over, as elsewhere in the world; here a man could lie down at peace and rest. Yet it was not for him to till the ground and to dwell amid all these things. For he had outgrown them, as he had outgrown the shelter of his mother’s skirts.

The lane gradually became a deep cart-track, which meandered between rocks and moorland. Pelle knew that he ought to keep to the east, but the track went now to the south, now to the north. He soon had enough of it, noted his direction exactly, and struck off obliquely. But it was difficult to make his way; the moonlight deceived his eyes so that he stumbled and sank into hollows, while the heather and the juniper reached as high as his waist, and hampered every movement. And then he turned obstinate, and would not turn back to the cart-track, but labored forward, so that he was soon steaming with heat; clambering over slanting ridges of rock, which were slippery with the dewfall on the moss, and letting himself tumble at hazard over the ledges. A little too late he felt a depth below him; it was as though a cold wave washed through his heart, and he clutched wildly at the air for some support. “Father Lasse!” he cried woefully; and at the same moment he was caught by brambles, and sank slowly down through their interwoven runners, which struck their myriad claws into him and reluctantly let him pass, until he was cautiously deposited, deep down among the sharp stones at the bottom of a ravine, shuddering and thanking his stars for all the thorns that had mercifully flayed his hide in order that he should not split his skull. Then he must needs grope forward, through the darkness and running water, until he found a tree and was able to climb to the surface.

Now he had lost his bearings, and when that became clear he lost his head as well. Nothing was left of the confident Pelle of a while ago; he ran blindly forward, in order to reach the summit of the hill. And as he was hastening upward, so that he might take note of the crags that lay about him, the ground rose and closed above him with a frightful clamor, and the air turned black and full of noises, and he could not see his hand before his eyes. It was like a stupendous explosion—as though released by his cheerful stamping over the rocks, the earth was hurled into the sky and dissolved in darkness, and the darkness itself cried aloud with terror and eddied round him. His heart pounded in his breast and robbed him of his last remnant of understanding; he jumped for sheer unbridled terror and bellowed like a maniac. The black mass drove over his head, so that he was forced to duck, and gleaming rifts showed and disappeared; and the darkness surged like the ocean and cried continually aloud with a hellish chaos of sounds. Then it suddenly swung to one side, drifted northward, and descended. And Pelle understood that he had stumbled upon a rookery.

He found himself behind a great rock. How he got there he did not know; but he knew that he was a terrible duffer. How easily he could have brought confusion on the fifty-odd crows by tossing a few stones into the air!

He went along the slope, very valiant in his resolve, but with shaking knees. In the far distance a fox sat upon a cliff and howled insanely at the moon, and far to the north and the south lay a transient glimmer of sea. Up here subterranean creatures had their home; when one trod upon the rock it sounded hollow.

In the southern opening the sea lay silver in the moonlight, but as Pelle looked again it disappeared, and the low-lying plain was drowned in white. In every direction the land was disappearing; Pelle watched in amazement while the sea slowly rose and filled every hollow. Then it closed above the lesser hills; one by one it swallowed them, and then it took the long ridge of hills to the east, until only the crests of the pine-trees lifted themselves above it; but Pelle did not as yet give himself up for lost; for behind all his anxiety lay a confused conception of Mount Ararat, which kept up his courage. But then it became so dreadfully cold that Pelle’s breeches seemed to stick to his body. “That’s the water,” he thought, and he looked round in alarm; the rock had become a little island, and he and it were floating on the ocean.

Pelle was a sturdy little realist, who had already had all manner of experiences. But now the fear had at last curdled his blood, and he accepted the supernatural without a protest. The world had evidently perished, and he himself was drifting—drifting out into space, and space was terribly cold. Father Lasse, and the workshop, Manna and the young master’s shining eyes—here was an end of them all. He did not mourn them; he simply felt terribly lonely. What would be the end of it all—or was this perhaps death? Had he perhaps fallen dead a little while ago, when he tumbled over the precipice? And was he now voyaging toward the land of the blessed? Or was this the end of the world itself, of which he had heard such dreadful things said, as far back as he could remember? Perhaps he was adrift on the last scrap of earth, and was the only person still living? It did not in the least surprise Pelle that he should be left where everybody else had perished; in this moment of despair he found it quite natural.

He stood breathlessly silent and listened to the infinite; and he heard the cudgel-like blows of his pulses. Still he listened, and now he heard something more: far away in the night that surged against his ears he heard the suggestion of a sound, the vibrating note of some living creature. Infinitely remote and faint though it was, yet Pelle was so aware of it that it thrilled him all through. It was a cow feeding on the chain; he could follow the sound of her neck scrubbing up and down against the post.

He ran down over the craggy declivity, fell, and was again on his feet and running forward; the mist had swallowed him unawares. Then he was down on arable that had once been woodland; then he trod on something that felt familiar as it brushed against his feet—it was land that had once been ploughed but had now been recaptured by the heath. The sound grew louder, and changed to all those familiar sounds that one hears at night coming from an open cowshed; and now a decayed farmhouse showed through the mist. This could not of course be the farm Pelle was looking for—Father Lasse had a proper farmhouse with four wings! But he went forward.

Out in the country people do not lock everything up as carefully as they do in town; so Pelle could walk right in. Directly he opened the door of the sitting-room he was filled with an uplifting joy. The most comfortable odor he had ever known struck upon his senses —the foundation of everything fragrant—the scent of Father Lasse! It was dark in the room, and the light of the night without could not make its way through the low window. He heard the deep breathing of persons asleep, and knew that they had not awakened—the night was not nearly over yet. “Good-evening!” he said.

A hand began to grope for the matches.

“Is any one there?” said a drowsy woman’s voice.

“Good-evening!” he cried again, and went forward into the room. “It’s Pelle!” He brought out the name in a singsong voice.

“So it’s you, boy!” Lasse’s voice quavered, and the hands could not manage the matches; but Pelle stepped toward the voice and clasped his wrist. “And how did you find your way here in the wilderness— and at night, too? Yes, yes, I’ll get up!” he continued, and he tried, with a groan, to sit up.

“No, you stop there and let me get up,” said Karna, who lay against the wall—she had kept silence while the men-folk were speaking. “He gets this lumbago, I can tell you!” she declared, jumping out of bed.

“Ay, I’ve been at it a bit too hard. Work comes easy when a man’s his own master—it’s difficult to leave off. But it’ll be all right when once I’ve got things properly going. Work’s a good embrocation for the lumbago. And how goes it with you then? I was near believing you must be dead!”

So Pelle had to sit on the edge of the bed and tell about everything in town—about the workshop, and the young master’s lame leg, and everything. But he said nothing of the disagreeable things; it was not for men to dwell upon such things.

“Then you’ve been getting on well in foreign parts!” said Lasse, delighted. “And do they think well of you?”

“Yes!” This came a trifle slowly. In the first place, respect was just particularly what he had not won—but why trumpet forth his miseries? “The young master must like me—he often chats with me, even over the journeyman’s head.”

“Now, think of that! I have often wondered, I can tell you, how you were getting on, and whether we shouldn’t soon have good news of you. But everything takes time, that we know. And as you see, I’m in a very different position.”

“Yes, you’ve become a landowner!” said Pelle, smiling.

“The deuce, yes, so I am!” Lasse laughed, too, but then he groaned piteously with the pain in his back. “In the daytime, when I’m working hard, I get along well enough, but as soon as I lie down, then it comes on directly. And it’s the devil of a pain—as though the wheels of a heavy loaded wagon were going to and fro across your back, whatever name you like to give it. Well, well! It’s a fine thing, all the same, to be your own master! It’s funny how it takes me—but dry bread tastes better to me at my own table than—yes, by God, I can tell you, it tastes better than cake at any other body’s table! And then to be all alone on your own bit of land, and to be able to spit wherever you like to spit, without asking anybody’s leave! And the soil isn’t so bad; even if most of it has never been under cultivation, it has all been lying there storing up its power to produce since the beginning of the world. But about the people in the town—are they agreeable?”

Oh, Pelle had nothing to complain about. “But when were you married?” he asked suddenly.

“Well, you see,” and Lasse began to stumble over his own words, although he had been prepared for the boy to ask this very question; “in a way we aren’t exactly married. That takes money, and the work here is getting forward.… But it’s our intention, I needn’t say, as soon as we have time and money.” It was honestly Lasse’s opinion that one could just as well dispense with the ceremony; at least until children came, and demanded an honorable birth. But he could see that Pelle did not relish the idea; he was still the same pedantic little chap the moment a point of honor was in question. “As soon as we’ve got the harvest under shelter we’ll invite people to a grand feast,” he said resolutely.

Pelle nodded eagerly. Now he was a landowner’s son, and he could make the shabby-genteel boys of the town envious of him. But they mustn’t be able to throw it in his face that his father was “living with a woman!”

Now Karna came in with some food. She looked at the boy with much affection. “Now, fall to, and don’t despise our poor table, my son,” she said, and gave his arm a friendly pat. Pelle fell to with a good appetite. Lasse hung half out of the alcove, delighted.

“You haven’t lost your appetite down there,” he said. “Do you get anything decent to eat? Karna thought the food wasn’t any too good.”

“It’s passable!” said Pelle obstinately. He repented of having betrayed himself to Karna that evening, when he was so depressed.

The desire to eat awoke in Lasse, so that little by little he crept out of the alcove. “You are sitting alone there,” he said, and sat down at the table in his nightcap and pants. He was wearing a knitted nightcap, one end of which fell loosely over his ear. He looked like a genuine old farmer, one that had money in his mattress. And Karna, who was moving to and fro while the menfolk ate, had a round, comfortable figure, and was carrying a big bread-knife in her hand. She inspired confidence, and she too looked a regular farmer’s wife.

A place was found for Pelle on the bed. He extinguished the tallow dip before he undressed, and thrust his underclothing under the pillow.

He woke late; the sun had already left the eastern heavens. The most delicious smell of coffee filled the room. Pelle started up hastily, in order to dress himself before Karna could come in and espy his condition; he felt under the pillow—and his shirt was no longer there! And his stockings lay on a stool, and they had been darned!

When Karna came in he lay motionless, in obstinate silence; he did not reply to her morning salutation, and kept his eyes turned toward the alcove. She ought not to have gone rummaging among his things!

“I’ve taken your shirt and washed it,” she said serenely, “but you can have it again this evening. After all, you can wear this until then.” She laid one of Lasse’s shirts on the coverlet.

Pelle lay there for a time as though he had not heard Karna. Then he sat up, feeling very cross and got into the shirt. “No, stay there until you’ve drunk your coffee,” she said as he attempted to get up, and she placed a stool by him. And so Pelle had his coffee in bed, as he had dreamed it was to happen when Father Lasse remarried; and he could not go on feeling angry. But he was still burning with shame, and that made him taciturn.

During the morning Lasse and Pelle went out and inspected the property.

“It’ll be best if we go round it first; then you will see plainly where the boundary lies,” said Lasse, who knew that the dimensions of the place would be a surprise to Pelle. They wandered through heather and brambles and thorns, striking across the moorland and skirting precipitous slopes. It was several hours before they had finished their round.

“It’s an awfully large holding,” Pelle said again and again.

And Lasse answered proudly. “Yes, there’s nearly seventy acres here—if only it were all tilled!”

It was virgin soil, but it was overrun with heather and juniper- scrub, through which brambles and honeysuckle twined their way. Halfway up a perpendicular wall of rock hung the ash and the wild cherry, gripping the bare cliff with roots that looked like crippled hands. Crab-apple trees, sloe-bushes and wild rose-briars made an impenetrable jungle, which already bore traces of Lasse's exertions. And in the midst of this luxuriant growth the rocky subsoil protruded its grim features, or came so near the surface that the sun had scorched the roots of the herbage.

"That's a proper little Paradise," said Lasse; "you can scarcely set foot in it without treading on the berries. But it's got to be turned into arable if one is to live here."

"Isn't the soil rather middling?" said Pelle.

"Middling—when all that can grow and flourish there?" Lasse pointed to where birch and aspen stood waving their shining foliage to and fro in the breeze. "No, but it'll be a damned rough bit of work to get it ready for ploughing; I'm sorry now that you aren't at home."

Lasse had several times made this allusion, but Pelle was deaf to it. All this was not what he had imagined; he felt no desire to play the landowner's son at home in the way Lasse had in mind.

"It'll be trouble enough here to manage about your daily bread," he said, with remarkable precocity.

"Oh, it won't be so difficult to earn our daily bread, even if we can't hold a feast every day," said Lasse, affronted. "And here at any rate a man can straighten his back without having a bailiff come yapping round him. Even if I were to work myself to death here, at least I've done with slavery. And you must not forget the pleasure of seeing the soil coming under one's hands, day after day, and yielding something instead of lying there useless. That is indeed the finest task a man can perform—to till the earth and make it fruitful—I can think of none better! But you—have you lost the farmer's instinct in town?"

Pelle did not reply. Although there might be something fine and splendid in working oneself to death over a bit of land, just so that something different might grow there, he himself was glad that he did not possess this farmer's instinct.

"My father, and his father, and all of our family I have ever known, we've all had something in us so that we've been driven to improve the soil, without thinking of our own comfort. But it certainly never entered the mind of one of us that we should ever hear it ill spoken of—and by one of our own people too!" Lasse spoke with his face turned away—as did the Almighty when He was wroth with His people; and Pelle felt as though he were a hateful renegade, as bad as bad could be. But nevertheless he would not give in.

"I should be no use at all here," he said apologetically, gazing in the direction of the sea. "I don't believe in it."

"No, you've cut yourself loose from it all, you have!" retorted Lasse bitterly. "But you'll repent it some day, in the long run. Life among the strangers there isn't all splendor and enjoyment."

Pelle did not answer; he felt at that moment too much of a man to bandy words. He contained himself, and they went onward in silence.

"Well, of course, it isn't an estate," said Lasse suddenly, in order to take the sting out of further criticism. Pelle was still silent.

Round the house the land was cultivated, and all round the cultivated land the luxuriant heather revealed disappearing traces of cultivation, and obliterated furrows.

"This was a cornfield once," said Pelle.

"Well, to think of your seeing that right off!" exclaimed Lasse, half sarcastically, half in real admiration. "The deuce of an eye you've got, you truly have! I should certainly have noticed nothing particular about the heath—if I had not known. Yes, that has been under cultivation, but the heath has won it back again! That was under my predecessor, who took in more than he could work, so that it ruined him. But you can see now that something can be done with the land!" Lasse pointed to a patch of rye, and Pelle was obliged to recognize that it looked very well. But through the whole length of the field ran high ridges of broken stone, which told him what a terrible labor this soil demanded before it could be brought under cultivation. Beyond the rye lay newly-broken soil, which looked like a dammed-up ice-field; the plough had been driven through mere patches of soil. Pelle looked at it all, and it made him sad to think of his father.

Lasse himself was undismayed.

"As it is, it needs two to hold the plough. Karna is very strong, but even so it's as though one's arms would be torn from one's body every time the plough strikes. And most of it has to be broken up with pick and drill—and now and again it takes a bit of a sneeze. I use dynamite; it's more powerful than powder, and it bites down into the ground better," he said proudly.

"How much is under cultivation here?" asked Pelle.

"With meadow and garden, almost fourteen acres; but it will be more before the year is out."

"And two families have been ruined already by those fourteen acres," said Karna, who had come out to call them in to dinner.

"Yes, yes; God be merciful to them—and now we get the fruit of their labors! The parish won't take the farm away again—not from us," he said. Lasse spoke in a tone full of self-reliance. Pelle had never seen him stand so upright.

"I can never feel quite easy about it," said Karna; "it's as though one were ploughing up churchyard soil. The first who was turned out by the parish hanged himself, so they say."

"Yes, he had a hut on the heath there—where you see the elder-trees—but it's fallen to pieces since then. I'm so glad it didn't happen in the house." Lasse shuddered uncomfortably. "People say he haunts the place when any misfortune is in store for those that come after him."

"Then the house was built later?" asked Pelle, astonished, for it had such a tumble-down appearance.

"Yes, my predecessor built that. He got the land from the parish free for twenty years, provided he built a house and tilled a tonde of land a year. Those were not such bad conditions. Only he took in too much at a time; he was one of those people who rake away fiercely all the morning and have tired themselves out before midday. But he built the house well"—and Lasse kicked the thin mud-daubed wall—"and the timber-work is good. I think I shall break a lot of stone when the winter comes; the stone must be got out of the way, and it isn't so bad to earn a few hundred kroner. And in two or three years we will make the old house into a barn and build ourselves a new house—eh, Karna? With a cellar underneath and high steps outside, like they have at Stone Farm. It could be of unhewn granite, and I can manage the walls myself."

Karna beamed with joy, but Pelle could not enter into their mood. He was disillusioned; the descent from his dream to this naked reality was too great. And a feeling rose within him of dull resentment against this endless labor, which, inexperienced though he was, was yet part of his very being by virtue of the lives of ten, nay, twenty generations. He himself had not waged the hard-fought war against the soil, but he had as a matter of course understood everything that had to do with tilling the soil ever since he could crawl, and his hands had an inborn aptitude for spade and rake and plough. But he had not inherited his father's joy in the soil; his thoughts had struck out in a new direction. Yet this endless bondage to the soil lay rooted in him, like a hatred, which gave him a survey unknown to his father. He was reasonable; he did not lose his head at the sight of seventy acres of land, but asked what they contained. He himself was not aware of it, but his whole being was quick with hostility toward the idea of spending one's strength in this useless labor; and his point of view was as experienced as though he had been Lasse's father.

"Wouldn't you have done better to buy a cottage-holding with twelve or fourteen acres of land, and that in a good state of cultivation?" he asked.

Lasse turned on him impatiently. "Yes, and then a man might stint and save all his life, and never get beyond cutting off his fly to mend his seat; he'd most likely spend twice what he made! What the deuce! I might as well have stayed where I was. Here, it's true, I do work harder and I have to use my brains more, but then there's a future before me. When I've once got the place under cultivation this will be a farm to hold its own with any of them!" Lasse gazed proudly over his holding; in his mind's eye it was waving with grain and full of prime cattle.

"It would carry six horses and a score or two of cows easily," he said aloud. "That would bring in a nice income! What do you think, Karna?"

"I think the dinner will be cold," said Karna, laughing. She was perfectly happy.

At dinner Lasse proposed that Pelle should send his clothes to be washed and mended at home. "You've certainly got enough to do without that," he said indulgently. "Butcher Jensen goes to market every Saturday; he'd take it for you and put it down by the church, and it would be odd if on a Sunday no one from the heath went to church, who could bring the bundle back to us."

But Pelle suddenly turned stubborn and made no reply.

“I just thought it would be too much for you to wash and mend for yourself,” said Lasse patiently. “In town one must have other things to think about, and then it isn’t really proper work for a man!”

“I’ll do it myself all right,” murmured Pelle ungraciously.

Now he would show them that he could keep himself decent. It was partly in order to revenge himself for his own neglect that he refused the offer.

“Yes, yes,” said Lasse meekly; “I just asked you. I hope you won’t take it amiss.”

However strong Karna might be, and however willing to help in everything, Lasse did greatly feel the need of a man to work with him. Work of a kind that needed two had accumulated, and Pelle did not spare himself. The greater part of the day was spent in heaving great stones out of the soil and dragging them away; Lasse had knocked a sledge together, and the two moorland horses were harnessed up to it.

“Yes, you mustn’t look at them too closely,” said Lasse, as he stroked the two scarecrows caressingly. “Just wait until a few months have gone by, and then you’ll see! But they’ve plenty of spirit now.”

There was much to be done, and the sweat was soon pouring down their faces; but they were both in good spirits. Lasse was surprised at the boy’s strength—with two or three such lads he could turn the whole wilderness over. Once again he sighed that Pelle was not living at home; but to this Pelle still turned a deaf ear. And before they were aware of it Karna had come out again and was calling them to supper.

“I think we’ll harness the horses and drive Pelle halfway to town— as a reward for the work he’s done,” said Lasse gaily. “And we’ve both earned a drive.” So the two screws were put into the cart.

It was amusing to watch Lasse; he was a notable driver, and one could not but be almost persuaded that he had a pair of blood horses in front of him. When they met any one he would cautiously gather up the reins in order to be prepared lest the horses should shy—“they might so easily bolt,” he said solemnly. And when he succeeded in inducing them to trot he was delighted. “They take some holding,” he would say, and to look at him you would have thought they called for a strong pair of wrists. “Damn it all, I believe I shall have to put the curb on them!” And he set both his feet against the dashboard, and sawed the reins to and fro.

When half the distance was covered Father Lasse wanted to drive just a little further, and again a little further still—oh, well, then, they might as well drive right up to the house! He had quite forgotten that the following day would be a day of hard labor both for himself and for the horses. But at last Pelle jumped out.

“Shan’t we arrange that about your washing?” asked Lasse.

“No!” Pelle turned his face away—surely they might stop asking him that!

“Well, well, take care of yourself, and thanks for your help. You’ll come again as soon as you can?”

Pelle smiled at them, but said nothing; he dared not open his mouth, for fear of the unmanly lump that had risen in his throat. Silently he held out his hand and ran toward the town.

VI

The other apprentices were able to provide themselves with clothes, as they worked on their own account in their own time; they got work from their friends, and at times they pirated the master's customers, by underbidding him in secret. They kept their own work under the bench; when the master was not at home they got it out and proceeded with it. "To-night I shall go out and meet my girl," they would say, laughing. Little Nikas said nothing at all.

Pelle had no friends to give him work, and he could not have done much. If the others had much to do after work-hours or on Sundays he had to help them; but he gained nothing by so doing. And he also had Nilen's shoes to keep mended, for old acquaintances' sake.

Jeppe lectured them at great length on the subject of tips, as he had promised; for the townsfolk had been complaining of this burdensome addition to their expenditure, and in no measured terms had sworn either to abate or abolish this tax on all retail transactions. But it was only because they had read of the matter in the newspapers, and didn't want to be behind the capital! They always referred to the subject when Pelle went round with his shoes, and felt in their purses; if there was a shilling there they would hide it between their fingers, and say that he should have something next time for certain—he must remind them of it another time! At first he did remind them—they had told him to do so—but then Jeppe received a hint that his youngest apprentice must stop his attempts at swindling. Pelle could not understand it, but he conceived an increasing dislike of these people, who could resort to such a shameless trick in order to save a penny piece, which they would never have missed.

Pelle, who had been thinking that he had had enough of the world of poor folk, and must somehow contrive to get into another class, learned once again to rely on the poor, and rejoiced over every pair of poor folk's shoes which the master anathematized because they were so worn out. The poor were not afraid to pay a shilling if they had one; it made him feel really sad to see how they would search in every corner to get a few pence together, and empty their children's money-boxes, while the little ones stood by in silence, looking on with mournful eyes. And if he did not wish to accept their money they were offended. The little that he did receive he owed to people who were as poor as himself.

Money, to these folk, no longer consisted of those round, indifferent objects which people in the upper strata of human society piled up in whole heaps. Here every shilling meant so much suffering or happiness, and a grimy little copper would still the man's angry clamor and the child's despairing cry for food. Widow Hoest gave him a ten-öre piece, and he could not help reflecting that she had given him her mid-day meal for two days to come!

One day, as he was passing the miserable hovels which lay out by the northern dunes, a poor young woman came to her door and called to him; she held the remains of a pair of elastic-sided boots in her hand. "Oh, shoemaker's boy, do be so kind as to mend these a bit for me!" she pleaded. "Just sew them up anyhow, so that they'll stick on my feet for half the evening. The stone-masons are giving their feast, and I do so want to go to it!" Pelle examined the boots; there was not much to be done for them, nevertheless he took them, and mended them in his own time. He learned from Jens that the woman was the widow of a stone-cutter, who was killed by an explosion shortly after their marriage. The boots looked quite decent when he returned them.

"Well, I've no money, but I do offer you many, many thanks!" she said, looking delightedly at the boots; "and how nice you've made them look! God bless you for it."

"Thanks killed the blacksmith's cat," said Pelle smiling. Her pleasure was contagious.

"Yes, and God's blessing falls where two poor people share their bed," the young woman rejoined jestingly. "Still, I wish you everything good as payment—now I can dance after all!"

Pelle was quite pleased with himself as he made off. But few doors farther on another poor woman accosted him; she had evidently heard of the success of the first, and there she stood holding a dirty pair of children's boots, which she earnestly begged him to mend. He took the boots and repaired them although it left him still poorer; he knew too well what need was to refuse. This was the first time that any one in the town had regarded him as an equal, and recognized him at the first glance as a fellow-creature. Pelle pondered over this; he did not know that poverty is cosmopolitan.

When he went out after the day’s work he took a back seat; he went about with the poorest boys and behaved as unobtrusively as possible. But sometimes a desperate mood came over him, and at times he would make himself conspicuous by behavior that would have made old Lasse weep; as, for example, when he defiantly sat upon a freshly-tarred bollard. He became thereby the hero of the evening; but as soon as he was alone he went behind a fence and let down his breeches in order to ascertain the extent of the damage. He had been running his errands that day in the best clothes he possessed. This was no joke. Lasse had deeply imbued him with his own moderation, and had taught him to treat his things carefully, so that it seemed to Pelle almost a pious duty. But Pelle felt himself forsaken by all the gods, and now he defied them.

The poor women in the streets were the only people who had eyes for him. “Now look at the booby, wearing his confirmation jacket on a weekday!” they would say, and call him over in order to give him a lecture, which as a rule ended in an offer to repair the damage. But it was all one to Pelle; if he ran about out-of-doors in his best clothes he was only doing as the town did. At all events he had a shirt on, even if it was rather big! And the barber’s assistant himself, who looked most important in tail-coat and top-hat, and was the ideal of every apprentice, did not always wear a shirt; Pelle had once noticed that fact as the youth was swinging some ladies. Up in the country, where a man was appraised according to the number of his shirts, such a thing would have been impossible. But here in town people did not regard such matters so strictly.

He was no longer beside himself with astonishment at the number of people—respectable folk for the most part—who had no abiding place anywhere, but all through the year drifted in the most casual manner from one spot to another. Yet the men looked contented, had wives and children, went out on Sundays, and amused themselves; and after all why should one behave as if the world was coming to an end because one hadn’t a barrel of salt pork or a clamp of potatoes to see one through the winter? Recklessness was finally Pelle’s refuge too; when all the lights seemed to have gone out of the future it helped him to take up the fairy-tale of life anew, and lent a glamor to naked poverty. Imagination entered even into starvation: are you or are you not going to die of it?

Pelle was poor enough for everything to be still before him, and he possessed the poor man’s alert imagination; the great world and the romance of life were the motives that drew him through the void, that peculiar music of life which is never silent, but murmurs to the reckless and the careful alike. Of the world he knew well enough that it was something incomprehensibly vast—something that was always receding; yet in eighty days one could travel right round it, to the place where men walk about with their heads downward, and back again, and experience all its wonders. He himself had set out into this incomprehensible world, and here he was, stranded in this little town, where there was never a crumb to feed a hungry imagination; nothing but a teeming confusion of petty cares. One felt the cold breath of the outer winds, and the dizziness of great spaces; when the little newspaper came the small tradesmen and employers would run eagerly across the street, their spectacles on their noses, and would speak, with gestures of amazement, of the things that happened outside. “China,” they would say; “America!” and fancy that they themselves made part of the bustling world. But Pelle used to wish most ardently that something great and wonderful might wander thither and settle down among them just for once! He would have been quite contented with a little volcano underfoot, so that the houses would begin to sway and bob to one another; or a trifling inundation, so that ships would ride over the town, and have to moor themselves to the weather-cock on the church steeple. He had an irrational longing that something of this kind should happen, something to drive the blood from his heart and make his hair stand on end. But now he had enough to contend against apart from matters of this sort; the world must look after itself until times were better.

It was more difficult to renounce the old fairy-tales, for poverty itself had sung them into his heart, and they spoke to him with Father Lasse’s quivering voice. “A rich child often lies in a poor mother’s lap,” his father used to say, when he prophesied concerning his son’s future, and the saying sank deep into the boy’s mind, like the refrain of a song. But he had learned this much, that there were no elephants here, on whose necks a plucky youngster could ride astraddle, in order to ride down the tiger which was on the point of tearing the King of the Himalayas to pieces so that he would of course receive the king’s daughter and half his kingdom as a reward for his heroic deed. Pelle often loitered about the harbor, but no beautifully dressed little girl ever fell into the water, so that he might rescue her, and then, when he was grown up, make her his wife. And if such a thing did really happen he knew now that his elders would cheat him out of any tip he might receive. And he had quite given up looking for the golden coach which was to run over him, so that the two terrified ladies, who would be dressed in mourning, would take him into their carriage and carry him off to their six- storied castle! Of course, they would adopt him permanently in place of the son which they had just lost, and who, curiously enough, was exactly the same age as himself. No, there were no golden coaches here!

Out in the great world the poorest boy had the most wonderful prospects; all the great men the books had ever heard of had been poor lads like himself, who had reached their high estate through good fortune and their own valor. But all the men in town who possessed anything had attained their wealth by wearily plodding forward and sucking the blood of the poor. They were always sitting and brooding over their money, and they threw nothing away for a lucky fellow to pick up; and they left nothing lying about, lest some poor lad should come and take it. Not one of them considered it beneath him to pick up an old trouser-button off the pavement, and carry it home.

One evening Pelle was running out to fetch half a pound of canister tobacco for Jeppe. In front of the coal-merchant's house the big dog, as always, made for his legs, and he lost the twenty-five-öre piece. While he was looking for it, an elderly man came up to him. Pelle knew him very well; he was Monsen the shipowner, the richest man in the town.

"Have you lost something, my lad?" he asked, and began to assist in the search.

"Now he will question me," thought Pelle. "And then I shall answer him boldly, and then he will look at me attentively and say—"

Pelle was always hoping for some mysterious adventure, such as happens to an able lad and raises him to fortune.

But the shipowner did nothing he was expected to do. He merely searched eagerly, and inquired: "Where were you walking? Here, weren't you? Are you quite certain of that?"

"In any case he'll give me another twenty-five öre," thought Pelle. "Extraordinary—how eager he is!" Pelle did not really want to go on searching, but he could not very well leave off before the other.

"Well, well!" said the shipowner at last, "you may as well whistle for those twenty-five öre. But what a booby you are!" And he moved on, and Pelle looked after him for a long while before putting his hand into his own pocket.

Later, as he was returning that way, he saw a man bowed over the flagstones, striking matches as he searched. It was Monsen. The sight tickled Pelle tremendously. "Have you lost anything?" he asked mischievously, standing on the alert, lest he should get a box on the ear. "Yes, yes; twenty-five öre;" groaned the shipowner. "Can't you help me to find it, my boy?"

Well, he had long understood that Monsen was the richest man in the town, and that he had become so by provisioning ships with spoiled foodstuffs, and refitting old crank vessels, which he heavily insured. And he knew who was a thief and who a bankrupt speculator, and that Merchant Lau only did business with the little shopkeepers, because his daughter had gone to the bad. Pelle knew the secret pride of the town, the "Top-galeass," as she was called, who in her sole self represented the allurements of the capital, and he knew the two sharpers, and the consul with the disease which was eating him up. All this was very gratifying knowledge for one of the rejected.

He had no intention of letting the town retain any trace of those splendors with which he had once endowed it. In his constant ramblings he stripped it to the buff. For instance, there stood the houses of the town, some retiring, some standing well forward, but all so neat on the side that faced the street, with their wonderful old doorways and flowers in every window. Their neatly tarred framework glistened, and they were always newly lime-washed, ochrous yellow or dazzling white, sea-green, or blue as the sky. And on Sundays there was quite a festive display of flags. But Pelle had explored the back quarters of every house; and there were sinks and traps there, with dense slimy growths, and stinking refuse-barrels, and one great dustbin with a drooping elder-tree over it. And the spaces between the cobble-stones were foul with the scales of herrings and the guts of codfish, and the lower portions of the walls were covered with patches of green moss.

The bookbinder and his wife went about hand in hand when they set out for the meeting of some religious society. But at home they fought, and in chapel, as they sat together and sang out of the same hymn-book, they would secretly pinch one another's legs. "Yes," people used to say, "such a nice couple!" But the town couldn't throw dust in Pelle's eyes; he knew a thing or two. If only he had known just how to get himself a new blouse!

Some people didn't go without clothes so readily; they were forever making use of that fabulous thing—credit! At first it took his breath away to discover that the people here in the town got everything they wanted without paying money for it. "Will you please put it down?" they would say, when they came for their boots; and "it's to be entered," he himself would say, when he made a purchase for his employers. All spoke the same magical formula, and Pelle was reminded of Father Lasse, who had counted his shillings over a score of times before he ventured to buy anything. He anticipated much from this discovery, and it was his intention to make good use of the magic words when his own means became exhausted.

Now, naturally, he was wiser. He had discovered that the very poor must always go marketing with their money in their hands, and even for the others there came a day of reckoning. The master already spoke with horror of the New Year; and it was very unfortunate for his business that the leather-sellers had got him in their pocket, so that he could not buy his material where it was cheapest. All the small employers made the same complaint.

But the fairy-tale of credit was not yet exhausted—there was still a manner of drawing a draft upon fortune, which could be kept waiting, and on the future, which redeems all drafts. Credit was a spark of poetry in the scramble of life; there were people going about who were poor as church mice, yet they played the lord. Alfred was such a lucky fellow; he earned not a red cent, but was always dressed like a counter-jumper, and let himself want for nothing. If he took a fancy to anything he simply went in and got it on "tick"; and he was never refused. His comrades envied him and regarded him as a child of fortune.

Pelle himself had a little flirtation with fortune. One day he went gaily into a shop, in order to procure himself some underclothing. When he asked for credit they looked at him as though he could not be quite sane, and he had to go away without effecting his object. "There must be some secret about it that I don't know," he thought; and he dimly remembered another boy, who couldn't stir the pot to cook his porridge or lay the table for himself, because he didn't know the necessary word. He sought Alfred forthwith in order to receive enlightenment.

Alfred was wearing new patent braces, and was putting on his collar. On his feet were slippers with fur edging, which looked like feeding pigeons. "I got them from a shopkeeper's daughter," he said; and he coquetted with his legs; "she's quite gone on me. A nice girl too— only there's no money."

Pelle explained his requirements.

"Shirts! shirts!" Alfred chortled with delight, and clapped his hands before his face. "Good Lord, he wants to gets shirts on tick! If only they had been linen shirts!" He was near bursting with laughter.

Pelle tried again. As a peasant—for he was still that—he had thought of shirts first of all; but now he wanted a summer overcoat and rubber cuffs. "Why do you want credit?" asked the shopkeeper, hesitating. "Are you expecting any money? Or is there any one who will give you a reference?"

No, Pelle didn't want to bring any one else into it; it was simply that he had no money.

"Then wait until you have," said the shopkeeper surlily. "We don't clothe paupers!" Pelle slunk away abashed.

"You're a fool!" said Alfred shortly. "You are just like Albinus—he can never learn how to do it!"

"How do you do it then?" asked Pelle meekly.

"How do I do it—how do I do it?" Alfred could give no explanation; "it just came of itself. But naturally I don't tell them that I'm poor! No, you'd better leave it alone—it'll never succeed with you!"

"Why do you sit there and pinch your upper lip?" asked Pelle discontentedly.

"Pinch? You goat, I'm stroking my moustache!"

VII

On Saturday afternoon Pelle was busily sweeping the street. It was getting on for evening; in the little houses there was already a fire in the grate; one could hear it crackling at Builder Rasmussen's and Swedish Anders', and the smell of broiled herrings filled the street. The women were preparing something extra good in order to wheedle their husbands when they came home with the week's wages. Then they ran across to the huckster's for schnaps and beer, leaving the door wide open behind them; there was just half a minute to spare while the herring was getting cooked on the one side! And now Pelle sniffed it afar off—Madame Rasmussen was tattling away to the huckster, and a voice screeched after her: "Madame Rasmussen! Your herring is burning!" Now she came rushing back, turning her head confusedly from house to house as she scampered across the street and into her house. The blue smoke drifted down among the houses; the sun fell lower and filled the street with gold-dust.

There were people sweeping all along the street; Baker Jörgen, the washerwoman, and the Comptroller's maid-servant. The heavy boughs of the mulberry-tree across the road drooped over the wall and offered their last ripe fruits to whomsoever would pick them. On the other side of the wall the rich merchant Hans—he who married the nurse-maid—was pottering about his garden. He never came out, and the rumor ran that he was held a prisoner by his wife and her kin. But Pelle had leaned his ear against the wall, and had heard a stammering old voice repeating the same pet names, so that it sounded like one of those love-songs that never come to an end; and when in the twilight he slipped out of his attic window and climbed on to the ridge of the roof, in order to take a look at the world, he had seen a tiny little white-haired man walking down there in the garden, with his arm round the waist of a woman younger than himself. They were like a couple of young lovers, and they had to stop every other moment in order to caress one another. The most monstrous things were said of him and his money; of his fortune, that once upon a time was founded on a paper of pins, and was now so great that some curse must rest upon it.

From the baker's house the baker's son came slinking hymn-book in hand. He fled across to the shelter of the wall, and hurried off; old Jörgen stood there gobbling with laughter as he watched him, his hands folded over his broomstick.

"O Lord, is that a man?" he cried to Jeppe, who sat at his window, shaving himself before the milk-can. "Just look how he puffs! Now he'll go in and beg God to forgive him for going courting!"

Jeppe came to the window to see and to silence him; one could hear Brother Jörgen's falsetto voice right down the street. "Has he been courting? However did you get him to venture such a leap?" he asked eagerly.

"Oh, it was while we were sitting at table. I had a tussle with my melancholy madman—because I couldn't help thinking of the little Jörgen. God knows, I told myself, no little Jörgen has come to carry on your name, and the boy's a weakling, and you've no one else to build on! It's all very well going about with your nose in the air all the days God gives you—everything will be swept away and be to no purpose. And everything of that sort—you know how I get thinking when ideas like that get the upper hand with me. I sat there and looked at the boy, and angry I felt with him, that I did; and right opposite him there was sitting a fine bit of womanhood, and he not looking at her. And with that I struck my hand on the table, and I says, 'Now, boy, just you take Marie by the hand and ask her whether she'll be your wife—I want to make an end of the matter now and see what you're good for!' The boy all shrivels up and holds out his hand, and Marie, it don't come amiss to her. 'Yes, that I will!' she says, and grips hold of him before he has time to think what he's doing. And we shall be having the marriage soon."

"If you can make a boot out of that leather!" said Jeppe.

"Oh, she's a warm piece—look at the way she's built. She's thawing him already. Women, they know the way—he won't freeze in bed."

Old Jörgen laughed contentedly, and went off to his work. "Yes, why, she'd breathe life into the dead," he announced to the street at large.

The others went out in their finest clothes, but Pelle did not care to go. He had not been able to accomplish his constant resolution to keep himself neat and clean, and this failure weighed upon him and abashed him. And the holes in his stockings, which were now so big that they could no longer be darned, were disgustingly apparent, with his skin showing through them, so that he had a loathing for himself.

Now all the young people were going out. He could see the sea in the opening at the end of the street; it was perfectly calm, and had borrowed the colors of the sunset. They would be going to the harbor or the dunes by the sea; there would be dancing on the grass, and perhaps some would get to fighting about a girl. But he wasn't going to be driven out of the pack like a mangy dog; he didn't care a hang for the whole lot of them!

He threw off his apron and established himself on a beer-barrel which stood outside before the gate. On the bench opposite sat the older inhabitants of the street, puffing at their pipes and gossiping about everything under the sun. Now the bells sounded the hour for leaving off work. Madame Rasmussen was beating her child and reviling it in time with her blows. Then suddenly all was silent; only the crying of the child continued, like a feeble evening hymn. Old Jeppe was talking about Malaga—"when I ran ashore at Malaga!"— but Baker Jörgen was still lamenting his want of an heir, and sighing: "Yes, yes; if only one could see into the future!" Then he suddenly began to talk about the Mormons. "It might really be great fun to see, some time, what they have to offer you," he said.

"I thought you'd been a Mormon a long time, Uncle Jörgen," said Master Andres. The old man laughed.

"Well, well; one tries all sorts of things in one's time," he said, and looked out at the sky.

Up the street stood the watchmaker, on his stone steps, his face turned up to the zenith, while he shouted his senseless warnings: "The new time! I ask you about the new time, O God the Father!" he repeated.

Two weary stevedores were going homeward. "He'll drive all poverty out of the world and give us all a new life—that's the form his madness takes," said one of them, with a dreary laugh.

"Then he's got the millennium on the brain?" said the other.

"No, he's just snarling at the world," said old Jörgen, behind them. "We shall certainly get a change in the weather."

"Things are bad with him just now, poor fellow," said Bjerregrav, shuddering. "It was about this time of the year that he lost his wits."

An inner voice admonished Pelle: "Don't sit there with your hands in your lap, but go in and look after your clothes!" But he could not bring himself to do so—the difficulties had become too insurmountable. On the following day Manna and the others called him, but he could not spring over the wall to join them; they had begun to turn up their noses at him and regard him critically. He did not very well understand it, but he had become an outcast, a creature who no longer cared about washing himself properly. But what was the use? He could not go on contending against the invincible! No one had warned him in time, and now the town had captured him, and he had given up everything else. He must shuffle through life as best he could.

No one had a thought for him! When washing was being done for his employers it never occurred to Madam to wash anything of his, and he was not the boy to come forward of himself. The washerwoman was more considerate; when she could she would smuggle in some of Pelle's dirty linen, although it meant more work for her. But she was poor herself; as for the rest, they only wanted to make use of him. There was no one in town who cared sufficiently for his welfare to take the trouble even to open his mouth to tell him the truth. This was a thought that made him feel quite weak about the knees, although he was fifteen years old and had courage to tackle a mad bull. More than anything else it was his loneliness that weakened his powers of resistance. He was helpless alone among all these people, a child, who had to look after himself as best he could, and be prepared for attacks from every quarter.

He sat there, making no effort to dispel the misery that had come over him, and was working its will with him, while with half an ear he listened to the life around him. But suddenly he felt something in his waistcoat pocket—money! He felt immensely relieved at once, but he did not hurry; he slipped behind the gate and counted it. One and a half kroner. He was on the point of regarding it as a gift from on high, as something which the Almighty had in His great goodness placed there, but then it occurred to him that this was his master's money. It had been given him the day before for repairs to a pair of ladies' shoes, and he had forgotten to pay it in, while the master, strangely enough, had quite forgotten to ask for it.

Pelle stood with bent back by the well outside, scrubbing himself over a bucket until his blood tingled. Then he put on his best clothes, drew his shoes on to his naked feet, to avoid the painful feeling of the ragged stockings, and buttoned his rubber collar—for the last time innocent of any tie—to his shirt. Shortly afterward he was standing outside a shop-window, contemplating some large neckties, which had just been put upon the market, and could be worn with any one of four faces outward; they filled the whole of the waistcoat, so that one did not see the shirt. Now he would be disdained no longer! For a moment he ran to and fro and breathed the air; then he got upon the scent, and ran at a breathless gallop toward the sea-dunes, where the young folk of the town played late into the summer night that lay over the wan sea.

Of course, it was only a loan. Pelle had to sole a pair of shoes for a baker's apprentice who worked with Nilen; as soon as they were finished he would repay the money. He could put the money under the cutting-out board in his master's room; the master would find it there, would gaze at it with a droll expression, and say: "What the devil is this?" And then he would knock on the wall, and would treat Pelle to a long rigmarole about his magical gifts—and then he would ask him to run out and fetch a half-bottle of port.

He did not receive the money for soling the shoes; half the sum he had to pay out for leather, and the rest was a long time coming, for the baker's apprentice was a needy wretch. But he did not doubt his own integrity; the master might be as sure of his money as if it had been in the bank. Yet now and again he forgot to give up petty sums —if some necessity or other was pressing him unexpectedly. They were, of course, all loans—until the golden time came. And that was never far away.

One day he returned home as the young master was standing at the door, staring at the driving clouds overhead. He gave Pelle's shoulder a familiar squeeze. "How was it they didn't pay you for the shoes at the Chamberlain's yesterday?"

Pelle went crimson and his hand went to his waistcoat pocket. "I forgot it," he said in a low voice.

"Now, now!" The master shook him good-naturedly. "It's not that I mistrust you. But just to be methodical!"

Pelle's heart pounded wildly in his body; he had just decided to use the money to buy a pair of stockings, the very next time he went out —and then what would have happened? And the master's belief in him! And all at once his offence showed itself to him in all its shameful treachery; he felt as if he was on the point of being sick, so disturbed was he. Until this moment he had preserved through everything the feeling of his own worth, and now it was destroyed; there could not be any one wickeder than he in all the world. In future no one could trust him any more, and he could no longer look people straight in the face; unless he went to the master at once and cast himself and his shame unconditionally on his mercy. There was no other salvation, that he knew.

But he was not certain that the master would conceive the matter in its finer aspect, or that everything would turn out for the best; he had given up believing in fairy-tales. Then he would simply be turned away, or perhaps be sent to the courthouse, and it would be all up with him.

Pelle resolved to keep it to himself; and for many days he went about suffering from a sense of his own wickedness. But then necessity gripped him by the throat and brushed all else aside; and in order to procure himself the most necessary things he was forced to resort to the dangerous expedient of stating, when the master gave him money to buy anything, that it was to be put down. And then one day it was all up with him. The others were ready to pull down the house about his ears; they threw his things out of the garret and called him a filthy beast. Pelle wept; he was quite convinced that not he was the guilty person, but Peter, who was always keeping company with the nastiest women, but he could get no hearing. He hurried away, with the resolves that he would never come back.

On the dunes he was captured by Emil and Peter, who had been sent out after him by old Jeppe. He did not want to go back with them, but they threw him down and dragged him back, one taking his head and one his legs. People came to the door and laughed and asked questions, and the other two gave their explanation of the matter, which was a terrible disgrace for Pelle.

And then he fell ill. He lay under the tiled roof raving with fever; they had thrown his bed into the loft. "What, isn't he up yet?" said Jeppe, astounded, when he came in to the workshop. "No? Well, he'll soon get up when he gets hungry." It was no joke to take a sick apprentice his meals in bed. But Pelle did not come down.

Once the young master threw all considerations overboard and took some food up to him. “You’re making yourself ridiculous,” sneered Jeppe; “you’ll never be able to manage people like that!” And Madam scolded. But Master Andres whistled until he was out of hearing.

Poor Pelle lay there, in delirium; his little head was full of fancies, more than it would hold. But now the reaction set in, and he lay there stuffing himself with all that was brought him.

The young master sat upstairs a great deal and received enlightenment on many points. It was not his nature to do anything energetically, but he arranged that Pelle’s washing should be done in the house, and he took care that Lasse should be sent for.

VIII

Jeppe was related to about half the island, but he was not greatly interested in disentangling his relationship. He could easily go right back to the founder of the family, and trace the generations through two centuries, and follow the several branches of the family from country to town and over the sea and back again, and show that Andres and the judge must be cousins twice removed. But if any insignificant person asked him: “How was it, then—weren’t my father and you first cousins?” he would answer brusquely, “Maybe, but the soup grows too thin after a time. This relationship!”

“Then you and I, good Lord! are second cousins, and you are related to the judge as well,” Master Andres would say. He did not grudge people any pleasure they could derive from the facts of relationship. Poor people regarded him gratefully—they said he had kind eyes; it was a shame that he should not be allowed to live.

Jeppe was the oldest employer in the town, and among the shoemakers his workshop was the biggest. He was able, too, or rather he had been, and he still possessed the manual skill peculiar to the old days. When it came to a ticklish job he would willingly show them how to get on with it, or plan some contrivance to assist them. Elastic-sided boots and lace-up boots had superseded the old footwear, but honest skill still meant an honest reputation. And if some old fellow wanted a pair of Wellingtons or Bluchers of leather waterproofed with grease, instead of by some new-fangled devilry, he must needs go to Jeppe—no one else could shape an instep as he could. And when it came to handling the heavy dressed leathers for sea-boots there was no one like Jeppe. He was obstinate, and rigidly opposed to everything new, where everybody else was led away by novelty. In this he was peculiarly the representative of the old days, and people respected him as such.

The apprentices alone did not respect him. They did everything they could to vex him and to retaliate on him for being such a severe task-master. They all laid themselves out to mystify him, speaking of the most matter-of-fact things in dark and covert hints, in order to make old Jeppe suspicious, and if he spied upon them and caught them at something which proved to be nothing at all they had a great day of it.

“What does this mean? Where are you going without permission?” asked Jeppe, if one of them got up to go into the court; he was always forgetting that times had altered. They did not answer, and then he would fly into a passion. “I’ll have you show me respect!” he would cry, stamping on the floor until the dust eddied round him. Master Andres would slowly raise his head. “What’s the matter with you this time, father?” he would ask wearily. Then Jeppe would break out into fulminations against the new times.

If Master Andres and the journeyman were not present, the apprentices amused themselves by making the old man lose his temper; and this was not difficult, as he saw hostility in everything. Then he would snatch up a knee-strap and begin to rain blows upon the sinner. At the same time he would make the most extraordinary grimaces and give vent to a singular gurgling sound. “There, take that, although it grieves me to use harsh measures!” he would mew. “And that, too—and that! You’ve got to go through with it, if you want to enter the craft!” Then he would give the lad something that faintly resembled a kick, and would stand there struggling for breath. “You’re a troublesome youngster—you’ll allow that?” “Yes, my mother used to break a broomstick over my head every other day!” replied Peter, the rogue, snorting. “There, you see you are! But it may all turn out for the best even now. The foundation’s not so bad!” Jeppe doddered to and fro, his hands behind his back. The rest of the day he was inclined to solemnity, and did his best to obliterate all remembrance of the punishment. “It was only for your own good!” he would say, in a propitiatory tone.

Jeppe was first cousin to the crazy Anker, but he preferred not to lay claim to the fact; the man could not help being mad, but he made his living, disgracefully enough, by selling sand in the streets—a specialist in his way. Day by day one saw Anker’s long, thin figure in the streets, with a sackful of sand slung over his sloping shoulders; he wore a suit of blue twill and white woollen stockings, and his face was death-like. He was quite fleshless. “That comes of all his digging,” people said. “Look at his assistant!”

He never appeared in the workshop with his sack of sand; he was afraid of Jeppe, who was now the oldest member of the family. Elsewhere he went in and out everywhere with his clattering wooden shoes; and people bought of him, as they must have sand for their floors, and his was as good as any other. He needed next to nothing for his livelihood; people maintained that he never ate anything, but lived on his own vitals. With the money he received he bought materials for the "New Time," and what was left he threw away, in his more exalted moments, from the top of his high stairs. The street-urchins always came running up when the word went round that the madness about the "new time" was attacking him.

He and Bjerregrav had been friends as boys. Formerly they had been inseparable, and neither of them was willing to do his duty and marry, although each was in a position to keep a wife and children. At an age when others were thinking about how to find favor with the womenfolk, these two were running about with their heads full of rubbish which enraged people. At that time a dangerous revolutionist was living with Bjerregrav's brother; he had spent many years on Christiansö, but then the Government had sent him to spend the rest of his term of captivity on Bornholm. Dampe was his name; Jeppe had known him when an apprentice in Copenhagen; and his ambition was to overthrow God and king. This ambition of his did not profit him greatly; he was cast down like a second Lucifer, and only kept his head on his shoulders by virtue of an act of mercy. The two young people regarded him as then justification, and he turned their heads with his venomous talk, so that they began to ponder over things which common folk do better to leave alone. Bjerregrav came through this phase with a whole skin, but Anker paid the penalty by losing his wits. Although they both had a comfortable competence, they pondered above all things over the question of poverty—as though there was anything particular to be discovered about that!

All this was many years ago; it was about the time when the craze for freedom had broken out in the surrounding nations with fratricide and rebellion. Matters were not so bad on the island, for neither Anker nor Bjerregrav was particularly warlike; yet everybody could see that the town was not behind the rest of the world. Here the vanity of the town was quite in agreement with Master Jeppe, but for the rest he roundly condemned the whole movement. He always looked ready to fall upon Bjerregrav tooth and nail if the conversation turned on Anker's misfortune.

"Dampe!" said Jeppe scornfully, "he has turned both your heads!"

"That's a lie!" stammered Bjerregrav. "Anker went wrong later than that—after King Frederick granted us liberty. And it's only that I'm not very capable; I have my wits, thank God!" Bjerregrav solemnly raised the fingers of his right hand to his lips, a gesture which had all the appearance of a surviving vestige of the sign of the cross.

"You and your wits!" hissed Jeppe contemptuously. "You, who throw your money away over the first tramp you meet! And you defend an abominable agitator, who never goes out by daylight like other people, but goes gallivanting about at night!"

"Yes, because he's ashamed of humanity; he wants to make the world more beautiful!" Bjerregrav blushed with embarrassment when he had said this.

But Jeppe was beside himself with contempt. "So gaol-birds are ashamed of honest people! So that's why he takes his walks at night! Well, the world would of course be a more beautiful place if it were filled with people like you and Dampe!"

The pitiful thing about Anker was that he was such a good craftsman. He had inherited the watchmaker's trade from his father and grandfather, and his Bornholm striking-clocks were known all over the world; orders came to him from Funen as well as from the capital. But when the Constitution was granted he behaved like a child—as though people had not always been free on Bornholm! Now, he said, the new time had begun, and in its honor he intended, in his insane rejoicing, to make an ingenious clock which should show the moon and the date and the month and year. Being an excellent craftsman, he completed it successfully, but then it entered his head that the clock ought to show the weather as well. Like so many whom God had endowed with His gifts, he ventured too far and sought to rival God Himself. But here the brakes were clapped on, and the whole project was nearly derailed. For a long time he took it greatly to heart, but when the work was completed he rejoiced. He was offered a large price for his masterpiece, and Jeppe bade him close with the offer, but he answered crazily—for he was now definitely insane—"This cannot be bought with money. Everything I made formerly had its value in money, but not this. Can any one buy *me*?"

For a long time he was in a dilemma as to what he should do with his work, but then one day he came to Jeppe, saying: “Now I know; the best ought to have the clock. I shall send it to the King. He has given us the new time, and this clock will tell the new time.” Anker sent the clock away, and after some time he received two hundred thalers, paid him through the Treasury.

This was a large sum of money, but Anker was not satisfied; he had expected a letter of thanks from the King’s own hand. He behaved very oddly about this, and everything went wrong with him; over and over again trouble built its nest with him. The money he gave to the poor, and he lamented that the new time had not yet arrived. So he sank even deeper into his madness, and however hard Jeppe scolded him and lectured him it did no good. Finally he went so far as to fancy that he was appointed to create the new time, and then he became cheerful once more.

Three or four families of the town—very poor people, so demoralized that the sects would have nothing to do with them—gathered around Anker, and heard the voice of God in his message. “*They* lose nothing by sitting under a crazy man,” saw Jeppe scornfully. Anker himself paid no attention to them, but went his own way. Presently he was a king’s son in disguise, and was betrothed to the eldest daughter of the King—and the new time was coming. Or when his mood was quieter, he would sit and work at an infallible clock which would not show the time; it would *be* the time—the new time itself.

He went to and fro in the workshop, in order to let Master Andres see the progress of his invention; he had conceived a blind affection for the young master. Every year, about the first of January, Master Andres had to write a letter for him, a love-letter to the king’s daughter, and had also to take it upon him to despatch it to the proper quarter; and from time to time Anker would run in to ask whether an answer had yet arrived; and at the New Year a fresh love-letter was sent off. Master Andres had them all put away.

One evening—it was nearly time to knock off—there was a thundering knock on the workshop door, and the sound of some one humming a march drifted in from the entry. “Can you not open?” cried a solemn voice: “the Prince is here!”

“Pelle, open the door quick!” said the master. Pelle flung the door wide open, and Anker marched in. He wore a paper hat with a waving plume, and epaulettes made out of paper frills; his face was beaming, and he stood there with his hand to his hat as he allowed the march to die away. The young master rose gaily and shouldered arms with his stick.

“Your Majesty,” he said, “how goes it with the new time?”

“Not at all well!” replied Anker, becoming serious. “The pendulums that should keep the whole in motion are failing me.” He stood still, gazing at the door; his brain was working mysteriously.

“Ought they to be made of gold?” The master’s eyes were twinkling, but he was earnestness personified.

“They ought to be made of eternity,” said Anker unwillingly, “and first it has got to be invented.”

For a long time he stood there, staring in front of him with his gray, empty eyes, without speaking a word. He did not move; only his temples went on working as though some worm was gnawing at them and seeking its way out.

Suddenly it became uncomfortable; his silence was sometimes like a living darkness that surrounded those about him. Pelle sat there with palpitating heart.

Then the lunatic came forward and bent over the young master’s ear. “Has an answer come from the king?” he asked, in a penetrating whisper.

“No, not yet; but I expect it every day. You can be quite easy,” the master whispered back. Anker stood for a few moments in silence; he looked as though he must be meditating, but after his own fashion. Then he turned round and marched out of the workshop.

“Go after him and see he gets home all right,” said the young master. His voice sounded mournful now. Pelle followed the clockmaker up the street.

It was a Saturday evening, and the workers were on their way homeward from the great quarries and the potteries which lay about half a mile beyond the town. They passed in large groups, their dinner-boxes on their back, with a beer-bottle hung in front as a counter-weight. Their sticks struck loudly on the flagstones, and the iron heel-pieces of their wooden shoes struck out sparks as they passed. Pelle knew that weary homecoming; it was as though weariness in person had invaded the town. And he knew the sound of this taciturn procession; the snarling sound when this man or that made an unexpected and involuntary movement with his stiffened limbs, and was forced to groan with the pain of it. But to-night they gave him a different impression, and something like a smile broke through the encrusted stone-dust on their faces; it was the reflection of the bright new kroner that lay in their pockets after the exhausting labor of the week. Some of them had to visit the post-office to renew their lottery tickets or to ask for a postponement, and here and there one was about to enter a tavern, but at the last moment would be captured by his wife, leading a child by the hand.

Anker stood motionless on the sidewalk, his face turned toward the passing workers. He had bared his head, and the great plume of his hat drooped to the ground behind him; he looked agitated, as though something were fermenting within him, which could not find utterance, save in an odd, unintelligible noise. The workers shook their heads sadly as they trudged onward; one solitary young fellow threw him a playful remark. “Keep your hat on—it’s not a funeral!” he cried. A few foreign seamen came strolling over the hill from the harbor; they came zigzagging down the street, peeping in at all the street doors, and laughing immoderately as they did so. One of them made straight for Anker with outstretched arms, knocked off his hat, and went on with his arm in the air as though nothing had happened. Suddenly he wheeled about. “What, are you giving yourself airs?” he cried, and therewith he attacked the lunatic, who timidly set about resisting him. Then another sailor ran up and struck Anker behind the knees, so that he fell. He lay on the ground shouting and kicking with fright, and the whole party flung itself upon him.

The boys scattered in all directions, in order to gather stones and come to Anker’s assistance. Pelle stood still, his body jerking convulsively, as though the old sickness were about to attack him. Once he sprang forward toward Anker, but something within him told him that sickness had deprived him of his blind courage.

There was one pale, slender youth who was not afraid. He went right among the sailors, in order to drag them off the lunatic, who was becoming quite frantic under their treatment of him.

“He isn’t in his right mind!” cried the boy, but he was hurled back with a bleeding face.

This was Morten, the brother of Jens the apprentice. He was so angry that he was sobbing.

Then a tall man came forward out of the darkness, with a rolling gait; he came forward muttering to himself. “Hurrah!” cried the boys. “Here comes the ‘Great Power.’” But the man did not hear; he came to a standstill by the fighting group and stood there, still muttering. His giant figure swayed to and fro above them. “Help him, father!” cried Morten. The man laughed foolishly, and began slowly to pull his coat off. “Help him, then!” bellowed the boy, quite beside himself, shaking his father’s arm. Jörgensen stretched out his hand to pat the boy’s cheek, when he saw the blood on his face. “Knock them down!” cried the boy, like one possessed. Then a sudden shock ran through the giant’s body—somewhat as when a heavy load is suddenly set in motion; he bowed himself a little, shook himself, and began to throw the sailors aside. One after another they stood still for a moment, feeling the place where he had seized them, and then they set off running as hard as they could toward the harbor.

Jörgensen set the madman on his legs again and escorted him home. Pelle and Morten followed them hand-in-hand. A peculiar feeling of satisfaction thrilled Pelle through; he had seen strength personified in action, and he had made a friend.

After that they were inseparable. Their friendship did not grow to full strength; it overshadowed them suddenly, magically conjured out of their hearts. In Morten’s pale, handsome face there was something indescribable that made Pelle’s heart throb in his breast, and a gentler note came into the voices of all who spoke to him. Pelle did not clearly understand what there could be attractive about himself; but he steeped himself in this friendship, which fell upon his ravaged soul like a beneficent rain. Morten would come up into the workshop as soon as work was over, or wait for Pelle at the corner. They always ran when they were going to meet. If Pelle had to work overtime, Morten did not go out, but sat in the workshop and amused him. He was very fond of reading, and told Pelle about the contents of many books.

Through Morten, Pelle drew nearer to Jens, and found that he had many good qualities under his warped exterior. Jens had just that broken, despondent manner which makes a child instinctively suspect a miserable home. Pelle had at first supposed that Jens and Morten must have been supported by the poor-box; he could not understand how a boy could bear his father to be a giant of whom the whole town went in terror. Jens seemed hard of hearing when any one spoke to him. “He has had so many beatings,” said Morten. “Father can’t endure him, because he is stupid.” Clever he was not, but he could produce the most wonderful melodies by whistling merely with his lips, so that people would stand still and listen to him.

After his illness Pelle had a more delicate ear for everything. He no longer let the waves pass over him, careless as a child, but sent out tentacles—he was seeking for something. Everything had appeared to him as simpler than it was, and his dream of fortune had been too crudely conceived; it was easily shattered, and there was nothing behind it for him to rest on. Now he felt that he must build a better foundation, now he demanded nourishment from a wider radius, and his soul was on the alert for wider ventures; he dropped his anchors in unfamiliar seas. The goal of his desires receded into the unknown; he now overcame his aversion from the great and mysterious Beyond, where the outlines of the face of God lay hidden. The God of Bible history and the sects had for Pelle been only a man, equipped with a beard, and uprightness, and mercy, and all the rest; he was not to be despised, but the “Great Power” was certainly stronger. Hitherto Pelle had not felt the want of a God; he had only obscurely felt his membership in that all-loving God who will arise from the lowest and foulest and overshadow heaven; in that frenzied dream of the poor, who see, in a thousand bitter privations, the pilgrimage to the beloved land. But now he was seeking for that which no words can express; now the words, “the millennium,” had a peculiar sound in his ears.

Anker, of course, was crazy, because the others said so; when they laughed at him, Pelle laughed with them, but there was still something in him that filled Pelle with remorse for having laughed at him. Pelle himself would have liked to scramble money from the top of his high steps if he had been rich; and if Anker talked strangely, in curious phrases, of a time of happiness for all the poor, why, Father Lasse’s lamentations had dealt with the same subject, as far back as he could remember. The foundation of the boy’s nature felt a touch of the same pious awe which had forbidden Lasse and the others, out in the country, to laugh at the insane, for God’s finger had touched them, so that their souls wandered in places to which no other could attain. Pelle felt the face of the unknown God gazing at him out of the mist.

He had become another being since his illness; his movements were more deliberate, and the features of his round childish face had become more marked and prominent. Those two weeks of illness had dislodged his cares, but they were imprinted on his character, to which they lent a certain gravity. He still roamed about alone, encompassing himself with solitude, and he observed the young master in his own assiduous way. He had an impression that the master was putting him to the proof, and this wounded him. He himself knew that that which lay behind his illness would never be repeated, and he writhed uneasily under suspicion.

One day he could bear it no longer. He took the ten kroner which Lasse had given him so that he might buy a much-needed winter overcoat, and went in to the master, who was in the cutting-out room, and laid them on the table. The master looked at him with a wondering expression, but there was a light in his eyes.

“What the devil is that?” he asked, drawling.

“That’s master’s money,” said Pelle, with averted face.

Master Andres gazed at him with dreamy eyes, and then he seemed to return, as though from another world, and Pelle all at once understood what every one said—that the young master was going to die. Then he burst into tears.

But the master himself could not understand.

“What the deuce. But that means nothing!” he cried, and he tossed the ten kroner in the air. “Lord o’ me! what a lot of money! Well, you aren’t poor!” He stood there, not knowing what to believe, his hand resting on Pelle’s shoulder.

“It’s right,” whispered Pelle. “I’ve reckoned it up exactly. And the master mustn’t suspect me—I’ll never do it again.”

Master Andres made a gesture of refusal with his hand, and wanted to speak, but at that very moment he was attacked by a paroxysm of coughing. “You young devil!” he groaned, and leaned heavily on Pelle;

his face was purple. Then came a fit of sickness, and the sweat beaded his face. He stood there for a little, gasping for breath while his strength returned, and then he slipped the money into Pelle’s hand and pushed him out of the room.

Pelle was greatly dejected. His uprightness was unrewarded, and what had become of his vindication? He had been so glad to think that he would shake himself free of all the disgrace. But late in the afternoon the master called him into the cutting-out room. “Here, Pelle,” he said confidentially, “I want to renew my lottery ticket; but I’ve no money. Can you lend me those ten kroner for a week?” So it was all as it should be; his one object was to put the whole disgrace away from him.

Jens and Morten helped him in that. There were three of them now; and Pelle had a feeling that he had a whole army at his back. The world had grown no smaller, no less attractive, by reason of the endless humiliations of the year. And Pelle knew down to the ground exactly where he stood, and that knowledge was bitter enough. Below him lay the misty void, and the bubbles which now and again rose to the surface and broke did not produce in him any feeling of mystical wonder as to the depths. But he did not feel oppressed thereby; what was, was so because it must be. And over him the other half of the round world revolved in the mystery of the blue heavens, and again and again he heard its joyous *Forward! On!*

IX

In his loneliness Pelle had often taken his way to the little house by the cemetery, where Due lived in two little rooms. It was always a sort of consolation to see familiar faces, but in other respects he did not gain much by his visits; Due was pleasant enough, but Anna thought of nothing but herself, and how she could best get on. Due had a situation as coachman at a jobmaster’s, and they seemed to have a sufficiency.

“We have no intention of being satisfied with driving other people’s horses,” Anna would say, “but you must crawl before you can walk.” She had no desire to return to the country.

“Out there there’s no prospects for small people, who want something more than groats in their belly and a few rags on their back. You are respected about as much as the dirt you walk on, and there’s no talk of any future. I shall never regret that we’ve come away from the country.”

Due, on the contrary, was homesick. He was quite used to knowing that there was a quarter of a mile between him and the nearest neighbor, and here he could hear, through the flimsy walls, whether his neighbors were kissing, fighting, or counting their money. “It is so close here, and then I miss the earth; the pavements are so hard.”

“He misses the manure—he can’t come treading it into the room,” said Anna, in a superior way; “for that was the only thing there was plenty of in the country. Here in the town too the children can get on better; in the country poor children can’t learn anything that’ll help them to amount to something; they’ve got to work for their daily bread. It’s bad to be poor in the country!”

“It’s worse here in town,” said Pelle bitterly, “for here only those who dress finely amount to anything!”

“But there are all sorts of ways here by which a man can earn money, and if one way doesn’t answer, he can try another. Many a man has come into town with his naked rump sticking out of his trousers, and now he’s looked up to! If a man’s only got the will and the energy —well, I’ve thought both the children ought to go to the municipal school, when they are older; knowledge is never to be despised.”

“Why not Marie as well?” asked Pelle.

“She? What? She’s not fitted to learn anything. Besides, she’s only a girl.”

Anna, like her brother Alfred, had set herself a lofty goal. Her eyes were quite bright when she spoke of it, and it was evidently her intention to follow it regardless of consequences. She was a loud-voiced, capable woman with an authoritative manner; Due simply sat by and smiled and kept his temper. But in his inmost heart, according to report, he knew well enough what he wanted. He never went to the public-house, but came straight home after work; and in the evening he was never happier than when all three children were scrambling over him. He made no distinction between his own two youngsters and the six-year-old Marie, whom Anna had borne before she married him.

Pelle was very fond of little Marie, who had thrived well enough so long as her child-loving grandparents had had her, but now she was thin and had stopped growing, and her eyes were too experienced. She gazed at one like a poor housewife who is always fretted and distressed, and Pelle was sorry for her. If her mother was harsh to her, he always remembered that Christmastide evening when he first visited his Uncle Kalle, and when Anna, weeping and abashed, had crept into the house, soon to be a mother. Little Anna, with the mind of a merry child, whom everybody liked. What had become of her now?

One evening, as Morten was not at liberty, he ran thither. Just as he was on the point of knocking, he heard Anna storming about indoors; suddenly the door flew open and little Marie was thrown out upon the footpath. The child was crying terribly.

“What’s the matter, then?” asked Pelle, in his cheerful way.

“What’s the matter? The matter is that the brat is saucy and won’t eat just because she doesn’t get exactly the same as the others. Here one has to slave and reckon and contrive—and for a bad girl like that! Now she’s punishing herself and won’t eat. Is it anything to her what the others have? Can she compare herself with them? She’s a bastard brat and always will be, however you like to dress it up!”

“She can’t help that!” said Pelle angrily.

“Can’t help it! Perhaps I can help it? Is it my fault that she didn’t come into the world a farmer’s daughter, but has to put up with being a bastard? Yes, you may believe me, the neighbors' wives tell me to my face she hasn't her father's eyes, and they look at me as friendly as a lot of cats! Am I to be punished all my life, perhaps, because I looked a bit higher, and let myself be led astray in a way that didn't lead to anything? Ah, the little monster!" And she clenched her fists and shook them in the direction from which the child's crying could still be heard.

"Here one goes and wears oneself out to keep the house tidy and to be respectable, and then no one will treat me as being as good as themselves, just because once I was a bit careless!" She was quite beside herself.

"If you aren't kind to little Marie, I shall tell Uncle Kalle," said Pelle warningly.

She spat contemptuously. "Then you can tell him. Yes, I wish to God you'd do it! Then he'd come and take her away, and delighted I should be!"

But now Due was heard stamping on the flags outside the door, and they could hear him too consoling the child. He came in holding her by the hand, and gave his wife a warning look, but said nothing. "There, there—now all that's forgotten," he repeated, in order to check the child's sobs, and he wiped away the grimy tears from her cheeks with his great thumbs.

Anna brought him his food, sulkily enough, and out in the kitchen she muttered to herself. Due, while he ate his supper of bacon and black bread, stood the child between his knees and stared at her with round eyes. "Rider!" she said, and smiled persuasively. "Rider!" Due laid a cube of bacon on a piece of bread.

"There came a rider riding
On his white hoss, hoss, hoss, hoss!"

he sang, and he made the bread ride up to her mouth. "And then?"

"Then, *pop* he rode in at the gate!" said the child, and swallowed horse and rider.

While she ate she kept her eyes fixed upon him unwaveringly, with that painful earnestness which was so sad to see. But sometimes it happened that the rider rode right up to her mouth, and then, with a jerk, turned about, and disappeared, at a frantic gallop, between Due's white teeth. Then she smiled for a moment.

"There's really no sense shoving anything into her," said Anna, who was bringing coffee in honor of the visitor. "She gets as much as she can eat, and she's not hungry."

"She's hungry, all the same!" hummed Due.

"Then she's dainty—our poor food isn't good enough for her. She takes after her father, I can tell you! And what's more, if she isn't naughty now she soon will be when once she sees she's backed up."

Due did not reply. "Are you quite well again now?" he asked, turning to Pelle.

"What have you been doing to-day?" asked Anna, filling her husband's long pipe.

"I had to drive a forest ranger from up yonder right across the whole of the moor. I got a krone and a half for a tip."

"Give it to me, right away!"

Due passed her the money, and she put it into an old coffeepot. "This evening you must take the bucket to the inspector's," she said.

Due stretched himself wearily. "I've been on the go since half-past four this morning," he said.

"But I've promised it faithfully, so there's nothing else to be done. And then I thought you'd see to the digging for them this autumn; you can see when we've got the moonlight, and then there's Sundays. If we don't get it some one else will—and they are good payers."

Due did not reply.

"In a year or two from now, I'm thinking, you'll have your own horses and won't need to go scraping other people's daily bread together," she said, laying her hand on his shoulder, "Won't you go right away and take the bucket? Then it's done. And I must have some small firewood cut before you go to bed."

Due sat there wearily blinking. After eating, fatigue came over him. He could hardly see out of his eyes, so sleepy was he. Marie handed him his cap, and at last he got on his legs. He and Pelle went out together.

The house in which Due lived lay far up the long street, which ran steeply down to the sea. It was an old watercourse, and even now when there was a violent shower the water ran down like a rushing torrent between the poor cottages.

Down on the sea-road they met a group of men who were carrying lanterns in their hands; they were armed with heavy sticks, and one of them wore an old leather hat and carried a club studded with spikes. This was the night-watch. They moved off, and behind them all went the new policeman, Pihl, in his resplendent uniform. He kept well behind the others, in order to show off his uniform, and also to ensure that none of the watch took to their heels. They were half drunk, and were taking their time; whenever they met any one they stood still and related with much detail precisely why they had taken the field. The "Great Power" was at his tricks again. He had been refractory all day, and the provost had given the order to keep an eye on him. And quite rightly, for in his cups he had met Ship- owner Monsen, on Church Hill, and had fallen upon him with blows and words of abuse: "So you take the widow's bread out of her mouth, do you? You told her the *Three Sisters* was damaged at sea, and you took over her shares for next to nothing, did you? Out of pure compassion, eh, you scoundrel? And there was nothing the matter with the ship except that she had done only too well and made a big profit, eh? So you did the poor widow a kindness, eh?" A scoundrel, he called him and at every question he struck him a blow, so that he rolled on the ground. "We are all witnesses, and now he must go to prison. A poor stone-cutter oughtn't to go about playing the judge. Come and help us catch him, Due—you are pretty strong!"

"It's nothing to do with me," said Due.

"You do best to keep your fingers out of it," said one of the men derisively; "you might get to know the feel of his fist." And they went on, laughing contemptuously.

"They won't be so pleased with their errand when they've done," said Due, laughing. "That's why they've got a nice drop stowed away— under their belts. To give them courage. The strong man's a swine, but I'd rather not be the one he goes for."

"Suppose they don't get him at all!" said Pelle eagerly.

Due laughed. "They'll time it so that they are where he isn't. But why don't he stick to his work and leave his fool's tricks alone? He could have a good drink and sleep it off at home—he's only a poor devil, he ought to leave it to the great people to drink themselves silly!"

But Pelle took another view of the affair. The poor man of course ought to go quietly along the street and take his hat off to everybody; and if anybody greeted him in return he'd be quite proud, and tell it to his wife as quite an event, as they were going to bed. "The clerk raised his hat to me to-day—yes, that he did!" But Stonecutter Jörgensen looked neither to right nor to left when he was sober, and in his cups he trampled everybody underfoot.

Pelle by no means agreed with the pitiful opinions of the town. In the country, whence he came, strength was regarded as everything, and here was a man who could have taken strong Erik himself and put him in his pocket. He roamed about in secret, furtively measuring his wrists, and lifted objects which were much too heavy for him; he would by no means have objected to be like the "Great Power," who, as a single individual, kept the whole town in a state of breathless excitement, whether he was in one of his raging moods or whether he lay like one dead. The thought that he was the comrade of Jens and Morten made him quite giddy, and he could not understand why they bowed themselves so completely to the judgment of the town, as no one could cast it in their teeth that they were on the parish, but only that their father was a powerful fellow.

Jens shrank from continually hearing his father's name on all lips, and avoided looking people in the eyes, but in Morten's open glance he saw no trace of this nameless grief.

One evening, when matters were quite at their worst, they took Pelle home with them. They lived in the east, by the great clay-pit, where the refuse of the town was cast away. Their mother was busy warming the supper in the oven, and in the chimney-corner sat a shrivelled old grandmother, knitting. It was a poverty-stricken home.

"I really thought that was father," said the woman, shivering. "Has any of you heard of him?"

The boys related what they had heard; some one had seen him here, another there. "People are only too glad to keep us informed," said Jens bitterly.

"Now it's the fourth evening that I've warmed up his supper to no purpose," the mother continued. "Formerly he used to take care to look in at home, however much they were after him—but he may come yet."

She tried to smile hopefully, but suddenly threw her apron in front of her eyes and burst into tears. Jens went about with hanging head, not knowing what he ought to do; Morten put his arm behind the weary back and spoke soothingly: "Come, come; it isn't worse than it has often been!" And he stroked the projecting shoulder-blades.

"No, but I did feel so glad that it was over. A whole year almost he never broke out, but took his food quietly when he came home from work, and then crawled into bed. All that time he broke nothing; he just slept and slept; at last I believed he had become weak-minded, and I was glad for him, for he had peace from those terrible ideas. I believed he had quieted down after all his disgraces, and would take life as it came; as the rest of his comrades do. And now he's broken out again as audacious as possible, and it's all begun over again!" She wept desolately.

The old woman sat by the stove, her shifting glance wandering from one to another; she was like a crafty bird of prey sitting in a cage. Then her voice began, passionless and uninflected:

"You're a great donkey; now it's the fourth evening you've made pancakes for your vagabond; you're always at him, kissing and petting him! I wouldn't sweeten my husband's sleep if he had behaved so scandalously to his wife and family; he could go to bed and get up again hungry, and dry too, for all I cared; then he'd learn manners at last. But there's no grit in you—that's the trouble; you put up with all his sauciness."

"If I were to lay a stone in his way—why, who would be good to him, if his poor head wanted to lie soft? Grandmother ought to know how much he needs some one who believes in him. And there's nothing else I can do for him."

"Yes, yes; work away and wear yourself out, so that there's always something for the great fellow to smash if he has a mind to! But now you go to bed and lie down; I'll wait up for Peter and give him his food, if he comes; you must be half dead with weariness, you poor worm."

"There's an old proverb says, 'A man's mother is the devil's pother,' but it don't apply to you, grandmother," said the mother of the boys mildly. "You always take my part, although there's no need. But now you go to bed! It's far past your bed-time, and I'll look after Peter. It's so easy to manage him if only he knows that you mean well by him."

The old woman behaved as though she did not hear; she went on knitting. The boys remembered that they had brought something with them; a bag of coffee-beans, some sugar-candy, and a few rolls.

"You waste all your hard-earned shillings on me," said the mother reproachfully, and put the water to boil for the coffee, while her face beamed with gratitude.

"They've no young women to waste it on," said the old woman dryly.

"Grandmother's out of humor this evening," said Morten. He had taken off the old woman's glasses and looked smilingly into her gray eyes.

"Out of humor—yes, that I am! But time passes, I tell you, and here one sits on the edge of the grave, waiting for her own flesh and blood to get on and do something wonderful, but nothing ever happens! Energies are wasted—they run away like brook-water into the sea— and the years are wasted too—or is it lies I'm telling you? All want to be masters; no one wants to carry the sack; and one man seizes hold of another and clambers over him just to reach an inch higher. And there ought to be plenty in the house—but there's poverty and filth in every corner. I should think the dear God will soon have had enough of it all! Not an hour goes by but I curse the day when I let myself be wheedled away from the country; there a poor man's daily bread grows in the field, if he'll take it as it comes. But here he must go with a shilling in his fist, if it's only that he wants a scrap of cabbage for his soup. If you've money you can have it; if you haven't, you can leave it. Yes, that's how it is! But one must live in town in order to have the same luck as Peter! Everything promised splendidly, and I, stupid old woman, have always had a craving to see my own flesh and blood up at the top. And now I sit here like a beggar-princess! Oh, it has been splendid—I'm the mother of the biggest vagabond in town!"

"Grandmother shouldn't talk like that," said the mother of the boys.

"Yes, yes; but I'm sick of it all—and yet I can't think about dying! How can I go and lay me down—who would take a stick to Peter?—the strong man!" she said contemptuously.

"Grandmother had better go quietly and lie down; I can manage Peter best if I'm alone with him," said the wife, but the old woman did not move.

"Can't you get her to go, Morten?" whispered the mother. "You are the only one she will listen to."

Morten lectured the old woman until he had enticed her away; he had to promise to go with her and arrange the bedclothes over her feet.

"Now, thank goodness, we've got her out of the way!" said the mother, relieved. "I'm always so afraid that father might forget what he's doing when he's like he is now; and she doesn't think of giving in to him, so it's flint against flint. But now I think you ought to go where the rest of the young folks are, instead of sitting here and hanging your heads."

"We'll stay and see whether father comes," declared Morten.

"But what does it matter to you—you can say good-day to father at any time. Go now—listen—father prefers to find me alone when he's like this and comes home merry. Perhaps he takes me in his arms and swings me round—he's so strong—so that I feel as giddy as a young girl. 'Ho, heigh, wench, here's the "Great Power"!' he says, and he laughs as loud as he used to in his rowdy young days. Yes, when he's got just enough in him he gets as strong and jolly as ever he was in his very best days. I'm glad it's soon over. But that's not for you —you had better go." She looked at them appealingly, and shrank back as some one fumbled at the door. Out-of-doors it was terrible weather.

It was only the youngest, who had come home from her day's work. She might have been ten or twelve years old and was small for her age, although she looked older; her voice was harsh and strident, and her little body seemed coarsened and worn with work. There was not a spot about her that shed or reflected a single ray of light; she was like some subterranean creature that has strayed to the surface. She went silently across the room and let herself drop into her grandmother's chair; she leaned over to one side as she sat, and now and again her features contracted.

"She's got that mischief in her back," said the mother, stroking her thin, unlovely hair. "She got it always carrying the doctor's little boy—he's so tall and so heavy. But as long as the doctor says nothing, it can't be anything dangerous. Yes, you did really leave home too early, my child; but, after all, you get good food and you learn to be smart. And capable, that she is; she looks after the doctor's three children all by herself! The eldest is her own age, but she has to dress and undress her. Such grand children, they don't even learn how to do things for themselves!"

Pelle stared at her curiously. He himself had put up with a good deal, but to cripple himself by dragging children about, who were perhaps stronger than himself—no, no one need expect that of him! "Why do you carry the over-fed brat?" he asked.

"They must have some one to look after them," said the mother, "and their mother, who's the nearest to them, she doesn't feel inclined to do it. And they pay her for it."

"If it was me, I'd let the brat fall," said Pelle boldly.

The little girl just glanced at him with her dull eyes, and a feeble interest glimmered in them. But her face retained its frozen indifference, and it was impossible to say what she was thinking, so hard and experienced was her expression.

"You mustn't teach her anything naughty," said the mother; "she has enough to struggle against already; she's got an obstinate nature. And now you must go to bed, Karen"—she caressed her once more— "Father can't bear to see you when he's had too much. He's so fond of her," she added helplessly.

Karen drew away from the caress without the slightest change of expression; silently she went up to the garret where she slept. Pelle had not heard her utter a sound.

"That's how she is," said the mother, shivering. "Never a word to say 'good night'! Nothing makes any impression on her nowadays— neither good nor bad; she's grown up too soon. And I have to manage so that father doesn't see her when he's merry. He goes on like a wild beast against himself and everybody else when it comes across his mind how she's been put upon." She looked nervously at the clock. "But go now—do listen! You'll do me a great favor if you'll go!" She was almost crying.

Morten stood up, hesitating, and the others followed his example. "Pull your collars up and run," said the mother, and buttoned up their coats. The October gale was beating in gusts against the house, and the rain was lashing violently against the window-panes.

As they were saying good night a fresh noise was heard outside. The outer door banged against the wall, and they heard the storm burst in and fill the entry. “Ah, now it’s too late!” lamented the mother reproachfully. “Why didn’t you go sooner?” A monstrous breathing sounded outside, like the breathing of a gigantic beast, sniffing up and down at the crack of the door, and fumbling after the latch with its dripping paws. Jens wanted to run and open the door. “No, you mustn’t do that!” cried his mother despairingly, and she pushed the bolt. She stood there, rigid, her whole body trembling. Pelle too began to shiver; he had a feeling that the storm itself was lying there in the entry like a great unwieldy being, puffing and snorting in a kind of gross content, and licking itself dry while it waited for them.

The woman bent her ear to the door, listening in frantic suspense. “What is he up to now?” she murmured; “he is so fond of teasing!” She was crying again. The boys had for the moment forgotten her.

Then the outer door was beaten in, and the monster got up on all four dripping paws, and began to call them with familiar growls. The woman turned about in her distress; waving her hands helplessly before her, and then clapping them to her face. But now the great beast became impatient; it struck the door sharply, and snarled warningly. The woman shrank back as though she herself were about to drop on all fours and answered him. “No, no!” she cried, and considered a moment. Then the door was burst in with one tremendous blow, and Master Bruin rolled over the threshold and leaped toward them in clumsy jumps, his head thrown somewhat backward as though wondering why his little comrade had not rushed to meet him, with an eager growl. “Peter, Peter, the boy!” she whispered, bending over him; but he pushed her to the floor with a snarl, and laid one heavy paw upon her. She tore herself away from him and escaped to a chair.

“Who am I?” he asked, in a stumbling, ghostly voice, confronting her.

“The great strong man!” She could not help smiling; he was ramping about in such a clumsy, comical way.

“And you?”

“The luckiest woman in all the world!” But now her voice died away in a sob.

“And where is the strong man to rest to-night?” He snatched at her breast.

She sprang up with blazing eyes. “You beast—oh, you beast!” she cried, red with shame, and she struck him in the face.

The “Great Power” wiped his face wonderingly after each blow. “We’re only playing,” he said. Then, in a flash, he caught sight of the boys, who had shrunk into a corner. “There you are!” he said, and he laughed crazily; “yes, mother and I, we’re having a bit of a game! Aren’t we, mother?”

But the woman had run out of doors, and now stood under the eaves, sobbing.

Jörgensen moved restlessly to and fro. “She’s crying,” he muttered. “There’s no grit in her—she ought to have married some farmer’s lad, devil take it, if the truth must be told! It catches me here and presses as though some one were shoving an iron ferrule into my brain. Come on, ‘Great Power’! Come on! so that you can get some peace from it! I say every day. No, let be, I say then—you must keep a hold on yourself, or she just goes about crying! And she’s never been anything but good to you! But deuce take it, if it would only come out! And then one goes to bed and says, Praise God, the day is done—and another day, and another. And they stand there and stare—and wait; but let them wait; nothing happens, for now the ‘Great Power’ has got control of himself! And then all at once it’s there behind! Hit away! Eight in the thick of the heap! Send them all to hell, the scoundrels! ’Cause a man must drink, in order to keep his energies in check.... Well, and there she sits! Can one of you lend me a krone?”

“Not I!” said Jens.

“No, not you—he’d be a pretty duffer who’d expect anything from you! Haven’t I always said ‘he takes after the wrong side’? He’s like his mother. He’s got a heart, but he’s incapable. What can you really do, Jens? Do you get fine clothes from your master, and does he treat you like a son, and will you finish up by taking over the business as his son-in-law? And why not? if I may ask the question. Your father is as much respected as Morten’s.”

“Morten won’t be a son-in-law, either, if his master has no daughter,” Jens muttered.

“No. But he might have had a daughter, hey? But there we’ve got an answer. You don’t reflect. Morten, he’s got something there!” He touched his forehead.

“Then you shouldn’t have hit me on the head,” retorted Jens sulkily.

“On the head—well! But the understanding has its seat in the head. That’s where one ought to hammer it in. For what use would it be, I ask you, supposing you commit some stupidity with your head and I smack you on the behind? You don’t need any understanding there? But it has helped—you’ve grown much smarter. That was no fool’s answer you gave me just now: ‘Then you shouldn’t have hit me on the head!’” He nodded in acknowledgment. “No, but here is a head that can give them some trouble—there are knots of sense in this wood, hey?” And the three boys had to feel the top of his head.

He stood there like a swaying tree, and listened with a changing expression to the less frequent sobs of his wife; she was now sitting by the fire, just facing the door. “She does nothing but cry,” he said compassionately; “that’s a way the women have of amusing themselves nowadays. Life has been hard on us, and she couldn’t stand hardships, poor thing! For example, if I were to say now that I’d like to smash the stove”—and here he seized a heavy chair and waved it about in the air—“then she begins to cry. She cries about everything. But if I get on I shall take another wife —one who can make a bit of a show. Because this is nonsense. Can she receive her guests and make fine conversation? Pah! What the devil is the use of my working and pulling us all out of the mud? But now I’m going out again—God knows, it ain’t amusing here!”

His wife hurried across to him. “Ah, don’t go out, Peter—stay here, do!” she begged.

“Am I to hang about here listening to you maundering on?” he asked sulkily, shrugging his shoulders. He was like a great, good-natured boy who gives himself airs.

“I won’t maunder—I’m ever so jolly—if only you’ll stay!” she cried, and she smiled through her tears. “Look at me—don’t you see how glad I am? Stay with me, do, ‘Great Power!’” She breathed warmly into his ear; she had shaken off her cares and pulled herself together, and was now really pretty with her glowing face.

The “Great Power” looked at her affectionately; he laughed stupidly, as though he was tickled, and allowed himself to be pulled about; he imitated her whisper to the empty air, and was overflowing with good humor. Then he slyly approached his mouth to her ear, and as she listened he trumpeted loudly, so that she started back with a little cry. “Do stay, you great baby!” she said, laughing. “I won’t let you go; I can hold you!” But he shook her off, laughing, and ran out bareheaded.

For a moment it looked as though she would run after him, but then her hands fell, and she drooped her head. “Let him run off,” she said wearily; “now things must go as they will. There’s nothing to be done; I’ve never seen him so drunk. Yes, you look at me, but you must remember that he carries his drink differently to every one else—he is quite by himself in everything!” She said this with a certain air of pride. “And he has punished the shipowner—and even the judge daren’t touch him. The good God Himself can’t be more upright than he is.”

X

Now the dark evenings had come when the lamp had to be lit early for the workers. The journeyman left while it was still twilight; there was little for him to do. In November the eldest apprentice had served his time. He was made to sit all alone in the master's room, and there he stayed for a whole week, working on his journeyman's task—a pair of sea-boots. No one was allowed to go in to him, and the whole affair was extremely exciting. When the boots were ready and had been inspected by some of the master-shoemakers, they were filled to the top with water and suspended in the garret; there they hung for a few days, in order to show that they were water-tight. Then Emil was solemnly appointed a journeyman, and had to treat the whole workshop. He drank brotherhood with little Nikas, and in the evening he went out and treated the other journeymen—and came home drunk as a lord. Everything passed off just as it should.

On the following day Jeppe came into the workshop. "Well, Emil, now you're a journeyman. What do you think of it? Do you mean to travel? It does a freshly baked journeyman good to go out into the world and move about and learn something."

Emil did not reply, but began to bundle his things together. "No, no; it's not a matter of life and death to turn you out. You can come to the workshop here and share the light and the warmth until you've got something better—those are good conditions, it seems to me. Now, when I was learning, things were very different—a kick behind, and out you went! And that's for young men—it's good for them!"

He could sit in the workshop and enumerate all the masters in the whole island who had a journeyman. But that was really only a joke —it never happened that a new journeyman was engaged. On the other hand, he and the others knew well enough how many freshly-baked journeymen had been thrown on to the streets that autumn.

Emil was by no means dejected. Two evenings later they saw him off on the Copenhagen steamer. "There is work enough," he said, beaming with delight. "You must promise me that you'll write to me in a year," said Peter, who had finished his apprenticeship at the same time. "That I will!" said Emil.

But before a month had passed they heard that Emil was home again. He was ashamed to let himself be seen. And then one morning he came, much embarrassed, slinking into the workshop. Yes, he had got work —in several places, but had soon been sent away again. "I have learned nothing," he said dejectedly. He loitered about for a time, to enjoy the light and warmth of the workshop, and would sit there doing some jobs of cobbling which he had got hold of. He kept himself above water until nearly Christmas-time, but then he gave in, and disgraced his handicraft by working at the harbor as an ordinary stevedore.

"I have wasted five years of my life," he used to say when they met him; "Run away while there's time! Or it'll be the same with you as it was with me." He did not come to the workshop any longer out of fear of Jeppe, who was extremely wroth with him for dishonoring his trade.

It was cozy in the workshop when the fire crackled in the stove and the darkness looked in at the black, uncovered window-panes. The table was moved away from the window so that all four could find place about it, the master with his book and the three apprentices each with his repairing job. The lamp hung over the table, and smoked; it managed to lessen the darkness a little. The little light it gave was gathered up by the great glass balls which focussed it and cast it upon the work. The lamp swayed slightly, and the specks of light wriggled hither and thither like tadpoles, so that the work was continually left in darkness. Then the master would curse and stare miserably at the lamp.

The others suffered with their eyes, but the master sickened in the darkness. Every moment he would stand up with a shudder. "Damn and blast it, how dark it is here; it's as dark as though one lay in the grave! Won't it give any light to-night?" Then Pelle would twist the regulator, but it was no better.

When old Jeppe came tripping in, Master Andres looked up without trying to hide his book; he was in a fighting mood.

"Who is there?" he asked, staring into the darkness. "Ah, it's father!"

"Have you got bad eyes?" asked the old man derisively. "Will you have some eye-water?"

"Father's eye-water—no thanks! But this damned light—one can't see one's hand before one's face!"

“Open your mouth, then, and your teeth will shine!” Jeppe spat the words out. This lighting was always a source of strike between them.

“No one else in the whole island works by so wretched a light, you take my word, father.”

“In my time I never heard complaints about the light,” retorted Jeppe. “And better work has been done under the glass ball than any one can do now with all their artificial discoveries. But it’s disappearing now; the young people to-day know no greater pleasure than throwing their money out of the window after such modern trash.”

“Yes, in father’s time—then everything was so splendid!” said Master Andres. “That was when the angels ran about with white sticks in their mouths!”

In the course of the evening now one and another would drop in to hear and tell the news. And if the young master was in a good temper they would stay. He was the fire and soul of the party, as old Bjerregrav said; he could, thanks to his reading, give explanations of so many things.

When Pelle lifted his eyes from his work he was blind. Yonder, in the workshop, where Baker Jörgen and the rest sat and gossiped, he could see nothing but dancing specks of light, and his work swam round in the midst of them; and of his comrades he saw nothing but their aprons. But in the glass ball the light was like a living fire, in whose streams a world was laboring.

“Well, this evening there’s a capital light,” said Jeppe, if one of them looked to the lamp.

“You mean there’s no light at all!” retorted Master Andres, twisting the regulator.

But one day the ironmonger’s man brought something in a big basket —a hanging lamp with a round burner; and when it was dark the ironmonger himself came in order to light it for the first time, and to initiate Pelle into the management of the wonderful contrivance. He went to work very circumstantially and with much caution. “It can explode, I needn’t tell you,” he said, “but you’d have to treat the mechanism very badly first. If you only set to work with care and reason there is no danger whatever.”

Pelle stood close to him, holding the cylinder, but the others turned their heads away from the table, while the young master stood right at the back, and shuffled to and fro. “Devil knows I don’t want to go to heaven in my living body!” he said, with a comical expression; “but deuce take it, where did you get the courage, Pelle? You’re a saucy young spark!” And he looked at him with his wide, wondering gaze, which held in it both jest and earnest.

At last the lamp shone out; and even on the furthest shelf, high up under the ceiling, one could count every single last. “That’s a regular sun!” said the young master, and he put his hand to his face; “why, good Lord, I believe it warms the room!” He was quite flushed, and his eyes were sparkling.

The old master kept well away from the lamp until the ironmonger had gone; then he came rushing over to it. “Well, aren’t you blown sky-high?” he asked, in great astonishment. “It gives an ugly light —oh, a horrible light! Poof, I say! And it doesn’t shine properly; it catches you in the eyes. Well, well, you can spoil your sight as far as I’m concerned!”

But for the others the lamp was a renewal of life. Master Andres sunned himself in its rays. He was like a sun-intoxicated bird; as he sat there, quite at peace, a wave of joy would suddenly come over him. And to the neighbors who gathered round the lamp in order to discover its qualities he held forth in great style, so that the light was doubled. They came often and stayed readily; the master beamed and the lamp shone; they were like insects attracted by the light—the glorious light!

Twenty times a day the master would go out to the front door, but he always came in again and sat by the window to read, his boot with the wooden heel sticking out behind him. He spat so much that Pelle had to put fresh sand every day under his place.

“Is there some sort of beast that sits in your chest and gnaws?” said Uncle Jörgen, when Andres’ cough troubled him badly. “You look so well otherwise. You’ll recover before we know where we are!”

“Yes, thank God!” The master laughed gaily between two attacks.

“If you only go at the beast hard enough, it’ll surely die. Now, where you are, in your thirtieth year, you ought to be able to get at it. Suppose you were to give it cognac?”

Jörgen Kofod, as a rule, came clumping in with great wooden shoes, and Jeppe used to scold him. “One wouldn’t believe you’ve got a shoemaker for a brother!” he would say crossly; “and yet we all get our black bread from you.”

“But what if I can’t keep my feet warm now in those damned leather shoes? And I’m full through and through of gout—it’s a real misery!” The big baker twisted himself dolefully.

“It must be dreadful with gout like that,” said Bjerregrav. “I myself have never had it.”

“Tailors don’t get gout,” rejoined Baker Jörgen scornfully. “A tailor’s body has no room to harbor it. So much I do know—twelve tailors go to a pound.”

Bjerregrav did not reply.

“The tailors have their own topsy-turvy world,” continued the baker. “I can’t compare myself with them. A crippled tailor—well, even he has got his full strength of body.”

“A tailor is as fine a fellow as a black-bread baker!” stammered Bjerregrav nervously. “To bake black bread—why, every farmer’s wife can do that!”

“Fine! I believe you! Hell and blazes! If the tailor makes a cap he has enough cloth left over to make himself a pair of breeches. That’s why tailors are always dressed so fine!” The baker was talking to the empty air.

“Millers and bakers are always rogues, everybody says.” Old Bjerregrav turned to Master Andres, trembling with excitement. But the young master stood there looking gaily from one to the other, his lame leg dangling in the air.

“For the tailor nothing comes amiss—there’s too much room in me!” said the baker, as though something were choking him. “Or, as another proverb says—it’s of no more consequence than a tailor in hell. They are the fellows! We all know the story of the woman who brought a full-grown tailor into the world without even knowing she was with child.”

Jeppe laughed. “Now, that’s enough, really; God knows neither of you will give in to the other.”

“Well, and I’ve no intention of trampling a tailor to death, if it can anyhow be avoided—but one can’t always see them.” Baker Jörgen carefully lifted his great wooden shoes. “But they are not men. Now is there even one tailor in the town who has been overseas? No, and there were no men about while the tailor was being made. A woman stood in a draught at the front door, and there she brought forth the tailor.” The baker could not stop himself when once he began to quiz anybody; now that Sören was married, he had recovered all his good spirits.

Bjerregrav could not beat this. “You can say what you like about tailors,” he succeeded in saying at last. “But people who bake black bread are not respected as handicraftsmen—no more than the washerwoman! Tailoring and shoemaking, they are proper crafts, with craftman’s tests, and all the rest.”

“Yes, shoemaking of course is another thing,” said Jeppe.

“But as many proverbs and sayings are as true of you as of us,” said Bjerregrav, desperately blinking.

“Well, it’s no longer ago than last year that Master Klausen married a cabinet-maker’s daughter. But whom must a tailor marry? His own serving-maid?”

“Now how can you, father!” sighed Master Andres. “One man’s as good as another.”

“Yes, you turn everything upside down! But I’ll have my handicraft respected. To-day all sorts of agents and wool-merchants and other trash settle in the town and talk big. But in the old days the handicraftsmen were the marrow of the land. Even the king himself had to learn a handicraft. I myself served my apprenticeship in the capital, and in the workshop where I was a prince had learned the trade. But, hang it all, I never heard of a king who learned tailoring!”

They were capable of going on forever in this way, but, as the dispute was at its worst, the door opened, and Wooden-leg Larsen stumped in, filling the workshop with fresh air. He was wearing a storm-cap and a blue pilot-coat. “Good evening, children!” he said gaily, and threw down a heap of leather ferrules and single boots on the window-bench.

His entrance put life into all. “Here’s a playboy for us! Welcome home! Has it been a good summer?”

Jeppe picked up the five boots for the right foot, one after another, turned back the uppers, and held heels and soles in a straight line before his eyes. “A bungler has had these in hand,” he growled, and then he set to work on the casing for the wooden leg. “Well, did the layer of felt answer?” Larsen suffered from cold in his amputated foot.

“Yes; I’ve not had cold feet any more.”

“Cold feet!” The baker struck himself on the loins and laughed.

“Yes, you can say what you like, but every time my wooden leg gets wet I get a cold in the head!”

“That’s the very deuce!” cried Jörgen, and his great body rolled like a hippopotamus. “A funny thing, that!”

“There are many funny things in the world,” stammered Bjerregrav. “When my brother died, my watch stopped at that very moment—it was he who gave it me.”

Wooden-leg Larsen had been through the whole kingdom with his barrel-organ, and had to tell them all about it; of the railway- trains which travelled so fast that the landscape turned round on its own axis, and of the great shops and places of amusement in the capital.

“It must be as it will,” said Master Andres. “But in the summer I shall go to the capital and work there!”

“In Jutland—that’s where they have so many wrecks!” said the baker. “They say everything is sand there! I’ve heard that the country is shifting under their feet—moving away toward the east. Is it true that they have a post there that a man must scratch himself against before he can sit down?”

“My sister has a son who has married a Jutland woman and settled down there,” said Bjerregrav. “Have you seen anything of them?”

The baker laughed. “Tailors are so big—they’ve got the whole world in their waistcoat pocket. Well, and Funen? Have you been there, too? That’s where the women have such a pleasant disposition. I’ve lain before Svendborg and taken in water, but there was no time to go ashore.” This remark sounded like a sigh.

“Can you stand it, wandering so much?” asked Bjerregrav anxiously.

Wooden-leg Larsen looked contemptuously at Bjerregrav’s congenital club-foot—he had received his own injury at Heligoland, at the hands of an honorable bullet. “If one’s sound of limb,” he said, spitting on the floor by the window.

Then the others had to relate what had happened in town during the course of the summer; of the Finnish barque which had stranded in the north, and how the “Great Power” had broken out again. “Now he’s sitting in the dumps under lock and key.”

Bjerregrav took exception to the name they gave him; he called it blasphemy, on the ground that the Bible said that power and might belonged to God alone.

Wooden-leg Larsen said that the word, as they had used it, had nothing to do with God; it was an earthly thing; across the water people used it to drive machinery, instead of horses.

“I should think woman is the greatest power,” said Baker Jörgen, “for women rule the world, God knows they do! And God protect us if they are once let loose on us! But what do you think, Andres, you who are so book-learned?”

“The sun is the greatest power,” said Master Andres. “It rules over all life, and science has discovered that all strength and force come from the sun. When it falls into the sea and cools, then the whole world will become a lump of ice.”

“Then the sea is the greatest power!” cried Jeppe triumphantly. “Or do you know of anything else that tears everything down and washes it away? And from the sea we get everything back again. Once when I went to Malaga——”

“Yes, that really is true,” said Bjerregrav, “for most people get their living from the sea, and many their death. And the rich people we have get all their money from the sea.”

Jeppe drew himself up proudly and his glasses began to glitter. “The sea can bear what it likes, stone or iron, although it is soft itself! The heaviest loads can travel on its back. And then all at once it swallows everything down. I have seen ships which sailed right into the weather and disappeared when their time came.”

“I should very much like to know whether the different countries float on the water, or whether they stand firm on the bottom of the sea. Don’t you know that, Andres?” asked Bjerregrav.

Master Andres thought they stood on the bottom of the sea, far below the surface; but Uncle Jörgen said: “Nay! Big as the sea is!”

“Yes, it’s big, for I’ve been over the whole island,” said Bjerregrav self-consciously; “but I never got anywhere where I couldn’t see the sea. Every parish in all Bornholm borders on the sea. But it has no power over the farmers and peasants—they belong to the land, don’t they?”

“The sea has power over all of us,” said Larsen. “Some it refuses; they go to sea for years and years, but then in their old age they suffer from sea-sickness, and then they are warned. That is why Skipper Andersen came on shore. And others it attracts, from right away up in the country! I have been to sea with such people—they had spent their whole lives up on the island, and had seen the sea, but had never been down to the shore. And then one day the devil collared them and they left the plough and ran down to the sea and hired themselves out. And they weren’t the worse seamen.”

“Yes,” said Baker Jörgen, “and all of us here have been to sea, and Bornholmers sail on all the seas, as far as a ship can go. And I have met people who had never been on the sea, and yet they were as though it was their home. When I sailed the brig *Clara* for Skipper Andersen, I had such a lad on board as ordinary seaman. He had never bathed in the sea; but one day, as we were lying at anchor, and the others were swimming around, he jumped into the water too—now this is God’s truth—as though he were tumbling into his mother’s arms; he thought that swimming came of its own accord. He went straight to the bottom, and was half dead before we fished him up again.”

“The devil may understand the sea!” cried Master Andres breathlessly. “It is curved like an arch everywhere, and it can get up on its hind legs and stand like a wall, although it’s a fluid! And I have read in a book that there is so much silver in the sea that every man in the whole world might be rich.”

“Thou righteous God!” cried Bjerregrav, “such a thing I have never heard. Now does that come from all the ships that have gone down? Yes, the sea—that, curse it, is the greatest power!”

“It’s ten o’clock,” said Jeppe. “And the lamp is going out—that devil’s contrivance!” They broke up hastily, and Pelle turned the lamp out.

But long after he had laid his head on his pillow everything was going round inside it. He had swallowed everything, and imaginary pictures thronged in his brain like young birds in an over-full nest, pushing and wriggling to find a place wherein to rest. The sea was strong; now in the wintertime the surging of the billows against the cliffs was continually in his ear. Pelle was not sure whether it would stand aside for him! He had an unconscious reluctance to set himself limits, and as for the power about which they had all been disputing, it certainly had its seat in Pelle himself, like a vague consciousness that he was, despite all his defeats, invincible.

At times this feeling manifested itself visibly and helped him through the day. One afternoon they were sitting and working, after having swallowed their food in five minutes, as their custom was; the journeyman was the only one who did not grudge himself a brief mid-day rest, and he sat reading the newspaper. Suddenly he raised his head and looked wonderingly at Pelle. “Now what’s this? Lasse Karlson—isn’t that your father?”

“Yes,” answered Pelle, with a paralyzed tongue, and the blood rushed to his cheeks. Was Father Lasse in the news? Not among the accidents? He must have made himself remarkable in one way or another through his farming! Pelle was nearly choking with excitement, but he did not venture to ask, and Little Nikas simply sat there and looked secretive. He had assumed the expression peculiar to the young master.

But then he read aloud: “Lost! A louse with three tails has escaped, and may be left, in return for a good tip, with the landowner Lasse Karlson, Heath Farm. Broken black bread may also be brought there.”

The others burst into a shout of laughter, but Pelle turned an ashen gray. With a leap he was across the table and had pulled little Nikas to the ground underneath him; there he lay, squeezing the man’s throat with his fingers, trying to throttle him, until he was overpowered. Emil and Peter had to hold him while the knee-strap put in its work.

And yet he was proud of the occurrence; what did a miserable thrashing signify as against the feat of throwing the journeyman to the ground and overcoming the slavish respect he had felt for him! Let them dare to get at him again with their lying allusions, or to make sport of Father Lasse! Pelle was not inclined to adopt circuitous methods.

And the circumstances justified him. After this he received more consideration; no one felt anxious to bring Pelle and his cobbler’s tools on top of him, even although the boy could be thrashed afterward.

XI

The skipper’s garden was a desert. Trees and bushes were leafless; from the workshop window one could look right through them, and over other gardens beyond, and as far as the backs of the houses in East Street. There were no more games in the garden; the paths were buried in ice and melting snow, and the blocks of coral, and the great conch-shells which, with their rosy mouths and fish-like teeth, had sung so wonderfully of the great ocean, had been taken in on account of the frost.

Manna he saw often enough. She used to come tumbling into the workshop with her school satchel or her skates; a button had got torn off, or a heel had been wrenched loose by a skate. A fresh breeze hovered about her hair and cheeks, and the cold made her face glow. “There is blood!” the young master would say, looking at her delightedly; he laughed and jested when she came in. But Manna would hold on to Pelle’s shoulder and throw her foot into his lap, so that he could button her boots. Sometimes she would pinch him secretly and look angry—she was jealous of Morten. But Pelle did not understand; Morten’s gentle, capable mind had entirely subjugated him and assumed the direction of their relations. Pelle was miserable if Morten was not there when he had an hour to spare. Then he would run, with his heart in his mouth, to find him; everything else was indifferent to him.

One Sunday morning, as he was sweeping the snow in the yard, the girls were in their garden; they were making a snowman.

“Hey, Pelle!” they cried, and they clapped their mittens; “come over here! You can help us to build a snow-house. We’ll wall up the door and light some Christmas-tree candles: we’ve got some ends. Oh, do come!”

“Then Morten must come too—he’ll be here directly!”

Manna turned up her nose. “No, we don’t want Morten here!”

“Why not? He’s so jolly!” said Pelle, wounded.

“Yes, but his father is so dreadful—everybody is afraid of him. And then he’s been in prison.”

“Yes, for beating some one—that’s nothing so dreadful! My father was too, when he was a young man. That’s no disgrace, for it isn’t for stealing.”

But Manna looked at him with an expression exactly like Jeppe’s when he was criticizing somebody from his standpoint as a respectable citizen.

“But, Pelle, aren’t you ashamed of it? That’s how only the very poorest people think—those who haven’t any feelings of shame!”

Pelle blushed for his vulgar way of looking at things. “It’s no fault of Morten’s that his father’s like that!” he retorted lamely.

“No, we won’t have Morten here. And mother won’t let us. She says perhaps we can play with you, but not with anybody else. We belong to a very good family,” she said, in explanation.

“My father has a great farm—it’s worth quite as much as a rotten barge,” said Pelle angrily.

“Father’s ship isn’t rotten!” rejoined Manna, affronted. “It’s the best in the harbor here, and it has three masts!”

“All the same, you’re nothing but a mean hussy!” Pelle spat over the hedge.

“Yes, and you’re a Swede!” Manna blinked her eyes triumphantly, while Dolores and Aina stood behind her and put out their tongues.

Pelle felt strongly inclined to jump over the garden wall and beat them; but just then Jeppe’s old woman began scolding from the kitchen, and he went on with his work.

Now, after Christmas, there was nothing at all to do. People were wearing out their old boots, or they went about in wooden shoes. Little Nikas was seldom in the workshop; he came in at meal-times and went away again, and he was always wearing his best clothes. “He earns his daily bread easily,” said Jeppe. Over on the mainland they didn’t feed their people through the winter; the moment there was no more work, they kicked them out.

In the daytime Pelle was often sent on a round through the harbor in order to visit the shipping. He would find the masters standing about there in their leather aprons, talking about nautical affairs; or they would gather before their doors, to gossip, and each, from sheer habit, would carry some tool or other in his hand.

And the wolf was at the door. The “Saints” held daily meetings, and the people had time enough to attend them. Winter proved how insecurely the town was established, how feeble were its roots; it was not here as it was up in the country, where a man could enjoy himself in the knowledge that the earth was working for him. Here people made themselves as small and ate as little as possible, in order to win through the slack season.

In the workshops the apprentices sat working at cheap boots and shoes for stock; every spring the shoemakers would charter a ship in common and send a cargo to Iceland. This helped them on a little. “Fire away!” the master would repeat, over and over again; “make haste—we don’t get much for it!”

The slack season gave rise to many serious questions. Many of the workers were near to destitution, and it was said that the organized charities would find it very difficult to give assistance to all who applied for it. They were busy everywhere, to their full capacity. “And I’ve heard it’s nothing here to what it is on the mainland,” said Baker Jörgen. “There the unemployed are numbered in tens of thousands.”

“How can they live, all those thousands of poor people, if the unemployment is so great?” asked Bjerregrav. “The need is bad enough here in town, where every employer provides his people with their daily bread.”

“Here no one starves unless he wants to,” said Jeppe. “We have a well-organized system of relief.”

“You’re certainly becoming a Social Democrat, Jeppe,” said Baker Jörgen; “you want to put everything on to the organized charities!”

Wooden-leg Larsen laughed; that was a new interpretation.

“Well, what do they really want? For they are not freemasons. They say they are raising their heads again over on the mainland.”

“Well, that, of course, is a thing that comes and goes with unemployment,” said Jeppe. “The people must do something. Last winter a son of the sailmaker’s came home—well, he was one of them in secret. But the old folks would never admit it, and he himself was so clever that he got out of it somehow.”

“If he’d been a son of mine he would have got the stick,” said Jörgen.

“Aren’t they the sort of people who are making ready for the millennium? We’ve got a few of their sort here,” said Bjerregrav diffidently.

“D’you mean the poor devils who believe in the watchmaker and his ‘new time’? Yes, that may well be,” said Jeppe contemptuously. “I have heard they are quite wicked enough for that. I’m inclined to think they are the Antichrist the Bible foretells.”

“Ah, but what do they really want?” asked Baker Jörgen. “What is their madness really driving at?”

“What do they want?” Wooden-leg Larsen pulled himself together. “I’ve knocked up against a lot of people, I have, and as far as I can understand it they want to get justice; they want to take the right of coining money away from the Crown and give it to everybody. And they want to overthrow everything, that is quite certain.”

“Well,” said Master Andres, “what they want, I believe, is perfectly right, only they’ll never get it. I know a little about it, on account of Garibaldi.”

“But what *do* they want, then, if they don’t want to overthrow the whole world?”

“What do they want? Well, what do they want? That everybody should have exactly the same?” Master Andres was uncertain.

“Then the ship’s boy would have as much as the captain! No, it would be the devil and all!” Baker Jörgen smacked his thigh and laughed.

“And they want to abolish the king,” said Wooden-leg Larsen eagerly.

“Who the devil would reign over us then? The Germans would soon come hurrying over! That’s a most wicked thing, that Danish people should want to hand over their country to the enemy! All I wonder is that they don’t shoot them down without trial! They’d never be admitted to Bornholm.”

“That we don’t really know!” The young master smiled.

“To the devil with them—we’d all go down to the shore and shoot them: they should never land alive!”

“They are just a miserable rabble, the lot of them,” said Jeppe. “I should very much like to know whether there is a decent citizen among them.”

“Naturally, it’s always the poor who complain of poverty,” said

Bjerregrav. “So the thing never comes to an end.”

Baker Jörgen was the only one of them who had anything to do. Things would have to be bad indeed before the people stopped buying his black bread. He even had more to do than usual; the more people abstained from meat and cheese, the more bread they ate. He often hired Jeppe’s apprentices so that they might help him in the kneading.

But he was not in a happy frame of mind. He was always shouting his abuse of Sören through the open doors, because the latter would not go near his buxom young wife. Old Jörgen had taken him and put him into bed with her with his own hands, but Sören had got out of the business by crying and trembling like a new-born calf.

“D’you think he’s perhaps bewitched?” asked Master Andres.

“She’s young and pretty, and there’s not the least fault to be found with her—and we’ve fed him with eggs right through the winter. She goes about hanging her head, she gets no attention from him. ‘Marie! Sören!’ I cry, just to put a little life into them—he ought to be the sort of devil I was, I can tell you! She laughs and blushes, but Sören, he simply sneaks off. It’s really a shame—so dainty as she is too, in every way. Ah, it ought to have been in my young days, I can tell you!”

“You are still young enough, Uncle Jörgen!” laughed Master Andres.

“Well, a man could almost bring himself to it—when he considers what a dreadful injustice is going on under his own eyes. For, look you, Andres, I’ve been a dirty beast about all that sort of thing, but I’ve been a jolly fellow too; people were always glad to be on board with me. And I’ve had strength for a booze, and a girl; and for hard work in bad weather. The life I’ve led—it hasn’t been bad; I’d live it all over again the same. But Sören—what sort of a strayed weakling is he? He can’t find his own way about! Now, if only you would have a chat with him—you’ve got some influence over him.”

“I’ll willingly try.”

“Thanks; but look here, I owe you money.” Jörgen took ten kroner and laid them on the table as he was going.

“Pelle, you devil’s imp, can you run an errand for me?” The young master limped into the cutting-out room, Pelle following on his heels.

A hundred times a day the master would run to the front door, but he hurried back again directly; he could not stand the cold. His eyes were full of dreams of other countries, whose climates were kinder, and he spoke of his two brothers, of whom one was lost in South America—perhaps murdered. But the other was in Australia, herding sheep. He earned more at that than the town magistrate received as salary, and was the cleverest boxer in the neighborhood. Here the master made his bloodless hands circle one round the other, and let them fall clenched upon Pelle’s back. “That,” he said, in a superior tone, “is what they call boxing. Brother Martin can cripple a man with one blow. He is paid for it, the devil!” The master shuddered. His brother had on several occasions offered to send him his steamer-ticket, but there was that damned leg. “Tell me what I should do over there, eh, Pelle?”

Pelle had to bring books from the lending library every day, and he soon learned which writers were the most exciting. He also attempted to read himself, but he could not get on with it; it was more amusing to stand about by the skating-pond and freeze and watch the others gliding over the ice. But he got Morten to tell him of exciting books, and these he brought home for the master; such was the “Flying Dutchman.” “That’s a work of poetry, Lord alive!” said the master, and he related its contents to Bjerregrav, who took them all for reality.

“You should have played some part in the great world, Andres—I for my part do best to stay at home here. But you could have managed it—I’m sure of it.”

“The great world!” said the master scornfully. No, he didn’t take much stock in the world—it wasn’t big enough. “If I were to travel, I should like to look for the way into the interior of the earth— they say there’s a way into it in Iceland. Or it would be glorious to make a voyage to the moon; but that will always be just a story.”

At the beginning of the new year the crazy Anker came to the young master and dictated a love-letter to the eldest daughter of the king. “This year he will surely answer,” he said thoughtfully. “Time is passing, and fortune disappears, and there are few that have their share of it; we need the new time very badly.”

“Yes, we certainly do,” said Master Andres. “But if such a misfortune should happen that the king should refuse, why, you are man enough to manage the matter yourself, Anker!”

It was a slack season, and, just as it was at its very worst, shoemaker Bohn returned and opened a shop on the marketplace. He had spent a year on the mainland and had learned all sorts of modern humbug. There was only one pair of boots in his window, and those were his own Sunday boots. Every Monday they were put out and exhibited again, so that there should be something to look at.

If he himself was in the shop, talking to the people, his wife would sit in the living-room behind and hammer on a boot, so that it sounded as though there were men in the workshop.

But at Shrovetide Jeppe received some orders. Master Andres came home quite cheerfully one day from Bjerhansen's cellar; there he had made the acquaintance of some of the actors of a troupe which had just arrived. "They are fellows, too!" he said, stroking his cheeks. "They travel continually from one place to another and give performances—they get to see the world!" He could not sit quiet.

The next morning they came rioting into the workshop, filling the place with their deafening gabble. "Soles and heels!" "Heels that won't come off!" "A bit of heel-work and two on the snout!" So they went on, bringing great armfuls of boots from under their cloaks, or fishing them out of bottomless pockets, and throwing them in heaps on the window-bench, each with his droll remarks. Boots and shoes they called "understandings"; they turned and twisted every word, tossing it like a ball from mouth to mouth, until not a trace of sense was left in it.

The apprentices forgot everything, and could scarcely contain themselves for laughing, and the young master overflowed with wit— he was equal to the best of them. Now one saw that he really might have luck with the women: there was no boasting or lying about it. The young actress with the hair like the lightest flax could not keep her eyes off him, although she evidently had all the others at her petticoat-tails; she made signs to her companions that they should admire the master's splendid big mustache. The master had forgotten his lame leg and thrown his stick away; he was on his knees, taking the actress's measure for a pair of high boots with patent tops and concertina-like folds in the legs. She had a hole in the heel of her stocking, but she only laughed over it; one of the actors cried "Poached egg!" and then they laughed uproariously.

Old Jeppe came tumbling into the room, attracted by the merriment. The blonde lady called him "Grandfather," and wanted to dance with him, and Jeppe forgot his dignity and laughed with the rest. "Yes, it's to us they come when they want to have something good," he said proudly. "And I learned my trade in Copenhagen, and I used to carry boots and shoes to more than one play-actor there. We had to work for the whole theater; Jungfer Patges, who became so famous later on, got her first dancing shoes from us."

"Yes, those are the fellows!" said Master Andres, as at last they bustled out; "devil take me, but those are the chaps!" Jeppe could not in the least understand how they had found their way thither, and Master Andres did not explain that he had been to the tavern. "Perhaps Jungfer Patges sent them to me," he said, gazing into the distance. "She must somehow have kept me in mind."

Free tickets poured in on them; the young master was in the theater every evening. Pelle received a gallery ticket every time he went round with a pair of boots. He was to say nothing—but the price was plainly marked on the sole with chalk.

"Did you get the money?" the master would ask eagerly; he used to stand on the stairs all the time, waiting. No, Pelle was to present their very best wishes, and to say they would come round and settle up themselves.

"Well, well, people of that sort are safe enough," said the master.

One day Lasse came stamping into the workshop and into the midst of them all, looking the picture of a big farmer, with his fur collar drawn round his ears. He had a sack of potatoes outside; it was a present to Pelle's employers, because Pelle was learning his trade so well. Pelle was given leave and went out with his father; and he kept looking furtively at the fur collar. At last he could contain himself no longer, but turned it up inquiringly. Disillusioned, he let it fall again.

"Ah, yes—er—well—that's just tacked on to my driving-cloak. It looks well, and it keeps my ears nice and warm. You thought I'd blossomed out into a proper fur coat? No, it won't run to that just yet—but it will soon. And I could name you more than one big farmer who has nothing better than this."

Yes, Pelle was just a trifle disappointed. But he must admit that there was no difference to be perceived between this cloak and the real bearskin. “Are things going on all right?” he asked.

“Oh, yes; at present I am breaking stone. I’ve got to break twenty cords if I’m to pay everybody what’s owing to him by the Devil’s birthday.[2] So long as we keep our health and strength, Karna and I.”

[2] The 11th December—the general pay-day and hiring-day.—Tr.

They drove to the merchant’s and put up the horses. Pelle noticed that the people at the merchant’s did not rush forward to Lasse quite so eagerly as they did to the real farmers; but Lasse himself behaved in quite an important manner. He stumped right into the merchant’s counting-house, just like the rest, filled his pipe at the barrel, and helped himself to a drink of brandy. A cold breath of air hung about him as he went backward and forward from the cart with buttoned-up cloak, and he stamped as loudly on the sharp cobble-stones as though his boot-soles too were made of stone.

Then they went on to Due’s cottage; Lasse was anxious to see how matters were prospering there. “It isn’t always easy when one of the parties brings a love-child into the business.”

Pelle explained to him how matters stood. “Tell them at Uncle Kalle’s that they must take little Maria back again. Anna ill-treats her. They are getting on well in other ways; now they want to buy a wagon and horses and set up as carriers.”

“Do they? Well, it’s easy for those to get on who haven’t any heart.” Lasse sighed.

“Look, father,” said Pelle suddenly, “there’s a theater here now, and I know all the players. I take them their boots, and they give me a ticket every evening. I’ve seen the whole thing.”

“But, of course, that’s all lies, eh?” Lasse had to pull up, in order to scrutinize Pelle’s face. “So you’ve been in a proper theater, eh? Well, those who live in the town have got the devil to thank for it if they are cleverer than a peasant. One can have everything here!”

“Will you go with me to-night? I can get the tickets.”

Lasse was uneasy. It wasn’t that he didn’t want to go; but the whole thing was so unaccustomed. However, it was arranged that he should sleep the night at Due’s, and in the evening they both went to the theater.

“Is it here?” asked Lasse, astounded. They had come to a great building like a barn, before which a number of people were standing. But it was fine inside. They sat right up at the top, at the back, where the seats were arranged like the side of a hill, and they had a view over the whole theater. Down below, right in front, sat some ladies who, so far as Lasse could see, were naked. “I suppose those are the performers?” he inquired.

Pelle laughed. “No, those are the grandest ladies in the town—the doctor’s wife, the burgomaster’s lady, and the inspector’s wife, and such like.”

“What, they are so grand that they haven’t enough clothes to wear!” cried Lasse. “With us we call that poverty! But where are the players, then?”

“They are the other side of the curtain.”

“Then have they begun already?”

“No, you can see they haven’t—the curtain has to go up first.”

There was a hole in the curtain, and a finger came through it, and began to turn from side to side, pointing at the spectators. Lasse laughed. “That’s devilish funny!” he cried, slapping his thighs, as the finger continued to point.

“It hasn’t begun yet,” said Pelle.

“Is that so?” This damped Lasse’s spirits a little.

But then the big crown-light began suddenly to run up through a hole in the ceiling; up in the loft some boys were kneeling round the hole, and as the light came up they blew out the lamps. Then the curtain went up, and there was a great brightly-lit hall, in which a number of pretty young girls were moving about, dressed in the most wonderful costumes—and they were speaking! Lasse was quite astonished to find that he could understand what they said; the whole thing seemed so strange and foreign to him; it was like a peep into dreamland. But there was one maiden who sat there all alone at her spinning wheel, and she was the fairest of them all.

“That’s surely a fine lady?” asked Lasse.

But Pelle whispered that she was only a poor forest maiden, whom the lord of the castle had robbed, and now he wanted to force her to be his sweetheart. All the others were making a tremendous lot of her, combing her golden hair and kneeling before her; but she only looked unhappier than before. And sometimes her sadness was more than she could bear; then she opened her beautiful mouth and her wounded heart bled in song, which affected Lasse so that he had to fetch a long sighing breath.

Then a tall man with a huge red beard came stamping into the hall. Lasse saw that he was dressed like a man who has been keeping Carnival.

“That’s the one we made the fine boots for,” whispered Pelle: “the lord of the castle, who wants to seduce her.”

“An ugly devil he looks too!” said Lasse, and spat. “The master at Stone Farm is a child of God compared with him!” Pelle signed to him to be quiet.

The lord of the castle drove all the other women away, and then began to tramp stormily to and fro, eyeing the forest maiden and showing the whites of his eyes. “Well, have you at last decided?” he roared, and snorted like a mad bull. And suddenly he sprang at her as if to take her by force.

“Ha! Touch me not!” she cried, “or by the living God, I will plunge this dagger into my heart! You believe you can buy my innocence because I am poor, but the honor of the poor is not to be bought with gold!”

“That’s a true word!” said Lasse loudly.

But the lord of the castle gave a malicious laugh, and tugged at his red beard. He rolled his r’s dreadfully.

“Is my offer not enough for you? Come, stay this night with me and you shall receive a farm with ten head of cattle, so that to-morrow you can stand at the altar with your huntsman!”

“Hold your tongue, you whoremonger!” said Lasse angrily.

Those round about him tried to calm him; one or another nudged him in the ribs. “Well, can’t a man speak any longer?” Lasse turned crossly to Pelle. “I’m no clergyman, but if the girl doesn’t want to, let him leave her alone; at any rate he shan’t slake his lust publicly in the presence of hundreds of people with impunity! A swine like that!” Lasse was speaking loudly, and it seemed as though his words had had their effect on the lord of the castle. He stood there awhile staring in front of him, and then called a man, and bade him lead the maiden back to the forest.

Lasse breathed easily again as the curtain fell and the boys overhead by the hole in the ceiling relit the lamps and let them down again. “So far she’s got out of it all right,” he told Pelle, “but I don’t trust the lord—he’s a scoundrel!” He was perspiring freely, and did not look entirely satisfied.

The next scene which was conjured up on the stage was a forest. It was wonderfully fine, with pelargoniums blooming on the ground, and a spring which was flowing out of something green. “That is a covered beer-barrel!” said Pelle, and now Lasse too could see the tap, but it was wonderfully natural. Right in the background one could see the lord’s castle on a cliff, and in the foreground lay a fallen tree-trunk; two green-clad huntsmen sat astride of it, concocting their evil schemes. Lasse nodded—he knew something of the wickedness of the world.

Now they heard a sound, and crouched down behind the tree-trunk, each with a knife in his hand. For a moment all was silent; then came the forest maiden and her huntsman, wandering all unawares down the forest path. By the spring they took a clinging and affectionate farewell; then the man came forward, hurrying to his certain death.

This was too much. Lasse stood up. “Look out!” he cried in a choking voice: “look out!” Those behind him pulled his coat and scolded him. “No, devil take you all, I won’t hold my tongue!” he cried, and laid about him. And then he leaned forward again: “Look where you’re going, d’you hear! Your life is at stake! They’re hiding behind the fallen tree!”

The huntsman stood where he was and stared up, and the two assassins had risen to their feet and were staring, and the actors and actresses came through from the wings and gazed upward over the auditorium. Lasse saw that the man was saved, but now he had to suffer for his services; the manager wanted to throw him out. “I can perfectly well go by myself,” he said. “An honorable man is one too many in this company!” In the street below he talked aloud to himself; he was in a blazing temper.

“It was only a play,” said Pelle dejectedly. In his heart he was ashamed of his father.

"You needn't try to teach me about that! I know very well that it all happened long ago and that I can do nothing to alter it, not if I was to stand on my head. But that such low doings should be brought to life again! If the others had felt as I did we should have taken the lord and thrashed him to death, even if it did come a hundred years too late!"

"Why—but that was Actor West, who comes to our workshop every day."

"Is that so? Actor West, eh? Then you are Actor Codfish, to let yourself be imposed on like that! I have met people before now who had the gift of falling asleep and conjuring up long dead people in their place—but not so real as here, you understand. If you had been behind the curtain you would have seen West lying there like dead, while he, the other one —the Devil—was carrying on and ordering everybody about. It's a gift I'd rather not have; a dangerous game! If the others forget the word of command that brings him back into the body it would be all up with him, and the other would take his place."

"But that is all superstition! When I know it's West in a play—why, I recognized him at once!"

"Oh, of course! You are always the cleverer! You'd like a dispute with the devil himself every day! So it was only a show? When he was rolling the whites of his eyes in his frantic lust! You believe me—if she hadn't had that knife he would have fallen on her and satisfied his desire in front of everybody! Because if you conjure up long bygone times the action has to have its way, however many there are to see. But that they should do it for money—for money —ugh! And now I'm going home!" Lasse would say nothing more, but had the horses harnessed.

"You had best not go there again," he said at parting. "But if it has got hold of you already, at least put a knife in your pocket. Yes, and we'll send you your washing by Butcher Jensen, one Saturday, soon."

Pelle went to the theater as before; he had a shrewd idea that it was only a play, but there *was* something mysterious about it; people must have a supernatural gift who evening after evening could so entirely alter their appearance and so completely enter into the people they represented. Pelle thought he would like to become an actor if he could only climb high enough.

The players created a considerable excitement when they strolled through the streets with their napping clothes and queer head-gear; people ran to their windows to see them, the old folk peeping over their shoulders. The town was as though transformed as long as they were in it.

Every mind had taken a perverse direction. The girls cried out in their sleep and dreamed of abductions; they even left their windows a little open; and every young fellow was ready to run away with the players. Those who were not theater-mad attended religious meetings in order to combat the evil.

And one day the players disappeared—as they had come—and left a cloud of debts behind them. "Devil's trash!" said the master with his despondent expression. "They've tricked us! But, all the same, they were fine fellows in their way, and they had seen the world!"

But after these happenings he could by no means get warm again. He crawled into bed and spent the best part of the month lying there.

XII

It can be very cozy on those winter evenings when everybody sits at home in the workshop and passes the time by doing nothing, because it is so dark and cold out of doors, and one has nowhere to go to. To stand about by the skating-ponds and to look on, frozen, while others go swinging past—well, Pelle has had enough of it; and as for strolling up the street toward the north, and then turning about and returning toward the south, and turning yet again, up and down the selfsame street—well, there is nothing in it unless one has good warm clothes and a girl whose waist one can hold. And Morten too is no fresh-air disciple; he is freezing, and wants to sit in the warmth.

So they slink into the workshop as soon as it begins to grow dark, and they take out the key and hang it on the nail in the entry, in order to deceive Jeppe, and then they secretly make a fire in the stove, placing a screen in front of it, so that Jeppe shall not see the light from it when he makes his rounds past the workshop windows. They crouch together on the ledge at the bottom of the stove, each with an arm round the other's shoulder, and Morten tells Pelle about the books he has read.

"Why do you do nothing but read those stupid books?" asks Pelle, when he has listened for a time.

"Because I want to know something about life and about the world," answers Morten, out of the darkness.

"Of the world?" says Pelle, in a contemptuous tone. "I want to go out into the world and see things—what's in the books is only lies. But go on."

And Morten goes on, good-natured as always. And in the midst of his narrative something suddenly occurs to him, and he pulls a paper packet from his breast-pocket: "That's chocolate from Bodil," he says, and breaks the stick in two.

"Where had she put it?" asks Pelle.

"Under the sheet—I felt something hard under my back when I lay down."

The boys laugh, while they nibble at the chocolate. Suddenly Pelle says: "Bodil, she's a child-seducer! She enticed Hans Peter away from Stone Farm—and he was only fifteen!"

Morten does not reply; but after a time his head sinks on Pelle's shoulder—his body is twitching.

"Well, you are seventeen," says Pelle, consoling. "But it's silly all the same; she might well be your mother—apart from her age." And they both laugh.

It can be still cozier on work-day evenings. Then the fire is burning openly in the stove, even after eight o'clock, and the lamp is shining, and Morten is there again. People come from all directions and look in for a moment's visit, and the cold, an impediment to everything else, awakens all sorts of notable reminiscences. It is as though the world itself comes creeping into the workshop. Jeppe conjures up his apprentice years in the capital, and tells of the great bankruptcy; he goes right back to the beginning of the century, to a wonderful old capital where the old people wore wigs, and the rope's-end was always at hand and the apprentices just kept body and soul together, begging on Sundays before the doors of the townsfolk. Ah, those were times! And he comes home and wants to settle down as master, but the guild won't accept him; he is too young. So he goes to sea as cook, and comes to places down south where the sun burns so fiercely that the pitch melts in the seams and the deck scorches one's feet. They are a merry band, and Jeppe, little as he is, by no means lags behind the rest. In Malaga they storm a tavern, throw all the Spaniards out of the window, and sport with the girls—until the whole town falls upon them and they have to fly to their boat. Jeppe cannot keep up with them, and the boat shoves off, so that he has to jump into the water and swim for it. Knives fall splashing about him in the water, and one sticks shivering in his shoulder-blades. When Jeppe comes to this he always begins to strip his back to show the scar, and Master Andres holds him back. Pelle and Morten have heard the story many a time, but they are willing always to hear it again.

And Baker Jörgen, who for the greater part of his life has been a seaman on the big vessels sailing the northern and southern oceans, talks about capstans and icebergs and beautiful black women from the West Indies. He sets the capstan turning, so that the great three-master makes sail out of the Havana roadstead, and all his hearers feel their hearts grow light.

“Heave ho, the capstan,
Waltz her well along!
Leave the girl a-weeping,
Strike up the song!”

So they walk round and round, twelve men with their breasts pressed against the heavy capstan-bars; the anchor is weighed, and the sail fills with the wind—and behind and through his words gleam the features of a sweetheart in every port. Bjerregrav cannot help crossing himself—he who has never accomplished anything, except to feel for the poor; but in the young master’s eyes everybody travels—round and round the world, round and round the world. And Wooden-leg Larsen, who in winter is quite the well-to-do pensioner, in blue pilot-coat and fur cap, leaves his pretty, solidly-built cottage when the Spring comes, and sallies forth into the world as a poor organ-grinder—he tells them of the Zoological Gardens on the hill, and the adventurous Holm-Street, and of extraordinary beings who live upon the dustbins in the back-yards of the capital.

But Pelle’s body creaks whenever he moves; his bones are growing and seeking to stretch themselves; he feels growth and restlessness in every part and corner of his being. He is the first to whom the Spring comes; one day it announces itself in him in the form of a curiosity as to what his appearance is like. Pelle has never asked himself this question before; and the scrap of looking-glass which he begged from the glazier from whom he fetches the glass scrapers tells him nothing truly. He has at bottom a feeling that he is an impossible person.

He begins to give heed to the opinions of others respecting his outward appearance; now and again a girl looks after him, and his cheeks are no longer so fat that people can chaff him about them. His fair hair is wavy; the lucky curl on his forehead is still visible as an obstinate little streak; but his ears are still terribly big, and it is of no use to pull his cap over them, in order to press them close to his head. But he is tall and well-grown for his age, and the air of the workshop has been powerless to spoil his ruddy complexion; and he is afraid of nothing in the world— particularly when he is angry. He thinks out a hundred different kinds of exercise in order to satisfy the demands of his body, but it is of no use. If he only bends over his hammer-work he feels it in every joint of his body.

And then one day the ice breaks and goes out to sea. Ships are fitted out again, and provisioned, and follow the ice, and the people of the town awake to the idea of a new life, and begin to think of green woods and summer clothing.

And one day the fishing-boats arrive! They come gliding across from Hellavik and Nogesund on the Swedish coast. They cut swiftly through the water, heeling far over under their queer lateen sails, like hungry sea-birds that sweep the waves with one wing-tip in their search for booty. A mile to seaward the fishermen of the town receive them with gunshots; they have no permission to anchor in the fishing port, but have to rent moorings for themselves in the old ship’s harbor, and to spread out the gear to dry toward the north. The craftsmen of the town come flocking down to the harbor, discussing the foreign thieves who have come from a poorer country in order to take the bread out of the mouths of the townsfolk; for they are inured to all weathers, and full of courage, and are successful in their fishing. They say the same things every Spring, but when they want to buy herrings they deal with the Swedes, who sell more cheaply than the Bornholmers. “Perhaps our fishermen wear leather boots?” inquires Jeppe. “No, they wear wooden shoes week-days and Sunday alike. Let the wooden-shoe makers deal with them—I buy where the fish is cheapest!”

It is as though the Spring in person has arrived with these thin, sinewy figures, who go singing through the streets, challenging the petty envy of the town. There are women, too, on every boat, to mend and clean the gear, and they pass the workshop in crowds, searching for their old lodgings in the poor part of the town near the “Great Power’s” home. Pelle’s heart leaps at the sight of these young women, with pretty slippers on their feet, black shawls round their oval faces, and many fine colors in their dress. His mind is full of shadowy memories of his childhood, which have lain as quiet as though they were indeed extinguished; vague traditions of a time that he has experienced but can no longer remember; it is like a warm breath of air from another and unknown existence.

If it happens that one or another of these girls has a little child on her arm, then the town has something to talk about. Is it Merchant Lund again, as it was last year? Lund, who since then had been known only as “the Herring Merchant”? Or is it some sixteen- year-old apprentice, a scandal to his pastor and schoolmaster, whose hands he has only just left?

Then Jens goes forth with his concertina, and Pelle makes haste with his tidying up, and he and Morten hurry up to Gallows Hill, hand-in-hand, for Morten finds it difficult to run so quickly. All that the town possesses of reckless youth is there; but the Swedish girls take the lead. They dance and whirl until their slippers fly off, and little battles are fought over them. But on Saturdays the boats do not go to sea; then the men turn up, with smouldering brows, and claim their women, and then there is great slaughter.

Pelle enters into it all eagerly; here he finds an opportunity of that exercise of which his handicraft deprives his body. He hungers for heroic deeds, and presses so close to the fighters that now and again he gets a blow himself. He dances with Morten, and plucks up courage to ask one of the girls to dance with him; he is shy, and dances like a leaping kid in order to banish his shyness; and in the midst of the dance he takes to his heels and leaves the girl standing there. “Damned silly!” say the onlookers, and he hears them laughing behind him. He has a peculiar manner of entering into all this recklessness which lets the body claim its due without thought for the following day and the following year. If some man-hunting young woman tries to capture his youth he lashes out behind, and with a few wanton leaps he is off and away. But he loves to join in the singing when the men and women go homeward with closely-twined arms, and he and Morten follow them, they too with their arms about each other. Then the moon builds her bridge of light across the sea, and in the pinewood, where a white mist lies over the tree-tops, a song rises from every path, heard as a lulling music in the haunts of the wandering couples; insistently melancholy in its meaning, but issuing from the lightest hearts. It is just the kind of song to express their happiness.

“Put up, put up thy golden hair;
A son thou’lt have before a year—
No help in thy clamor and crying!
In forty weeks may’st look for me.
I come to ask how it fares with thee.
The forty weeks were left behind.
And sad she was and sick of mind,
And fell to her clamor and crying—”

And the song continues as they go through the town, couple after couple, wandering as they list. The quiet winding closes ring with songs of love and death, so that the old townsfolk lift their heads from their pillows, and, their nightcaps pushed to one side, wag gravely at all this frivolity. But youth knows nothing of this; it plunges reveling onward, with its surging blood. And one day the old people have the best of it; the blood surges no longer, but there they are, and there are the consequences, and the consequences demand paternity and maintenance. “Didn’t we say so?” cry the old folk; but the young ones hang their heads, and foresee a long, crippled existence, with a hasty marriage or continual payments to a strange woman, while all through their lives a shadow of degradation and ridicule clings to them; both their wives and their company must be taken from beneath them. They talk no longer of going out into the world and making their way; they used to strut arrogantly before the old folk and demand free play for their youth, but now they go meekly in harness with hanging heads, and blink shamefacedly at the mention of their one heroic deed. And those who cannot endure their fate must leave the country secretly and by night, or swear themselves free.

The young master has his own way of enjoying himself. He takes no part in the chase after the girls; but when the sunlight is really warm, he sits before the workshop window and lets it warm his back. “Ah, that’s glorious!” he says, shaking himself. Pelle has to feel his fur jacket to see how powerful the sun is. “Thank God, now we have the spring here!”

Inside the workshop they whistle and sing to the hammer-strokes; there are times when the dark room sounds like a bird-shop. “Thank God, now we have the spring!” says Master Andres over and over again, “but the messenger of spring doesn’t seem to be coming this year.”

“Perhaps he is dead,” says little Nikas.

“Garibaldi dead? Good Lord! he won’t die just yet. All the years I can remember he has looked just as he does now and has drunk just as hard. Lord of my body! but how he has boozed in his time, the rascal! But you won’t find his equal as a shoemaker all the world over.”

One morning, soon after the arrival of the steamer, a thin, tall, sharp-shouldered man comes ducking through the workshop door. His hands and face are blue with the cold of the morning and his cheeks are rather baggy, but in his eyes burns an undying fire. “Morning, comrades!” he says, with a genial wave of the hand. “Well, how’s life treating us? Master well?” He dances into the workshop, his hat pressed flat under his left arm. His coat and trousers flap against his body, revealing the fact that he is wearing nothing beneath them; his feet are thrust bare into his shoes, and he wears a thick kerchief round his neck. But such a manner and a carriage in a craftsman Pelle has never seen in all his days; and Garibaldi’s voice alone is like a bell.

“Now, my son,” he says, and strikes Pelle lightly on the shoulder, “can you fetch me something to drink? Just a little, now at once, for I’m murderously thirsty. The master has credit! Pst! We’ll have the bottleful—then you needn’t go twice.”

Pelle runs. In half a minute he is back again. Garibaldi knows how to do things quickly; he has already tied his apron, and is on the point of passing his opinion on the work in the workshop. He takes the bottle from Pelle, throws it over his shoulder, catches it with the other hand, sets his thumb against the middle of the bottle, and drinks. Then he shows the bottle to the others. “Just to the thumbnail, eh?”

“I call that smart drinking!” says little Nikas.

“It can be done though the night is black as a crow;” Garibaldi waves his hand in a superior manner. “And old Jeppe is alive still? A smart fellow!”

Master Andres strikes on the wall. “He has come in—he is there!” he says, with his wide-opened eyes. After a time he slips into his clothes and comes out into the workshop; he hangs about gossiping, but Garibaldi is sparing of his words; he is still rusty after the night voyage.

A certain feverishness has affected them all; an anxiety lest anything should escape them. No one regards his daily work with aversion to-day; everybody exerts his capacities to the utmost. Garibaldi comes from the great world, and the spirit of adventure and the wandering life exhales from his flimsy clothes.

“If he’ll only begin to tell us about it,” whispers Pelle to Jens; he cannot sit still. They hang upon his lips, gazing at him; if he is silent it is the will of Providence. Even the master does not bother him, but endures his taciturnity and little Nikas submits to being treated like an apprentice.

Garibaldi raises his head. “Well, one didn’t come here to sit about and idle!” he cries gaily. “Plenty to do, master?”

“There’s not much doing here, but we’ve always work for you,” replies Master Andres. “Besides, we’ve had an order for a pair of wedding-shoes, white satin with yellow stitching; but we haven’t properly tackled it.” He gives little Nikas a meaning glance.

“No yellow stitching with white satin, master; white silk, of course, and white edges.”

“Is that the Paris fashion?” asks Master Andres eagerly. Garibaldi shrugs his shoulders. “Don’t let us speak of Paris, Master Andres; here we have neither the leather nor the tools to make Parisian shoes; and we haven’t the legs to put into them, either.”

“The deuce! Are they so fashionable?”

“Fashionable! I should say so! I can hold the foot of a well-grown Parisian woman in the hollow of my hand. And when they walk they don’t touch the pavement! You could make shoes for a Parisian girl out of whipped cream, and they’d hold together! If you were to fit her with a pair of ordinary woman’s beetle-crushers she’d jump straight into the sewer!”

“Well, I’m damned!” The master is hastily cutting some leather to shape. “The devil she would!”

Never did any one make himself at home more easily; Garibaldi draws a seat up to the table and is at once in full swing. No rummaging about after tools; his hand finds his way to the exact spot where the thing required lies, as though an invisible track lay between them. These hands do everything of themselves, quietly, with gentle movements, while the eyes are elsewhere; gazing out into the garden, or examining the young master, or the work of the apprentices. To Pelle and the others, who always have to look at everything from every side in turn, this is absolutely marvelous. And before they have had time to look round Garibaldi has put everything in order, and is sitting there working and looking across the room at the master, who is himself sewing to-day.

And then Jeppe comes tumbling in, annoyed that no one has told him of

Garibaldi’s arrival. “’Day, master—’day, craft-master!” says Garibaldi, who stands up and bows.

“Yes,” says Jeppe self-consciously, “if there were craft-masters still, I should be one. But manual work is in a wretched case to-day; there’s no respect for it, and where shall a man look for respect if he doesn’t respect himself?”

“That’s meant for the young master, eh?” says Garibaldi laughing. “But times have altered, Master Jeppe; knee-straps and respect have given out; yes, those days are over! Begin at seven, and at six off and away! So it is in the big cities!”

“Is that this sosherlism?” says Jeppe disdainfully.

“It’s all the same to me what it is—Garibaldi begins and leaves off when it pleases him! And if he wants more for his work he asks for it! And if that doesn’t please them—then adieu, master, adieu! There are slaves enough, said the boy, when he got no bread.”

The others did not get very much done; they have enough to do to watch Garibaldi’s manner of working. He has emptied the bottle, and now his tongue is oiled; the young master questions him, and Garibaldi talks and talks, with continual gestures. Not for a moment do his hands persist at their work; and yet the work progresses so quickly it is a revelation to watch it; it is as though it were proceeding of itself. His attention is directed upon their work, and he always interferes at the right moment; he criticizes their way of holding their tools, and works out the various fashions of cut which lend beauty to the heel and sole. It is as though he feels it when they do anything wrongly; his spirit pervades the whole workshop. “That’s how one does it in Paris,” he says, or “this is Nuremberg fashion.” He speaks of Vienna and Greece in as matter-of-fact a way as though they lay yonder under Skipper Elleby’s trees. In Athens he went to the castle to shake the king by the hand, for countrymen should always stand by one another in foreign parts.

“He was very nice, by the by; but he had had his breakfast already. And otherwise it’s a damned bad country for traveling; there are no shoemakers there. No, there I recommend you Italy—there are shoemakers there, but no work; however, you can safely risk it and beg your way from place to place. They aren’t like those industrious Germans; every time you ask them for a little present they come and say, ‘Come in, please, there is some work you can do!’ And it is so warm there a man can sleep on the bare ground. Wine flows in every gutter there, but otherwise it’s no joke.” Garibaldi raises the empty bottle high in the air and peeps wonderingly up at the shelves; the young master winks at Pelle, and the latter fetches another supply of drink at the gallop.

The hot blood is seething in Pelle’s ears. He must go away, far away from here, and live the wandering life, like Garibaldi, who hid himself in the vineyards from the gendarmes, and stole the bacon from the chimneys while the people were in the fields. A spirit is working in him and the others; the spirit of their craft. They touch their tools and their material caressingly with their fingers; everything one handles has an inward color of its own; which tells one something. All the dustiness and familiarity of the workshop is swept away; the objects standing on the shelves glow with interest; the most tedious things contain a radiant life of their own.

The world rises before them like a cloudy wonder, traversed by endless highways deep in white dust, and Garibaldi treads them all. He has sold his journeyman’s pass to a comrade for a slice of bread and butter, and is left without papers; German policemen give chase to him, and he creeps through the vineyards for fourteen days, on hands and knees, getting nothing for his pains but grapes and a shocking attack of summer cholera. Finally his clothes are so very much alive that he no longer needs to move of himself; he simply lies quiet, and lets himself be carried along until he comes to a little town. “An inn?” asks Garibaldi. Yes, there is an inn. There he tells a story to the effect that he has been robbed; and the good people put him to bed, and warm and dry his clothes. Garibaldi snores, and pushes the chair nearer the stove; snores, and pushes it a little further; and as his clothes burst into a blaze he starts up roaring and scolding and weeping, and is inconsolable. So then he is given fine new clothes and new papers, and is out on the road again, and the begging begins afresh; mountains rise and pass him by, and great cities too, cities with wide rivers. There are towns in which the wandering journeyman can get no money, but is forced to work; damnable places, and there are German hostels where one is treated like a prisoner; all clothes must be taken off in a long corridor, even to one’s shirt; a handful of men examine them, and then everything is put safely away. Thirty or forty naked men are admitted, one after another, to the great bare dormitory.

Paris—the name is like a bubble bursting in one’s ear! There Garibaldi has worked for two years, and he has been there a score of times on passing visits. Paris is the glory of the whole world massed together, and all the convenient contrivances of the world brought to a state of perfection. Here in the town no respectable shoemaker will mend the dirty shoes of the “Top-galeass”; she goes about in down-trodden top-boots, or, if the snipping season has been poor, she wears wooden shoes. In Paris there are women who wear shoes at twenty guineas a pair, who carry themselves like queens, earn forty thousand pounds a year, and are yet nothing but prostitutes. Forty thousand! If another than Garibaldi had said it he would have had all the lasts thrown at his head!

Pelle does not hear what the master says to him, and Jens is in a great hurry for the cobbler’s wax; he has cut the upper of the shoe he is soling. They are quite irresponsible; as though bewitched by this wonderful being, who goes on pouring brandy down his throat, and turning the accursed drink into a many-colored panorama of the whole world, and work that is like a miracle.

The news has soon spread, and people come hurrying in to see Garibaldi, and perhaps to venture to shake him by the hand; Klausen wants to borrow some pegs, and Marker, quite unabashed, looks in to borrow the biggest last. The old cobbler Drejer stands modestly in a corner and says “Yes, yes!” to the other’s remarks. Garibaldi has reached him his hand, and now he can go home to his gloomy shop and his dirty stock and his old man’s solitude. The genius of the craft has touched him, and for the rest of his days has shed a light upon his wretched work of patching and repairing; he has exchanged a handshake with the man who made the cork-soled boots for the Emperor of Germany himself when he went out to fight the French. And the crazy Anker is there too; but does not come in, as he is shy of strangers. He walks up and down the yard before the workshop window, and keeps on peeping in. Garibaldi points his finger to his forehead and nods, and Anker does the same; he is shaking with suppressed laughter, as over some excellent joke, and runs off like a child who must hide himself in a corner in order to savor his delight. Baker Jörgen is there, bending down with his hands on his thighs, and his mouth wide open. “Lor’ Jiminy!” he cries from time to time; “did ever one hear the like!” He watches the white silk run through the sole and form itself into glistening pearls along the edge. Pearl after pearl appears; Garibaldi’s arms fly about him, and presently he touches the baker on the hip. “Am I in the way?” asks old Jörgen. “No, God forbid—stay where you are!” And his arms fly out again, and the butt of the bodkin touches the baker with a little click. “I’m certainly in the way,” says Jörgen, and moves a few inches. “Not in the least!” replies Garibaldi, stitching away. Then out fly his arms again, but this time the point of the bodkin is turned toward the baker. “Now, good Lord, I can see I’m in the way!” says Jörgen, rubbing himself behind. “Not at all!” replies Garibaldi courteously, with an inviting flourish of his hand. “Pray come nearer.” “No, thank you! No, thank you!” Old Jörgen gives a forced laugh, and hobbles away.

Otherwise Garibaldi lets them come and stare and go as they like. It does not trouble him that he is an eminent and remarkable person; quite unperturbed, he puts the brandy-bottle to his lips and drinks just as long as he is thirsty. He sits there, playing thoughtlessly with knife and leather and silk, as though he had sat on the stool all his life, instead of having just fallen from the moon. And about the middle of the afternoon the incomparable result is completed; a pair of wonderful satin shoes, slender as a neat’s tongue, dazzling in their white brilliance, as though they had just walked out of the fairy-tale and were waiting for the feet of the Princess.

“Look at them, damn it all!” says the master, and passes them to little Nikas, who passes them round the circle. Garibaldi throws back his close-cropped gray head.

“You need not say who has made them—everybody can see that. Suppose now the shoes go to Jutland and are worn there and are thrown on the rubbish-heap. One day, years hence, some porridge-eater goes ploughing; a scrap of the instep comes to the surface; and a wandering journeyman, who is sitting in the ditch nibbling at his supper, rakes it toward him with his stick. That bit of instep, he says, that, or the Devil may fry me else, was part of a shoe made by Garibaldi—deuce take me, he says, but that’s what it was. And in that case the journeyman must be from Paris, or Nuremberg, or Hamburg—one or the other, that’s certain. Or am I talking nonsense, master?”

No; Master Andres can asseverate this is no nonsense—he who from childhood lived with Garibaldi on the highways and in great cities, who followed him so impetuously with that lame leg of his that he remembers Garibaldi's heroic feats better than Garibaldi himself. "But now you will stay here," he says persuasively. "Now we'll work up the business—we'll get all the fine work of the whole island." Garibaldi has nothing against this; he has had enough of toiling through the world.

Klausen will gladly make one of the company; in the eyes of all those present this proposal is a dream which will once more raise the craft to its proper level; will perhaps improve it until the little town can compete with Copenhagen. "How many medals have you really received?" says Jeppe, as he stands there with a great framed diploma in his hand. Garibaldi shrugs his shoulders. "I don't know, old master; one gets old, and one's hand gets unsteady. But what is this? Has Master Jeppe got the silver medal?"

Jeppe laughs. "For this I have to thank a tramp by the name of Garibaldi. He was here four years ago and won the silver medal for me!" Well—that is a thing Garibaldi has long forgotten! But medals are scattered about wherever he has been.

"Yes, there are a hundred masters knocking about who boast of their distinctions: first-class workshop—you can see it for yourself— 'a silver medal.' But who did the work? Who got his day's wages and an extra drop of drink and then—good-bye, Garibaldi! What has one to show for it, master? There are plenty of trees a man can change his clothes behind—but the shirt?" For a moment he seems dejected. "Lorrain in Paris gave me two hundred francs for the golden medal I won for him; but otherwise it was always—Look in my waistcoat pocket! or—I've an old pair of trousers for you, Garibaldi! But now there's an end to that, I tell you; Garibaldi has done with bringing water to the mill for the rich townsfolk; for now he's a sosherlist!" He strikes the table so that the glass scrapers jingle. "That last was Franz in Cologne—gent's boots with cork socks. He was a stingy fellow; he annoyed Garibaldi. I'm afraid this isn't enough for the medal, master, I said; there's too much unrest in the air. Then he bid me more and yet more—but it won't run to the medal—that's all I will say. At last he sends Madame to me with coffee and Vienna bread—and she was in other respects a lady, who drove with a lackey on the box. But we were furious by that time! Well, it was a glorious distinction—to please Madame."

"Had he many journeymen?" asks Jeppe.

"Oh, quite thirty or forty."

"Then he must have been somebody." Jeppe speaks in a reproving tone.

"Somebody—yes—he was a rascal! What did it matter to me that he had a lot of journeymen? I didn't cheat them out of their wages!"

Now Garibaldi is annoyed; he takes off his apron, puts his hat on sideways, and he goes into the town.

"Now he's going to look for a sweetheart!" says the young master; "he has a sweetheart in every town."

At eight he comes sailing into the workshop again. "What, still sitting here?" he says to the apprentices. "In other parts of the world they have knocked off work two hours ago. What sort of slaves are you to sit crouching here for fourteen hours? Strike, damn it all!"

They look at one another stupidly. "Strike—what is that?"

Then comes the young master. "Now it would do one good to warm one's eyes a bit," says Garibaldi.

"There's a bed made up for you in the cutting-out room," says the master. But Garibaldi rolls his coat under his head and lies down on the window-bench. "If I snore, just pull my nose," he says to Pelle, and goes to sleep. Next day he makes two pairs of kid boots with yellow stitching—for little Nikas this would be a three days' job. Master Andres has all his plans ready—Garibaldi is to be a partner. "We'll knock out a bit of wall and put in a big shop-window!" Garibaldi agrees—he really does for once feel a desire to settle down. "But we mustn't begin too big," he says: "this isn't Paris." He drinks a little more and does not talk much; his eyes stray to the wandering clouds outside.

On the third day Garibaldi begins to show his capacities. He does not do much more work, but he breaks a heavy stick in two with one blow as it flies through the air, and jumps over a stick which he holds in both hands. "One must have exercise," he says restlessly. He balances an awl on the face of a hammer and strikes it into a hole in the sole of a boot.

And suddenly he throws down his work. "Lend me ten kroner, master," he says; "I must go and buy myself a proper suit. Now I'm settled and a partner in a business I can’t go about looking like a pig.”

“It will be better for you to get that finished,” says the master quietly, pushing Garibaldi’s work across to little Nikas. “We shan’t see him again!”

This is really the case. He will go into the town with the honorable intentions, to buy something, and then he will be caught and whirled out into the great world, far away, quite at hazard. “He’s on the way to Germany with some skipper already,” says the master.

“But he hasn’t even said good-bye!” The master shrugs his shoulders.

He was like a falling star! But for Pelle and the others he signified more than that; they learned more in three days than in the whole course of their apprenticeship. And they saw brilliant prospects for the craft; it was no hole-and-corner business after all; with Garibaldi, they traveled the whole wonderful world. Pelle’s blood burned with the desire to wander; he knew now what he wanted. To be capable as Garibaldi—that genius personified; and to enter the great cities with stick and knapsack as though to a flourish of trumpets.

They all retained traces of his fleeting visit. Something inside them had broken with a snap; they gripped their tools more freely, more courageously; and they had seen their handicraft pass before their eyes like a species of technical pageant. For a long time the wind of the passage of the great bird hung about the little workshop with its atmosphere of respectable citizenship.

And this fresh wind in one’s ears was the spirit of handicraft itself which hovered above their heads—borne upon its two mighty pinions—genius and debauchery.

But one thing remained in Pelle’s mind as a meaningless fragment—the word “strike.” What did it mean?

XIII

One could not be quite as cheerful and secure here as one could at home in the country; there was always a gnawing something in the background, which kept one from wholly surrendering oneself. Most people had wandered hither in search of fortune—poverty had destroyed their faculty of surrendering to fate; they were weary of waiting and had resolved to take matters into their own hands. And now here they were, sunk in wretchedness. They could not stir from the spot; they only labored and sunk deeper into the mire. But they continued to strive, with the strength of their bodies, until that gave way, and it was all over with them.

Pelle had often enough wondered to see how many poor people there were in the town. Why did not they go ahead with might and main until they were well off? They had all of them had intentions of that kind, but nothing came of them. Why? They themselves did not understand why, but bowed their heads as though under a curse. And if they raised them again it was only to seek that consolation of the poor—alcohol, or to attend the meetings of the home missions.

Pelle could not understand it either. He had an obscure sense of that joyous madness which arises from poverty itself, like a dim but wonderful dream of reaching the light. And he could not understand why it failed; and yet he must always follow that impetus upward which resided in him, and scramble up once more. Yet otherwise his knowledge was wide; a patched-up window-pane, or a scurfy child’s head, marked an entrance to that underworld which he had known so well from birth, so that he could have found his way about it with bandaged eyes. He attached no particular importance to it, but in this direction his knowledge was continually extended; he “thee’d and thou’d” poor people from the first moment, and knew the mournful history of every cottage. And all he saw and heard was like a weary refrain—it spoke of the same eternally unalterable longing and the same defeats. He reflected no further about the matter, but it entered into his blood like an oppression, purged his mind of presumption, and vitiated his tense alertness. When he lay his head on his pillow and went to sleep the endless pulsing of his blood in his ears became the tramping of weary hordes who were for ever passing in their blind groping after the road which should lead to light and happiness. His consciousness did not grasp it, but it brooded oppressively over his days.

The middle-class society of the town was still, as far as he was concerned, a foreign world. Most of the townsfolk were as poor as church mice, but they concealed the fact skilfully, and seemed to have no other desire than to preserve appearances. “Money!” said Master Andres; “here there’s only one ten-kroner note among all the employers in the town, and that goes from hand to hand. If it were to stop too long with one of them all the rest of us would stop payment!” The want of loose capital weighed on them oppressively, but they boasted of Shipowner Monsen’s money—there were still rich people in the town! For the rest, each kept himself going by means of his own earnings; one had sent footwear to the West Indies, and another had made the bride-bed for the burgomaster’s daughter; they maintained themselves as a caste and looked down with contempt upon the people.

Pelle himself had honestly and honorably intended to follow the same path; to keep smiles for those above him and harsh judgments for those below him; in short, like Alfred, to wriggle his way upward. But in the depths of his being his energies were working in another direction, and they continually thrust him back where he belonged. His conflict with the street-urchins stopped of itself, it was so aimless; Pelle went in and out of their houses, and the boys, so soon as they were confirmed, became his comrades.

The street boys sustained an implacable conflict with those who attended the town school and the grammar-school. They called them pigs, after the trough-like satchels which they carried on their backs. Pelle found himself between a double fire, although he accepted the disdain and the insult of those above him, as Lasse had taught him, as something that was inherent in the nature of things. “Some are born to command and some to obey,” as Lasse said.

But one day he came to blows with one of them. And having thrashed the postmaster’s son until not a clean spot was left on him, he discovered that he now had a crow to pluck with the sons of all the fine folks, or else they would hold him up to ridicule. It was as though something was redeemed at his hands when he managed to plant them in the face of one of these lads, and there seemed to be a particular charm connected with the act of rolling their fine clothes in the mire. When he had thrashed a “pig” he was always in the rosiest of tempers, and he laughed to think how Father Lasse would have crossed himself!

One day he met three grammar-school students, who fell upon him then and there, beating him with their books; there was repayment in every blow. Pelle got his back against the wall, and defended himself with his belt, but could not manage the three of them; so he gave the biggest of them a terrific kick in the lower part of the body and took to his heels. The boy rolled on the ground and lay there shrieking; Pelle could see, from the other end of the street, how the other two were toiling to set him on his legs again. He himself had got off with a black eye.

“Have you been fighting again, you devil’s imp?” said the young master.

No! Pelle had fallen and bruised himself.

In the evening he went round the harbor to see the steamer go out and to say good-bye to Peter. He was in a bad temper; he was oppressed by a foreboding of evil.

The steamer was swarming with people. Over the rail hung a swarm of freshly-made journeymen of that year’s batch—the most courageous of them; the others had already gone into other trades, had become postmen or farm servants. “There is no employment for us in the shoe trade,” they said dejectedly as they sank. As soon as their journeyman’s test-work was done they took to their heels, and new apprentices were taken all along the line. But these fellows here were crossing to the capital; they wanted to go on working at their own trade. The hundreds of apprentices of the little town were there, shouting “Hurrah!” every other moment, for those departing were the heroes who were going forth to conquer the land of promise for them all. “We are coming after you!” they cried. “Find me a place, you! Find me a place!”

Emil stood by the harbor shed, with some waterside workers, looking on. His time was long ago over. The eldest apprentice had not had the pluck to leave the island; he was now a postman in Sudland and cobbled shoes at night in order to live. Now Peter stood on the deck above, while Jens and Pelle stood below and looked up at him admiringly. “Good-bye, Pelle!” he cried. “Give Jeppe my best respects and tell him he can kiss my bootsoles!”

Some of the masters were strolling to and fro on the quay, in order to note that none of their apprentices were absconding from the town.

Jens foresaw the time when he himself would stand there penniless. “Send me your address,” he said, “and find me something over there.”

“And me too,” said Pelle.

Peter spat. “There’s a bit of sour cabbage soup—take it home and give it to Jeppe with my love and I wish him good appetite! But give my very best respects to Master Andres. And when I write, then come over—there’s nothing to be done in this hole.”

“Don’t let the Social Democrats eat you up!” cried some one from among the spectators. The words “Social Democrat” were at this time in every mouth, although no one knew what they meant; they were used as terms of abuse.

“If they come to me with their damned rot they’ll get one on the mouth!” said Peter, disdainfully. And then the steamer began to move; the last cheers were given from the outer breakwater. Pelle could have thrown himself into the sea; he was burning with desire to turn his back on it all. And then he let himself drift with the crowd from the harbor to the circus-ground. On the way he heard a few words of a conversation which made his ears burn. Two townsmen were walking ahead of him and were talking.

“They say he got such a kick that he brought up blood,” said the one.

“Yes, it’s terrible, the way that scum behaves! I hope they’ll arrest the ruffian.”

Pelle crept along behind the tent until he came to the opening. There he stood every evening, drinking everything in by his sense of smell. He had no money to pay his way in; but he could catch a glimpse of a whole host of magnificent things when the curtain was drawn up in order to admit a late-comer. Albinus came and went at will—as always, when jugglers were in the town. He was acquainted with them almost before he had seen them. When he had seen some clever feat of strength or skill he would come crawling out from under the canvas in order to show his companions that he could do the same thing. Then he was absolutely in his element; he would walk on his hands along the harbor railings and let his body hang over the water.

Pelle wanted to go home and sleep on the day's doings, but a happy pair came up to him—a woman who was dancing as she walked, and a timid young workman, whom she held firmly by the arm. "Here, Hans!" she said, "this is Pelle, whose doing it is that we two belong to each other!"

Then she laughed aloud for sheer delight, and Hans, smiling, held out his hand to Pelle. "I ought to thank you for it," he said.

"Yes, it was that dance," she said. "If my dancing-shoes hadn't been mended Hans would have run off with somebody else!" She seized Pelle's arm. And then they went on, very much pleased with one another, and Pelle's old merriment returned for a time. He too could perform all sorts of feats of strength.

On the following day Pelle was hired by Baker Jörgensen to knead some dough; the baker had received, at short notice, a large order for ship's biscuit for the *Three Sisters*.

"Keep moving properly!" he would cry every moment to the two boys, who had pulled off their stockings and were now standing up in the great kneading-trough, stamping away, with their hands gripping the battens which were firmly nailed to the rafters. The wooden ceiling between the rafters was black and greasy; a slimy paste of dust and dough and condensed vapor was running down the walls. When the boys hung too heavily on the battens the baker would cry: "Use your whole weight! Down into the dough with you—then you'll get a foot like a fine young lady!"

Sören was pottering about alone, with hanging head as always; now and again he sighed. Then old Jörgen would nudge Marie in the side, and they would both laugh. They stood close together, and as they were rolling out the dough their hands kept on meeting; they laughed and jested together. But the young man saw nothing of this.

"Don't you see?" whispered his mother, striking him sharply in the ribs; her angry eyes were constantly fixed on the pair.

"Oh, leave me alone!" the son would say, moving a little away from her. But she moved after him. "Go and put your arm round her waist—that's what she wants! Let her feel your hands on her hips! Why do you suppose she sticks out her bosom like that? Let her feel your hands on her hips! Push the old man aside!"

"Oh, leave me alone!" replied Sören, and he moved further away from her again.

"You are tempting your father to sin—you know what he is! And she can't properly control herself any longer, now that she claims to have a word in the matter. Are you going to put up with that? Go and take her round the waist—strike her if you can't put up with her, but make her feel that you're a man!"

"Well, are you working up there?" old Jörgen cried to the boys, turning his laughing countenance from Marie. "Tread away! The dough will draw all the rottenness out of your bodies! And you, Sören—get a move on you!"

"Yes, get a move on—don't stand there like an idiot!" continued his mother.

"Oh, leave me alone! I've done nothing to anybody; leave me in peace!"

"Pah!" The old woman spat at him. "Are you a man? Letting another handle your wife! There she is, obliged to take up with a gouty old man like that! Pah, I say! But perhaps you are a woman after all? I did once bring a girl into the world, only I always thought she was dead. But perhaps you are she? Yes, make long ears at me!" she cried to the two boys, "you've never seen anything like what's going on here! There's a son for you, who leaves his father to do all the work by himself!"

"Now then, what's the matter with you?" cried old Jörgen jollily. "Is mother turning the boys' heads?" Marie broke into a loud laugh.

Jeppe came to fetch Pelle. "Now you'll go to the Town Hall and get a thrashing," he said, as they entered the workshop. Pelle turned an ashen gray.

"What have you been doing now?" asked Master Andres, looking sadly at him.

"Yes, and to one of our customers, too!" said Jeppe. "You've deserved that, haven't you?"

"Can't father get him let off the beating?" said Master Andres.

"I have proposed that Pelle should have a good flogging here in the workshop, in the presence of the deputy and his son. But the deputy says no. He wants justice to run its course."

Pelle collapsed. He knew what it meant when a poor boy went to the town hall and was branded for life. His brain sought desperately for some way of escape. There was only one—death! He could secretly hide the knee-strap under his blouse and go into the little house and hang himself. He was conscious of a monotonous din; that was Jeppe, admonishing him; but the words escaped him; his soul had already began its journey toward death. As the noise ceased he rose silently.

"Well? What are you going out for?" asked Jeppe.

"I'm going to the yard." He spoke like a sleepwalker.

"Perhaps you want to take the knee-strap out with you?"

Jeppe and the master exchanged a look of understanding. Then Master Andres came over to him. "You wouldn't be so silly?" he said, and looked deep into Pelle's eyes. Then he made himself tidy and went into the town.

"Pelle, you devil's imp," he said, as he came home, "I've been running from Herod to Pilate, and I've arranged matters so that you can get off if you will ask for pardon. You must go to the grammar- school about one o'clock. But think it over first, as to what you are going to say, because the whole class will hear it."

"I won't ask for pardon." It sounded like a cry.

The master looked at Pelle hesitatingly. "But that is no disgrace— if one has done wrong."

"I have not done wrong. They began it, and they have been making game of me for a long time."

"But you thrashed him, Pelle, and one mustn't thrash fine folks like that; they have got a doctor's certificate that might be your ruin. Is your father a friend of the magistrate's? They can dishonor you for the rest of your life. I think you ought to choose the lesser evil."

No, Pelle could not do that. "So let them flog me instead!" he said morosely.

"Then it will be about three o'clock at the town hall," said the master, shortly, and he turned red about the eyes.

Suddenly Pelle felt how obstinacy must pain the young master, who, lame and sick as he was, had of his own accord gone running about the town for him. "Yes, I'll do it!" he said; "I'll do it!"

"Yes, yes!" replied Master Andres quietly; "for your own sake as well. And I believe you ought to be getting ready now."

Pelle slunk away; it was not his intention to apologize, and he had plenty of time. He walked as though asleep; everything was dead within him. His thoughts were busy with all sorts of indifferent matters, as though he sought to delay something by chattering; Crazy Anker went by with his bag of sand on his back, his thin legs wobbling under him. "I will help him to carry it," thought Pelle dejectedly, as he went onward; "I will help him to carry it."

Alfred came strolling down the street; he was carrying his best walking-stick and was wearing gloves, although it was in the midst of working hours. "If he sees me now he'll turn down the corner by the coal-merchant's," thought Pelle bitterly. "Oughtn't I to ask him to say a good word for me? He is such an important person! And he still owes me money for soling a pair of boots."

But Alfred made straight for him. "Have you seen anything of Albinus? He has disappeared!" he said; and his pretty face seemed somehow unusually moved. He stood there chewing at his moustache, just as fine folk do when they are musing over something.

"I've got to go to the town hall," said Pelle.

"Yes, I know—you've got to be flogged. But don't you know anything of Albinus?" Alfred had drawn him into the coal-merchant's doorway, in order not to be seen in his company.

"Yes, Albinus, Albinus—" Something was dawning in Pelle's mind. "Wait a minute—he—he—I'm sure he has run away with the circus. At least, I believe he has!" Whereat Alfred turned about and ran— ran in his best clothes!

Of course Albinus had run away with the circus. Pelle could understand the whole affair perfectly well. The evening before he had slipped on board Ole Hansen's yacht, which during the night was to have taken the trick-rider across to Sweden, and now he would live a glorious life and do what he liked. To run away—that was the only clear opening in life. Before Pelle knew it, he was down by the harbor, staring at a ship which was on the point of sailing. He followed up his inspiration, and went about inquiring after a vacancy on board some vessel, but there was none.

He sat down by the waterside, and played with a chip of wood. It represented a three-master, and Pelle gave it a cargo; but every time it should have gone to sea it canted over, and he had to begin the loading all over again. All round him carpenters and stone- cutters were working on the preparations for the new harbor; and behind them, a little apart, stood the “Great Power,” at work, while, as usual, a handful of people were loitering near him; they stood there staring, in uneasy expectation that something would happen. Pelle himself had a feeling of something ominous as he sat there and plashed in the water to drive his ship out to sea; he would have accepted it as a manifestation of the most sacred principle of life had Jörgensen begun to rage before his eyes.

But the stone-cutter only laid down his hammer, in order to take his brandy-bottle from under the stone and swallow a mouthful; with that exception, he stood there bowed over the granite as peacefully as though there were no other powers in the world save it and him. He did not see the onlookers who watched him in gaping expectation, their feet full of agility, ready to take to flight at his slightest movement.

He struck so that the air moaned, and when he raised himself again his glance swept over them. Gradually Pelle had concentrated all his expectations upon this one man, who endured the hatred of the town without moving an eyelash, and was a haunting presence in every mind. In the boy’s imagination he was like a loaded mine; one stood there not knowing whether or not it was ignited, and in a moment the whole might leap into the air. He was a volcano, and the town existed from day to day by his mercy. And from time to time Pelle allowed him to shake himself a little—just enough to make the town rock.

But now, moreover, there was a secret between them; the “Great Power” had been punished too for beating the rich folks. Pelle was not slow in deducing the consequences—was there not already a townsman standing and watching him at play? He too was the terror of the people. Perhaps he would join himself to the “Great Power”; there would be little left of the town then! In the daytime they would lie hidden among the cliffs, but at night they came down and plundered the town.

They fell upon all who had earned their living as bloodsuckers; people hid themselves in their cellars and garrets when they heard that Pelle and the “Great Power” were on the march. They hanged the rich shipowner Monsen to the church steeple, and he dangled there a terror and a warning to all. But the poor folk came to them as trustingly as lambs and ate out of their hands. They received all they desired; so poverty was banished from the world, and Pelle could proceed upon his radiant, onward way without a feeling of betrayal.

His glance fell upon the clock on the harbor guard-house; it was nearly three. He sprang up and looked irresolutely about him; he gazed out over the sea and down into the deep water of the harbor, looking for help. Manna and her sisters—they would disdainfully turn their backs upon the dishonored Pelle; they would no longer look at him. And the people would point their fingers at him, or merely look at him, and think: “Ha, there goes the boy who was flogged at the town hall!” Wherever he went in the world it would follow him like a shadow, that he had been flogged as a child; such a thing clings visibly to a man. He knew men and maids and old white-headed men who had come to Stone Farm from places where no one else had ever been. They might come as absolute strangers, but there was something in their past which in spite of all rose up behind them and went whispering from mouth to mouth.

He roamed about, desperately in his helplessness, and in the course of his wanderings came to stone-cutter Jörgensen.

“Well,” said the “Great Power,” as he laid down his hammer, “you’ve quarrelled nicely with the big townsfolk! Do you think you can keep a stiff upper-lip?” Then he reached for his hammer again. But Pelle took his bearings and ran despondently to the town-hall.

XIV

The punishment itself was nothing. It was almost laughable, those few strokes, laid on through his trousers, by the stick of the old gaoler; Pelle had known worse thrashings. But he was branded, an outcast from the society even of the very poorest; he read as much into the compassion of the people to whom he carried boots and shoes. “Good Lord, this miserable booby! Has it gone as far as that with him!” This was what he read in their eyes. Everybody would always stare at him now, and when he went down the street he saw faces in the “spy” mirrors fixed outside the windows. “There goes that shoemaker boy!”

The young master was the only one who treated him precisely as before; and Pelle repaid him for that with the most limitless devotion. He bought on credit for him and saved him from blows where only he could. If the young master in his easy-going way had promised to have something completed and had then forgotten it, Pelle would sit in his place and work overtime on it. “What’s it matter to us?” Jens used to say. But Pelle would not have the customers coming to scold Master Andres, nor would he allow him to suffer the want of anything that would keep him on his feet.

He became more intimate than ever with Jens and Morten; they all suffered from the same disgrace; and he often accompanied them home, although no pleasure awaited them in their miserable cottage. They were among the very poorest, although the whole household worked. It was all of no avail.

“Nothing’s any use,” the “Great Power” himself would say when he was disposed to talk; “poverty is like a sieve: everything goes straight through it, and if we stop one hole, it’s running through ten others at the same time. They say I’m a swine, and why shouldn’t I be? I can do the work of three men—yes, but do I get the wages of three? I get my day’s wages and the rest goes into the pockets of those who employ me. Even if I wanted to keep myself decent, what should we gain by it? Can a family get decent lodging and decent food and decent clothing for nine kroner a week? Will the means of a laborer allow him to live anywhere but by the refuse-heaps, where only the pigs used to be kept? Why should I be housed like a pig and live like a pig and yet be no pig—is there any sense in that? My wife and children have to work as well as me, and how can things be decent with us when wife and children have to go out and make things decent for other people? No, look here! A peg of brandy, that makes everything seem decent, and if that doesn’t do it, why, then, a bottle!” So he would sit talking, when he had been drinking a little, but otherwise he was usually silent.

Pelle knew the story of the “Great Power” now, from the daily gossip of the townsfolk, and his career seemed to him sadder than all the rest; it was as though a fairy-tale of fortune had come to a sudden end.

Among the evil reports which were continually in circulation respecting Stone-cutter Jörgensen—it seemed that there was never an end of them—it was said that in his youth he had strolled into town from across the cliffs, clad in canvas trousers, with cracked wooden shoes on his feet, but with his head in the clouds as though the whole town belonged to him. Brandy he did not touch. He had a better use for his energies, he said: he was full of great ideas of himself and would not content himself with ordinary things. And he was thoroughly capable—he was quite absurdly talented for a poor man. And at once he wanted to begin turning everything topsy-turvy. Just because he was begotten among the cliffs and crags by an old toil- worn stone-cutter, he behaved like a deity of the rocks; he brushed long-established experience aside, and introduced novel methods of work which he evolved out of his own mind. The stone was as though bewitched in his hands. If one only put a sketch before him, he would make devils’ heads and subterranean monsters and sea-serpents —the sort of thing that before his time had to be ordered from the sculptors in Copenhagen. Old deserving stone-masons saw themselves suddenly set aside and had then and there to take to breaking stones; and this young fellow who had strayed into the town straightway ignored and discounted the experience of their many years. They tried, by the most ancient of all methods, to teach the young man modesty. But they gave it up. Peter Jörgensen had the strength of three men and the courage of ten. It was not good to meddle with one who had stolen his capacities from God himself, or perhaps was in league with Satan. So they resigned themselves, and avenged themselves by calling him the “Great Power”—and they put their trust in misfortune. To follow in his footsteps meant to risk a broken neck. And whenever the brave townsfolk made the journey, something of its dizzy quality remained with them.

In the night he would sit sketching and calculating, so that no one could understand when he slept; and on Sundays, when decent people went to church, he would stop at home and cut the queerest things out of stone—although he never got a penny for it.

It was at this time that the famous sculptor came from the capital of Germany to hew a great lion out of granite, in honor of Liberty. But he could not get forward with his toolbox full of butter-knives; the stone was too hard for one who was accustomed to stand scratching at marble. And when for once he really did succeed in knocking off a bit of granite, it was always in the wrong place.

Then the “Great Power” asserted himself, and undertook to hew the lion out of granite, according to a scale model of some sort which the sculptor slapped together for him! All were persuaded that he would break down in this undertaking, but he negotiated it so cleverly that he completed the work to the utmost satisfaction of those concerned. He received a good sum of money for this, but it was not enough for him; he wanted half the honor, and to be spoken of in the newspapers like the sculptor himself; and as nothing came of it he threw down his tools and refused to work any more for other people. “Why should I do the work and others have the honor of it?” he asked, and sent in a tender for a stone-cutting contract. In his unbounded arrogance he sought to push to one side those who were born to ride on the top of things. But pride comes before a fall; his doom was already hanging over him.

He had sent in the lowest tender for the work on the South Bridge. They could not disregard it; so they sought to lay every obstacle in his path; they enticed his workmen away from him and made it difficult for him to obtain materials. The district judge, who was in the conspiracy, demanded that the contract should be observed; so the “Great Power” had to work day and night with the few men left to him in order to complete the work in time. A finer bridge no one had ever seen. But he had to sell the shirt off his body in order to meet his engagements.

He lived at that time in a pretty little house that was his own property. It lay out on the eastern highway, and had a turret on the mansard—Jens and Morten had spent their early childhood there. A little garden, with tidy paths, and a grotto which was like a heap of rocks, lay in front of it. Jörgenson had planned it all himself. It was taken from him, and he had to remove to a poor quarter of the town, to live among the people to whom he rightly belonged, and to rent a house there. But he was not yet broken. He was cheerful in spite of his downfall, and more high-and-mighty than ever in his manners. It was not easy to hit him! But then he sent in a tender for the new crane-platform. They could have refused him the contract on the pretext that he had no capital at his disposal. But now he *should* be struck down! He got credit from the savings-bank, in order to get well under way, and workers and material were his to dispose of. And then, as he was in the midst of the work, the same story was repeated—only this time he was to break his neck! Rich and poor, the whole town was at one in this matter. All demanded the restoration of the old certainty, high and low, appointed by God Himself. The “Great Power” was of the humblest descent; now he could quietly go back to the class he was born in!

He failed! The legal proprietor took over a good piece of work and got it for nothing, and Stonemason Jörgensen stood up in a pair of cracked wooden shoes, with a load of debts which he would never be able to shake off. Every one rejoiced to see him return to the existence of a day-laborer. But he did not submit quietly. He took to drink. From time to time he broke out and raged like the devil himself. They could not get rid of him; he weighed upon the minds of all, like an angry rumbling; even when he was quietly going about his work they could not quite forget him. Under these conditions he squandered his last possessions, and he moved into the cottage by the refuse-heaps, where formerly no one had dwelt.

He had become another man since the grant for the great harbor project had been approved. He no longer touched any brandy; when Pelle went out to see his friends, the “Great Power” would be sitting at the window, busying himself with sketches and figures. His wife was moving about and weeping quietly to herself; the old woman was scolding. But Jörgensen turned his broad back upon them and pored silently over his own affairs. He was not to be shaken out of his self-sufficiency.

The mother received them out in the kitchen, when she heard their noisy approach. “You must move quietly—Father is calculating and calculating, poor fellow! He can get no peace in his head since the harbor plans have been seriously adopted. His ideas are always working in him. That must be so, he says, and that so! If he would only take life quietly among his equals and leave the great people to worry over their own affairs!”

He sat in the window, right in the sunlight, adding up some troublesome accounts; he whispered half to himself, and his mutilated forefinger, whose outer joint had been blown off, ran up and down the columns. Then he struck the table. “Oh, if only a man had learned something!” he groaned. The sunlight played on his dark beard; his weary labors had been powerless to stiffen his limbs or to pull him down. Drink had failed to hurt him—he sat there like strength personified; his great forehead and his throat were deeply bronzed by the sun.

“Look here, Morten!” he cried, turning to the boys. “Just look at these figures!”

Morten looked. “What is it, father?”

“What is it? Our earnings during the last week! You can see they are big figures!”

“No, father; what are they?” Morten twined his slender hand in his father’s beard.

The “Great Power’s” eyes grew mild under this caress.

“It’s a proposed alteration—they want to keep the channel in the old place, and that is wrong; when the wind blows in from the sea, one can’t get into the harbor. The channel must run out there, and the outer breakwater must curve like this”—and he pointed to his sketches. “Every fisherman and sailor will confirm what I say—but the big engineer gentlemen are so clever!”

“But are you going—again—to send in a tender?” Morten looked at his father, horrified. The man nodded.

“But you aren’t good enough for them—you know you aren’t! They just laugh at you!”

“This time I shall be the one to laugh,” retorted Jörgensen, his brow clouding at the thought of all the contempt he had had to endure.

“Of course they laugh at him,” said the old woman from the chimney-corner, turning her hawk-like head toward them; “but one must play at something. Peter must always play the great man!”

Her son did not reply.

“They say you know something about sketching, Pelle?” he said quietly. “Can’t you bring this into order a bit? This here is the breakwater—supposing the water isn’t there—and this is the basin —cut through the middle, you understand? But I can’t get it to look right—yet the dimensions are quite correct. Here above the water-line there will be big coping-stones, and underneath it’s broken stone.”

Pelle set to work, but he was too finicking.

“Not so exact!” said Jörgensen. “Only roughly!”

He was always sitting over his work when they came. From his wife they learned that he did not put in a tender, after all, but took his plans to those who had undertaken the contract and offered them his cooperation. She had now lost all faith in his schemes, and was in a state of continual anxiety. “He’s so queer—he’s always taken up with only this one thing,” she said, shuddering. “He never drinks —and he doesn’t go raging against all the world as he used to do.”

“But that’s a good thing,” said Morten consolingly.

“Yes, you may talk, but what do you know about it? If he looks after his daily bread, well, one knows what that means. But now, like this.… I’m so afraid of the reaction if he gets a set-back. Don’t you believe he’s changed—it’s only sleeping in him. He’s the same as ever about Karen; he can’t endure seeing her crooked figure; she reminds him always too much of everything that isn’t as it should be. She mustn’t go to work, he says, but how can we do without her help? We must live! I daren’t let him catch sight of her. He gets so bitter against himself, but the child has to suffer for it. And he’s the only one she cares anything about.”

Karen had not grown during the last few years; she had become even more deformed; her voice was dry and shrill, as though she had passed through a frozen desert on her way to earth. She was glad when Pelle was there and she could hear him talk; if she thought he would come in the evening, she would hurry home from her situation. But she never joined in the conversation and never took part in anything. No one could guess what was going on in her mind. Her mother would suddenly break down and burst into tears if her glance by chance fell upon her.

“She really ought to leave her place at once,” said her mother over and again. “But the doctor’s wife has one child after another, and then they ask so pleadingly if she can’t stay yet another half-year. They think great things of her; she is so reliable with children.”

“Yes, if it was Pelle, he’d certainly let them fall.” Karen laughed —it was a creaking laugh. She said nothing more; she never asked to be allowed to go out, and she never complained. But her silence was like a silent accusation, destroying all comfort and intimacy.

But one day she came home and threw some money on the table. “Now I needn’t go to Doctor’s any more.”

“What’s the matter? Have you done something wrong?” asked the mother, horrified.

“The doctor gave me a box on the ear because I couldn’t carry Anna over the gutter—she’s so heavy.”

“But you can’t be sent away because he has struck you! You’ve certainly had a quarrel—you are so stubborn!”

“No; but I accidentally upset the perambulator with little Erik in it—so that he fell out. His head is like a mottled apple.” Her expression was unchanged.

The mother burst into tears. “But how could you do such a thing?” Karen stood there and looked at the other defiantly. Suddenly her mother seized hold of her. “You didn’t do it on purpose? Did you do it on purpose?”

Karen turned away with a shrug of the shoulders and went up to the garret without saying good night. Her mother wanted to follow her.

“Let her go!” said the old woman, as though from a great distance. “You have no power over her! She was begotten in wrath.”

XV

All the winter Jens had smeared his upper lip with fowl’s dung in order to grow a moustache; now it was sprouting, and he found himself a young woman; she was nurse-maid at the Consul’s. “It’s tremendous fun,” he said; “you ought to get one yourself. When she kisses me she sticks out her tongue like a little kid.” But Pelle wanted no young woman—in the first place, no young woman would have him, branded as he was; and then he was greatly worried.

When he raised his head from his work and looked out sideways over the manure-sheds and pigsties, he saw the green half-twilight of the heart of the apple-tree, and he could dream himself into it. It was an enchanted world of green shadows and silent movement; countless yellow caterpillars hung there, dangling to and fro, each on its slender thread; chaffinches and yellow-hammers swung themselves impetuously from bough to bough, and at every swoop snapped up a caterpillar; but these never became any fewer. Without a pause they rolled themselves down from the twigs, and hung there, so enticingly yellow, swinging to and fro in the gentle breath of the summer day, and waited to be gobbled up.

And deeper still in the green light—as though on the floor of a green sea—three brightly-clad maidens moved and played. Now and again the two younger would suddenly look over at Pelle, but they turned their eyes away again the moment he looked at them; and Manna was as grown-up and self-controlled as though he had never existed. Manna had been confirmed a long time now; her skirts were halfway to the ground, and she walked soberly along the street, arm-in-arm with her girl friends. She no longer played; she had long been conscious of a rapidly-increasing certainty that it wouldn’t do to play any longer. In a few days she went over from Pelle’s side to the camp of the grown-ups. She no longer turned to him in the workshop, and if he met her in the street she looked in another direction. No longer did she leap like a wild cat into the shop, tearing Pelle from his stool if she wanted something done; she went demurely up to the young master, who wrapped up her shoes in paper. But in secret she still recognized her playmate; if no one was by she would pinch his arm quite hard, and gnash her teeth together as she passed him.

But Pelle was too clumsy to understand the transition, and too much of a child to be shy of the light himself. He hung hack, lonely, and pondered, uncomprehending, over the new condition of affairs.

But now she did not know him in secret even—he simply did not exist for her any longer. And Dolores and Aina too had withdrawn their favor; when he looked out, they averted their heads and shrugged their shoulders. They were ashamed that they had ever had anything to do with such a person, and he knew very well why that was.

It had been a peculiar and voluptuous delight to be handled by those delicate and generous hands. It had been really splendid to sit there with open mouth and let all three stuff him with delicacies, so that he was in danger of choking! He wasn’t allowed to swallow them down—they wanted to see how much his mouth would hold; and then they would laugh and dance round him, and their plump girlish hands would take hold of his head, one on each side, and press his jaws together. Now Pelle had gradually added quite an ell to his stature as a worldly wise citizen; he knew very well that he was of coarser clay than his companions, and that there must have been an end of it all, even without the town hall.

But it hurt him; he felt as though he had been betrayed; properly he oughtn’t to touch his food. For was not Manna his betrothed? He had never thought of that! These were the pains of love! So this was what they were like! Did those who took their lives on account of unhappy love feel any different? His grief, to be sure, was not very stupendous; when the young master made a joke or cursed in his funny way he could laugh quite heartily still. That, with his disgrace, was the worst of all.

“You ought to get yourself a young woman,” said Jens. “She’s as soft as a young bird, and she warms you through your clothes and everything!”

But Pelle had something else on hand. He wanted to learn to swim. He wanted to know how to do everything that the town boys did, and to win back his place among them. He no longer dreamed of leading them. So he went about with the “gang”; he drew back a little if they teased him too brutally, and then crept back again; finally they grew accustomed to him.

Every evening he ran down to the harbor. To the south of the big basin, which was now being pumped dry, there was always, in the twilight, a crowd of apprentices; they leaped naked among the rocks and swam in chattering shoals toward the west, where the sky still glowed after the sunset. A long way out a reef lay under the water, and on this they could just touch bottom; there they would rest before they swam back, their dark heads brooding on the water like chattering sea-birds.

Pelle swam out with them in order to accustom himself to deep water, although they always tried to pull him under by his legs. When the sea blushed it was as though one was swimming amid roses; and the light, slippery, shining fronds which the deep-lying weed-beds had thrown up gleamed in the evening light and slid gently across his shoulders, and far out in the west lay the land of Fortune, beyond the vast radiant portals of the sunset; or it showed its golden plains stretching out into infinity. There it lay, shining with a strange enticing radiance, so that Pelle forgot the limits of his strength, and swam out farther than his powers justified. And when he turned round, parting the floating weed with vigorous strokes, the water stared at him blackly, and the terror of the depths seized upon him.

One evening the boys had been hostile in their attitude, and one of them maintained that the marks of the whip could still be seen on Pelle’s back. “Pelle has never been beaten with a whip!” cried Morten, in a rage. Pelle himself made no reply, but followed the “squadron”; his whole nature felt somehow embittered.

There was a slight swell, and this perhaps washed the swimmers out of their proper course; they could not find the reef on which they were used to rest. For a time they splashed about, trying to find it, and wasting their strength; then they turned back to the shore. Pelle looked after them with wondering eyes.

“Lie on your back and rest!” they cried, as they passed him, and then they made for the beach; a touch of panic had fallen on them. Pelle tried to rest, but he had had no practice in floating; the waves broke over his face; so he labored after the others. On the shore there was great excitement; he wondered what it meant. Morten, who had never bathed with the others, was standing on a rock and was shouting.

Some of the foremost swimmers were already in safety. “You can touch bottom here!” they shouted, standing with outstretched arms, the water up to their chins. Pelle labored on indefatigably, but he was quite convinced that it was useless. He was making hardly any progress, and he was sinking deeper and deeper. Every moment a wave washed over him and filled him with water. The stronger swimmers came out again; they swam round him and tried to help him, but they only made matters worse. He saw Morten run shouting into the water with all his clothes on, and that gave him a little strength. But then suddenly his arms became paralyzed; he went round and round in the same spot, and only his eyes were above water. Pelle had often flown in his dreams, and something had always clutched his legs and hampered his flight. But now this had become reality; he was floating in the blue sky and poised on his outspread pinions; and out of the darkness below he heard voices. “Pelle!” they cried, “little Pelle!” “Yes, Father Lasse!” he answered, and with a sense of relief he folded his weary wings; he sank in whirling haste, and a surging sounded in his ears.

Then of a sudden he felt a violent pain in his shins. His hands clutched at growing plants. He stood up with a leap, and light and air flowed over him as from a new existence. The boys were running about, frightened, one leg in their trousers, and he was standing on the submarine reef, up to the breast in the sea, vomiting salt water. Round about him swimmers were splashing, diving in every direction to fetch him up from the bottom of the sea. It was all really rather funny, and Pelle raised his arms high above his head as a greeting to life, and took the water with a long dive. Some distance farther in he appeared again, and swam to shore, parting the waves like a frolicsome porpoise. But on the beach he fell down as God had made him, in a profound sleep; he had just pulled one stocking over his big toe.

Since that day the boys recognized him again. He had certainly performed no heroic deed, but Destiny had for a moment rested upon his head—that was enough! Pelle always took the steel sharpener with him after that; and laid it on the beach with the point toward the land; he wanted after all to live a little longer. He did not allow himself to be intimidated, but plunged headlong into the water.

If the sea was so rough that they could not swim, they would lie on the brink of the water and let the waves roll them over and over. Then the waves would come in sweeping flight from the west, as though to spring upon them; the herds of white horses drove onward, their grayish manes streaming obliquely behind them. Rearing they came, sweeping the sea with their white tails, striking out wildly with their hooves and plunging under the surface. But others sprang up and leaped over them in serried ranks. They lay flat on the water and rushed toward the land. The storm whipped the white foam out of their mouths and drove it along the beach, where it hung gleaming on the bushes, and then vanished into nothingness. Right up to the shore they dashed, and then fell dead. But fresh hordes stormed shoreward from the offing, as though the land must be over-run by them; they reared, foaming, and struck at one another; they sprang, snorting and quivering, high in the air; they broke asunder in panic; there was never an end to it all. And far out in the distance the sun went down in a flame-red mist. A streak of cloud lay across it, stretching far out into infinity. A conflagration like a glowing prairie fire surrounded the horizon, and drove the hordes before it in panic-stricken flight, and on the beach shouted the naked swarm of boys. Now and again they sprang up with outspread arms, and, shouting, chased the wild horses back into the sea.

XVI

Things were not going well in the brothers' home. Jörgensen had done nothing with his plans. He was the only person who had not known that such would be the case. The people knew, too, on very good authority, that the engineer had offered him a hundred kroner for them, and as he would not take them, but demanded a share in the undertaking and the honor of executing it, he was shown to the door.

He had never before taken anything so quietly. He did not burst out roaring with violent words; he simply betook himself to his usual day-laborer's work in the harbor, like any other worker. He did not mention his defeat, and allowed no one else to do so. He treated his wife as though she did not exist. But she had to watch him wrap himself up in silence, without knowing what was going on in his mind. She had a foreboding of something terrible, and spoke of her trouble to the boys. He made no scenes, although now and again he got drunk; he ate in silence and went to bed. When he was not working, he slept.

But as he himself had so far revealed his plans that they were known to all, it was all up with his work. The engineer had taken from Jörgensen's plans as much as he could use—every one could see that—and now the "Great Power" stood with his mouth empty, simply because he had put more in his spoon than his mouth would hold. Most people were far from envying his position, and they took plenty of time to talk about it; the town was quite accustomed to neglect its own affairs in order to throw its whole weight on his obstinate back. But now he was down in the dust all had been to the harbor to watch the "Great Power" working there—to see him, as a common laborer, carting the earth for his own wonderful scheme. They marvelled only that he took it all so quietly; it was to some extent a disappointment that he did not flinch under the weight of his burden and break out into impotent raving.

He contented himself with drinking; but that he did thoroughly. He went about it as it were in the midst of a cloud of alcoholic vapor, and worked only just enough to enable him to go on drinking. "He has never yet been like this," said his wife, weeping. "He doesn't storm and rage, but he is angry all the time so that one can't bear him at home any longer. He breaks everything in his anger, and he scolds poor Karen so that it's wretched. He has no regard for anybody, only for his old mother, and God knows how long that will last. He doesn't work, he only drinks. He steals my hard-earned money out of my dress-pocket and buys brandy with it. He has no shame left in him, although he always used to be so honorable in his way of life. And he can't stand his boozing as he used to; he's always falling about and staggering. Lately he came home all bloody—he'd knocked a hole in his head. What have we ever done to the dear God that he should punish us like this?"

The old woman said nothing, but let her glance sweep from one to the other, and thought her own thoughts.

So it went on, week after week. The boys became weary of listening to their mother's complaints, and kept away from home.

One day, when Karen had been sent on an errand for her mother, she did not return. Neither had she returned on the following day. Pelle heard of it down at the boat-harbor, where she had last been seen. They were dragging the water with nets in the hope of finding her, but no one dared tell Jörgensen. On the following afternoon they brought her to the workshop; Pelle knew what it was when he heard the many heavy footsteps out in the street. She lay on a stretcher, and two men carried her; before her the autumn wind whirled the first falling leaves, and her thin arms were hanging down to the pavement, as though she sought to find a hold there. Her disordered hair was hanging, too, and the water was dripping from her. Behind the stretcher came the "Great Power." He was drunk. He held one hand before his eyes, and murmured as though in thought, and at every moment he raised his forefinger in the air. "She has found peace," he said thickly, trying to look intelligent.

"Peace—the higher it is——" He could not find the word he wanted.

Jens and Pelle replaced the men at the stretcher, and bore it home. They were afraid of what was before them. But the mother stood at the door and received them silently, as though she had expected them; she was merely pale. "She couldn't bear it!" she whispered to them, and she kneeled down beside the child.

She laid her head on the little crippled body, and whispered indistinctly; now and again she pressed the child's fingers into her mouth, in order to stifle her sobs. "And you were to have run an errand for mother," she said, and she shook her head, smilingly. "You are a nice sort of girl to me—not to be able to buy me two skeins of thread; and the money I gave you for it—have you thrown it away?” Her words came between smiles and sobs, and they sounded like a slow lament. “Did you throw the money away? It doesn’t matter —it wasn’t your fault. Dear child, dear little one!” Then her strength gave way. Her firmly closed mouth broke open, and closed again, and so she went on, her head rocking to and fro, while her hands felt eagerly in the child’s pocket. “Didn’t you run that errand for mother?” she moaned. She felt, in the midst of her grief, the need of some sort of corroboration, even if it referred to something quite indifferent. And she felt in the child’s purse. There lay a few öre and a scrap of paper.

Then she suddenly stood up. Her face was terribly hard as she turned to her husband, who stood against the wall, swaying to and fro. “Peter!” she cried in agony, “Peter! Don’t you know what you have done? ‘Forgive me, mother,’ it says here, and she has taken four öre of the thirteen to buy sugar-candy. Look here, her hand is still quite sticky.” She opened the clenched hand, which was closed upon a scrap of sticky paper. “Ah, the poor persecuted child! She wanted to sweeten her existence with four öre worth of sugar-candy, and then into the water! A child has so much pleasure at home here! ‘Forgive me, mother!’ she says, as though she had done something wrong. And everything she did was wrong; so she had to go away. Karen! Karen! I’m not angry with you—you were very welcome—what do they signify, those few öre! I didn’t mean it like that when I reproached you for hanging about at home! But I didn’t know what to do—we had nothing to eat. And he spent the little money there was!” She turned her face from the body to the father and pointed to him. It was the first time that the wife of the “Great Power” had ever turned upon him accusingly. But he did not understand her. “She has found peace,” he murmured, and attempted to pull himself up a little; “the peace of—” But here the old woman rose in the chimney-corner—until this moment she had not moved. “Be silent!” she said harshly, setting her stick at his breast, “or your old mother will curse the day when she brought you into the world.” Wondering, he stared at her; and a light seemed to shine through the mist as he gazed. For a time he still stood there, unable to tear his eyes from the body. He looked as though he wished to throw himself down beside his wife, who once more lay bowed above the bier, whispering. Then, with hanging head, he went upstairs and lay down.

XVII

It was after working hours when Pelle went homeward; but he did not feel inclined to run down to the harbor or to bathe. The image of the drowned child continued to follow him, and for the first time Death had met him with its mysterious “Why?” He found no answer, and gradually he forgot it for other things. But the mystery itself continued to brood within him, and made him afraid without any sort of reason, so that he encountered the twilight even with a foreboding of evil. The secret powers which exhale from heaven and earth when light and darkness meet clutched at him with their enigmatical unrest, and he turned unquietly from one thing to another, although he must be everywhere in order to cope with this inconceivable Something that stood, threatening, behind everything. For the first time he felt, rid of all disguise, the unmercifulness which was imminent in this or that transgression of his. Never before had Life itself pressed upon him with its heavy burden.

It seemed to Pelle that something called him, but he could not clearly discover whence the call came. He crept from his window on to the roof and thence to the gable-end; perhaps it was the world that called. The hundreds of tile-covered roofs of the town lay before him, absorbing the crimson of the evening sky, and a blue smoke was rising. And voices rose out of the warm darkness that lay between the houses. He heard, too, the crazy Anker’s cry; and this eternal prophecy of things irrational sounded like the complaint of a wild beast. The sea down yonder and the heavy pine-woods that lay to the north and the south—these had long been familiar to him.

But there was a singing in his ears, and out of the far distance, and something or some one stood behind him, whose warm breath struck upon his neck. He turned slowly about. He was no longer afraid in the darkness, and he knew beforehand that nothing was there. But his lucid mind had been invaded by the twilight, with its mysterious train of beings which none of the senses can confirm.

He went down into the courtyard and strolled about. Everywhere prevailed the same profound repose. Peers, the cat, was sitting on the rain-water butt, mewing peevishly at a sparrow which had perched upon the clothes-line. The young master was in his room, coughing; he had already gone to bed. Pelle bent over the edge of the well and gazed vacantly over the gardens. He was hot and dizzy, but a cool draught rose from the well and soothingly caressed his head. The bats were gliding through the air like spirits, passing so close to his face that he felt the wind of their flight, and turning about with a tiny clapping sound. He felt a most painful desire to cry.

Among the tall currant-bushes yonder something moved, and Sjermanna’s head made its appearance. She was moving cautiously and peering before her. When she saw Pelle she came quickly forward.

“Good evening!” she whispered.

“Good evening!” he answered aloud, delighted to return to human society.

“Hush! You mustn’t shout!” she said peremptorily.

“Why not?” Pelle himself was whispering now. He was feeling quite concerned. “Because you mustn’t! Donkey! Come, I’ll show you something. No, nearer still!”

Pelle pushed his head forward through the tall elder-bush, and suddenly she put her two hands about his head and kissed him violently and pushed him back. He tried gropingly to take hold of her, but she stood there laughing at him. Her face glowed in the darkness. “You haven’t heard anything about it!” she whispered. “Come, I’ll tell you!”

Now he was smiling all over his face. He pushed his way eagerly into the elder-bush. But at the same moment he felt her clenched fist strike his face. She laughed crazily, but he stood fixed in the same position, as though stunned, his mouth held forward as if still awaiting a kiss. “Why do you hit me?” he asked, gazing at her brokenly.

“Because I can’t endure you! You’re a perfect oaf, and so ugly and so common!”

“I have never done anything to you!”

“No? Anyhow, you richly deserved it! What did you want to kiss me for?”

Pelle stood there helplessly stammering. The whole world of his experience collapsed under him. “But I didn’t!” he at last brought out; he looked extraordinarily foolish. Manna aped his expression. “Ugh! Bugh!

Take care, or you'll freeze to the ground and turn into a lamp-post! There's nothing on the hedge here that will throw light on your understanding!"

With a leap Pelle was over the hedge. Manna took him hastily by the hand and drew him through the bushes. "Aina and Dolores will be here directly. Then we'll play," she declared.

"I thought they couldn't come out in the evenings any more," said Pelle, obediently allowing her to lead him. She made no reply, but looked about her as though she wanted to treat him to something as in the old days. In her need she stripped a handful of leaves off the currant-boughs, and stuffed them into his mouth. "There, take that and hold your mouth!" She was quite the old Manna once more, and Pelle laughed.

They had come to the summer-house. Manna cooled his swollen cheeks with wet earth while they waited.

"Did it hurt you much?" she asked sympathetically, putting her arm about his shoulder.

"It's nothing. What's a box on the ear?" he said manfully.

"I didn't mean it—you know that. Did *that* hurt you very much?"

Pelle gazed at her sadly. She looked at him inquisitively. "Was it here?" she said, letting her hand slide down his back. He rose silently, in order to go, but she seized him by the wrist. "Forgive me," she whispered.

"Aren't the others coming soon?" asked Pelle harshly. He proposed to be angry with her, as in the old days.

"No! They aren't coming at all! I've deceived you. I wanted to talk to you!" Manna was gasping for breath.

"I thought you didn't want to have anything more to do with me?"

"Well, I don't! I only want—" She could not find words, and stamped angrily on the ground. Then she said slowly and solemnly, with the earnestness of a child: "Do you know what I believe? I believe—I love you!"

"Then we can get married when we are old enough!" said Pelle joyfully.

She looked at him for a moment with a measuring glance. The town-hall and the flogging! thought Pelle. He was quite resolved that he would do the beating now; but here she laughed at him. "What a glorious booby you are!" she said, and as though deep in thought, she let a handful of wet earth run down his neck.

Pelle thought for a moment of revenge; then, as though in sport, he thrust his hand into her bosom. She fell back weakly, groping submissively with her hands; a new knowledge arose in him, and impelled him to embrace her violently.

She looked at him in amazement, and tried gently to push his hand away. But it was too late. The boy had broken down her defences.

As Pelle went back into the house he was overwhelmed, but not happy. His heart hammered wildly, and a chaos reigned in his brain. Quite instinctively he trod very softly. For a long time he lay tossing to and fro without being able to sleep. His mind had resolved the enigma, and now he discovered the living blood in himself. It sang its sufferings in his ear; it welled into his cheeks and his heart; it murmured everywhere in numberless pulses, so that his whole body thrilled. Mighty and full of mystery, it surged through him like an inundation, filling him with a warm, deep astonishment. Never before had he known all this!

In the time that followed his blood was his secret confidant in everything; he felt it like a caress when it filled his limbs, causing a feeling of distension in wrists and throat. He had his secret now, and his face never betrayed the fact that he had ever known Sjermanna. His radiant days had all at once changed into radiant nights. He was still enough of a child to long for the old days, with their games in the broad light of day; but something impelled him to look forward, listening, and his questing soul bowed itself before the mysteries of life. The night had made him accomplice in her mysteries. With Manna he never spoke again. She never came into the garden, and if he met her she turned into another street. A rosy flame lay continually over her face, as though it had burned its way in. Soon afterward she went to a farm in Ostland, where an uncle of hers lived.

But Pelle felt nothing and was in no way dejected. He went about as though in a half-slumber; everything was blurred and veiled before his spiritual vision. He was quite bewildered by all that was going on within him. Something was hammering and laboring in every part and corner of him. Ideas which were too fragile were broken down and built up more strongly, so that they should bear the weight of the man in him. His limbs grew harder; his muscles became like steel, and he was conscious of a general feeling of breadth across his back, and of unapplied strength. At times he awakened out of his half-slumber into a brief amazement, when he felt himself, in one particular or another, to have become a man; as when one day he heard his own voice. It had gained a deep resonance, which was quite foreign to his ear, and forced him to listen as though it had been another that spoke.

XVIII

Pelle fought against the decline of the business. A new apprentice had been taken into the workshop, but Pelle, as before, had to do all the delicate jobs. He borrowed articles when necessary, and bought things on credit; and he had to interview impatient customers, and endeavor to pacify them. He got plenty of exercise, but he learned nothing properly. “Just run down to the harbor,” the master used to say: “Perhaps there will be some work to bring back!” But the master was much more interested in the news which he brought thence.

Pelle would also go thither without having received any orders. Everybody in the town must needs make for the harbor whenever he went from home; it was the heart through which everything came and went, money and dreams and desires and that which gratified them. Every man had been to sea, and his best memories and his hardest battles belonged to the sea. Dreams took the outward way; yonder lay the sea, and all men’s thoughts were drawn to it; the thoughts of the young, who longed to go forth and seek adventure, and of the old, who lived on their memories. It was the song in all men’s hearts, and the God in the inmost soul of all; the roving-ground of life’s surplus, the home of all that was inexplicable and mystical. The sea had drunk the blood of thousands, but its color knew no change; the riddle of life brooded in its restless waters.

Destiny rose from the floor of the deep and with short shrift set her mark upon a man; he might escape to the land, like Baker Jörgensen, who went no more to sea when once the warning had come to him, or, like Boatman Jensen, he might rise in his sleep and walk straight over the vessel’s side. Down below, where the drowned dwelt, the ships sank to bring them what they needed; and from time to time the bloodless children of the sea rose to the shore, to play with the children that were born on a Sunday, and to bring them death or happiness.

Over the sea, three times a week, came the steamer with news from Copenhagen; and vessels all wrapped in ice, and others that had sprung a heavy leak, or bore dead bodies on board; and great ships which came from warm countries and had real negroes among their crews.

Down by the harbor stood the old men who had forsaken the sea, and now all the long day through they stared out over the playground of their manhood, until Death came for them. The sea had blown gout into their limbs, had buffeted them until they were bent and bowed, and in the winter nights one could hear them roar with the pain like wild beasts. Down to the harbor drifted all the flotsam and jetsam of the land, invalids and idle men and dying men, and busy folk raced round about and up and down with fluttering coat-tails, in order to scent out possible profits.

The young sported here continually; it was as though they encountered the future when they played here by the open sea. Many never went further, but many let themselves be caught and whirled away out into the unknown. Of these was Nilen. When the ships were being fitted out he could wait no longer. He sacrificed two years’ apprenticeship, and ran away on board a vessel which was starting on a long voyage. Now he was far away in the Trades, on the southern passage round America, homeward bound with a cargo of redwood. And a few left with every steamer. The girls were the most courageous when it came to cutting themselves loose; they steamed away swiftly, and the young men followed them in amorous blindness. And men fought their way outward in order to seek something more profitable than could be found at home.

Pelle had experienced all this already: he had felt this same longing, and had known the attractive force of the unknown. Up in the country districts it was the dream of all poor people to fight their way to town, and the boldest one day ventured thither, with burning cheeks, while the old people spoke warningly of the immorality of cities. And in the town here it was the dream of all to go to the capital, to Copenhagen; there fortune and happiness were to be found! He who had the courage hung one day over the ship’s rail, and waved farewell, with an absent expression in his eyes, as though he had been playing a game with high stakes; over there on the mainland he would have to be a match with the best of them. But the old people shook their heads and spoke at length of the temptations and immorality of the capital.

Now and again one came back and justified their wisdom. Then they would run delightedly from door to door. “Didn’t we tell you so?” But many came home at holiday seasons and were such swells that it was really the limit! And this or that girl was so extremely stylish that people had to ask the opinion of Wooden-leg Larsen about her.

The girls who got married over there—well, they were well provided for! After an interval of many years they came back to their parents' homes, travelling on deck among the cattle, and giving the stewardess a few pence to have them put in the newspaper as cabin-passengers. They were fine enough as to their clothes, but their thin haggard faces told another story. "There is certainly not enough to eat for all over there!" said the old women.

But Pelle took no interest in those that came home again. All his thoughts were with those who went away; his heart tugged painfully in his breast, so powerful was his longing to be off. The sea, whether it lay idle or seethed with anger, continually filled his head with the humming of the world "over yonder," with a vague, mysterious song of happiness.

One day, as he was on his way to the harbor, he met old thatcher Holm from Stone Farm. Holm was going about looking at the houses from top to bottom; he was raising his feet quite high in the air from sheer astonishment, and was chattering to himself. On his arm he carried a basket loaded with bread and butter, brandy, and beer.

"Well, here's some one at last!" he said, and offered his hand. "I'm going round and wondering to myself where they all live, those that come here day after day and year after year, and whether they've done any good. Mother and I have often talked about it, that it would be splendid to know how things have turned out for this one or that. And this morning she said it would be best if I were to make a short job of it before I quite forget how to find my way about the streets here, I haven't been here for ten years. Well, according to what I've seen so far, mother and I needn't regret we've stayed at home. Nothing grows here except lamp-posts, and mother wouldn't understand anything about rearing them. Thatched roofs I've not seen here. Here in the town they'd grudge a thatcher his bread. But I'll see the harbor before I go home."

"Then we'll go together," said Pelle. He was glad to meet some one from his home. The country round about Stone Farm was always for him the home of his childhood. He gossiped with the old man and pointed out various objects of interest.

"Yes, I've been once, twice, three times before this to the harbor," said Holm, "but I've never managed to see the steamer. They tell me wonderful things of it; they say all our crops are taken to Copenhagen in the steamer nowadays."

"It's lying here to-day," said Pelle eagerly. "This evening it goes out."

Holm's eyes beamed. "Then I shall be able to see the beggar! I've often seen the smoke from the hill at home—drifting over the sea— and that always gave me a lot to think about. They say it eats coals and is made of iron." He looked at Pelle uncertainly.

The great empty harbor basin, in which some hundreds of men were at work, interested him greatly. Pelle pointed out the "Great Power," who was toiling like a madman and allowing himself to be saddled with the heaviest work.

"So that is he!" cried Holm. "I knew his father; he was a man who wanted to do things above the ordinary, but he never brought them off. And how goes it with your father? Not any too well, as I've heard?"

Pelle had been home a little while before; nothing was going well there, but as to that he was silent. "Karna isn't very well," he said. "She tried to do too much; she's strained herself lifting things."

"They say he'll have a difficult job to pull through. They have taken too much on themselves," Holm continued.

Pelle made no reply; and then the steamer absorbed their whole attention. Talkative as he was, Holm quite forgot to wag his tongue.

The steamer was on the point of taking in cargo; the steam derricks were busy at both hatches, squealing each time they swung round in another direction. Holm became so light on his legs one might have thought he was treading on needles; when the derrick swung round over the quay and the chain came rattling down, he ran right back to the granary. Pelle wanted to take him on board, but he would not hear of it. "It looks a bad-tempered monster," he said: "look how it sneezes and fusses!"

On the quay, by the forward hold, the goods of a poverty-stricken household lay all mixed together. A man stood there holding a mahogany looking-glass, the only article of value, in his arms. His expression was gloomy. By the manner in which he blew his nose—with his knuckles instead of with his fingers—one could see that he had something unaccustomed on hand. His eyes were fixed immovably on his miserable household possessions, and they anxiously followed every breakable article as it went its airy way into the vessel’s maw. His wife and children were sitting on the quay-wall, eating out of a basket of provisions. They had been sitting there for hours. The children were tired and tearful; the mother was trying to console them, and to induce them to sleep on the stone.

“Shan’t we start soon?” they asked continually, in complaining tones.

“Yes, the ship starts directly, but you must be very good or I shan’t take you with me. And then you’ll come to the capital city, where they eat white bread and always wear leather boots. The King himself lives there, and they’ve got everything in the shops there.” She arranged her shawl under their heads.

“But that’s Per Anker’s son from Blaaholt!” cried Holm, when he had been standing a while on the quay and had caught sight of the man. “What, are you leaving the country?”

“Yes, I’ve decided to do so,” said the man, in an undertone, passing his hand over his face.

“And I thought you were doing so well! Didn’t you go to Ostland, and didn’t you take over a hotel there?”

“Yes, they enticed me out there, and now I’ve lost everything there.”

“You ought to have considered—considering costs nothing but a little trouble.”

“But they showed me false books, which showed a greater surplus than there really was. Shipowner Monsen was behind the whole affair, together with the brewer from the mainland, who had taken the hotel over in payment of outstanding debts.”

“But how did big folks like that manage to smell you out?” Holm scratched his head; he didn’t understand the whole affair.

“Oh, they’d heard of the ten thousand, of course, which I’d inherited from my father. They throw their nets out for sums like that, and one day they sent an agent to see me. Ten thousand was just enough for the first instalment, and now they have taken the hotel over again. Out of compassion, they let me keep this trash here.” He suddenly turned his face away and wept; and then his wife came swiftly up to him.

Holm drew Pelle away. “They’d rather be rid of us,” he said quietly; and he continued to discuss the man’s dismal misfortune, while they strolled out along the mole. But Pelle was not listening to him. He had caught sight of a little schooner which was cruising outside, and was every moment growing more restless.

“I believe that’s the Iceland schooner!” he said at last. “So I must go back.”

“Yes, run off,” said Holm, “and many thanks for your guidance, and give my respects to Lasse and Karna.”

On the harbor hill Pelle met Master Jeppe, and farther on Drejer, Klaussen, and Blom. The Iceland boat had kept them waiting for several months; the news that she was in the roads quickly spread, and all the shoemakers of the whole town were hurrying down to the harbor, in order to hear whether good business had been done before the gangway was run out.

“The Iceland boat is there now!” said the merchants and leather-dealers, when they saw the shoemakers running by. “We must make haste and make out our bills, for now the shoemakers will be having money.”

But the skipper had most of the boots and shoes still in his hold; he returned with the terrifying news that no more boots and shoes could be disposed of in Iceland. The winter industry had been of great importance to the shoemakers.

“What does this mean?” asked Jeppe angrily. “You have been long enough about it! Have you been trying to open another agency over there? In others years you have managed to sell the whole lot.”

“I have done what I could,” replied the captain gloomily. “I offered them to the dealers in big parcels, and then I lay there and carried on a retail trade from the ship. Then I ran down the whole west coast; but there is nothing to be done.”

“Well, well,” said Jeppe, “but do the Icelanders mean to go without boots?”

“There’s the factories,” replied the captain.

“The factories, the factories!” Jeppe laughed disdainfully, but with a touch of uncertainty. “You’ll tell me next that they can make shoes by machinery—cut out and peg and sew and fix the treads and all? No, damn it, that can only be done by human hands directed by human intelligence. Shoemaking is work for men only. Perhaps I myself might be replaced by a machine—by a few cog-wheels that go round and round! Bah! A machine is dead, I know that, and it can't think or adapt itself to circumstances; you may have to shape the boot in a particular way for a special foot, on account of tender toes, or—here I give the sole a certain cut in the instep, so that it looks smart, or—well, one has to be careful, or one cuts into the upper!"

"There are machines which make boots, and they make them cheaper than you, too," said the skipper brusquely.

"I should like to see them! Can you show me a boot that hasn't been made by human hands?" Jeppe laughed contemptuously. "No; there's something behind all this, by God! Some one is trying to play us a trick!" The skipper went his way, offended.

Jeppe stuck to it that there was something uncanny about it—the idea of a machine making boots was enough to haunt him. He kept on returning to it.

"They'll be making human beings by machinery too, soon!" he exclaimed angrily.

"No," said Baker Jörgen; "there, I believe, the old method will survive!"

One day the skipper came in at the workshop door, banged a pair of shoes down on the window-bench, and went out again. They had been bought in England, and belonged to the helmsman of a bark which had just come into the harbor. The young master looked at them, turned them over in his hands, and looked at them again. Then he called Jeppe. They were sewn throughout—shoes for a grown man, yet sewn throughout! Moreover, the factory stamp was under the sole.

In Jeppe's opinion they were not worth a couple of shillings. But he could not get over the fact that they were machine-made.

"Then we are superfluous," he said, in a quavering voice. All his old importance seemed to have fallen from him. "For if they can make the one kind on a machine, they can make another. The handicraft is condemned to death, and we shall all be without bread one fine day! Well, I, thank God, have not many years before me." It was the first time that Jeppe had admitted that he owed his life to God.

Every time he came into the workshop he began to expatiate on the same subject. He would stand there turning the hated shoes over between his hands. Then he would criticize them. "We must take more pains next winter."

"Father forgets it's all up with us now," said the young master wearily.

Then the old man would be silent and hobble out. But after a time he would be back again, fingering the boots and shoes, in order to discover defects in them. His thoughts were constantly directed upon this new subject; no song of praise, no eulogy of his handicraft, passed his lips nowadays. If the young master came to him and asked his help in some difficult situation, he would refuse it; he felt no further desire to triumph over youth with his ancient dexterity, but shuffled about and shrank into himself. "And all that we have thought so highly of—what's to become of it?" he would ask. "For machines don't make masterpieces and medal work, so where will real good work come in?"

The young master did not look so far ahead; he thought principally of the money that was needed. "Devil take it, Pelle, how are we going to pay every one, Pelle?" he would ask dejectedly. Little Nikas had to look out for something else; their means would not allow them to keep a journeyman. So Nikas decided to marry, and to set up as a master shoemaker in the north. The shoemaker of the Baptist community had just died, and he could get plenty of customers by joining the sect; he was already attending their services. "But go to work carefully!" said Jeppe. "Or matters will go awry!"

It was a bad shock to all of them. Klaussen went bankrupt and had to find work on the new harbor. Blom ran away, deserting his wife and children, and they had to go home to the house of her parents. In the workshop matters had been getting worse for a long time. And now this had happened, throwing a dazzling light upon the whole question. But the young master refused to believe the worst. "I shall soon be well again now," he said. "And then you will just see how I'll work up the business!" He lay in bed more often now, and was susceptible to every change in the weather. Pelle had to see to everything.

"Run and borrow something!" the master would say. And if Pelle returned with a refusal, he would look at the boy with his wide, wondering eyes. "They've got the souls of grocers!" he would cry. "Then we must peg those soles!"

“That won’t answer with ladies’ patent-leather shoes!” replied Pelle very positively.

“Damn and blast it all, it will answer! We’ll black the bottom with cobbler’s wax.”

But when the black was trodden off, Jungfer Lund and the others called, and were wroth. They were not accustomed to walk in pegged shoes. “It’s a misunderstanding!” said the young master, the perspiration standing in clear beads on his forehead. Or he would hide and leave it to Pelle. When it was over, he would reach up to the shelf, panting with exhaustion. “Can’t you do anything for me, Pelle?” he whispered.

One day Pelle plucked up courage and said it certainly wasn’t healthy to take so much spirit; the master needed so much now.

“Healthy?” said the master; “no, good God, it isn’t healthy! But the beasts demand it! In the beginning I couldn’t get the stuff down, especially beer; but now I’ve accustomed myself to it. If I didn’t feed them, they’d soon rush all over me and eat me up.”

“Do they swallow it, then?”

“I should think they do! As much as ever you like to give them. Or have you ever seen me tipsy? I can’t get drunk; the tubercles take it all. And for them it’s sheer poison. On the day when I am able to get drunk again I shall thank God, for then the beasts will be dead and the spirit will be able to attack me again. Then it’ll only be a question of stopping it, otherwise it’ll play the deuce with my mind!”

Since the journeyman had left, the meals had become more meager than ever. The masters had not had enough money in the spring to buy a pig. So there was no one to consume the scraps. Now they had to eat them all themselves. Master Andres was never at the table; he took scarcely any nourishment nowadays; a piece of bread-and-butter now and again, that was all. Breakfast, at half-past seven, they ate alone. It consisted of salt herrings, bread and hog’s lard, and soup. The soup was made out of all sorts of odds and ends of bread and porridge, with an addition of thin beer. It was fermented and unpalatable. What was left over from breakfast was put into a great crock which stood in one corner of the kitchen, on the floor, and this was warmed up again the next morning, with the addition of a little fresh beer. So it went on all the year round. The contents were renewed only when some one kicked the crock so that it broke. The boys confined themselves to the herrings and the lard; the soup they did not use except to fish about in it. They made a jest of it, throwing all sorts of objects into it, and finding them again after half a year.

Jeppe was still lying in the alcove, asleep; his nightcap was hoved awry over one eye. Even in his sleep he still had a comical expression of self-importance. The room was thick with vapor; the old man had his own way of getting air, breathing it in with a long snort and letting it run rumbling through him. If it got too bad, the boys would make a noise; then he would wake and scold them.

They were longing for food by dinner-time; the moment Jeppe called his “Dinner!” at the door they threw everything down, ranged themselves according to age, and tumbled in behind him. They held one another tightly by the coat-tails, and made stupid grimaces. Jeppe was enthroned at the head of the table, a little cap on his head, trying to preserve seemly table-manners. No one might begin before him or continue after he had finished. They snatched at their spoons, laid them down again with a terrified glance at the old man, and nearly exploded with suppressed laughter. “Yes, I’m very hungry to-day, but there’s no need for you to remark it!” he would say warningly, once they were in full swing. Pelle would wink at the others, and they would go on eating, emptying one dish after another. “There’s no respect nowadays!” roared Jeppe, striking on the table. But when he did this discipline suddenly entered into them, and they all struck the table after him in turn. Sometimes, when matters got too bad, Master Andres had to find some reason for coming into the room.

The long working-hours, the bad food, and the foul air of the workshop left their mark on Pelle. His attachment to Master Andres was limitless; he could sit there till midnight and work without payment if a promise had been made to finish some particular job. But otherwise he was imperceptibly slipping into the general slackness, sharing the others’ opinion of the day as something utterly abominable, which one must somehow endeavor to get through. To work at half pressure was a physical necessity; his rare movements wearied him, and he felt less inclined to work than to brood. The semi-darkness of the sunless workshop bleached his skin and filled him with unhealthy imaginations.

He did little work now on his own account; but he had learned to manage with very little. Whenever he contrived to get hold of a ten-öre piece, he bought a savings-stamp, so that in this way he was able to collect a few shillings, until they had grown to quite a little sum. Now and again, too, he got a little help from Lasse, but Lasse found it more and more difficult to spare anything. Moreover, he had learned to compose his mind by his work.

XIX

The crazy Anker was knocking on the workshop door. “Bjerregrav is dead!” he said solemnly. “Now there is only one who can mourn over poverty!” Then he went away and announced the news to Baker Jörgen. They heard him going from house to house, all along the street.

Bjerregrav dead! Only yesterday evening he was sitting yonder, on the chair by the window-bench, and his crutch was standing in the corner by the door; and he had offered them all his hand in his odd, ingenuous way—that unpleasantly flabby hand, at whose touch they all felt a certain aversion, so importunate was it, and almost skinless in its warmth, so that one felt as if one had involuntarily touched some one on a naked part. Pelle was always reminded of Father Lasse; he too had never learned to put on armor, but had always remained the same loyal, simple soul, unaffected by his hard experience.

The big baker had fallen foul of him as usual. Contact with this childlike, thin-skinned creature, who let his very heart burn itself out in a clasp of his hand, always made him brutal. “Now, Bjerregrav, have you tried it—you know what—since we last saw you?”

Bjerregrav turned crimson. “I am content with the experience which the dear God has chosen for me,” he answered, with blinking eyes.

“Would you believe it, he is over seventy and doesn’t know yet how a woman is made!”

“Because, after all I find it suits me best to live alone, and then there’s my club foot.”

“So he goes about asking questions about everything, things such as every child knows about,” said Jeppe, in a superior tone. “Bjerregrav has never rubbed off his childish innocence.”

Yet as he was going home, and Pelle was helping him over the gutter, he was still in his mood of everlasting wonder.

“What star is that?” he said; “it has quite a different light to the others. It looks so red to me—if only we don’t have a severe winter, with the soil frozen and dear fuel for all the poor people.” Bjerregrav sighed.

“You mustn’t look at the moon so much. Skipper Andersen came by his accident simply because he slept on deck and the moon shone right in his face; now he has gone crazy!”

Yesterday evening just the same as always—and now dead! And no one had known or guessed, so that they might have been a little kinder to him just at the last! He died in his bed, with his mind full of their last disdainful words, and now they could never go to him and say: “Don’t take any notice of it, Bjerregrav; we didn’t mean to be unkind.” Perhaps their behavior had embittered his last hours. At all events, there stood Jeppe and Brother Jörgen, and they could not look one another in the face; an immovable burden weighed upon them.

And it meant a void—as when the clock in a room stops ticking. The faithful sound of his crutch no longer approached the workshop about six o’clock. The young master grew restless about that time; he could not get used to the idea of Bjerregrav’s absence.

“Death is a hateful thing,” he would say, when the truth came over him; “it is horribly repugnant. Why must one go away from here without leaving the least part of one behind? Now I listen for Bjerregrav’s crutch, and there’s a void in my ears, and after a time there won’t be even that. Then he will be forgotten, and perhaps more besides, who will have followed him, and so it goes on forever. Is there anything reasonable about it all, Pelle? They talk about Heaven, but what should I care about sitting on a damp cloud and singing ‘Hallelujah’? I’d much rather go about down here and get myself a drink—especially if I had a sound leg!”

The apprentices accompanied him to the grave. Jeppe wished them to do so, as a sort of atonement. Jeppe himself and Baker Jörgen, in tall hats, walked just behind the coffin. Otherwise only a few poor women and children followed, who had joined the procession out of curiosity. Coachman Due drove the hearse. He had now bought a pair of horses, and this was his first good job.

Otherwise life flowed onward, sluggish and monotonous. Winter had come again, with its commercial stagnation, and the Iceland trade was ruined. The shoemakers did no more work by artificial light; there was so little to do that it would not repay the cost of the petroleum; so the hanging lamp was put on one side and the old tin lamp was brought out again. That was good enough to sit round and to gossip by. The neighbors would come into the twilight of the workshop; if Master

Andres was not there, they would slip out again, or they would sit idly there until Jeppe said it was bed-time. Pelle had begun to occupy himself with carving once more; he got as close to the lamp as possible, listening to the conversation while he worked upon a button which was to be carved like a twenty-five-öre piece. Morten was to have it for a tie-pin.

The conversation turned upon the weather, and how fortunate it was that the frost had not yet come to stop the great harbor works. Then it touched upon the "Great Power," and from him it glanced at the crazy Anker, and poverty, and discontent. The Social Democrats "over yonder" had for a long time been occupying the public mind. All the summer through disquieting rumors had crossed the water; it was quite plain that they were increasing their power and their numbers —but what were they actually aiming at? In any case, it was nothing good. "They must be the very poorest who are revolting," said Wooden-leg Larsen. "So their numbers must be very great!" It was as though one heard the roaring of something or other out on the horizon, but did not know what was going on there. The echo of the upheaval of the lower classes was quite distorted by the time it reached the island; people understood just so much, that the lowest classes wanted to turn God's appointed order upside down and to get to the top themselves, and involuntarily their glance fell covertly on the poor in the town. But these were going about in their customary half-slumber, working when there was work to be had and contenting themselves with that. "That would be the last straw," said Jeppe, "here, where we have such a well-organized poor-relief!"

Baker Jörgen was the most eager—every day he came with news of some kind to discuss. Now they had threatened the life of the King himself! And now the troops were called out.

"The troops!" The young master made a disdainful gesture. "That'll help a lot! If they merely throw a handful of dynamite among the soldiers there won't be a trouser-button left whole! No, they'll conquer the capital now!" His cheeks glowed: he saw the event already in his mind's eye. "Yes, and then? Then they'll plunder the royal Mint!"

"Yes—no. Then they'll come over here—the whole party!"

"Come over here? No, by God! We'd call out all the militia and shoot them down from the shore. I've put my gun in order already!"

One day Marker came running in. "The pastrycook's got a new journeyman from over yonder—and he's a Social Democrat!" he cried breathlessly. "He came yesterday evening by the steamer." Baker Jörgen had also heard the news.

"Yes, now they're on you!" said Jeppe, as one announcing disaster. "You've all been trifling with the new spirit of the times. This would have been something for Bjerregrav to see—him with his compassion for the poor!"

"Let the tailor rest in peace in his grave," said Wooden-leg Larsen, in a conciliatory tone. "You mustn't blame him for the angry masses that exist to-day. He wanted nothing but people's good—and perhaps these people want to do good, too!"

"Good!" Jeppe was loud with scorn. "They want to overturn law and order, and sell the fatherland to the Germans! They say the sum is settled already, and all!"

"They say they'll be let into the capital during the night, when our own people are asleep," said Marker.

"Yes," said Master Andres solemnly. "They've let out that the key's hidden under the mat—the devils!" Here Baker Jörgen burst into a shout of laughter; his laughter filled the whole workshop when he once began.

They guessed what sort of a fellow the new journeyman might be. No one had seen him yet. "He certainly has red hair and a red beard," said Baker Jörgen. "That's the good God's way of marking those who have signed themselves to the Evil One."

"God knows what the pastrycook wants with him," said Jeppe. "People of that sort can't do anything—they only ask. I've heard the whole lot of them are free-thinkers."

"What a lark!" The young master shook himself contentedly. "He won't grow old here in the town!"

"Old?" The baker drew up his heavy body. "To-morrow I shall go to the pastrycook and demand that he be sent away. I am commander of the militia, and I know all the townsfolk think as I do."

Drejer thought it might be well to pray from the pulpit—as in time of plague, and in the bad year when the field-mice infested the country.

Next morning Jörgen Kofod looked in on his way to the pastrycook's. He was wearing his old militia coat, and at his belt hung the leather wallet in which flints for the old flint-locks had been carried many years before. He filled his uniform well; but he came back without success. The pastrycook praised his new journeyman beyond all measure, and wouldn’t hear a word of sending him away. He was quite besotted. “But we shall buy there no more—we must all stick to that—and no respectable family can deal with the traitor in future.”

“Did you see the journeyman, Uncle Jörgen?” asked Master Andres eagerly.

“Yes, I saw him—that is, from a distance! He had a pair of terrible, piercing eyes; but he shan’t bewitch me with his serpent’s glance!”

In the evening Pelle and the others were strolling about the market in order to catch a glimpse of the new journeyman—there were a number of people there, and they were all strolling to and fro with the same object in view. But he evidently kept the house.

And then one day, toward evening, the master came tumbling into the workshop. “Hurry up, damn it all!” he cried, quite out of breath; “he’s passing now!” They threw down their work and stumbled along the passage into the best room, which at ordinary times they were not allowed to enter. He was a tall, powerful man, with full cheeks and a big, dashing moustache, quite as big as the master’s. His nostrils were distended, and he held his chest well forward. His jacket and wasitcoat were open, as though he wanted more air. Behind him slunk a few street urchins, in the hope of seeing something; they had quite lost their accustomed insolence, and followed him in silence.

“He walks as though the whole town belonged to him!” said Jeppe scornfully. “But we’ll soon finish with him here!”

XX

Out in the street some one went by, and then another, and then another; there was quite a trampling of feet. The young master knocked on the wall. “What in the world is it, Pelle?” He did not mean to get up that day.

Pelle ran out to seek information. “Jen’s father has got delirium— he’s cleared the whole harbor and is threatening to kill them all!”

The master raised his head a little. “By God, I believe I shall get up!” His eyes were glistening; presently he had got into his clothes, and limped out of doors; they heard him coughing terribly in the cold.

Old Jeppe put his official cap in his pocket before he ran out; perhaps the authorities would be needed. For a time the apprentices sat staring at the door like sick birds; then they, too, ran out of the house.

Outside everything was in confusion. The wildest rumors were flying about as to what Stonemason Jörgensen had done. The excitement could not have been greater had a hostile squadron come to anchor and commenced to bombard the town. Everybody dropped what he was holding and rushed down to the harbor. The smaller side-streets were one unbroken procession of children and old women and small employers in their aprons. Old gouty seamen awoke from their decrepit slumber and hobbled away, their hands dropped to the back of their loins and their faces twisted with pain.

“Toot aroot aroot aroot,
All the pitchy snouts!”

A few street-urchins allowed themselves this little diversion, as Pelle came running by with the other apprentices; otherwise all attention was concentrated on the one fact that the “Great Power” had broken out again! A certain festivity might have been noted on the faces of the hurrying crowd; a vivid expectation. The stonemason had been quiet for a long time now; he had labored like a giant beast of burden, to all appearance extinguished, but toiling like an elephant, and quietly taking home a couple of kroner in the evening. It was almost painful to watch him, and a disappointed silence gathered about him. And now came a sudden explosion, thrilling everybody through!

All had something to say of the “strong man” while they hastened down to the harbor. Everybody had foreseen that it must come; he had for a long time looked so strange, and had done nothing wrong, so that it was only a wonder that it hadn’t come sooner! Such people ought not really to be at large; they ought to be shut up for life! They went over the events of his life for the hundredth time—from the day when he came trudging into town, young and fearless in his rags, to find a market for his energies, until the time when he drove his child into the sea and settled down as a lunatic.

Down by the harbor the people were swarming; everybody who could creep or crawl was stationed there. The crowd was good-humored, in spite of the cold and the hard times; the people stamped their feet and cracked jokes. The town had in a moment shaken off its winter sleep; the people clambered up on the blocks of stone, or hung close-packed over the rough timber frames that were to be sunk in building the breakwater. They craned their necks and started nervously, as though some one might come up suddenly and hit them over the head. Jens and Morten were there, too; they stood quite apart and were speaking to one another. They looked on mournfully, with shy, harrassed glances, and where the great slip ran obliquely down to the floor of the basin the workmen stood in crowds; they hitched up their trousers, for the sake of something to do, exchanged embarrassed glances, and swore.

But down on the floor of the great basin the “Great Power” ruled supreme. He was moving about alone, and he seemed to be as unconscious of his surroundings as a child absorbed in play; he had some purpose of his own to attend to. But what that was it was not easy to tell. In one hand he held a bundle of dynamite cartridges; with the other he was leaning on a heavy iron bar. His movements were slow and regular, not unlike those of a clumsy bear. When he stood up, his comrades shouted to him excitedly; they would come and tear him into little pieces; they would slit his belly so that he could see his own bowels; they would slash him with their knives and rub his wounds with vitriol if he didn’t at once lay down his weapons and let them come down to their work.

But the “Great Power” did not deign to answer. Perhaps he never heard them. When he raised his head his glance swept the distance, laden with a mysterious burden which was not human. That face, with its deadly weariness, seemed in its sadness to be turned upon some distant place whither none could follow him. “He is mad!” they whispered; “God has taken away his wits!” Then he bent himself to his task again; he seemed to be placing the cartridges under the great breakwater which he himself had proposed. He was pulling cartridges out of every pocket; that was why they had stuck out from his body curiously.

“What the devil is he going to do now? Blow up the breakwater?” they asked, and tried to creep along behind the causeway, so as to come upon him from behind. But he had eyes all round him; at the slightest movement on their part he was there with his iron bar.

The whole works were at a standstill! Two hundred men stood idle hour after hour, growling and swearing and threatening death and the devil, but no one ventured forward. The overseer ran about irresolutely, and even the engineer had lost his head; everything was in a state of dissolution. The district judge was walking up and down in full uniform, with an impenetrable expression of face; his mere presence had a calming effect, but he did nothing.

Each proposal made was wilder than the last. Some wanted to make a gigantic screen which might be pushed toward him; others suggested capturing him with a huge pair of tongs made of long balks of timber; but no one attempted to carry out these suggestions; they were only too thankful that he allowed them to stand where they were. The “Great Power” could throw a dynamite cartridge with such force that it would explode where it struck and sweep away everything around it.

“The tip-wagons!” cried some one. Here at last was an idea! The wagons were quickly filled with armed workmen. The catch was released, but the wagons did not move. The “Great Power” with his devilish cunning, had been before them; he had spiked the endless chain so that it could not move. And now he struck away the under-pinning of a few of the supports, so that the wagons could not be launched upon him by hand.

This was no delirium; no one had ever yet seen delirium manifest itself in such a way! And he had touched no spirit since the day they had carried his daughter home. No; it was the quietest resolution imaginable; when they got up after the breakfast-hour and were strolling down to the slip, he stood there with his iron bar and quietly commanded them to keep away—the harbor belonged to him! They had received more than one sharp blow before they understood that he was in earnest; but there was no malice in him—one could see quite plainly how it hurt him to strike them. It was certainly the devil riding him—against his own will.

But where was it going to end? They had had enough of it now! For now the great harbor bell was striking midday, and there was something derisive in the sound, as though it was jeering at respectable people who only wanted to resume their work. They didn’t want to waste the whole day; neither did they want to risk life and limb against the fool’s tricks of a lunatic. Even the mighty Bergendal had left his contempt of death at home to-day, and was content to grumble like the rest.

“We must knock a hole in the dam,” he said, “then the brute may perish in the waves!”

They immediately picked up their tools, in order to set to work. The engineer threatened them with the law and the authorities; it would cost thousands of kroner to empty the harbor again. They would not listen to him; what use was he if he couldn’t contrive for them to do their work in peace?

They strolled toward the dam, with picks and iron crowbars, in order to make the breach; the engineer and the police were thrust aside. Now it was no longer a matter of work; it was a matter of showing that two hundred men were not going to allow one crazy devil to make fools of them. Beelzebub had got to be smoked out. Either the “Great Power” would come up from the floor of the basin, or he would drown.

“You shall have a full day’s wages!” cried the engineer, to hold them back. They did not listen; but when they reached the place of the intended breach, the “Great Power” was standing at the foot of the dam, swinging his pick so that the walls of the basin resounded. He beamed with helpfulness at every blow; he had posted himself at the spot where the water trickled in, and they saw with horror what an effect his blows had. It was sheer madness to do what he was doing there.

“He’ll fill the harbor with water, the devil!” they cried, and they hurled stones at his head. “And such a work as it was to empty it!”

The “Great Power” took cover behind a pile and worked away.

Then there was nothing for it but to shoot him down before he had attained his object. A charge of shot in the legs, if nothing more, and he would at least be rendered harmless. The district judge was at his wits' end; but Wooden-leg Larsen was already on the way home to fetch his gun. Soon he came stumping back, surrounded by a swarm of boys.

"I've loaded it with coarse salt!" he cried, so that the judge might hear.

"Now you'll be shot dead!" they called down to him. In reply, the "Great Power" struck his pick into the foot of the dam, so that the trampled clay sighed and the moisture rose underfoot. A long crackling sound told them that the first plank was shattered.

The final resolve had been formed quite of itself; everybody was speaking of shooting him down as though the man had been long ago sentenced, and now everybody was longing for the execution. They hated the man below there with a secret hatred which needed no explanation; his defiance and unruliness affected them like a slap in the face; they would gladly have trampled him underfoot if they could.

They shouted down insults; they reminded him how in his presumption he had ruined his family, and driven his daughter to suicide; and they cast in his face his brutal attack on the rich shipowner Monsen, the benefactor of the town. For a time they roused themselves from their apathy in order to take a hand in striking him down. And now it must be done thoroughly; they must have peace from this fellow, who couldn't wear his chains quietly, but must make them grate like the voice of hatred that lay behind poverty and oppression.

The judge leaned out over the quay, in order to read his sentence over the "Great Power"—three times must it be read, so the man might have opportunity to repent. He was deathly pale, and at the second announcement he started convulsively; but the "Great Power" threw no dynamite cartridges at him; he merely lifted his hand to his head, as though in greeting, and made a few thrusting motions in the air with two of his fingers, which stood out from his forehead like a pair of horns. From where the apothecary stood in a circle of fine ladies a stifled laugh was heard. All faces were turned to where the burgomaster's wife stood tall and stately on a block of stone. But she gazed down unflinchingly at the "Great Power" as though she had never seen him before.

On the burgomaster the gesture had an effect like that of an explosion. "Shoot him down!" he roared, with purple face, stumbling excitedly along the breakwater. "Shoot him down, Larsen!"

But no one heeded his command. All were streaming toward the wagon-slip, where an old, faded little woman was in the act of groping her way along the track toward the floor of the basin. "It's the 'Great Power's' mother!" The word passed from mouth to mouth. "No! How little and old she is! One can hardly believe she could have brought such a giant into the world!"

Excitedly they followed her, while she tottered over the broken stone of the floor of the basin, which was littered with the *debris* of explosions until it resembled an ice-floe under pressure. She made her way but slowly, and it looked continually as though she must break her legs. But the old lady persevered, bent and withered though she was, with her shortsighted eyes fixed on the rocks before her feet.

Then she perceived her son, who stood with his iron bar poised in his hand. "Throw the stick away, Peter!" she cried sharply, and mechanically he let the iron rod fall. He gave way before her, slowly, until she had pinned him in a corner and attempted to seize him; then he pushed her carefully aside, as though she was something that inconvenienced him.

A sigh went through the crowd, and crept round the harbor like a wandering shudder. "He strikes his own mother—he must be mad!" they repeated, shuddering.

But the old woman was on her legs again. "Do you strike your own mother, Peter?" she cried, with sheer amazement in her voice, and reached up after his ear; she could not reach so far; but the "Great Power" bent down as though something heavy pressed upon him, and allowed her to seize his ear. Then she drew him away, over stock and stone, in a slanting path to the slipway, where the people stood like a wall. And he went, bowed, across the floor of the basin, like a great beast in the little woman's hands.

Up on the quay the police stood ready to fall upon the "Great Power" with ropes; but the old woman was like pepper and salt when she saw their intention. "Get out of the way, or I'll let him loose on you!" she hissed. "Don't you see he has lost his intellect? Would you attack a man whom God has smitten?"

"Yes, he is mad!" said the people, in a conciliatory tone; "let his mother punish him—she is the nearest to him!"

XXI

Now Pelle and the youngest apprentice had to see to everything, for in November Jens had finished his term and had left at once. He had not the courage to go to Copenhagen to seek his fortune. So he rented a room in the poor quarter of the town and settled there with his young woman. They could not get married; he was only nineteen years of age. When Pelle had business in the northern portion of the town he used to look in on them. The table stood between the bed and the window, and there sat Jens, working on repairs for the poor folk of the neighborhood. When he had managed to get a job the girl would stand bending over him, waiting intently until he had finished, so that she could get something to eat. Then she would come back and cook something right away at the stove, and Jens would sit there and watch her with burning eyes until he had more work in hand. He had grown thin, and sported a sparse pointed beard; a lack of nourishment was written in both their faces. But they loved one another, and they helped one another in everything, as awkwardly as two children who are playing at “father and mother.” They had chosen the most dismal locality; the lane fell steeply to the sea, and was full of refuse; mangy cats and dogs ran about, dragging fish-offal up the steps of the houses and leaving it lying there. Dirty children were grubbing about before every door.

One Sunday morning, when Pelle had run out there to see them, he heard a shriek from one of the cottages, and the sound of chairs overturned. Startled, he stood still. “That’s only one-eyed Johann beating his wife,” said an eight-year-old girl; “he does that almost every day.”

Before the door, on a chair, sat an old man, staring imperturbably at a little boy who continually circled round him.

Suddenly the child ran inward, laid his hands on the old man’s knee, and said delightedly: “Father runs round the table—mother runs round the table—father beats mother—mother runs round the table and—cries.” He imitated the crying, laughed all over his little idiot’s face, and dribbled. “Yes, yes,” was all the old man said. The child had no eyebrows, and the forehead was hollow over the eyes. Gleefully he ran round and round, stamping and imitating the uproar within. “Yes, yes,” said the old man imperturbably, “yes, yes!”

At the window of one of the cottages sat a woman, gazing out thoughtfully, her forehead leaning against the sash-bar. Pelle recognized her; he greeted her cheerfully. She motioned him to the door. Her bosom was still plump, but there was a shadow over her face. “Hans!” she cried uncertainly, “here is Pelle, whose doing it was that we found one another!”

The young workman replied from within the room: “Then he can clear out, and I don’t care if he looks sharp about it!” He spoke threateningly.

In spite of the mild winter, Master Andres was almost always in bed now. Pelle had to receive all instructions, and replace the master as well as he could. There was no making of new boots now—only repairs. Every moment the master would knock on the wall, in order to gossip a little.

“To-morrow I shall get up,” he would say, and his eyes would shine; “yes, that I shall, Pelle! Give me sunlight tomorrow, you devil’s imp! This is the turning-point—now nature is turning round in me. When that’s finished I shall be quite well! I can feel how it’s raging in my blood—it’s war to the knife now—but the good sap is conquering! You should see me when the business is well forward— this is nothing to what it will be! And you won’t forget to borrow the list of the lottery-drawings?”

He would not admit it to himself, but he was sinking. He no longer cursed the clergy, and one day Jeppe silently went for the pastor. When he had gone, Master Jeppe knocked on the wall.

“It’s really devilish queer,” he said, “for suppose there should be anything in it? And then the pastor is so old, he ought rather to be thinking of himself.” The master lay there and looked thoughtful; he was staring up at the ceiling. He would lie all day like that; he did not care about reading now. “Jens was really a good boy,” he would say suddenly. “I could never endure him, but he really had a good disposition. And do you believe that I shall ever be a man again?”

“Yes, when once the warm weather comes,” said Pelle.

From time to time the crazy Anker would come to ask after Master Andres. Then the master would knock on the wall. “Let him come in, then,” he said to Pelle. “I find myself so terribly wearisome.” Anker had quite given up the marriage with the king’s eldest daughter, and had now taken matters into his own hands. He was now working at a clock which would *be* the "new time" itself, and which would go in time with the happiness of the people. He brought the wheels and spring and the whole works with him, and explained them, while his gray eyes, fixed out-of-doors, wandered from one object to another. They were never on the thing he was exhibiting. He, like all the others, had a blind confidence in the young master, and explained his invention in detail. The clock would be so devised that it would show the time only when every one in the land had what he wanted. "Then one can always see and know if anybody is suffering need—there'll be no excuse then! For the time goes and goes, and they get nothing to eat; and one day their hour comes, and they go hungry into the grave." In his temples that everlasting thing was beating which seemed to Pelle like the knocking of a restless soul imprisoned there; and his eyes skipped from one object to another with their vague, indescribable expression.

The master allowed himself to be quite carried away by Anker's talk as long as it lasted; but as soon as the watchmaker was on the other side of the door he shook it all off. "It's only the twaddle of a madman," he said, astonished at himself.

Then Anker repeated his visit, and had something else to show. It was a cuckoo; every ten-thousandth year it would appear to the hour and cry "Cuckoo!" The time would not be shown any longer—only the long, long course of time—which never comes to an end—eternity. The master looked at Anker bewildered. "Send him away, Pelle!" he whispered, wiping the sweat from his forehead: "he makes me quite giddy; he'll turn me crazy with his nonsense!"

Pelle ought really to have spent Christmas at home, but the master would not let him leave him. "Who will chat with me all that time and look after everything?" he said. And Pelle himself was not so set on going; it was no particular pleasure nowadays to go home. Karna was ill, and Father Lasse had enough to do to keep her in good spirits. He himself was valiant enough, but it did not escape Pelle that as time went on he was sinking deeper into difficulties. He had not paid the latest instalment due, and he had not done well with the winter stone-breaking, which from year to year had helped him over the worst. He had not sufficient strength for all that fell to his lot. But he was plucky. "What does it matter if I'm a few hundred kroner in arrears when I have improved the property to the tune of several thousand?" he would say.

Pelle was obliged to admit the truth of that. "Raise a loan," he advised.

Lasse did try to do so. Every time he was in the town he went to the lawyers and the savings-banks. But he could not raise a loan on the land, as on paper it belonged to the commune, until, in a given number of years, the whole of the sum to which Lasse had pledged himself should be paid up. On Shrove Tuesday he was again in town, and then he had lost his cheerful humor. "Now we know it, we had better give up at once," he said despondently, "for now Ole Jensen is haunting the place—you know, he had the farm before me and hanged himself because he couldn't fulfill his engagements. Karna saw him last night."

"Nonsense!" said Pelle. "Don't believe such a thing!" But he could not help believing in it just a little himself.

"You think so? But you see yourself that things are always getting more difficult for us—and just now, too, when we have improved the whole property so far, and ought to be enjoying the fruit of our labor. And Karna can't get well again," he added despondently.

"Well, who knows?—perhaps it's only superstition!" he cried at last. He had courage for another attempt.

Master Andres was keeping his bed. But he was jolly enough there; the more quickly he sank, the more boldly he talked. It was quite wonderful to listen to his big words, and to see him lying there so wasted, ready to take his departure when the time should come.

At the end of February the winter was so mild that people were already beginning to look for the first heralds of spring; but then in one night came the winter from the north, blustering southward on a mighty ice-floe. Seen from the shore it looked as though all the vessels in the world had hoisted new white sails, and were on the way to Bornholm, to pay the island a visit, before they once again set out, after the winter's rest, on their distant voyages. But rejoicings over the breaking-up of the ice were brief; in four-and- twenty hours the island was hemmed in on every side by the ice-pack, so that there was not a speck of open water to be seen.

And then the snow began. "We really thought it was time to begin work on the land," said the people; but they could put up with the cold—there was still time enough. They proceeded to snowball one another, and set their sledges in order; all through the winter there had been no toboggan-slide. Soon the snow was up to one's ankles, and the slide was made. Now it might as well stop snowing. It might lie a week or two, so that people might enjoy a few proper sleighing-parties. But the snow continued to flutter down, until it reached to the knee, and then to the waist; and by the time people were going to bed it was no longer possible to struggle through it. And those who did not need to rise before daylight were very near not getting out of bed at all, for in the night a snowstorm set in, and by the morning the snow reached to the roofs and covered all the windows. One could hear the storm raging about the chimneys, but down below it was warm enough. The apprentices had to go through the living-room to reach the workshop. The snow was deep there and had closed all outlets.

"What the devil is it?" said Master Andres, looking at Pelle in alarm. "Is the world coming to an end?"

Was the world coming to an end? Well, it might have come to an end already; they could not hear the smallest sound from without, to tell them whether their fellow-men were living still, or were already dead. They had to burn lamps all day long; but the coal was out in the snow, so they must contrive to get to the shed. They all pushed against the upper half-door of the kitchen, and succeeded in forcing it so far open that Pelle could just creep through. But once out there it was impossible to move. He disappeared in the mass of snow. They must dig a path to the well and the coal-shed; as for food, they would have to manage as best they could. At noon the sun came out, and so far the snow melted on the south side of the house that the upper edge of the window admitted a little daylight. A faint milky shimmer shone through the snow. But there was no sign of life outside.

"I believe we shall starve, like the people who go to the North Pole," said the master, his eyes and mouth quite round with excitement. His eyes were blazing like lamps; he was deep in the world's fairy-tale.

During the evening they dug and bored halfway to Baker Jörgen's. They must at least secure their connection with the baker. Jeppe went in with a light. "Look out that it doesn't fall on you," he said warningly. The light glistened in the snow, and the boys proceeded to amuse themselves. The young master lay in bed, and called out at every sound that came to him from outside—so loudly that his cough was terrible. He could not contain himself for curiosity. "I'll go and see the robbers' path, too, by God!" he said, over and over again. Jeppe scolded him, but he took no notice. He had his way, got into his trousers and fur jacket, and had a counterpane thrown about him. But he could not stand up, and with a despairing cry he fell back on the bed.

Pelle watched him until his heart burned within him. He took the master on his arm, and supported him carefully until they entered the tunnel. "You are strong; good Lord, you are strong!" The master held Pelle convulsively, one arm about his neck, while he waved the other in the air, as defiantly as the strong man in the circus. "Hip, hip!" He was infected by Pelle's strength. Cautiously he turned round in the glittering vault; his eyes shone like crystals of ice. But the fever was raging in his emaciated body. Pelle felt it like a devouring fire through all his clothes.

Next day the tunnel was driven farther—as far as Baker Jörgen's steps, and their connection with the outer world was secure. At Jörgen's great things had happened in the course of the last four- and-twenty hours. Marie had been so excited by the idea that the end of the world was perhaps at hand that she had hastily brought the little Jörgen into it. Old Jörgen was in the seventh heaven; he had to come over at once and tell them about it. "He's a regular devil, and he's the very image of me!"

"That I can well believe!" cried Master Andres, and laughed. "And is Uncle pleased?"

But Jeppe took the announcement very coolly; the condition of his brother's household did not please him. "Is Sören delighted with the youngster?" he asked cautiously.

"Sören?" The baker gave vent to a shout of laughter. "He can think of nothing but the last judgment—he's praying to the dear God!"

Later in the day the noise of shovels was heard. The workmen were outside; they cleared one of the pavements so that one could just get by; but the surface of the street was still on a level with the roofs.

Now one could get down to the harbor once more; it felt almost as though one were breathing again after a choking-fit. As far as the eyes could reach the ice extended, packed in high ridges and long ramparts where the waves had battled. A storm was brewing. "God be thanked!" said the old seamen, "now the ice will go!" But it did not move. And then they understood that the whole sea was frozen; there could not be one open spot as big as a soup-plate on which the storm could begin its work. But it was a wonderful sight, to see the sea lying dead and motionless as a rocky desert in the midst of this devastating storm.

And one day the first farmer came to town, with news of the country. The farms inland were snowed up; men had to dig pathways into the open fields, and lead the horses in one by one; but of accidents he knew nothing.

All activities came to a standstill. No one could do any work, and everything had to be used sparingly—especially coals and oil, both of which threatened to give out. The merchants had issued warnings as early as the beginning of the second week. Then the people began to take to all sorts of aimless doings; they built wonderful things with the snow, or wandered over the ice from town to town. And one day a dozen men made ready to go with the ice-boat to Sweden, to fetch the post; people could no longer do without news from the outside world. On Christiansö they had hoisted the flag of distress; provisions were collected in small quantities, here, there, and everywhere, and preparations were made for sending an expedition thither.

And then came the famine; it grew out of the frozen earth, and became the only subject of conversation. But only those who were well provided for spoke of it; those who suffered from want were silent. People appealed to organized charity; there was Bjerregrav’s five thousand kroner in the bank. But no, they were not there. Ship-owner Monsen declared that Bjerregrav had recalled the money during his lifetime. There was no statement in his will to the contrary. The people knew nothing positively; but the matter gave plenty of occasion for discussion. However things might be, Monsen was the great man, now as always—and he gave a thousand kroner out of his own pocket for the help of the needy.

Many eyes gazed out over the sea, but the men with the ice-boat did not come back; the mysterious “over yonder” had swallowed them. It was as though the world had sunk into the sea; as if, behind the rugged ice-field which reached to the horizon, there now lay nothing but the abyss.

The “Saints” were the only people who were busy; they held overcrowded meetings, and spoke about the end of the world. All else lay as though dead. Under these conditions, who would worry himself about the future? In the workshop they sat in caps and overcoats and froze; the little coal that still remained had to be saved for the master. Pelle was in his room every moment. The master did not speak much now; he lay there and tossed to and fro, his eyes gazing up at the ceiling; but as soon as Pelle had left him he knocked for him again. “How are things going now?” he would ask wearily. “Run down to the harbor and see whether the ice isn’t near breaking—it is so very cold; at this rate the whole earth will become a lump of ice. This evening they will certainly hold another meeting about the last judgment. Run and hear what they think about it.”

Pelle went, and returned with the desired information, but when he had done so the master had usually forgotten all about the matter. From time to time Pelle would announce that there seemed to be a bluish shimmer on the sea, far beyond the ice. Then the master’s eyes would light up. But he was always cast down again by the next announcement. “The sea will eat up the ice yet—you’ll see,” said Master Andres, as though from a great distance. “But perhaps it cannot digest so much. Then the cold will get the upper hand, and we shall all be done for!”

But one morning the ice-field drove out seaward, and a hundred men got ready to clear the channel of ice by means of dynamite. Three weeks had gone by since any post had been received from the outer world, and the steamer went out in order to fetch news from Sweden. It was caught by the ice out in the offing, and driven toward the south; from the harbor they could see it for days, drifting about in the ice-pack, now to the north and now to the south.

At last the heavy bonds were broken. But it was difficult alike for the earth and for mankind to resume the normal activities of life. Everybody’s health had suffered. The young master could not stand the change from the bitter frost to the thaw; when his cough did not torment him he lay quite still. “Oh, I suffer so dreadfully, Pelle!” he complained, whispering. “I have no pain—but I suffer, Pelle.”

But then one morning he was in a good humor. “Now I am past the turning-point,” he said, in a weak but cheerful voice; “now you’ll just see how quickly I shall get well. What day is it really to-day? Thursday? Death and the devil! then I must renew my lottery ticket! I am so light I was flying through the air all night long, and if I only shut my eyes I am flying again. That is the force in the new blood—by summer I shall be quite well. Then I shall go out and see the world! But one never—deuce take it!—gets to see the best—the stars and space and all that! So man must learn to fly. But I was there last night.”

Then the cough overpowered him again. Pelle had to lift him up; at every spasm there was a wet, slapping sound in his chest. He put one hand on Pelle’s shoulder and leaned his forehead against the boy’s body. Suddenly the cough ceased; and the white, bony hand convulsively clutched Pelle’s shoulder. “Pelle, Pelle!” moaned the master, and he gazed at him, a horrible anxiety in his dying eyes.

“What does he see now?” thought Pelle, shuddering; and he laid him back on his pillow.

XXII

Often enough did Pelle regret that he had wasted five years as apprentice. During his apprenticeship he had seen a hundred, nay, two hundred youths pass into the ranks of the journeymen; and then they were forthwith turned into the streets, while new apprentices from the country filled up the ranks again. There they were, and they had to stand on their own legs. In most cases they had learned nothing properly; they had only sat earning their master's daily bread, and now they suddenly had to vindicate their calling. Emil had gone to the dogs; Peter was a postman and earned a krone a day, and had to go five miles to do that. When he got home he had to sit over the knee-strap and waxed-end, and earn the rest of his livelihood at night. Many forsook their calling altogether. They had spent the best years of their youth in useless labor.

Jens had done no better than the majority. He sat all day over repairs, and had become a small employer, but they were positively starving. The girl had recently had a miscarriage, and they had nothing to eat. When Pelle went to see them they were usually sitting still and staring at one another with red eyes; and over their heads hung the threat of the police, for they were not yet married. "If I only understood farm work!" said Jens. "Then I'd go into the country and serve with a farmer."

Despite all his recklessness, Pelle could not help seeing his own fate in theirs; only his attachment to Master Andres had hindered him from taking to his heels and beginning something else.

Now everything suddenly came to an end; old Jeppe sold the business, with apprentices and all. Pelle did not wish to be sold. Now was his opportunity; now, by a sudden resolve, he might bring this whole chapter to an end.

"You don't go!" said Jeppe threateningly; "you have still a year of your apprenticeship before you! I shall give information to the police about you—and you've learned what that means." But Pelle went. Afterward they could run to the police as often as they liked.

With a light and cheerful mind he rented an attic on the hill above the harbor, and removed his possessions thither. He felt as though he was stretching himself after his years of slavery; he no longer had any one over him, and he had no responsibilities, and no burdens. Year by year he had fought against a continual descent. It had by no means fortified his youthful courage vainly to pit his energies, day after day, against the decline of the workshop; he was only able to hold back the tide a little, and as for the rest, he must perforce sink with the business.

A good share of resignation and a little too much patience with regard to his eighteen years—this was for the moment his net profit from the process of going downhill.

Now it all lay at the foot of the hill, and he could stand aside and draw himself up a little. His conscience was clear, and he felt a somewhat mitigated delight in his freedom; that was all he had won. He had no money for traveling, and his clothes were in a sad case; but that did not trouble him at first. He breathed deeply, and considered the times. The death of the master had left a great void within him; he missed that intelligent glance, which had given him the feeling that he was serving an idea; and the world was a terribly desolate and God-forsaken place now that this glance no longer rested on him, half lucid and half unfathomable, and now that the voice was silent which had always gone to his heart—when it was angry just as much as when it was infinitely mild or frolicsome. And where he was used to hear that voice his ear encountered only solitude.

He did nothing to arouse himself; he was for the present idle. This or that employer was after him, truly, for they all knew that he was a quick and reliable worker, and would willingly have taken him as apprentice, for a krone a week and his food. But Pelle would have none of them; he felt that his future did not lie in that direction. Beyond that he knew nothing, but only waited, with a curious apathy, for something to happen—something, anything. He had been hurried out of his settled way of life, yet he had no desire to set to work. From his window he could look out over the harbor, where the extensive alterations that had been interrupted by the winter were again in full swing. And the murmur of the work rose up to him; they were hewing, boring and blasting; the tip-wagons wandered in long rows up the slipway, threw their contents out on the shore, and returned. His limbs longed for strenuous work with pick and shovel, but his thoughts took another direction.

If he walked along the street the industrious townsfolk would turn to look after him, exchanging remarks which were loud enough to reach his ear. “There goes Master Jeppe’s apprentice, loafing along,” they would tell one another; “young and strong he is, but he doesn’t like work. He’ll turn into a loafer if you give him time— that you can see. Yes, wasn’t it he who got a beating at the town hall, for his brutal behavior? What else can you expect of him?”

So then Pelle kept the house. Now and again he got a little work from comrades, and poor people of his acquaintance; he did his best without proper implements, or if he could not manage otherwise he would go to Jens. Jens had lasts and an anvil. At other times he sat at the window, freezing, and gazed out over the harbor and the sea. He saw the ships being rigged and fitted, and with every ship that went gliding out of the harbor, to disappear below the horizon, it seemed to him that a last possibility had escaped him; but although he had such a feeling it did not stir him. He shrank from Morten, and did not mix with other people. He was ashamed to be so idle when every one else was working.

As for food, he managed fairly well; he lived on milk and bread, and needed only a few öre a day. He was able to avoid extreme hunger. As for firing, it was not to be thought of. Sitting idly in his room, he enjoyed his repose, apart from a certain feeling of shame; otherwise he was sunk in apathy.

On sunny mornings he got up early and slipped out of the town. All day long he would stroll in the great pine-woods or lie on the dunes by the shore, with the murmur of the sea sounding through his half- slumber. He ate like a dog whatever he could get that was eatable, without particularly thinking of what it consisted. The glitter of the sun on the water, and the poignant scent of the pine-trees, and the first rising of the sluggish sap which came with spring, made him dizzy, and filled his brain with half-wild imaginations. The wild animals were not afraid of him, but only stood for a moment inhaling his scent; then they would resume their daily life before his eyes. They had no power to disturb his half-slumber; but if human beings approached, he would hide himself, with a feeling of hostility, almost of hatred. He experienced a kind of well-being out in the country. The thought often occurred to him that he would give up his dwelling in the town, and creep at night under the nearest tree.

Only when the darkness hid him did he return to his room. He would throw himself, fully dressed, on his bed, and lie there until he fell asleep. As though from a remote distance he could hear his next-door neighbor, Ström the diver, moving about his room with tottering steps, and clattering with his cooking utensils close at hand. The smell of food, mingled with tobacco smoke and the odor of bedding, which crept through the thin board partition, and hovered, heavy and suffocating, above his head, became even more overpowering. His mouth watered. He shut his eyes and forced himself to think of other things, in order to deaden his hunger. Then a light, well-known step sounded on the stairs and some one knocked on the door—it was Morten. “Are you there, Pelle?” he asked. But Pelle did not move.

Pelle could hear Ström attacking his bread with great bites, and chewing it with a smacking sound; and suddenly in the intervals of mastication, another sound was audible; a curious bellowing, which was interrupted every time the man took a bite; it sounded like a child eating and crying simultaneously. That another person should cry melted something in Pelle, and filled him with a feeble sense of something living; he raised himself on his elbows and listened to Ström struggling with terror, while cold shudders chased one another down his back.

People said that Ström lived here because in his youth he had done something at home. Pelle forgot his own need and listened, rigid with terror, to this conflict with the powers of evil. Patiently, through his clenched teeth, in a voice broken by weeping, Ström attacked the throng of tiny devils with words from the Bible. “I’ll do something to you at last that’ll make you tuck your tails between your legs!” he cried, when he had read a little. There was a peculiar heaviness about his speech, which seemed charged with a craving for peace. “Ah!” he cried presently, “you want some more, you damned rascals, do you? Then what have you got to say to this —‘I, the Lord thy God, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob’”—Ström hurled the words at them, anger crept into his voice, and suddenly he lost patience. He took the Bible and flung it on the floor. “Satan take you, then!” he shouted, laying about him with the furniture.

Pelle lay bathed in sweat, listening to this demoniac struggle; and it was with a feeling of relief that he heard Ström open the window and drive the devils out over the roofs. The diver fought the last part of the battle with a certain humor. He addressed the corner of the room in a wheedling, flattering tone. “Come, you sweet, pretty little devil! What a white skin you have—Ström would so like to stroke you a little! No, you didn’t expect that! Are we getting too clever for you? What? You’d still bite, would you, you devil’s brat? There, don’t scowl like that!”—Ström shut the window with an inward chuckle.

For a while he strolled about amusing himself. “Ström is still man enough to clear up Hell itself!” he said, delighted.

Pelle heard him go to bed, and he himself fell asleep. But in the night he awoke; Ström was beating time with his head against the board partition, while he lay tearfully singing “By the waters of Babylon!” But halfway through the psalm the diver stopped and stood up. Pelle heard him groping to and fro across the floor and out on the landing. Seized with alarm, he sprang out of bed and struck a light. Outside stood Ström, in the act of throwing a noose over the rafters. “What do you want here?” he said fiercely. “Can I never get any peace from you?”

“Why do you want to lay hands on yourself?” asked Pelle quietly.

“There’s a woman and a little child sitting there, and she’s forever and forever crying in my ear. I can’t stand it any longer!” answered Ström, knotting his rope.

“Think of the little child, then!” said Pelle firmly, and he tore down the rope. Ström submitted to be led back into his room, and he crawled into bed. But Pelle must stay with him; he dared not put out the light and lie alone in the darkness.

“Is it the devils?” asked Pelle.

“What devils?” Ström knew nothing of any devils. “No, it’s remorse,” he replied. “The child and its mother are continually complaining of my faithlessness.”

But next moment he would spring out of bed and stand there whistling as though he was coaxing a dog. With a sudden grip he seized something by the throat, opened the window, and threw it out. “So, that was it!” he said, relieved; “now there’s none of the devil’s brood left!” He reached after the bottle of brandy.

“Leave it alone!” said Pelle, and he took the bottle away from him. His will increased in strength at the sight of the other’s misery.

Ström crept into bed again. He lay there tossing to and fro, and his teeth chattered. “If I could only have a mouthful!” he said pleadingly; “what harm can that do me? It’s the only thing that helps me! Why should a man always torment himself and play the respectable when he can buy peace for his soul so cheaply? Give me a mouthful!” Pelle passed him the bottle. “You should take one yourself—it sets a man up! Do you think I can’t see that you’ve suffered shipwreck, too? The poor man goes aground so easily, he has so little water under the keel. And who d’you think will help him to get off again if he’s betrayed his own best friend? Take a swallow, then—it wakes the devil in us and gives us courage to live.”

No, Pelle wanted to go to bed.

“Why do you want to go now? Stay here, it is so comfortable. If you could, tell me about something, something that’ll drive that damned noise out of my ears for a bit! There’s a young woman and a little child, and they’re always crying in my ears.”

Pelle stayed, and tried to distract the diver. He looked into his own empty soul, and he could find nothing there; so he told the man of Father Lasse and of their life at Stone Farm, with everything mixed up just as it occurred to him. But his memories rose up within him as he spoke of them, and they gazed at him so mournfully that they awakened his crippled soul to life. Suddenly he felt utterly wretched about himself, and he broke down helplessly.

“Now, now!” said Ström, raising his head. “Is it your turn now? Have you, too, something wicked to repent of, or what is it?”

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t know? That’s almost like the women—crying is one of their pleasures. But Ström doesn’t hang his head; he would like to be at peace with himself, if it weren’t for a pair of child’s eyes that look at him so reproachfully, day in and day out, and the crying of a girl! They’re both at home there in Sweden, wringing their hands for their daily bread. And the one that should provide for them is away from them here and throws away his earnings in the beer-houses. But perhaps they’re dead now because I’ve forsaken them. Look you, that is a real grief; there’s no child’s talk about that! But you must take a drink for it.”

But Pelle did not hear; he sat there gazing blindly in front of him. All at once the chair began to sail through air with him; he was almost fainting with hunger. “Give me just one drink—I’ve had not a mouthful of food to-day!” He smiled a shamefaced smile at the confession.

With one leap, Ström was out of bed. “No, then you shall have something to eat,” he said eagerly, and he fetched some food. “Did one ever see the like—such a desperate devil! To take brandy on an empty stomach! Eat now, and then you can drink yourself full elsewhere! Ström has enough on his conscience without that.... He can drink his brandy himself! Well, well, then, so you cried from hunger! It sounded like a child crying to me!”

Pelle often experienced such nights. They enlarged his world in the direction of the darkness. When he came home late and groped his way across the landing he always experienced a secret terror lest he should rub against Ström’s lifeless body; and he only breathed freely when he heard him snoring or ramping round his room. He liked to look in on him before he went to bed.

Ström was always delighted to see him, and gave him food; but brandy he would not give him. “It’s not for fellows as young as you! You’ll get the taste for it early enough, perhaps.”

“You drink, yourself,” said Pelle obstinately.

“Yes, I drink to deaden remorse. But that’s not necessary in your case.”

“I’m so empty inside,” said Pelle. “Really brandy might set me up a little. I feel as if I weren’t human at all, but a dead thing, a table, for instance.”

“You must do something—anything—or you’ll become a good-for-nothing. I’ve seen so many of our sort go to the dogs; we haven’t enough power of resistance!”

“It’s all the same to me what becomes of me!” replied Pelle drowsily. “I’m sick of the whole thing!”

XXIII

It was Sunday, and Pelle felt a longing for something unaccustomed. At first he went out to see Jens, but the young couple had had a dispute and had come to blows. The girl had let the frying-pan containing the dinner fall into the fire, and Jens had given her a box on the ears. She was still white and poorly after her miscarriage. Now they were sitting each in a corner, sulking like children. They were both penitent, but neither would say the first word. Pelle succeeded in reconciling them, and they wanted him to stay for dinner. “We’ve still got potatoes and salt, and I can borrow a drop of brandy from a neighbor!” But Pelle went; he could not watch them hanging on one another’s necks, half weeping, and kissing and babbling, and eternally asking pardon of one another.

So he went out to Due’s. They had removed to an old merchant’s house where there was room for Due’s horses. They seemed to be getting on well. It was said that the old consul took an interest in them and helped them on. Pelle never went into the house, but looked up Due in the stable, and if he was not at home Pelle would go away again. Anna did not treat him as though he was welcome. Due himself greeted him cordially. If he had no rounds to make he used to hang about the stable and potter round the horses; he did not care about being in the house. Pelle gave him a hand, cutting chaff for him, or helping in anything that came to hand, and then they would go into the house together. Due was at once another man if he had Pelle behind him; he was more decided in his behavior. Anna was gradually and increasingly getting the upper hand over him.

She was just as decided as ever, and kept the house in good order. She no longer had little Marie with her. She dressed her own two children well, and sent them to a school for young children, and she paid for their attendance. She was delightful to look at, and understood how to dress herself, but she would hear nothing good of any one else. Pelle was not smart enough for her; she turned up her nose at his every-day clothes, and in order to make him feel uncomfortable she was always talking about Alfred’s engagement to Merchant Lau’s daughter. This was a fine match for him. “*He* doesn’t loaf about and sleep his time away, and sniff at other people’s doors in order to get their plate of food,” she said. Pelle only laughed; nothing made any particular impression on him nowadays. The children ran about, wearying themselves in their fine clothes —they must not play with the poor children out-of-doors, and must not make themselves dirty. “Oh, play with us for a bit, Uncle Pelle!” they would say, hanging on to him. “Aren’t you our uncle too? Mother says you aren’t our uncle. She’s always wanting us to call the consul uncle, but we just run away. His nose is so horribly red.”

“Does the consul come to see you, then?” asked Pelle.

“Yes, he often comes—he’s here now!”

Pelle peeped into the yard. The pretty wagon had been taken out. “Father’s gone out,” said the children. Then he slipped home again. He stole a scrap of bread and a drop of brandy from Ström, who was not at home, and threw himself on his bed. As the darkness came on he strolled out and lounged, freezing, about the street corners. He had a vague desire to do something. Well-dressed people were promenading up and down the street, and many of his acquaintances were there, taking their girls for a walk; he avoided having to greet them, and to listen to whispered remarks and laughter at his expense. Lethargic as he was, he still had the acute sense of hearing that dated from the time of his disgrace at the town hall. People enjoyed finding something to say when he passed them; their laughter still had the effect of making his knees begin to jerk with a nervous movement, like the quickly-suppressed commencement of a flight.

He slipped into a side-street; he had buttoned his thin jacket tightly about him, and turned up his collar. In the half-darkness of the doorways stood young men and girls, in familiar, whispered conversation. Warmth radiated from the girls, and their bibbed aprons shone in the darkness. Pelle crept along in the cold, and knew less than ever what to do with himself; he ranged about to find a sweetheart for himself.

In the market he met Alfred, arm-in-arm with Lau’s daughter. He carried a smart walking-stick, and wore brown gloves and a tall hat. “The scamp—he still owes me two and a half kroner, and I shall never get it out of him!” thought Pelle, and for a moment he felt a real desire to spring upon him and to roll all his finery in the mud. Alfred turned his head the other way. “He only knows me when he wants to do something and has no money!” said Pelle bitterly.

He ran down the street at a jog-trot, in order to keep himself warm, turning his eyes toward the windows. The bookbinder and his wife were sitting at home, singing pious songs. The man drank when at home; that one could see plainly on the blind. At the wool-merchant’s they were having supper.

Farther on, at the Sow’s, there was life, as always. A mist of tobacco smoke and a great deal of noise were escaping through the open window. The Sow kept a house for idle seamen, and made a great deal of money. Pelle had often been invited to visit her, but had always considered himself too good; moreover, he could not bear Rud. But this evening he seized greedily upon the memory of this invitation, and went in. Perhaps a mouthful of food would come his way.

At a round table sat a few tipsy seamen, shouting at one another, and making a deafening row. The Sow sat on a young fellow’s knee; she lay half over the table and dabbled her fingers in a puddle of spilt beer; from time to time she shouted right in the face of those who were making the most noise. The last few years had not reduced her circumference.

“Now look at that! Is that you, Pelle?” she said, and she stood up to give him her hand. She was not quite sober, and had some difficulty in taking his. “That’s nice of you to come, now—I really thought we weren’t good enough for you! Now, sit down and have a drop; it won’t cost you anything.” She motioned to him to take a seat.

The sailors were out of humor; they sat staring sleepily at Pelle. Their heavy heads wagged helplessly. “That’s surely a new customer?” asked one, and the others laughed.

The Sow laughed too, but all at once became serious. “Then you can leave him out of your games, for he’s far too good to be dragged into anything; one knows what you are!” She sank into a chair next to Pelle, and sat looking at him, while she rubbed her own greasy countenance. “How tall and fine you’ve grown—but you aren’t well-off for clothes! And you don’t look to be overfed…. Ah, I’ve known you from the time when you and your father came into the country; a little fellow you were then, and Lasse brought me my mother’s hymn-book!” She was suddenly silent, and her eyes filled with tears.

One of the sailors whispered to the rest, and they began to laugh.

“Stop laughing, you swine!” she cried angrily, and she crossed over to them. “You aren’t going to play any of your nonsense with him—he comes like a memory of the times when I was respectable, too. His father is the only creature living who can prove that I was once a pretty, innocent little maid, who got into bad company. He’s had me on his lap and sung lullabies to me.” She looked about her defiantly, and her red face quivered.

“Didn’t you weigh as much then as you do now?” asked one of the men, and embraced her.

“Don’t play the fool with the little thing!” cried another. “Don’t you see she’s crying? Take her on your lap and sing her a lullaby— then she’ll believe you are Lasse-Basse!”

Raging, she snatched up a bottle. “Will you hold your tongue with your jeering? Or you’ll get this on the head!” Her greasy features seemed to run together in her excitement.

They let her be, and she sat there sobbing, her hands before her face. “Is your father still alive?” she asked. “Then give him my respects—just say the Sow sends her respects—you can safely call me the Sow!—and tell him he’s the only person in the world I have to thank for anything. He thought well of me, and he brought me the news of mother’s death.”

Pelle sat there listening with constraint to her tearful speech, with an empty smile. He had knives in his bowels, he was so empty, and the beer was going to his head. He remembered all the details of Stone Farm, where he had first seen and heard the Sow, just as Father Lasse had recalled her home and her childhood to her. But he did not connect any further ideas with that meeting; it was a long time ago, and—”isn’t she going to give me anything to eat?” he thought, and listened unsympathetically to her heavy breathing.

The sailors sat looking at her constrainedly; a solemn silence lay on their mist-wreathed faces; they were like drunken men standing about a grave. “Give over washing the decks now—and get us something to drink!” an old fellow said suddenly. “Each of us knows what it is to have times of childish innocence come back to him, and I say it’s a jolly fine thing when they will peep through the door at old devils like us! But let the water stop overboard now, I say! The more one scours an old barge the more damage comes to light! So, give us something to drink now, and then the cards, ma’am!”

She stood up and gave them what they asked for; she had mastered her emotion, but her legs were still heavy.

"That's right—and then we've got a sort of idea that to-day is Sunday! Show us your skill, ma'am, quick!"

"But that costs a krone, you know!" she said, laughing.

They collected the money and she went behind the bar and undressed. She reappeared in her chemise, with a burning candle in her hand….

Pelle slipped out. He was quite dizzy with hunger and a dull feeling of shame. He strolled on at random, not knowing what he did. He had only one feeling—that everything in the world was indifferent to him, whatever happened—whether he went on living in laborious honesty, or defiled himself with drinking, or perished—it was all one to him! What was the good of it all? No one cared what happened to him—not even he himself. Not a human soul would miss him if he went to the dogs—but yes, there was Lasse, Father Lasse! But as for going home now and allowing them to see him in all his wretchedness —when they had expected such unreasonable things of him—no, he could not do it! The last remnants of shame protested against it. And to work—what at? His dream was dead. He stood there with a vague feeling that he had come to the very edge of the abyss, which is so ominous to those in the depths.

Year in, year out, he had kept himself by his never-flagging exertions, and with the demented idea that he was mounting upward. And now he stood very near the lowest depth of life—the very bottom. And he was so tired. Why not let himself sink yet a little further; why not let destiny run its course? There would be a seductive repose in the acts, after his crazy struggle against the superior powers.

The sound of a hymn aroused him slightly. He had come down a side-street, and right in front of him stood a wide, lofty building, with the gable facing the street and a cross on the point of the gable. Hundreds of voices had sought, in the course of the years, to entice him hither; but in his arrogance he had had no use for spiritual things. What was there here for a smart youngster? And now he was stranded outside! And now he felt a longing for a little care, and he had a feeling that a hand had led him hither.

The hall was quite filled with poor families. They were packed amazingly close together on the benches, each family by itself; the men, as a rule, were asleep, and the women had all they could do to quiet their children, and to make them sit politely with their legs sticking out in front of them. These were people who had come to enjoy a little light and warmth, free of cost, in the midst of their desolate lives; on Sundays, at least, they thought, they could ask for a little of these things. They were the very poorest of the poor, and they sought refuge here, where they would not be persecuted, and where they were promised their part in the millennium. Pelle knew them all, both those whom he had seen before and those others, who wore the same expression, as of people drowned in the ocean of life. He soon found himself cozily settled among all these dishevelled nestlings, whom the pitiless wind had driven oversea, and who were now washed ashore by the waves.

A tall man with a full beard and a pair of good child-like eyes stood up among the benches, beating the time of a hymn—he was Dam, the smith. He led the singing, and as he stood there he bent his knees in time, and they all sang with him, with tremulous voices, each in his own key, of that which had passed over them. The notes forced their way through the parched, worn throats, cowering, as though afraid, now that they had flown into the light. Hesitatingly they unfurled their fragile, gauzy wings, and floated out into the room, up from the quivering lips. And under the roof they met with their hundreds of sisters, and their defilement fell from them. They became a jubilation, loud and splendid, over some unknown treasure, over the kingdom of happiness, that was close at hand. To Pelle it seemed that the air must be full of butterflies winged with sunshine:

"O blessed, blessed shall we be
When we, from care and mis'ry free,
The splendor of Thy kingdom see,
And with our Saviour come to Thee!"

"Mother, I'm hungry!" said a child's voice, as the hymn was followed by silence. The mother, herself emaciated, silenced the child with a shocked expression, and looked wonderingly about her. What a stupid idea of the child's! "You've just had your food!" she said loudly, as though she had been comfortably off. But the child went on crying: "Mother, I'm so hungry!"

Then Baker Jörgen's Sören came by, and gave the child a roll. He had a whole basket full of bread. “Are there any more children who are hungry?” he asked aloud. He looked easily in people’s faces, and was quite another creature to what he was at home; here no one laughed at him, and no one whispered that he was the brother of his own son.

An old white-bearded man mounted the pulpit at the back of the hall. “That’s him,” was whispered in every direction, and they all hastened to clear their throats by coughing, and to induce the children to empty their mouths of food. He took the cry of the little one as his text: “Mother, I am so hungry!” That was the voice of the world—that great, terrible cry—put into the mouth of a child. He saw no one there who had not writhed at the sound of that cry on the lips of his own flesh and blood—no one who, lest he should hear it again, had not sought to secure bread during his lifetime—no one who had not been beaten back. But they did not see God’s hand when that hand, in its loving-kindness, changed that mere hunger for bread into a hunger for happiness. They were the poor, and the poor are God’s chosen people. For that reason they must wander in the desert, and must blindly ask: “Where is the Promised Land?” But the gleam of which the faithful followed was not earthly happiness! God himself led them to and fro until their hunger was purged and became the true hunger—the hunger of the soul for eternal happiness!

They did not understand much of what he said; but his words set free something within them, so that they engaged in lively conversation over everyday things. But suddenly the buzz of conversation was silenced; a little hunchbacked man had clambered up on a bench and was looking them over with glittering eyes. This was Sort, the traveling shoemaker from the outer suburb.

“We want to be glad and merry,” he said, assuming a droll expression; “God’s children are always glad, however much evil they have to fight against, and they can meet with no misfortune—God is Joy!” He began to laugh, as boisterously as a child, and they all laughed with him; one infected the next. They could not control themselves; it was as though an immense merriment had overwhelmed them all. The little children looked at the grown-ups and laughed, till their little throats began to cough with laughing. “He’s a proper clown!” said the men to their wives, their own faces broad with laughter, “but he’s got a good heart!”

On the bench next to Pelle sat a silent family, a man and wife and three children, who breathed politely through their raw little noses. The parents were little people, and there was a kind of inward deftness about them, as though they were continually striving to make themselves yet smaller. Pelle knew them a little, and entered into conversation with them. The man was a clay-worker, and they lived in one of the miserable huts near the “Great Power’s” home.

“Yes, that is true—that about happiness,” said the wife. “Once we too used to dream of getting on in the world a little, so that we might be sure of our livelihood; and we scraped a little money together, that some good people lent us, and we set up in a little shop, and I kept it while father went to work. But it wouldn’t answer; no one supported us, and we got poorer goods because we were poor, and who cares about dealing with very poor people? We had to give it up, and we were deeply in debt, and we’re still having to pay it off—fifty öre every week, and there we shall be as long as we live, for the interest is always mounting up. But we are honorable people, thank God!” she concluded. The man took no part in the conversation.

Her last remark was perhaps evoked by a man who had quietly entered the hall, and was now crouching on a bench in the background; for he was not an honorable man. He had lived on a convict’s bread and water; he was “Thieving Jacob,” who about ten years earlier had smashed in the window of Master Jeppe’s best room and had stolen a pair of patent-leather shoes for his wife. He had heard of a rich man who had given his betrothed such a pair of shoes, and he wanted to see what it was like, just for once, to give a really fine present—a present worth as much as one would earn in two weeks. This he had explained before the court. “Numbskull!” said Jeppe always, when the conversation touched upon Jacob; “for such a miserable louse suddenly to get a swollen head, to want to make big presents! And if it had been for his young woman even—but for his wife! No, he paid the penalty to the very last day—in spite of Andres.”

Yes, he certainly had to pay the penalty! Even here no one would sit next to him! Pelle looked at him and wondered that his own offence should be so little regarded. The remembrance of it now only lay in people’s eyes when they spoke to him. But at this moment Smith Dam went and sat next to Thieving Jacob, and they sat hand-in-hand and whispered.

And over yonder sat some one who nodded to Pelle—in such a friendly manner; it was the woman of the dancing-shoes; her young man had left her, and now she was stranded here—her dancing days were over. Yet she was grateful to Pelle; the sight of him had recalled delightful memories; one could see that by the expression of her eyes and mouth.

Pelle’s own temper was softened as he sat there. Something melted within him; a quiet and humble feeling of happiness came over him. There was still one human being who believed herself in Pelle’s debt, although everything had gone wrong for her.

As the meeting was breaking up, at half-past nine, she was standing in the street, in conversation with another woman. She came up to Pelle, giving him her hand. “Shall we walk a little way together?” she asked him. She evidently knew of his circumstances; he read compassion in her glance. “Come with me,” she said, as their ways parted. “I have a scrap of sausage that’s got to be eaten. And we are both of us lonely.”

Hesitatingly he went with her, a little hostile, for the occasion was new and unfamiliar. But once he was seated in her little room he felt thoroughly at ease. Her white, dainty bed stood against the wall. She went to and fro about the room, cooking the sausage at the stove, while she opened her heart to him, unabashed.

It isn’t everybody would take things so easily! thought Pelle, and he watched her moving figure quite happily.

They had a cheerful meal, and Pelle wanted to embrace her in his gratitude, but she pushed his hands away. “You can keep that for another time!” she said, laughing. “I’m a poor old widow, and you are nothing but a child. If you want to give me pleasure, why, just settle down and come to yourself again. It isn’t right that you should be just loafing about and idling, and you so young and such a nice boy. And now go home, for I must get up early to-morrow and go to my work.”

Pelle visited her almost every evening. She had a disagreeable habit of shaking him out of his slumber, but her simple and unchanging manner of accepting and enduring everything was invigorating. Now and again she found a little work for him, and was always delighted when she could share her poor meal with him. “Any one like myself feels a need of seeing a man-body at the table-end once in a while,” she said. “But hands off—you don’t owe me anything!”

She criticized his clothes. “They’ll all fall off your body soon— why don’t you put on something else and let me see to them?”

“I have nothing but these,” said Pelle, ashamed.

On Saturday evening he had to take off his rags, and creep, mother-naked, into her bed. She would take no refusal, and she took shirt and all, and put them into a bucket of water. It took her half the night to clean everything. Pelle lay in bed watching her, the coverlet up to his chin. He felt very strange. As for her, she hung the whole wash to dry over the stove, and made herself a bed on a couple of chairs. When he woke up in the middle of the morning she was sitting by the window mending his clothes.

“But what sort of a night did you have?” asked Pelle, a trifle concerned.

“Excellent! Do you know what I’ve thought of this morning? You ought to give up your room and stay here until you are on your feet again — you’ve had a good rest—for once,” she smiled teasingly. “That room is an unnecessary expense. As you see, there’s room here for two.”

But Pelle would not agree. He would not hear of being supported by a woman. “Then people will believe that there’s something wrong between us—and make a scandal of it,” he said.

“Let them then!” she answered, with her gay laugh. “If I’ve a good conscience it’s indifferent to me what others think.” While she was talking she was working diligently at his linen, and she threw one article after another at his head. Then she ironed his suit. “Now you’re quite a swell again!” she said, when he stood up dressed once more, and she looked at him affectionately. “It’s as though you had become a new creature. If I were only ten or fifteen years younger I’d be glad to go down the street on your arm. But you shall give me a kiss—I’ve put you to rights again, as if you were my own child.” She kissed him heartily and turned about to the stove.

“And now I’ve got no better advice than that we have some cold dinner together and then go our ways,” she said, with her back still turned. “All my firing has been used overnight to dry your things, and you can’t stay here in the cold. I think I can pay a visit somewhere or other, and so the day will pass; and you can find some corner to put yourself in.’

“It’s all the same to me where I am,” said Pelle indifferently.

She looked at him with a peculiar smile. “Are you really always going to be a loafer?” she said. “You men are extraordinary creatures! If anything at all goes wrong with you, you must start drinking right away, or plunge yourself into unhappiness in some other way—you are no better than babies! We must work quietly on, however things go with us!” She stood there hesitating in her hat and cloak. “Here’s five-and-twenty öre,” she said; “that’s just for a cup of coffee to warm you!”

Pelle would not accept it. “What do I want with your money?” he said. “Keep it yourself!”

“Take it, do! I know it’s only a little, but I have no more, and there’s no need for us to be ashamed of being helped by one another.” She put the coin in his jacket pocket and hurried off.

Pelle strolled out to the woods. He did not feel inclined to go home, to resume the aimless battle with Ström. He wandered along the deserted paths, and experienced a feeble sense of well-being when he noticed that the spring was really coming. The snow was still lying beneath the old moss-gray pinetrees, but the toadstools were already thrusting their heads up through the pine-needles, and one had a feeling, when walking over the ground, as though one trod upon rising dough.

He found himself pondering over his own affairs, and all of a sudden he awoke out of his half-slumber. Something had just occurred to him, something cozy and intimate—why, yes, it was the thought that he might go to Marie and set up for himself, like Jens and his girl. He could get hold of a few lasts and sit at home and work … he could scrape along for a bit, until better times came. She earned something too, and she was generous.

But when he thought over the matter seriously it assumed a less pleasant aspect. He had already sufficiently abused her poverty and her goodness of heart. He had taken her last scrap of firing, so that she was now forced to go out in order to get a little warmth and some supper. The idea oppressed him. Now that his eyes were opened he could not escape this feeling of shame. It went home and to bed with him, and behind all her goodness he felt her contempt for him, because he did not overcome his misery by means of work, like a respectable fellow.

On the following morning he was up early, and applied for work down at the harbor. He did not see the necessity of work in the abstract, but he would not be indebted to a woman. On Sunday evening he would repay her outlay over him and his clothes.

XXIV

Pelle stood on the floor of the basin, loading broken stone into the tip-wagons. When a wagon was full he and his comrade pushed it up to the head of the track, and came gliding back hanging to the empty wagons. Now and again the others let fall their tools, and looked across to where he stood; he was really working well for a cobbler! And he had a fine grip when it came to lifting the stone. When he had to load a great mass of rock into the wagon, he would lift it first to his knee, then he would let out an oath and put his whole body into it; he would wipe the sweat from his forehead and take a dram of brandy or a drop of beer. He was as good as any of the other men!

He did not bother himself with ideas; two and two might make five for all he cared; work and fatigue were enough for him. Hard work had made his body supple and filled him with a sense of sheer animal well-being. “Will my beer last out the afternoon to-day?” he would wonder; beyond that nothing mattered. The future did not exist, nor yet the painful feeling that it did not exist; there was no remorse in him for what he had lost, or what he had neglected; hard work swallowed up everything else. There was only this stone that had to be removed—and then the next! This wagon which had to be filled— and then the next! If the stone would not move at the first heave he clenched his teeth; he was as though possessed by his work. “He’s still fresh to harness,” said the others; “he’ll soon knock his horns off!” But Pelle wanted to show his strength; that was his only ambition. His mate let him work away in peace and did not fatigue himself. From time to time he praised Pelle, in order to keep his steam up.

This work down at the harbor was the hardest and lowest kind of labor; any one could get taken on for it without previous qualifications. Most of Pelle’s comrades were men who had done with the world, who now let themselves go as the stream carried them, and he felt at ease among them. He stood on the solid ground, and no words had power to call the dead past to life; it had power to haunt only an empty brain. An iron curtain hung before the future; happiness lay here to his hand; the day’s fatigue could straightway be banished by joyous drinking.

His free time he spent with his companions. They led an unsettled, roving life; the rumor that extensive works were to be carried out had enticed them hither. Most were unmarried; a few had wives and children somewhere, but held their tongues about them, or no longer remembered their existence, unless reminded by something outside themselves. They had no proper lodgings, but slept in Carrier Köller’s forsaken barn, which was close to the harbor. They never undressed, but slept in the straw, and washed in a bucket of water that was seldom changed; their usual diet consisted of stale bread, and eggs, which they grilled over a fire made between two stones.

The life pleased Pelle, and he liked the society. On Sundays they ate and drank alternately, all day long, and lay in the smoke-filled barn; burrowing deep into the straw, they told stories, tragic stories of youngest sons who seized an axe and killed their father and mother, and all their brothers and sisters, because they thought they were being cheated of their share of their inheritance! Of children who attended confirmation class, and gave way to love, and had children themselves, and were beheaded for what they did! And of wives who did not wish to bring into the world the children it was their duty to bear, and whose wombs were closed as punishment!

Since Pelle had begun to work here he had never been out to see Marie Nielsen. “She’s making a fool of you,” said the others, to whom he had spoken of Marie; “she’s playing the respectable so that you shall bite. Women have always got second thoughts—it’s safest to be on the lookout. They and these young widows would rather take two than one—they’re the worst of all. A man must be a sturdy devil to be able to stand up against them.”

But Pelle was a man, and would allow no woman to lead him by the nose. Either you were good friends and no fuss about it, or nothing. He’d tell her that on Saturday, and throw ten kroner on the table— then they would sure enough be quits! And if she made difficulties she’d get one over the mouth! He could not forgive her for using all her firing, and having to pass Sunday in the street; the remembrance would not leave him, and it burned like an angry spark. She wanted to make herself out a martyr.

One day, about noon, Pelle was standing among the miners on the floor of the basin; Emil and he had just come from the shed, where they had swallowed a few mouthfuls of dinner. They had given up their midday sleep in order to witness the firing of a big blast during the midday pause when the harbor would be empty. The whole space was cleared, and the people in the adjacent houses had opened their windows so that they should not be shattered by the force of the explosion.

The fuse was lit, and the men took shelter behind the caissons, and stood there chatting while they waited for the explosion. The "Great Power" was there too. He was always in the neighborhood; he would stand and stare at the workers with his apathetic expression, without taking part in anything. They took no notice of him, but let him move about as he pleased. "Take better cover, Pelle," said Emil; "it's going off directly!"

"Where are Olsen and Ström?" said some one suddenly. The men looked at one another bewildered.

"They'll be taking their midday sleep," said Emil. "They've been drinking something chronic this morning."

"Where are they sleeping?" roared the foreman, and he sprang from his cover. They all had a foreboding, but no one wanted to say. It flashed across them that they must do something. But no one stirred. "Lord Jesus!" said Bergendal, and he struck his fist against the stone wall. "Lord Jesus!"

The "Great Power" sprang from his shelter and ran along the side of the basin, taking long leaps from one mass of rock to the next, his mighty wooden shoes clattering as he went. "He's going to tear the fuse away!" cried Bergendal. "He'll never reach it—it must be burnt in!" There was a sound as of a cry of distress, far above the heads of those who heard it. They breathlessly followed the movements of the "Great Power"; they had come completely out of shelter. In Pelle an irrational impulse sprang into being. He made a leap forward, but was seized by the scruff of the neck. "One is enough," said Bergendal, and he threw him back.

Now the "Great Power" had reached the goal. His hand was stretched out to seize the fuse. Suddenly he was hurled away from the fuse, as though by an invisible hand, and was swept upward and backward through the air, gently, like a human balloon, and fell on his back. Then the roar of the explosion drowned everything.

When the last fragments had fallen the men ran forward. The "Great Power" lay stretched upon his back, looking quietly up at the sky. The corners of his mouth were a little bloody and the blood trickled from a hole behind the ear. The two drunken men were scathless. They rose to their feet, bewildered, a few paces beyond the site of the explosion. The "Great Power" was borne into the shed, and while the doctor was sent for Emil tore a strip from his blouse, and soaked it in brandy, and laid it behind the ear.

The "Great Power" opened his eyes and looked about him. His glance was so intelligent that every one knew that he had not long to live.

"It smells of brandy here," he said. "Who will stand me a drop?" Emil reached him the bottle, and he emptied it. "It tastes good," he said easily. "Now I haven't touched brandy for I don't know how long, but what was the good? The poor man must drink brandy, or he's good for nothing; it is no joke being a poor man! There is no other salvation for him; that you have seen by Ström and Olsen—drunken men never come to any harm. Have they come to any harm?" He tried to raise his head. Ström stepped forward. "Here we are," he said, his voice stifled with emotion. "But I'd give a good deal to have had us both blown to hell instead of this happening. None of us has wished you any good!" He held out his hand.

But the "Great Power" could not raise his; he lay there, staring up through the holes in the thatched roof. "It has been hard enough, certainly, to belong to the poor," he said, "and it's a good thing it's all over. But you owe me no thanks. Why should I leave you in the lurch and take everything for myself—would that be like the 'Great Power'? Of course, the plan was mine! But could I have carried it out alone? No, money does everything. You've fairly deserved it! The 'Great Power' doesn't want to have more than any one else—where we have all done an equal amount of work." He raised his hand, painfully, and made a magnanimous gesture.

"There—he believes he's the engineer of the harbor works!" said Ström. "He's wandering. Wouldn't a cold application do him good?" Emil took the bucket in order to fetch fresh water. The "Great Power" lay with closed eyes and a faint smile on his face; he was like a blind man who is listening. "Do you understand," he said, without opening his eyes, "how we have labored and labored, and yet have been barely able to earn our daily bread? The big people sat there and ate up everything that we could produce; when we laid down our tools and wanted to still our hunger there was nothing. They stole our thoughts, and if we had a pretty sweetheart or a young daughter they could do with her too—they didn't disdain our cripple even. But now that's done with, and we will rejoice that we have lived to see it; it might have gone on for a long time. Mother wouldn't believe what I told her at all—that the bad days would soon be over. But now just see! Don't I get just as much for my work as the doctor for his? Can't I keep my wife and daughter neat and have books and get myself a piano, just as he can? Isn't it a great thing to perform manual labor too? Karen has piano lessons now, just as I've always wished, for she's weakly and can't stand any hard work. You should just come home with me and hear her play—she does it so easily too! Poor people's children have talent too, it's just that no one notices it."

"God, how he talks!" said Ström, crying. "It's almost as if he had the delirium."

Pelle bent down over the "Great Power." "Now you must be good and be quiet," he said, and laid something wet on his forehead. The blood was trickling rapidly from behind his ear.

"Let him talk," said Olsen. "He hasn't spoken a word for months now; he must feel the need to clear his mind this once. It'll be long before he speaks again, too!"

Now the "Great Power" was only weakly moving his lips. His life was slowly bleeding away. "Have you got wet, little Karen?" he murmured. "Ah, well, it'll dry again! And now it's all well with you, now you can't complain. Is it fine to be a young lady? Only tell me everything you want. Why be modest? We've been that long enough! Gloves for the work-worn fingers, yes, yes. But you must play something for me too. Play that lovely song: 'On the joyful journey through the lands of earth....' That about the Eternal Kingdom!"

Gently he began to hum it; he could no longer keep time by moving his head, but he blinked his eyes in time; and now his humming broke out into words.

Something irresistibly impelled the others to sing in concert with him; perhaps the fact that it was a religious song. Pelle led them with his clear young voice; and it was he who best knew the words by heart.

"Fair, fair is earth,
And glorious Heaven;
Fair is the spirit's journey long;
Through all the lovely earthly kingdoms,
Go we to Paradise with song."

The "Great Power" sang with increasing strength, as though he would outsing Pelle. One of his feet was moving now, beating the time of the song. He lay with closed eyes, blindly rocking his head in time with the voices, like one who, at a drunken orgy, must put in his last word before he slips under the table. The saliva was running from the corners of his mouth.

"The years they come,
The years they go,
And down the road to death we throng,
But ever sound the strains from heaven—
The spirit's joyful pilgrim song!"

The "Great Power" ceased; his head drooped to one side, and at the same moment the others ceased to sing.

They sat in the straw and gazed at him—his last words still rang in their ears, like a crazy dream, which mingled oddly with the victorious notes of the hymn.

They were all sensible of the silent accusation of the dead, and in the solemnity of the moment they judged and condemned themselves.

"Yes, who knows what we might come to!" said one ragged fellow, thoughtfully chewing a length of straw.

"I shall never do any good," said Emil dejectedly. "With me it's always been from bad to worse. I was apprenticed, and when I became a journeyman they gave me the sack; I had wasted five years of my life and couldn't do a thing. Pelle—he'll get on all right."

Astonished, Pelle raised his head and gazed at Emil uncomprehendingly.

"What use is it if a poor devil tries to make his way up? He'll always be pushed down again!" said Olsen. "Just look at the 'Great Power'; could any one have had a better claim than he? No, the big folks don't allow us others to make our way up!"

"And have we allowed it ourselves?" muttered Ström. "We are always uneasy if one of our own people wants to fly over our heads!"

"I don't understand why all the poor folk don't make a stand together against the others," said Bergendal. "We suffer the same wrongs. If we all acted together, and had nothing to do with them that mean us harm, for instance, then it would soon be seen that collective poverty is what makes the wealth of the others. And I've heard that that's what they're doing elsewhere."

"But we shall never in this life be unanimous about anything whatever," said an old stonemason sadly. "If one of the gentlemen only scratches our neck a bit, then we all grovel at his feet, and let ourselves be set on to one of our own chaps. If we were all like the 'Great Power,' then things might have turned out different."

They were silent again; they sat there and gazed at the dead man; there was something apologetic in the bearing of each and all.

"Yes, that comes late!" said Ström, with a sigh. Then he felt in the straw and pulled out a bottle.

Some of the men still sat there, trying to put into words something that ought perhaps to be said; but then came the doctor, and they drew in their horns. They picked up their beer-cans and went out to their work.

Silently Pelle gathered his possessions together and went to the foreman. He asked for his wages.

"That's sudden," said the foreman. "You were getting on so well just now. What do you want to do now?"

"I just want my wages," rejoined Pelle. What more he wanted, he himself did not know. And then he went home and put his room in order. It was like a pigsty; he could not understand how he could have endured such untidiness. In the meantime he thought listlessly of some way of escape. It had been very convenient to belong to the dregs of society, and to know that he could not sink any deeper; but perhaps there were still other possibilities. Emil had said a stupid thing—what did he mean by it? "Pelle, he'll get on all right!" Well, what did Emil know of the misery of others? He had enough of his own.

He went down into the street in order to buy a little milk; then he would go back and sleep. He felt a longing to deaden all the thoughts that once more began to seethe in his head.

Down in the street he ran into the arms of Sort, the wandering shoemaker. "Now we've got you!" cried Sort. "I was just coming here and wondering how best I could get to speak with you. I wanted to tell you that I begin my travelling to-morrow. Will you come with me? It is a splendid life, to be making the round of the farms now in the spring-time; and you'll go to the dogs if you stay here. Now you know all about it and you can decide. I start at six o'clock! I can't put it off any later!"

Sort had observed Pelle that evening at the prayer-meeting, and on several occasions had spoken to him in the hope of arousing him. "He can put off his travels for a fortnight as far as I'm concerned!" thought Pelle, with a touch of self-esteem. He wouldn't go! To go begging for work from farm to farm! Pelle had learned his craft in the workshop, and looked down with contempt upon the travelling cobbler, who lives from hand to mouth and goes from place to place like a beggar, working with leather and waxed-ends provided on the spot, and eating out of the same bowl as the farm servants. So much pride of craft was still left in Pelle. Since his apprentice days, he had been accustomed to regard Sort as a pitiful survival from the past, a species properly belonging to the days of serfdom.

"You'll go to the dogs!" Sort had said. And all Marie Melsen's covert allusions had meant the same thing. But what then? Perhaps he had already gone to the dogs! Suppose there was no other escape than this! But now he would sleep, and think no more of all these things.

He drank his bottle of milk and ate some bread with it, and went to bed. He heard the church clock striking—it was midnight, and glorious weather. But Pelle wanted to sleep—only to sleep! His heart was like lead.

He awoke early next morning and was out of bed with one leap. The sun filled his room, and he himself was filled with a sense of health and well-being. Quickly he slipped into his clothes—there was still so much that he wanted to do! He threw up the window, and drank in the spring morning in a breath that filled his body with a sense of profound joy. Out at sea the boats were approaching the harbor; the morning sun fell on the slack sails, and made them glow; every boat was laboring heavily forward with the aid of its tiller. He had slept like a stone, from the moment of lying down until now. Sleep lay like a gulf between yesterday and to-day. Whistling a tune to himself, he packed his belongings and set out upon his way, a little bundle under his arm. He took the direction of the church, in order to see the time. It was still not much past five. Then he made for the outermost suburb with vigorous steps, as joyful as though he were treading the road to happiness.

XXV

Two men appeared from the wood and crossed the highroad. One was little and hump-backed; he had a shoemaker’s bench strapped tightly on his back; the edge rested on his hump, and a little pillow was thrust between, so that the bench should not chafe him. The other was young and strongly built; a little thin, but healthy and fresh- colored. He carried a great bundle of lasts on his back, which were held in equilibrium by another box, which he carried on his chest, and which, to judge by the sounds that proceeded from it, contained tools. At the edge of the ditch he threw down his burden and unstrapped the bench from the hunchback. They threw themselves down in the grass and gazed up into the blue sky. It was a glorious morning; the birds twittered and flew busily to and fro, and the cattle were feeding in the dewy clover, leaving long streaks behind them as they moved.

“And in spite of that, you are always happy?” said Pelle. Sort had been telling him the sad story of his childhood.

“Yes, look you, it often vexes me that I take everything so easily— but what if I can’t find anything to be sad about? If I once go into the matter thoroughly, I always hit on something or other that makes me still happier—as, for instance, your society. You are young, and health beams out of your eyes. The girls become so friendly wherever we go, and it’s as though I myself were the cause of their pleasure!”

“Where do you really get your knowledge of everything?” asked Pelle.

“Do you find that I know so much?” Sort laughed gaily. “I go about so much, and I see so many different households, some where man and wife are as one, and others where they live like cat and dog. I come into contact with people of every kind. And I get to know a lot, too, because I’m not like other men—more than one maiden has confided her miseries to me. And then in winter, when I sit alone, I think over everything—and the Bible is a good book, a book a man can draw wisdom from. There a man learns to look behind things; and if you once realize that everything has its other side, then you learn to use your understanding. You can go behind everything if you want to, and they all lead in the same direction —to God. And they all came from Him. He is the connection, do you see; and once a man grasps that, then he is always happy. It would be splendid to follow things up further—right up to where they divide, and then to show, in spite of all, that they finally run together in God again! But that I’m not able to do.”

“We ought to see about getting on.” Pelle yawned, and he began to bestir himself.

“Why? We’re so comfortable here—and we’ve already done what we undertook to do. What if there should be a pair of boots yonder which Sort and Pelle won’t get to sole before they’re done with? Some one else will get the job!”

Pelle threw himself on his back and again pulled his cap over his eyes —he was in no hurry. He had now been travelling nearly a month with Sort, and had spent almost as much time on the road as sitting at his work. Sort could never rest when he had been a few days in one place; he must go on again! He loved the edge of the wood and the edge of the meadow, and could spend half the day there. And Pelle had many points of contact with this leisurely life in the open air; he had his whole childhood to draw upon. He could lie for hours, chewing a grass-stem, patient as a convalescent, while sun and air did their work upon him.

“Why do you never preach to me?” he said suddenly, and he peeped mischievously from tinder his cap.

“Why should I preach to you? Because I am religious? Well, so are you; every one who rejoices and is content is religious.”

“But I’m not at all content!” retorted Pelle, and he rolled on his back with all four limbs in the air. “But you—I don’t understand why you don’t get a congregation; you’ve got such a power over language.”

“Yes, if I were built as you are—fast enough. But I’m humpbacked!”

“What does that matter? You don’t want to run after the women!”

“No, but one can’t get on without them; they bring the men and the children after them. And it’s really queer that they should—for women don’t bother themselves about God! They haven’t the faculty of going behind things. They choose only according to the outside—they want to hang everything on their bodies as finery—and the men too, yes, and the dear God best of all—they’ve got a use for the lot!”

Pelle lay still for a time, revolving his scattered experiences. “But

Marie Nielsen wasn’t like that,” he said thoughtfully. “She’d willingly give the shirt off her body and ask nothing for herself. I’ve behaved badly to her—I didn’t even say goodbye before I came away!”

“Then you must look her up when we come to town and confess your fault. There was no lovemaking between you?”

“She treated me like a child; I’ve told you.”

Sort was silent a while.

“If you would help me, we’d soon get a congregation! I can see it in your eyes, that you’ve got influence over them, if you only cared about it; for instance, the girl at Willow Farm. Thousands would come to us.”

Pelle did not answer. His thoughts were roaming back wonderingly to Willow Farm, where Sort and he had last been working; he was once more in that cold, damp room with the over-large bed, on which the pale girl’s face was almost invisible. She lay there encircling her thick braids with her transparent hand, and gazed at him; and the door was gently closed behind him. “That was really a queer fancy,” he said, and he breathed deeply; “some one she’d never laid eyes on before; I could cry now when I think of it.”

“The old folks had told her we were there, and asked if she wouldn’t like me to read something from God’s word with her. But she’d rather see you. The father was angry and didn’t want to allow it. ‘She has never thought about young men before,’ he said, ‘and she shall stand before the throne of God and the Lamb quite pure.’ But I said, ‘Do you know so precisely that the good God cares anything for what you call purity, Ole Jensen? Let the two of them come together, if they can take any joy in it.’ Then we shut the door behind you—and how was it then?” Sort turned toward Pelle.

“You know,” replied Pelle crossly. “She just lay there and looked at me as though she was thinking: ‘That’s what he looks like—and he’s come a long way here.’ I could see by her eyes that you had spoken of me and that she knew about all my swinishness.”

Sort nodded.

“Then she held out her hand to me. How like she is to one of God’s angels already—I thought—but it’s a pity in one who’s so young. And then I went close to her and took her hand.”

“And what then?” Sort drew nearer to Pelle. His eyes hung expectantly on Pelle’s lips.

“Then she stretched out her mouth to me a little—and at that very moment I forgot what sort of a hog I’d been—and I kissed her!”

“Didn’t she say anything to you—not a word?”

“She only looked at me with those eyes that you can’t understand. Then I didn’t know what I—what I ought to do next, so I came away.”

“Weren’t you afraid that she might transfer death to you?”

“No; why should I be? I didn’t think about it. But she could never think of a thing like that—so child-like as she was!”

They both lay for a time without speaking. “You have something in you that conquers them all!” said Sort at length. “If only you would help me—I’d see to the preaching!”

Pelle stretched himself indolently—he felt no desire to create a new religion. “No, I want to go away and see the world now,” he said. “There must be places in that world where they’ve already begun to go for the rich folks—that’s where I want to go!”

“One can’t achieve good by the aid of evil—you had better stay here! Here you know where you are—and if we went together—”

“No, there’s nothing here for any one to do who is poor—if I go on here any longer, I shall end in the mud again. I want to have my share—even if I have to strike a bloodsucker dead to get it—and that couldn’t be any very great sin! But shan’t we see about getting on now? We’ve been a whole month now tramping round these Sudland farms. You’ve always promised me that we should make our way toward the heath. For months now I’ve heard nothing of Father Lasse and Karna. When things began to go wrong with me, it was as though I had quite forgotten them.”

Sort rose quickly. “Good! So you’ve still thoughts for other things than killing bloodsuckers! How far is it, then, to Heath Farm?”

“A good six miles.”

“We’ll go straight there. I’ve no wish to begin anything to-day.”

They packed their possessions on their backs and trudged onward in cheerful gossip. Sort pictured their arrival to Pelle. “I shall go in first and ask whether they’ve any old boots or harness that we can mend; and then you’ll come in, while we’re in the middle of a conversation.”

Pelle laughed. “Shan’t I carry the bench for you? I can very well strap it on the other things.”

“You shan’t sweat for me as well as yourself!” rejoined Sort, laughing. “You’d want to take off even your trousers then.”

They had chattered enough, and tramped on in silence. Pelle stepped forward carelessly, drinking in the fresh air. He was conscious of a superfluity of strength and well-being; otherwise he thought of nothing, but merely rejoiced unconsciously over his visit to his home. At every moment he had to moderate his steps, so that Sort should not be left behind.

“What are you really thinking about now?” he asked suddenly. He would always have it that Sort was thinking of something the moment he fell silent. One could never know beforehand in what region he would crop up next.

“That’s just what the children ask!” replied Sort, laughing. “They always want to know what’s inside.”

“Tell me, then—you might as well tell me!”

“I was thinking about life. Here you walk at my side, strong and certain of victory as the young David. And yet a month ago you were part of the dregs of society!”

“Yes, that is really queer,” said Pelle, and he became thoughtful.

“But how did you get into such a mess? You could quite well have kept your head above water if you had only wanted to!”

“That I really don’t know. I tell you, it’s as if some one had hit you over the head; and then you run about and don’t know what you’re doing; and it isn’t so bad if you’ve once got there. You work and drink and bang each other over the head with your beer-cans or bottles—”

“You say that so contentedly—you don’t look behind things—that’s the point! I’ve seen so many people shipwrecked; for the poor man it’s only one little step aside, and he goes to the dogs; and he himself believes he’s a devilish fine fellow. But it was a piece of luck that you got out of it all! Yes, it’s a wonder remorse didn’t make your life bitter.”

“If we felt remorse we had brandy,” said Pelle, with an experienced air. “That soon drives out everything else.”

“Then it certainly has its good points—it helps a man over the time of waiting!”

“Do you really believe that an eternal kingdom is coming—the ‘thousand-year kingdom’—the millennium? With good times for all, for the poor and the miserable?”

Sort nodded. “God has promised it, and we must believe His Word. Something is being prepared over on the mainland, but whether it’s the real millennium, I don’t know.”

They tramped along. The road was stony and deserted. On either side the rocky cliffs, with their scrubby growth, were beginning to rise from the fields, and before them ranged the bluish rocky landscape of the heath or moorland. “As soon as we’ve been home, I shall travel; I must cross the sea and find out what they do really intend there,” said Pelle.

“I have no right to hold you back,” answered Sort quietly, “but it will be lonely travelling for me. I shall feel as if I’d lost a son. But of course you’ve got other things to think of than to remember a poor hunchback! The world is open to you. Once you’ve feathered your nest, you’ll think no more of little Sort!”

“I shall think of you, right enough,” replied Pelle. “And as soon as I’m doing well I shall come back and look out for you—not before. Father will be sure to object to my idea of travelling—he would so like me to take over Heath Farm from him; but there you must back me up. I’ve no desire to be a farmer.”

“I’ll do that.”

“Now just look at it! Nothing but stone upon stone with heather and scrubby bushes in between! That’s what Heath Farm was four years ago—and now it’s quite a fine property. That the two of them have done—without any outside help.”

“You must be built of good timber,” said Sort. “But what poor fellow is that up on the hill? He’s got a great sack on his back and he’s walking as if he’d fall down at every step.”

“That—that is Father Lasse! Hallo!” Pelle waved his cap.

Lasse came stumbling up to them; he dropped his sack and gave them his hand without looking at them.

“Are you coming this way?” cried Pelle joyfully; “we were just going on to look for you!”

"You can save yourself the trouble! You've become stingy about using your legs. Spare them altogether!" said Lasse lifelessly.

Pelle stared at him. "What's the matter? Are you leaving?"

"Yes, we're leaving!" Lasse laughed—a hollow laugh. "Leaving—yes! We've left—indeed, we've each of us gone our own way. Karna has gone where there's no more care and trouble—and here's Lasse, with all that's his!" He struck his foot against the sack, and stood there with face averted from them, his eyes fixed upon the ground.

All signs of life had vanished from Pelle's face. Horrified, he stared at his father, and his lips moved, but he could form no words.

"Here I must meet my own son by accident in the middle of the empty fields! So often as I've looked for you and asked after you! No one knew anything about you. Your own flesh and blood has turned from you, I thought—but I had to tell Karna you were ill. She fully expected to see you before she went away. Then you must give him my love, she said, and God grant all may go well with him. She thought more about you than many a mother would have done! Badly you've repaid it. It's a long time ago since you set foot in our house."

Still Pelle did not speak; he stood there swaying from side to side; every word was like the blow of a club.

"You mustn't be too hard on him!" said Sort. "He's not to blame—ill as he's been!"

"Ah, so you too have been through bad times and have got to fight your way, eh? Then, as your father, I must truly be the last to blame you." Lasse stroked his son's sleeve, and the caress gave Pelle pleasure. "Cry, too, my son—it eases the mind. In me the tears are dried up long ago. I must see how I can bear my grief; these have become hard times for me, you may well believe. Many a night have I sat by Karna and been at my wits' end—I could not leave her and go for help, and everything went wrong with us all at the same time. It almost came to my wishing you were ill. You were the one who ought to have had a kindly thought for us, and you could always have sent us news. But there's an end of it all!"

"Are you going to leave Heath Farm, father?" asked Pelle quietly.

"They have taken it away from me," replied Lasse wretchedly. "With all these troubles, I couldn't pay the last instalment, and now their patience is at an end. Out of sheer compassion they let me stay till Karna had fought out her fight and was happily buried in the earth—every one could see it wasn't a matter of many days more."

"If it is only the interest," said Sort, "I have a few hundred kroner which I've saved up for my old days."

"Now it's too late; the farm is already taken over by another man. And even if that were not the case—what should I do there without Karna? I'm no longer any use!"

"We'll go away together, father!" said Pelle, raising his head.

"No; I go nowhere now except to the churchyard. They have taken my farm away from me, and Karna has worked herself to death, and I myself have left what strength I had behind me. And then they took it away from me!"

"I will work for us both—you shall be comfortable and enjoy your old days!" Pelle saw light in the distance.

Lasse shook his head. "I can no longer put things away from me—I can no longer leave them behind and go on again!"

"I propose that we go into the town," said Sort. "Up by the church we are sure to find some one who will drive us in."

They collected their things and set off. Lasse walked behind the others, talking to himself; from time to time he broke out into lamentation. Then Pelle turned back to him in silence and took his hand.

"There is no one to help us and give us good advice. On the contrary, they'd gladly see us lose life and fortune if they could only earn a few shillings on that account. Even the authorities won't help the poor man. He's only there so that they can all have a cut at him and then each run off with his booty. What do they care that they bring need and misery and ruin upon us? So long as they get their taxes and their interest! I could stick them all in the throat, in cold blood!"

So he continued a while, increasing in bitterness, until he broke down like a little child.

XXVI

They lived with Sort, who had his own little house in the outermost suburb. The little travelling cobbler did not know what to do for them: Lasse was so dejected and so aimless. He could not rest; he did not recover; from time to time he broke out into lamentation. He had grown very frail, and could no longer lift his spoon to his mouth without spilling the contents. If they tried to distract him, he became obstinate.

“Now we must see about fetching your things,” they would both say repeatedly. “There is no sense in giving your furniture to the parish.”

But Lasse would not have them sent for. “They’ve taken everything else from me; they can take that, too,” he said. “And I won’t go out there again—and let myself be pitied by every one.”

“But you’ll beggar yourself,” said Sort.

“They’ve done that already. Let them have their way. But they’ll have to answer for it in the end!”

Then Pelle procured a cart, and drove over himself to fetch them. There was quite a load to bring back. Mother Bengta’s green chest he found upstairs in the attic; it was full of balls of thread. It was so strange to see it again—for many years he had not thought of his mother. “I’ll have that for a travelling trunk,” he thought, and he took it with him.

Lasse was standing before the door when he returned.

“See, I’ve brought everything here for you, father!” he cried, lustily cracking his whip. But Lasse went in without saying a word. When they had unloaded the cart and went to look for him, he had crawled into bed. There he lay with his face to the wall, and would not speak.

Pelle told him all sorts of news of Heath Farm, in order to put a little life into him. “Now the parish has sold Heath Farm to the Hill Farm man for five thousand kroner, and they say he’s got a good bargain. He wants to live there himself and to leave Hill Farm in his son’s hands.”

Lasse half turned his head. “Yes, something grows there now. Now they are making thousands—and the farmer will do better still,” he said bitterly. “But it’s well-manured soil. Karna overstrained herself and died and left me.... And we went so well in harness together. Her thousand kroner went into it, too ... and now I’m a poor wreck. All that was put into the barren, rocky soil, so that it became good and generous soil. And then the farmer buys it, and now he wants to live there—we poor lice have prepared the way for him! What else were we there for? Fools we are to excite ourselves so over such a thing! But, how I loved the place!” Lasse suddenly burst into tears.

“Now you must be reasonable and see about becoming cheerful again,” said Sort. “The bad times for the poor man will soon be over. There is a time coming when no one will need to work himself to death for others, and when every one will reap what he himself has sown. What injury have you suffered? For you are on the right side and have thousands of kroner on which you can draw a bill. It would be still worse if you owed money to others!”

“I haven’t much more time,” said Lasse, raising himself on his elbows.

“Perhaps not, you and I, for those who start on the pilgrimage must die in the desert! But for that reason we are God’s chosen people, we poor folk. And Pelle, he will surely behold the Promised Land!”

“Now you ought to come in, father, and see how we have arranged it,” said Pelle.

Lasse stood up wearily and went with them. They had furnished one of Sort’s empty rooms with Lasse’s things. It looked quite cozy.

“We thought that you would live here until Pelle is getting on well ‘over there,’” said Sort. “No, you don’t need to thank me! I’m delighted to think I shall have society, as you may well understand.”

“The good God will repay it to you,” said Lasse, with a quavering voice. “We poor folk have no one but Him to rely on.”

Pelle could not rest, nor control his thoughts any longer; he must be off! “If you’ll give me what the fare comes to, as I’ve helped you,” he told Sort, “then I’ll start this evening....”

Sort gave him thirty kroner.

“That’s the half of what we took. There’s not so much owing to me,” said Pelle. “You are the master and had the tools and everything.”

“I won’t live by the work of other hands—only by that of my own,” said Sort, and he pushed the money across to Pelle. “Are you going to travel just as you stand?”

"No, I have plenty of money," said Pelle gaily. "I've never before possessed so much money all at once! One can get quite a lot of clothes for that."

"But you mustn't touch the money! Five kroner you'll need for the passage and the like; the rest you must save, so that you can face the future with confidence!"

"I shall soon earn plenty of money in Copenhagen!"

"He has always been a thoughtless lad," said Lasse anxiously. "Once, when he came into town here to be apprenticed he had five kroner; and as for what he spent them on, he could never give any proper account!"

Sort laughed.

"Then I shall travel as I stand!" said Pelle resolutely. But that wouldn't do, either!

He could not by any means please both—they were like two anxious clucking hens.

He had no lack of linen, for Lasse had just thought of his own supply. Karna had looked after him well. "But it will be very short for your long body. It's not the same now as it was when you left Stone Farm—then we had to put a tuck in my shirt for you."

In the matter of shoes he was not well off. It would never do for a journeyman shoemaker to look for work wearing such shoes as his. Sort and Pelle must make a pair of respectable boots. "We must leave ourselves time," said Sort. "Think! They must be able to stand the judgment of the capital!" Pelle was impatient, and wanted to get the work quickly out of hand.

Now there was only the question of a new suit. "Then buy it ready made on credit," said Sort. "Lasse and I will be good enough securities for a suit."

In the evening, before he started, he and Lasse went out to look up Due. They chose the time when they were certain of meeting Due himself. They neither of them cared much for Anna. As they approached the house they saw an old richly-dressed gentleman go in at the front door.

"That is the consul," said Pelle, "who has helped them to get on. Then Due is out with the horses, and we are certainly not welcome."

"Is it like that with them?" said Lasse, standing still. "Then I am sorry for Due when he first finds out how his affairs really stand! He will certainly find that he has bought his independence too dearly! Yes, yes; for those who want to get on the price is hard to pay. I hope it will go well with you over there, my boy."

They had reached the church. There stood a cart full of green plants; two men were carrying them into a dwelling-house.

"What festivity's going on here?" asked Pelle.

"There's to be a wedding to-morrow," answered one of the men. "Merchant Lau's daughter is marrying that swaggering fellow, who's always giving himself airs—Karlsen, he's called, and he's a poor chap like ourselves. But do you suppose he'll notice us? When dirt comes to honor, there's no bearing with it! Now he's become a partner in the business!"

"Then I'll go to the wedding," said Lasse eagerly, while they strolled on. "It is very interesting to see when one of a family comes to something." Pelle felt that this was to some extent meant as a reproach, but he said nothing.

"Shall we have one look at the new harbor?" he said.

"No, now the sun's going down, and I'll go home and get to bed. I'm old—but you go. I shall soon find my way back." Pelle strolled onward, but then turned aside toward the north—he would go and bid Marie Nielsen good-bye. He owed her a friendly word for all her goodness. Also, as an exception, she should for once see him in respectable clothes. She had just come home from her work, and was on the point of preparing her supper.

"No, Pelle, is that you?" she cried delightedly, "and so grand, too—you look like a prince!" Pelle had to remain to supper.

"I have really only come to thank you for all your friendliness and to say good-bye. To-morrow I go to Copenhagen."

She looked at him earnestly. "And you are glad!"

Pelle had to tell her what he had been doing since he had last seen her. He sat there looking gratefully about the poor, clean room, with the bed set so innocently against the wall, covered with a snow-white counterpane. He had never forgotten that fragrance of soap and cleanliness and her fresh, simple nature. She had taken him in the midst of all his misery and had not thought her own white bed too good for him while she scrubbed the mire from him. When he reached the capital he would have himself photographed and send her his portrait.

“And how are you doing now?” he asked gently.

“Just as when you last saw me—only a little more lonely,” she answered earnestly.

And then he must go. “Good-bye, and may everything go well with you!” he said, and he shook her hand. “And many thanks for all your goodness!”

She stood before him silently, looking at him with an uncertain smile. “Ah, no! I’m only a human being too!” she cried suddenly, and she flung her arms about him in a passionate embrace.

And then the great day broke! Pelle awaked with the sun and had the green chest already packed before the others were up, and then he roamed about, not knowing what he should set his hand to, he was so restless and so excited. He answered at random, and his eyes were full of radiant dreams. In the morning he and Lasse carried the chest to the steamer, in order to have the evening free. Then they went to the church, in order to attend Alfred’s wedding. Pelle would gladly have stayed away; he had enough to do with his own affairs, and he had no sympathy for Alfred’s doings.

But Lasse pushed him along.

The sun stood high in heaven and blazed in the winding side-streets so that the tarred timberwork sweated and the gutters stank; from the harbor came the sound of the crier, with his drum, crying herrings, and announcing an auction. The people streamed to church in breathless conversation concerning this child of fortune, Alfred, who had climbed so far.

The church was full of people. It was gaily decorated, and up by the organ stood eight young women who were to sing “It is so lovely together to be!” Lasse had never seen or heard of such a wedding. “I feel quite proud!” he said.

“He’s a bladder full of wind!” said Pelle. “He’s taking her simply on account of the honor.”

And then the bridal pair stepped up to the altar. “It’s tremendous the way Alfred has greased his head!” whispered Lasse. “It looks like a newly-licked calf’s head! But she is pretty. I’m only puzzled that she’s not put on her myrtle-wreath—I suppose nothing has happened?”

“Yes, she’s got a child,” whispered Pelle. “Otherwise, he would never in this world have got her!”

“Oh, I see! Yes, but that’s smart of him, to catch such a fine lady!”

Now the young women sang, and it sounded just as if they were angels from heaven who had come to seal the bond.

“We must take our places so that we can congratulate them,” said Lasse, and he wanted to push right through the crowd, but Pelle held him back.

“I’m afraid he won’t know us to-day; but look now, there’s Uncle Kalle.”

Kalle stood squeezed among the hindmost chairs, and there he had to stay until everybody had passed out. “Yes, I was very anxious to take part in this great day,” he said, “and I wanted to bring mother with me, but she thought her clothes weren’t respectable enough.” Kalle wore a new gray linsey-woolsey suit; he had grown smaller and more bent with the years.

“Why do you stand right away in the corner here, where you can see nothing? As the bridegroom’s father, you must have been given your place in the first row,” said Lasse.

“I have been sitting there, too—didn’t you see me sitting next to Merchant Lau? We sang out of the same hymn-book. I only got pushed here in the crowd. Now I ought to go to the wedding-feast. I was properly invited, but I don’t quite know….” He looked down at himself. Suddenly he made a movement, and laughed in his own reckless way. “Ugh—what am I doing standing here and telling lies to people who don’t believe me! No, pigs don’t belong in the counting-house! I might spread a bad smell, you know! People like us haven’t learned to sweat scent!”

“Bah! He’s too grand to know his own father! Devil take it! Then come with us so that you needn’t go away hungry!” said Lasse.

“No—I’ve been so overfed with roast meats and wine and cakes that I can’t get any more down for the present. Now I must go home and tell mother about all the splendid things. I’ve eighteen miles to go.”

“And you came here on foot—thirty-six miles! That’s too much for your years!”

“I had really reckoned that I’d stay the night here. I didn’t think … Well, an owl’s been sitting there! Children can’t very well climb higher than that—not to recognize their own fathers! Anna is now taking the best way to become a fine lady, too…. I shall be wondering how long I shall know myself! Devil take it, Kalle Karlsen, I’m of good family, too, look you! Well, then, ajoo!”

Wearily he set about tramping home. He looked quite pitiful in his disappointment. “He’s never looked so miserable in his life!” said Lasse, gazing after him, “and it takes something, too, to make Brother Kalle chuck his gun into the ditch!”

Toward evening they went through the town to the steamer. Pelle took long strides, and a strange feeling of solemnity kept him silent. Lasse trotted along at his side; he stooped as he went. He was in a doleful mood. “Now you won’t forget your old father?” he said, again and again.

“There’s no danger of that,” rejoined Sort. Pelle heard nothing of this; his thoughts were all set on his journey. The blue smoke of kitchen fires was drifting down among the narrow lanes. The old people were sitting out of doors on their front steps, and were gossiping over the news of the day. The evening sun fell upon round spectacles, so that great fiery eyes seemed to be staring out of their wrinkled faces. The profound peace of evening lay over the streets. But in the narrow lanes there was the breathing of that eternal, dull unrest, as of a great beast that tosses and turns and cannot sleep. Now and again it blazed up into a shout, or the crying of a child, and then began anew—like heavy, labored breathing. Pelle knew it well, that ghostly breathing, which rises always from the lair of the poor man. The cares of poverty had shepherded the evil dreams home for the night. But he was leaving this world of poverty, where life was bleeding away unnoted in the silence; in his thoughts it was fading away like a mournful song; and he gazed out over the sea, which lay glowing redly at the end of the street. Now he was going out into the world!

The crazy Anker was standing at the top of his high steps. “Good-bye!” cried Pelle, but Anker did not understand. He turned his face up to the sky and sent forth his demented cry.

Pelle threw a last glance at the workshop. “There have I spent many a good hour!” he thought; and he thought, too, of the young master. Old Jörgen was standing before his window, playing with the little Jörgen, who sat inside on the windowseat. “Peep, peep, little one!” he cried, in his shrill voice, and he hid, and bobbed up into sight again. The young wife was holding the child; she was rosy with maternal delight.

“You’ll be sure to let us hear from you,” said Lasse yet again, as Pelle stood leaning over the steamer’s rail. “Don’t forget your old father!” He was quite helpless in his anxiety.

“I will write to you as soon as I’m getting on,” said Pelle, for the twentieth time at least. “Only don’t worry!” Sure of victory, he laughed down at the old man. For the rest they stood silent and gazed at one another.

At last the steamer moved. “Good luck—take care of yourself!” he cried for the last time, as they turned the pier-head; and as long as he could see he waved his cap. Then he went right forward and sat on a coil of rope.

He had forgotten all that lay behind him. He gazed ahead as though at any moment the great world itself might rise in front of the vessel’s bow. He pictured nothing to himself of what was to come and how he would meet it—he was only longing—longing!

THE END

III. THE GREAT STRUGGLE

I

A swarm of children was playing on the damp floor of the shaft. They hung from the lower portions of the timber-work, or ran in and out between the upright supports, humming tunes, with bread-and-dripping in their hands; or they sat on the ground and pushed themselves forward across the sticky flagstones. The air hung clammy and raw, as it does in an old well, and already it had made the little voices husky, and had marked their faces with the scars of scrofula. Yet out of the tunnel- like passage which led to the street there blew now and again a warm breath of air and the fragrance of budding trees—from the world that lay behind those surrounding walls.

They had finished playing “Bro-bro-brille,” for the last rider had entered the black cauldron; and Hansel and Gretel had crept safely out of the dwarf Vinslev’s den, across the sewer-grating, and had reached the pancake-house, which, marvelously enough, had also a grating in front of the door, through which one could thrust a stick or a cabbage-stalk, in order to stab the witch. Sticks of wood and cabbage-stalks were to be found in plenty in the dustbins near the pancake-house, and they knew very well who the witch was! Now and again she would pop up out of the cellar and scatter the whole crowd with her kitchen tongs! It was almost a little too lifelike; even the smell of pancakes came drifting down from where the well-to-do Olsens lived, so that one could hardly call it a real fairy tale. But then perhaps the dwarf Vinslev would come out of his den, and would once again tell them the story of how he had sailed off with the King’s gold and sunk it out yonder, in the King’s Deep, when the Germans were in the land. A whole ship’s crew took out the King’s treasure, but not one save Vinslev knew where it was sunk, and even he did not know now. A terrible secret that, such as well might make a man a bit queer in the head. He would explain the whole chart on his double-breasted waistcoat; he had only to steer from this button to that, and then down yonder, and he was close above the treasure. But now some of the buttons had fallen off, and he could no longer make out the chart. Day by day the children helped him to trace it; this was an exciting bit of work, for the King was getting impatient!

There were other wonderful things to do; for instance, one could lie flat down on the slippery flagstones and play Hanne’s game—the “Glory” game. You turned your eyes from the darkness down below, looking up through the gloomy shaft at the sky overhead, which floated there blazing with light, and then you suddenly looked down again, so that everything was quite dark. And in the darkness floated blue and yellow rings of color, where formerly there had been nothing but dustbins and privies. This dizzy flux of colors before the eyes was the journey far out to the land of happiness, in search of all the things that cannot be told. “I can see something myself, and I know quite well what it is, but I’m just not going to tell,” they murmured, blinking mysteriously up into the blue.

However, one could have too much of a good thing.... But the round grating under the timbers yonder, where Hanne’s father drowned himself, was a thing one never grew weary of. The depths were forever bubbling upward, filling the little children with a secret horror; and the half- grown girls would stand a-straddle over the grating, shuddering at the cold breath that came murmuring up from below. The grating was sure enough the way down to hell, and if you gazed long enough you could see the faintest glimmer of the inky stream that was flowing down below. Every moment it sent its putrid breath up into your face; that was the Devil, who sat panting down there in a corner. If you turned your eyes away from the depths the twilight of the well had turned to brightest day, so you could make the world light or dark just as you wished.

A few children always lay there, on all fours, gazing down with anxious faces; and all summer through, directly over the grating, hung a cloud of midges, swaying in the breath of the depths. They would rise to a certain height, then suddenly fall, and rise again, just like a juggler’s balls. Sometimes the breathing from below sucked the whole swarm right down, but it rose up again, veering hither and thither like a dancing wraith in the draught from the tunnel-like entry. The little girls would gaze at it, lift their petticoats, and take a few graceful steps. Olsen’s Elvira had learned her first dance-steps here, and now she was dancing respectable citizens into the poor-house. And the furniture broker’s daughter was in Petersburg, and was *almost* a Grand Duchess!

On the walls of the narrow shaft projecting porches hung crazily, so that they left only a small free space, and here the clothes-lines ran to and fro, loaded with dishclouts and children’s clothing. The decaying wooden staircases ran zig-zag up the walls, disappearing into the projecting porches and coming out again, until they reached the very garrets.

From the projecting porches and the galleries, doors led into the various tenements, or to long corridors that connected the inner portions of the house. Only in Pipman’s side there were neither porches nor galleries, from the second story upward; time had devoured them, so that the stairs alone remained in place. The ends of the joists stuck out of the wall like decaying tooth stumps, and a rope hung from above, on which one could obtain a hold. It was black and smooth from the grip of many hands.

On one of those hot June days when the heavens shone like a blazing fire above the rift overhead, the heavy, mouldering timbers came to life again, as if their forest days had returned. People swarmed in and out on the stairs, shadows came and went, and an incessant chattering filled the twilight. From porch to porch dropped the sour-smelling suds from the children’s washing, until at last it reached the ground, where the children were playing by the sluggish rivulets which ran from the gutters. The timbers groaned continually, like ancient boughs that rub together, and a clammy smell as of earth and moist vegetation saturated the air, while all that one touched wore a coating of slime, as in token of its exuberant fertility.

One’s gaze could not travel a couple of steps before it was checked by wooden walls, but one felt conscious of the world that lay behind them. When the doors of the long passages opened and shut, one heard the rumor of the innumerable creatures that lived in the depths of the “Ark”; the crying of little children, the peculiar fidgeting sound of marred, eccentric individuals, for many a whole life’s history unfolded itself within there, undisturbed, never daring the light of day. On Pipman’s side the waste-pipes stuck straight out of the wall, like wood-goblins grinning from the thicket with wide-open mouths, and long gray beards, which bred rose-pink earthworms, and from time to time fell with a heavy smack into the yard. Green hanging bushes grew out of holes in the wall. The waste water trickled through them and dripped continually as though from the wet locks of the forest. Inside, in the greenish, dripping darkness, sat curiously marked toads, like little water-nymphs, each in her grotto, shining with unwholesome humidity. And up among the timbers of the third story hung Hanne’s canary, singing quite preposterously, its beak pointing up toward the spot of fiery light overhead. Across the floor of the courtyard went an endless procession of people, light-shy creatures who emerged from the womb of the “Ark” or disappeared into it. Most of them were women, weirdly clad, unwholesomely pale, but with a layer of grime as though the darkness had worked into their skins, with drowsy steps and fanatical, glittering eyes.

Little old men, who commonly lay in their dark corners waiting for death, came hobbling out on the galleries, lifted their noses toward the blazing speck of sky overhead, and sneezed three times. “That’s the sun!” they told one another, delighted. “Artishu! One don’t catch cold so easy in winter!”

II

High up, out of Pipman’s garret, a young man stepped out onto the platform. He stood there a moment turning his smiling face toward the bright heavens overhead. Then he lowered his head and ran down the break-neck stairs, without holding on by the rope. Under his arm he carried something wrapped in a blue cloth.

“Just look at the clown! Laughing right into the face of the sun as though there was no such thing as blindness!” said the women, thrusting their heads out of window. “But then, of course, he’s from the country. And now he’s going to deliver his work. Lord, how long is he going to squat up there and earn bread for that sweater? The red’ll soon go from his cheeks if he stops there much longer!” And they looked after him anxiously.

The children down in the courtyard raised their heads when they heard his steps above them.

“Have you got some nice leather for us to-day, Pelle?” they cried, clutching at his legs.

He brought out of his pockets some little bits of patent-leather and red imitation morocco.

“That’s from the Emperor’s new slippers,” he said, as he shared the pieces among the children. Then the youngsters laughed until their throats began to wheeze.

Pelle was just the same as of old, except that he was more upright and elastic in his walk, and had grown a little fair moustache. His protruding ears had withdrawn themselves a little, as though they were no longer worked so hard. His blue eyes still accepted everything as good coin, though they now had a faint expression that seemed to say that all that happened was no longer to their liking. His “lucky curls” still shone with a golden light.

The narrow streets lay always brooding in a dense, unbearable atmosphere that never seemed to renew itself. The houses were grimy and crazy; where a patch of sunlight touched a window there were stained bed- clothes hung out to dry. Up one of the side streets was an ambulance wagon, surrounded by women and children who were waiting excitedly for the bearers to appear with their uneasy burden, and Pelle joined them; he always had to take part in everything.

It was not quite the shortest way which he took. The capital was quite a new world to him; nothing was the same as at home; here a hundred different things would happen in the course of the day, and Pelle was willing enough to begin all over again; and he still felt his old longing to take part in it all and to assimilate it all.

In the narrow street leading down to the canal a thirteen-year-old girl placed herself provocatively in his way. “Mother’s ill,” she said, pointing up a dark flight of steps. “If you’ve got any money, come along!” He was actually on the point of following her, when he discovered that the old women who lived in the street were flattening their noses against their windowpanes. “One has to be on one’s guard here!” he told himself, at least for the hundredth time. The worst of it was that it was so easy to forget the necessity.

He strolled along the canal-side. The old quay-wall, the apple-barges, and the granaries with the high row of hatchways overhead and the creaking pulleys right up in the gables awakened memories of home. Sometimes, too, there were vessels from home lying here, with cargoes of fish or pottery, and then he was able to get news. He wrote but seldom. There was little success to be reported; just now he had to make his way, and he still owed Sort for his passage-money.

But it would soon come.… Pelle hadn’t the least doubt as to the future. The city was so monstrously large and incalculable; it seemed to have undertaken the impossible; but there could be no doubt of such an obvious matter of course as that he should make his way. Here wealth was simply lying in great heaps, and the poor man too could win it if only he grasped at it boldly enough. Fortune here was a golden bird, which could be captured by a little adroitness; the endless chances were like a fairy tale. And one day Pelle would catch the bird; when and how he left confidingly to chance.

In one of the side streets which ran out of the Market Street there was a crowd; a swarm of people filled the whole street in front of the iron-foundry, shouting eagerly to the blackened iron-workers, who stood grouped together by the gateway, looking at one another irresolutely.

“What’s up here?” asked Pelle.

“This is up—that they can’t earn enough to live on,” said an old man. “And the manufacturers won’t increase their pay. So they’ve taken to some new-fangled fool’s trick which they say has been brought here from abroad, where they seem to have done well with it. That’s to say, they all suddenly chuck up their work and rush bareheaded into the street and make a noise, and then back to work again, just like school children in play-time. They’ve already been in and out two or three times, and now half of them’s outside and the others are at work, and the gate is locked. Nonsense! A lot that’s going to help their wages! No; in my time we used to ask for them prettily, and we always got something, too. But, anyhow, we’re only working-folks, and where’s it going to come from? And now, what’s more, they’ve lost their whole week’s wages!”

The workmen were at a loss as to what they should do; they stood there gazing mechanically up at the windows of the counting-house, from which all decisions were commonly issued. Now and again an impatient shudder ran through the crowd, as it made threats toward the windows and demanded what was owing it. “He won’t give us the wages that we’ve honestly earned, the tyrant!” they cried. “A nice thing, truly, when one’s got a wife and kids at home, and on a Saturday afternoon, too! What a shark, to take the bread out of their mouths! Won’t the gracious gentleman give us an answer—just his greeting, so that we can take it home with us?—just his kind regards, or else they’ll have to go hungry to bed!” And they laughed, a low, snarling laugh, spat on the pavement, and once more turned their masterless faces up to the counting-house windows.

Proposals were showered upon them, proposals of every kind; and they were as wise as they were before. “What the devil are we to do if there’s no one who can lead us?” they said dejectedly, and they stood staring again. That was the only thing they knew how to do.

“Choose a few of your comrades and send them in to negotiate with the manufacturer,” said a gentleman standing by.

“Hear, hear! Forward with Eriksen! He understands the deaf-and-dumb alphabet!” they shouted. The stranger shrugged his shoulders and departed.

A tall, powerful workman approached the group. “Have you got your killer with you, Eriksen?” cried one, and Eriksen turned on the staircase and exhibited his clenched fist.

“Look out!” they shouted at the windows. “Look out we don’t set fire to the place!” Then all was suddenly silent, and the heavy house-door was barred.

Pelle listened with open mouth. He did not know what they wanted, and they hardly knew, themselves; none the less, there was a new note in all this! These people didn’t beg for what they wanted; they preferred to use their fists in order to get it, and they didn’t get drunk first, like the strong man Eriksen and the rest at home. “This is the capital!” he thought, and again he congratulated himself for having come thither.

A squad of policemen came marching up. “Room there!” they cried, and began to hustle the crowd in order to disperse it. The workmen would not be driven away. “Not before we’ve got our wages!” they said, and they pressed back to the gates again. “This is where we work, and we’re going to have our rights, that we are!” Then the police began to drive the onlookers away; at each onset they fell back a few steps, hesitating, and then stood still, laughing. Pelle received a blow in the back; he turned quickly round, stared for a moment into the red face of a policeman, and went his way, muttering and feeling his back.

“Did he hit you?” asked an old woman. “Devil take him, the filthy lout! He’s the son of the mangling-woman what lives in the house here, and now he takes up the cudgels against his own people! Devil take him!”

“Move on!” ordered the policeman, winking, as he pushed her aside with his body. She retired to her cellar, and stood there using her tongue to such purpose that the saliva flew from her toothless mouth.

“Yes, you go about bullying old people who used to carry you in their arms and put dry clouts on you when you didn’t know enough to ask.… Are you going to use your truncheon on me, too? Wouldn’t you like to, Fredrik? Take your orders from the great folks, and then come yelping at us, because we aren’t fine enough for you!” She was shaking with rage; her yellowish gray hair had become loosened and was tumbling about her face; she was a perfect volcano.

The police marched across the Knippel Bridge, escorted by a swarm of street urchins, who yelled and whistled between their fingers. From time to time a policeman would turn round; then the whole swarm took to its heels, but next moment it was there again. The police were nervous:

their fingers were opening and closing in their longing to strike out. They looked like a party of criminals being escorted to the court-house by the extreme youth of the town, and the people were laughing.

Pelle kept step on the pavement. He was in a wayward mood. Somewhere within him he felt a violent impulse to give way to that absurd longing to leap into the air and beat his head upon the pavement which was the lingering result of his illness. But now it assumed the guise of insolent strength. He saw quite plainly how big Eriksen ran roaring at the bailiff, and how he was struck to the ground, and thereafter wandered about an idiot. Then the "Great Power" rose up before him, mighty in his strength, and was hurled to his death; they had all been like dogs, ready to fall on him, and to fawn upon everything that smelt of their superiors and the authorities. And he himself, Pelle, had had a whipping at the court-house, and people had pointed the finger at him, just as they pointed at the "Great Power." "See, there he goes loafing, the scum of humanity!" Yes, he had learned what righteousness was, and what mischief it did. But now he had escaped from the old excommunication, and had entered a new world, where respectable men never turned to look after the police, but left such things to the street urchins and old women. There was a great satisfaction in this; and Pelle wanted to take part in this world; he longed to understand it.

It was Saturday, and there was a crowd of journeymen and seamstresses in the warehouse, who had come to deliver their work. The foreman went round as usual, grumbling over the work, and before he paid for it he would pull at it and crumple it so that it lost its shape, and then he made the most infernal to-do because it was not good enough. Now and again he would make a deduction from the week's wages, averring that the material was ruined; and he was especially hard on the women, who stood there not daring to contradict him. People said he cheated all the seamstresses who would not let him have his way with them.

Pelle stood there boiling with rage. "If he says one word to me, we shall come to blows!" he thought. But the foreman took the work without glancing at it—ah, yes, that was from Pipman!

But while he was paying for it a thick-set man came forward out of a back room; this was the court shoemaker, Meyer himself. He had been a poor young man with barely a seat to his breeches when he came to Copenhagen from Germany as a wandering journeyman. He did not know much about his craft, but he knew how to make others work for him! He did not answer the respectful greetings of the workers, but stationed himself before Pelle, his belly bumping against the counter, wheezing loudly through his nose, and gazing at the young man.

"New man?" he asked, at length. "That's Pipman's assistant," replied the foreman, smiling. "Ah! Pipman—he knows the trick, eh? You do the work and he takes the money and drinks it, eh?" The master shoemaker laughed as at an excellent joke.

Pelle turned red. "I should like to be independent as soon as possible," he said.

"Yes, yes, you can talk it over with the foreman; but no unionists here, mind that! We've no use for those folks."

Pelle pressed his lips together and pushed the cloth wrapper into the breast of his coat in silence. It was all he could do not to make some retort; he couldn't approve of that prohibition. He went out quickly into Kobmager Street and turned out of the Coal Market into Hauser Street, where, as he knew, the president of the struggling Shoemakers' Union was living. He found a little cobbler occupying a dark cellar. This must be the man he sought; so he ran down the steps. He had not understood that the president of the Union would be found in such a miserable dwelling-place.

Under the window sat a hollow-cheeked man bowed over his bench, in the act of sewing a new sole on to a worn-out shoe. The legs of the passers- by were just above his head. At the back of the room a woman stood cooking something on the stove; she had a little child on her arm, while two older children lay on the ground playing with some lasts. It was frightfully hot and oppressive.

"Good day, comrade!" said Pelle. "Can I become a member of the Union?"

The man looked up, astonished. Something like a smile passed over his mournful face.

"Can you indulge yourself so far?" he asked slowly. "It may prove a costly pleasure. Who d'you work for, if I may ask?"

"For Meyer, in Kobmager Street."

“Then you’ll be fired as soon as he gets to know of it!”

“I know that sure enough; all the same, I want to join the Union. He’s not going to tell me what I can and what I can’t do. Besides, we’ll soon settle with him.”

“That’s what I thought, too. But there’s too few of us. You’ll be starved out of the Union as soon as you’ve joined.”

“We must see about getting a bit more numerous,” said Pelle cheerfully, “and then one fine day we’ll shut up shop for him!”

A spark of life gleamed in the tired eyes of the president. “Yes, devil take him, if we could only make him shut up shop!” he cried, shaking his clenched fist in the air. “He tramples on all those hereabouts that make money for him; it’s a shame that I should sit here now and have come down to cobbling; and he keeps the whole miserable trade in poverty! Ah, what a revenge, comrade!” The blood rushed into his hollow cheeks until they burned, and then he began to cough. “Petersen!” said the woman anxiously, supporting his back. “Petersen!” She sighed and shook her head, while she helped him to struggle through his fit of coughing. “When the talk’s about the Court shoemaker Petersen always gets like one possessed,” she said, when he had overcome it. “He really don’t know what he’s doing. No—if everybody would only be as clever as Meyer and just look after his own business, then certain people would be sitting there in good health and earning good money!”

“Hold your tongue!” said Petersen angrily. “You’re a woman—you know nothing about the matter.” At which the woman went back to her cooking.

Petersen filled out a paper, and Pelle signed his name to it and paid his subscription for a week. “And now you must try to break away from that bloodsucker as soon as possible!” said Petersen earnestly. “A respectable workman can’t put up with such things!”

“I was forced into it,” said Pelle. “And I learned nothing of this at home. But now that’s over and done with.”

“Good, comrade! There’s my hand on it—and good luck to you! We must work the cause up, and perhaps we shall succeed yet; I tell you, you’ve given me back my courage! Now you persuade as many as you can, and don’t miss the meetings; they’ll be announced in *The Working Man*.” He shook Pelle’s hand eagerly. Pelle took a brisk walk out to the northward. He felt pleased and in the best of spirits.

It was about the time when the workers are returning home; they drifted along singly and in crowds, stooping and loitering, shuffling a little after the fatigue of the day. There was a whole new world out here, quite different from that of the “Ark.” The houses were new and orderly, built with level and plumb-line; the men went their appointed ways, and one could see at a glance what each one was.

This quarter was the home of socialism and the new ideas. Pelle often strolled out thither on holidays in order to get a glimpse of these things; what they were he didn’t know, and he hadn’t dared to thrust himself forward, a stranger, as he still felt himself to be there; but it all attracted him powerfully. However, to-day he forgot that he was a stranger, and he went onward with a long, steady stride that took him over the bridge and into North Bridge Street. Now he himself was a trades unionist; he was like all these others, he could go straight up to any one if he wished and shake him by the hand. There was a strong and peculiar appeal about the bearing of these people, as though they had been soldiers. Involuntarily he fell into step with them, and felt himself stronger on that account, supported by a feeling of community. He felt solemnly happy, as on his birthday; and he had a feeling as though he must do something. The public houses were open, and the workmen were entering them in little groups. But he had no desire to sit there and pour spirits down his throat. One could do that sort of thing when everything had gone to the dogs.

He stationed himself in front of a pastry cook’s window, eagerly occupied in comparing the different kinds of cakes. He wanted to go inside and expend five and twenty öre in celebration of the day. But first of all the whole affair must be properly and methodically planned out, so that he should not be disappointed afterward. He must, of course, have something that he had never eaten before, and that was just the difficult part. Many of the cakes were hollow inside too, and the feast would have to serve as his evening meal.

It was by no means easy, and just as Pelle was on the point of solving the difficulty he was startled out of the whole affair by a slap on the shoulder. Behind him was Morten, smiling at him with that kindly smile of his, as though nothing had gone wrong between them. Pelle was ashamed of himself and could not find a word to say. He had been unfaithful to his only friend; and it was not easy for him to account for his behavior. But Morten didn’t want any explanations; he simply shook Pelle by the hand. His pale face was shining with joy. It still betrayed that trace of suffering which was so touching, and Pelle had to surrender at discretion. “Well, to think we should meet here!” he cried, and laughed good-naturedly.

Morten was working at the pastry cook’s, and had been out; now he was going in to get some sleep before the night’s work. “But come in with me; we can at least sit and talk for half an hour; and you shall have a cake too.” He was just the same as in the old days.

They went in through the gate and up the back stairs; Morten went into the shop and returned with five “Napoleons.” “You see I know your taste,” he said laughing.

Morten’s room was right up under the roof; it was a kind of turret-room with windows on both sides. One could look out over the endless mass of roofs, which lay in rows, one behind the other, like the hotbeds in a monstrous nursery garden. From the numberless flues and chimneys rose a thin bluish smoke, which lay oppressively over all. Due south lay the Kalvebod Strand, and further to the west the hill of Frederiksberg with its castle rose above the mist. On the opposite side lay the Common, and out beyond the chimneys of the limekilns glittered the Sound with its many sails. “That’s something like a view, eh?” said Morten proudly.

Pelle remained staring; he went from one window to another and said nothing. This was the city, the capital, for which he and all other poor men from the farthest corners of the land, had longed so boundlessly; the Fortunate Land, where they were to win free of poverty!

He had wandered through it in all directions, had marvelled at its palaces and its treasures, and had found it to be great beyond all expectation. Everything here was on the grand scale; what men built one day they tore down again on the morrow, in order to build something more sumptuous. So much was going on here, surely the poor man might somehow make his fortune out of it all!

And yet he had had no true conception of the whole. Now for the first time he saw the City! It lay there, a mighty whole, outspread at his feet, with palaces, churches, and factory chimneys rising above the mass of houses. Down in the street flowed a black, unending stream, a stream of people continually renewed, as though from a mighty ocean that could never be exhausted. They all had some object; one could not see it, but really they were running along like ants, each bearing his little burden to the mighty heap of precious things, which was gathered together from all the ends of the earth.

“There are millions in all this!” said Pelle at last, drawing a deep breath. “Yes,” said Morten standing beside him. “And it’s all put together by human hands—by the hands of working people!”

Pelle started. That was a wonderful idea. But it was true enough, if one thought about it.

“But now it has fallen into very different hands!” he exclaimed, laughing. “Yes, they’ve got it away from us by trickery, just as one wheedles a child out of a thing,” cried Morten morosely. “But there’s no real efficiency in anything that children do—and the poor have never been anything more than children! Only now they are beginning to grow up, look you, and one fine day they’ll ask for their own back.”

“It would go ill with us if we went and tried to take it for ourselves,” said Pelle.

“Not if we were united about it—but we are only the many.”

Pelle listened; it had never occurred to him that the question of organization was so stupendous. Men combined, sure enough, but it was to secure better conditions in their trade.

“You are like your father!” he said. “He always had big ideas, and wanted to get his rights. I was thinking about him a little while ago, how he never let himself be trampled on. Then you used to be ashamed of him; but….”

Morten hung his head. “I couldn’t bear the contempt of respectable folks,” he said half under his breath. “I understood nothing beyond the fact that he was destroying our home and bringing disgrace on us. And I was horribly afraid, too, when he began to lay about him; I wake up sometimes now quite wet and cold with sweat, when I’ve been dreaming of my childhood. But now I’m proud that I’m the son of the ‘Great Power.’ I haven’t much strength myself; yet perhaps I’ll do something to surprise the city folks after all.”

"And I too!"

Power! It was really extraordinary that Morten should be the son of the giant stone-cutter, so quiet and delicate was he. He had not yet quite recovered the strength of which Bodil had robbed him in his early boyhood; it was as though that early abuse was still wasting him.

He had retained his girlish love of comfort. The room was nicely kept; and there were actually flowers in a vase beneath the looking-glass. Flowers, good Lord! "How did you get those?" asked Pelle.

"Bought them, of course!"

Pelle had to laugh. Was there another man in the world who would pay money for flowers?

But he did not laugh at the books. There seemed to be a sort of mysterious connection between them and Morten's peculiar, still energy. He had now a whole shelf full. Pelle took a few down and looked into them.

"What sort of stuff is this, now?" he asked doubtfully. "It looks like learning!"

"Those are books about us, and how the new conditions are coming, and how we must make ready for them."

"Ah, you've got the laugh of me," said Pelle. "In a moment of depression you've got your book-learning to help you along. But we other chaps can just sit where we are and kick our heels." Morten turned to him hastily.

"That's the usual complaint!" he cried irritably. "A man spits on his own class and wants to get into another one. But that's not the point at stake, damn it all! We want to stay precisely where we are, shoemakers and bakers, all together! But we must demand proper conditions! Scarcely one out of thousands can come out on top; and then the rest can sit where they are and gape after him! But do you believe he'd get a chance of rising if it wasn't that society needs him—wants to use him to strike at his own people and keep them down? 'Now you can see for yourself what a poor man can do if he likes!' That's what they tell you. There's no need to blame society.

"No, the masses themselves are to blame if they aren't all rich men! Good God! They just don't want to be! So they treat you like a fool, and you put up with it and baa after them! No, let them all together demand that they shall receive enough for their work to live on decently. I say a working man ought to get as much for his work as a doctor or a barrister, and to be educated as well. That's my Lord's Prayer!"

"Now I've set you off finely!" said Pelle good-naturedly. "And it's just the same as what your father was raving about when he lay dying in the shed. He lay there delirious, and he believed the ordinary workman had got pictures on the wall and a piano, just like the fine folks."

"Did he say that?" cried Morten, and he raised his head. Then he fell into thought. For he understood that longing. But Pelle sat there brooding. Was this the "new time" all over again? Then there was really some sense in banding people together—yes, and as many as possible.

"I don't rightly understand it," he said at last. "But to-day I joined the trade union. I shan't stand still and look on when there's anything big to be done."

Morten nodded, faintly smiling. He was tired now, and hardly heard what Pelle was saying. "I must go to bed now so that I can get up at one. But where do you live? I'll come and see you some time. How queer it is that we should have run across one another here!"

"I live out in Kristianshavn—in the 'Ark,' if you know where that is!"

"That's a queer sort of house to have tumbled into! I know the 'Ark' very well, it's been so often described in the papers. There's all sorts of people live there!"

"I don't know anything about that," said Pelle, half offended. "I like the people well enough.... But it's capital that we should have run into one another's arms like this! What bit of luck, eh? And I behaved like a clown and kept out of your way? But that was when I was going to the dogs, and hated everybody! But now nothing's going to come between us again, you may lay to that!"

"That's good, but now be off with you," replied Morten, smiling; he was already half-undressed.

"I'm going, I'm going!" said Pelle, and he picked up his hat, and stood for a moment gazing out over the city. "But it's magnificent, what you were saying about things just now!" he cried suddenly. "If I had the strength of all us poor folks in me, I'd break out right away and conquer the whole of it! If such a mass of wealth were shared out there'd never be any poverty any more!” He stood there with his arms uplifted, as though he held it all in his hands. Then he laughed uproariously. He looked full of energy. Morten lay half asleep, staring at him and saying nothing. And then he went.

Pipman scolded Pelle outrageously when at last he returned. “Curse it all, what are you thinking of? To go strolling about and playing the duke while such as we can sit here working our eyes out of our heads! And we have to go thirsty too! Now don’t you dream of being insolent to me, or there’ll be an end of the matter. I am excessively annoyed!”

He held out his hand in pathetic expostulation, although Pelle had no intention of answering him. He no longer took Pipman seriously. “Devil fry me, but a man must sit here and drink the clothes off his body while a lout like you goes for a stroll!”

Pelle was standing there counting the week’s earnings when he suddenly burst into a loud laugh as his glance fell upon Pipman. His blue naked shanks, miserably shivering under his leather apron, looked so enormously ridiculous when contrasted with the fully-dressed body and the venerable beard.

“Yes, you grin!” said Pipman, laughing too. “But suppose it was you had to take off your trousers in front of the old clothes’ man, and wanted to get upstairs respectably! Those damned brats! ‘Pipman’s got D. T.,’ they yell. ‘Pipman’s got D. T. And God knows I haven’t got D. T., but I haven’t got any trousers, and that’s just the trouble! And these accursed open staircases! Olsen’s hired girl took the opportunity, and you may be sure she saw all there was to see! You might lend me your old bags!”

Pelle opened his green chest and took out his work-day trousers.

“You’d better put a few more locks on that spinach-green lumber-chest of yours,” said Pipman surlily. “After all, there might be a thief here, near heaven as we are!”

Pelle apparently did not hear the allusion, and locked the chest up again. Then, his short pipe in his hand, he strolled out on to the platform. Above the roofs the twilight was rising from the Sound. A few doves were flying there, catching the last red rays of the sun on their white pinions, while down in the shaft the darkness lay like a hot lilac mist. The hurdy-gurdy man had come home and was playing his evening tune down there to the dancing children, while the inhabitants of the “Ark” were gossiping and squabbling from gallery to gallery. Now and again a faint vibrating note rose upward, and all fell silent. This was the dwarf Vinslev, who sat playing his flute somewhere in his den deep within the “Ark.” He always hid himself right away when he played, for at such times he was like a sick animal, and sat quaking in his lair. The notes of his flute were so sweet, as they came trickling out of his hiding place, that they seemed like a song or a lament from another world. And the restless creatures in the “Ark” must perforce be silent and listen. Now Vinslev was in one of his gentle moods, and one somehow felt better for hearing him. But at times, in his dark moods, the devil seemed to enter into him, and breathed such music into his crazy mind that all his hearers felt a panic terror. Then the decaying timbers of the “Ark” seemed to expand and form a vast monstrous, pitch-black forest, in which all terror lay lurking, and one must strike out blindly in order to avoid being trampled on. The hearse-driver in the fourth story, who at other times was so gentle in his cups, would beat his wife shamefully, and the two lay about in their den drinking and fighting in self-defence. And Vinslev’s devilish flute was to blame when Johnsen vainly bewailed his miserable life and ended it under the sewer-grating. But there was nothing to be said about the matter; Vinslev played the flute, and Johnsen’s suicide was a death like any other.

Now the devil was going about with a ring in his nose; Vinslev’s playing was like a gentle breeze that played on people’s hearts, so that they opened like flowers. This was his good time.

Pelle knew all this, although he had not long been here; but it was nothing to him. For he wore the conqueror’s shirt of mail, such as Father Lasse had dreamed of for him.

Down in the third story, on the built-out gallery, another sort of magic was at work. A climbing pelargonium and some ivy had wound themselves round the broken beams and met overhead, and there hung a little red paper lantern, which cast a cheerful glow over it all.

It was as though the summer night had found a sanctuary in the heart of this wilderness of stone. Under the lantern sat Madam Johnsen and her daughter sewing; and Hanne’s face glowed like a rose in the night, and every now and then she turned it up toward Pelle and smiled, and made an impatient movement of her head. Then Pelle turned away a little, re- crossed his leg, and leant over on the other side, restless as a horse in blinkers.

Close behind him his neighbor, Madam Frandsen, was bustling about her little kitchen. The door stood open on to the platform, and she chattered incessantly, half to herself and half to Pelle, about her gout, her dead husband, and her lout of a son. She needed to rest her body, did this old woman. “My God, yes; and here I have to keep slaving and getting his food ready for Ferdinand from morning to night and from night to morning again. And he doesn’t even trouble himself to come home to it. I can’t go looking into his wild ways; all I can do is to sit here and worry and keep his meals warm. Now that’s a tasty little bit; and he’ll soon come when he’s hungry, I tell myself. Ah, yes, our young days, they’re soon gone. And you stand there and stare like a baa-lamb and the girl down there is nodding at you fit to crick her neck! Yes, the men are a queer race; they pretend they wouldn’t dare—and yet who is it causes all the misfortunes?”

“She doesn’t want anything to do with me!” said Pelle grumpily; “she’s just playing with me.”

“Yes, a girl goes on playing with a white mouse until she gets it! You ought to be ashamed to stand there hanging your head! So young and well- grown as you are too! You cut her tail-feathers off, and you’ll get a good wife!” She nudged him in the side with her elbow.

Then at last Pelle made up his mind to go clattering down the stairs to the third story, and along the gallery.

“Why have you been so stand-offish to-day?” said Madam Johnsen, making room for him. “You know you are always very welcome. What are all these preliminaries for?”

“Pelle is short-sighted; he can’t see as far as this,” said Hanne, tossing her head. She sat there turning her head about; she gazed at him smiling, her head thrown back and her mouth open. The light fell on her white teeth.

“Shall we get fine weather to-morrow?” asked the mother.

Pelle thought they would; he gazed up at the little speck of sky in a weather-wise manner. Hanne laughed.

“Are you a weather-prophet, Pelle? But you haven’t any corns!”

“Now stop your teasing, child!” said the mother, pretending to slap her. “If it’s fine to-morrow we want to go into the woods. Will you come with us?”

Pelle would be glad to go; but he hesitated slightly before answering.

“Come with us, Pelle,” said Hanne, and she laid her hand invitingly on his shoulder. “And then you shall be my young man. It’s so tedious going to the woods with the old lady; and then I want to be able to do as I like.” She made a challenging movement with her head.

“Then we’ll go from the North Gate by omnibus; I don’t care a bit about going by train.”

“From the North Gate? But it doesn’t exist any longer, mummy! But there are still omnibuses running from the Triangle.”

“Well then, from the Triangle, you clever one! Can I help it if they go pulling everything down? When I was a girl that North Gate was a splendid place. From there you could get a view over the country where my home was, and the summer nights were never so fine as on the wall. One didn’t know what it was to feel the cold then. If one’s clothes were thin one’s heart was young.”

Hanne went into the kitchen to make coffee. The door stood open. She hummed at her task and now and again joined in the conversation. Then she came out, serving Pelle with a cracked tea-tray. “But you look very peculiar tonight!” She touched Pelle’s face and gazed at him searchingly.

“I joined the trade union to-day,” answered Pelle; he still had the feeling that of something unusual, and felt as though everybody must notice something about him.

Hanne burst out laughing. “Is that where you got that black sign on your forehead? Just look, mother, just look at him! The trade mark!” She turned her head toward the old woman.

“Ah, the rogue!” said the old woman, laughing. “Now she’s smeared soot over your face!” She wetted her apron with her tongue and began to rub the soot away, Hanne standing behind him and holding his head in both hands so that he should not move. “Thank your stars that Pelle’s a good- natured fellow,” said the old woman, as she rubbed. “Or else he’d take it in bad part!”

Pelle himself laughed shamefacedly.

The hearse-driver came up through the trap in the gallery and turned round to mount to the fourth story. “Good evening!” he said, in his deep bass voice, as he approached them; “and good digestion, too, I ought to say!” He carried a great ham under his arm.

“Lord o’ my body!” whispered Madam Johnsen. “There he is again with his ham; that means he’s wasted the whole week’s wages again. They’ve always got more than enough ham and bacon up there, poor things, but they’ve seldom got bread as well.”

Now one sound was heard in the “Ark,” now another. The crying of children which drifted so mournfully out of the long corridors whenever a door was opened turned to a feeble clucking every time some belated mother came rushing home from work to clasp the little one to her breast. And there was one that went on crying whether the mother was at home or at work. Her milk had failed her.

From somewhere down in the cellars the sleepy tones of a cradle-song rose up through the shaft; it was only “Grete with the child,” who was singing her rag-doll asleep. The real mothers did not sing.

“She’s always bawling away,” said Hanne; “those who’ve got real children haven’t got strength left to sing. But her brat doesn’t need any food; and that makes a lot of difference when one is poor.”

“To-day she was washing and ironing the child’s things to make her fine for to-morrow, when her father comes. He is a lieutenant,” said Hanne.

“Is he coming to-morrow, then?” asked Pelle naively.

Hanne laughed loudly. “She expects him every Sunday, but she has never seen him yet!”

“Well, well, that’s hardly a thing to laugh about,” said the old woman. “She’s happy in her delusions, and her pension keeps her from need.”

III

Pelle awoke to find Hanne standing by his bed and pulling his nose, and imitating his comical grimaces. She had come in over the roof. “Why are you stopping here, you?” she said eagerly. “We are waiting for you!”

“I can’t get up!” replied Pelle piteously. “Pipman went out overnight with my trousers on and hasn’t come back, so I lay down to sleep again!” Hanne broke into a ringing laugh. “What if he never comes back at all? You’ll have to lie in bed always, like Mother Jahn!”

At this Pelle laughed too.

“I really don’t know what I shall do! You must just go without me.”

“No, that we shan’t!” said Hanne very decidedly. “No, we’ll fetch the picnic-basket and spread the things on your counterpane! After all, it’s green! But wait now, I know what!” And she slipped through the back door and out on to the roof. Half an hour later she came again and threw a pair of striped trousers on the bed. “He’s obliging, is Herr Klodsmajor! Now just hurry yourself a bit. I ran round to see the hearse-driver’s Marie, where she works, and she gave me a pair of her master’s week-day breeches. But she must have them again early to-morrow morning, so that his lordship doesn’t notice it.”

Directly she had gone Pelle jumped into the trousers. Just as he was ready he heard a terrific creaking of timbers. The Pipman was coming up the stairs. He held the rope in one hand, and at every turn of the staircase he bowed a few times outward over the rope. The women were shrieking in the surrounding galleries and landings. That amused him. His big, venerable head beamed with an expression of sublime joy.

“Ah, hold your tongue!” he said good-naturedly, as soon as he set eyes on Pelle. “You hold your tongue!” He propped himself up in the doorway and stood there staring.

Pelle seized him by the collar. “Where are my Sunday trousers?” he asked angrily. The Pipman had the old ones on, but where were the new?

The Pipman stared at him uncomprehending, his drowsy features working in the effort to disinter some memory or other. Suddenly he whistled. “Trousers, did you say, young man? What, what? Did you really say trousers? And you ask me where your trousers have got to? Then you might have said so at once! Because, d’you see, your bags … I’ve … yes … why, I’ve pawned them!”

“You’ve pawned my best trousers?” cried Pelle, so startled that he loosed his hold.

“Yes, by God, that’s what I did! You can look for yourself—there’s no need to get so hot about it! You can’t eat me, you know. That goes without saying. Yes, that’s about it. One just mustn’t get excited!”

“You’re a scoundrelly thief!” cried Pelle. “That’s what you are!”

“Now, now, comrade, always keep cool! Don’t shout yourself hoarse. Nothing’s been taken by me. Pipman’s a respectable man, I tell you. Here, you can see for yourself! What’ll you give me for that, eh?” He had taken the pawnticket from his pocket and held it out to Pelle, deeply offended.

Pelle fingered his collar nervously; he was quite beside himself with rage. But what was the use? And now Hanne and her mother had come out over yonder. Hanne was wearing a yellow straw hat with broad ribbons. She looked bewitching; the old lady had the lunch-basket on her arm. She locked the door carefully and put the key under the doorstep. Then they set out.

There was no reasoning with this sot of a Pipman! He edged round Pelle with an uncertain smile, gazed inquisitively into his face, and kept carefully just out of his reach. “You’re angry, aren’t you?” he said confidingly, as though he had been speaking to a little child. “Dreadfully angry? But what the devil do you want with two pairs of trousers, comrade? Yes, what do you want with two pairs of trousers?” His voice sounded quite bewildered and reproachful.

Pelle pulled out a pair of easy-looking women’s shoes from under his bed, and slipped out through the inner door. He squeezed his way between the steep roof and the back wall of the room, ducked under a beam or two, and tumbled into the long gangway which ran between the roof- buildings and had rooms on either side of it. A loud buzzing sound struck suddenly on his ears. The doors of all the little rooms stood open on to the long gangway, which served as a common livingroom. Wrangling and chattering and the crying of children surged together in a deafening uproar; here was the life of a bee-hive. Here it’s really lively, thought Pelle. To-morrow I shall move over here! He had thought over this for a long time, and now there should be an end of his lodging with Pipman.

In front of one of the doors stood a little eleven-years-old maiden, who was polishing a pair of plump-looking boy's boots; she wore an apron of sacking which fell down below her ankles, so that she kept treading on it. Within the room two children of nine and twelve were moving backward and forward with mighty strides, their hands in their pockets. Then enjoyed Sundays. In their clean shirt-sleeves, they looked like a couple of little grown-up men. This was the "Family"; they were Pelle's rescuers.

"Here are your shoes, Marie," said Pelle. "I couldn't do them any better."

She took them eagerly and examined the soles. Pelle had repaired them with old leather, and had therefore polished the insteps with cobbler's wax. "They're splendid now!" she whispered, and she looked at him gratefully. The boys came and shook hands with Pelle. "What will the shoes cost?" asked the elder, feeling for his purse with a solemn countenance.

"We'd better let that stand over, Peter; I'm in a hurry to-day," said Pelle, laughing. "We'll put it on the account until the New Year."

"I'm going out, too, to-day with the boys," said Marie, beaming with delight. "And you are going to the woods with Hanne and her mother, we know all about it!" Hopping and skipping, she accompanied him to the steps, and stood laughing down at him. To-day she was really like a child; the shrewd, old, careful woman was as though cast to the winds. "You can go down the main staircase," she cried.

A narrow garret-stairs led down to the main staircase, which lay inside the building and was supposed to be used only by those who lived on the side facing the street. This was the fashionable portion of the "Ark"; here lived old sea-dogs, shipbuilders, and other folks with regular incomes. The tradesmen who rented the cellars—the coal merchant, the old iron merchant, and the old clothes dealer, also had their dwellings here.

These dwellings were composed of two splendid rooms; they had no kitchen or entry, but in a corner of the landing on the main staircase, by the door, each family had a sink with a little board cover. When the cover was on one could use the sink as a seat; this was very convenient.

The others had almost reached the Knippels Bridge when he overtook them. "What a long time you've been!" said Hanne, as she took his arm. "And how's the 'Family?' Was Marie pleased with the shoes? Poor little thing, she hasn't been out for two Sundays because she had no soles to her shoes."

"She had only to come to me; I'm ever so much in her debt!"

"No, don't you believe she'd do that. The 'Family' is proud. I had to go over and steal the shoes somehow!"

"Poor little things!" said Madam Johnsen, "it's really touching to see how they hold together! And they know how to get along. But why are you taking Pelle's arm, Hanne? You don't mean anything by it."

"Must one always mean something by it, little mother? Pelle is my young man to-day, and has to protect me."

"Good Lord, what is he to protect you from? From yourself, mostly, and that's not easy!"

"Against a horde of robbers, who will fall upon me in the forest and carry me away. And you'll have to pay a tremendous ransom!"

"Good Lord, I'd much rather pay money to get rid of you! If I had any money at all! But have you noticed how blue the sky is? It's splendid with all this sun on your back—it warms you right through the cockles of your heart."

At the Triangle they took an omnibus and bowled along the sea-front. The vehicle was full of cheerful folk; they sat there laughing at a couple of good-natured citizens who were perspiring and hurling silly witticisms at one another. Behind them the dust rolled threateningly, and hung in a lazy cloud round the great black waterbutts which stood on their high trestles along the edge of the road. Out in the Sound the boats lay with sails outspread, but did not move; everything was keeping the Sabbath.

In the Zoological Gardens it was fresh and cool. The beech-leaves still retained their youthful brightness, and looked wonderfully light and festive against the century-old trunks. "Heigh, how beautiful the forest is!" cried Pelle. "It is like an old giant who has taken a young bride!"

He had never been in a real beech-wood before. One could wander about here as in a church. There were lots of other people here as well;

all Copenhagen was on its legs in this fine weather. The people were as though intoxicated by the sunshine; they were quite boisterous, and the sound of their voices lingered about the tree-tops and only challenged them to give vent to their feelings. People went strolling between the tree-trunks and amusing themselves in their own way, laying about them with great boughs and shouting with no other object than to hear their own voices. On the borders of the wood, a few men were standing and singing in chorus; they wore white caps, and over the grassy meadows merry groups were strolling or playing touch or rolling in the grass like young kittens.

Madam Johnsen walked confidently a few steps in advance; she was the most at home out here and led the way. Pelle and Hanne walked close together, in order to converse. Hanne was silent and absent; Pelle took her hand in order to make her run up a hillock, but she did not at first notice that he was touching her, and the hand was limp and clammy. She walked on as in a sleep, her whole bearing lifeless and taciturn. “She’s dreaming!” said Pelle, and released her hand, offended. It fell lifelessly to her side.

The old woman turned round and looked about her with beaming eyes.

“The forest hasn’t been so splendid for many years,” she said. “Not since I was a young girl.”

They climbed up past the Hermitage and thence out over the grass and into the forest again, until they came to the little ranger’s house where they drank coffee and ate some of the bread-and-butter they had brought with them. Then they trudged on again. Madam Johnsen was paying a rare visit to the forest and wanted to see everything. The young people raised objections, but she was not to be dissuaded. She had girlhood memories of the forest, and she wanted to renew them; let them say what they would. If they were tired of running after her they could go their own way. But they followed her faithfully, looking about them wearily and moving along dully onward, moving along rather more stupidly than was justifiable.

On the path leading to Raavad there were not so many people.

“It’s just as forest-like here as in my young days!” said the old woman. “And beautiful it is here. The leaves are so close, it’s just the place for a loving couple of lovers. Now I’m going to sit down and take my boots off for a bit, my feet are beginning to hurt me. You look about you for a bit.”

But the young people looked at one another strangely and threw themselves down at her feet. She had taken off her boots, and was cooling her feet in the fresh grass as she sat there chatting. “It’s so warm to-day the stones feel quite burning—but you two certainly won’t catch fire. Why do you stare in that funny way? Give each other a kiss in the grass, now! There’s no harm in it, and it’s so pretty to see!”

Pelle did not move. But Hanne moved over to him on her knees, put her hands gently round his head, and kissed him. When she had done so she looked into his eyes, lovingly, as a child might look at her doll. Her hat had slipped on to her shoulders. On her white forehead and her upper lip were little clear drops of sweat. Then, with a merry laugh, she suddenly released him. Pelle and the old woman had gathered flowers and boughs of foliage; these they now began to arrange. Hanne lay on her back and gazed up at the sky.

“You leave that old staring of yours alone,” said the mother. “It does you no good.”

“I’m only playing at ‘Glory’; it’s such a height here,” said Hanne. “But at home in the ‘Ark’ you see more. Here it’s too light.”

“Yes, God knows, one does see more—a sewer and two privies. A good thing it’s so dark there. No, one ought to have enough money to be able to go into the forests every Sunday all the summer. When one has grown up in the open air it’s hard to be penned in between dirty walls all one’s life. But now I think we ought to be going on. We waste so much time.”

“Oh Lord, and I’m so comfortable lying here!” said Hanne lazily. “Pelle, just push my shawl under my head!”

Out of the boughs high above them broke a great bird. “There, there, what a chap!” cried Pelle, pointing at it. It sailed slowly downward, on its mighty outspread wings, now and again compressing the air beneath it with a few powerful strokes, and then flew onward, close above the tree-tops, with a scrutinizing glance.

“Jiminy, I believe that was a stork!” said Madam Johnsen. She reached for her boots, alarmed. “I won’t stay here any longer now. One never knows what may happen.” She hastily laced up her boots, with a prudish expression on her face. Pelle laughed until the tears stood in his eyes.

Hanne raised her head. “That was surely a crane, don’t you think so? Stupid bird, always to fly along like that, staring down at everything as though he were short-sighted. If I were he I should fly straight up in the air and then shut my eyes and come swooping down. Then, wherever one got to, something or other would happen.”

“Sure enough, this would happen, that you’d fall into the sea and be drowned. Hanne has always had the feeling that something has got to happen; and for that reason she can never hold on to what she’s got in her hands.”

“No, for I haven’t anything in them!” cried Hanne, showing her hands and laughing. “Can you hold what you haven’t got, Pelle?”

About four o’clock they came to the Schleswig Stone, where the Social-Democrats were holding a meeting. Pelle had never yet attended any big meeting at which he could hear agitators speaking, but had obtained his ideas of the new movements at second hand. They were in tune with the blind instinct within him. But he had never experienced anything really electrifying—only that confused, monotonous surging such as he had heard in his childhood when he listened with his ear to the hollow of the wooden shoe.

“Well, it looks as if the whole society was here!” said Madam Johnsen half contemptuously. “Now you can see all the Social-Democrats of Copenhagen. They never have been more numerous, although they pretend the whole of society belongs to them. But things don’t always go so smoothly as they do on paper.”

Pelle frowned, but was silent. He himself knew too little of the matter to be able to convert another.

The crowd affected him powerfully; here were several thousands of people gathered together for a common object, and it became exceedingly clear to him that he himself belonged to this crowd. “I belong to them too!” Over and over again the words repeated themselves rejoicingly in his mind. He felt the need to verify it all himself, and to prove himself grateful for the quickly-passing day. If the Court shoemaker hadn’t spoken the words that drove him to join the Union he would still have been standing apart from it all, like a heathen. The act of subscribing the day before was like a baptism. He felt quite different in the society of these men—he felt as he did not feel with others. And as the thousands of voices broke into song, a song of jubilation of the new times that were to come, a cold shudder went through him. He had a feeling as though a door within him had opened, and as though something that had lain closely penned within him had found its way to the light.

Up on the platform stood a darkish man talking earnestly in a mighty voice. Shoulder to shoulder the crowd stood breathless, listening open-mouthed, with every face turned fixedly upon the speaker. A few were so completely under his spell that they reproduced the play of his features. When he made some particular sally from his citadel a murmur of admiration ran through the crowd. There was no shouting. He spoke of want and poverty, of the wearisome, endless wandering that won no further forward. As the Israelites in their faith bore the Ark of the Covenant through the wilderness, so the poor bore their hope through the unfruitful years. If one division was overthrown another was ready with the carrying-staves, and at last the day was breaking. Now they stood at the entrance to the Promised Land, with the proof in their hands that they were the rightful dwellers therein. All that was quite a matter of course; if there was anything that Pelle had experienced it was that wearisome wandering of God’s people through the wilderness. That was the great symbol of poverty. The words came to him like something long familiar. But the greatness of the man’s voice affected Pelle; there was something in the speech of this man which did not reach him through the understanding, but seemed somehow to burn its way in through the skin, there to meet something that lay expanding within him. The mere ring of anger in his voice affected Pelle; his words beat upon one’s old wounds, so that they broke open like poisonous ulcers, and one heaved a deep breath of relief. Pelle had heard such a voice, ringing over all, when he lived in the fields and tended cows. He felt as though he too must let himself go in a great shout and subdue the whole crowd by his voice —he too! To be able to speak like that, now thundering and now mild, like the ancient prophets!

A peculiar sense of energy was exhaled by this dense crowd of men, this thinking and feeling crowd. It produced a singular feeling of strength. Pelle was no longer the poor journeyman shoemaker, who found it difficult enough to make his way. He became one, as he stood there, with that vast being; he felt its strength swelling within him; the little finger shares in the strength of the whole body. A blind certainty of irresistibility went out from this mighty gathering, a spur to ride the storm with. His limbs swelled; he became a vast, monstrous being that only needed to go trampling onward in order to conquer everything. His brain was whirling with energy, with illimitable, unconquerable strength!

Pelle had before this gone soaring on high and had come safely to earth again. And this time also he came to ground, with a long sigh of relief, as though he had cast off a heavy burden. Hanne's arm lay in his; he pressed it slightly. But she did notice him; she too now was far away. He looked at her pretty neck, and bent forward to see her face. The great yellow hat threw a golden glimmer over it. Her active intelligence played restlessly behind her strained, frozen features; her eyes looked fixedly before her. It has taken hold of her too, he thought, full of happiness; she is far away from here. It was something wonderful to know that they were coupled together in the same interests—were like man and wife!

At that very moment he accidentally noticed the direction of her fixed gaze, and a sharp pain ran through his heart. Standing on the level ground, quite apart from the crowd, stood a tall, handsome man, astonishingly like the owner of Stone Farm in his best days; the sunlight was coming and going over his brown skin and his soft beard. Now that he turned his face toward Pelle his big, open features reminded him of the sea.

Hanne started, as though awakening from a deep sleep, and noticed Pelle.

"He is a sailor!" she said, in a curious, remote voice, although Pelle had not questioned her. God knows, thought Pelle, vexedly, how is it she knows him; and he drew his arm from hers. But she took it again at once and pressed it against her soft bosom. It was as though she suddenly wanted to give him a feeling of security.

She hung heavily on his arm and stood with her eyes fixed unwaveringly on the speakers' platform. Her hands busied themselves nervously about her hair. "You are so restless, child," said the mother, who had seated herself at their feet. "You might let me lean back against your knee; I was sitting so comfortably before."

"Yes," said Hanne, and she put herself in the desired position. Her voice sounded quite excited.

"Pelle," she whispered suddenly, "if he comes over to us I shan't answer him. I shan't."

"Do you know him, then?"

"No, but it does happen sometimes that men come and speak to one. But then you'll say I belong to you, won't you?"

Pelle was going to refuse, but a shudder ran through her. She's feverish, he thought compassionately; one gets fever so easily in the "Ark." It comes up with the smell out of the sewer. She must have lied to me nicely, he thought after a while. Women are cunning, but he was too proud to question her. And then the crowd shouted "Hurrah!" so that the air rang. Pelle shouted with them; and when they had finished the man had disappeared.

They went over to the Hill, the old woman keeping her few steps in advance. Hanne hummed as she went; now and then she looked questioningly at Pelle—and then went on humming.

"It's nothing to do with me," said Pelle morosely. "But it's not right of you to have lied to me."

"I lie to you? But Pelle!" She gazed wonderingly into his eyes.

"Yes, that you do! There's something between you and him."

Hanne laughed, a clear, innocent laugh, but suddenly broken off. "No, Pelle, no, what should I have to do with him? I have never even seen him before. I have never even once kissed a man—yes, you, but you are my brother."

"I don't particularly care about being your brother—not a straw, and you know that!"

"Have I done anything to offend you? I'm sorry if I have." She seized his hand.

"I want you for my wife!" cried Pelle passionately.

Hanne laughed. "Did you hear, mother? Pelle wants me for his wife!" she cried, beaming.

"Yes, I see and hear more than you think," said Madam Johnsen shortly.

Hanne looked from one to the other and became serious. "You are so good, Pelle," she said softly, "but you can't come to me bringing me something from foreign parts—I know everything about you, but I've never dreamed of you at night. Are you a fortunate person?"

"I'll soon show you if I am," said Pelle, raising his head. "Only give me a little time."

"Lord, now she's blethering about fortune again," cried the mother, turning round. "You really needn't have spoiled this lovely day for us with your nonsense. I was enjoying it all so."

Hanne laughed helplessly. "Mother will have it that I'm not quite right in my mind, because father hit me on the head once when I was a little girl," she told Pelle.

"Yes, it's since then she's had these ideas. She'll do nothing but go rambling on at random with her ideas and her wishes. She'll sit whole days at the window and stare, and she used to make the children down in the yard even crazier than herself with her nonsense. And she was always bothering me to leave everything standing—poor as we were after my man died—just to go round and round the room with her and the dolls and sing those songs all about earls. Yes, Pelle, you may believe I've wept tears of blood over her."

Hanne wandered on, laughing at her mother's rebuke, and humming—it was the tune of the "Earl's Song."

"There, you hear her yourself," said the old woman, nudging Pelle. "She's got no shame in her—there's nothing to be done with her!"

Up on the hill there was a deafening confusion of people in playful mood; wandering to and fro in groups, blowing into children's trumpets and "dying pigs," and behaving like frolicsome wild beasts. At every moment some one tooted in your ear, to make you jump, or you suddenly discovered that some rogue was fixing something on the back of your coat. Hanne was nervous; she kept between Pelle and her mother, and could not stand still. "No, let's go away somewhere—anywhere!" she said, laughing in bewilderment.

Pelle wanted to treat them to coffee, so they went on till they found a tent where there was room for them. Hallo! There was the hurdy-gurdy man from home, on a roundabout, nodding to him as he went whirling round. He held his hand in front of his mouth like a speaking-trumpet in order to shout above the noise. "Mother's coming up behind you with the Olsens," he roared.

"I can't hear what he says at all," said Madam Johnsen. She didn't care about meeting people out of the "Ark" to-day.

When the coffee was finished they wandered up and down between the booths and amused themselves by watching the crowd. Hanne consented to have her fortune told; it cost five and twenty öre, but she was rewarded by an unexpected suitor who was coming across the sea with lots of money. Her eyes shone.

"I could have done it much better than that!" said Madam Johnsen.

"No, mother, for you never foretell me anything but misfortune," replied Hanne, laughing.

Madam Johnsen met an acquaintance who was selling "dying pigs." She sat down beside her. "You go over there now and have a bit of a dance while I rest my tired legs," she said.

The young people went across to the dancing marquee and stood among the onlookers. From time to time they had five öre worth of dancing. When other men came up and asked Hanne to dance, she shook her head; she did not care to dance with any one but Pelle.

The rejected applicants stood a little way off, their hats on the backs of their heads, and reviled her. Pelle had to reprove her. "You have offended them," he said, "and perhaps they're screwed and will begin to quarrel."

"Why should I be forced to dance with anybody, with somebody I don't know at all?" replied Hanne. "I'm only going to dance with you!" She made angry eyes, and looked bewitching in her unapproachableness. Pelle had nothing against being her only partner. He would gladly have fought for her, had it been needful.

When they were about to go he discovered the foreigner right at the back of the dancing-tent. He urged Hanne to make haste, but she stood there, staring absent-mindedly in the midst of the dancers as though she did not know what was happening around her. The stranger came over to them. Pelle was certain that Hanne had not seen him.

Suddenly she came to herself and gripped Pelle's arm. "Shan't we go, then?" she said impatiently, and she quickly dragged him away.

At the doorway the stranger came to meet them and bowed before

Hanne. She did not look at him, but her left arm twitched as though she wanted to lay it across his shoulders.

“My sweetheart isn’t dancing any more; she is tired,” said Pelle shortly, and he led her away.

“A good thing we’ve come out from there,” she cried, with a feeling of deliverance, as they went back to her mother. “There were no amusing dancers.”

Pelle was taken aback; then she had not seen the stranger, but merely believed that it had been one of the others who had asked her to dance! It was inconceivable that she should have seen him; and yet a peculiar knowledge had enveloped her, as though she had seen obliquely through her down-dropped eyelids; and then it was well known women could see round corners! And that twitch of the arm! He did not know what to think. “Well, it’s all one to me,” he thought, “for I’m not going to be led by the nose!”

He had them both on his arm as they returned under the trees to the station. The old woman was lively; Hanne walked on in silence and let them both talk. But suddenly she begged Pelle to be quiet a moment; he looked at her in surprise.

“It’s singing so beautifully in my ears; but when you talk then it stops!”

“Nonsense! Your blood is too unruly,” said the mother, “and mouths were meant to be used.”

During the journey Pelle was reserved. Now and again he pressed Hanne’s hand, which lay, warm and slightly perspiring, in his upon the seat.

But the old woman’s delight was by no means exhausted, the light shining from the city and the dark peaceful Sound had their message for her secluded life, and she began to sing, in a thin, quavering falsetto:

“Gently the Night upon her silent wings
Comes, and the stars are bright in east and west;
And lo, the bell of evening rings;
And men draw homewards, and the birds all rest.”

But from the Triangle onward it was difficult for her to keep step; she had run herself off her legs.

“Many thanks for to-day,” she said to Pelle, down in the courtyard. “To-morrow one must start work again and clean old uniform trousers. But it’s been a beautiful outing.” She waddled forward and up the steps, groaning a little at the numbers of them, talking to herself.

Hanne stood hesitating. “Why did you say ‘my sweetheart’?” she asked suddenly. “I’m not.”

“You told me to,” answered Pelle, who would willingly have said more.

“Oh, well!” said Hanne, and she ran up the stairs. “Goodnight, Pelle!” she called down to him.

IV

Pelle was bound to the “Family” by peculiar ties. The three orphans were the first to reach him a friendly helping hand when he stood in the open street three days after his landing, robbed of his last penny.

He had come over feeling important enough. He had not slept all night on his bench between decks among the cattle. Excitement had kept him awake; and he lay there making far-reaching plans concerning himself and his twenty-five kroner. He was up on deck by the first light of morning, gazing at the shore, where the great capital with its towers and factory-chimneys showed out of the mist. Above the city floated its misty light, which reddened in the morning sun, and gave a splendor to the prospect. And the passage between the forts and the naval harbor was sufficiently magnificent to impress him. The crowd on the landing-stage before the steamer laid alongside and the cabmen and porters began shouting and calling, was enough to stupefy him, but he had made up his mind beforehand that nothing should disconcert him. It would have been difficult enough in any case to disentangle himself from all this confusion.

And then Fortune herself was on his side. Down on the quay stood a thick-set, jovial man, who looked familiarly at Pelle; he did not shout and bawl, but merely said quietly, “Good-day, countryman,” and offered Pelle board and lodging for two kroner a day. It was good to find a countryman in all this bustle, and Pelle confidingly put himself in his hands. He was remarkably helpful; Pelle was by no means allowed to carry the green chest. “I’ll soon have that brought along!” said the man, and he answered everything with a jolly “I’ll soon arrange that; you just leave that to me!”

When three days had gone by, he presented Pelle with a circumstantial account, which amounted exactly to five and twenty kroner. It was a curious chance that Pelle had just that amount of money. He was not willing to be done out of it, but the boarding-house keeper, Elleby, called in a policeman from the street, and Pelle had to pay.

He was standing in the street with his green box, helpless and bewildered, not knowing what to be about. Then a little boy came whistling up to him and asked if he could not help him. “I can easily carry the box alone, to wherever you want it, but it will cost twenty- five öre and ten öre for the barrow. But if I just take one handle it will be only ten öre,” he said, and he looked Pelle over in a business- like manner. He did not seem to be more than nine or ten years old.

“But I don’t know where I shall go,” said Pelle, almost crying. “I’ve been turned out on the street and have nowhere where I can turn. I am quite a stranger here in the city and all my money has been taken from me.”

The youngster made a gesture in the air as though butting something with his head. “Yes, that’s a cursed business. You’ve fallen into the hands of the farmer-catchers, my lad. So you must come home with us—you can very well stay with us, if you don’t mind lying on the floor.”

“But what will your parents say if you go dragging me home?”

“I haven’t any parents, and Marie and Peter, they’ll say nothing. Just come with me, and, after all, you can get work with old Pipman. Where do you come from?”

“From Bornholm.”

“So did we! That’s to say, a long time ago, when we were quite children. Come along with me, countryman!” The boy laughed delightedly and seized one handle of the chest.

It was also, to be sure, a fellow-countryman who had robbed him; but none the less he went with the boy; it was not in Pelle’s nature to be distrustful.

So he had entered the “Ark,” under the protection of a child. The sister, a little older than the other two, found little Karl’s action entirely reasonable, and the three waifs, who had formerly been shy and retiring, quickly attached themselves to Pelle. They found him in the street and treated him like an elder comrade, who was a stranger, and needed protection. They afforded him his first glimpse of the great city, and they helped him to get work from Pipman.

On the day after the outing in the forest, Pelle moved over to the row of attics, into a room near the “Family,” which was standing empty just then. Marie helped him to get tidy and to bring his things along, and with an easier mind he shook himself free of his burdensome relations with Pipman. There was an end of his profit-sharing, and all the recriminations which were involved in it. Now he could enter into direct relations with the employers and look his comrades straight in the eyes. For various reasons it had been a humiliating time; but he had no feeling of resentment toward Pipman; he had learned more with him in a few months than during his whole apprenticeship at home.

He obtained a few necessary tools from an ironmonger, and bought a bench and a bed for ready money. From the master-shoemaker he obtained as a beginning some material for children's shoes, which he made at odd times. His principal living he got from Master Beck in Market Street.

Beck was a man of the old school; his clientele consisted principally of night watchmen, pilots, and old seamen, who lived out in Kristianshavn. Although he was born and had grown up in Copenhagen, he was like a country shoemaker to look at, going about in canvas slippers which his daughter made for him, and in the mornings he smoked his long pipe at the house-door. He had old-fashioned views concerning handwork, and was delighted with Pelle, who could strain any piece of greased leather and was not afraid to strap a pair of old dubbin'd boots with it. Beck's work could not well be given out to do at home, and Pelle willingly established himself in the workshop and was afraid of no work that came his way. But he would not accept bed and board from his master in the old-fashioned way.

From the very first day this change was an improvement. He worked heart and soul and began to put by something with which to pay off his debt to Sort. Now he saw the day in the distance when he should be able to send for Father Lasse.

In the morning, when the dwellers on the roof, drunken with sleep, tumbled out into the long gangway, in order to go to their work, before the quarter-to-six whistle sounded, Pelle already sat in his room hammering on his cobbler's last. About seven o'clock he went to Beck's workshop, if there was anything for him to do there. And he received orders too from the dwellers in the "Ark."

In connection with this work he acquired an item of practical experience, an idea which was like a fruitful seed which lay germinating where it fell and continually produced fresh fruit. It was equivalent to an improvement in his circumstances to discover that he had shaken off one parasite; if only he could send the other after him and keep all his profits for himself!

That sounded quite fantastic, but Pelle had no desire to climb up to the heights only to fall flat on the earth again. He had obtained certain tangible experience, and he wanted to know how far it would take him. While he sat there working he pursued the question in and out among his thoughts, so that he could properly consider it.

Pipman was superfluous as a middleman; one could get a little work without the necessity of going to him and pouring a flask of brandy down his thirsty gullet. But was it any more reasonable that the shoes Pelle made should go to the customer by way of the Court shoemaker and yield him carriages and high living? Could not Pelle himself establish relations with his customers? And shake off Meyer as he had shaken off Pipman? Why, of course! It was said that the Court shoemaker paid taxes on a yearly income of thirty thousand kroner. "That ought to be evenly divided among all those who work for him!" thought Pelle, as he hammered away at his pegs. "Then Father Lasse wouldn't need to stay at home a day longer, or drag himself through life so miserably."

Here was something which he could take in hand with the feeling that he was setting himself a practical problem in economics—and one that apparently had nothing to do with his easy belief in luck. This idea was always lurking somewhere in secrecy, and held him upright through everything—although it did not afford him any definite assistance. A hardly earned instinct told him that it was only among poor people that this idea could be developed. This belief was his family inheritance, and he would retain it faithfully through all vicissitudes; as millions had done before him, always ready to cope with the unknown, until they reached the grave and resigned the inherited dream. There lay hope for himself in this, but if he miscarried, the hope itself would remain in spite of him. With Fortune there was no definite promise of tangible success for the individual, but only a general promise, which was maintained through hundreds of years of servitude with something of the long patience of eternity.

Pelle bore the whole endless wandering within himself: it lay deep in his heart, like a great and incomprehensible patience. In his world, capacity was often great enough, but resignation was always greater. It was thoroughly accustomed to see everything go to ruin and yet to go on hoping.

Often enough during the long march, hope had assumed tones like those of “David’s City with streets of gold,” or “Paradise,” or “The splendor of the Lord returns.” He himself had questioningly given ear; but never until now had the voice of hope sounded in a song that had to do with food and clothing, house and farm; so how was he to find his way?

He could only sit and meditate the problem as to how he should obtain, quickly and easily, a share in the good things of this world; presumptuously, and with an impatience for which he himself could not have accounted.

And round about him things were happening in the same way. An awakening shudder was passing through the masses. They no longer wandered on and on with blind and patient surrender, but turned this way and that in bewildered consultation. The miracle was no longer to be accomplished of itself when the time was fulfilled. For an evil power had seized upon their great hope, and pressed her knees together so that she could not bring forth; they themselves must help to bring happiness into the world!

The unshakable fatalism which hitherto had kept them on their difficult path was shattered; the masses would no longer allow themselves to be held down in stupid resignation. Men who all their lives had plodded their accustomed way to and from their work now stood still and asked unreasonable questions as to the aim of it all. Even the simple ventured to cast doubts upon the established order of things. Things were no longer thus because they must be; there was a painful cause of poverty. That was the beginning of the matter; and now they conceived a desire to master life; their fingers itched to be tearing down something that obstructed them—but what it was they did not know.

All this was rather like a whirlpool; all boundaries disappeared. Unfamiliar powers arose, and the most good-natured became suspicious or were frankly bewildered. People who had hitherto crawled like dogs in order to win their food were now filled with self-will, and preferred to be struck down rather than bow down of their own accord. Prudent folks who had worked all their lives in one place could no longer put up with the conditions, and went at a word. Their hard-won endurance was banished from their minds, and those who had quietly borne the whole burden on their shoulders were now becoming restive; they were as unwilling and unruly as a pregnant woman. It was as though they were acting under the inward compulsion of an invisible power, and were striving to break open the hard shell which lay over something new within them. One could perceive that painful striving in their bewildered gaze and in their sudden crazy grasp at the empty air.

There was something menacing in the very uncertainty which possessed the masses. It was as though they were listening for a word to sound out of the darkness. Swiftly they resolved to banish old custom and convention from their minds, in order to make room there. On every side men continually spoke of new things, and sought blindly to find their way to them; it was a matter of course that the time had come and the promised land was about to be opened to them. They went about in readiness to accomplish something—what, they did not know; they formed themselves into little groups; they conducted unfortunate strikes, quite at random. Others organized debating societies, and began in weighty speech to squabble about the new ideas—which none of them knew anything about. These were more particularly the young men. Many of them had come to the city in search of fortune, as had Pelle himself, and these were full of burning restlessness. There was something violent and feverish about them.

Such was the situation when Pelle entered the capital. It was chaotic; there was no definite plan by which they could reach their goal. The masses no longer supported one another, but were in a state of solution, bewildered and drifting about in the search for something that would weld them together. In the upper ranks of society people noted nothing but the insecurity of the position of the workers; people complained of their restlessness, a senseless restlessness which jeopardized revenue and aggravated foreign competition. A few thoughtful individuals saw the people as one great listening ear; new preachers were arising who wanted to lead the crowd by new ways to God. Pelle now and again allowed the stream to carry him into such quarters, but he did allow himself to be caught; it was only the old story over again; there was nothing in it. Nobody now was satisfied with directions how to reach heaven—the new prophets disappeared as quickly as they had arisen.

But in the midst of all this confusion there was one permanent center, one community, which had steadily increased during the years, and had fanatically endured the scorn and the persecution of those above and below, until it at last possessed several thousand of members. It stood fast in the maelstrom and obstinately affirmed that its doctrines were those of the future. And now the wind seemed to be filling its sails; it replied after its own fashion to the impatient demands for a heaven to be enjoyed here on earth and an attainable happiness.

Pelle had been captured by the new doctrines out by the Schleswig Stone, and had thrown himself, glowing and energetic, into the heart of the movement. He attended meetings and discussions, his ears on the alert to absorb anything really essential; for his practical nature called for something palpable whereupon his mind could get to work. Deep within his being was a mighty flux, like that of a river beneath its ice; and at times traces of it rose to the surface, and alarmed him. Yet he had no power to sound the retreat; and when he heard the complaint, in respect of the prevailing unrest, that it endangered the welfare of the nation, he was not able to grasp the connection.

“It’s preposterous that they should knock off work without any reason,” he once told Morten, when the baker’s driver had thrown up his place. “Like your driver, for example—he had no ground for complaint.”

“Perhaps he suddenly got a pain between the legs because his ancestor great-grandfather was once made to ride on a wooden horse—he came from the country,” said Morten solemnly.

Pelle looked at him quickly. He did not like Morten’s ambiguous manner of expressing himself. It made him feel insecure.

“Can’t you talk reasonably?” he said. “I can’t understand you.”

“No? And yet that’s quite reason enough—there have been lots of reasons since his great-grandfather’s days. What the devil—why should they want a reason referring to yesterday precisely? Don’t you realize that the worker, who has so long been working the treadmill in the belief that the movement was caused by somebody else, has suddenly discovered that it’s he that keeps the whole thing in motion? For that’s what is going on. The poor man is not merely a slave who treads the wheel, and had a handful of meal shoved down his gullet now and again to keep him from starving to death. He is on the point of discovering that he performs a higher service, look you! And now the movement is altering—it is continuing of itself! But that you probably can’t see,” he added, as he noted Pelle’s incredulous expression.

“No, for I’m not one of the big-bellies,” said Pelle, laughing, “and you’re no prophet, to prophesy such great things. And I have enough understanding to realize that if you want to make a row you must absolutely have something definite to make a fuss about, otherwise it won’t work. But that about the wooden horse isn’t good enough!”

“That’s just the point about lots of fusses,” Morten replied. “There’s no need to give a pretext for anything that everybody’s interested in.”

Pelle pondered further over all this while at work. But these deliberations did not proceed as in general; as a rule, such matters as were considered in his world of thought were fixed by the generations and referred principally to life and death. He had to set to work in a practical manner, and to return to his own significant experience.

Old Pipman was superfluous; that Pelle himself had proved. And there was really no reason why he should not shake off the Court shoemaker as well; the journeymen saw to the measuring and the cutting-out; indeed, they did the whole work. He was also really a parasite, who had placed himself at the head of them all, and was sucking up their profits. But then Morten was right with his unabashed assertion that the working-man carried on the whole business! Pelle hesitated a little over this conclusion; he cautiously verified the fact that it was in any case valid in his craft. There was some sense in winning back his own—but how?

His sound common-sense demanded something that would take the place of Meyer and the other big parasites. It wouldn’t do for every journeyman to sit down and botch away on his own account, like a little employer; he had seen that plainly enough in the little town at home; it was mere bungling.

So he set himself to work out a plan for a cooperative business. A number of craftsmen should band together, each should contribute his little capital, and a place of business would be selected. The work would be distributed according to the various capacities of the men, and they would choose one from their midst who would superintend the whole. In this way the problem could be solved—every man would receive the full profit of his work.

When he had thoroughly thought out his plan, he went to Morten.

“They’ve already put that into practice!” cried Morten, and he pulled out a book. “But it didn’t work particularly well. Where did you get the idea from?”

“I thought it out myself,” answered Pelle self-consciously.

Morten looked a trifle incredulous; then he consulted the book, and showed Pelle that his idea was described there—almost word for word—as a phase of the progressive movement. The book was a work on Socialism.

But Pelle did not lose heart on that account! He was proud to have hit on something that others had worked out before him—and learned people, too! He began to have confidence in his own ideas, and eagerly attended lectures and meetings. He had energy and courage, that he knew. He would try to make himself efficient, and then he would seek out those at the head of things, who were preparing the way, and would offer them his services.

Hitherto Fortune had always hovered before his eyes, obscurely, like a fairy-tale, as something that suddenly swooped down upon a man and lifted him to higher regions, while all those who were left behind gazed longingly after him—that was the worst of it! But now he perceived new paths, which for all those that were in need led on to fortune, just as the “Great Power” had fancied in the hour of his death. He did not quite understand where everything was to come from, but that was just the thing he must discover.

All this kept his mind in a state of new and unaccustomed activity. He was not used to thinking things out for himself, but had until now always adhered to the ideas which had been handed down from generation to generation as established—and he often found it difficult and wearisome. Then he would try to shelve the whole subject, in order to escape from it; but it always returned to him.

When he was tired, Hanne regained her influence over him, and then he went over to see her in the evenings. He knew very well that this would lead to nothing good. To picture for himself a future beside Hanne seemed impossible; for her only the moment existed. Her peculiar nature had a certain power over him—that was all. He often vowed to himself that he would not allow her to make a fool of him—but he always went over to see her again. He must try to conquer her—and then take the consequences.

One day, when work was over, he strolled across to see her. There was no one on the gallery, so he went into the little kitchen.

“Is that you, Pelle?” Hanne’s voice sounded from the living-room. “Come in, then!”

She had apparently been washing her body, and was now sitting in a white petticoat and chemise, and combing her beautiful hair. There was something of the princess about her; she took such care of her body, and knew how it should be done. The mirror stood before her, on the window- sill; from the little back room one could see, between the roofs and the mottled party-wall, the prison and the bridge and the canal that ran beneath it. Out beyond the Exchange the air was gray and streaked with the tackle of ships.

Pelle sat down heavily by the stove, his elbows on his knees, and gazed on the floor. He was greatly moved. If only the old woman would come! “I believe I’ll go out,” he thought, “and behave as though I were looking out for her.” But he remained sitting there. Against the wall was the double bed with its red-flowered counterpane, while the table stood by the opposite wall, with the chairs pushed under it. “She shouldn’t drive me too far,” he thought, “or perhaps it’ll end in my seizing her, and then she’ll have her fingers burnt!”

“Why don’t you talk to me, Pelle?” said Hanne.

He raised his head and looked at her in the mirror. She was holding the end of her plait in her mouth, and looked like a kitten biting its tail.

“Oh, what should I talk about?” he replied morosely.

“You are angry with me, but it isn’t fair of you—really, it isn’t fair! Is it my fault that I’m so terrified of poverty? Oh, how it does frighten me! It has always been like that ever since I was born, and you are poor too, Pelle, as poor as I am! What would become of us both? We know the whole story!”

“What will become of us?” said Pelle.

“That I don’t know, and it’s all the same to me—only it must be something I don’t know all about. Everything is so familiar if one is poor —one knows every stitch of one’s clothes by heart; one can watch them wearing out. If you'd only been a sailor, Pelle!"

"Have you seen *him* again?" asked Pelle.

Hanne laughingly shook her head. "No; but I believe something will happen—something splendid. Out there lies a great ship—I can see it from the window. It's full of wonderful things, Pelle."

"You are crazy!" said Pelle scornfully. "That's a bark—bound for the coal quay. She comes from England with coals."

"That may well be," replied Hanne indifferently. "I don't mind that. There's something in me singing, 'There lies the ship, and it has brought something for me from foreign parts.' And you needn't grudge me my happiness."

But now her mother came in, and began to mimic her.

"Yes, out there lies the ship that has brought me something—out there lies the ship that has brought me something! Good God! Haven't you had enough of listening to your own crazy nonsense? All through your childhood you've sat there and made up stories and looked out for the ship! We shall soon have had enough of it! And you let Pelle sit there and watch you uncovering your youth—aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Pelle's so good, mother—and he's my brother, too. He thinks nothing of it."

"Thinks nothing of it? Yes, he does; he thinks how soft and white your bosom is! And he's fit to cry inside of him because he mustn't lay his head there. I, too, have known what it is to give joy, in my young days."

Hanne blushed from her bosom upward. She threw a kerchief over her bosom and ran into the kitchen.

The mother looked after her.

"She's got a skin as tender as that of a king's daughter. Wouldn't one think she was a cuckoo's child? Her father couldn't stand her. 'You've betrayed me with some fine gentleman'—he used so often to say that. 'We poor folks couldn't bring a piece like that into the world!' 'As God lives, Johnsen,' I used to say, 'you and no other are the girl's father.' But he used to beat us—he wouldn't believe me. He used to fly into a rage when he looked at the child, and he hated us both because she was so fine. So its no wonder that she had gone a bit queer in the head. You can believe she's cost me tears of blood, Pelle. But you let her be, Pelle. I could wish you could get her, but it wouldn't be best for you, and it isn't good for you to have her playing with you. And if you got her after all, it would be even worse. A woman's whims are poor capital for setting up house with."

Pelle agreed with her in cold blood; he had allowed himself to he fooled, and was wasting his youth upon a path that led nowhere. But now there should be an end of it.

Hanne came back and looked at him, radiant, full of visions. "Will you take me for a walk, Pelle?" she asked him.

"Yes!" answered Pelle joyfully, and he threw all his good resolutions overboard.

V

Pelle and his little neighbor used to compete as to which of them should be up first in the morning. When she was lucky and had to wake him her face was radiant with pride. It sometimes happened that he would lie in bed a little longer, so that he should not deprive her of a pleasure, and when she knocked on the wall he would answer in a voice quite stupid with drowsiness. But sometimes her childish years demanded the sleep that was their right, when Pelle would move about as quietly as possible, and then, at half-past six, it would be his turn to knock on the wall. On these occasions she would feel ashamed of herself all the morning. Her brothers were supposed to get their early coffee and go to work by six o'clock. Peter, who was the elder, worked in a tin-plate works, while Earl sold the morning papers, and undertook every possible kind of occasional work as well; this he had to hunt for, and you could read as much in his whole little person. There was something restless and nomadic about him, as though his thoughts were always seeking some outlet.

It was quite a lively neighborhood at this time of day; across the floor of the well, and out through the tunnel-like entry there was an endless clattering of footsteps, as the hundreds of the "Ark" tumbled out into the daylight, half tipsy with sleep, dishevelled, with evidence of hasty rising in their eyes and their garments, smacking their lips as though they relished the contrast between the night and day, audibly yawning as they scuttled away. Up in Pelle's long gangway factory girls, artisans, and newspaper women came tumbling out, half naked; they were always late, and stood there scolding until their turn came to wash themselves. There was only one lavatory at either end of the gangway, and there was only just time to sluice their eyes and wake themselves up. The doors of all the rooms stood open; the odors of night were heavy on the air.

On the days when Pelle worked at home little Marie was in high spirits. She sang and hummed continually, with her curiously small voice, and every few minutes she would run in and offer Pelle her services. At such times she would station herself behind him and stand there in silence, watching the progress of his work, while her breathing was audibly perceptible, as a faint, whistling sound. There was a curious, still, brooding look about her little under-grown figure that reminded Pelle of Morten's unhappy sister; something hard and undeveloped, as in the fruit of a too-young tree. But the same shadow did not lie upon her; childish toil had not steeped her as with a bitter sap; only her outer shell was branded by it. There was about her, on the contrary, a gleam of careful happiness, as though things had turned out much better than she had expected. Perhaps this was because she could see the result of her hard childish labors; no one could scatter that to the winds.

She was a capable little housewife, and her brothers respected her, and faithfully brought home what they earned. Then she took what she needed, laid something by toward the rent, in a box which was put away in the chest of drawers, and gave them something wherewith to amuse themselves. "They must have something!" she told people; "besides, men always need money in their pockets. But they deserve it, for they have never yet spent a farthing in drink. On Saturday nights they always come straight home with their earnings. But now I must get on with my work; it's dreadful how the time runs through one's hands."

She talked just like a young married woman, and Pelle inwardly chuckled over her.

After a while she would peep in again; it was time for Pelle to have a bite of something; or else she would bring her mending with her and sit down on the edge of a chair.

She was always in a fidget lest a saucepan should boil over, or something else go amiss.

At such times they had long, sensible talks. Little Marie did not care about gossip; but there were plenty of serious things which had to be talked over; the difficult times, Marie's parents, and then the wonderful fact that they had met one another once before, a long time ago; that was an event which provided her with an inexhaustible mine of discussion, although she herself could not remember the occasion.

But Pelle remembered it all quite well, and over and over again he had to tell her how one day at home he had gone down to the harbor, in order to show old Thatcher Holm the steamers; and she always laughed when she heard how Holm had run away in his alarm every time the steam-crane blew off steam. And then? Yes, the steamer was just on the point of taking on board a heap of furniture, old beds, tables, and the like.

"That was all ours!" cried Marie, clapping her hands. "We still had a few things then. We took them to the pawn-shop when father lay ill after his fall." And then she would meet his gaze, asking for more.

And in the midst of all the furniture stood a man with a fine old mirror in his arms. Thatcher Holm knew him, and had a talk with him.

"He was crying, wasn't he?" asked Marie compassionately. "Father was so unhappy, because things were going so badly with us."

And then she herself would talk about the hotel, down among the cliffs of the east coast, and of the fine guests who came there in summer. Three years they had kept the hotel, and Pelle had to name the sum out of which her father had been cheated. She was proud that they had once possessed so much. Ten thousand kroner!

Over here her father had found work as a stonemason's laborer, but one day he trod on a loose beam and fell. For a few months he lay sick, and all their household goods found their way to the pawn-shop; then he died, and then they came to the "Ark." Their mother did washing out of doors, but at last she became queer in the head. She could not bear unhappiness, and neglected her housework, to run about seeking consolation from all sorts of religious sects. At last she was quite demented, and one day she disappeared. It was believed that she had drowned herself in the canal. "But things are going well with us now," Marie always concluded; "now there's nothing to worry about."

"But don't you get tired of having all this to look after?" Pelle would ask, wondering.

She would look at him in astonishment. "Why should I be tired? There's not more than one can manage—if one only knows how to manage. And the children never make things difficult for me; they are pleased with everything I do."

The three orphans struggled on as well as they could, and were quite proud of their little household. When things went badly with them, they went hungry, and took serious counsel together; but they accepted help from no one. They lived in the continual fear that the police would get to know of their position, and haul them off to school. Then they would be forcibly separated and brought up at the expense of the poor-rates. They were shy, and "kept themselves to themselves." In the "Ark" everybody liked them, and helped them to keep their secret. The other inmates managed their family affairs as best they could; there was always a scandal somewhere. It was a sort of satisfaction to have these three children living so decently in the midst of all this hotch-potch. People thought a great deal of their little model household, and protected it as though it had been a sanctuary.

To Pelle they attached themselves blindly. They had picked him up out of the streets, and they certainly regarded him to some extent as a foundling who was still under their protection. When Marie had given the boys their morning coffee, she carried some in to Pelle—it was no use protesting. And in the mornings, when she was busy indoors by herself, she would go round to him with broom and bucket. Her precocious, intelligent face was beaming with circumspection and the desire to help. She did not ask permission, but set to work where need was. If Pelle was away at Beck's workshop, he always found his room clean and tidy in the evening.

If he had work at home, she would bring coffee for the two of them during the morning. He did not dare to drive her away, for she would take that to heart, and would go about offended all the rest of the day; so he would run below to fetch a roll of white bread. Marie always found some pretext for putting aside her share for the boys; it gave her no real pleasure to enjoy anything by herself.

Pelle felt that he was making headway; and he was conscious of his own youth. He was continually in the rosiest of humors, and even Hanne could not throw any real shadow over his existence. In his relations with her there was something of a beautiful unreality; they left no permanent scar upon his heart.

He felt quite simply ashamed in the presence of this much tried child, whenever something cropped up to put him out of temper. He felt it was his duty to brighten her poverty-stricken life with his high spirits. He chatted merrily to her, chaffed her, teased her, to charm her from her unnatural solemnity. And she would smile, in her quiet, motherly fashion, as one smiles at a much-loved child who seeks to drive away our cares—and would then offer to do something for him.

"Shall I wash out your blouse or do up your shirt?" she would ask. Her gratitude always found its expression in some kind of work.

“No, thanks, Marie; Hanne and her mother look after that.”

“But that’s not work for the Princess—I can do it much better.”

“The Princess?” said Pelle, raising his head. “Is that what they call her?”

“Only us children—we don’t mean it unkindly. But we always played at there being a princess when she was with us—and she was always the princess. But do you know what? Some one will come and take her away — some one very distinguished. She has been promised from the cradle to a fine gentleman.”

“What nonsense!” said Pelle crossly.

“But that’s really true! When it rained we used to sit under the gallery —in the corner by the dustbin—and she used to tell us—and it’s really true! And, besides, don’t you think she’s fascinating? She’s really just like a princess—like that!” Marie made a gesture in the air with her fingers outspread. “And she knows everything that is going to happen. She used to run down to us, in the courtyard, in her long dress, and her mother used to stand up above and call her; then she’d sit on the grating as if it was a throne and she was the queen and we were her ladies. She used to braid our hair, and then dress it beautifully with colored ribbons, and when I came up here again mother used to tear it all down and make my hair rough again. It was a sin against God to deck one’s self out like that, she said. And when mother disappeared I hadn’t time to play down there any more.”

“Poor little girl!” said Pelle, stroking her hair.

“Why do you say that?” she asked him, looking at him in astonishment.

He enjoyed her absolute confidence, and was told things that the boys were not allowed to know. She began to dress more carefully, and her fine fair hair was always brushed smoothly back from her forehead. She was delighted when they both had some errand in the city. Then she put on her best and went through the streets at his side, her whole face smiling. “Now perhaps people will think we are a couple of lovers—but what does it matter? Let them think it!” Pelle laughed; with her thirteen years she was no bigger than a child of nine, so backward in growth was she.

She often found it difficult to make both ends meet; she would say little or nothing about it, but a kind of fear would betray itself in her expression. Then Pelle would speak cheerfully of the good times that would soon be coming for all poor people. It cost him a great deal of exertion to put this in words so as to make it sound as it ought to sound. His thoughts were still so new—even to himself. But the children thought nothing of his unwieldy speech; to them it was easier to believe in the new age than it was to him.

VI

Pelle was going through a peculiar change at this time. He had seen enough need and poverty in his life; and the capital was simply a battlefield on which army upon army had rushed forward and had miserably been defeated. Round about him lay the fallen. The town was built over them as over a cemetery; one had to tread upon them in order to win forward and harden one’s heart. Such was life in these days; one shut one’s eyes—like the sheep when they see their comrades about to be slaughtered—and waited until one’s own turn came. There was nothing else to do.

But now he was awake and suffering; it hurt him with a stabbing pain whenever he saw others suffer; and he railed against misfortune, unreasonable though it might be.

There came a day when he sat working at home. At the other end of the gangway a factory girl with her child had moved in a short while before. Every morning she locked the door and went to work—and she did not return until the evening. When Pelle came home he could hear the sound of crying within the room.

He sat at his work, wrestling with his confused ideas. And all the time a curious stifled sound was in his ears—a grievous sound, as though something were incessantly complaining. Perhaps it was only the dirge of poverty itself, some strophe of which was always vibrating upon the air.

Little Marie came hurrying in. “Oh, Pelle, it’s crying again!” she said, and she wrung her hands anxiously upon her hollow chest. “It has cried all day, ever since she came here—it is horrible!”

“We’ll go and see what’s wrong,” said Pelle, and he threw down his hammer.

The door was locked; they tried to look through the keyhole, but could see nothing. The child within stopped its crying for a moment, as though it heard them, but it began again at once; the sound was low and monotonous, as though the child was prepared to hold out indefinitely. They looked at one another; it was unendurable.

“The keys on this gangway do for all the doors,” said Marie, under her breath. With one leap Pelle had rushed indoors, obtained his key, and opened the door.

Close by the door sat a little four-year-old boy; he stared up at them, holding a rusty tin vessel in his hand. He was tied fast to the stove; near him, on an old wooden stool, was a tin plate containing a few half-nibbled crusts of bread. The child was dressed in filthy rags and presented a shocking appearance. He sat in his own filth; his little hands were covered with it. His tearful, swollen face was smeared all over with it. He held up his hands to them beseechingly.

Pelle burst into tears at the horrible sight and wanted to pick the child up. “Let me do that!” cried Marie, horrified. “You’ll make yourself filthy!”

“What then?” said Pelle stupidly. He helped to untie the child; his hands were trembling.

To some extent they got the child to rights and gave him food. Then they let him loose in the long gangway. For a time he stood stupidly gaping by the doorpost; then he discovered that he was not tied up, and began to rush up and down. He still held in his hand the old tea-strainer which he had been grasping when they rescued him; he had held on to it convulsively all the time. Marie had to dip his hand in the water in order to clean the strainer.

From time to time he stood in front of Pelle’s open door, and peeped inside. Pelle nodded to him, when he went storming up and down again—he was like a wild thing. But suddenly he came right in, laid the tea-strainer in Pelle’s lap and looked at him. “Am I to have that?” asked Pelle. “Look, Marie, he is giving me the only thing he’s got!”

“Oh, poor little thing!” cried Marie pityingly. “He wants to thank you!”

In the evening the factory girl came rushing in; she was in a rage, and began to abuse them for breaking into her room. Pelle wondered at himself, that he was able to answer her so quietly instead of railing back at her. But he understood very well that she was ashamed of her poverty and did not want any one else to see it. “It is unkind to the child,” was all he said. “And yet you are fond of it!”

Then she began to cry. “I have to tie him up, or he climbs out over the window-sill and runs into the street—he got to the corner once before.

And I've no clothes, to take him to the crêche!"

"Then leave the door open on the gangway! We will look after him, Marie and I."

After this the child tumbled about the gangway and ran to and fro. Marie looked after him, and was like a mother to him. Pelle bought some old clothes, and they altered them to fit him. The child looked very droll in them; he was a little goblin who took everything in good part. In his loneliness he had not learned to speak, but now speech came quickly to him.

In Pelle this incident awakened something quite novel. Poverty he had known before, but now he saw the injustice that lay beneath it, and cried to heaven. His hands would suddenly clench with anger as he sat so quietly in his room. Here was something one must hasten forward, without intermission, day and night, as long as one drew breath—Morten was right about that! This child's father was a factory hand, and the girl dared not summon him before the magistrates in order to make him pay for its support for fear of being dismissed from her place. The whole business seemed so hopeless—society seemed so unassailable—yet he felt that he must strike a blow. His own hands alone signified so little; but if they could only strike the blow all together—then perhaps it would have some effect.

In the evenings he and Morten went to meetings where the situation was passionately discussed. Those who attended these meetings were mostly young people like himself. They met in some inn by the North Bridge. But Pelle longed to see some result, and applied himself eagerly to the organization of his own craft.

He inspired the weary president with his own zeal, and they prepared together a list of all the members of their trade—as the basis of a more vigorous agitation. When the "comrades" were invited to a meeting through the press, they turned lazy and failed to appear. More effectual means were needed; and Pelle started a house-to-house agitation. This helped immediately; they were in a dilemma when one got them face to face, and the Union was considerably increased, in spite of the persecution of the big masters.

Morten began to treat him with respect; and wanted him to read about the movement. But Pelle had no time for that. Together with Peter and Karl, who were extremely zealous, he took in *The Working Man*, and that was enough for him. "I know more about poverty than they write there," he said.

There was no lack of fuel to keep this fire burning. He had participated in the march of poverty, from the country to the town and thence to the capital, and there they stood and could go no farther for all their longing, but perished on a desert shore. The many lives of the "Ark" lay always before his eyes as a great common possession, where no one need conceal himself, and where the need of the one was another's grief.

His nature was at this time undergoing a great change. There was an end of his old careless acceptance of things. He laughed less and performed apparently trivial actions with an earnestness which had its comical side. And he began to display an appearance of self-respect which seemed ill-justified by his position and his poverty.

One evening, when work was over, as he came homeward from Beck's workshop, he heard the children singing Hanne's song down in the courtyard. He stood still in the tunnel-like entry; Hanne herself stood in the midst of a circle, and the children were dancing round her and singing:

"I looked from the lofty mountain
Down over vale and lea,
And I saw a ship come sailing,
  Sailing, sailing,
I saw a ship come sailing,
And on it were lordlings three."

On Hanne's countenance lay a blind, fixed smile; her eyes were tightly closed. She turned slowly about as the children sang, and she sang softly with them:

"The youngest of all the lordlings
Who on the ship did stand..."

But suddenly she saw Pelle and broke out of the circle. She went up the stairs with him. The children, disappointed, stood calling after her.

"Aren't you coming to us this evening?" she asked. "It is so long since we have seen you."

“I’ve no time. I’ve got an appointment,” replied Pelle briefly.

“But you must come! I beg you to, Pelle.” She looked at him pleadingly, her eyes burning.

Pelle’s heart began to thump as he met her gaze. “What do you want with me?” he asked sharply.

Hanne stood still, gazing irresolutely into the distance.

“You must help me, Pelle,” she said, in a toneless voice, without meeting his eye.

“Yesterday I met.... Yesterday evening, as I was coming out of the factory ... he stood down below here ... he knows where I live. I went across to the other side and behaved as though I did not see him; but he came up to me and said I was to go to the New Market this evening!”

“And what did you say to that?” answered Pelle sulkily.

“I didn’t say anything—I ran as hard as I could!”

“Is that all you want me for?” cried Pelle harshly. “You can keep away from him, if you don’t want him!”

A cold shudder ran through her. “But if he comes here to look for me?... And you are so.... I don’t care for anybody in the world but you and mother!” She spoke passionately.

“Well, well, I’ll come over to you,” answered Pelle cheerfully.

He dressed himself quickly and went across. The old woman was delighted to see him. Hanne was quite frolicsome; she rallied him continually, and it was not long before he had abandoned his firm attitude and allowed himself to be drawn into the most delightful romancing. They sat out on the gallery under the green foliage, Hanne’s face glowing to rival the climbing pelargonium; she kept on swinging her foot, and continually touched Pelle’s leg with the tip of her shoe.

She was nervously full of life, and kept on asking the time. When her mother went into the kitchen to make coffee, she took Pelle’s hand and smilingly stroked it.

“Come with me,” she said. “I should so like to see if he is really so silly as to think I’d come. We can stand in a corner somewhere and look out.”

Pelle did not answer.

“Mother,” said Hanne, when Madam Johnsen returned with the coffee, “I’m going out to buy some stuff for my bodice. Pelle’s coming with me.”

The excuse was easy to see through. But the old woman betrayed no emotion. She had already seen that Hanne was well disposed toward Pelle to-day; something was going on in the girl’s mind, and if Pelle only wanted to, he could now bridle her properly. She had no objection to make if both the young people kicked over the traces a little. Perhaps then they would find peace together.

“You ought to take your shawl with you,” she told Hanne. “The evening air may turn cold.”

Hanne walked so quickly that Pelle could hardly follow her. “It’ll be a lark to see his disappointment when we don’t turn up,” she said, laughing. Pelle laughed also. She stationed herself behind one of the pillars of the Town Hall, where she could peep out across the market. She was quite out of breath, she had hurried so.

Gradually, as the time went by and the stranger did not appear, her animation vanished; she was silent, and her expression was one of disappointment.

“No one’s going to come!” she said suddenly, and she laughed shortly.

“I only made up the whole thing to tell you, to see what you’d say.”

“Then let’s go!” said Pelle quietly, and he took her hand.

As they went down the steps, Hanne started; and her hand fell limply from his. The stranger came quickly up to her. He held out his hand to Hanne, quietly and as a matter of course, as though he had known her for years. Pelle, apparently, he did not see.

“Will you come somewhere with me—where we can hear music, for example?” he asked, and he continued to hold her hand. She looked irresolutely at Pelle.

For a moment Pelle felt an inordinate longing to throw himself upon this man and strike him to the ground, but then he met Hanne’s eyes, which wore an expression as though she was longing for some means of shaking him off. “Well, it looks as if one was in the way here!” he thought. “And what does it all matter to me?” He turned away from her and sauntered off down a side street.

Pelle strolled along to the quays by the gasworks, and he stood there, sunk in thought, gazing at the ships and the oily water. He did not suffer;

it was only so terribly stupid that a strange hand should appear out of the unknown, and that the bird which he with all his striving could not entice, should have hopped right away on to that hand.

Below the quay-wall the water plashed with a drowsy sound; fragments of wood and other rubbish floated on it; it was all so home-like! Out by the coal-quay lay a three-master. It was after working hours; the crew were making an uproar below decks, or standing about on deck and washing themselves in a bucket. One well-grown young seaman in blue clothes and a white neckerchief came out of the cabin and stared up at the rigging as though out of habit, and yawned. Then he strolled ashore. His cap was on the back of his head, and between his teeth was a new pipe. His face was full of freakish merriment, and he walked with a swing of the hips. As he came up to Pelle he swayed to and fro a few times and then bumped into him. “Oh, excuse me!” he said, touching his cap. “I thought it was a scratching-post, the gentleman stood so stiff. Well, you mustn’t take it amiss!” And he began to go round and round Pelle, bending far forward as though he were looking for something on him, and finally he pawed his own ears, like a friendly bear, and shook with laughter. He was overflowing with high spirits and good humor.

Pelle had not shaken off his feeling of resentment; he did not know whether to be angry or to laugh at the whole thing.

He turned about cautiously, so as to keep his eye on the sailor, lest the latter should pull his feet from under him. He knew the grip, and also how it should be parried; and he held his hands in readiness. Suddenly something in the stooping position struck him as familiar. This was Per Kofod—Howling Peter, from the village school at home, in his own person! He who used to roar and blubber at the slightest word! Yes, this was he!

“Good evening, Per!” he cried, delighted, and he gave him a thump in the back.

The seaman stood up, astonished. “What the devil! Good evening! Well, that I should meet you here, Pelle; that’s the most comical thing I’ve ever known! You must excuse my puppy-tricks! Really!” He shook Pelle heartily by the hand.

They loafed about the harbor, chatting of old times. There was so much to recall from their schooldays. Old Fris with his cane, and the games on the beach! Per Kofod spoke as though he had taken part in all of them; he had quite forgotten that he used always to stand still gripping on to something and bellowing, if the others came bawling round him. “And Nilen, too, I met him lately in New Orleans. He is second mate on a big American full-rigged ship, and is earning big money. A smart fellow he is. But hang it all, he’s a tough case! Always with his revolver in his hand. But that’s how it has to be over there—among the niggers. Still, one fine day they’ll slit his belly up, by God they will! Now then, what’s the matter there?”

From some stacks of timber near by came a bellowing as of some one in torment, and the sound of blows. Pelle wanted, to turn aside, but Per Kofod seized his arm and dragged him forward.

In among the timber-stacks three “coalies” were engaged in beating a fourth. He did not cry out, but gave vent to a muffled roar every time he received a blow. The blood was flowing down his face.

“Come on!” shouted Per Kofod, hitching up his trousers. And then, with a roar, he hurled himself into their midst, and began to lay about him in all directions. It was like an explosion with its following hail of rocks. Howling Peter had learned to use his strength; only a sailor could lay about him in that fashion. It was impossible to say where his blows were going to fall; but they all went home. Pelle stood by for a moment, mouth and eyes open in the fury of the fray; then he, too, tumbled into the midst of it, and the three dock-laborers were soon biting the dust.

“Damn it all, why did you interfere!” said Pelle crossly, when it was over, as he stood pulling his collar straight.

“I don’t know,” said Howling Peter. “But it does one no harm to bestir one’s self a bit for once!”

After the heat of the battle they had all but forgotten the man originally attacked; he lay huddled up at the foot of a timber-stack and made no sound. They got him on his legs again, but had to hold him upright; he stood as limp as though asleep, and his eyes were staring stupidly. He was making a heavy snoring sound, and at every breath the blood made two red bubbles at his nostrils. From time to time he ground his teeth, and then his eyes turned upward and the whites gleamed strangely in his coal-blackened face.

The sailor scolded him, and that helped him so far that he was able to stand on his feet. They drew a red rag from his bulging jacket-pocket, and wiped the worst of the blood away. “What sort of a fellow are you, damn it all, that you can’t stand a drubbing?” said Per Kofod.

“I didn’t call for help,” said the man thickly. His lips were swollen to a snout.

“But you didn’t hit back again! Yet you look as if you’d strength enough. Either a fellow manages to look after himself or he sings out so that others can come to help him. D’ye see, mate?”

“I didn’t want to bring the police into it; and I’d earned a thrashing. Only they hit so damned hard, and when I fell they used their clogs.”

He lived in the Saksogade, and they took each an arm. “If only I don’t get ill now!” he groaned from time to time. “I’m all a jelly inside.” And they had to stop while he vomited.

There was a certain firm for which he and his mates had decided no longer to unload, as they had cut down the wages offered. There were only four of them who stuck to their refusal; and what use was it when others immediately took their place? The four of them could only hang about and play the gentleman at large; nothing more came of it. But of course he had given his word—that was why he had not hit back. The other three had found work elsewhere, so he went back to the firm and ate humble pie. Why should he hang about idle and killing time when there was nothing to eat at home? He was damned if he understood these new ways; all the same, he had betrayed the others, for he had given his word. But they had struck him so cursedly hard, and had kicked him in the belly with their clogs.

He continued rambling thus, like a man in delirium, as they led him along. In the Saksogade they were stopped by a policeman, but Per Kofod quickly told him a story to the effect that the man had been struck on the head by a falling crane. He lived right up in the attics. When they opened the door a woman who lay there in child-bed raised herself up on the iron bedstead and gazed at them in alarm. She was thin and anemic. When she perceived the condition of her husband she burst into a heartrending fit of crying.

“He’s sober,” said Pelle, in order to console her; “he has only got a bit damaged.”

They took him into the kitchen and bathed his head over the sink with cold water. But Per Kofod’s assistance was not of much use; every time the woman’s crying reached his ears he stopped helplessly and turned his head toward the door; and suddenly he gave up and tumbled headforemost down the back stairs.

“What was really the matter with you?” asked Pelle crossly, when he, too, could get away. Per was waiting at the door for him.

“Perhaps you didn’t hear her hymn-singing, you blockhead! But, anyhow, you saw her sitting up in bed and looking like wax? It’s beastly, I tell you; it’s infamous! He’d no need to go making her cry like that! I had the greatest longing to thrash him again, weak as a baby though he was. The devil—what did he want to break his word for?”

“Because they were starving, Per!” said Pelle earnestly. “That does happen at times in this accursed city.”

Kofod stared at him and whistled. “Oh, Satan! Wife and child, and the whole lot without food—what? And she in childbed. They were married, right enough, you can see that. Oh, the devil! What a honeymoon! What misery!”

He stood there plunging deep into his trouser pockets; he fetched out a handful of things: chewing-tobacco, bits of flock, broken matches, and in the midst of all a crumpled ten-kroner note. “So I thought!” he said, fishing out the note. “I was afraid the girls had quite cleaned me out last night! Now Pelle, you go up and spin them some sort of a yarn; I can’t do it properly myself; for, look you, if I know that woman she won’t stop crying day and night for another twenty-four hours! That’s the last of my pay. But—oh, well, blast it … we go to sea to-morrow!”

“She stopped crying when I took her the money,” said Pelle, when he came down again.

“That’s good. We sailors are dirty beasts; you know; we do our business into china and eat our butter out of the tarbucket; all the same, we—I tell you, I should have left the thing alone and used the money to have made a jolly night of it to-night....” He was suddenly silent; he chewed at his quid as though inwardly considering his difficult philosophy. “Damn it all, to-morrow we put to sea!” he cried suddenly.

They went out to Alleenberg and sat in the gardens. Pelle ordered beer. “I can very well stand a few pints when I meet a good pal,” he said, "but at other times I save like the devil. I've got to see about getting my old father over here; he's living on charity at home."

"So your father's still living? I can see him still so plainly—he had a love-affair with Madam Olsen for some time, but then bo'sun Olsen came home unexpectedly; they thought he'd remain abroad."

Pelle laughed. Much water had run into the sea since those days. Now he was no longer ashamed of Father Lasse's foolish prank.

Light was gleaming from the booths in the garden. Young couples wandered about and had their fortunes told; they ventured themselves on the Wheel of Happiness, or had their portraits cut out by the silhouette artist. By the roundabout was a mingled whirl of cries and music and brightly colored petticoats. Now and again a tremendous outcry arose, curiously dreadful, over all other sounds, and from the concert-pavilion one heard the cracked, straining voices of one-time "stars." Wretched little worldlings came breathlessly hurrying thither, pushing through the crowd, and disappeared into the pavilion, nodding familiarly to the man in the ticket-office window.

"It's really quite jolly here," said Per Kofod. "You have a damn good time of it on land!"

On the wide pathway under the trees apprentices, workmen, soldiers, and now and again a student, loitered up and down, to and fro, looking sideways at the servant-girls, who had stationed themselves on either side of the walk, standing there arm-in-arm, or forming little groups. Their eyes sent many a message before ever one of them stopped and ventured to speak. Perhaps the maiden turned away; if so, that was an end of the matter, and the youngster began the business all over again. Or perhaps she ran off with him to one of the closed arbors, where they drank coffee, or else to the roundabouts. Several of the young people were from Pelle's home; and every time he heard the confident voices of the Bornholm girls Pelle's heart stirred like a bird about to fly away.

Suddenly his troubles returned to his mind. "I really felt inclined, this evening, to have done with the whole thing.... Just look at those two, Per!" Two girls were standing arm-in-arm under a tree, quite close to their table. They were rocking to and fro together, and now and again they glanced at the two young men.

"Nothing there for me—that's only for you land-lubbers," said Per Kofod. "For look you now, they're like so many little lambs whose ears you've got to tickle. And then it all comes back to you in the nights when you take the dog-watch alone; you've told her lies, or you promised to come back again when she undid her bodice.... And in the end there she is, planted, and goin' to have a kid! It don't do. A sailor ought to keep to the naughty girls."

"But married women can be frisky sometimes," said Pelle.

"That so, really? Once I wouldn't have believed that any one could have kicked a good woman; but after all they strangle little children.... And they come and eat out of your hand if you give 'em a kind word—that's the mischief of it.... D'you remember Howling Peter?"

"Yes, as you ask me, I remember him very well."

"Well, his father was a sailor, too, and that's just what he did.... And she was just such a girl, one who couldn't say no, and believed everything a man told her. He was going to come back again—of course. 'When you hear the trap-door of the loft rattle, that'll be me,' he told her. But the trap-door rattled several times, and he didn't come. Then she hanged herself from the trap-door with a rope. Howling Peter came on to the parish. And you know how they all scorned him. Even the wenches thought they had the right to spit at him. He could do nothing but bellow. His mother had cried such a lot before he was born, d'ye see? Yes, and then he hanged himself too—twice he tried to do it. He'd inherited that! After that he had a worse time than ever; everybody thought it honorable to ill-use him and ask after the marks on his throat. No, not you; you were the only one who didn't raise a hand to him. That's why I've so often thought about you. 'What has become of him?' I used to ask myself. 'God only knows where he's got to!'" And he gazed at Pelle with a pair of eyes full of trust.

"No, that was due to Father Lasse," said Pelle, and his tone was quite childlike. "He always said I must be good to you because you were in God's keeping."

"In God's keeping, did he say?" repeated Per Kofod thoughtfully. "That was a curious thing to say. That's a feeling I've never had. There was nothing in the whole world at that time that could have helped me to stand up for myself. I can scarcely understand how it is that I'm sitting here talking to you—I mean, that they didn't torment the life out of my body.”

“Yes, you’ve altered very much. How does it really come about that you’re such a smart fellow now?”

“Why, such as I am now, that’s really my real nature. It has just waked up, that’s what I think. But I don’t understand really what was the matter with me then. I knew well enough I could knock you down if I had only wanted to. But I didn’t dare strike out, just out of sheer wretchedness. I saw so much that you others couldn’t see. Damn it all, I can’t make head nor tail of it! It must have been my mother’s dreadful misery that was still in my bones. A horror used to come over me—quite causeless—so that I had to bellow aloud; and then the farmers used to beat me. And every time I tried to get out of it all by hanging myself, they beat me worse than ever. The parish council decided I was to be beaten. Well, that’s why I don’t do it, Pelle—a sailor ought to keep to women that get paid for it, if they have anything to do with him—that is, if he can’t get married. There, you have my opinion.”

“You’ve had a very bad time,” said Pelle, and he took his hand. “But it’s a tremendous change that’s come over you!”

“Change! You may well say so! One moment Howling Peter—and the next, the strongest man on board! There you have the whole story! For look here now, at sea, of course, it was just the same; even the ship’s boy felt obliged to give me a kick on the shins in passing. Everybody who got a blow on a rowing passed it on to me. And when I went to sea in an American bark, there was a nigger on board, and all of them used to hound him down; he crawled before them, but you may take your oath he hated them out of the whites of his devil’s eyes. But me, who treated him with humanity, he played all manner of tricks on—it was nothing to him that I was white. Yet even with him I didn’t dare to fetch him one— there was always like a flabby lump in my midriff. But once the thing went too far—or else the still-born something inside me was exhausted. I just aimed at him a bit with one arm, so that he fell down. That really was a rummy business. It was, let’s say, like a fairy tale where the toad suddenly turns into a man. I set to then and there and thrashed him till he was half dead. And while I was about it, and in the vein, it seemed best to get the whole thing over, so I went right ahead and thrashed the whole crew from beginning to end. It was a tremendous moment, there was such a heap of rage inside me that had got to come out!”

Pelle laughed. “A lucky thing that I knew you a little while ago, or you would have made mincemeat of me, after all!”

“Not me, mate, that was only a little joke. A fellow is in such high spirits when he comes ashore again. But out at sea it’s—thrash the others, or they’ll thrash you! Well, that’s all right, but one ought to be good to the women. That’s what I’ve told the old man on board; he’s a fellow-countryman, but a swine in his dealings with women. There isn’t a single port where he hasn’t a love-affair. In the South, and on the American coast. It’s madman’s work often, and I have to go along with him and look out that he doesn’t get a knife between his ribs. ‘Per,’ he says, ‘this evening we’ll go on the bust together.’ ‘All right, cap’n,’ I say. ‘But it’s a pity about all the women.’ ‘Shut your mouth, Per,’ he says; ‘they’re most of them married safe enough.’ He’s one of us from home, too—from a little cottage up on the heath.”

“What’s his name, then?” said Pelle, interested.

“Albert Karlsen.”

“Why, then he’s Uncle Kalle’s eldest, and in a way my cousin—Kalle, that is to say, isn’t really his father. His wife had him before she was married—he’s the son of the owner of Stone Farm.”

“So he’s a Kongstrup, then!” cried Per Kofod, and he laughed loudly. “Well, that’s as it should be!”

Pelle paid, and they got up to go. The two girls were still standing by the tree. Per Kofod went up to one of them as though she had been a bird that might escape him. Suddenly he seized her round the waist; she withdrew herself slowly from his grip and laughed in his big fair face. He embraced her once again, and now she stood still; it was still in her mind to escape, for she laughingly half-turned away. He looked deep into her eyes, then released her and followed Pelle.

“What’s the use, Pelle—why, I can hear her complaining already! A fellow ought to be well warned,” he said, with a despairing accent. “But, damn it all, why should a man have so much compassion when he himself has been so cruelly treated? And the others; they’ve no compassion. Did you see how gentle her eyes were? If I’d money I’d marry her right away.”

“Perhaps she wouldn’t have you,” replied Pelle. “It doesn’t do to take the girls for granted.”

In the avenue a few men were going to and fro and calling; they were looking for their young women, who had given them the slip. One of them came up to Per and Pelle—he was wearing a student’s cap. “Have the gentlemen seen anything of our ladies?” he asked. “We’ve been sitting with them and treating them all the evening, and then they said they’d just got to go to a certain place, and they’ve gone off.”

They went down to the harbor. “Can’t you come on board with me and say how d’ye-do to the old man?” said Per. “But of course, he’s ashore to-night. I saw him go over the side about the time we knocked off—rigged out for chasing the girls.”

“I don’t know him at all,” said Pelle; “he was at sea already when I was still a youngster. Anyhow, I’ve got to go home to bed now—I get to work early in the mornings.”

They stood on the quay, taking leave of one another. Per Kofod promised to look Pelle up next time he was in port. While they were talking the door of the after-cabin rattled. Howling Peter drew Pelle behind a stack of coal. A powerful, bearded man came out, leading a young girl by the hand. She went slowly, and appeared to resist. He set her ceremoniously ashore, turned back to the cabin, and locked the door behind him. The girl stood still for a moment. A low ’plaint escaped her lips. She stretched her arms pleadingly toward the cabin. Then she turned and went mournfully along the quay.

“That was the old man,” whispered Per Kofod. “That’s how he treats them all—and yet they don’t want to give him up.”

Pelle could not utter a word; he stood there cowering, oppressed as by some terrible burden. Suddenly he pulled himself together, pressed his comrade’s hand, and set off quickly between the coal-stacks.

After a time he turned aside and followed the young girl at a little distance. Like a sleep-walker, she staggered along the quay and went over the long bridge. He feared she would throw herself in the water, so strangely did she behave.

On the bridge she stood gazing across at the ship, with a frozen look on her face. Pelle stood still; turned to ice by the thought that she might see him. He could not have borne to speak to her just then—much less look into her eyes.

But then she moved on. Her bearing was broken; from behind she looked like one of those elderly, shipwrecked females from the “Ark,” who shuffled along by the house-walls in trodden-down men’s shoes, and always boasted a dubious past. “Good God!” thought Pelle, “is her dream over already? Good God!”

He followed her at a short distance down the narrow street, and as soon as he knew that she must have reached her dwelling he entered the tunnel.

VII

In the depths of Pelle's soul lay a confident feeling that he was destined for something particular; it was his old dream of fortune, which would not be wholly satisfied by the good conditions for all men which he wanted to help to bring about. His fate was no longer in his eyes a grievous and crushing predestination to poverty, which could only be lifted from him by a miracle; he was lord of his own future, and already he was restlessly building it up!

But in addition to this there was something else that belonged only to him and to life, something that no one else in the world could undertake. What it was he had not yet figured to himself; but it was something that raised him above all others, secretly, so that only he was conscious of it. It was the same obscure feeling of being a pioneer that had always urged him forward; and when it did take the form of a definite question he answered it with the confident nod of his childhood. Yes, he would see it through all right! As though that which was to befall him was so great and so wonderful that it could not be put into words, nor even thought of. He saw the straight path in front of him, and he sauntered on, strong and courageous. There were no other enemies than those a prudent man might perceive; those lurking forces of evil which in his childhood had hovered threateningly above his head were the shadows of the poor man's wretchedness. There was nothing else evil, and that was sinister enough. He knew now that the shadows were long. Morten was right. Although he himself when a child had sported in the light, yet his mind was saddened by the misery of all those who were dead or fighting in distant parts of the earth; and it was on this fact that the feeling of solidarity must be based. The miraculous simply had no existence, and that was a good thing for those who had to fight with the weapon of their own physical strength. No invisible deity sat overhead making his own plans for them or obstructing others. What one willed, that could one accomplish, if only he had strength enough to carry it through. Strength—it was on that and that alone that everything depended. And there was strength in plenty. But the strength of all must be united, must act as the strength of one. People always wondered why Pelle, who was so industrious and respectable, should live in the "Ark" instead of in the northern quarter, in the midst of the Movement. He wondered at himself when he ever thought about it at all; but he could not as yet tear himself away from the "Ark." Here, at the bottom of the ladder, he had found peace in his time of need. He was too loyal to turn his back on those among whom he had been happy.

He knew they would feel it as a betrayal; the adoration with which the inmates of the "Ark" regarded the three orphan children was also bestowed upon him; he was the foundling, the fourth member of the "Family," and now they were proud of him too!

It was not the way of the inmates of the "Ark" to make plans for the future. Sufficient to the day was the evil thereof; to-morrow's cares were left for the morrow. The future did not exist for them. They were like careless birds, who had once suffered shipwreck and had forgotten it. Many of them made their living where they could; but however down in the world they were, let the slightest ray of sunlight flicker down to them, and all was forgotten. Of the labor movement and other new things they gossiped as frivolously as so many chattering starlings, who had snapped up the news on the wind.

But Pelle went so confidently out into the world, and set his shoulders against it, and then came back home to them. He had no fear; he could look Life straight in the face, he grappled boldly with the future, before which they shudderingly closed their eyes. And thereby his name came to be spoken with a particular accent; Pelle was a prince; what a pity it was that he wouldn't, it seemed, have the princess!

He was tall and well-grown, and to them he seemed even taller. They went to him in their misery, and loaded it all on his strong young shoulders, so that he could bear it for them. And Pelle accepted it all with an increasing sense that perhaps it was not quite aimlessly that he lingered here—so near the foundations of society!

At this time Widow Frandsen and her son Ferdinand came upon the scene. Misfortune must house itself somewhere!

Ferdinand was a sturdy young fellow of eighteen years, with a powerfully modelled head, which looked as though it had originally been intended to absorb all the knowledge there is in all the world. But he used it only for dispensing blows; he had no other use for it whatever.

Yet he was by no means stupid; one might even call him a gifted young man. But his gifts were of a peculiar quality, and had gradually become even more peculiar.

As a little child he had been forced to fight a besotted father, in order to protect his mother, who had no other protector. This unequal battle *had* to be fought; and it necessarily blunted his capacity for feeling pain, and particularly his sense of danger. He knew what was in store for him, but he rushed blindly into the fray the moment his mother was attacked; just as a dog will attack a great beast of prey, so he hung upon the big man’s fists, and would not be shaken off. He hated his father, and he longed in his heart to be a policeman when he was grown up. With his blind and obtuse courage he was particularly adapted to such a calling; but he actually became a homeless vagabond.

Gradually as he grew in height and strength and the battle was no longer so unequal, his father began to fear him and to think of revenge; and once, when Ferdinand had thoroughly thrashed him, he reported him, and the boy was flogged. The boy felt this to be a damnable piece of injustice; the flogging left scars behind it, and another of its results was that his mother was no longer left in peace.

From that time onward he hated the police, and indulged his hatred at every opportunity. His mother was the only being for whom he still cared. It was like a flash of sunshine when his father died. But it came too late to effect any transformation; Ferdinand had long ago begun to look after his mother in his own peculiar way—which was partly due to the conditions of his life.

He had grown up in the streets, and even when quite a child was one of those who are secretly branded. The police knew him well, and were only awaiting their opportunity to ask him inside. Ferdinand could see it in their eyes—they reckoned quite confidently on that visit, and had got a bed already for him in their hotel on the New Market.

But Ferdinand would not allow himself to be caught. When he had anything doubtful in hand, he always managed to clear himself. He was an unusually strong and supple young fellow, and was by no means afraid to work; he obtained all kinds of occasional work, and he always did it well. But whenever he got into anything that offered him a future, any sort of regular work which must be learned and attacked with patience, he could never go on with it.

“You speak to him, Pelle!” said his mother. “You are so sensible, and he does respect you!” Pelle did speak to him, and helped him to find some calling for which he was suited; and Ferdinand set to work with a will, but when he got to a certain point he always threw it up.

His mother never lacked actual necessaries; although sometimes he only procured them at the last moment. When not otherwise engaged, he would stand in some doorway on the market-place, loafing about, his hands in his pockets, his supple shoulders leaning against the wall. He was always in clogs and mittens; at stated intervals he spat upon the pavement, his sea-blue eyes following the passers-by with an unfathomable expression. The policeman, who was aggressively pacing up and down his beat, glanced at him in secret every time he passed him, as much as to say, “Shan’t we ever manage to catch the rogue? Why doesn’t he make a slip?”

And one day the thing happened—quite of itself, and not on account of any clumsiness on his part—in the “Ark” they laid particular stress upon that. It was simply his goodness of heart that was responsible. Had Ferdinand not been the lad he was, matters had not gone awry, for he was a gifted young man.

He was in the grocer’s shop on the corner of the Market buying a few coppers’ worth of chewing-tobacco. An eight-year-old boy from the “Ark” was standing by the counter, asking for a little flour on credit for his mother. The grocer was making a tremendous fuss about the affair. “Put it down—I dare say! One keeps shop on the corner here just to feed all the poor folks in the neighborhood! I shall have the money to-morrow? Peculiar it is, that in this miserable, poverty-stricken quarter folks are always going to have money the very next day! Only the next day never comes!”

“Herre Petersen can depend on it,” said the child, in a low voice.

The grocer continued to scoff, but began to weigh the meal. Before the scales there was a pile of yard brooms and other articles, but Ferdinand could see that the grocer was pressing the scale with his fingers. He’s giving false weight because it’s for a poor person, thought Ferdinand, and he felt an angry pricking in his head, just where his thoughts were.

The boy stood by, fingering something concealed in his hand. Suddenly a coin fell on the floor and went rolling round their feet. Quick as lightning the grocer cast a glance at the till, as he sprang over the counter and seized the boy by the scruff of the neck. “Ay, ay,” he said sharply, “a clever little rogue!”

“I haven’t stolen anything!” cried the boy, trying to wrench himself loose and to pick up his krone-piece. “That’s mother’s money!”

“You leave the kid alone!” said Ferdinand threateningly. “He hasn’t done anything!”

The grocer struggled with the boy, who was twisting and turning in order to recover his money. “Hasn’t done anything!” he growled, panting, “then why did he cry out about stealing before ever I had mentioned the word? And where does the money come from? He wanted credit, because they hadn’t got any! No, thanks—I’m not to be caught like that.”

“The money belongs to mother!” shrieked the youngster, twisting desperately in the grocer’s grip. “Mother is ill—I’m to get medicine with it!” And he began to blubber.

“It’s quite right—his mother is ill!” said Ferdinand, with a growl. “And the chemist certainly won’t give credit. You’d best let him go, Petersen.” He took a step forward.

“You’ve thought it out nicely!” laughed the grocer scornfully, and he wrenched the shop-door open. “Here, policeman, here!”

The policeman, who was keeping watch at the street corner, came quickly over to the shop. “Here’s a lad who plays tricks with other folks’ money,” said the grocer excitedly. “Take care of him for a bit, Iversen!”

The boy was still hitting out in all directions; the policeman had to hold him off at arm’s length. He was a ragged, hungry little fellow. The policeman saw at a glance what he had in his fingers, and proceeded to drag him away; and there was no need to have made any more ado about the matter.

Ferdinand went after him and laid his hand on the policeman’s arm. “Mister Policeman, the boy hasn’t done anything,” he said. “I was standing there myself, and I saw that he did nothing, and I know his mother!”

The policeman stood still for a moment, measuring Ferdinand with a threatening eye; then he dragged the boy forward again, the latter still struggling to get free, and bellowing: “My mother is ill; she’s waiting for me and the medicine!” Ferdinand kept step with them, in his thin canvas shoes.

“If you drag him off to the town hall, I shall come with you, at all events, and give evidence for him,” he continued; “the boy hasn’t done anything, and his mother is lying sick and waiting for the medicine at home.”

The policeman turned about, exasperated. “Yes, you’re a nice witness. One crow don’t pick another’s eyes out. You mind your own business—and just you be off!”

Ferdinand stood his ground. “Who are you talking to, you Laban?” he muttered, angrily looking the other up and down. Suddenly he took a run and caught the policeman a blow in the neck so that he fell with his face upon the pavement while his helmet rolled far along the street. Ferdinand and the boy dashed off, each in a different direction, and disappeared.

And now they had been hunting him for three weeks already. He did not dare go home. The “Ark” was watched night and day, in the hope of catching him—he was so fond of his mother. God only knew where he might be in that rainy, cold autumn. Madam Frandsen moved about her attic, lonely and forsaken. It was a miserable life. Every morning she came over to beg Pelle to look in *The Working Man*, to see whether her son had been caught. He was in the city—Pelle and Madam Frandsen knew that. The police knew it also; and they believed him responsible for a series of nocturnal burglaries. He might well be sleeping in the outhouses and the kennels of the suburban villas.

The inmates of the “Ark” followed his fate with painful interest. He had grown up beneath their eyes. He had never done anything wrong there; he had always respected the “Ark” and its inhabitants; that at least could be said of him, and he loved his mother dearly. And he had been entirely in the right when he took the part of the boy; a brave little fellow he was! His mother was very ill; she lived at the end of one of the long gangways, and the boy was her only support. But it was a mad undertaking to lay hands on the police; that was the greatest crime on earth! A man had far better murder his own parents—as far as the punishment went. As soon as they got hold of him, he would go to jail, for the policeman had hit his handsome face against the flagstones; according to the newspaper, anybody but a policeman would have had concussion of the brain.

Old Madam Frandsen loved to cross the gangway to visit Pelle, in order to talk about her son.

"We must be cautious," she said. At times she would purse up her mouth, tripping restlessly to and fro; then he knew there was something particular in the wind.

"Shall I tell you something?" she would ask, looking at him importantly.

"No; better keep it to yourself," Pelle would reply. "What one doesn't know one can't give evidence about."

"You'd better let me chatter, Pelle—else I shall go running in and gossiping with strangers. Old chatterbox that I am, I go fidgeting round here, and I've no one I can trust; and I daren't even talk to myself! Then that Pipman hears it all through the wooden partition; it's almost more than I can bear, and I tremble lest my toothless old mouth should get him into trouble!"

"Well, then, tell it me!" said Pelle, laughing. "But you mustn't speak loud."

"He's been here again!" she whispered, beaming. "This morning, when I got up, there was money for me in the kitchen. Do you know where he had put it? In the sink! He's such a sensible lad! He must have come creeping over the roofs—otherwise I can't think how he does it, they are looking for him so. But you must admit that—he's a good lad!"

"If only you can keep quiet about it!" said Pelle anxiously. She was so proud of her son!

"M—m!" she said, tapping her shrunken lips. "No need to tell me that — and do you know what I've hit on, so that the bloodhounds shan't wonder what I live on? I'm sewing canvas slippers."

Then came little Marie with mop and bucket, and the old woman hobbled away.

It was a slack time now in Master Beck's workshop, so Pelle was working mostly at home. He could order his hours himself now, and was able to use the day, when people were indoors, in looking up his fellow-craftsmen and winning them for the organization. This often cost him a lengthy argument, and he was proud of every man he was able to inscribe. He very quickly learned to classify all kinds of men, and he suited his procedure to the character of the man he was dealing with; one could threaten the waverers, while others had to be enticed or got into a good humor by chatting over the latest theories with them. This was good practice, and he accustomed himself to think rapidly, and to have his subject at his fingers' ends. The feeling of mastery over his means continually increased in strength, and lent assurance to his bearing.

He had to make up for neglecting his work, and at such times he was doubly busy, rising early and sitting late at his bench.

He kept away from his neighbors on the third story; but when he heard Hanne's light step on the planking over there, he used to peep furtively across the well. She went her way like a nun—straight to her work and straight home again, her eyes fixed on the ground. She never looked up at his window, or indeed anywhere. It was as though her nature had completed its airy flutterings, as though it now lay quietly growing.

It surprised him that he should now regard her with such strange and indifferent eyes, as though she had never been anything to him. And he gazed curiously into his own heart—no, there was nothing wrong with him. His appetite was good, and there was nothing whatever the matter with his heart. It must all have been a pleasant illusion, a mirage such as the traveller sees upon his way. Certainly she was beautiful; but he could not possibly see anything fairy-like about her. God only knew how he had allowed himself to be so entangled! It was a piece of luck that he hadn't been caught—there was no future for Hanne.

Madam Johnsen continued to lean on him affectionately, and she often came over for a little conversation; she could not forget the good times they had had together. She always wound up by lamenting the change in Hanne; the old woman felt that the girl had forsaken her.

"Can you understand what's the matter with her, Pelle? She goes about as if she were asleep, and to everything I say she answers nothing but 'Yes, mother; yes, mother!' I could cry, it sounds so strange and empty, like a voice from the grave. And she never says anything about good fortune now—and she never decks herself out to be ready for it! If she'd only begin with her fool's tricks again—if she only cared to look out and watch for the stranger—then I should have my child again. But she just goes about all sunk into herself, and she stares about her as if she was half asleep, as though she were in the middle of empty space; and she's never in any spirits now. She goes about so unmeaning—like with her own dreary thoughts, it's like a wandering corpse. Can you understand what's wrong with her?"

"No, I don't know," answered Pelle.

"You say that so curiously, as if you did know something and wouldn't come out with it—and I, poor woman, I don't know where to turn." The good-natured woman began to cry. "And why don't you come over to see us any more?"

"Oh, I don't know—I've so much on hand, Madam Johnsen," answered Pelle evasively.

"If only she's not bewitched. She doesn't enter into anything I tell her; you might really come over just for once; perhaps that would cheer her up a little. You oughtn't to take your revenge on us. She was very fond of you in her way—and to me you've been like a son. Won't you come over this evening?"

"I really haven't the time. But I'll see, some time," he said, in a low voice.

And then she went, drooping and melancholy. She was showing her fifty years. Pelle was sorry for her, but he could not make up his mind to visit her.

"You are quite detestable!" said Marie, stamping angrily on the floor. "It's wretched of you!"

Pelle wrinkled his forehead. "You don't understand, Marie."

"Oh, so you think I don't know all about it? But do you know what the women say about you? They say you're no man, or you would have managed to clip Hanne's feathers."

Pelle gazed at her, wondering; he said nothing, but looked at her and shook his head.

"What are you staring at me for?" she said, placing herself aggressively in front of him. "Perhaps you think I'm afraid to say what I like to you? Don't you stare at me with that face, or you'll get one in the mouth!" She was burning red with shame. "Shall I say something still worse? with you staring at me with that face? Eh? No one need think I'm ashamed to say what I like!" Her voice was hard and hoarse; she was quite beside herself with rage.

Pelle was perfectly conscious that it was shame that was working in her. She must be allowed to run down. He was silent, but did not avert his reproachful gaze. Suddenly she spat in his face and ran into her own room with a malicious laugh.

There she was very busy for a time.

There for a time she worked with extreme vigor, but presently grew quieter. Through the stillness Pelle could hear her gently sobbing. He did not go in to her. Such scenes had occurred between them before, and he knew that for the rest of the day she would be ashamed of herself, and it would he misery for her to look him in the face. He did not wish to lessen that feeling.

He dressed himself and went out.

VIII

The “Ark” now showed as a clumsy gray mass. It was always dark; the autumn daylight was unable to penetrate it. In the interior of the mass the pitch-black night brooded continually; those who lived there had to grope their way like moles. In the darkness sounds rose to the surface which failed to make themselves noticeable in the radiance of summer. Innumerable sounds of creatures that lived in the half-darkness were heard. When sleep had laid silence upon it all, the stillness of night unveiled yet another world: then the death-watches audibly bored their way beneath the old wall-papers, while rats and mice and the larvae of wood-beetles vied with one another in their efforts. The darkness was full of the aromatic fragrance of the falling worm-dust. All through this old box of a building dissolution was at work, with thousands of tiny creatures to aid it. At times the sound of it all rose to a tremendous crash which awoke Pelle from sleep, when some old worm-eaten timber was undermined and sagged in a fresh place. Then he would turn over on the other side.

When he went out of an evening he liked to make his way through the cheerful, crowded streets, in order to share in the brightness of it all; the rich luxury of the shops awakened something within him which noted the startling contrast between this quarter of the town and his own. When he passed from the brightly lit city into his own quarter, the streets were like ugly gutters to drain the darkness, and the “Ark” rose mysteriously into the sky of night like a ponderous mountain. Dark cellar-openings led down into the roots of the mountain, and there, in its dark entrails, moved wan, grimy creatures with smoky lamps; there were all those who lived upon the poverty of the “Ark”—the old iron merchant, the old clothes merchant, and the money-lender who lent money upon tangible pledges. They moved fearfully, burrowing into strange- looking heaps. The darkness was ingrained in them; Pelle was always reminded of the “underground people” at home. So the base of the cliffs had opened before his eyes in childhood, and he had shudderingly watched the dwarfs pottering about their accursed treasure. Here they moved about like greedy goblins, tearing away the foundations from under the careless beings in the “Ark,” so that one day these might well fall into the cellars—and in the meantime they devoured them hair and hide. At all events, the bad side of the fairy tale was no lie!

One day Pelle threw down his work in the twilight and went off to carry out his mission. Pipman had some days earlier fallen drunk from the rickety steps, and down in the well the children of the quarter surrounded the place where he had dropped dead, and illuminated it with matches. They could quite plainly see the dark impress of a shape that looked like a man, and were all full of the spectacle.

Outside the mouth of the tunnel-like entry he stopped by the window of the old clothes dealer’s cellar. Old Pipman’s tools lay spread out there in the window. So she had got her claws into them too! She was rummaging about down there, scurfy and repulsive to look at, chewing an unappetizing slice of bread-and-butter, and starting at every sound that came from above, so anxious was she about her filthy money! Pelle needed a new heel-iron, so he went in and purchased that of Pipman. He had to haggle with her over the price.

“Well, have you thought over my proposal?” she asked, when the deal was concluded.

“What proposal?” said Pelle, in all ignorance.

“That you should leave your cobbling alone and be my assistant in the business.”

So that was what she meant? No, Pelle hadn’t thought over it sufficiently.

“I should think there isn’t much to think over. I have offered you more than you could earn otherwise, and there’s not much to do. And I keep a man who fetches and carries things. It’s mostly that I have a fancy to have a male assistant. I am an old woman, going about alone here, and you are so reliable, I know that.”

She needed some one to protect all the thousands of kroner which she had concealed in these underground chambers. Pelle knew that well enough— she had approached him before on the subject.

“I should scarcely be the one for that—to make my living out of the poverty of others,” said Pelle, smiling. “Perhaps I might knock you over the head and distribute all your pennies to the poor!”

The old woman stared at him for a moment in alarm. “Ugh, what a horrible thing to say!" she cried, shuddering. "You libel your good heart, joking about such things. Now I shan't like to stay here in the cellar any longer when you've gone. How can you jest so brutally about life and death? Day and night I go about here trembling for my life, and yet I've nothing at all, the living God knows I've nothing. That is just gossip! Everybody looks at me as much as to say, 'I'd gladly strike you dead to get your money!' And that's why I'd like to have a trustworthy man in the business; for what good is it to me that I've got nothing when they all believe I have? And there are so many worthless fellows who might fall upon one at any moment."

"If you have nothing, you can be easy," said Pelle teasingly. "No need for an empty stomach to have the nightmare!"

"Have nothing! Of course one always has something! And Pelle"—she leaned confidentially over him with a smirk on her face—"now Mary will soon come home, perhaps no later than this summer. She has earned so much over there that she can live on it, and she'll still be in the prime of her youth. What do you think of that? In her last letter she asked me to look out for a husband for her. He need only be handsome, for she has money enough for two. Then she'd rent a big house in the fine part of the city, and keep her own carriage, and live only for her handsome husband. What do you say to that, Pelle?"

"Well, that is certainly worth thinking over!" answered Pelle; he was in overflowing high spirits.

"Thinking over? Is that a thing to think over? Many a poor lord would accept such an offer and kiss my hand for it, if only he were here."

"But I'm not a lord, and now I must be going."

"Won't you just see her pictures?" The old woman began to rummage in a drawer.

"No." Pelle only wanted to be gone. He had seen these pictures often enough, grimed with the air of the cellar and the old woman's filthy hands; pictures which represented Mary now as a slim figure, striped like a tiger-cat, as she sang in the fashionable variety theaters of St. Petersburg, now naked, with a mantle of white furs, alone in the midst of a crowd of Russian officers—princes, the old woman said. There was also a picture from the aquarium, in which she was swimming about in a great glass tank amid some curious-looking plants, with nothing on her body but golden scales and diamond ornaments. She had a magnificent body—that he could plainly see; but that she could turn the heads of fabulously wealthy princes and get thousands out of their pockets merely by undressing herself—that he could not understand. And he was to take her to wife, was he?—and to get all that she had hoarded up! That was tremendously funny! That beat everything!

He went along the High Street with a rapid step. It was raining a little; the light from the street lamps and shop-windows was reflected in the wet flagstones; the street wore a cheerful look. He went onward with a feeling that his mind was lifted above the things of everyday; the grimy old woman who lived as a parasite on the poverty of the "Ark" and who had a wonderful daughter who was absorbing riches like a leech. And on top of it all the little Pelle with the "lucky curl," like the curly-haired apprentice in the story! Here at last was the much-longed- for fairy tale!

He threw back his head and laughed. Pelle, who formerly used to feel insults so bitterly, had achieved a sense of the divinity of life.

That evening his round included the Rabarber ward. Pelle had made himself a list, according to which he went forth to search each ward of the city separately, in order to save himself unnecessary running about. First of all, he took a journeyman cobbler in Smith Street; he was one of Meyer's regular workers, and Pelle was prepared for a hard fight. The man was not at home. "But you can certainly put him down," said his wife. "We've been talking it over lately, and we've come to see it's really the best thing." That was a wife after Pelle's heart. Many would deny that their husbands were at home when they learned what Pelle wanted; or would slam the door in his face; they were tired of his running to and fro.

He visited various houses in Gardener Street, Castle Street, Norway Street, making his way through backyards and up dark, narrow stairs, up to the garrets or down to the cellars.

Over all was the same poverty; without exception the cobblers were lodged in the most miserable holes. He had not a single success to record. Some had gone away or were at fresh addresses; others wanted time to consider or gave him a direct refusal. He promised himself that he would presently give the wobblers another call; he would soon bring them round; the others he ticked off, keeping them for better times—

their day too would come before long! It did not discourage him to meet with refusals; he rejoiced over the single sheep. This was a work of patience, and patience was the one thing in which he had always been rich.

He turned into Hunter Street and entered a barrack-like building, climbing until he was right under the roof, when he knocked on a door. It was opened by a tall thin man with a thin beard. This was Peter, his fellow-'prentice at home. They were speedily talking of the days of their apprenticeship, and the workshop at home with all the curious company there. There was not much that was good to be said of Master Jeppe. But the memory of the young master filled them with warmth. "I often think of him in the course of the year," said Peter. "He was no ordinary man. That was why he died."

There was something abstracted about Peter; and his den gave one an impression of loneliness. Nothing was left to remind one of the mischievous fellow who must always be running; but something hostile and obstinate glowed within his close-set eyes. Pelle sat there wondering what could really be the matter with him. He had a curious bleached look as though he had shed his skin; but he wasn't one of the holy sort, to judge by his conversation.

"Peter, what's the truth of it—are you one of us?" said Pelle suddenly.

A disagreeable smile spread over Peter's features. "Am I one of you? That sounds just like when they ask you—have you found Jesus? Have you become a missionary?"

"You are welcome to call it that," replied Pelle frankly, "if you'll only join our organization. We want you."

"You won't miss me—nobody is missed, I believe, if he only does his work. I've tried the whole lot of them—churches and sects and all—and none of them has any use for a man. They want one more listener, one more to add to their list; it's the same everywhere." He sat lost in thought, looking into vacancy. Suddenly he made a gesture with his hands as though to wave something away. "I don't believe in anything any longer, Pelle—there's nothing worth believing in."

"Don't you believe in improving the lot of the poor, then? You haven't tried joining the movement?" asked Pelle.

"What should I do there? They only want to get more to eat—and the little food I need I can easily get. But if they could manage to make me feel that I'm a man, and not merely a machine that wants a bit more greasing, I'd as soon be a thin dog as a fat one."

"They'd soon do that!" said Pelle convincingly. "If we only hold together, they'll have to respect the individual as well, and listen to his demands. The poor man must have his say with the rest."

Peter made an impatient movement. "What good can it do me to club folks on the head till they look at me? It don't matter a damn to me! But perhaps they'd look at me of their own accord—and say, of their own accord—'Look, there goes a man made in God's image, who thinks and feels in his heart just as I do!' That's what I want!"

"I honestly don't understand what you mean with your 'man,'" said Pelle irritably. "What's the good of running your head against a wall when there are reasonable things in store for us? We want to organize ourselves and see if we can't escape from slavery. Afterward every man can amuse himself as he likes."

"Well, well, if it's so easy to escape from slavery! Why not? Put down my name for one!" said Peter, with a slightly ironical expression.

"Thanks, comrade!" cried Pelle, joyfully shaking his hand. "But you'll do something for the cause?"

Peter looked about him forlornly. "Horrible weather for you to be out in," he said, and he lighted Pelle down the stairs.

Pelle went northward along Chapel Street. He wanted to look up Morten. The wind was chasing the leaves along by the cemetery, driving the rain in his face. He kept close against the cemetery wall in order to get shelter, and charged against the wind, head down. He was in the best of humors. That was two new members he had won over; he was getting on by degrees! What an odd fish Peter had become; the word, "man, man," sounded meaningless to Pelle's ears. Well, anyhow, he had got him on the list.

Suddenly he heard light, running steps behind him. The figure of a man reached his side, and pushed a little packet under Pelle's arm without stopping for a moment. At a short distance he disappeared. It seemed to Pelle as though he disappeared over the cemetery wall.

Under one of the street lamps he stopped and wonderingly examined the parcel; it was bound tightly with tape. “For mother” was written upon it in an awkward hand. Pelle was not long in doubt—in that word “mother” he seemed plainly to hear Ferdinand’s hoarse voice. “Now Madam Frandsen will be delighted,” he thought, and he put it in his pocket. During the past week she had had no news of Ferdinand. He dared no longer venture through Kristianshavn. Pelle could not understand how Ferdinand had lit upon him. Was he living out here in the Rabarber ward?

Morten was sitting down, writing in a thick copybook. He closed it hastily as Pelle entered.

“What is that?” asked Pelle, who wanted to open the book; “are you still writing in your copybook?”

Morten, confused, laid his hand on the book. “No. Besides—oh, as far as that goes,” he said, “you may as well know. I have written a poem. But you mustn’t speak of it.”

“Oh, do read it out to me!” Pelle begged.

“Yes; but you must promise me to be silent about it, or the others will just think I’ve gone crazy.”

He was quite embarrassed, and he stammered as he read. It was a poem about poor people, who bore the whole world on their upraised hands, and with resignation watched the enjoyment of those above them. It was called, “Let them die!” and the words were repeated as the refrain of every verse. And now that Morten was in the vein, he read also an unpretentious story of the struggle of the poor to win their bread.

“That’s damned fine!” cried Pelle enthusiastically. “Monstrously good, Morten! I don’t understand how you put it together, especially the verse. But you’re a real poet. But I’ve always thought that—that you had something particular in you. You’ve got your own way of looking at things, and they won’t clip your wings in a hurry. But why don’t you write about something big and thrilling that would repay reading—there’s nothing interesting about us!”

“But I find there is!”

“No, I don’t understand that. What can happen to poor fellows like us?”

“Then don’t you believe in greatness?”

To be sure Pelle did. “But why shouldn’t we have splendid things right away?”

“You want to read about counts and barons!” said Morten. “You are all like that. You regard yourself as one of the rabble, if it comes to that! Yes, you do! Only you don’t know it! That’s the slave-nature in you; the higher classes of society regard you as such and you involuntarily do the same. Yes, you may pull faces, but it’s true, all the same! You don’t like to hear about your own kind, for you don’t believe they can amount to anything! No, you must have fine folks— always rich folks! One would like to spit on one’s past and one’s parents and climb up among the fine folks, and because one can’t manage it one asks for it in books.” Morten was irritated.

“No, no,” said Pelle soothingly, “it isn’t as bad as all that!”

“Yes, it is as bad as all that!” cried Morten passionately. “And do you know why? Because you don’t yet understand that humanity is holy, and that it’s all one where a man is found!”

“Humanity is holy?” said Pelle, laughing. “But I’m not holy, and I didn’t really think you were!”

“For your sake, I hope you are,” said Morten earnestly, “for otherwise you are no more than a horse or a machine that can do so much work.” And then he was silent, with a look that seemed to say that the matter had been sufficiently discussed.

Morten’s reserved expression made Pelle serious. He might jestingly pretend that this was nonsense, but Morten was one of those who looked into things—perhaps there was something here that he didn’t understand.

“I know well enough that I’m a clown compared with you,” he said good- naturedly, “but you needn’t be so angry on that account. By the way, do you still remember Peter, who was at Jeppe’s with your brother Jens and me? He’s here, too—I—I came across him a little while ago. He’s always looking into things too, but he can’t find any foundation to anything, as you can. He believes in nothing in the whole world. Things are in a bad way with him. It would do him good if he could talk with you.”

“But I’m no prophet—you are that rather than I,” said Morten ironically.

“But you might perhaps say something of use to him. No, I’m only a trades unionist, and that’s no good.”

On his way home Pelle pondered honestly over Morten’s words, but he had to admit that he couldn’t take them in. No, he had no occasion to surround his person with any sort of holiness or halo; he was only a healthy body, and he just wanted to do things.

IX

Pelle came rushing home from Master Beck's workshop, threw off his coat and waistcoat, and thrust his head into a bucket of water. While he was scrubbing himself dry, he ran over to the "Family." "Would you care to come out with me? I have some tickets for an evening entertainment—only you must hurry up."

The three children were sitting round the table, doing tricks with cards. The fire was crackling in the stove, and there was a delicious smell of coffee. They were tired after the day's work and they didn't feel inclined to dress themselves to go out. One could see how they enjoyed feeling that they were at home. "You should give Hanne and her mother the tickets," said Marie, "they never go out."

Pelle thought the matter over while he was dressing. Well, why not? After all, it was stupid to rake up an old story.

Hanne did not want to go with him. She sat with downcast eyes, like a lady in her boudoir, and did not look at him. But Madam Johnsen was quite ready to go—the poor old woman quickly got into her best clothes.

"It's a long time since we two have been out together, Pelle," she said gaily, as they walked through the city. "You've been so frightfully busy lately. They say you go about to meetings. That is all right for a young man. Do you gain anything by it?"

"Yes, one could certainly gain something by it—if only one used one's strength!"

"What can you gain by it, then? Are you going to eat up the Germans again, as in my young days, or what is it you are after?"

"We want to make life just a little happier," said Pelle quietly.

"Oh, you don't want to gain anything more than happiness? That's easy enough, of course!" said Madam Johnsen, laughing loudly. "Why, to be sure, in my pretty young days too the men wanted to go to the capital to make their fortunes. I was just sixteen when I came here for purposes of my own—where was a pretty girl to find everything splendid, if not here? One easily made friends—there were plenty to go walking with a nice girl in thin shoes, and they wanted to give her all sorts of fine things, and every day brought its happiness with it. But then I met a man who wanted to do the best thing by me, and who believed in himself, too. He got me to believe that the two of us together might manage something lasting. And he was just such a poor bird as I was, with empty hands—but he set to valiantly. Clever in his work he was, too, and he thought we could make ourselves a quiet, happy life, cozy between our four walls, if only we'd work. Happiness—pooh! He wanted to be a master, at all costs—for what can a journeyman earn! And more than once we had scraped a little together, and thought things would be easier now; but misfortune always fell on us and took it all away. It's always hovering like a great bird over the poor man's home; and you must have a long stick if you want to drive it away! It was always the same story whenever we managed to get on a little. A whole winter he was ill. We only kept alive by pawning all we'd got, stick by stick. And when the last thing had gone to the devil we borrowed a bit on the pawn-ticket." The old woman had to pause to recover her breath.

"Why are we hurrying like this?" she said, panting. "Any one would think the world was trying to run away from us!"

"Well, there was nothing left!" she continued, shuffling on again. "And he was too tired to begin all over again, so we moved into the 'Ark.' And when he'd got a few shillings he sought consolation—but it was a poor consolation for me, who was carrying Hanne, that you may believe! She was like a gift after all that misfortune; but he couldn't bear her, because our fancy for a little magnificence was born again in her. She had inherited that from us—poor little thing!—with rags and dirt to set it off. You should just have seen her, as quite a little child, making up the fine folks' world out of the rags she got together out of the dustbins. 'What's that?' Johnsen he said once—he was a little less full than usual. 'Oh, that's the best room with the carpet on the floor, and there by the stove is your room, father. But you mustn't spit on the floor, because we are rich people.'"

Madam Johnsen began to cry. "And then he struck her on the head. 'Hold your tongue!' he cried, and he cursed and swore at the child something frightful. 'I don't want to hear your infernal chatter!' That's the sort he was. Life began to be a bit easier when he had drowned himself in the sewer. The times when I might have amused myself he'd stolen from me with his talk of the future, and now I sit there turning old soldiers' trousers that fill the room with filth, and when I do two a day I can earn a mark. And Hanne goes about like a sleep-walker. Happiness! Is there a soul in the 'Ark' that didn't begin with a firm belief in something better? One doesn't move from one's own choice into such a mixed louse's nest, but one ends up there all the same. And is there anybody here who is really sure of his daily bread? Yes, Olsens with the warm wall, but they've got their daughter's shame to thank for that."

"All the more reason to set to work," said Pelle.

"Yes, you may well say that! But any one who fights against the unconquerable will soon be tired out. No, let things be and amuse yourself while you are still young. But don't you take any notice of my complaining—me—an old whimperer, I am—walking with you and being in the dumps like this—now we'll go and amuse ourselves!" And now she looked quite contented again.

"Then take my arm—it's only proper with a pair of sweethearts," said Pelle, joking. The old woman took his arm and went tripping youthfully along. "Yes, if it had been in my young days, I would soon have known how to dissuade you from your silly tricks," she said gaily. "I should have been taking you to the dance."

"But you didn't manage to get Johnsen to give them up," said Pelle in reply.

"No, because then I was too credulous. But no one would succeed in robbing me of my youth now!"

The meeting was held in a big hall in one of the side streets by the North Bridge. The entertainment, which was got up by some of the agitators, was designed principally for young people; but many women and young girls were present. Among other things a poem was read which dealt with an old respectable blacksmith who was ruined by a strike. "That may be very fine and touching," whispered Madam Johnsen, polishing her nose in her emotion, "but they really ought to have something one can laugh over. We see misfortune every day."

Then a small choir of artisans sang some songs, and one of the older leaders mounted the platform and told them about the early years of the movement. When he had finished, he asked if there was no one else who had something to tell them. It was evidently not easy to fill out the evening.

There was no spirit in the gathering. The women were not finding it amusing, and the men sat watching for anything they could carp at. Pelle knew most of those present; even the young men had hard faces, on which could be read an obstinate questioning. This homely, innocent entertainment did not appease the burning impatience which filled their hearts, listening for a promise of better things.

Pelle sat there pained by the proceedings; the passion for progress and agitation was in his very blood. Here was such an opportunity to strike a blow for unification, and it was passing unused. The women only needed a little rousing, the factory-girls and the married women too, who held back their husbands. And they stood up there, frittering away the time with their singing and their poetry-twaddle! With one leap he stood on the platform.

"All these fine words may be very nice," he cried passionately, "but they are very little use to all those who can't live on them! The clergyman and the dog earn their living with their mouths, but the rest of us are thrown on our own resources when we want to get anything. Why do we slink round the point like cats on hot bricks, why all this palaver and preaching? Perhaps we don't yet know what we want? They say we've been slaves for a thousand years! Then we ought to have had time enough to think it out! Why does so little happen, although we are all waiting for something, and are ready? Is there no one anywhere who has the courage to lead us?"

Loud applause followed, especially from the young men; they stamped and shouted. Pelle staggered down from the platform; he was covered with sweat.

The old leader ascended the platform again and thanked his colleagues for their acceptable entertainment. He turned also with smiling thanks to Pelle. It was gratifying that there was still fire glowing in the young men; although the occasion was unsuitable. The old folks had led the movement through evil times; but they by no means wished to prevent youth from testing itself.

Pelle wanted to stand up and make some answer, but Madam Johnsen held him fast by his coat. "Be quiet, Pelle," she whispered anxiously; "you'll venture too far." She would not let go of him, so he had to sit down again to avoid attracting attention. His cheeks were burning, and he was as breathless as though he had been running up a hill. It was the first time he had ventured on a public platform; excitement had sent him thither.

The people began to get up and to mix together. “Is it over already?” asked Madam Johnsen. Pelle could see that she was disappointed.

“No, no; now we’ll treat ourselves to something,” he said, leading the old woman to a table at the back of the hall. “What can I offer you?”

“Coffee, please, for me! But you ought to have a glass of beer, you are so warm!”

Pelle wanted coffee too. “You’re a funny one for a man!” she said, laughing. “First you go pitching into a whole crowd of men, and then you sit down here with an old wife like me and drink coffee! What a crowd of people there are here; it’s almost like a holiday!” She sat looking about her with shining eyes and rosy cheeks, like a young girl at a dance. “Take some more of the skin of the milk, Pelle; you haven’t got any. This really is cream!”

The leader came up to ask if he might make Pelle’s acquaintance. “I’ve heard of you from the president of your Union,” he said, giving Pelle his hand. “I am glad to make your acquaintance; you have done a pretty piece of work.”

“Oh, it wasn’t so bad,” said Pelle, blushing. “But it really would be fine if we could really get to work!”

“I know your impatience only too well,” retorted the old campaigner, laughing. “It’s always so with the young men. But those who really want to do something must be able to see to the end of the road.” He patted Pelle on the shoulders and went.

Pelle felt that the people were standing about him and speaking of him. God knows whether you haven’t made yourself ridiculous, he thought. Close by him two young men were standing, who kept on looking at him sideways. Suddenly they came up to him.

“We should much like to shake hands with you,” said one of them. “My name is Otto Stolpe, and this is my brother Frederik. That was good, what you said up there, we want to thank you for it!” They stood by for some little while, chatting to Pelle. “It would please my father and mother too, if they could make your acquaintance,” said Otto Stolpe. “Would you care to come home with us?”

“I can’t very well this evening; I have some one with me,” replied Pelle.

“You go with them,” said Madam Johnsen. “I see some folks from Kristianshavn back there, I can go home with them.”

“But we were meaning to go on the spree a bit now that we’ve at last come out!” said Pelle, smiling.

“God forbid! No, we’ve been on the spree enough for one evening, my old head is quite turned already. You just be off; that’s a thing I haven’t said for thirty years! And many thanks for bringing me with you.” She laughed boisterously.

The Stolpe family lived in Elm Street, on the second floor of one of the new workmen’s tenement houses. The stairs were roomy, and on the door there was a porcelain plate with their name on it. In the entry an elderly, well-dressed woman up to them.

“Here is a comrade, mother,” said Otto.

“Welcome,” she said, as she took Pelle’s hand. She held it a moment in her own as she looked at him.

In the living room sat Stolpe, a mason, reading *The Working Man*. He was in shirt sleeves, and was resting his heavy arms on the table. He read whispering to himself, he had not noticed that a guest was in the room.

“Here’s some one who would like to say how-d’ye-do to father,” said Otto, laying his hand on his father’s arm.

Stolpe raised his head and looked at Pelle. “Perhaps you would like to join the Union?” he asked, rising with difficulty, with one hand pressed on the table. He was tall, his hair was sprinkled with gray; his eyes were mottled from the impact of splinters of limestone.

“You and your Union!” said Madam Stolpe. “Perhaps you think there’s no one in it but you!”

“No, mother; little by little a whole crowd of people have entered it, but all the same I was the first.”

“I’m already in the Union,” said Pelle. “But not in yours. I’m a shoemaker, you know.”

“Shoemaker, ah, that’s a poor trade for a journeyman; but all the same a man can get to be a master; but to-day a mason can’t do that—there’s a great difference there. And if one remains a journeyman all his life long, he has more interest in modifying his position. Do you understand? That's why the organization of the shoemakers has never been of more than middling dimensions. Another reason is that they work in their own rooms, and one can't get them together. But now there's a new man come, who seems to be making things move."

"Yes, and this is he, father," said Otto, laughing.

"The deuce, and here I stand making a fool of myself! Then I'll say how- d'ye-do over again! And here's good luck to your plans, young comrade." He shook Pelle by the hand. "I think we might have a drop of beer, mother?"

Pelle and Stolpe were soon engaged in a lively conversation; Pelle was in his element. Until now he had never found his way to the heart of the movement. There was so much he wanted to ask about, and the old man incontinently told him of the growth of the organization from year to year, of their first beginning, when there was only one trades unionist in Denmark, namely, himself, down to the present time. He knew all the numbers of the various trades, and was precisely informed as to the development of each individual union. The sons sat silent, thoughtfully listening. When they had something to say, they always waited until the old man nodded his head to show that he had finished. The younger, Frederik, who was a mason's apprentice, never said "thou" to his father; he addressed him in the third person, and his continual "father says, father thinks," sounded curious to Pelle's ears.

While they were still talking Madam Stolpe opened the door leading into an even prettier room, and invited them to go in and to drink their coffee. The living-room had already produced an extremely pleasant impression on Pelle, with its oak-grained dining-room suite and its horse-hair sofa. But here was a red plush suite, an octagonal table of walnut wood, with a black inlaid border and twisted wooden feet, and an étagère full of knick-knacks and pieces of china; mostly droll, impudent little things. On the walls hung pictures of trades unions and assemblies and large photographs of workshops; one of a building during construction, with the scaffolding full of the bricklayers and their mortar-buckets beside them, each with a trowel or a beer-bottle can in his hand. On the wall over the sofa hung a large half-length portrait of a dark, handsome man in a riding-cloak. He looked half a dreamy adventurer, half a soldier.

"That's the grand master," said Stolpe proudly, standing at Pelle's side. "There was always a crowd of women at his heels. But they kept themselves politely in the background, for a fire went out of him at such times—do you understand? Then it was—Men to the front! And even the laziest fellow pricked up his ears."

"Then he's dead now, is he?" asked Pelle, with interest.

Stolpe did not answer. "Well," he said briefly, "shall we have our coffee now?" Otto winked at Pelle; here evidently was a matter that must not be touched upon.

Stolpe sat staring into his cup, but suddenly he raised his head. "There are things one doesn't understand," he cried earnestly. "But this is certain, that but for the grand master here I and a whole host of other men wouldn't perhaps be respectable fathers of families to-day. There were many smart fellows among us young comrades, as is always the case; but as a rule the gifted ones always went to the dogs. For when a man has no opportunity to alter things, he naturally grows impatient, and then one fine day he begins to pour spirit on the flames in order to stop his mouth. I myself had that accursed feeling that I must do something, and little by little I began to drink. But then I discovered the movement, before it existed, I might venture to say; it was in the air like, d'you see. It was as though something was coming, and one sniffed about like a dog in order to catch a glimpse of it. Presently it was, Here it is! There it is! But when one looked into it, there was just a few hungry men bawling at one another about something or other, but the devil himself didn't know what it was. But then the grand master came forward, and that was like a flash of light for all of us. For he could say to a nicety just where the shoe pinched, although he didn't belong to our class at all. Since that time there's been no need to go searching for the best people —they were always to be found in the movement! Although there weren't very many of them, the best people were always on the side of the movement."

"But now there's wind in the sails," said Pelle.

"Yes, now there's talk of it everywhere. But to whom is that due? God knows, to us old veterans—and to him there!"

Stolpe began to talk of indifferent matters, but quite involuntarily the conversation returned to the movement; man and wife lived and breathed for nothing else. They were brave, honest people, who quite simply divided mankind into two parts: those who were for and those who were against the movement. Pelle seemed to breathe more freely and deeply in this home, where the air was as though steeped in Socialism.

He noticed a heavy chest which stood against the wall on four twisted legs. It was thickly ornamented with nail-heads and looked like an old muniment chest.

“Yes—that’s the standard!” said Madam Stolpe, but she checked herself in alarm. Mason Stolpe knitted his brows.

“Ah, well, you’re a decent fellow, after all,” he said. “One needn’t slink on tiptoe in front of you!” He took a key out of a secret compartment in his writing-table. “Now the danger’s a thing of the past, but one still has to be careful. That’s a vestige of the times when things used to go hardly with us. The police used to be down on all our badges of common unity. The grand master himself came to me one evening with the flag under his cloak, and said to me, ‘You must look out for it, Stolpe, you are the most reliable of us all.’”

He and his wife unfolded the great piece of bunting. “See, that’s the banner of the International. It looks a little the worse for wear, for it has undergone all sorts of treatment. At the communist meetings out in the fields, when the troops were sent against us with ball cartridge, it waved over the speaker’s platform, and held us together. When it flapped over our heads it was as though we were swearing an oath to it. The police understood that, and they were mad to get it. They went for the flag during a meeting, but nothing came of it, and since then they’ve hunted for it so, it’s had to be passed from man to man. In that way it has more than once come to me.”

“Yes, and once the police broke in here and took father away as we were sitting at supper. They turned the whole place upside down, and dragged him off to the cells without a word of explanation. The children were little then, and you can imagine how miserable it seemed to me. I didn’t know when they would let him out again.”

“Yes, but they didn’t get the colors,” said Stolpe, and he laughed heartily. “I had already passed them on, they were never very long in one place in those days. Now they lead a comparatively quiet life, and mother and the rest of us too!”

The young men stood in silence, gazing at the standard that had seen so many vicissitudes, and that was like the hot red blood of the movement. Before Pelle a whole new world was unfolding itself; the hope that had burned in the depths of his soul was after all not so extravagant. When he was still running, wild at home, playing the games of childhood or herding the cows, strong men had already been at work and had laid the foundations of the cause.… A peculiar warmth spread through him and rose to his head. If only it had been he who had waved the glowing standard in the face of the oppressor—he, Pelle!

“And now it lies here in the chest and is forgotten!” he said dejectedly.

“It is only resting,” said Stolpe. “Forgotten, yes; the police have no idea that it still exists. But fix it on a staff, and you will see how the comrades flock about it! Old and young alike. There’s fire in that bit of cloth! True fire, that never goes out!”

Carefully they folded the colors and laid them back in the chest. “It won’t do even now to speak aloud of the colors! You understand?” said Stolpe.

There was a knock, and Stolpe made haste to lock the chest and hide the key, while Frederik went to the door. They looked at one another uneasily and stood listening.

“It is only Ellen,” said Frederik, and he returned, followed by a tall dark girl with an earnest bearing. She had a veil over her face, and before her mouth her breath showed like a pearly tissue.

“Ah, that’s the lass!” cried Stolpe, laughing. “What folly—we were quite nervous, just as nervous as in the old days. And you’re abroad in the streets at this hour of night! And in this weather?” He looked at her affectionately; one could see that she was his darling. Outwardly they were very unlike.

She greeted Pelle with the tiniest nod, but looked at him earnestly. There was something still and gracious about her that fascinated him. She wore dark clothes, without the slightest adornment, but they were of good sound stuff.

“Won’t you change?” asked the mother, unbuttoning her cloak. “You are quite wet, child.”

“No, I must go out again at once,” Ellen replied. “I only wanted to peep in.”

“But it’s really very late,” grumbled Stolpe. “Are you only off duty now?”

“Yes, it’s not my going-out day.”

“Not to-day again? Yes, it’s sheer slavery, till eleven at night!”

“That’s the way things are, and it doesn’t make it any better for you to scold me,” said Ellen courageously.

“No, but you needn’t go out to service. There’s no sense in our children going out to service in the houses of the employers. Don’t you agree with me?” He turned to Pelle.

Ellen laughed brightly. “It’s all the same—father works for the employers as well.”

“Yes, but that’s a different thing. It’s from one fixed hour to another, and then it’s over. But this other work is a home; she goes from one home to another and undertakes all the dirty work.”

“Father’s not in a position to keep me at home.”

“I know that very well, but all the same I can’t bear it. Besides, you could surely get some other kind of work.”

“Yes, but I don’t want to! I claim the right to dispose of myself!” she replied heatedly.

The others sat silent, looking nervously at one another. The veins swelled on Stolpe’s forehead; he was purple, and terribly angry. But Ellen looked at him with a little laugh. He got up and went grumbling into the other room.

Her mother shook her head at Ellen. She was quite pale. “Oh, child, child!” she whispered.

After a while Stolpe returned with some old newspapers, which he wanted to show Pelle. Ellen stood behind his chair, looking down at them; she rested her arm on his shoulders and idly ruffled his hair. The mother pulled at her skirt. The papers were illustrated, and went back to the stirring times.

The clock struck the half-hour; it was half-past eleven. Pelle rose in consternation; he had quite forgotten the time.

“Take the lass with you,” said Stolpe. “You go the same way, don’t you, Ellen? Then you’ll have company. There’s no danger going with her, for she’s a saint.” It sounded as though he wanted to make up for his scolding. “Come again soon; you will always be welcome here.”

They did not speak much on the way home. Pelle was embarrassed, and he had a feeling that she was considering him and thinking him over as they walked, wondering what sort of a fellow he might be. When he ventured to say something, she answered briefly and looked at him searchingly. And yet he found it was an interesting walk. He would gladly have prolonged it.

“Many thanks for your company,” he said, when they stood at her house- door. “I should be very glad to see you again.”

“You will if we meet,” she said taciturnly; but she gave him her hand for a moment.

“We are sure to meet again! Be sure of that!” cried Pelle jovially. “But you are forgetting to reward me for my escort?” He bent over her.

She gazed at him in astonishment—with eyes that were turning him to stone, he thought. Then she slowly turned and went indoors.

X

One day, after his working hours, Pelle was taking some freshly completed work to the Court shoemaker's. The foreman took it and paid for it, and proceeded to give out work to the others, leaving Pelle standing. Pelle waited impatiently, but did no more than clear his throat now and again. This was the way of these people; one had to put up with it if one wanted work. "Have you forgotten me?" he said at last, a little impatiently.

"You can go," said the foreman. "You've finished here."

"What does that mean?" asked Pelle, startled.

"It means what you hear. You've got the sack—if you understand that better."

Pelle understood that very well, but he wanted to establish the fact of his persecution in the presence of his comrades. "Have you any fault to find with my work?" he asked.

"You mix yourself up too much with things that don't concern you, my good fellow, and then you can't do the work you ought to do."

"I should like very much to know what fault you have to find with my work," said Pelle obstinately.

"Go to the devil! I've told you already!" roared the foreman.

The Court shoemaker came down through the door of the back room and looked about him. When he saw Pelle, he went up to him.

"You get out of here, and that at once!" he cried, in a rage. "Do you think we give bread to people that undermine us? Out, out of my place of business, Mossoo Trades-Unionist!"

Pelle stood his ground, and looked his employer in the eyes; he would have struck the man a blow in the face rather than allow himself to be sent away. "Be cool, now; be cool!" he said to himself. He laughed, but his features were quivering. The Court shoemaker kept a certain distance, and continued to shout, "Out with him! Here, foreman, call the police at once!"

"Now you can see, comrades, how they value one here," said Pelle, turning his broad back on Meyer. "We are dogs; nothing more!"

They stood there, staring at the counter, deaf and dumb in their dread of taking sides. Then Pelle went.

He made his way northward. His heart was full of violent emotion. Indignation raged within him like a tempest, and by fits and starts found utterance on his lips. Meyer's work was quite immaterial to him; it was badly paid, and he only did it as a stop-gap. But it was disgusting to think they could buy his convictions with badly-paid work! And there they stood not daring to show their colors, as if it wasn't enough to support such a fellow with their skill and energy! Meyer stood there like a wall, in the way of any real progress, but he needn't think he could strike at Pelle, for he'd get a blow in return if he did!

He went straight to Mason Stolpe, in order to talk the matter over with him; the old trades unionist was a man of great experience.

"So he's one of those who go in for the open slave-trade!" said Stolpe. "We've had a go at them before now. 'We've done with you, my good man; we can make no use of agitators!' And if one steals a little march on them 'Off you go; you're done with here!' I myself have been like a hunted cur, and at home mother used to go about crying. I could see what she was feeling, but when I put the matter before her she said, 'Hold out, Stolpe, you shan't give in!' 'You're forgetting our daily bread, mother,' I say. 'Oh, our daily bread. I can just go out washing!' That was in those days—they sing another tune to us now! Now the master politely raises his hat to old Stolpe! If he thinks he can allow himself to hound a man down, an embargo must be put on him!"

Pelle had nothing to say against that. "If only it works," he said. "But our organization looks weak enough as yet."

"Only try it; in any case, you can always damage him. He attacks your livelihood in order to strike at your conscience, so you hit back at his purse—that's where his conscience is! Even if it does no good, at least it makes him realize that you're not a slave."

Pelle sat a while longer chatting. He had secretly hoped to meet Ellen again, but he dared not ask whether that was her day for coming home. Madam Stolpe invited him to stay and to have supper with them she was only waiting for her sons. But Pelle had no time; he must be off to think out instructions for the embargo. "Then come on Sunday," said the mother; "Sunday is Ellen's birthday."

With rapid strides he went off to the president of the Union; the invitation for the following Sunday had dissipated the remains of his anger. The prospect of a tussle with Meyer had put him in the best of tempers. He was certain of winning the president, Petersen, for his purpose, if only he could find him out of bed; he himself had in his time worked for wholesale shoemakers, and hated them like the plague. It was said that Petersen had worked out a clever little invention—a patent button for ladies' boots—which he had taken to Meyer, as he himself did not know how to exploit it. But Meyer had, without more ado, treated the invention as his own, inasmuch as it was produced by one of his workmen. He took out a patent and made a lot of money by it, trifling as the thing was. When Petersen demanded a share of the profits, he was dismissed. He himself never spoke of the matter; he just sat in his cellar brooding over the injustice, so that he never managed to recover his position. Almost his whole time had been devoted to the Union, so that he might revenge himself through it; but it never really made much progress. He fired up passionately enough, but he was lacking in persistence. And his lungs were weak.

He trembled with excitement when Pelle explained his plan. "Great God in heaven, if only we could get at him!" he whispered hoarsely, clenching his skinny fists which Death had already marked with its dusky shadows. "I would willingly give my miserable life to see the scoundrel ruined! Look at that!" He bent down, whispering, and showed Pelle a file ground to a point, which was fastened into a heavy handle. "If I hadn't the children, he would have got that between his ribs long before this!" His gray, restless eyes, which reminded Pelle of Anker, the crazy clockmaker, had a cold, piercing expression.

"Yes, yes," said Pelle, laying his hand soothingly on the other's; "but it's no use to do anything stupid. We shall only do what we want to do if we all stand together."

The day was well spent; on the very next evening the members of the Union were summoned to a meeting. Petersen spoke first, and beginning with a fiery speech. It was like the final efforts of a dying man. "You organize the struggle," said Petersen. "I'm no good nowadays for that—and I've no strength. But I'll sound the assault—ay, and so that they wake up. Then you yourself must see to keeping the fire alight in them." His eyes burned in their shadowy sockets; he stood there like a martyr upholding the necessity of the conflict. The embargo was agreed upon unanimously!

Then Pelle came forward and organized the necessary plan of campaign. It was his turn now. There was no money in the chest, but every man had to promise a certain contribution to be divided among those who were refusing to work. Every man must do his share to deprive Meyer of all access to the labor market. And there was to be no delirious enthusiasm —which they would regret when they woke up next morning. It was essential that every man should form beforehand a clear conception of the difficulties, and must realize what he was pledging himself to. And then—three cheers for a successful issue!

This business meant a lot of running about. But what of that! Pelle, who had to sit such a lot, wouldn't suffer from getting out into the fresh air! He employed the evenings in making up for lost time. He got work from the small employers in Kristianshavn, who were very busy in view of Christmas, which made up for that which he had lost through the Court shoemaker.

On the second day after his dismissal, the declaration of the embargo appeared under the "Labor Items" in *The Working Man*. "Assistance strictly prohibited!" It was like the day's orders, given by Pelle's own word of mouth. He cut the notice out, and now and again, as he sat at his work, he took it out and considered it. This was Pelle—although it didn't say so—Pelle and the big employer were having a bit of a tussle! Now they should see which was the stronger!

Pelle went often to see Stolpe. Strangely enough, his visits always coincided with Ellen's days off. Then he accompanied her homeward, and they walked side by side talking of serious things. There was nothing impetuous about them—they behaved as though a long life lay before them. His vehemence cooled in the conflict with Meyer. He was sure of Ellen's character, unapproachable though she was. Something in him told him that she ought to be and would remain so. She was one of those natures to whom it is difficult to come out of their shell, so as to reveal the kernel within; but he felt that there was something that was growing for him within that reserved nature, and he was not impatient.

One evening he had as usual accompanied her to the door, and they stood there bidding one another good night. She gave him her hand in her shy, awkward manner, which might even mean reluctance, and was then about to go indoors.

“But are we going on like this all our lives?” said Pelle, holding her fingers tightly. “I love you so!”

She stood there a while, with an impenetrable expression, then advanced her face and kissed him mechanically, as a child kisses, with tightly closed lips. She was already on her way to the house when she suddenly started back, drew him to herself, and kissed him passionately and unrestrainedly. There was something so violent, so wild and fanatical in her demeanor, that he was quite bewildered. He scarcely recognized her, and when he had come to himself she was already on her way up the kitchen steps. He stood still, as though blinded by a rain of fire, and heard her running as though pursued.

Since that day she had been another creature. Her love was like the spring that comes in a single night. She could not be without him for a day; when she went out to make purchases, she came running over to the “Ark.” Her nature had thrown off its restraint; there was tension in her manner and her movements; and this tension now and again escaped from within in little explosions. She did not say very much; when they were together, she clung to him passionately as though to deaden some pain, and hid her face; if he lifted it, she kept her eyes persistently closed. Then she breathed deeply, and sat down smiling and humming to herself when he spoke to her.

It was as though she was delving deep into his inmost being, and Pelle, who felt the need to reach and to know that inner nature, drew confidence from her society. No matter what confronted him, he had always sought in his inner self for his natural support, anxiously listening for that which came to the surface, and unconsciously doubting and inquiring. And now, so surely as she leaned silently on his arm, she confirmed something deep within him, and her steadfast gaze vibrated within him like a proud vocation, and he felt himself infinitely rich. She spoke to something deep within him when she gazed at him so thoughtfully. But what she said he did not know—nor what answer she received. When he recalled her from that gaze of hers, as of one bewitched, she only sighed like one awaking, and kissed him.

Ellen was loyal and unselfish and greatly valued by her employers. There was no real development to be perceived in her—she longed to become his—and that was all. But the future was born on Pelle’s own lips under her dreamy gaze, as though it was she who inspired him with the illuminating words. And then she listened with an absent smile—as to something delightful; but she herself seemed to give no thought to the future. She seemed full of a hidden devotion, that filled Pelle with an inward warmth, so that he held up his head very high toward the light. This constant devotion of Ellen’s made the children “Family” teasingly call her “the Saint.”

It gave him much secret pleasure to be admitted to her home, where the robust Copenhagen humor concealed conditions quite patriarchal in their nature. Everything was founded on order and respect for the parents, especially the father, who spoke the decisive word in every matter, and had his own place, in which no one else ever sat. When he came home from his work, the grown-up sons would always race to take him his slippers, and the wife always had some extra snack for him. The younger son, Frederik, who was just out of his apprenticeship, was as delighted as a child to think of the day when he should become a journeyman and be able to drink brotherhood with the old man.

They lived in a new, spacious, three-roomed tenement with a servant’s room thrown in; to Pelle, who was accustomed to find his comrades over here living in one room with a kitchen, this was a new experience. The sons boarded and lodged at home; they slept in the servant’s room. The household was founded on and supported by their common energies; although the family submitted unconditionally to the master of the house, they did not do so out of servility; they only did as all others did. For Stolpe was the foremost man in his calling, an esteemed worker and the veteran of the labor movement. His word was unchallenged.

Ellen was the only one who did not respect his supremacy, but courageously opposed him, often without any further motive than that of contradiction. She was the only girl of the family, and the favorite; and she took advantage of her position. Sometimes it looked as though Stolpe would be driven to extremities; as though he longed to pulverize her in his wrath; but he always gave in to her.

He was greatly pleased with Pelle. And he secretly admired his daughter more than ever. “You see, mother, there’s something in that lass! She understands how to pick a man for himself!” he would cry enthusiastically.

“Yes; I’ve nothing against him, either,” Madam Stolpe would reply. “A bit countrified still, but of course he’s growing out of it.”

“Countrified? He? No, you take my word, he knows what he wants. She’s really found her master there!” said Stolpe triumphantly.

In the two brothers Pelle found a pair of loyal comrades, who could not but look up to him.

XI

With the embargo matters were going so-so. Meyer replied to it by convoking the employers to a meeting with a view to establishing an employers' union, which would refuse employment to the members of the trade union. Then the matter would have been settled at one blow.

However, things did not go so far as that. The small employers were afraid the journeymen would set up for themselves and compete against them. And instinctively they feared the big employers more than the journeymen, and were shy of entering the Union with them. The inner tendency of the industrial movement was to concentrate everything in a few hands, and to ruin the small business. The small employers had yet another crow to pluck with Meyer, who had extended his business at the expense of their own.

Through Master Beck, Pelle learned what was taking place among the employers. Meyer had demanded that Beck should discharge Pelle, but Beck would not submit to him.

"I can't really complain of you," he said. "Your trades-unionism I don't like—you would do better to leave it alone. But with your work I am very well satisfied. I have always endeavored to render justice to all parties. But if you can knock Meyer's feet from under him, we small employers will be very grateful to your Union, for he's freezing us out."

To knock his feet from under him—that wasn't an easy thing to do. On the contrary, he was driving the weaker brethren out of the Union, and had always enough workers—partly Swedes, with whom he had a written contract, and whom he had to pay high wages. The system of home employment made it impossible to get to grips with him. Pelle and the president of the Union carefully picketed the warehouse about the time when the work was delivered, in order to discover who was working for him. And they succeeded in snatching a few workers away from him and in bringing them to reason, or else their names were published in *The Working Man*. But then the journeymen sent their wives or children with the work—and there was really nothing that could be done. It cost Meyer large sums of money to keep his business going, but the Union suffered more. It had not as yet sufficient authority, and the large employers stood by Meyer and would not employ members of the Union as long as the embargo lasted. So it was finally raised.

That was a defeat; but Pelle had learned something, none the less! The victory was to the strong, and their organization was not as yet sufficient. They must talk and agitate, and hold meetings! The tendency to embrace the new ideas certainly inclined the men to organize themselves, but their sense of honor was as yet undeveloped. The slightest mishap dispersed them.

Pelle did not lose heart; he must begin all over again, that was all.

On the morning after the defeat was an accomplished fact he was up early. His resolution to go ahead with redoubled energies, he had, so to speak, slept into him, so that it pervaded his body and put energy and decision into his hammer-strokes.

He whistled as the work progressed rapidly under his hands. The window stood open so that the night air might escape; hoar frost lay on the roofs, and the stars twinkled overhead in the cold heavens. But Pelle was not cold! He had just awakened the "Family" and could hear them moving about in their room. People were beginning to tumble out into the gangway, still drunken with sleep. Pelle was whistling a march. On the previous evening he had sent off the last instalment of his debt to Sort, and at the same time had written definitely to Father Lasse that he was to come. And now the day was dawning!

Marie came and reached him his coffee through the door. "Good morning!" she cried merrily, through the crack of the door. "We're going to have fine weather to-day, Pelle!" She was not quite dressed yet and would not let herself be seen. The boys nodded good morning as they ran out. Karl had his coat and waistcoat under his arm. These articles of clothing he always used to put on as he ran down the stairs.

When it was daylight Marie came in to set the room in order. She conversed with him as she scrubbed.

"Look here, Marie!" cried Pelle suddenly. "Ellen came here yesterday and asked you to bring me a message when I came home. You didn't do it."

Marie's face became set, but she did not reply.

"It was only by pure chance that I met her yesterday, otherwise we should have missed one another."

“Then I must have forgotten it,” said Marie morosely.

“Why, of course you forgot it. But that’s the second time this week. You must be in love!” he added, smiling.

Marie turned her back on him. “I’ve got nothing to do with her—I don’t owe her anything!” suddenly she cried defiantly. “And I’m not going to clean your room any longer, either—let her do it—so there!” She seized her pail and scrubbing-brush and ran into her own room. After a time he heard her voice from within the room; at first he thought she was singing a tune to herself, but then he heard sobs.

He hurried into the room; she was lying on the bed, weeping, biting the pillow and striking at it angrily with her roughened hands. Her thin body burned as if with fever.

“You are ill, Marie dear,” said Pelle anxiously, laying his hand on her forehead. “You ought to go to bed and take something to make you sweat. I’ll warm it up for you.”

She was really ill; her eyes were dry and burning, and her hands were cold and clammy. But she would agree to nothing. “Go away!” she said angrily, “and attend to your own work! Leave me alone!” She had turned her back on him and nudged him away defiantly with her shoulder. “You’d best go in and cuddle Ellen!” she cried suddenly, with a malicious laugh.

“Why are you like this, Marie?” said Pelle, distressed. “You are quite naughty!”

She buried her face in the bed and would neither look at him nor answer him. So he went back to his work.

After a time she came into his room again and resumed her work of cleaning. She banged the things about; pulling down some work of his that he had set to dry by the stove, and giving him a malicious sidelong look. Then a cup containing paste fell to the ground and was broken. “She did that on purpose,” he thought unhappily, and he put the paste into an empty box. She stood watching him with a piercing, malicious gaze.

He turned to his work again, and made as though nothing had happened. Suddenly he felt her thin arms about his neck. “Forgive me!” she said, weeping, and she hid her face against his shoulder.

“Come, come, nothing very dreadful has happened! The silly old cup!” he said consolingly, as he stroked her head. “You couldn’t help it!”

But at that she broke down altogether, and it seemed as though her crying would destroy her meager body. “Yes, I did it on purpose!” she bellowed. “And I threw down the boots on purpose, and yesterday I didn’t give you the message on purpose. I would have liked to hurt you still more, I’m so bad, bad, bad! Why doesn’t some one give me a good beating? If you’d only once be properly angry with me!”

She was quite beside herself and did not know what she was saying.

“Now listen to me at once—you’ve got to be sensible!” said Pelle decidedly, “for this sort of thing is not amusing. I was pleased to think I was going to be at home to-day, so as to work beside you, and then you go and have an attack just like a fine lady!”

She overcame her weeping by a tremendous effort, and went back to her room, gently sobbing. She returned at once with a cracked cup for the paste and a small tin box with a slit in the lid. This was her money-box.

“Take it,” she said, pushing the box onto his lap. “Then you can buy yourself lasts and needn’t go asking the small employers for work. There’s work enough here in the ‘Ark.’”

“But, Marie—that’s your rent!” said Pelle, aghast.

“What does that matter? I can easily get the money together again by the first.”

Oh, she could easily do that! Pelle laughed, a bewildered laugh. How cheerfully she threw her money about, the money that cost her thirty days of painful thought and saving, in order to have it ready each month!

“What do you think Peter and Karl would say to your chucking your money about like that? Put the box away again safely—and be quick about it!”

“Oh, take it!” she cried persistently, thrusting the box upon him again. “Yes—or I’ll throw it out of the window!” She quickly opened one of the sashes. Pelle stood up.

“It’s true I still owe you for the last washing,” he said, offering to put a krone in the box.

“A good thing you reminded me.” She stared at him with an impenetrable expression and ran back to her room.

In there she moved about singing in her harsh voice. After a while she went out to make some purchases clad in a gray shawl, with her housewife’s basket on her arm. He could follow her individual step, which was light as a child’s, and yet sounded so old—right to the end of the tunnel. Then he went into the children’s room and pulled out the third drawer in the chest of drawers. There she always hid her money-box, wrapped up in her linen. He still possessed two kroner, which he inserted in the box.

He used always to pay her in this way. When she counted out her money and found there was too much, she believed the good God had put the money in her box, and would come jubilantly into his room to tell him about it. The child believed blindly in Fortune, and accepted the money as a sign of election; and for her this money was something quite different to that which she herself had saved.

About noon she came to invite him into her room. “There’s fried herring, Pelle, so you can’t possibly say no,” she said persuasively, “for no Bornholmer could! Then you needn’t go and buy that stuffy food from the hawker, and throw away five and twenty öre.” She had bought half a score of the fish, and had kept back five for her brothers when they came home. “And there’s coffee after,” she said. She had set out everything delightfully, with a clean napkin at one end of the table.

The factory girl’s little Paul came in and was given a mouthful of food. Then he ran out into the gangway again and tumbled about there, for the little fellow was never a moment still from the moment his mother let him out in the morning; there was so much to make up for after his long imprisonment. From the little idiot whom his mother had to tie to the stove because he had water on the brain and wanted to throw himself out of the window, he had become a regular vagabond. Every moment he would thrust his head in at the door and look at Pelle; and he would often come right in, put his hand on Pelle’s knee, and say, “You’s my father!” Then he would rush off again. Marie helped him in all his infantile necessities—he always appealed to her!

After she had washed up, she sat by Pelle with her mending, chattering away concerning her household cares. “I shall soon have to get jackets for the boys—it’s awful what they need now they’re grown up. I peep in at the second-hand clothes shop every day. And you must have a new blouse, too, Pelle; that one will soon be done for; and then you’ve none to go to the wash. If you’ll buy the stuff, I’ll soon make it up for you—I can sew! I made my best blouse myself—Hanne helped me with it! Why, really, don’t you go to see Hanne any longer?”

“Oh, I don’t know.”

“Hanne has grown so peculiar. She never comes down into the courtyard now to dance with us. She used to. Then I used to watch out of the window, and run down. It was so jolly, playing with her. We used to go round and round her and sing! ‘We all bow to Hanne, we curtsy all to Hanne, we all turn round before her!’ And then we bowed and curtsied and suddenly we all turned round. I tell you, it was jolly! You ought to have taken Hanne.”

“But you didn’t like it when I took Ellen. Why should I have taken Hanne?”

“Oh, I don’t know … Hanne….” Marie stopped, listened, and suddenly wrenched the window open.

Down in the “Ark” a door slammed, and a long hooting sound rose up from below, sounding just like a husky scream from the crazy Vinslev’s flute or like the wind in the long corridors. Like a strange, disconnected snatch of melody, the sound floated about below, trickling up along the wooden walls, and breaking out into the daylight with a note of ecstasy: “Hanne’s with child! The Fairy Princess is going to be confined!”

Marie went down the stairs like a flash. The half-grown girls were shrieking and running together in the court below; the women on the galleries were murmuring to others above and below. Not that this was in itself anything novel; but in this case it was Hanne herself, the immaculate, whom as yet no tongue had dared to besmirch. And even now they dared hardly speak of it openly; it had come as such a shock. In a certain sense they had all entered into her exaltation, and with her had waited for the fairy-tale to come true; as quite a child she had been elected to represent the incomprehensible; and now she was merely going to have a child! It really was like a miracle just at first; it was such a surprise to them all!

Marie came back with dragging steps and with an expression of horror and astonishment. Down in the court the grimy-nosed little brats were screeching, as they wheeled hand in hand round the sewer-grating—it was splendid for dancing round—

“Bro-bro-brille-brid
Hanne’s doin’ to have a tid!”

They couldn’t speak plainly yet.

And there was “Grete with the baby,” the mad-woman, tearing her cellar- window open, leaning out of it backward, with her doll on her arm, and yelling up through the well, so that it echoed loud and shrill: “The Fairy Princess has got a child, and Pelle’s its father!”

Pelle bent over his work in silence. Fortunately he was not the king’s son in disguise in this case! But he wasn’t going to wrangle with women.

Hanne’s mother came storming out onto her gallery. “That’s a shameless lie!” she cried. “Pelle’s name ain’t going to be dragged into this—the other may be who he likes!”

Overhead the hearse-driver came staggering out onto his gallery. “The princess there has run a beam into her body,” he rumbled, in his good-natured bass. “What a pity I’m not a midwife! They’ve got hold of the wrong end of it!”

“Clear off into your hole and hold your tongue, you body-snatcher!” cried Madam Johnsen, spitting with rage. “You’ve got to stick your brandy-nose into everything!”

He stood there, half drunk, leaning over the rail, babbling, teasing, without returning Madam Johnsen’s vituperation. But then little Marie flung up a window and came to her assistance, and up from her platform Ferdinand’s mother emerged. “How many hams did you buy last month? Fetch out your bear hams, then, and show us them! He kills a bear for every corpse, the drunkard!” From all sides they fell upon him. He could do nothing against them, and contented himself with opening his eyes and his mouth and giving vent to a “Ba-a-a!” Then his red-haired wife came out and hailed him in.

XII

From the moment when the gray morning broke there was audible a peculiar note in the buzzing of the “Ark,” a hoarse excitement, which thrust all care aside. Down the long corridors there was a sound of weeping and scrubbing; while the galleries and the dark wooden staircases were sluiced with water. “Look out there!” called somebody every moment from somewhere, and then it was a question of escaping the downward-streaming flood. During the whole morning the water poured from one gallery to another, as over a mill-race.

But now the “Ark” stood freezing in its own cleanliness, with an expression that seemed to say the old warren didn’t know itself. Here and there a curtain or a bit of furniture had disappeared from a window —it had found its way to the pawn shop in honor of the day. What was lacking in that way was made up for by the expectation and festive delight on the faces of the inmates.

Little fir-trees peeped out of the cellar entries in the City Ward, and in the market-place they stood like a whole forest along the wall of the prison. In the windows of the basement-shops hung hearts and colored candles, and the grocer at the corner had a great Christmas goblin in his window—it was made of red and gray wool-work and had a whole cat’s skin for its beard.

On the stairs of the “Ark” the children lay about cleaning knives and forks with sand sprinkled on the steps.

Pelle sat over his work and listened in secret. His appearance usually had a quieting effect on these crazy outbursts of the “Ark,” but he did not want to mix himself up with this affair. And he had never even dreamed that Hanne’s mother could be like this! She was like a fury, turning her head, quick as lightning, now to one side, now to the other, and listening to every sound, ready to break out again!

Ah, she was protecting her child now that it was too late! She was like a spitting cat.

> “The youngest of all the lordlin’s,”

sang the children down in the court. That was Hanne’s song. Madam Johnsen stood there as though she would like to swoop down on their heads. Suddenly she flung her apron over her face and ran indoors, sobbing.

“Ah!” they said, and they slapped their bellies every time an odor of something cooking streamed out into the court. Every few minutes they had to run out and buy five or ten öre worth of something or other; there was no end to the things that were needed in preparation for Christmas Eve. “We’re having lovely red beetroot!” said one little child, singing, making a song of it—“We’re having lovely red beetroot, aha, aha, aha!” And they swayed their little bodies to and fro as they scoured.

“Frederik!” a sharp voice cried from one of the corridors. “Run and get a score of firewood and a white roll—a ten-öre one. But look out the grocer counts the score properly and don’t pick out the crumb!”

Madam Olsen with the warm wall was frying pork. She couldn’t pull her range out onto the gallery, but she did let the pork burn so that the whole courtyard was filled with bluish smoke. “Madam Olsen! Your pork is burning!” cried a dozen women at once.

“That’s because the frying-pan’s too small!” replied Frau Olsen, thrusting her red head out through the balusters. “What’s a poor devil to do when her frying-pan’s too small?” And Madam Olsen’s frying-pan was the biggest in the whole “Ark”!

Shortly before the twilight fell Pelle came home from the workshop. He saw the streets and the people with strange eyes that diffused a radiance over all things; it was the Christmas spirit in his heart. But why? he asked himself involuntarily. Nothing in particular was in store for him. To-day he would have to work longer than usual, and he would not be able to spend the evening with Ellen, for she had to be busy in her kitchen, making things jolly for others. Why, then, did this feeling possess him? It was not a memory; so far as he could look back he had never taken part in a genuine cheerful Christmas Eve, but had been forced to content himself with the current reports of such festivities. And all the other poor folks whom he met were in the same mood as he himself. The hard questioning look had gone from their faces; they were smiling to themselves as they went. To-day there was nothing of that wan, heavy depression which commonly broods over the lower classes like the foreboding of disaster; they could not have looked more cheerful had all their hopes been fulfilled! A woman with a feather-bed in her arms passed him and disappeared into the pawn-shop; and she looked extremely well pleased. Were they really so cheerful just because they were going to have a bit of a feast, while to do so they were making a succession of lean days yet leaner? No, they were going to keep festival because the Christmas spirit prevailed in their hearts, because they must keep holiday, however dearly it might cost them!

It was on this night to be sure that Christ was born. Were the people so kind and cheerful on that account?

Pelle still knew by heart most of the Bible texts of his school-days. They had remained stowed away somewhere in his mind, without burdening him or taking up any room, and now and again they reappeared and helped to build up his knowledge of mankind. But of Christ Himself he had formed his own private picture, from the day when as a boy he first stumbled upon the command given to the rich: to sell all that they had and to give to the starving. But they took precious good care not to do so; they took the great friend of the poor man and hanged him on high! He achieved no more than this, that He became a promise to the poor; but perhaps it was this promise that, after two thousand years, they were now so solemnly celebrating!

They had so long been silent, holding themselves in readiness, like the wise virgins in the Bible, and now at last it was coming! Now at last they were beginning to proclaim the great Gospel of the Poor—it was a goodly motive for all this Christmas joy! Why did they not assemble the multitudes on the night of Christ’s birth and announce the Gospel to them? Then they would all understand the Cause and would join it then and there! There was a whirl of new living thoughts in Pelle’s head. He had not hitherto known that that in which he was participating was so great a thing. He felt that he was serving the Highest.

He stood a while in the market-place, silently considering the Christmas-trees—they led his thoughts back to the pasture on which he had herded the cows, and the little wood of firs. It pleased him to buy a tree, and to take the children by surprise; the previous evening they had sat together cutting out Christmas-tree decorations, and Karl had fastened four fir-tree boughs together to make a Christmas-tree.

At the grocer’s he bought some sweets and Christmas candles. The grocer was going about on tip-toe in honor of the day, and was serving the dirty little urchins with ceremonious bows. He was “throwing things in,” and had quite forgotten his customary, “Here, you, don’t forget that you still owe for two lots of tea and a quarter of coffee!” But he was cheating with the scales as usual.

Marie was going about with rolled-up sleeves, and was very busy. But she dropped her work and came running when she saw the tree. “It won’t stand here yet, Pelle,” she cried, “it will have to be cut shorter. It will have to be cut still shorter even now! Oh, how pretty it is! No, at the end there—at the end! We had a Christmas-tree at home; father went out himself and cut it down on the cliffs; and we children went with him. But this one is much finer!” Then she ran out into the gangway, in order to tell the news, but it suddenly occurred to her that the boys had not come home yet, so she rushed in to Pelle once more.

Pelle sat down to his work. From time to time he lifted his head and looked out. The seamstress, who had just moved into Pipman’s old den, and who was working away at her snoring machine, looked longingly at him. Of course she must be lonely; perhaps there was nowhere where she could spend the evening.

Old Madam Frandsen came out on her platform and shuffled down the steep stairs in her cloth slippers. The rope slipped through her trembling hands. She had a little basket on her arm and a purse in her hand—she too looked so lonely, the poor old worm! She had now heard nothing of her son for three months. Madam Olsen called out to her and invited her in, but the old woman shook her head. On the way back she looked in on Pelle.

“He’s coming this evening,” she whispered delightedly. “I’ve been buying brandy and beefsteak for him, because he’s coming this evening!”

“Well, don’t be disappointed, Madam Frandsen,” said Pelle, “but he daren’t venture here any more. Come over to us instead and keep Christmas with us.”

She nodded confidently. “He’ll come tonight. On Christmas Eve he has always slept in mother’s bed, ever since he could crawl, and he can’t do without it, not if I know my Ferdinand!” She had already made up a bed for herself on the chairs, so certain was she.

The police evidently thought as she did, for down in the court strange footsteps were heard. It was just about twilight, when so many were coming and going unremarked. But at these steps a female head popped back over the balustrade, a sharp cry was heard, and at the same moment every gallery was filled with women and children. They hung over the rails and made an ear-splitting din, so that the whole deep, narrow shaft was filled with an unendurable uproar. It sounded as though a hurricane came raging down through the shaft, sweeping with it a hailstorm of roofing-slates. The policeman leaped back into the tunnel- entry, stupefied. He stood there a moment recovering himself before he withdrew. Upstairs, in the galleries, they leaned on the rails and recovered their breath, exhausted by the terrific eruption; and then fell to chattering like a flock of small birds that have been chasing a flying hawk.

"Merry Christmas!" was now shouted from gallery to gallery. "Thanks, the same to you!" And the children shouted to one another, "A jolly feast and all the best!" "A dainty feast for man and beast!"

Christmas Eve was here! The men came shuffling home at a heavy trot, and the factory-girls came rushing in. Here and there a feeble wail filtered out of one of the long corridors, so that the milk-filled breast ached. Children incessantly ran in and out, fetching the last ingredients of the feast. Down by the exit into the street they had to push two tramps, who stood there shuddering in the cold. They were suspicious-looking people. "There are two men down there, but they aren't genuine," said Karl. "They look as if they came out of a music-hall."

"Run over to old Madam Frandsen and tell her that," said Pelle. But her only answer was, "God be thanked, then they haven't caught him yet!"

Over at Olsen's their daughter Elvira had come home. The blind was not drawn, and she was standing at the window with her huge hat with flowers in it, allowing herself to be admired. Marie came running in. "Have you seen how fine she is, Pelle?" she said, quite stupefied. "And she gets all that for nothing from the gentlemen, just because they think she's so pretty. But at night she paints her naked back!"

The children were running about in the gangway, waiting until Pelle should have finished. They would not keep Christmas without him. But now he, too, had finished work; he pulled on a jacket, wrapped up his work, and ran off.

Out on the platform he stood still for a moment. He could see the light of the city glimmering in the deep, star-filled sky. The night was so solemnly beautiful. Below him the galleries were forsaken; they were creaking in the frost. All the doors were closed to keep the cold out and the joy in. "Down, down from the green fir-trees!"—it sounded from every corner. The light shone through the window and in all directions through the woodwork. Suddenly there was a dull booming sound on the stairs—it was the hearse-driver staggering home with a ham under either arm. Then all grew quiet—quiet as it never was at other times in the "Ark," where night or day some one was always complaining. A child came out and lifted a pair of questioning eyes, in order to look at the Star of Bethlehem! There was a light at Madam Frandsen's. She had hung a white sheet over the window today, and had drawn it tight; the lamp stood close to the window, so that any one moving within would cast no shadow across it.

The poor old worm! thought Pelle, as he ran past; she might have spared herself the trouble! When he had delivered his work he hurried over to Holberg Street, in order to wish Ellen a happy Christmas.

The table was finely decked out in his room when he got home; there was pork chops, rice boiled in milk, and Christmas beer. Marie was glowing with pride over her performance; she sat helping the others, but she herself took nothing.

"You ought to cook a dinner as good as this every day, lass!" said Karl, as he set to. "God knows, you might well get a situation in the King's kitchen."

"Why don't you eat any of this nice food?" said Pelle.

"Oh, no, I can't," she replied, touching her cheeks; her eyes beamed upon him.

They laughed and chattered and clinked their glasses together. Karl came out with the latest puns and the newest street-songs; so he had gained something by his scouring of the city streets. Peter sat there looking impenetrably now at one, now at another; he never laughed, but from time to time he made a dry remark by which one knew that he was amusing himself. Now and again they looked over at old Madam Frandsen's window— it was a pity that she wouldn't be with them.

Five candles were now burning over there—they were apparently fixed on a little Christmas tree which stood in a flowerpot. They twinkled like distant stars through the white curtain, and Madam Frandsen's voice sounded cracked and thin: "O thou joyful, O thou holy, mercy-bringing Christmas-tide!" Pelle opened his window and listened; he wondered that the old woman should be so cheerful.

Suddenly a warning voice sounded from below: "Madam Frandsen, there are visitors coming!"

Doors and windows flew open on the galleries round about. People tumbled out of doorways, their food in their hands, and leaned over the railings. "Who dares to disturb our Christmas rejoicings?" cried a deep, threatening voice.

"The officers of the law!" the reply came out of the darkness. "Keep quiet, all of you—in the name of the law!"

Over on Madam Frandsen's side two figures became visible, noiselessly running up on all fours. Upstairs nothing was happening; apparently they had lost their heads. "Ferdinand, Ferdinand!" shrieked a girl's voice wildly; "they're coming now!"

At the same moment the door flew open, and with a leap Ferdinand stood on the platform. He flung a chair down at his pursuers, and violently swayed the hand-rope, in order to sweep them off the steps. Then he seized the gutter and swung himself up onto the roof. "Good-bye, mother!" he cried from above, and his leap resounded in the darkness. "Good-bye, mother, and a merry Christmas!" A howl like that of a wounded beast flung the alarm far out into the night, and they heard the stumbling pursuit of the policemen over the roofs. And then all was still.

They returned unsuccessful. "Well, then you haven't got him!" cried Olsen, leaning out of his window down below.

"No; d'you think we are going to break our necks for the like of him?" retorted the policemen, as they scrambled down. "Any one going to stand a glass of Christmas beer?" As no response followed, they departed.

Old Madam Frandsen went into her room and locked up; she was tired and worried and wanted to go to bed. But after a time she came shuffling down the long gangway. "Pelle," she whispered, "he's in bed in my room! While they were scrambling about on the roofs he slipped quietly back over the garrets and got into my bed! Good God, he hasn't slept in a bed for four months! He's snoring already!" And she slipped out again.

Yes, that was an annoying interruption! No one felt inclined to begin all over again excepting Karl, and Marie did not count him, as he was always hungry. So she cleared away, gossiping as she went in and out; she did not like to see Pelle so serious.

"But the secret!" she cried of a sudden, quite startled. The boys ran in to her; then they came back, close together, with Marie behind them, carrying something under her apron. The two boys flung themselves upon Pelle and closed his eyes, while Marie inserted something in his mouth. "Guess now!" she cried, "guess now!" It was a porcelain pipe with a green silken tassel. On the bowl of the pipe, which was Ellen's Christmas gift, was a representation of a ten-kroner note. The children had inserted a screw of tobacco. "Now you'll be able to smoke properly," said Marie, pursing her lips together round the mouthpiece; "you are so clever in everything else."

The children had invited guests for the Christmas-tree; the seamstress, the old night-watchman from the courtyard, the factory-hand with her little boy; all those who were sitting at home and keeping Christmas all alone. They didn't know themselves, there were so many of them! Hanne and her mother were invited too, but they had gone to bed early—they were not inclined for sociability. One after another they were pulled into the room, and they came with cheerful faces. Marie turned the lamp out and went in to light up the Christmas tree.

They sat in silence and expectation. The light from the stove flickered cheerfully to and fro in the room, lighting up a face with closed eyelids and eager features, and dying away with a little crash. The factory hand's little boy was the only one to chatter; he had sought a refuge on Pelle's knee and felt quite safe in the darkness; his childish voice sounded strangely bright in the firelight. "Paul must be quite good and quiet," repeated the mother admonishingly.

"Mus'n't Paul 'peak?" asked the child, feeling for Pelle's face.

"Yes, to-night Paul can do just as he likes," replied Pelle. Then the youngster chattered on and kicked out at the darkness with his little legs.

"Now you can come!" cried Marie, and she opened the door leading to the gangway. In the children's room everything had been cleared away. The Christmas-tree stood in the middle, on the floor, and was blazing with light. And how splendid it was—and how tall! Now they could have a proper good look! The lights were reflected in their eyes, and in the window-panes, and in the old mahogany-framed mirror, and the glass of the cheap pictures, so that they seemed suddenly to be moving about in the midst of myriads of stars, and forgot all their miseries. It was as though they had escaped from all their griefs and cares, and had entered straightway into glory, and all of a sudden a pure, clear voice arose, tremulous with embarrassment, and the voice sang:

"O little angel, make us glad!
   Down from high Heaven's halls
Through sunshine flown, in splendor clad,
   Earth's shadow on thee falls!"

It sounded like a greeting from the clouds. They closed their eyes and wandered, hand in hand, about the tree. Then the seamstress fell silent, blushing. "You aren't singing with me!" she cried.

"We'll sing the Yule Song—we all know that," said Pelle.

"Down, down from the high green tree!"—It was Karl who struck up. And they just did sing that! It fitted in so admirably—even the name of Peter fitted in! And it was great fun, too, when all the presents cropped up in the song; every single person was remembered! Only, the lines about the purse, at the end, were all too true! There wasn't much more to be said for that song! But suddenly the boys set the ring-dance going; they stamped like a couple of soldiers, and then they all went whirling round in frantic movement—a real witches' dance!

"Hey dicker dick,
My man fell smack;
It was on Christmas Eve!
I took a stick
And broke it on his back,
It was on Christmas Eve!"

How hot all the candles made it, and how it all went to one's head! They had to open the door on to the gangway.

And there outside stood the inmates of the garrets, listening and craning their necks. "Come inside," cried the boys. "There's room enough if we make two rings!" So once again they moved round the tree, singing Christmas carols. Every time there was a pause somebody struck up a new carol, that had to be sung through. The doors opposite were open too, the old rag-picker sat at the head of his table singing on his own account. He had a loaf of black bread and a plate of bacon in front of him, and after every carol he took a mouthful. In the other doorway sat three coal-porters playing "sixty-six" for beer and brandy. They sat facing toward the Christmas-tree, and they joined in the singing as they played; but from time to time they broke off in the middle of a verse in order to say something or to cry "Trumped!" Now they suddenly threw down their cards and came into the room. "We don't want to sit here idle and look on while others are working," they said, and they joined the circle.

Finally they had all had enough of circling round the tree and singing. So chairs and stools were brought in from the other rooms; they had to squeeze close together, right under the sloping roof, and some sat up on the window-sill. There was a clear circle left round the Christmas-tree. And there they sat gossiping, crouching in all sorts of distorted postures, as though that was the only way in which their bodies could really find repose, their arms hanging loosely between their knees. But their faces were still eager and excited; and the smoke from the candles and the crackling fir-boughs of the tree veiled them in a bluish cloud, through which they loomed as round as so many moons. The burning turpentine gave the smoke a mysterious, alluring fragrance, and the devout and attentive faces were like so many murmuring spirits, hovering in the clouds, each above its outworn body.

Pelle sat there considering them till his heart bled for them—that was his Christmas devotion. Poor storm-beaten birds, what was this splendid experience which outweighed all their privations? Only a little light! And they looked as though they could fall down before it and give up their lives! He knew the life's story of each one of them better than they knew. But their faces were still eager and excited; and they themselves; when they approached the light they always burned themselves in it, like the moths, they were so chilled!

"All the same, that's a queer invention, when one thinks about it," said one of the dockers, nodding toward the Christmas-tree. "But it's fine. God knows what it really is supposed to mean!"

"It means that now the year is returning toward the light again," said the old night-watchman.

"No; it stands for the joy of the shepherds over the birth of Christ," said the rag-picker, stepping into the doorway.

"The shepherds were poor folks, like ourselves, who lived in the darkness. That's why they rejoiced so over Him, because He came with the light."

"Well, it don't seem to me we've been granted such a terrible deal of light! Oh, yes, the Christmas-tree here, that's splendid, Lord knows it is, and we should all of us like to thank the children for it—but one can't have trees like that to set light to every day; and as for the sun—well, you see, the rich folks have got a monopoly of that!"

"Yes, you are right there, Jacob," said Pelle, who was moving about round the tree, taking down the hearts and packages for the children, who distributed the sweets. "You are all three of you right—curiously enough. The Christmas-tree is to remind us of Christ's birth, and also that the year is returning toward the sun—but that's all the same thing. And then it's to remind us, too, that we too ought to have a share in things; Christ was born especially to remind the poor of their rights! Yes, that is so! For the Lord God isn't one to give long-winded directions as to how one should go ahead; He sends the sun rolling round the earth every day, and each of us must look out for himself, and see how best he himself can get into the sunshine. It's just like the wife of a public-house keeper I remember at home, who used to tell travellers, 'What would you like to eat? You can have ducks or pork chops or sweets—anything you've brought with you!'"

"That was a devilish funny statement!" said his hearers, laughing.

"Yes, it's easy enough to invite one to all sorts of fine things when all the time one has to bring them along one's self! You ought to have been a preacher."

"He'd far better be the Devil's advocate!" said the old rag-picker. "For there's not much Christianity in what he says!"

"But you yourself said that Christ came bringing light for the poor," said Pelle; "and He Himself said as much, quite plainly; what He wanted was to make the blind to see and the dead to walk, and to restore consideration to the despised and rejected. Also, He wanted men to have faith!"

"The blind shall see, the lame shall walk, the leper shall be clean, the deaf shall hear, and the dead shall arise, and the Word shall be preached to the poor," said the rag-picker, correcting Pelle. "You are distorting the Scriptures, Pelle."

"But I don't believe He meant only individual cripples—no, He meant all of us in our misery, and all the temptations that lie in wait for us. That's how Preacher Sort conceived it, and he was a godly, upright man. He believed the millennium would come for the poor, and that Christ was already on the earth making ready for its coming."

The women sat quite bemused, listening with open mouths; they dared scarcely breathe. Paul was asleep on his mother's lap.

"Can He really have thought about us poor vermin, and so long beforehand?" cried the men, looking from one to another. "Then why haven't we long ago got a bit more forward than this?"

"Yes, I too don't understand that," said Pelle, hesitating. "Perhaps we ourselves have got to work our way in the right direction—and that takes time."

"Yes, but—if He would only give us proper conditions of life. But if we have to win them for ourselves we don't need any Christ for that!"

This was something that Pelle could not explain even to himself, although he felt it within him as a living conviction, A man must win what was due to him himself—that was clear as the day, and he couldn't understand how they could be blind to the fact; but why he must do so he couldn't—however he racked his brains—explain to another person. "But I can tell you a story," he said.

"But a proper exciting story!" cried Earl, who was feeling bored. "Oh, if only Vinslev were here—he has such droll ideas!"

"Be quiet, boy!" said Marie crossly. "Pelle makes proper speeches—before whole meetings," she said, nodding solemnly to the others. "What is the story called?"

"Howling Peter."

"Oh, it's a story with Peter in it—then it's a fairy-tale! What is it about?"

"You'll know that when you hear it, my child," said the old night-watchman.

"Yes, but then one can't enjoy it when it comes out right. Isn't it a story about a boy who goes out into the world?"

"The story is about"—Pelle bethought himself a moment; "the story is about the birth of Christ," he said quickly, and then blushed a deep red at his own audacity. But the others looked disappointed, and settled themselves decently and stared at the floor, as though they had been in church.

And then Pelle told them the story of Howling Peter; who was born and grew up in poverty and grief, until he was big and strong, and every man's cur to kick. For it was the greatest pity to see this finely-made fellow, who was so full of fear and misery that if even a girl so much as touched him he must flood himself with tears; and the only way out of his misery was the rope. What a disgrace it was, that he should have earned his daily bread and yet have been kept in the workhouse, as though they did him a kindness in allowing him a hole to creep into there, when with his capacity for work he could have got on anywhere! And it became quite unendurable as he grew up and was still misused by all the world, and treated like a dog. But then, all of a sudden, he broke the magic spell, struck down his tormentors, and leaped out into the daylight as the boldest of them all!

They drew a deep breath when he had finished. Marie clapped her hands. "That was a real fairy-tale!" she cried. Karl threw himself upon Peter and pummeled away at him, although that serious-minded lad was anything but a tyrant!

They cheerfully talked the matter over. Everybody had something to say about Howling Peter. "That was damned well done," said the men; "he thrashed the whole crew from beginning to end; a fine fellow that! And a strong one too! But why the devil did he take such a long time about it? And put up with all that?"

"Yes, it isn't quite so easy for us to understand that—not for us, who boast such a lot about our rights!" said Pelle, smiling.

"Well, you're a clever chap, and you've told it us properly!" cried the cheerful Jacob. "But if ever you need a fist, there's mine!" He seized and shook Pelle's hand.

The candles had long burned out, but they did not notice it.

Their eyes fastened on Pelle's as though seeking something, with a peculiar expression in which a question plainly came and went. And suddenly they overwhelmed him with questions. They wanted to know enough, anyhow! He maintained that a whole world of splendors belonged to them, and now they were in a hurry to get possession of them. Even the old rag-picker let himself be carried away with the rest; it was too alluring, the idea of giving way to a little intoxication, even if the everyday world was to come after it.

Pelle stood among them all, strong and hearty, listening to all their questions with a confident smile. He knew all that was to be theirs—even if it couldn't come just at once. It was a matter of patience and perseverance; but that they couldn't understand just now. When they had at last entered into their glory they would know well enough how to protect it. He had no doubts; he stood there among them like their embodied consciousness, happily growing from deeply-buried roots.

XIII

From the foundations of the “Ark” rose a peculiar sound, a stumbling, countrified footstep, dragging itself in heavy footgear over the flagstones. All Pelle’s blood rushed to his heart; he threw down his work, and with a leap was on the gallery, quite convinced that this was only an empty dream…. But there below in the court stood Father Lasse in the flesh, staring up through the timbers, as though he couldn’t believe his own eyes. He had a sack filled with rubbish on his back.

“Hallo!” cried Pelle, taking the stairs in long leaps. “Hallo!”

“Good-day, my lad!” said Lasse, in a voice trembling with emotion, considering his son with his lashless eyes. “Yes, here you have Father Lasse—if you will have him. But where, really, did you come from? Seems to me you fell down from heaven?”

Pelle took his father’s sack. “You just come up with me,” he said. “You can trust the stairs all right; they are stronger than they look.”

“Then they are like Lasse,” answered the old man, trudging up close behind him; the straps of his half-Wellingtons were peeping out at the side, and he was quite the old man. At every landing he stood still and uttered his comments on his surroundings. Pelle had to admonish him to be silent.

“One doesn’t discuss everything aloud here. It might so easily be regarded as criticism,” he said.

“No, really? Well, one must learn as long as one lives. But just look how they stand about chattering up here! There must be a whole courtyard-full! Well, well. I won’t say any more. I knew they lived one on top of another, but I didn’t think there’d be so little room here. To hang the backyard out in front of the kitchen door, one on top of another, that’s just like the birds that build all on one bough. Lord God, suppose it was all to come tumbling down one fine day!”

“And do you live here?” he cried, gazing in a disillusioned manner round the room with its sloping ceiling. “I’ve often wondered how you were fixed up over here. A few days ago I met a man at home who said they were talking about you already; but one wouldn’t think so from your lodgings. However, it isn’t far to heaven, anyhow!”

Pelle was silent. He had come to love his den, and his whole life here; but Father Lasse continued to enlarge upon his hopes of his son’s respectability and prosperity, and he felt ashamed. “Did you imagine I was living in one of the royal palaces?” he said, rather bitterly.

Lasse looked at him kindly and laid both hands on his shoulders. “So big and strong as you’ve grown, lad,” he said, wondering. “Well, and now you have me here too! But I won’t be a burden to you. No, but at home it had grown so dismal after what happened at Due’s, that I got ready without sending you word. And then I was able to come over with one of the skippers for nothing.”

“But what’s this about Due?” asked Pelle. “I hope nothing bad?”

“Good God, haven’t you heard? He revenged himself on his wife because he discovered her with the Consul. He had been absolutely blind, and had only believed the best of her, until he surprised her in her sin. Then he killed her, her and the children they had together, and went to the authorities and gave himself up. But the youngest, whom any one could see was the Consul’s, he didn’t touch. Oh, it was a dreadful misfortune! Before he gave himself up to the police he came to me; he wanted just one last time to be with some one who would talk it over with him without hypocrisy. ‘I’ve strangled Anna,’ he said, as soon as he had sat down. ‘It had to be, and I’m not sorry. I’m not sorry. The children that were mine, too. I’ve dealt honestly with them.’ Yes, yes, he had dealt honestly with the poor things! ‘I just wanted to say goodbye to you, Lasse, for my life’s over now, happy as I might have been, with my contented nature. But Anna always wanted to be climbing, and if I got on it was her shame I had to thank for it. I never wanted anything further than the simple happiness of the poor man—a good wife and a few children—and now I must go to prison! God be thanked that Anna hasn’t lived to see that! She was finer in her feelings than the rest, and she had to deceive in order to get on in the world.’ So he sat there, talking of the dead, and one couldn’t notice any feeling in him. I wouldn’t let him see how sick at heart he made me feel. For him it was the best thing, so long as his conscience could sleep easy. ‘Your eyes are watering, Lasse,’ he said quietly; ‘you should bathe them a bit; they say urine is good.’ Yes, God knows, my eyes did water! God of my life, yes! Then he stood up. ‘You, too, Lasse, you haven’t much longer life granted you,’ he said, and he gave me his hand. ‘You are growing old now. But you must give Pelle my greetings—he’s safe to get on!’”

Pelle sat mournfully listening to the dismal story. But he shuddered at the last words. He had so often heard the expression of that anticipation of his good fortune, which they all seemed to feel, and had rejoiced to hear it; it was, after all, only an echo of his own self- confidence. But now it weighed upon him like a burden. It was always those who were sinking who believed in his luck; and as they sank they flung their hopes upward toward him. A grievous fashion was this in which his good fortune was prophesied! A terrible and grievous blessing it was that was spoken over him and his success in life by this man dedicated to death, even as he stepped upon the scaffold. Pelle sat staring at the floor without a sign of life, a brooding expression on his face; his very soul was shuddering at the foreboding of a superhuman burden; and suddenly a light was flashed before his eyes; there could never be happiness for him alone—the fairy-tale was dead! He was bound up with all the others—he must partake of happiness or misfortune with them; that was why the unfortunate Due gave him his blessing. In his soul he was conscious of Due’s difficult journey, as though he himself had to endure the horror of it. And Fine Anna, who must clamber up over his own family and tread them in the dust! Never again could he wrench himself quite free as before! He had already encountered much unhappiness and had learned to hate its cause. But this was something more—this was very affliction itself!

“Yes,” sighed Lasse, “a lucky thing that Brother Kalle did not live to see all this. He worked himself to skin and bone for his children, and now, for all thanks, he lied buried in the poorhouse burying-ground. Albinus, who travels about the country as a conjurer, was the only one who had a thought for him; but the money came too late, although it was sent by telegraph. Have you ever heard of a conjuring-trick like that— to send money from England to Bornholm over the telegraph cable? A devilish clever acrobat! Well, Brother Kalle, he knew all sorts of conjuring-tricks too, but he didn’t learn them abroad. They had heard nothing at all of Alfred at the funeral. He belongs to the fine folks now and has cut off all connection with his poor relations. He has been appointed to various posts of honor, and they say he’s a regular bloodhound toward the poor—a man’s always worst toward his own kind. But the fine folks, they say, they think great things of him.”

Pelle heard the old man’s speech only as a monotonous trickle of sound.

Due, Due, the best, the most good-natured man he knew, who championed Anna’s illegitimate child against her own mother, and loved her like his own, because she was defenceless and needed his love—Due was now to lay his head on the scaffold! So dearly bought was the fulfilment of his wish, to obtain a pair of horses and become a coachman! He had obtained the horses and a carriage on credit, and had himself made up for the instalments and the interest—the Consul had merely stood security for him. And for this humble success he was now treading the path of shame! His steps echoed in Pelle’s soul; Pelle did not know how he was going to bear it. He longed for his former obtuseness.

Lasse continued to chatter. For him it was fate—grievous and heavy, but it could not be otherwise. And the meeting with Pelle had stirred up so many memories; he was quite excited. Everything he saw amused him. However did anybody hit on the idea of packing folks away like this, one on top of another, like herrings in a barrel? And at home on Bornholm there were whole stretches of country where no one lived at all! He did not venture to approach the window, but prudently stood a little way back in the room, looking out over the roofs. There, too, was a crazy arrangement! One could count the ears in a cornfield as easily as the houses over here!

Pelle called Marie, who had discreetly remained in her own room. “This is my foster-mother,” he said, with his arm round her shoulders. “And that is Father Lasse, whom you are fond of already, so you always say. Now can you get us some breakfast?” He gave her money.

“She’s a good girl, that she is,” said Lasse, feeling in his sack. “She shall have a present. There’s a red apple,” he said to Marie, when she returned; “you must eat it, and then you’ll be my sweetheart.” Marie smiled gravely and looked at Pelle.

They borrowed the old clothes dealer’s handcart and went across to the apple barges to fetch Lasse’s belongings. He had sold most of them in order not to bring too great a load to the city. But he had retained a bedstead with bedding, and all sorts of other things. “And then I have still to give you greetings from Sort and Marie Nielsen,” he said.

Pelle blushed. “I owe her a few words, but over here I quite forgot it somehow! And I have half promised her my portrait. I must see now about sending it.”

“Yes, do,” said Father Lasse. “I don’t know how close you two stand to each other, but she was a good woman. And those who stay behind, they’re sad when they’re forgotten. Remember that.”

At midday Lasse had tidied himself a trifle and began to brush his hat.

“What now?” inquired Pelle. “You don’t want to go out all alone?”

“I want to go out and look at the city a bit,” replied Lasse, as though it were quite a matter of course. “I want to find some work, and perhaps I’ll go and have a peep at the king for once. You need only explain in which direction I must go.”

“You had better wait until I can come with you—you’ll only lose yourself.”

“Shall I do that?” replied Lasse, offended. “But I found my way here alone, I seem to remember!”

“I can go with the old man!” said Marie.

“Yes, you come with the old man, then no one can say he has lost his youth!” cried Lasse jestingly, as he took her hand. “I think we two shall be good friends.”

Toward evening they returned. “There are folks enough here,” said Lasse, panting, “but there doesn’t seem to be a superfluity of work. I’ve been asking first this one and then that, but no one will have me. Well, that’s all right! If they won’t, I can just put a spike on my stick and set to work collecting the bits of paper in the streets, like the other old men; I can at least do that still.”

“But I can’t give my consent to that,” replied Pelle forcibly. “My father shan’t become a scavenger!”

“Well—but I must get something to do, or I shall go back home again. I’m not going to go idling about here while you work.”

“But you can surely rest and enjoy a little comfort in your old days, father. However, we shall soon see.”

“I can rest, can I? I had better lie on my back and let myself be fed like a long-clothes child! Only I don’t believe my back would stand it!”

They had placed Lasse’s bed with the footboard under the sloping ceiling; there was just room enough for it. Pelle felt like a little boy when he went to bed that night; it was so many years since he had slept in the same room as Father Lasse. But in the night he was oppressed by evil dreams; Due’s dreadful fate pursued him in his sleep. His energetic, good-humored face went drifting through the endless grayness, the head bowed low, the hands chained behind him, a heavy iron chain was about his neck, and his eyes were fixed on the ground as though he were searching the very abyss. When Pelle awoke it was because Father Lasse stood bending over his bed, feeling his face, as in the days of his childhood.

XIV

Lasse would not sit idle, and was busily employed in running about the city in search of work. When he spoke to Pelle he put a cheerful face on a bad business; and looked hopeful; but the capital had already disillusioned him. He could not understand all this hubbub, and felt that he was too old to enter into it and fathom its meaning—besides, perhaps it had none! It really looked as though everybody was just running to and fro and following his own nose, without troubling in the least about all the rest. And there were no greetings when you passed folks in the street; the whole thing was more than Lasse could understand. “I ought to have stayed at home,” he would often think.

And as for Pelle—well, Pelle was taken up with his own affairs! That was only to be expected in a man. He ran about going to meetings and agitating, and had a great deal to do; his thoughts were continually occupied, so that there was no time for familiar gossip as in the old days. He was engaged, moreover, so that what time was not devoted to the Labor movement was given to his sweetheart. How the boy had grown, and how he had altered, bodily and in every way! Lasse had a feeling that he only reached up to Pelle’s belt nowadays. He had grown terribly serious, and was quite the man; he looked as though he was ready to grasp the reins of something or other; you would never, to look at him, have thought that he was only a journeyman cobbler. There was an air of responsibility about him—just a little too much may be!

Marie got into the way of accompanying the old man. They had become good friends, and there was plenty for them to gossip over. She would take him to the courtyard of the Berlingske Tidende, where the people in search of work eddied about the advertisement board, filling up the gateway and forming a crowd in the street outside.

“We shall never get in there!” said Lasse dejectedly. But Marie worked herself forward; when people scolded her she scolded them back. Lasse was quite horrified by the language the child used; but it was a great help!

Marie read out the different notices, and Lasse made his comments on every one, and when the bystanders laughed Lasse gazed at them uncomprehendingly, then laughed with them, and nodded his head merrily. He entered into everything.

“What do you say? Gentleman’s coachman? Yes, I can drive a pair of horses well enough, but perhaps I’m not fine enough for the gentry—I’m afraid my nose would drip!”

He looked about him importantly, like a child that is under observation. “But errand boy—that isn’t so bad. We’ll make a note of that. There’s no great skill needed to be everybody’s dog! House porter! Deuce take it—there one need only sit downstairs and make angry faces out of a basement window! We’ll look in there and try our luck.”

They impressed the addresses on their minds until they knew them by heart, and then squeezed their way out through the crowd. “Damn funny old codger!” said the people, looking after him with a smile—Lasse was quite high-spirited. They went from house to house, but no one had any use for him. The people only laughed at the broken old figure with the wide-toed boots.

“They laugh at me,” said Lasse, quite cast down; “perhaps because I still look a bit countrified. But that after all can soon be overcome.

“I believe it’s because you are so old and yet want to get work,” said Marie.

“Do you think it can be on that account? Yet I’m only just seventy, and on both my father’s and mother’s side we have almost all lived to ninety. Do you really think that’s it? If they’d only let me set to work they’d soon see there’s still strength in old Lasse! Many a younger fellow would sit on his backside for sheer astonishment. But what are those people there, who stand there and look so dismal and keep their hands in their pockets?”

“Those are the unemployed; it’s a slack time for work, and they say it will get still worse.”

“And all those who were crowding round the notice-board—were they idle hands too?”

Marie nodded.

“But then it’s worse here than at home—there at least we always have the stone-cutting when there is nothing else. And I had really believed that the good time had already begun over here!”

“Pelle says it will soon come,” said Marie consolingly.

“Yes, Pelle—he can well talk. He is young and healthy and has the time before him.”

Lasse was in a bad temper; nothing seemed right to him. In order to give him pleasure, Marie took him to see the guard changed, which cheered him a little.

“Those are smart fellows truly,” he said. “Hey, hey, how they hold themselves! And fine clothes too. But that they know well enough themselves! Yes—I’ve never been a king’s soldier. I went up for it when I was young and felt I’d like it; I was a smart fellow then, you can take my word for it! But they wouldn’t have me; my figure wouldn’t do, they said; I had worked too hard, from the time I was quite a child. They’d got it into their heads in those days that a man ought to be made just so and so. I think it’s to please the fine ladies. Otherwise I, too, might have defended my country.”

Down by the Exchange the roadway was broken up; a crowd of navvies were at work digging out the foundation for a conduit. Lasse grew quite excited, and hurried up to them.

“That would be the sort of thing for me,” he said, and he stood there and fell into a dream at the sight of the work. Every time the workers swung their picks he followed the movement with his old head. He drew closer and closer. “Hi,” he said to one of the workers, who was taking a breath, “can a man get taken on here?”

The man took a long look at him. “Get taken on here?” he cried, turning more to his comrades than to Lasse. “Ah, you’d like to, would you? Here you foreigners come running, from Funen and Middlefart, and want to take the bread out of the mouths of us natives. Get away with you, you Jutland carrion!” Laughing, he swung his pick over his head.

Lasse drew slowly hack. “But he was angry!” he said dejectedly to Marie.

In the evening Pelle had to go to all his various meetings, whatever they might be. He had a great deal to do, and, hard as he worked, the situation still remained unfavorable. It was by no means so easy a thing, to break the back of poverty!

“You just look after your own affairs,” said Lasse. “I sit here and chat a little with the children—and then I go to bed. I don’t know why, but my body gets fonder and fonder of bed, although I’ve never been considered lazy exactly. It must be the grave that’s calling me. But I can’t go about idle any longer—I’m quite stiff in my body from doing it.”

Formerly Lasse never used to speak of the grave; but now he had seemingly reconciled himself to the idea. “And the city is so big and so confusing,” he told the children. “And the little one has put by soon runs through one’s fingers.”

He found it much easier to confide his troubles to them. Pelle had grown so big and so serious that he absolutely inspired respect. One could take no real pleasure in worrying him with trivialities.

But with the children he found himself in tune. They had to contend with little obstacles and difficulties, just as he did, and could grasp all his troubles. They gave him good, practical advice, and in return he gave them his senile words of wisdom.

“I don’t exactly know why it is so,” he said, “but this great city makes me quite confused and queer in the head. To mention nothing else, no one here knows me and looks after me when I go by. That takes all the courage out of my knees. At home there was always one or another who would turn his head and say to himself, ‘Look, there goes old Lasse, he’ll be going down to the harbor to break stone; devil take me, but how he holds himself! Many a man would nod to me too, and I myself knew every second man. Here they all go running by as if they were crazy! I don’t understand how you manage to find employment here, Karl?”

“Oh, that’s quite easy,” replied the boy. “About six in the morning I get to the vegetable market; there is always something to be delivered for the small dealers who can’t keep a man. When the vegetable market is over I deliver flowers for the gardeners. That’s a very uncertain business, for I get nothing more than the tips. And besides that I run wherever I think there’s anything going. To the East Bridge and out to Frederiksburg. And I have a few regular places too, where I go every afternoon for an hour and deliver goods. There’s always something if one runs about properly.”

“And does that provide you with an average good employment every day?” said Lasse wonderingly. “The arrangement looks to me a little uncertain. In the morning you can’t be sure you will have earned anything when the night comes.”

“Ah, Karl is so quick,” said Marie knowingly. “When the times are ordinarily good he can earn a krone a day regularly.”

“And that could really be made a regular calling?” No, Lasse couldn’t understand it.

“Very often it’s evening before I have earned anything at all, but one just has to stir one’s stumps; there’s always something or other if one knows where to look for it.”

“What do you think—suppose I were to go with you?” said Lasse thoughtfully.

“You can’t do that, because I run the whole time. Really you’d do much better to hide one of your arms.”

“Hide one of my arms?” said Lasse wonderingly.

“Yes—stick one arm under your coat and then go up to people and ask them for something. That wouldn’t be any trouble to you, you look like an invalid.”

“Do I, indeed?” asked Lasse, blinking his eyes. “I never knew that before. But even if that were so I shouldn’t like to beg at people’s doors. I don’t think any one will get old Lasse to do that.”

“Then go along to the lime works—they are looking for stone-breakers these days,” said the omniscient youngster.

“Now you are talking!” said Lasse; “so they have stone here? Yes, I brought my stone-cutter’s tools with me, and if there’s one thing on earth I long to do it is to be able to bang away at a stone again!”

XV

Pelle was now a man; he was able to look after his own affairs and a little more besides; and he was capable of weighing one circumstance against another. He had thrust aside his horror concerning Due’s fate, and once again saw light in the future. But this horror still lurked within his mind, corroding everything else, lending everything a gloomy, sinister hue. Over his brow brooded a dark cloud, as to which he himself was not quite clear. But Ellen saw it and stroked it away with her soft fingers, in order to make it disappear. It formed a curious contrast to his fresh, ruddy face, like a meaningless threat upon a fine spring day.

He began to be conscious of confidence like a sustaining strength. It was not only in the “Ark” that he was idolized; his comrades looked up to him; if there was anything important in hand their eyes involuntarily turned to him. Although he had, thoughtlessly enough, well-nigh wrecked the organism in order to come to grips with Meyer, he had fully made up for his action, and the Union was now stronger than ever, and this was his doing. So he could stretch his limbs and give a little thought to his own affairs.

He and Ellen felt a warm longing to come together and live in their own little home. There were many objections that might be opposed to such a course, and he was not blind to them. Pelle was a valiant worker, but his earnings were not so large that one could found a family on them; it was the naked truth that even a good worker could not properly support a wife and children. He counted on children as a matter of course, and the day would come also when Father Lasse would no longer be able to earn his daily bread. But that day lay still in the remote future, and, on the other hand, it was no more expensive to live with a companion than alone—if that companion was a good and saving wife. If a man meant to enjoy some little share of the joy of life, he must close his eyes and leap over all obstacles, and for once put his trust in the exceptional.

“It’ll soon be better, too,” said Mason Stolpe. “Things look bad now in most trades, but you see yourself, how everything is drawing to a great crisis. Give progress a kick behind and ask her to hurry herself a little—there’s something to be gained by that. A man ought to marry while he’s still young; what’s the good of going about and hankering after one another?”

Madam Stolpe was, as always, of his opinion. “We married and enjoyed the sweetness of it while our blood was still young. That’s why we have something now that we can depend on,” she said simply, looking at Pelle.

So it was determined that the wedding should be held that spring. In March the youngest son would complete his apprenticeship, so that the wedding feast and the journeyman’s feast could be celebrated simultaneously.

On the canal, just opposite the prison, a little two-roomed dwelling was standing vacant, and this they rented. Mason Stolpe wanted to have the young couple to live out by the North Bridge, “among respectable people,” but Pelle had become attached to this quarter. Moreover, he had a host of customers there, which would give him a foothold, and there, too, were the canals. For Pelle, the canals were a window opening on the outer world; they gave his mind a sense of liberty; he always felt oppressed among the stone walls by the North Bridge. Ellen let him choose—it was indifferent to her where they lived. She would gladly have gone to the end of the world with him, in order to yield herself.

She had saved a little money in her situation, and Pelle also had a little put by; he was wise in his generation, and cut down all their necessities. When Ellen was free they rummaged about buying things for their home. Many things they bought second-hand, for cheapness, but not for the bedroom; there everything was to be brand-new!

It was a glorious time, in which every hour was full of its own rich significance; there was no room for brooding or for care. Ellen often came running in to drag him from his work; he must come with her and look at something or other—one could get it so cheap—but quickly, quickly, before it should be gone! On her “off” Sundays she would reduce the little home to order, and afterward they would walk arm in arm through the city, and visit the old people.

Pelle had had so much to do with the affairs of others, and had given so little thought to his own, that it was delightful, for once in a way, to be able to rest and think of himself. The crowded outer world went drifting far away from him; he barely glanced at it as he built his nest; he thought no more about social problems than the birds that nest in spring.

And one day Pelle carried his possessions to his new home, and for the last time lay down to sleep in the “Ark.” There was no future for any one here; only the shipwrecked sought an abiding refuge within these walls. It was time for Pelle to move on. Yet from all this raggedness and overcrowding rose a voice which one did not hear elsewhere; a careless twittering, like that of unlucky birds that sit and plume their feathers when a little sunlight falls on them. He looked back on the time he had spent here with pensive melancholy.

On the night before his wedding he lay restlessly tossing to and fro. Something seemed to follow him in his sleep. At last he woke, and was sensible of a stifled moaning, that came and went with long intervals in between, as though the “Ark” itself were moaning in an evil dream. Suddenly he stood up, lit the lamp, and began to polish his wedding-boots, which were still on the lasts, so that they might retain their handsome shape. Lasse was still asleep, and the long gangway outside lay still in slumber.

The sound returned, louder and more long-drawn, and something about it reminded him of Stone Farm, and awaked the horror of his childish days. He sat and sweated at his work. Suddenly he heard some one outside—some one who groped along the gangway and fumbled at his door. He sprang forward and opened it. Suspense ran through his body like an icy shudder. Outside stood Hanne’s mother, shivering in the morning cold.

“Pelle,” she whispered anxiously, “it’s so near now—would you run and fetch Madam Blom from Market Street? I can’t leave Hanne. And I ought to be wishing you happiness, too.”

The errand was not precisely convenient, nevertheless, he ran oft. And then he sat listening, working still, but as quietly as possible, in order not to wake Father Lasse. But then it was time for the children to get up; for the last time he knocked on the wall and heard Marie’s sleepy “Ye—es!” At the same moment the silence of night was broken; the inmates tumbled out and ran barefooted to the lavatories, slamming their doors. “The Princess is lamenting,” they told one another. “She’s lamenting because she’s lost what she’ll never get again.” Then the moaning rose to a loud shriek, and suddenly it was silent over there.

Poor Hanne! Now she had another to care for—and who was its father? Hard times were in store for her.

Lasse was not going to work to-day, although the wedding-feast was not to be held until the afternoon. He was in a solemn mood, from the earliest morning, and admonished Pelle not to lay things cross-wise, and the like. Pelle laughed every time.

“Yes, you laugh,” said Lasse, “but this is an important day—perhaps the most important in your life. You ought to take care lest the first trifling thing you do should ruin everything.”

He pottered about, treating everything as an omen. He was delighted with the sun—it rose out of a sack and grew brighter and brighter in the course of the day. It was never lucky for the sun to begin too blazing.

Marie went to and fro, considering Pelle with an expression of suppressed anxiety, like a mother who is sending her child into the world, and strives hard to seem cheerful, thought Pelle. Yes, yes, she had been like a mother to him in many senses, although she was only a child; she had taken him into her nest as a little forsaken bird, and with amazement had seen him grow. He had secretly helped her when he could. But what was that in comparison with the singing that had made his work easy, when he saw how the three waifs accepted things as they were, building their whole existence on nothing? Who would help them now over the difficult places without letting them see the helping hand? He must keep watchful eye on them.

Marie’s cheeks were a hectic red, and her eyes were shining when he held her roughened hands in his and thanked her for being such a good neighbor. Her narrow chest was working, and a reflection of hidden beauty rested upon her. Pelle had taught her blood to find the way to her colorless face; whenever she was brought into intimate contact with him or his affairs, her cheeks glowed, and every time a little of the color was left behind. It was as though his vitality forced the sap to flow upward in her, in sympathy, and now she stood before him, trying to burst her stunted shell, and unfold her gracious capacities before him, and as yet was unable to do so. Suddenly she fell upon his breast. “Pelle, Pelle,” she said, hiding her face against him. And then she ran into her own room.

Lasse and Pelle carried the last things over to the new home, and put everything tidy; then they dressed themselves in their best and set out for the Stoples’ home. Pelle was wearing a top-hat for the first time in his life, and looked quite magnificent in it. “You are like a big city chap,” said Lasse, who could not look at him often enough. “But what do you think they’ll say of old Lasse? They are half-way fine folks themselves, and I don’t know how to conduct myself. Wouldn’t it perhaps be better if I were to turn back?”

“Don’t talk like that, father!” said Pelle.

Lasse was monstrously pleased at the idea of attending the wedding-feast, but he had all sorts of misgivings. These last years had made him shy of strangers, and he liked to creep into corners. His holiday clothes, moreover, were worn out, and his every-day things were patched and mended; his long coat he had hired expressly for the occasion, while the white collar and cuffs belonged to Peter. He did not feel at all at home in his clothes, and looked like an embarrassed schoolboy waiting for confirmation.

At the Stolpes’ the whole household was topsy-turvy. The guests who were to go to the church had already arrived; they were fidgeting about in the living-room and whistling to themselves, or looking out into the street, and feeling bored. Stople’s writing-table had been turned into a side-board, and the brothers were opening bottles of beer and politely pressing everybody: “Do take a sandwich with it—you’ll get a dry throat standing so long and saying nothing.”

In the best room Stolpe was pacing up and down and muttering. He was in his shirtsleeves, waiting until it was his turn to use the bedroom, where Ellen and her mother had locked themselves in. Prom time to time the door was opened a little, and Ellen’s bare white arm appeared, as she threw her father some article of attire. Then Pelle’s heart began to thump.

On the window-sill stood Madam Stolpe’s myrtle; it was stripped quite bare.

Now Stolpe came back; he was ready! Pelle had only to button his collar for him. He took Lasse’s hand and then went to fetch *The Working Man*. “Now you just ought to hear this, what they say of your son,” he said, and began to read:

“Our young party-member, Pelle, to-day celebrates his nuptials with the daughter of one of the oldest and most respected members of the party, Mason Stolpe. This young man, who has already done a great deal of work for the Cause, was last night unanimously proposed as President of his organization. We give the young couple our best wishes for the future.”

“That speaks for itself, eh?” Stolpe handed the paper to his guests.

“Yes, that looks well indeed,” they said, passing the paper from hand to hand. Lasse moved his lips as though he, too, were reading the notice through. “Yes, devilish good, and they know how to put these things,” he said, delighted.

“But what’s wrong with Petersen—is he going to resign?” asked Stolpe.

“He is ill,” replied Pelle. “But I wasn’t there last night, so I don’t know anything about it.” Stolpe gazed at him, astonished.

Madam Stolpe came in and drew Pelle into the bedroom, where Ellen stood like a snow-white revelation, with a long veil and a myrtle-wreath in her hair. “Really you two are supposed not to see one another, but I think that’s wrong,” she said, and with a loving glance she pushed them into each other’s arms.

Frederik, who was leaning out of the window, in order to watch for the carriage, came and thundered on the door. “The carriage is there, children!” he roared, in quite a needlessly loud voice. “The carriage is there!”

And they drove away in it, although the church was only a few steps distant. Pelle scarcely knew what happened to him after that, until he found himself back in the carriage; they had to nudge him every time he had to do anything. He saw no one but Ellen.

She was his sun; the rest meant nothing to him. At the altar he had seized her hand and held it in his during the whole service.

Frederik had remained at home, in order to admit, receive messages and people who came to offer their congratulations. As they returned he leaned out of the window and threw crackers and detonating pellets under the horses’ feet, as a salute to the bridal pair.

People drank wine, touched glasses with the young couple, and examined the wedding-presents. Stolpe looked to see the time; it was still quite early. “You must go for a bit of a stroll, father,” said Madam Stolpe. “We can’t eat anything for a couple of hours yet.” So the men went across to Ventegodt’s beer-garden, in order to play a game of skittles, while the women prepared the food.

Pelle would rather have stopped in the house with Ellen, but he must not; he and Lasse went together. Lasse had not yet properly wished Pelle happiness; he had waited until they should be alone.

“Well, happiness and all blessings, my boy,” he said, much moved, as he pressed Pelle’s hand. “Now you, too, are a man with a family and responsibilities. Now don’t you forget that the women are like children. In serious matters you mustn’t be too ceremonious with them, but tell them, short and plain. This is to be so! It goes down best with them. If once a man begins discussing too much with them, then they don’t know which way they want to go. Otherwise they are quite all right, and it’s easy to get on with them—if one only treats them well. I never found it any trouble, for they like a firm hand over them. You’ve reason to be proud of your parents-in-law; they are capital people, even if they are a bit proud of their calling. And Ellen will make you a good wife—if I know anything of women. She’ll attend to her own affairs and she’ll understand how to save what’s left over. Long in the body she is, like a fruitful cow—she won’t fail you in the matter of children.”

Outdoors in the beer-garden Swedish punch was served, and Lasse’s spirits began to rise. He tried to play at skittles—he had never done so before; and he plucked up courage to utter witticisms.

The others laughed, and Lasse drew himself up and came out of his shell. “Splendid people, the Copenhageners!” he whispered to Pelle. “A ready hand for spending, and they’ve got a witty word ready for everything.”

Before any one noticed it had grown dark, and now they must be home!

At home the table was laid, and the rest of the guests had come. Madam Stolpe was already quite nervous, they had stopped away so long. “Now we’ll all wobble a bit on our legs,” whispered Stolpe, in the entry; “then my wife will go for us! Well, mother, have you got a warm welcome ready for us?” he asked, as he tumbled into the room.

“Ah, you donkey, do you think I don’t know you?” cried Madam Stolpe, laughing. “No, one needn’t go searching in the taverns for my man!”

Pelle went straight up to Ellen in the kitchen and led her away. Hand in hand they went round the rooms, looking at the last presents to arrive. There was a table-lamp, a dish-cover in German silver, and some enamelled cooking-utensils. Some one, too, had sent a little china figure of a child in swaddling-clothes, but had forgotten to attach his name.

Ellen led Pelle out into the entry, in order to embrace him, but there stood Morten, taking off his things. Then they fled into the kitchen, but the hired cook was in possession; at length they found an undisturbed haven in the bedroom. Ellen wound her arms round Pelle’s neck and gazed at him in silence, quite lost in happiness and longing. And Pelle pressed the beloved, slender, girlish body against his own, and looked deep in her eyes, which were dark and shadowy as velvet, as they drank in the light in his. His heart swelled within him, and he felt that he was unspeakably fortunate—richer than any one else in the whole world—because of the treasure that he held in his arms. Silently he vowed to himself that he would protect her and cherish her and have no other thought than to make her happy.

An impatient trampling sounded from the other room. “The young couple— the young couple!” they were calling. Pelle and Ellen hastened in, each by a different door. The others were standing in their places at the table, and were waiting for Pelle and Ellen to take their seats. “Well, it isn’t difficult to see what she’s been about!” said Stolpe teasingly. “One has only to look at the lass’s peepers—such a pair of glowing coals!”

Otto Stolpe, the slater, was spokesman, and opened the banquet by offering brandy. “A drop of spirits,” he said to each: “we must make sure there’s a vent to the gutter, or the whole thing will soon get stopped up.”

“Now, take something, people!” cried Stolpe, from the head of the table, where he was carving a loin of roast pork. “Up with the bricks there!” He had the young couple on his right and the newly-baked journeyman on his left. On the table before him stood a new bedroom chamber with a white wooden cover to it; the guests glanced at it and smiled at one another. “What are you staring at?” he asked solemnly. “If you need anything, let the cat out of the bag!”

“Ah, it’s the tureen there!” said his brother, the carpenter, without moving a muscle. “My wife would be glad to borrow it a moment, she says.”

His wife, taken aback, started up and gave him a thwack on the back.

"Monster!" she said, half ashamed, and laughing. "The men must always make a fool of somebody!"

Then they all set to, and for a while eating stopped their mouths. From time to time some droll remark was made. "Some sit and do themselves proud, while others do the drudging," said the Vanishing Man, Otto's comrade. Which was to say that he had finished his pork. "Give him one in the mouth, mother!" said Stolpe.

When their hunger was satisfied the witticisms began to fly. Morten's present was a great wedding-cake. It was a real work of art; he had made it in the form of a pyramid. On the summit stood a youthful couple, made of sugar, who held one another embraced, while behind them was a highly glazed representation of the rising sun. Up the steps of the pyramid various other figures were scrambling to the top, holding their arms outstretched toward the summit. Wine was poured out when they came to the cake, and Morten made a little speech in Pelle's honor, in which he spoke of loyalty toward the new comrade whom he had chosen. Apparently the speech concerned Ellen only, but Pelle understood that his words were meant to be much more comprehensive; they had a double meaning all the time.

"Thank you, Morten," he said, much moved, and he touched glasses with him.

Then Stolpe delivered a speech admonishing the newly-married pair. This was full of precious conceits and was received with jubilation.

"Now you see how father can speak," said Madam Stolpe. "When nothing depends on it then he can speak!"

"What's that you say, mother?" cried Stolpe, astonished. He was not accustomed to criticism from that source. "Just listen to that now— one's own wife is beginning to pull away the scaffolding-poles from under one!"

"Well, that's what I say!" she rejoined, looking at him boldly. Her face was quite heated with wine. "Does any one stand in the front of things like father does? He was the first, and he has been always the most zealous; he has done a good stroke of work, more than most men. And to-day he might well have been one of the leaders and have called the tune, if it weren't for that damned hiccoughing. He's a clever man, and his comrades respect him too, but what does all that signify if a man hiccoughs? Every time he stands on the speaker's platform he has the hiccoughs."

"And yet it isn't caused by brandy?" said the thick-set little Vanishing Man, Albert Olsen.

"Oh, no, father has never gone in for bottle agitation," replied Madam Stolpe.

"That was a fine speech that mother made about me," said Stolpe, laughing, "and she didn't hiccough. It is astonishing, though—there are some people who can't. But now it's your turn, Frederik. Now you have become a journeyman and must accept the responsibility yourself for doing things according to plumb-line and square. We have worked on the scaffold together and we know one another pretty well. Many a time you've been a clown and many a time a sheep, and a box on the ears from your old man has never been lacking. But that was in your fledgling years. When only you made up your mind there was no fault to be found with you. I will say this to your credit—that you know your trade—you needn't be shamed by anybody. Show what you can do, my lad! Do your day's work so that your comrades don't need to take you in tow, and never shirk when it comes to your turn!"

"Don't cheat the drinker of his bottle, either," said Albert Olsen, interrupting. Otto nudged him in the ribs.

"No, don't do that," said Stolpe, and he laughed. "There are still two things," he added seriously. "Take care the girls don't get running about under the scaffold in working hours, that doesn't look well; and always uphold the fellowship. There is nothing more despicable than the name of strikebreaker."

"Hear, hear!" resounded about the table. "A true word!"

Frederik sat listening with an embarrassed smile.

He was dressed in a new suit of the white clothes of his calling, and on his round chin grew a few dark downy hairs, which he fingered every other moment. He was waiting excitedly until the old man had finished, so that he might drink brotherhood with him.

"And now, my lad," said Stolpe, taking the cover from the "tureen," "now you are admitted to the corporation of masons, and you are welcome! Health, my lad." And with a sly little twinkle of his eye, he set the utensil to his mouth, and drank.

"Health, father!" replied Frederik, with shining eyes, as his father passed him the drinking-bowl. Then it went round the table. The women shrieked before they drank; it was full of Bavarian beer, and in the amber fluid swam Bavarian sausages. And while the drinking-bowl made its cheerful round, Stolpe struck up with the Song of the Mason:

"The man up there in snowy cap and blouse,
He is a mason, any fool could swear.
Just give him stone and lime, he'll build a house
Fine as a palace, up in empty air!
Down in the street below stands half the town:
Ah, ah! Na, na!
The scaffold sways, but it won't fall down!

"Down in the street he's wobbly in his tread,
He tumbles into every cellar door;
That's 'cause his home is in the clouds o'erhead,
Where all the little birds about him soar.
Up there he works away with peaceful mind:
Ah, ah. Na, na!
The scaffold swings in the boisterous wind!

"What it is to be giddy no mason knows:
Left to himself he'd build for ever,
Stone upon stone, till in Heaven, I s'pose!
But up comes the Law, and says—Stop now, clever!
There lives the Almighty, so just come off!
Ah, ah! Na, na!
Sheer slavery this, but he lets them scoff!

"Before he knows it the work has passed:
He measures all over and reckons it up.
His wages are safe in his breeches at last,
And he clatters off home to rest and to sup.
And a goodly wage he's got in his pocket:
Ah, ah! Na, na!
The scaffold creaks to the winds that rock it!"

The little thick-set slater sat with both arms on the table, staring right in front of him with veiled eyes. When the song was over he raised his head a little. "Yes, that may be all very fine—for those it concerns. But the slater, he climbs higher than the mason." His face was purple.

"Now, comrade, let well alone," said Stolpe comfortably. "It isn't the question, to-night, who climbs highest, it's a question of amusing ourselves merely."

"Yes, that may be," replied Olsen, letting his head sink again. "But the slater, he climbs the highest." After which he sat there murmuring to himself.

"Just leave him alone," whispered Otto. "Otherwise he'll get in one of his Berserker rages. Don't be so grumpy, old fellow," he said, laying his arm on Olsen's shoulders. "No one can compete with you in the art of tumbling down, anyhow!"

The Vanishing Man was so called because he was in the habit—while lying quite quietly on the roof at work—of suddenly sliding downward and disappearing into the street below. He had several times fallen from the roof of a house without coming to any harm; but on one occasion he had broken both legs, and had become visibly bow-legged in consequence. In order to appease him, Otto, who was his comrade, related how he had fallen down on the last occasion.

"We were lying on the roof, working away, he and I, and damned cold it was. He, of course, had untied the safety-rope, and as we were lying there quite comfortably and chatting, all of a sudden he was off. 'The devil!' I shouted to the others, 'now the Vanishing Man has fallen down again!' And we ran down the stairs as quick as we could. We weren't in a humor for any fool's tricks, as you may suppose. But there was no Albert Olsen lying on the pavement. 'Damn and blast it all, where has the Vanisher got to?' we said, and we stared at one another, stupefied. And then I accidentally glanced across at a beer-cellar opposite, and there, by God, he was sitting at the basement window, winking at us so, with his forefinger to his nose, making signs to us to go down and have a glass of beer with him. 'I was so accursedly thirsty,' was all he said; 'I couldn't wait to run down the stairs!'"

The general laughter appeased the Vanishing Man. "Who'll give me a glass of beer?" he said, rising with difficulty. He got his beer and sat down in a corner.

Stolpe was sitting at the table playing with his canary, which had to partake of its share in the feast. The bird sat on his red ear and fixed its claws in his hair, then hopped onto his arm and along it onto the table. Stolpe kept on asking it, "What would you like to smoke, Hansie?" "Peep!" replied the canary, every time. Then they all laughed. "Hansie would like a pipe!"

"How clever he is, to answer like that!" said the women.

"Clever?—ay, and he's sly too! Once we bought a little wife for him; mother didn't think it fair that he shouldn't know what love is. Well, they married themselves very nicely, and the little wife lay two eggs. But when she wanted to begin to sit Hansie got sulky; he kept on calling to her to come out on the perch. Well, she wouldn't, and one fine day, when she wanted to get something to eat, he hopped in and threw the eggs out between the bars! He was jealous—the rascal! Yes, animals are wonderfully clever—stupendous it is, that such a little thing as that could think that out! Now, now, just look at him!"

Hansie had hopped onto the table and had made his way to the remainder of the cake. He was sitting on the edge of the dish, cheerfully flirting his tail as he pecked away. Suddenly something fell upon the table- cloth. "Lord bless me," cried Stolpe, in consternation, "if that had been any one else! Wouldn't you have heard mother carry on!"

Old Lasse was near exploding at this. He had never before been in such pleasant company. "It's just as if one had come upon a dozen of Brother Kalle's sort," he whispered to Pelle. Pelle smiled absently. Ellen was holding his hand in her lap and playing with his fingers.

A telegram of congratulation came for Pelle from his Union, and this brought the conversation back to more serious matters. Morten and Stolpe became involved in a dispute concerning the labor movement; Morten considered that they did not sufficiently consider the individual, but attached too much importance to the voice of the masses. In his opinion the revolution must come from within.

"No," said Stolpe, "that leads to nothing. But if we could get our comrades into Parliament and obtain a majority, then we should build up the State according to our own programme, and that is in every respect a legal one!"

"Yes, but it's a question of daily bread," said Morten, with energy. "Hungry people can't sit down and try to become a majority; while the grass grows the cow starves! They ought to help themselves. If they do not, their self-consciousness is imperfect; they must wake up to the consciousness of their own human value. If there were a law forbidding the poor man to breathe the air, do you think he'd stop doing so? He simply could not. It's painful for him to look on at others eating when he gets nothing himself. He is wanting in physical courage. And so society profits by his disadvantage. What has the poor man to do with the law? He stands outside all that! A man mustn't starve his horse or his dog, but the State which forbids him to do so starves its own workers. I believe they'll have to pay for preaching obedience to the poor; we are getting bad material for the now order of society that we hope to found some day."

"Yes, but we don't obey the laws out of respect for the commands of a capitalist society," said Stolpe, somewhat uncertainly, "but out of regard for ourselves. God pity the poor man if he takes the law into his own hands!"

"Still, it keeps the wound fresh! As for all the others, who go hungry in silence, what do they do? There are too few of them, alas—there's room in the prisons for them! But if every one who was hungry would stick his arm through a shop window and help himself—then the question of maintenance would soon be solved. They couldn't put the whole nation in prison! Now, hunger is yet another human virtue, which is often practised until men die of it—for the profit of those who hoard wealth. They pat the poor, brave man on the back because he's so obedient to the law. What more can he want?"

"Yes, devil take it, of course it's all topsy-turvy," replied Stolpe. "But that's precisely the reason why——No, no, you won't persuade me, my young friend! You seem to me a good deal too 'red.' It wouldn't do! Now I've been concerned in the movement from the very first day, and no one can say that Stolpe is afraid to risk his skin; but that way wouldn't suit me. We have always held to the same course, and everything that we have won we have taken on account."

"Yes, that's true," interrupted Frau Stolpe. "When I look back to those early years and then consider these I can scarcely believe it's true. Then it was all we could do to find safe shelter, even among people of our own standing; they annoyed us in every possible way, and hated father because he wasn't such a sheep as they were, but used to concern himself about their affairs. Every time I went out of the kitchen door I'd find a filthy rag of dishcloth hung over the handle, and they smeared much worse things than that over the door—and whose doing was it? I never told father; he would have been so enraged he would have torn the whole house down to find the guilty person. No, father had enough to contend against already. But now: 'Ah, here comes Stolpe— Hurrah! Long live Stolpe! One must show respect to Stolpe, the veteran!'"

"That may be all very fine," muttered Albert Olsen, "but the slater, he climbs the highest." He was sitting with sunken head, staring angrily before him.

"To be sure he climbs highest," said the women. "No one says he doesn't."

"Leave him alone," said Otto; "he's had a drop too much!"

"Then he should take a walk in the fresh air and not sit there and make himself disagreeable," said Madam Stolpe, with a good deal of temper.

The Vanishing Man rose with an effort. "Do you say a walk in the fresh air, Madam Stolpe? Yes, if any one can stand the air, by God, it's Albert Olsen. Those big-nosed masons, what can they do?" He stood with bent head, muttering angrily to himself. "Yes, then we'll take a walk in the fresh air. I don't want to have anything to do with your fools' tricks." He staggered out through the kitchen door.

"What's he going to do there?" cried Madam Stolpe, in alarm.

"Oh, he'll just go down into the yard and turn himself inside out," said Otto. "He's a brilliant fellow, but he can't carry much."

Pelle, still sitting at table, had been drawing with a pencil on a scrap of paper while the others were arguing. Ellen leaned over his shoulder watching him. He felt her warm breath upon his ear and smiled happily as he used his pencil. Ellen took the drawing when he had finished and pushed it across the table to the others. It showed a thick-set figure of a man, dripping with sweat, pushing a wheelbarrow which supported his belly. "Capitalism—when the rest of us refuse to serve him any longer!" was written below. This drawing made a great sensation. "You're a deuce of a chap!" cried Stolpe. "I'll send that to the editor of the humorous page—I know him."

"Yes, Pelle," said Lasse proudly, "there's nothing he can't do; devil knows where he gets it from, for he doesn't get it from his father." And they all laughed.

Carpenter Stolpe's good lady sat considering the drawing with amazement, quite bewildered, looking first at Pelle's fingers and then at the drawing again. "I can understand how people can say funny things with their mouths," she said, "but with their fingers—that I don't understand. Poor fellow, obliged to push his belly in front of him! It's almost worse than when I was going to have Victor."

"Cousin Victor, her youngest, who is so deucedly clever," said Otto, in explanation, giving Pelle a meaning wink.

"Yes, indeed he is clever, if he is only six months old. The other day I took him downstairs with me when I went to buy some milk. Since then he won't accept his mother's left breast any more. The rascal noticed that the milkman drew skim milk from the left side of the cart and full-cream milk from the tap on the right side. And another time——"

"Now, mother, give over!" said Carpenter Stolpe; "don't you see they're sitting laughing at you? And we ought to see about getting home presently." He looked a trifle injured.

"What, are you going already?" said Stolpe. "Why, bless my soul, it's quite late already. But we must have another song first."

"It'll be daylight soon," said Madam Stolpe; she was so tired that she was nodding.

When they had sung the Socialist marching song, the party broke up. Lasse had his pockets filled with sweets for the three orphans.

"What's become of the Vanishing Man?" said Otto suddenly.

"Perhaps he's been taken bad down in the yard," said Stolpe. "Run down and see, Frederick." They had quite forgotten him.

Frederik returned and announced that Albert Olsen was not in the yard — and the gate was locked.

"Surely he can't have gone on the roof?" said one. They ran up the back stairs; the door of the loft was open, and the skylight also.

Otto threw off his coat and swung himself up through the opening. On the extreme end of the ridge of the roof sat Albert Olsen, snoring.

He was leaning against the edge of the party-wall, which projected upward about eighteen inches. Close behind him was empty space.

"For God's sake don't call him," said Mother Stolpe, under her breath; "and catch hold of him before he wakes."

But Otto went straight up to his comrade. "Hullo, mate! Time's up!" he cried.

"Righto!" said the Vanisher, and he rose to his feet. He stood there a moment, swaying above the abyss, then, giving the preference to the way leading over the roof, he followed in Otto's track and crept through the window.

"What the dickens were you really doing there?" asked Stolpe, laughing. "Have you been to work?"

"I just went up there and enjoyed the fresh air a bit. Have you got a bottle of beer? But what's this? Everybody going home already?"

"Yes, you've been two hours sitting up there and squinting at the stars," replied Otto.

Now all the guests had gone. Lasse and the young couple stood waiting to say farewell. Madam Stolpe had tears in her eyes. She threw her arms round Ellen. "Take good care of yourself, the night is so cold," she said, in a choking voice, and she stood nodding after them with eyes that were blinded with tears.

"Why, but there's nothing to cry about!" said Mason Stolpe, as he led her indoors. "Go to bed now—I'll soon sing the Vanishing Man to sleep! Thank God for to-day, mother!"

XVI

Pelle had placed his work-bench against the wall-space between the two windows of the living-room. There was just room to squeeze past between the edge of the bench and the round table which stood in the middle of the room. Against the wall by the door stood an oak-stained sideboard, which was Ellen's pride, and exactly opposite this, on the opposing wall, stood the chest of drawers of her girlhood, with a mirror above it and a white embroidered cover on the top. On this chest of drawers stood a polished wooden workbox, a few photographs, and various knick-knacks; with its white cover it was like a little altar.

Pelle went to Master Beck's only every other day; the rest of the time he sat at home playing the little master. He had many acquaintances hereabouts, really poor folks, who wore their boots until their stockings appeared before they had them repaired; nevertheless, it was possible to earn a day's pay among them. He obtained work, too, from Ellen's family and their acquaintances. These were people of another sort; even when things went badly with them they always kept up appearances and even displayed a certain amount of luxury. They kept their troubles to themselves.

He could have obtained plenty of journeyman work, but he preferred this arrangement, which laid the foundation of a certain independence; there was more chance of a future in it. And there was a peculiar feeling about work done with his home as the background. When he lifted his eyes from his work as he sat at home a fruitful warmth came into his heart; things looked so familiar; they radiated comfort, as though they had always belonged together. And when the morning sun shone into the room everything wore a smile, and in the midst of it all Ellen moved busily to and fro humming a tune. She felt a need always to be near him, and rejoiced over every day which he spent at home. On those days she hurried through her work in the kitchen as quickly as possible, and then sat down to keep him company. He had to teach her how to make a patch, and how to sew a sole on, and she helped him with his work.

"Now you are the master and I'm the journeyman!" she would say delightedly. She brought him customers too; her ambition was to keep him always at home. "I'll help you all I can. And one fine day you'll have so much work you'll have to take an apprentice—and then a journeyman." Then he would take her in his arms, and they worked in emulation, and sang as they worked.

Pelle was perfectly happy, and had cast off all his cares and burdens. This was his nest, where every stick and stone was worth more than all else in the world besides. They had their work cut out to keep it together and feed themselves a little daintily; and Pelle tackled his work as joyfully as though he had at last found his true vocation. Now and again a heavy wave came rolling up from the struggling masses, making his heart beat violently, and then he would break out into fiery speech; or his happiness would weave radiant pictures before his eyes, and he would describe these to Ellen. She listened to him proudly, and with her beloved eyes upon him he would venture upon stronger expression and more vivid pictures, as was really natural to him. When at last he was silent she would remain quietly gazing at him with those dark eyes of hers that always seemed to be looking at something in him of which he himself was unaware.

"What are you thinking of now?" Pelle would ask, for he would have enjoyed an exposition of the ideas that filled his mind. There was no one for him but Ellen, and he wanted to discuss the new ideas with her, and to feel the wonderful happiness of sharing these too with her.

"I was thinking how red your lips are when you speak! They certainly want to be kissed!" she replied, throwing her arms round his neck.

What happened round about her did not interest her; she could only speak of their love and of what concerned herself. But the passionate gaze of her eyes was like a deep background to their life. It had quite a mysterious effect upon his mind; it was like a lure that called to the unknown depths of his being. "The Pelle she sees must be different to the one I know," he thought happily. There must be something fine and strong in him for her to cling to him so closely and suffer so when parted from him only for a moment. When she had gazed at him long enough she would press herself against him, confused, and hide her face.

Without his remarking it, she directed his energies back to his own calling. He could work for two when she sat at the bench facing him and talked to him as she helped him. Pelle really found their little nest quite comfortable, but Ellen's mind was full of plans for improvement and progress. His business was to support a respectable home with dainty furniture and all sorts of other things; she was counting on these already. This home, which to him was like a beloved face that one cannot imagine other than it is, was to her only a temporary affair, which would by degrees be replaced by something finer and better. Behind her intimate gossip of every-day trivialities she concealed a far-reaching ambition. He must do his utmost if he was to accomplish all she expected of him!

Ellen by no means neglected her housekeeping, and nothing ever slipped through her fingers. When Pelle was away at the workshop she turned the whole place upside down, sweeping and scrubbing, and had always something good on the table for him. In the evening she was waiting for him at the door of the workshop. Then they would take a stroll along the canal, and across the green rampart where the children played. “Oh, Pelle, how I’ve longed for you to-day!” she would say haltingly. “Now, I’ve got you, and yet I’ve still got quite a pain in my breasts; they don’t know yet that you’re with me!”

“Shan’t we work a little this evening—just a quarter of an hour?” she would say, when they had eaten, “so that you can become a master all the sooner and make things more comfortable for yourself.” Pelle perhaps would rather have taken a walk through the city with her, or have gone somewhere where they could enjoy the sunset, but her dark eyes fixed themselves upon him.

She was full of energy from top to toe, and it was all centered on him. There was something in her nature that excluded the possibility of selfishness. In relation to herself, everything was indifferent; she only wanted to be with him—and to live for him. She was beneficent and intact as virgin soil; Pelle had awakened love in her—and it took the shape of a perpetual need of giving. He felt, humbly, that she brought all she had and was to him as a gift, and all he did was done to repay her generosity.

He had refused to undertake the direction of the labor organization. His life together with Ellen and the maintenance of the newly established household left him no time for any effectual efforts outside his home. Ellen did not interfere in the matter; but when he came home after spending the evening at a meeting he could see she had been crying. So he stopped at home with her; it was weak of him, but he did not see what else he could do. And he missed nothing; Ellen more than made amends. She knew how to make their little home close itself about him, how to turn it into a world of exuberant inner life. There was no greater pleasure than to set themselves to achieve some magnificent object—as, for instance, to buy a china flower-pot, which could stand on the window-sill and contain an aspidistra. That meant a week of saving, and when they had got it they would cross over to the other side of the canal, arm in arm, and look up at the window in order to see the effect. And then something else would be needed; a perforating machine, an engraved nameplate for the door; every Saturday meant some fresh acquisition.

The Working Man lay unread. If Pelle laid down his work a moment in order to glance at it, there was Ellen nipping his ear with her lips; his free time belonged to her, and it was a glorious distraction in work-time, to frolic as carelessly as a couple of puppies, far more delightful than shouldering the burden of the servitude of the masses! So the paper was given up; Ellen received the money every week for her savings-bank. She had discovered a corner in Market Street where she wanted to set up a shop and work-room with three or four assistants— that was what she was saving for. Pelle wondered at her sagacity, for that was a good neighborhood.

After their marriage they did not visit Ellen’s parents so often. Stolpe found Pelle was cooling down, and used to tease him a little, in order to make him answer the helm; but that angered Ellen, and resulted in explosions—she would tolerate no criticism of Pelle. She went to see them only when Pelle proposed it; she herself seemed to feel no desire to see her family, but preferred staying at home. Often they pretended they were not at home when “the family” knocked, in order to go out alone, to the Zoological Gardens or to Lyngby.

They did not see much of Lasse. Ellen had invited him once for all to eat his supper with them. But when he came home from work he was too tired to change his clothes, and wash himself, and make himself tidy, and Ellen was particular about her little home. He had a great respect for her, but did not feel properly at home in her living-room.

He had taken Pelle’s old room, and was boarding with the three orphans. They thought great things of him, and all their queer care for the big foundling Pelle was now transferred to old Lasse. And here they fell on better soil. Lasse was becoming a child again, and had felt the need of a little pampering. With devout attention he would listen to Marie's little troubles, and the boy's narrations of everything that they did and saw. In return he told them the adventures of his boyhood, or related his experiences in the stone-breaking yard, swaggering suitably, in order not to be outdone. When Pelle came to fetch his father the four of them would be sitting down to some childish game. They would wrangle as to how the game should be played, for Lasse was the most skilful. The old man would excuse himself.

"You mustn't be angry, lad, because I neglect you—but I'm tired of an evening and I go to bed early."

"Then come on Sunday—and breakfast with us; afterward we go out."

"No, I've something on for Sunday—an assignation," said Lasse roguishly, in order to obviate further questions. "Enjoy your youthful happiness; it won't last forever."

He would never accept help. "I earn what I need for my food and a few clothes; I don't need much of either, and I am quite contented. And you've enough to see to yourself," was his constant answer.

Lasse was always gentle and amiable, and appeared contented, but there was a curious veil over his eyes, as though some disappointment were gnawing at his heart.

And Pelle knew well what it was—it had always been an understood thing that Lasse should spend his old age at Pelle's fireside. In his childish dreams of the future, however various they might be, Father Lasse was always at hand, enjoying a restful old age, in return for all he had done for Pelle.

That was how it should be; at home in the country in every poor home a gray-headed old man sat in the chimney-corner—for children among the poor are the only comfort of age.

For the time being this could not be arranged; there was no room in their two little rooms. Ellen was by no means lacking in heart; she often thought of this or that for the old man's comfort, but her passionate love would permit of no third person to approach them too closely. Such a thing had never entered her mind; and Pelle felt that if he were to persuade her to take Father Lasse into their home, the wonder of their life together would be killed. They lived so fully from hour to hour; theirs was a sacred happiness, that must not be sacrificed, but which itself demanded the sacrifice of all else. Their relation was not the usual practical self-love, but love itself, which seldom touches the every-day life of the poor, save that they hear it in tragic and beautiful songs of unhappy lovers. But here, to them, had come its very self—a shining wonder!

And now Ellen was going to bear a child. Her figure grew fuller and softer. Toward all others she was cold and remote in her behavior; only to Pelle she disclosed herself utterly. The slight reserve which had always lurked somewhere within her, as though there was something that he could not yet conquer, had disappeared. Her gaze was no longer fixed and searching; but sought his own with quiet self-surrender. A tender and wonderful harmony was visible in her, as though she had now come into her own, and from day to day she grew more beautiful.

Pelle was filled with pride to see how luxuriantly she unfolded beneath his caresses. He was conscious of a sense of inexhaustible liberality, such as the earth had suddenly inspired in him at times in his childhood; and an infinite tenderness filled his heart. There was an alluring power in Ellen's helplessness, so rich in promise as it was. He would joyfully have sacrificed the whole world in order to serve her and that which she so wonderfully bore within her.

He got up first in the morning, tidied the rooms, and made coffee before he went to work. He was vexed if when he came home Ellen had been sweeping or scrubbing. He made two of himself in order to spare her, stinted himself of sleep, and was restlessly busy; his face had assumed a fixed expression of happiness, which gave him almost a look of stupidity. His thoughts never went beyond the four walls of his home; Ellen's blessed form entirely engrossed him.

The buying of new furniture was discontinued; in its place Ellen made curious purchases of linen and flannel and material for swaddling-bands, and mysterious conversations were continually taking place between her and her mother, from which Pelle was excluded; and when they went to see Ellen's parents Madam Stolpe was always burrowing in her chests of drawers, and giving Ellen little packages to be taken home.

The time passed only too quickly. Exclusively as they had lived for their own affairs, it seemed as if they could never get everything finished. And one day it was as though the world was shattered about their heads. Ellen lay in bed, turning from side to side and shrieking as though an evil spirit had taken possession of her body. Pelle bent over her with a helpless expression, while at the foot of the bed sat Madam Blom; she sat there knitting and reading the papers as though nothing whatever was amiss. “Shriek away, little woman,” she said from time to time, when Ellen became silent; “that’s part of the business!” Ellen looked at her spitefully and defiantly pressed her lips together, but next moment she opened her mouth wide and roared wildly. A rope was fastened to the foot of the bed, and she pulled on this while she shrieked. Then she collapsed, exhausted. “You wicked, wicked boy,” she whispered, with a faint smile. Pelle bent over her happily; but she pushed him suddenly away; her beautiful body contorted itself, and the dreadful struggle was raging again. But at last a feeble voice relieved hers and filled the home with a new note. “Another mouth to fill,” said Madam Blom, holding the new-born child in the air by one leg. It was a boy.

Pelle went about blushing and quite bewildered, as though something had happened to him that no one else had ever experienced. At first he took Master Beck’s work home with him and looked after the child himself at night. Every other moment he had to put down his work and run in to the mother and child. “You are a wonderful woman, to give me such a child for a kiss,” he said, beaming, “and a boy into the bargain! What a man he’ll be!”

“So it’s a boy!” said the “family.” “Don’t quite lose your head!”

“That would be the last straw!” said Pelle gravely.

The feminine members of the family teased him because he looked after the child. “What a man—perhaps he’d like to lie in child-bed, too!” they jeered.

“I don’t doubt it,” growled Stolpe. “But he’s near becoming an idiot, and that’s much more serious. And it pains me to say it, but that’s the girl’s fault. And yet all her life she has only heard what is good and proper. But women are like cats—there’s no depending on them.”

Pelle only laughed at their gibes. He was immeasurably happy.

And now Lasse managed to find his way to see them! He had scarcely received the news of the event, when he made his appearance just as he was. He was full of audaciously high spirits; he threw his cap on the ground outside the door, and rushed into the bedroom as though some one were trying to hold him back.

“Ach, the little creature! Did any one ever see such an angel!” he cried, and he began to babble over the child until Ellen was quite rosy with maternal pride.

His joy at becoming a grandfather knew no limits. “So it’s come at last, it’s come at last!” he repeated, over and over again. “And I was always afraid I should have to go to my grave without leaving a representative behind me! Ach, what a plump little devil! He’s got something to begin life on, he has! He’ll surely be an important citizen, Pelle! Just look how plump and round he is! Perhaps a merchant or a manufacturer or something of that sort! To see him in his power and greatness—but that won’t be granted to Father Lasse.” He sighed. “Yes, yes, here he is, and how he notices one already! Perhaps the rascal’s wondering, who is this wrinkled old man standing there and coming to see me in his old clothes? Yes, it’s Father Lasse, so look at him well, he’s won his magnificence by fair means!”

Then he went up to Pelle and fumbled for his hand. “Well, I’ve hardly dared to hope for this—and how fine he is, my boy! What are you going to call him?” Lasse always ended with that question, looking anxiously at his son as he asked it. His old head trembled a little now when anything moved him.

“He’s to be called Lasse Frederik,” said Pelle one day, “after his two grandfathers.”

This delighted the old man. He went off on a little carouse in honor of the day.

And now he came almost every day. On Sunday mornings he made himself scrupulously tidy, polishing his boots and brushing his clothes, so as to make himself thoroughly presentable. As he went home from work he would look in to ask whether little Lasse had slept well. He eulogized Ellen for bringing such a bright, beautiful youngster into the world, and she quite fell in love with the old man, on account of his delight in the child.

She even trusted him to sit with the little one, and he was never so pleased as when she wished to go out and sent for him accordingly.

So little Lasse succeeded, merely by his advent, in abolishing all misunderstandings, and Pelle blessed him for it. He was the deuce of a fellow already—one day he threw Lasse and Ellen right into one another's arms! Pelle followed step by step the little creature's entrance into the world; he noticed when first his glance showed a watchful attention, and appeared to follow an object, and when first his hand made a grab at something. "Hey, hey, just look! He wants his share of things already!" he cried delightedly. It was Pelle's fair moustache the child was after—and didn't he give it a tug!

The little hand gripped valiantly and was scarcely to be removed; there were little dimples on the fingers and deep creases at the wrist. There was any amount of strength in Ellen's milk!

They saw nothing more of Morton. He had visited them at first, but after a time ceased coming. They were so taken up with one another at the time, and Ellen's cool behavior had perhaps frightened him away. He couldn't know that that was her manner to everybody. Pelle could never find an idle hour to look him up, but often regretted him. "Can you understand what's amiss with him?" he would ask Ellen wonderingly. "We have so much in common, he and I. Shall I make short work of it and go and look him up?"

Ellen made no answer to this; she only kissed him. She wanted to have him quite to herself, and encompassed him with her love; her warm breath made him feel faint with happiness. Her will pursued him and surrounded him like a wall; he had a faint consciousness of the fact, but made no attempt to bestir himself. He felt quite comfortable as he was.

The child occasioned fresh expenses, and Ellen had all she could do; there was little time left for her to help him. He had to obtain suitable work, so that they might not suffer by the slack winter season, but could sit cozily between their four walls. There was no time for loafing about and thinking. It was an obvious truth, which their daily life confirmed, that poor people have all they can do to mind their own affairs. This was a fact which they had not at once realized.

He no longer gave any thought to outside matters. It was really only from old habit that, as he sat eating his breakfast in the workshop, he would sometimes glance at the paper his sandwiches were wrapped in—part of some back number of *The Working Man.* Or perhaps it would happen that he felt something in the air, that passed him by, something in which he had no part; and then he would raise his head with a listening expression. But Ellen was familiar with the remoteness that came into his eyes at such times, and she knew how to dispel it with a kiss.

One day he met Morten in the street. Pelle was delighted, but there was a sceptical expression in Morten's eyes. "Why don't you ever come to see me now?" asked Pelle. "I often long to see you, but I can't well get away from home."

"I've found a sweetheart—which is quite an occupation."

"Are you engaged?" said Pelle vivaciously. "Tell me something about her!"

"Oh, there's not much to tell," said Morten, with a melancholy smile. "She is so ragged and decayed that no one else would have her—that's why I took her."

"That is truly just like you!" Pelle laughed. "But seriously, who is the girl and where does she live?"

"Where does she live?" Morten stared at him for a moment uncomprehendingly. "Yes, after all you're right. If you know where people live you know all about them. The police always ask that question."

Pelle did not know whether Morten was fooling him or whether he was speaking in good faith; he could not understand him in the least to-day. His pale face bore signs of suffering. There was a curious glitter in his eyes. "One has to live somewhere in this winter cold."

"Yes, you are right! And she lives on the Common, when the policeman doesn't drive her away. He's the landlord of the unfortunate, you know! There has been a census lately—well, did you observe what happened? It was given out that everybody was to declare where he lodged on a particular night. But were the census-papers distributed among the homeless? No—all those who live in sheds and outhouses, or on the Common, or in newly erected buildings, or in the disused manure-pits of the livery stables—they have no home, and consequently were not counted in the census. That was cleverly managed, you know; they simply don't exist! Otherwise there would be a very unpleasant item on the list—the number of the homeless. Only one man in the city here knows what it is; he's a street missionary, and I've sometimes been out with him at night; it's horrifying, what we've seen! Everywhere, wherever there's a chink, they crowd into it in order to find shelter; they lie under the iron staircases even, and freeze to death. We found one like that—an old man—and called up a policeman; he stuck his red nose right in the corpse's mouth and said, 'Dead of drink.' And now that's put down, where really it ought to say, 'Starved to death!' It mustn't be said that any one really suffers need in this country, you understand. No one freezes to death here who will only keep moving; no one starves unless it's his own fault. It must necessarily be so in one of the most enlightened countries in the world; people have become too cultivated to allow Want to stalk free about the streets; it would spoil their enjoyment and disturb their night's rest. And they must be kept at a distance too; to do away with them would be too troublesome; but the police are drilled to chase them back into their holes and corners. Go down to the whaling quay and see what they bring ashore in a single day at this time of the year—it isn't far from your place. Accidents, of course! The ground is so slippery, and people go too near the edge of the quay. The other night a woman brought a child into the world in an open doorway in North Bridge Street—in ten degrees of frost. People who collected were indignant; it was unpardonable of her to go about in such a condition—she ought to have stopped at home. It didn't occur to them that she had no home. Well then, she could have gone to the police; they are obliged to take people in. On the other hand, as we were putting her in the cab, she began to cry, in terror, 'Not the maternity hospital—not the maternity hospital!' She had already been there some time or other. She must have had some reason for preferring the doorstep—just as the others preferred the canal to the workhouse."

Morten continued, regardless of Pelle, as though he had to ease some inward torment. Pelle listened astounded to this outburst of lacerating anguish with a shamed feeling that he himself had a layer of fat round his heart. As Morten spoke poverty once more assumed a peculiar, horrible, living glimmer.

"Why do you tell me all this as if I belonged to the upper classes?" he said. "I know all this as well as you do."

"And we haven't even a bad year," Morten continued, "the circumstances are as they always are at this time of year. Yesterday a poor man stole a loaf from the counter and ran off with it; now he'll be branded all his life. 'My God, that he should want to make himself a thief for so little!' said the master's wife—it was a twopenny-ha'penny roll. It's not easy to grasp—branded for his whole life for a roll of bread!"

"He was starving," said Pelle stupidly.

"Starving? Yes, of course he was starving! But to me it's insanity, I tell you—I can't take it in; and every one else thinks it's so easy to understand. Why do I tell you this, you ask? You know it as well as I do. No, but you don't know it properly, or you'd have to rack your brains till you were crazy over the frightful insanity of the fact that these two words—bread and crime—can belong together! Isn't it insane, that the two ends should bend together and close in a ring about a human life? That a man should steal bread of all things—bread, do you understand? Bread ought not to be stolen. What does any man want with thieving who eats enough? In the mornings, long before six o'clock, the poor people gather outside our shop, and stand there in rows, in order to be the first to get the stale bread that is sold at half-price. The police make them stand in a row, just as they do outside the box-office at the theater, and some come as early as four, and stand two hours in the cold, in order to be sure of their place. But besides those who buy there is always a crowd of people still poorer; they have no money to buy with, but they stand there and stare as though it interested them greatly to see the others getting their bread cheap. They stand there waiting for a miracle in the shape of a slice of bread. One can see that in the way their eyes follow every movement, with the same desperate hope that you see in the eyes of the dogs when they stand round the butcher's cart and implore Heaven that the butcher may drop a bit of meat. They don't understand that no one will pity them. Not we human beings—you should see their surprise when we give them anything!—but chance, some accident. Good God, bread is so cheap, the cheapest of all the important things in this world—and yet they can't for once have enough of it! This morning I slipped a loaf into an old woman's hand— she kissed it and wept for joy! Do you feel that that's endurable?" He stared at Pelle with madness lurking in his gaze.

"You do me an injustice if you think I don't feel it too," said Pelle quietly. "But where is there a quick way out of this evil? We must be patient and organize ourselves and trust to time. To seize on our rights as they've done elsewhere won't do for us."

"No, that's just it! They know it won't do for us—that's why justice never goes forward. The people get only what's due to them if the leaders know that if the worst comes to the worst they can provide for themselves."

"I don't believe that any good would come of a revolution," said Pelle emphatically. He felt the old longing to fight within him.

"You can't understand about that unless you've felt it in yourself," replied Morten passionately. "Revolution is the voice of God, which administers right and justice, and it cannot be disputed. If the poor were to rise to see that justice was done it would be God's judgment, and it would not be overthrown. The age has surely the right to redeem itself when it has fallen into arrears in respect of matters so important; but it could do so only by a leap forward. But the people don't rise, they are like a damp powder! You must surely some time have been in the cellar of the old iron merchant under the 'Ark,' and have seen his store of rags and bones and old iron rubbish? They are mere rakings of the refuse-heap, things that human society once needed and then rejected. He collects them again, and now the poor can buy them. And he buys the soldiers' bread too, when they want to go on the spree, and throws it on his muck-heap; he calls it fodder for horses, but the poor buy it of him and eat it. The refuse-heap is the poor man's larder —that is, when the pigs have taken what they want. The Amager farmers fatten their swine there, and the sanitary commission talks about forbidding it; but no one has compassion on the Copenhagen poor."

Pelle shuddered. There was something demoniacal in Morten's hideous knowledge—he knew more of the "Ark" than Pelle himself. "Have you, too, been down in that loathsome rubbish-store?" he asked, "or how do you know all this?"

"No, I've not been there—but I can't help knowing it—that's my curse! Ask me even whether they make soup out of the rotten bones they get there. And not even the poison of the refuse-heap will inflame them; they lap it up and long for more! I can't bear it if nothing is going to happen! Now you've pulled yourself out of the mire—and it's the same with everybody who has accomplished anything—one after another—either because they are contented or because they are absorbed in their own pitiful affairs. Those who are of any use slink away, and only the needy are left."

"I have never left you in the lurch," said Pelle warmly. "You must realize that I haven't."

"It isn't to be wondered at that they get weary," Morten continued. "Even God loses patience with those who always let themselves be trampled upon. Last night I dreamed I was one of the starving. I was going up the street, grieving at my condition, and I ran up against God. He was dressed like an old Cossack officer, and had a knout hanging round his neck.

"'Help me, dear God!' I cried, and fell on my knees before him. 'My brothers won't help me.'

"'What ails you?' he asked, 'and who are you?'

"'I am one of Thy chosen folk, one of the poor,' I answered. 'I am starving!'

"'You are starving and complain of your brothers, who have set forth food for you in abundance?' he said angrily, pointing to all the fine shops. 'You do not belong to my chosen people—away with you!' And then he lashed me over the back with his knout."

Morten checked himself and spoke no more; it was as though he neither saw nor heard; he had quite collapsed. Suddenly he turned away, without saying good-bye.

Pelle went home; he was vexed by Morten's violence, which was, he felt, an attack upon himself. He knew this of himself—that he was not faithless; and no one had any right to grudge him the happiness of founding a family. He was quite indignant—for the first time for a long time. That they should taunt him, who had done more for the cause than most!—just because he looked after his own affairs for a time! Something unruly was rising within him; he felt a sudden need to lay about him; to fight a good stiff battle and shake the warm domesticity out of his bones.

Down by the canal they were engaged cutting the ice in order to clear the water. It was already spring tide, and the ice-cakes were drifting toward the sea, but with unbelievable slowness. After all, that's the work for you, he told himself as he turned away. He was conscious of that which lay beneath the surface, but he would not let it rise.

As soon as he was between four walls again he grew calmer. Ellen sat by the stove busied with little Lasse, who lay sprawling on his belly in her lap.

“Only look what a sweet little roly-poly he is! There isn’t a trace of chafing anywhere!”

XVII

From his place at the window Pelle could look out over the canal and the bridge by the prison, where the prisoners lay on the rafts, washing wool. He recognized Ferdinand’s tall, powerful figure; shortly after Christmas they had captured him in an underground vault in the cemetery, where he had established himself; the snow had betrayed his hiding- place. And now he lay yonder, so near the “Ark” and his mother! From time to time he raised his closely-shorn head and looked thither.

Beyond the bridge toward the market, was the potter with his barge; he had piled up his Jutland wares on the quay, and the women from Kristianshavn came to deal with him. And behind at the back of all rose the mass of the “Ark.”

It was so huge that it did not give the impression of a barracks, but had rather the character of a fantastic village—as though a hundred hamlets had been swept together in one inextricable heap. Originally it had been a little frame building of one story with a gabled roof. Then it had gradually become an embryo town; it budded in all directions, upward as well, kaleidoscopically increasing to a vast mass of little bits of facade, high-pitched roofs, deep bays, and overhanging gables, all mingled together in an endless confusion, till in the middle it was five stories high. And there a bluish ring of vapor always hovered, revealing the presence of the well, that hidden ventilating shaft for the thronging inmates of the “Ark.” One could recognize Madam Frandsen’s garret with its chimney-cowl, and farther back, in a deep recess, which ran far into the mass of the building, Pelle could distinguish Hanne’s window. Otherwise he could not place many of the little windows. They stared like failing eyes. Even the coal-dealer, who was the deputy landlord of the “Ark,” was imperfectly acquainted with all its holes and corners.

He could see the inmates of the “Ark” running to and fro across the bridge, careless and myopic; they always rushed along, having started at the last moment. There was something tranquilizing about their negligence, which was evoked by privation; in the “Ark” a man began to worry about his food only when he sat down to table and discovered there wasn’t any!

And among them little groups of workmen wandered in and out across the bridge; that steady march from the North Bridge had travelled hither, as though seeking him out.

The masses were now no longer vaguely fermenting; a mighty will was in process of formation. Amid the confusion, the chaotic hubbub, definite lines became visible; a common consciousness came into being and assumed a direction; the thousands of workers controlled themselves in a remarkable way, and were now progressing, slowly and prudently, with the ideal of closing up the ranks. One whose hearing was a little dull might have received the impression that nothing was happening—that they were reconciled with their lot; but Pelle knew what was going on. He himself had put his shoulder to the wheel, and was secretly one of their number.

He was happy in Ellen’s divided love, and all he undertook had reference to her and the child.

But now again the sound of footsteps echoed through his brain; and it would not be silenced. They had penetrated further than he himself could go. It was as though a deadening screen had suddenly been removed and whether he wished it or not, he heard every step of the wanderers outside.

The hard times forced them to proceed quietly, but work was being done in secret. The new ideas were in process of becoming current, the newspapers introduced them into the bosom of the family, and they were uttered from the speaker’s platform, or discussed at meal-times in workshop and factory. The contagion ran up staircases and went from door to door. Organizations which more than once had been created and broken up were created afresh—and this time to endure. The employers fought them, but could not defeat them; there was an inward law working upon the masses, making a structure behind which they must defend themselves.

They taxed themselves and stole the bread out of their own mouths in order to increase the funds of their organization, in the blind conviction that eventually something miraculous would come of it all. The poor achieved power by means of privation, tears, and self-denial, and had the satisfaction of feeling that they were rich through their organization. When many united together they tasted of the sweets of wealth; and, grateful as they were, they regarded that already as a result. A sense of well-being lifted them above the unorganized, and they felt themselves socially superior to the latter. To join the trades unions now signified a rise in the social scale. This affected many, and others were driven into the movement by the strong representations of their house-mates. The big tenement buildings were gradually leavened by the new ideas; those who would not join the Union must clear out. They were treated as the scum of society, and could only settle down in certain quarters of the city. It no longer seemed impossible to establish the organization of labor in a stable fashion, and to accomplish something for the workers—if only some courageous worker would place himself at the head of affairs. The fact that most of them worked at home in their lodgings could no longer make them invisible— the movement had eyes everywhere. Pelle, with surprise, caught himself sitting at his bench and making plans for the development of the movement.

He put the matter from him, and devoted his whole mind to Ellen and the child. What had he to do with the need of strangers, when these two called for all his ability and all his strength, if he was to provide them merely with necessities? He had tortured himself enough with the burden of poverty—and to no end. And now he had found his release in a blessed activity, which, if he was to neglect nothing, would entirely absorb him. What then was the meaning of this inward admonition, that seemed to tell him that he was sinning against his duty?

He silenced the inward voice by dwelling on his joy in his wife and child. But it returned insidiously and haunted his mind like a shadow.

At times, as he sat quietly working, something called him: “Pelle, Pelle!”—or the words throbbed in his ears in the depth of the night.

At such times he sat upright in bed, listening. Ellen and the child were fast asleep; he could hear a faint whistling as little Lasse drew his breath. He would go to the door and open it, although he shook his head at his own folly. It was surely a warning that some one near to him was in trouble!

At this time Pelle threw himself passionately into his life with Ellen and the child; he lived for them as wholly as though he had anticipated an immediate parting.

They had purchased a perambulator on the instalment system, and every Sunday they packed sandwiches under the apron and pushed it before them to the Common, or they turned into some beer-garden in the neighborhood of the city, where they ate their provisions and drank coffee. Often too they made their way along the coast road, and went right out into the forest. Lasse-Frederik, as Ellen called him, sat throned in all his splendor in the perambulator, like a little idol, Pelle and Ellen pushing him alternately. Ellen did not want to permit this. “It’s no work for a man, pushing a perambulator,” she would say. “You won’t see any other man doing it! They let their wives push the family coach.”

“What are other people to me?” replied Pelle. “I don’t keep a horse yet.”

She gave him a grateful look; nevertheless, she did not like it.

They spent glorious hours out there. Little Lasse was allowed to scramble about to his heart’s content, and it was wonderful how he tumbled about; he was like a frolicsome little bear. “I believe he can smell the earth under him,” said Pelle, recalling his own childish transports. “It’s a pity he has to live in that barrack there!” Ellen gazed at him uncomprehendingly.

They did not move about much; it contented them to lie there and to delight in the child, when he suddenly sat up and gazed at them in astonishment, as though he had just discovered them. “Now he’s beginning to think!” said Pelle, laughing.

“You take my word for it, he’s hungry.” And little Lasse scrambled straight up to his mother, striking at her breast with his clenched hands, and saying, “Mam, mam!” Pelle and the perambulator had to station themselves in front of her while he was fed.

When they reached home it was evening. If the doormat was displaced it meant that some one had been to call on them; and Ellen was able to tell, from its position, who the visitor had been. Once it stood upright against the wall.

“That’s Uncle Carpenter,” said Pelle quietly. Little Lasse was sleeping on his arm, his head resting on Pelle’s shoulder.

“No, it will have been Cousin Anna,” said Ellen, opening the door. “Thank the Lord we weren’t at home, or we should have had such a business till late in the evening! They never eat anything at home on Sundays, they simply drink a mouthful of coffee and then go round eating their relations out of house and home.”

XVIII

Pelle often thought with concern of the three orphans in the “Ark.” They were learning nothing that would be of use to them in the future, but had all they could do to make a living. The bad times had hit them too, and little Karl in particular; people were stingy with their tips. In these days they were never more than a day ahead of destitution, and the slightest misfortune would have brought them face to face with it. But they let nothing of this be seen—they were only a little quieter and more solemn than usual. He had on several occasions made inquiries as to obtaining help for them, but nothing could be done without immediately tearing them asunder; all those who were in a position to help them cried out against their little household, and separation was the worst that could befall them.

When he went to see them Marie always had plenty to tell and to ask him; he was still her particular confidant, and had to listen to all her household cares and give her his advice. She was growing tall now, and had a fresher look than of old; and Pelle’s presence always filled her eyes with joy and brought the color to her cheeks. Father Lasse she eulogized, in a voice full of emotion, as though he were a little helpless child; but when she asked after Ellen a little malice glittered in her eyes.

One morning, as he sat working at home, while Ellen was out with the child, there was a knock at the door. He went out and opened it. In the little letter-box some one had thrust a number of *The Working Man*, with an invitation to take the paper regularly. He opened the paper eagerly, as he sat down to his bench again; an extraordinary feeling of distress caused him first of all to run through the “Accidents.”

He started up in his chair; there was a heading concerning a fourteen-year-old boy who worked in a tinplate works and had had the fingers of the right hand cut off. A premonition told him that this misfortune had befallen the little “Family”; he quickly drew on a coat and ran over to the “Ark.”

Marie met him anxiously. “Can you understand what has happened to Peter? He never came home last night!” she said, in distress. “Lots of boys roam about the streets all night, but Peter has never been like that, and I kept his supper warm till midnight. I thought perhaps he’d got into bad company.”

Pelle showed her *The Working Man*. In a little while the inmates of the “Ark” would see the report and come rushing up with it. It was better that he should prepare her beforehand. “But it’s by no means certain,” he said, to cheer her. “Perhaps it isn’t he at all.”

Marie burst into tears. “Yes, of course it is! I’ve so often gone about worrying when he’s been telling me about those sharp knives always sliding between their fingers. And they can’t take proper care of themselves; they must work quickly or they get the sack. Oh, poor dear Peter!” She had sunk into her chair and now sat rocking to and fro with her apron to her eyes, like an unhappy mother.

“Now be grown-up and sensible,” said Pelle, laying his hand on her shoulder. “Perhaps it’s not so bad after all; the papers always exaggerate. Now I’ll run out and see if I can trace him.”

“Go to the factory first, then,” said Marie, jumping to her feet, “for, of course, they’ll know best. But you mustn’t in any case say where we live—do you hear? Remember, we’ve not been to school, and he hasn’t been notified to the pastor for confirmation. We could be punished if they found that out.”

“I’ll take good care,” said Pelle, and he hurried away.

At the factory he received the information that Peter was lying in hospital. He ran thither, and arrived just at the time for visitors. Peter was sitting upright in bed, his hand in a sling; this gave him a curiously crippled appearance. And on the boy’s face affliction had already left those deep, ineradicable traces which so dismally distinguish the invalided worker. The terrible burden of the consequences of mutilation could already be read in his pondering, childish gaze.

He cheered up when he saw Pelle, made an involuntary movement with his right hand, and then, remembering, held out his left. “There—I must give you my left fist now,” he said, with a dismal smile. “That’ll seem queer to me for a bit. If I can do anything at all. Otherwise”—he made a threatening movement of the head—“I tell you this—I’ll never be a burden to Marie and Karl all my life. Take my word for it, I shall be able to work again.”

“We shall soon find something for you,” said Pelle, “and there are kind people, too. Perhaps some one will help you so that you can study." He himself did not know just where that idea came from; he certainly had never seen such a case. The magical dreams of his childhood had been responsible for a whole class of ideas, which were nourished by the anecdotes of poor boys in the reading-books. He was confronted by the impossible, and quite simply he reached out after the impossible.

Peter had no reading-books at his back. "Kind people!" he cried scornfully—"they never have anything themselves, and I can't even read—how should I learn how to study? Karl can read; he taught himself from the signs in the streets while he was running his errands; and he can write as well. And Hanne has taught Marie a little. But all my life I've only been in the factory." He stared bitterly into space; it was melancholy to see how changed his face was—it had quite fallen in.

"Don't worry now," said Pelle confidently: "we shall soon find something."

"Only spare me the poor-relief! Don't you go begging for me—that's all!" said Peter angrily. "And, Pelle," he whispered, so that no one in the room should hear, "it really isn't nice here. Last night an old man lay there and died—close to me. He died of cancer, and they didn't even put a screen round him. All the time he lay there and stared at me! But in a few days I shall be able to go out. Then there'll be something to be paid—otherwise the business will come before the Poor Law guardians, and then they'll begin to snuff around—and I've told them fibs, Pelle! Can't you come and get me out? Marie has money for the house-rent by her—you can take that."

Pelle promised, and hurried back to his work. Ellen was at home; she was moving about and seemed astonished. Pelle confided the whole affair to her. "Such a splendid fellow he is," he said, almost crying. "A little too solemn with all his work—and now he's a cripple! Only a child, and an invalided worker already—it's horrible to think of!"

Ellen went up to him and pulled his head against her shoulder; soothingly she stroked his hair. "We must do something for him, Ellen," he said dully.

"You are so good, Pelle. You'd like to help everybody; but what can we do? We've paid away all our savings over my lying-in."

"We must sell or pawn some of our things."

She looked at him horrified. "Pelle, our dear home! And there's nothing here but just what is absolutely necessary. And you who love our poor little belongings so! But if you mean that, why, of course! Only you are doing something for him already in sacrificing your time."

After that he was silent. She several times referred to the matter again, as something that must be well deliberated, but he did not reply. Her conversation hurt him—whether he replied to it or was silent.

In the afternoon he invented an errand in the city, and made his way to the factory. He made for the counting-house, and succeeded in seeing the manufacturer himself. The latter was quite upset by the occurrence, but pleaded in vindication that the accident was entirely the result of negligence. He advised Pelle to make a collection among the workers in the factory, and he opened it himself with a contribution of twenty kroner. He also held out the prospect that Peter, who was a reliable lad, might take a place as messenger and collector when he was well again.

Peter was much liked by his comrades; a nice little sum was collected. Pelle paid his hospital dues, and there was so much left that he would be able to stay at home and rest with an easy mind until his hand was healed and he could take the place of messenger at the factory. The young invalid was in high spirits, knowing that his living was assured; he passed the time in lounging about the town, wherever there was music to be heard, in order to learn fresh tunes. "This is the first holiday I've had since I went to the factory," he told Pelle.

He did not get the place as messenger—some one stole a march on him; but he received permission to go back to his old work! With the remains of his right hand he could hold the sheet of tin-plate on the table, while the left hand had to accustom itself to moving among the threatening knives. This only demanded time and a little extra watchfulness.

This accident was branded on Pelle's soul, and it aroused his slumbering resentment. Chance had given him the three orphans in the place of brothers and sisters, and he felt Peter's fate as keenly as if it had been his own. It was a scandal that young children should be forced to earn their living by work that endangered their lives, in order to keep the detested Poor Law guardians at bay. What sort of a social order was this? He felt a suffocating desire to strike out, to attack it.

The burden of Due’s fate, aggravated by this fresh misfortune, was once more visible in his face; Ellen’s gentle hand, could not smooth it away. “Don’t look so angry, now—you frighten the child so!” she would say, reaching him the boy. And Pelle would try to smile; but it was only a grim sort of smile.

He did not feel that it was necessary to allow Ellen to look into his bleeding soul; he conversed with her about indifferent things. At other times he sat gazing into the distance, peering watchfully at every sign; he was once more full of the feeling that he was appointed to some particular purpose. He was certain that tidings of some kind were on the way to him.

And then Shoemaker Petersen died, and he was again asked to take over the management of the Union.

“What do you say to that?” he asked Ellen, although his mind was irrevocably made up.

“You must know that yourself,” she replied reservedly. “But if it gives you pleasure, why, of course!”

“I am not doing it to please myself,” said Pelle gloomily. “I am not a woman!”

He regretted his words, and went over to Ellen and kissed her. She had tears in her eyes, and looked at him in astonishment.

XIX

There was plenty to be done. The renegades must be shepherded back to the organization—shepherded or driven; Pelle took the most willing first, allowing numbers to impress the rest. Those who were quite stubborn he left to their own devices for the time being; when they were isolated and marked men into the bargain, they could do no further mischief.

He felt well rested, and went very methodically to work. The feeling that his strength would hold out to the very end lent him a quiet courage that inspired confidence. He was not over-hasty, but saw to everything from the foundations upward; individual questions he postponed until the conditions for solving them should be at hand. He knew from previous experience that nothing could be accomplished unless the ranks were tightly knit together.

So passed the remainder of the summer. And then the organization was complete; it looked as though it could stand a tussle. And the first question was the tariff. This was bad and antiquated; thoroughly behind the times in all respects; the trade was groaning under a low rate of wages, which had not kept step with the general development and the augmentation of prices. But Pelle allowed his practical common sense to prevail. The moment was not favorable for a demand for higher wages. The organization could not lend the demand sufficient support; they must for the time being content themselves with causing the current tariff to be respected. Many of the large employers did not observe it, although they themselves had introduced it. Meyer was a particularly hard case; he made use of every possible shift and evasion to beat down the clearest wages bill.

Complaints were continually coming in, and one day Pelle went to him in order to discuss the situation and come to some agreement. He was prepared to fight for the inviolability of the tariff, otherwise Meyer would make big promises and afterward break them. He had really expected Meyer to show him the door; however, he did not do so, but treated him with a sort of polite effrontery. Hatred of his old enemy awaked in Pelle anew, and it was all he could do to control himself. “The embargo will be declared against you if you don’t come to an arrangement with your workers within a week,” he said threateningly.

Meyer laughed contemptuously. “What’s that you say? Oh, yes, your embargo, we know something about that! But then the employers will declare a lock-out for the whole trade—what do you think of that? Old hats will be selling cheap!”

Pelle was silent, and withdrew; it was the only way in which he could succeed in keeping cool. He had said what had to be said, and he was no diplomat, to smile quietly with a devil lurking in the corners of his eyes.

Meyer obligingly accompanied him to the door. “Can I oblige you in any other way—with work, for example? I could very well find room for a worker who will make children’s boots and shoes.”

When Pelle reached the street he drew a long breath. Poof! That was tough work; a little more insolence and he’d have given him one on the jaw! That would have been the natural answer to the fellow’s effrontery! Well, it was a fine test for his hot temper, and he had stood it all right! He could always be master of the situation if he held his tongue.

“Now suppose we do put an embargo on Meyer,” he thought, as he went down the street. “What then? Why, then he’ll hit back and declare a lock-out. Could we hold out? Not very long, but the employers don’t know that—and then their businesses would be ruined. But then they would introduce workers from abroad—or, if that didn’t answer, they would get the work done elsewhere; or they would import whole cargoes of machinery, as they have already begun to do on a small scale.”

Pelle stood still in the middle of the street. Damn it all, this wouldn’t do! He must take care that he didn’t make a hash of the whole affair. If these foreign workers and machines were introduced, a whole host of men would in a moment be deprived of their living. But he wanted to have a go at Meyer; there must be some means of giving the bloodsucker a blow that he would feel in his purse!

Next morning he went as usual to Beck’s. Beck looked at him from over his spectacles. “I’ve nothing more to do with you, Pelle,” he said, in a low voice.

“What!” cried Pelle, startled. “But we’ve such a lot of work on hand, master!”

“Yes, but I can’t employ you any longer. I’m not doing this of my own free will; I have always been very well pleased with you; but that’s how it stands. There are so many things one has to take into consideration; a shoemaker can do nothing without leather, and one can’t very well do without credit with the leather merchants.”

He would not say anything further.

But Pelle had sufficiently grasped the situation. He was the president of the Shoemakers’ Union; Master Beck had been compelled to dismiss him, by the threat of stopping his source of supplies. Pelle was a marked man because he was at the head of the organization—although the latter was now recognized. This was an offence against the right of combination. Still there was nothing to be done about the matter; one had the right to dismiss a man if one had no further need of him. Meyer was a cunning fellow!

For a time Pelle drifted about dejectedly. He was by no means inclined to go home to Ellen with this melancholy news; so he went to see various employers in order to ask them for work. But as soon as they heard who he was they found they had nothing for him to do. He saw that a black mark had been set against his name.

So he must confine himself to home work, and must try to hunt up more acquaintances of his acquaintances. And he must be ready day and night lest some small shoemaker who muddled along without assistance should suddenly have more to do than he could manage.

Ellen took things as they came, and did not complain. But she was mutely hostile to the cause of their troubles. Pelle received no help from her in his campaign; whatever he engaged in, he had to fight it out alone. This did not alter his plans, but it engendered a greater obstinacy in him. There was one side of his nature that Ellen’s character was unable to reach; well, she was only a woman, after all. One must be indulgent with her! He was kind to her, and in his thoughts he more and more set her on a level with little Lasse. In that way he avoided considering her opinion concerning serious matters—and thereby felt more of a man.

Thanks to his small salary as president of his Union, they suffered no actual privation. Pelle did not like the idea of accepting this salary; he felt greatly inclined to refuse the few hundred kroner. There was not a drop of bureaucratic blood in his veins, and he did not feel that a man should receive payment for that which he accomplished for the general good. But now this money came in very conveniently; and he had other things to do than to make mountains out of molehills. He had given up the embargo; but he was always racking his brains for some way of getting at Meyer; it occupied him day and night.

One day his thoughts blundered upon Meyer’s own tactics. Although he was quite innocent, they had driven him away from his work. How would it be if he were to employ the same method and, quite secretly, take Meyer’s workmen away from him? Meyer was the evil spirit of the shoemaker’s craft. He sat there like a tyrant, thanks to his omnipotence, and oppressed the whole body of workers. It would not be so impossible to set a black mark against his name! And Pelle did not mean to be too particular as to the means.

He talked the matter over with his father-in-law, whose confidence in him was now restored. Stolpe, who was an old experienced tactician, advised him not to convoke any meeting on this occasion, but to settle the matter with each man face to face, so that the Union could not be attacked. “You’ve got plenty of time,” he said. “Go first of all to the trustworthy fellows, and make them understand what sort of a man Karl Meyer is; take his best people away first of all; it won’t do him much good to keep the bad ones. You can put the fear of God into your mates when you want to! Do your business so well that no one will have the courage any longer to take the place of those that leave him. He must be branded as what he is—but between man and man.”

Pelle did not spare himself; he went from one comrade to another, fiery and energetic. And what had proved impossible three years before he was now able to accomplish; the resentment of Meyer’s injustice had sunk into the minds of all.

Meyer had been in the habit of letting his workers run about to no purpose; if the work was not quite ready for them they could call again. And when the work was given out to them they had, as a rule, to finish it with a rush; there was intention in this; it made the people humble and submissive.

But now the boot was on the other leg. The workers did not call; they did not deliver urgent commissions at the appointed time; Meyer had to send to them, and got his own words as answer; they were not quite ready yet, but they would see what they could do for him! He had to run after his own workers in order not to offend his rich customers. In the first instances he settled the matter, as a rule, by dismissal. But that did not help him at all; the devil of arrogance had entered into the simple journeymen! It looked as though they had got their ideas of master and subordinate reversed! He had to give up trusting to the hard hand on the rein; he must seek them out with fair words! His business had the whole fashionable world as customer, and always required a staff of the very best workers. But not even friendly approaches availed. Scarcely did he find a good journeyman-worker but he was off again, and if he asked the reason he always received the same jeering answer: they didn’t feel inclined to work. He offered high wages, and at great expense engaged qualified men from outside; but Pelle was at once informed and immediately sought them out. When they had been subjected to his influence only for a few days they went back to the place they came from, or found other masters, who, now that Meyer’s business was failing, were getting more orders. People who went to the warehouse said that Meyer was raging about upstairs, abusing innocent people and driving them away from him.

Meyer was conscious of a hand behind all this, and he demanded that the Employers’ Union should declare a lock-out. But the other masters scented a move for his benefit in this.

His own business was moribund, so he wanted to bring theirs to a standstill also. They had no fundamental objection to the new state of affairs; in any case they could see no real occasion for a lock-out.

So he was forced to give in, and wrote to Pelle requesting him to enter into negotiations—in order to put an end to the unrest affecting the craft. Pelle, who as yet possessed no skill in negotiations, answered Meyer in a very casual manner, practically sending him about his business. He showed his reply to his father-in-law before dispatching it.

“No, deuce take it, that won’t do!” said Stolpe. “Look you, my lad, everything depends on the tone you take, if you are dealing with labor politics! These big folks think such a damn lot about the way a thing is wrapped up! If I were setting about this business I’d come out with the truth and chuck it in their faces—but that won’t answer; they’d be so wild there’d be no dealing with them. Just a nice little lie—that answers much better! Yes, yes, one has to be a diplomatist and set a fox to catch a fox. Now you write what I tell you! I’ll give you an example. Now—”

Stolpe paced up and down the room a while, with a thoughtful expression; he was in shirt-sleeves and slippers and had thrust both his forefingers in his waistcoat pockets. “Are you ready, son-in-law? Then we’ll begin!”

> “To the President of the Employers’ Union, Herre H. Meyer, Shoemaker to the Court.
>
> “Being in receipt of your honored favor of yesterday’s date hereby acknowledged, I take the liberty of remarking that so far as is known to me complete quiet and the most orderly conditions prevail throughout the trade. There appears therefore to be no motive for negotiation.
>
> “For the Shoemakers’ Union,
> “Your obedient servant,
> “Pelle.”

“There, that’s to the point, eh? Napoleon himself might have put his name to that! And there’s enough sting to it, too!” said Stolpe, much gratified. “Now write that out nicely, and then get a big envelope.”

Pelle felt quite important when he had written this out on a big sheet of paper; it was like an order of the day issued by a sheriff or burgomaster at home. Only in respect of its maliciousness he entertained a certain doubt.

One morning, a few days later, he was sitting at home working. In the meantime he had been obliged to undertake casual jobs for sailors in the harbor, and now he was soling a pair of sea-boots for a seaman on board a collier. On the other side of the bench sat little Lasse, chattering and aping his movements, and every time Pelle drove a peg home the youngster knocked his rattle against the edge of the table, and Pelle smiled at him. Ellen was running in and out between the living-room and the kitchen. She was serious and silent.

There was a knock at the door. She ran to the stove, snatching away some of the child’s linen which was drying there, ran out, and opened the door.

A dark, corpulent gentleman in a fur overcoat entered, bowing, holding his tall hat before him, together with his gloves and stick. Pelle could not believe his eyes—it was the Court shoemaker! “He’s come to have it out!” thought Pelle, and prepared himself for a tussle. His heart began to thump, there was a sudden sinking inside him; his old submissiveness was on the point of coming to the surface and mastering him. But that was only for a moment; then he was himself again. Quietly he offered his guest a chair.

Meyer sat down, looking about the neat, simple room as though he wanted to compare his enemy’s means with his own before he made a move. Pelle gathered something from his wandering glance, and suddenly found himself considerably richer in his knowledge of human nature. “He’s sitting there staring about him to see if something has gone to the pawnshop,” he thought indignantly.

“H’m! I have received your favor of the other day,” began Meyer. “You are of opinion that there is no occasion for a discussion of the situation; but—however—ah—I think—”

“That is certainly my opinion,” answered Pelle, who had resolved to adhere to the tone of the letter. “The most perfect order prevails everywhere. But generally speaking it would seem that matters ought to go smoothly now, when we each have our Union and can discuss affairs impartially.” He gazed innocently at Meyer.

“Ah, you think so too! It cannot be unknown to you that my workers have left me one after another—not to say that they were taken away from me. Even to please you I can’t call those orderly conditions.”

Pelle sat there getting angrier and angrier at his finicking tone. Why the devil couldn’t he bluster like a proper man instead of sitting there and making his damned allusions? But if he wanted that sort of foolery he should have it! “Ah! your people are leaving you?” he said, in an interested manner.

“They are,” said Meyer, and he looked surprised. Pelle’s tone made him feel uncertain. “And they are playing tricks on me; they don’t keep to their engagements, and they keep my messengers running about to no purpose. Formerly every man came to get his work and to deliver it, but now I have to keep messengers for that; the business can’t stand it.”

“The journeymen have had to run about to no purpose—I myself have worked for you,” replied Pelle. “But you are perhaps of opinion that we can better bear the loss of time?”

Meyer shrugged his shoulders. “That’s a condition of your livelihood—its conditions are naturally based on order. But if only I could at least depend on getting hands! Man, this can’t go on!” he cried suddenly, “damn and blast it all, it can’t go on, it’s not honorable!”

Little Lasse gave a jump and began to bellow. Ellen came hurrying in and took him into the bedroom.

Pelle’s mouth was hard. “If your people are leaving you, they must surely have some reason for it,” he replied; he would far rather have told Meyer to his face that he was a sweater! “The Union can’t compel its members to work for an employer with whom perhaps they can’t agree. I myself even have been dismissed from a workshop—but we can’t bother two Unions on those grounds!” He looked steadily at his opponent as he made this thrust; his features were quivering slightly.

“Aha!” Meyer responded, and he rubbed his hands with an expression that seemed to say that—now at last he felt firm ground under his feet. “Aha—so it’s out at last! So you’re a diplomatist into the bargain—a great diplomatist! You have a clever husband, little lady!” He turned to Ellen, who was busying herself at the sideboard. “Now just listen, Herre Pelle! You are just the man for me, and we must come to an arrangement. When two capable men get talking together something always comes of it— it couldn’t be otherwise! I have room for a capable and intelligent expert who understands fitting and cutting. The place is well paid, and you can have a written contract for a term of years. What do you say to that?”

Pelle raised his head with a start. Ellen’s eyes began to sparkle, and then became mysteriously dark; they rested on him compellingly, as though they would burn their purpose into him. For a moment he gazed before him, bewildered. The offer was so overpowering, so surprising; and then he laughed. What, what, was he to sell himself to be the understrapper of a sweater!

“That won’t do for me,” he replied.

“You must naturally consider my offer,” said Meyer, rising. “Shall we say three days?”

When the Court shoemaker had gone, Ellen came slowly back and laid her arm round Pelle’s shoulders. “What a clever, capable man you are, then!” she said, in a low voice, playing with his hair; there was something apologetic in her manner. She said nothing to call attention to the offer, but she began to sing at her work. It was a long time since Pelle had heard her sing; and the song was to him like a radiant assurance that this time he would be the victor.

XX

Pelle continued the struggle indefatigably, contending with opposing circumstances and with disloyalty, but always returning more boldly to the charge. Many times in the course of the conflict he found himself back at the same place; Meyer obtained a new lot of workers from abroad, and he had to begin all over again; he had to work on them until they went away again, or to make their position among their housemates so impossible that they resigned. The later winter was hard and came to Meyer’s assistance. He paid his workers well now, and had brought together a crowd of non-union hands; for a time it looked as though he would get his business going again. But Pelle had left the non-unionists alone only through lack of time; now he began to seek them out, and he spoke with more authority than before. Already people were remarking on his strength of will; and most of them surrendered beforehand. “The devil couldn’t stand up against him!” they said. He never wavered in his faith in an ultimate victory, but went straight ahead; he did not philosophize about the other aspect of the result, but devoted all his energies to achieving it. He was actuated by sheer robust energy, and it led him the shortest way. The members of the Union followed him willingly, and willingly accepted the privations involved in the emptying of the workshops. He possessed their confidence, and they found that it was, after all, glorious sport to turn the tables, when for once in a way they could bring the grievance home to its point of departure! They knew by bitter experience what it was to run about to no purpose, to beg for work, and to beg for their wages, and to haggle over them—in short, to be the underdog. It was amusing to reverse the roles. Now the mouse was playing with the cat and having a rattling good time of it— although the claws did get home now and again!

Pelle felt their confidence, the trust of one and all, in the readiness with which they followed him, as though he were only the expression of their own convictions. And when he stood up at the general meetings or conferences, in order to make a report or to conduct an agitation, and the applause of his comrades fell upon his ears, he felt an influx of sheer power. He was like the ram of a ship; the weight of the whole was behind him. He began to feel that he was the expression of something great; that there was a purpose within him.

The Pelle who dealt so quietly and cleverly with Meyer and achieved precisely what he willed was not the usual Pelle. A greater nature was working within him, with more responsibility, according to his old presentiment. He tested himself, in order to assimilate this as a conviction, and he felt that there was virtue in the idea.

This higher nature stood in mystical connection with so much in his life; far back into his childhood he could trace it, as an abundant promise. So many had involuntarily expected something from him; he had listened to them with wonder, but now their expectation was proving prophetic.

He paid strict attention to his words in his personal relations, now that their illimitable importance had been revealed to him. But in his agitator’s work the strongest words came to him most naturally; came like an echo out of the illimitable void that lay behind him. He busied himself with his personality. All that had hitherto had free and careless play must now be circumscribed and made to serve an end. He examined his relations with Ellen, was indulgent to her, and took pains to understand her demand for happiness. He was kind and gentle to her, but inflexible in his resolve.

He had no conscientious scruples in respect of the Court shoemaker. Meyer had in all respects misused his omnipotence long enough; owing to his huge business he had made conditions and ruled them; and the evil of those conditions must be brought home to him. It was now summer and a good time for the workers, and his business was rapidly failing. Pelle foresaw his fall, and felt himself to be a righteous avenger.

The year-long conflict absorbed his whole mind. He was always on his feet; came rushing home to the work that lay there waiting for him, threw it aside like a maniac, and hurried off again. He did not see much of Ellen and little Lasse these days; they lived their own life without him.

He dared not rest on what he had accomplished, now that the cohesion of the Union was so powerful. He was always seeking means to strengthen and to undermine; he did not wish to fall a sacrifice to the unforeseen. His indefatigability infected his comrades, they became more eager the longer the struggle lasted. The conflict was magnified by the sacrifice it demanded, and by the strength of the opposition; Meyer gradually became a colossus whom all must stake their welfare to hew down. Families were ruined thereby, but the more sacrifice the struggle demanded the more recklessly they struggled on. And they were full of jubilation on the day when the colossus fell, and buried some of them in his fall!

Pelle was the undisputed victor. The journeyman-cobbler had laid low the biggest employer in the trade. They did not ask what the victory had cost, but carried his name in triumph. They cheered when they caught sight of him or when his name was mentioned. Formerly this would have turned his head, but now he regarded his success as entirely natural—as the expression of a higher power!

A few days later he summoned a general meeting of the Union, laid before them the draft of a new tariff which was adapted to the times, and proposed that they should at once begin the fight for its adoption. “We could never have a better opportunity,” he said. “Now they have seen what we can do! With the tariff question we struck down Meyer! We must strike the iron while it is hot!”

He reckoned that his comrades were just in the mood for battle, despite all the privations that the struggle had entailed, and he was not mistaken. His proposal was unanimously accepted.

But there was no fight for better wages. Meyer was now making the rounds of the employers’ establishments with the sample-box of one of the leather firms. The sight of this once so mighty man had a stimulating effect. The masters’ Union appointed a few employers with whom the workers’ Union could discuss the question of the tariff.

XXI

It often happened that Pelle would look back with longing on his quiet home-life with Ellen and the child, and he felt dejectedly that they lived in a happier world, and were on the point of accustoming themselves to live without him. “When once you have got this out of hand you can live really comfortably with them again,” he thought.

But one thing inevitably followed on another, and one question arose from the solution of another, and the poor man’s world unfolded itself like the development of a story. The fame of his skill as organizer spread itself abroad; everywhere men were at work with the idea of closing up the ranks, and many began to look toward him with expectant eyes.

Frequently workers came to him begging him to help them to form an organization—no one had such a turn for the work as he. Then they called a meeting together, and Pelle explained the process to them. There was a certain amount of fancifulness and emphasis in his speech, but they understood him very well. “He talks so as to make your ears itch,” they told one another. He was the man they trusted, and he initiated them into the practical side of the matter.

“But you must sacrifice your wages—so that you can start a fund,” he told them continually; “without money nothing can be done. Remember, it’s capital itself we are fighting against!”

“Will it be any use to understand boxing when the fight comes on?” asked a simple-minded workman one day.

“Yes—cash-boxing!” retorted Pelle swiftly. They laughed, and turned their pitiful pockets inside out. They gazed a moment at the money before they gave it away. “Oh, well, it’s of no consequence,” they said.

“The day will soon come when it will be of consequence—if we only hang together,” said Pelle confidently.

It was the dripping they had scraped off their bread—he knew that well, but there was no help for it! In these days he was no better situated than they were.

His activities were leading him abroad, in wider and wider circles, until he found himself at length in the very midst of the masses. Their number did not astonish him; he had always really been conscious of that. And he grew by this contact, and measured himself and the movement by an ever-increasing standard.

At this time he underwent a noticeable change in his outer man. In his forehead were always those deep creases which in young men speak of a gloomy childhood; they were the only bitter token of that which he had taken upon himself, and reminded one of a clouded sky. Otherwise he looked fresh and healthy enough; his hard life was not undermining his strength; he thrived on the sense of community, and was almost always cheerful. His cheeks grew round as those of a cornet-player, and his distended nostrils spoke of his fiery zeal; he needed much air, and always wore his clothes open upon his chest. His carriage was upright and elastic; his whole appearance was arresting, challenging. When he spoke at meetings there was energy in his words; he grew deeply flushed, and wet with perspiration. Something of this flush remained in his face and neck, and there was always a feeling of heat in his body. When he strode forward he looked like a trumpeter at the head of a column.

The many—that was his element. There were many who were to be brought under one hat. Yet most of them lacked a clear understanding; old suspicions suddenly came to light; and many doubts were abroad among the masses. Some believed blindly; others said, “It’s all one whether this party or that does the plucking of us!” Nothing of palpable importance occurred, such as to catch the eye; but they came to trust in his personality as the blind man trusts his leader, and they were forever demanding to hear his voice. Pelle became their darling speaker. He felt that their blind confidence bore him up, and for them he gazed far over the hubbub and confusion. He had always been a familiar of Fortune; now he saw it plainly, far out along the route of march, and inflamed them all with his enthusiasm.

One evening he was summoned to rouse a calling that was in low water. It was the dustmen who applied to him. In order to stimulate their self- consciousness he showed them what a vast power they possessed in their despised activity. He imagined, as an example, that they refused to work, and painted, with much humor, the results which their action would have for the world of rich people. This had a tremendous effect on the meeting. The men stared at one another as if they had just discovered themselves, and then sat laughing like one man. To follow up his effect, he showed how one kind of work depends on another, and imagined one calling to support another, until a general strike had laid its paralyzing hand on the city. What a fantastic picture it was! Pelle knew nothing of the theory of the labor movement, but his energy and enthusiasm lifted the veil from the remotest consequences. Stimulated and startled by the terrible power which lay in their hands, the dustmen went home.

There was something in all this that did not satisfy him; it was in his nature to create, not to destroy. But if only the poor would, they could make society all over again—so Morten had one day said, and the words had never ceased to haunt Pelle's mind. But he could not endure the idea of violent revolution; and now he had found a good way out of his difficulty. He felt convinced that cohesion was irresistible, and that life would undergo a peaceful change.

He had welded his own Union together so that the members hung together through thick and thin. He had accomplished something there, but if a real result were to be achieved the Unions here must work in conjunction with those of all the cities in the country, and that was being done to a certain small extent, in his own trade as well as in others. But all these federations of local Unions must be combined in a mighty whole, so that the whole country would be of one single mind. In other countries matters were progressing as here, so why not summon all countries to one vast work of cooperation?

Before Pelle was aware, he had included the whole world in his solidarity. He knew now that poverty is international. And he was convinced that the poor man felt alike all the world over.

The greatness of this idea did not go to his head. It had evolved naturally on the lines of his own organization—it was just like the idea at the base of the latter. But he continued to play with it until it assumed a definite form. Then he went with his plan to his father-in- law, who was a member of the party executive, and through him was invited to lay the matter before the Central Committee.

Pelle was a practised speaker by now, but he was feverishly excited when he stood in the presence of the actual heart of the labor movement. His words delighted the many, but would he succeed in winning over these tried and experienced men, the leaders who stood behind the whole movement, while quietly going about their own business? He felt that this was the most significant day in his life.

These were men with quieter temperaments than his own. They sat there immovable, listening with half-closed eyes; his big words brought the faintest smile to their lips—they had long got over that sort of thing! They were artisans and craftsmen who worked hard all day for a living, as did he himself, but several of them had given themselves a considerable education; they must be regarded as scholarly persons. In the evening and on Sundays they worked for the Cause, devising political schemes and devoting themselves to keeping accounts and the ever-increasing work of administration. They were awkward at these unaccustomed tasks, which had hitherto been reserved by quite a different class of society, and had had to grow accustomed thereto; their heads were gray and wrinkled.

Pelle felt that he was still only at the beginning. These men gave him the impression of a great secret council; outside they looked like any one else, but here at the green table they sat creating the vast organization into which he merely drove the masses. Here high politics came into play. There was something impious in this—as though one saw ants making plans to overturn a mountain; and he must do the same if he wanted to accomplish anything! But here something more than big words was needed! He involuntarily moderated his tone and did his best to speak in a dry, professional manner.

He received no applause when he had finished; the men sat there gazing in front of them with a slightly pondering expression. The silence and the great empty room had the effect of making him feel dizzy. All his faculties were directed outward, drawing strength from the echo from without of the many who had shaped him. But at this decisive moment they were silent, leaving him in suspense, without any kind of support. Was the whole stupendous plan of federation a piece of madness, and was he a fool to propound it? No one replied. The leaders quietly asked him the details of his plan, and undertook to consider it.

Pelle left in a state of dreadful suspense. He felt that he had touched upon something on which a great decision depended, and he wanted corroboration of the fact that he had set about the matter rightly. In this moment of need he turned to himself. It was not his way to ask questions of his inner self, but now no other could answer him. He must look to himself for recognition.

This was the first time that Pelle had sought refuge in his own ego, or learned to fall back upon it in critical moments. But solitude did not suit him and he sought it only under the compulsion of necessity. His heart beat uncontrollably within him when he learned that his plan was approved. A committee was appointed to put it into execution, and Pelle was on the committee.

At one stroke the National Federation made a single army of the many divisions, and was effective merely by the attractive virtue of its mass. It became a heavy and fatiguing task to organize the swarms that came streaming in, as water rushes to the sea, by virtue of a natural law. It needed the talent of a great general to marshal them for a conclusive battle and to lead them into the line of fire.

Pelle was naturally placed in the front ranks of the organization; his work was properly that of the pioneer and agitator; no one possessed the ear of the crowd as he did. He had received regular employment from one of the larger employers, which amounted to a recognition of the organization, and the increased rate of wages meant that he earned a moderate income. He did not object to the fact that the work had to be done away from home. Life at home had lost its radiance. Ellen was loving enough, but she had always some purpose in view—and he would not allow himself to be tied!

When he went home—and as a rule he managed to include a meal—it was only to make himself ready and to rush out again—to general or committee meetings. Father Lasse was there as a rule in the evenings, and he gazed longingly after Pelle when the latter left his wife and child; he did not understand it, but he did not venture to say anything —he felt a great respect for the lad’s undertakings. Ellen and the old man had discovered one another; they were like a pair of horses in harness; there was a great consolation in that.

Pelle went forward in a sort of intoxication of power, produced by the sense of the multiplying hosts. He was like an embodiment of those hosts, and he heard their step echoing in his own; it was natural that the situation should assume large dimensions. He was a product of an ancient culture, but a culture that had always dwelt in the shadow, and was based on stern and narrow tenets, each of which summed up a lifetime of bitter experience. The need of light and sunshine, continually suppressed, had been accumulating, through illimitable years, until it had resulted in a monstrous tension. Now it had exploded, and was mounting dizzily upward. His mind was reeling in the heights, in a blinding cloud of light!

But fundamentally he was still the sturdy realist and stood with his feet on the earth! The generations beneath him had been disciplined by the cold, and had learned to content themselves with bare necessities; a lesson which they handed down to him, simply and directly, with no inheritance of frivolity. In his world, cause and effect were in a direct line; an obtrusive odor did not translate itself into a spectral chattering of the teeth. The result was in a direct line with the cause —but their relation was often that of the match and the bonfire. Herein lay the strength of his imagination; this was why he could encompass all things with so simple a preparation.

He was not afraid to consider the fate of the masses; when he could not see ahead, his old fatalism came to his help. His words flamed high despite himself and kept the hope alive in many who did not themselves understand the meaning of the whole movement, but saw that its adherents grew ever more numerous, and that in other respects they were just as well off. Where he himself could not see he was like a lens that collects the half-darkness and gives it out again as a beam of light.

Morten he preferred to avoid. Pelle had gradually absorbed all the theories of the labor movement, and they comfortably filled his mind. And how could one accomplish more than by remaining in harmony with the whole? Morten had an unfruitful tendency to undermine the certainty of one’s mind; he always brought forth his words from his inner consciousness, from places where no one else had ever been, and he delivered them as though they had been God’s voice in the Bible, which always made people pause in their designs. Pelle respected his peculiar nature, which never marched with the crowd, and avoided him.

But his thoughts often returned to him. Morten had first thrown a light upon chaos—upon the knowledge of Pelle’s world, the poor man’s world; and when he was confronted by any decisive question he involuntarily asked himself how Morten would have dealt with it.

At times they met at meetings called together by the workers themselves, and at which they both collaborated. Morten had no respect for the existing laws and little for the new. He did not play a very zealous part in the work of party organization, and was rather held at arm’s length by the leaders. But his relations with the man in the street were of the closest. He worked independently; there was scarcely his match in individual cases of need or injustice; and he was always laboring to make people think for themselves.

And they loved him. They looked up to Pelle and the rest, and made way for them with shining eyes; but they smilingly put themselves in Morten’s way. They wanted to press his hand—he could scarcely make his way to the speaker’s platform. His pale face filled them with joy—women and children hung on to him. When he passed through the streets of the poor quarters in his simple clothes, the women smiled at him. “That’s him, the master-journeyman, who is so good and so book-learned,” they would say. “And now he has sold all his books in order to help a poor child!” And they gave their own children a little push, and the children went up to him and held out their hands and followed him right to the end of the street.

XXII

When Pelle went now and again to the “Ark,” to see his brothers and sister, the news of his visit spread quickly through the building. “Pelle is here!” sounded from gallery to gallery, and they hurried up the stairs in order to nod to him and to seek to entice him to swallow a cup of coffee. Old Madam Frandsen had moved; she disappeared when Ferdinand came out of prison—no one knew whither. Otherwise there were no changes. A few factory women left by night on account of their rent, and others had taken their places. And from time to time some one completed his term, and was carried out of the dark corridors and borne away on the dead-cart—as always. But in the “Ark” there was no change to be observed.

It happened one day that he went over to call on Widow Johnsen. She looked very melancholy sitting there as she turned her old soldiers’ trousers and attended to Hanne’s child, which promised to be a fine girl. She had aged; she was always sitting at home and scolding the child; when Pelle visited her he brought a breath of fresh air into her joyless existence. Then she recalled the excursion to the forest, and the cozy evenings under the hanging lantern, and sighed. Hanne never looked at Pelle. When she came running home from the factory, she had no eyes for anything but her little girl, who threw herself upon her mother and immediately wanted to play. For the remainder of the day the child was close under her eyes, and Hanne had to hold her hand as she moved about, and play with her and the doll.

> “Far up the mountain did I climb,”

sang Hanne, and the child sang with her—she could sing already! Hanne’s clear, quiet eyes rested on the child, and her expression was as joyful as though fortune had really come to her. She was like a young widow who has lived her share of life, and in the “Ark” every one addressed her as Widow Hanne. This was a mark of respect paid to her character; they threw a widow’s veil over her fate because she bore it so finely. She had expected so much, and now she centered everything in her child, as though the Stranger could have brought her no more valuable present.

Peter’s misfortune had struck the little home a serious blow. They had always only just kept their heads above water; and now he earned less than ever with his crippled hand. Karl wanted to get on in the world, and was attending confirmation classes, which cost money and clothes. They had made up for Peter’s loss of earning power by giving up Father Lasse’s room and moving his bed into their own room. But all three were growing, and needed food and clothing.

Peter’s character had taken on a little kink; he was no longer so cheerful over his work, and he often played the truant, loafing about the streets instead of going to the factory. Sometimes he could not be got out of bed in the morning; he crept under the bedclothes and hid himself. “I can’t work with my bad hand,” he would say, crying, when Marie wanted to drag him out; “every moment the knives are quite close to it and nearly chop it off.”

“Then stay at home!” said Marie at last. “Look after the house and I will go out and see if I can earn something. I can get work as a charwoman in the new buildings in Market Street.”

But at that he got up and slunk away; he would not allow a woman to earn his food for him.

Karl was a brisk, merry young vagabond; nothing made any impression on him. The streets had brought him up, had covered his outer man with a coating of grime, and had lit the inextinguishable sparks in his eyes. He was like the sparrows of the capital; black with soot, but full of an urban sharpness, they slip in and out among the heavy wagon-wheels, and know everything. He was always getting into difficulties, but always came home with a whole skin. His continual running about seemed to have got into his blood like a never-resting impulse.

He was full of shifts for lessening the uncertainty of his earnings, and the little household depended principally on him. But now he had had enough of seeking his living in the streets; he wanted to get on; he wanted most of all to be a shopkeeper. The only thing that held him back was his regard for his home.

Pelle saw that the little home would have to be broken up. Marie was developing rapidly; she must leave the “Ark,” and if Karl could not live his own life, but was forced to sacrifice himself to his brother and sister, he would end as a street-loafer. Pelle resolved suddenly to deal with the matter himself, as his habit was. He obtained an outfit for Karl from a charitable society, and placed him as apprentice with a shopkeeper for whom the boy had run errands.

One Sunday afternoon he went over to the “Ark” with a big parcel under his arm. He was holding Young Lasse by the hand; every moment the child stooped down, picked up a little stone, dragged his father to the quay- wall, and threw the stone into the water. He chattered incessantly.

Pelle mechanically allowed himself to be pulled aside, and answered the child at random. He was thinking of the children’s little home, which had once been so hospitably opened to him, and must now be broken up. Perhaps it would be the salvation of Karl and Marie; there was a future for them outside; they were both young and courageous. And Father Lasse could come to him; it would be quite possible to make up his bed in the living-room at night and put it out of the way in the daytime. Ellen was no longer so particular. But Peter—what was to become of him? The home was the only thing that still held him.

When Young Lasse looked through the tunnel-entry into the darkness of the “Ark” he did not want to go in. “Ugly, ugly!” he said, in energetic refusal. Pelle had to take him in his arms. “Lasse not like that!” he said, pushing with his hands against his father’s shoulders. “Lasse wants to go back! get down!”

“What!” said Pelle, laughing, “doesn’t Young Lasse like the ‘Ark’? Father thinks it’s jolly here!”

“Why?” asked the boy, pouting.

“Why?” Well, Pelle could not at once explain. “Because I lived here once on a time!” he replied.

“And where was Young Lasse then?”

“Then you used to sit in mother’s eyes and laugh at father.”

At this the child forgot his fear of the darkness and the heavy timbers. He pressed his round little nose against his father’s, and gazed into his eyes, in order to see whether a little boy was sitting in them too. He laughed when he glimpsed himself in them. “Who sits in mother’s eyes now?” he asked.

“Now a little sister sits there, who likes to play with Young Lasse,” said Pelle. “But now you must walk again—it doesn’t do for a man to sit on anybody’s arm!”

The three orphans were waiting for him eagerly; Karl hopped and leaped into the air when he saw Pelle.

“Where is Father Lasse?” asked Pelle.

“He has gone out with the hand-cart for the second-hand dealer,” said Marie; “he had to fetch a sofa.” She had taken Young Lasse on her lap and was almost eating him.

Karl put on his fine new clothes, his fresh face beaming with delight. The trousers were fully long enough, but it was quite fashionable to go about with turned-up trousers. That was easily got over.

“Now you look like a real grocer!” said Pelle, laughing.

Karl ran out into the gangway and came back immediately with his head wetted and his hair parted down the middle. “Ach, you fool, why don’t you leave well alone!” cried Marie, ruffling his head. A fight ensued. Peter sat in a corner, self-absorbed, staring gloomily out of the window.

“Now, Peter, hold your head up!” cried Pelle, clapping him on the shoulder. “When we’ve got the great Federation together and things are working properly, I’ll manage something for you too. Perhaps you can act as messenger for us.”

Peter did not reply, but turned his head away.

“He’s always like that—he’s so grumpy! Do at least be a little polite, Peter!” said Marie irritably. The boy took his cap and went out.

“Now he’s going out by the North Bridge, to his sweetheart—and we shan’t see anything of him for the next few days,” said Marie, looking after him. “She’s a factory girl—she’s had a child by one man—he deserted her,” said Marie.

“He has a sweetheart already?” said Pelle.

“What of that? He’s seventeen. But there’s nothing in her.”

“She has red hair! And she drags one leg behind her as though she wanted to take the pavement with her,” said Karl. “She might well be his mother.”

“I don’t think you ought to tease him,” said Pelle seriously.

“We don’t,” said Marie. “But he won’t have it when we try to be nice to him. And he can’t bear to see us contented. Lasse says it is as though he were bewitched.”

“I have a situation for you too, Marie,” said Pelle. “With Ellen’s old employers in Holberg Street—you’ll be well treated there. But you must be ready by October.”

“That will be fine! Then Karl and I can go into situations on the same day!” She clapped her hands. “But Peter!” she cried suddenly. “Who will look after him? No, I can’t do it, Pelle!”

“We must see if we can’t find nice lodgings for him. You must take the situation—you can’t go on living here.”

Prom the end of the long gangway came a curious noise, which sounded like a mixture of singing and crying. Young Lasse got down onto his feet near the open door, and said, “Sh! Singing! Sh!”

“Yes! That’s the pasteboard-worker and her great Jutlander,” said Marie. “They’ve got a funeral to-day. The poor little worm has ceased to suffer, thank God!”

“Is that any one new?” said Pelle.

“No, they are people who moved here in the spring. He hasn’t been living here, but every Saturday he used to come here and take her wages. ‘You are crazy to give him your wages when he doesn’t even live with you!’ we told her. ‘He ought to get a thrashing instead of money!’ ‘But he’s the child’s father!’ she said, and she went on giving him her money. And on Sunday, when he had drunk it, he regretted it, and then he used to come and beat her, because she needn’t have given it to him. She was an awful fool, for she could just have been out when he came. But she was fond of him and thought nothing of a few blows—only it didn’t do for the child. She never had food for it, and now it’s dead.”

The door at the end of the gangway opened, and the big Jutlander came out with a tiny coffin under his arm. He was singing a hymn in an indistinct voice, as he stood there waiting. In the side passage, behind the partition-wall, a boy’s voice was mocking him. The Jutlander’s face was red and swollen with crying, and the debauch of the night before was still heavy in his legs. Behind him came the mother, and now they went down the gangway with funeral steps; the woman’s thin black shawl hung mournfully about her, and she held her handkerchief to her mouth; she was crying still. Her livid face had a mildewed appearance.

Pelle and Young Lasse had to be off. “You are always in such a hurry!” said Marie dolefully. “I wanted to make coffee.”

“Yes, I’ve got a lot to do to-day still. Otherwise I’d gladly stay with you a bit.”

“Do you know you are gradually getting quite famous?” said Marie, looking at him in admiration. “The people talk almost as much about you as they do about the big tinplate manufacturer. They say you ruined the biggest employer in the city.”

“Yes. I ruined his business,” said Pelle, laughing. “But where has the shopwalker got to?”

“He’s gone down into the streets to show himself!”

Karl, sure enough, was strolling about below and allowing the boys and girls to admire him. “Look, when we come into the shop and the grocer isn’t there you’ll stand us treat!” Pelle heard one of them say.

“You don’t catch me! And if you dare you’ll get one in the jaw!” replied Karl. “Think I’m going to have you loafing about?”

At the end of the street the great Jutlander was rolling along, the coffin under his arm; the girl followed at a distance, and they kept to the middle of the road as though they formed part of a funeral procession. It was a dismal sight. The gray, dismal street was like a dungeon.

The shutters were up in all the basement windows, excepting that of the bread-woman. Before the door of her shop stood a crowd of grimy little children, smearing themselves with dainties; every moment one of them slipped down into the cellar to spend an öre. One little girl, dressed in her Sunday best, with a tightly braided head, was balancing herself on the edge of the curbstone with a big jug of cream in her hand; and in a doorway opposite stood a few young fellows meditating some mischief or other.

“Shall we go anywhere to-day?” asked Ellen, when Pelle and young Lasse got home. “The fine season is soon over.”

“I must go to the committee-meeting,” Pelle replied hesitatingly. He was sorry for her; she was going to have another child, and she looked so forsaken as she moved about the home. But it was impossible for him to stay at home.

“When do you think you’ll be back?”

“That I don’t know, Ellen. It is very possible it will take the whole day.”

Then she was silent and set out his food.

XXIII

That year was, if possible, worse than the preceding. As early as September the unemployed stood in long ranks beside the canals or in the market-place, their feet in the wet. The bones of their wrists were blue and prominent and foretold a hard winter, of which the corns of the old people had long ago given warning; and sparks of fire were flying up from under poor folks' kettles. "Now the hard winter is coming and bringing poverty with it," said the people. "And then we shall have a pretty time!"

In October the frost appeared and began to put an end to all work that had not already been stopped by the hard times.

In the city the poor were living from hand to mouth; if a man had a bad day it was visible on his plate the next morning. Famine lay curled up beneath the table in ten thousand households; like a bear in its winter sleep it had lain there all summer, shockingly wasted and groaning in its evil dreams; but they were used to its society and took no notice of it so long as it did not lay its heavy paw upon the table. One day's sickness, one day's loss of work—and there it was!

"Ach, how good it would be if we only had a brine-tub that we could go to!" said those who could still remember their life in the country. "But the good God has taken the brine-tub and given us the pawnbroker instead!" and then they began to pledge their possessions.

It was sad to see how the people kept together; the city was scattered to the winds in summer, but now it grew compacter; the homeless came in from the Common, and the great landowners returned to inhabit their winter palaces. Madam Rasmussen, in her attic, suddenly appeared with a husband; drunken Valde had returned—the cold, so to speak, had driven him into her arms! At the first signs of spring he would be off again, into the arms of his summer mistress, Madam Grassmower. But as long as he was here, here he was! He stood lounging in the doorway downstairs, with feathers sticking in the shaggy hair of his neck and bits of bed- straw adhering to his flat back. His big boots were always beautifully polished; Madam Rasmussen did that for him before she went to work in the morning; after which she made two of herself, so that her big strong handsome protector should have plenty of time to stand and scratch himself.

Week by week the cold locked up all things more closely; it locked up the earth, so that the husbandmen could not get at it; and it closed the modest credit account of the poor. Already it had closed all the harbors round about. Foreign trade shrunk away to nothing; the stevedores and waterside workers might as well stop at home. It tightened the heart-strings—and the strings of the big purse that kept everything going. The established trades began to work shorter hours, and the less stable trades entirely ceased. Initiative drew in its horns; people began nothing new, and did no work for the warehouses; fear had entered into them. All who had put out their feelers drew them back; they were frostbitten, so to speak. The earth had withdrawn its sap into itself and had laid a crust of ice over all; humanity did the same. The poor withdrew their scanty blood into their hearts, in order to preserve the germ of life. Their limbs were cold and bloodless, their skin gray. They withdrew into themselves, and into the darkest corners, packed closely together. They spent nothing. And many of those who had enough grudged themselves even food; the cold ate their needs away, and set anxiety in their place. Consumption was at a standstill.

One could not go by the thermometer, for according to that the frost had been much harder earlier in the year. "What, is it no worse!" said the people, taken aback. But they felt just as cold and wretched as ever. What did the thermometer know of a hard winter? Winter is the companion of hard times, and takes the same way whether it freezes or thaws—and on this occasion it froze!

In the poor quarters of the city the streets were as though depopulated. A fall of snow would entice the dwellers therein out of their hiding- places; it made the air milder, and made it possible, too, to earn a few kroner for sweeping away the snow. Then they disappeared again, falling into a kind of numb trance and supporting their life on incredibly little—on nothing at all. Only in the mornings were the streets peopled—when the men went out to seek work. But everywhere where there was work for one man hundreds applied and begged for it. The dawn saw the defeated ones slinking home; they slept the time away, or sat all day with their elbows on the table, never uttering a word. The cold, that locked up all else, had an opposite effect upon the heart; there was much compassion abroad. Many whose wits had been benumbed by the cold, so that they did not attempt to carry on their avocations, had suffered no damage at heart, but expended their means in beneficence. Kindly people called the poor together, and took pains to find them out, for they were not easy to find.

But the Almighty has created beings that live upon the earth and creatures that live under the earth; creatures of the air and creatures of the water; even in the fire live creatures that increase and multiply. And the cold, too, saw the growth of a whole swarm of creatures that live not by labor, but on it, as parasites. The good times are their bad times; then they grow thin, and there are not many of them about. But as soon as cold and destitution appear they come forth in their swarms; it is they who arouse beneficence—and get the best part of what is going. They scent the coming of a bad year and inundate the rich quarters of the city. "How many poor people come to the door this year!" people say, as they open their purses. "These are hard times for the poor!"

In the autumn Pelle had removed; he was now dwelling in a little two-roomed apartment on the Kapelvej. He had many points of contact with this part of the city now; besides, he wanted Ellen to be near her parents when she should be brought to bed. Lasse would not accompany him; he preferred to be faithful to the "Ark"; he had got to know the inmates now, and he could keep himself quite decently by occasional work in the neighboring parts of the city.

Pelle fought valiantly to keep the winter at bay. There was nothing to do at the workshop; and he had to be on the go from morning to night. Wherever work was to be had, there he applied, squeezing his way through hundreds of others. His customers needed footwear now more than ever; but they had no money to pay for it.

Ellen and he drew nearer at this season and learned to know one another on a new side. The hard times drew them together; and he had cause to marvel at the stoutness of her heart. She accepted conditions as they were with extraordinary willingness, and made a little go a very long way. Only with the stove she could do nothing. "It eats up everything we scrape together," she said dejectedly; "it sends everything up the chimney and doesn't give out any warmth. I've put a bushel of coal on it to-day, and it's as cold as ever! Where I was in service we were able to warm two big rooms with one scuttle! I must be a fool, but won't you look into it?" She was almost crying.

"You mustn't take that to heart so!" said Pelle gloomily. "That's the way with poor folks' stoves. They are old articles that are past use, and the landlords buy them up as old iron and then fit them in their workmen's dwellings! And it's like that with everything! We poor people get the worst and pay the dearest—although we make the things! Poverty is a sieve."

"Yes, it's dreadful," said Ellen, looking at him with mournful eyes. "And I can understand you so well now!"

Threatening Need had spread its pinions above them. They hardly dared to think now; they accepted all things at its hands.

One day, soon after Ellen had been brought to bed, she asked Pelle to go at once to see Father Lasse. "And mind you bring him with you!" she said. "We can very well have him here, if we squeeze together a little. I'm afraid he may be in want."

Pelle was pleased by the offer, and immediately set out. It was good of Ellen to open her heart to the old man when they were by no means certain of being able to feed themselves.

The "Ark" had a devastated appearance. All the curtains had disappeared —except at Olsen's; with the gilt mouldings they always fetched fifty öre. The flowers in the windows were frostbitten. One could see right into the rooms, and inside also all was empty. There was something shameless about the winter here; instead of clothing the "Ark" more warmly it stripped it bare—and first of all of its protecting veils. The privies in the court had lost their doors and covers, and it was all Pelle could do to climb up to the attics! Most of the balustrades had vanished, and every second step was lacking; the "Ark" was helping itself as well as it could! Over at Madam Johnsen's the bucket of oak was gone that had always stood in the corner of the gallery when it was not lent to some one—the "Ark" possessed only the one. And now it was burned or sold. Pelle looked across, but had not the courage to call. Hanne, he knew, was out of work.

A woman came slinking out of the third story, and proceeded to break away a fragment of woodwork; she nodded to Pelle. "For a drop of coffee!" she said, "and God bless coffee! You can make it as weak as you like as long as it’s still nice and hot.”

The room was empty; Lasse was not there. Pelle asked news of him along the gangway. He learned that he was living in the cellar with the old clothes woman. Thin gray faces appeared for a moment in the doorways, gazed at him, and silently disappeared.

The cellar of the old clothes woman was overcrowded with all sorts of objects; hither, that winter, the possessions of the poor had drifted. Lasse was sitting in a corner, patching a mattress; he was alone down there. “She has gone out to see about something,” he said; “in these times her money finds plenty of use! No, I’m not going to come with you and eat your bread. I get food and drink here—I earn it by helping her —and how many others can say this winter that they’ve their living assured? And I’ve got a corner where I can lie. But can’t you tell me what’s become of Peter? He left the room before me one day, and since then I’ve never seen him again.”

“Perhaps he’s living with his sweetheart,” said Pelle. “I’ll see if I can’t find out.”

“Yes, if you will. They were good children, those three, it would be a pity if one of them were to come to any harm.”

Pelle would not take his father away from a regular situation where he was earning a steady living. “We don’t very well see what we could offer you in its place. But don’t forget that you will always be welcome— Ellen herself sent me here.”

“Yes, yes! Give her many thanks for that! And now you be off, before the old woman comes back,” said Lasse anxiously. “She doesn’t like any one to be here—she’s afraid for her money.”

The first thing that had to go was Pelle’s winter overcoat. He pawned it one day, without letting Ellen know, and on coming home surprised her with the money, which he delightedly threw on the table, krone by krone. “How it rings!” he said to Young Lasse. The child gave a jump, and wanted the money to play with.

“What do I want with a winter coat?” he retorted, to Ellen’s kindly reproaches. “I’m not cold, and it only hangs up indoors here. I’ve borne with it all the summer. Ah, that’s warm!” he cried, to the child, when Ellen had brought some fuel. “That was really a good winter coat, that of father’s! Mother and sister and Young Lasse can all warm themselves at it!”

The child put his hands on his knees and peeped into the fire after his father’s winter coat. The fire kindled flames in his big child’s eyes, and played on his red cheeks. “Pretty overcoat!” he said, laughing all over his face.

They did not see much of the tenants of the house; nor of the family. People were living quietly, each one fighting his own privations within his four walls. On Sundays they gave the children to one of the neighbors, went into the city, and stood for an hour outside some concert-hall, freezing and listening to the music. Then they went home again and sat vegetating in the firelight, without lighting the lamp.

One Sunday things looked bad. “The coals will hold out only till midday,” said Ellen; “we shall have to go out. And there’s no more food either. But perhaps we can go to the old folks; they’ll put up with us till evening.”

As they were about to start, Ellen’s brother Otto arrived, with his wife and two children, to call on them. Ellen exchanged a despairing glance with Pelle. Winter had left its stamp on them too; their faces were thin and serious. But they still had warm clothes. “You must keep your cloaks on,” said Ellen, “for I have no more coal. I forgot it yesterday, I had so much to do; I had to put off ordering it until to-day, and to-day, unfortunately, the coal dealer isn’t at home.”

“If only the children aren’t cold,” said Pelle, “we grown-ups can easily keep ourselves warm.”

“Well, as long as they haven’t icicles hanging from their noses they won’t come to any harm!” said Otto with a return of his old humor.

They moved restlessly about the room and spoke of the bad times and the increasing need. “Yes, it’s terrible that there isn’t enough for everybody,” said Otto’s wife.

“But the hard winter and the misery will come to an end and then things will be better again.”

“You mean we shall come to an end first?” said Otto, laughing despairingly.

“No, not we—this poverty, of course. Ach, you know well enough what I mean. But he’s always like that,” she said, turning to Pelle.

"Curious, how you women still go about in the pious belief that there's not enough for all!" said Pelle. "Yet the harbor is full of stacks of coal, and there's no lack of eatables in the shops. On the contrary— there is more than usual, because so many are having to do without—and you can see, too, that everything in the city is cheaper. But what good is that when there's no money? It's the distribution that's all wrong."

"Yes, you are quite right!" said Otto Stolpe. "It's really damnable that no one has the courage to help himself!"

Pelle heard Ellen go out through the kitchen door, and presently she came back with firing in her apron. She had borrowed it. "I've scraped together just a last little bit of coal," she said, going down on her knees before the stove. "In any case it's enough to heat the water for a cup of coffee."

Otto and his wife begged her urgently not to give herself any trouble; they had had some coffee before they left home—after a good solid breakfast. "On Sundays we always have a solid breakfast," said young Madam Stolpe; "it does one such a lot of good!" While she was speaking her eyes involuntarily followed Ellen's every moment, as though she could tell thereby how soon the coffee would be ready.

Ellen chatted as she lit the fire. But of course they must have a cup of coffee; they weren't to go away with dry throats!

Pelle sat by listening in melancholy surprise; her innocent boasting only made their poverty more glaring. He could see that Ellen was desperately perplexed, and he followed her into the kitchen.

"Pelle, Pelle!" she said, in desperation. "They've counted on stopping here and eating until the evening. And I haven't a scrap in the house. What's to be done?"

"Tell them how it is, of course!"

"I can't! And they've had nothing to eat to-day—can't you see by looking at them?" She burst into tears.

"Now, now, let me see to the whole thing!" he said consolingly. "But what are you going to give us with our coffee?"

"I don't know! I have nothing but black bread and a little butter."

"Lord, what a little donkey!" he said, smiling, and he took her face between his hands. "And you stand there lamenting! Just you be cutting the bread-and-butter!"

Ellen set to work hesitatingly. But before she appeared with the refreshments they heard her bang the front door and go running down the steps. After a time she returned. "Oh, Lord! Now the baker has sold out of white bread," she said, "so you must just have black bread-and-butter with your coffee."

"But that's capital," they cried. "Black bread always goes best with coffee. Only it's a shame we are giving you so much trouble!"

"Look here," said Pelle, at last. "It may please you to play hide-and-seek with one another, but it doesn't me—I am going to speak my mind. With us things are bad, and it can't be any better with you. Now how is it, really, with the old folks?"

"They are struggling along," said Otto. "They always have credit, and I think they have a little put by as well."

"Then shan't we go there to-night and have supper? Otherwise I'm afraid we shan't get anything."

"Yes, we will! It's true we were there the day before yesterday—but what does that matter? We must go somewhere, and at least it's sticking to the family!"

* * *

The cold had no effect on Pelle; the blood ran swiftly through his veins. He was always warm. Privation he accepted as an admonition, and merely felt the stronger for it; and he made use of his involuntary holiday to work for the Cause.

It was no time for public meetings and sounding words—many had not even clothes with which to go to meetings. The movement had lost its impetus through the cold; people had their work cut out to keep the little they already had. Pelle made it his business to encourage the hopes of the rejected, and was always on the run; he came into contact with many people. Misery stripped them bare and developed his knowledge of humanity.

Wherever a trade was at a standstill, and want had made its appearance, he and others were at hand to prevent demoralization and to make the prevailing conditions the subject of agitation. He saw how want propagates itself like the plague, and gradually conquers all—a callous accomplice in the fate of the poor man. In a week to a fortnight unemployment would take all comfort from a home that represented the scraping and saving of many years—so crying was the disproportion. Here was enough to stamp a lasting comprehension upon the minds of all, and enough to challenge agitation. All but persons of feeble mind could see now what they were aiming at.

And there were people here like those at home. Want made them even more submissive. They could hardly believe that they were so favored as to be permitted to walk the earth and go hungry. With them there was nothing to be done. They were born slaves, born with slavery deep in their hearts, pitiful and cur-like.

They were people of a certain age—of an older generation than his. The younger folk were of another and a harder stuff; and he often was amazed to find how vigorously their minds echoed his ideas. They were ready to dare, ready to meet force with force. These must be held back lest they should prejudice the movement—for them its progress was never sufficiently rapid.

His mind was young and intact and worked well in the cold weather; he restlessly drew comparisons and formed conclusions in respect of everything he came into contact with. The individual did not seem to change. The agitation was especially directed to awakening what was actually existent. For the rest, they must live their day and be replaced by a younger generation in whom demands for compensation came more readily to the tongue. So far as he could survey the evolution of the movement, it did not proceed through the generations, but in some amazing fashion grew out of the empty space between them. So youth, even at the beginning, was further ahead than age had been where it left off.

The movements of the mind had an obscure and mystical effect upon him, as had the movement of his blood in childhood; sometimes he felt a mysterious shudder run through him, and he began to understand what Morten had meant when he said that humanity was sacred. It was terrible that human beings should suffer such need, and Pelle’s resentment grew deeper.

Through his contact with so many individuals he learned that Morten was not so exceptional; the minds of many betrayed the same impatience, and could not understand that a man who is hungry should control himself and be content with the fact of organization. There was a revolutionary feeling abroad; a sterner note was audible, and respectable people gave the unemployed a wide berth, while old people prophesied the end of the world. The poor had acquired a manner of thinking such as had never been known.

One day Pelle stood in a doorway with some other young people, discussing the aspect of affairs; it was a cold meeting-place, but they had not sufficient means to call a meeting in the usual public room. The discussion was conducted in a very subdued tune; their voices were bitter and sullen. A well-dressed citizen went by. “There’s a fine overcoat,” cried one; “I should like to have one like that! Shall we fetch him into the doorway and pull his coat off?” He spoke loudly, and was about to run out into the street.

“No stupidity!” said Pelle sadly, seizing him by the arm. “We should only do ourselves harm! Remember the authorities are keeping their eyes on us!”

“Well, what’s a few weeks in prison?” the man replied. “At least one would get board and lodging for so long.” There was a look that threatened mischief in his usually quiet and intelligent eyes.

XXIV

There were rumors that the city authorities intended to intervene in order to remedy the condition of the unemployed, and shortly before Christmas large numbers of navvies were given employment. Part of the old ramparts was cleared away, and the space converted into parks and boulevards. Pelle applied among a thousand others and had the good fortune to be accepted. The contractor gave the preference to youthful energy.

Every morning the workers appeared in a solid phalanx; the foreman of the works chose those he had need of, and the rest were free to depart. At home sat their wives and children, cheered by the possibility of work; the men felt no inclination to go home with bad news, so they loafed about in the vicinity.

They came there long before daybreak in order to be the first, although there was not much hope. There was at least an excuse to leave one’s bed; idleness was burning like hell fire in their loins. When the foreman came they thronged silently about him, with importunate eyes. One woman brought her husband; he walked modestly behind her, kept his eyes fixed upon her, and did precisely as she did. He was a great powerful fellow, but he did nothing of his own accord—did not even blow his nose unless she nudged him. “Come here, Thorvald!” she said, cuffing him so hard as to hurt him. “Keep close behind me!” She spoke in a harsh voice, into the empty air, as though to explain her behavior to the others; but no one looked at her. “He can’t speak for himself properly, you see,” she remarked at random. Her peevish voice made Pelle start; she was from Bornholm. Ah, those smart young girls at home, they were a man’s salvation! “And the children have got to live too!” she continued. “We have eight. Yes, eight.”

“Then he’s some use for something,” said a workman who looked to be perishing with the cold.

The woman worked her way through them, and actually succeeded in getting her man accepted. “And now you do whatever they tell you, nicely, and don’t let them tempt you to play the fool in any way!” she said, and she gave him a cuff which set him off working in his place. She raised her head defiantly as contemptuous laughter sounded about her.

The place was like a slave-market. The foreman, went to and fro, seeking out the strongest, eyeing them from head to foot and choosing them for their muscular development and breadth of back. The contractor too was moving about and giving orders. “One of them rich snobs!” said the laborers, grumbling; “all the laborers in town have to march out here so that he can pick himself the best. And he’s beaten down the day’s wages to fifty öre. He’s been a navvy himself, too; but now he’s a man who enjoys his hundred thousand a year. A regular bloodsucker, he is!”

The crowd continued to stand there and to loaf about all the day, in the hope that some one would give up, or fall ill—or go crazy—so that some one could take his place. They could not tear themselves away; the mere fact that work was being done chained them to the spot. They looked as though they might storm the works at any moment, and the police formed a ring about the place. They stood pressing forward, absorbed by their desire for work, with a sick longing in their faces. When the crowd had pressed forward too far it hesitatingly allowed itself to be pushed back again. Suddenly there was a break in the ranks; a man leaped over the rail and seized a pickaxe. A couple of policemen wrested the tool from his hand and led him away.

And as they stood there a feeling of defiance rose within them, a fierce contempt for their privations and the whole shameless situation. It expressed itself in an angry half-suppressed growl. They followed the contractor with curious eyes as though they were looking for something in him but could not conceive what it was.

In his arrogance at receiving such an excessive offer of labor, he decided to go further, and to lengthen the working day by an hour. The workers received an order to that effect one morning, just as they had commenced work. But at the same moment the four hundred men, all but two, threw down their implements and returned to their comrades. They stood there discussing the matter, purple with rage. So now their starving condition was to be made use of, in order to enrich the contractor by a further hundred thousand! “We must go to the city authorities,” they cried. “No, to the newspaper!” others replied. “The paper! The paper is better!”

“It’s no use going to the city council—not until we have elected members of our own party to it," cried Pelle. "Remember that at the elections, comrades! We must elect men of our party everywhere, their encroachments will never be stopped until then. And now we must stand together and be firm! If it's got to be, better starve to death at once than do it slowly!"

They did not reply, but pressed closely about him, heavily listening. There was something altogether too fierce and profound in their attention. These men had declared a strike in midwinter, as their only remedy. What were they thinking of doing now? Pelle looked about him and was daunted by their dumb rage. This threatening silence wouldn't do; what would it lead to? It seemed as though something overwhelming, and uncontrollable, would spring from this stony taciturnity. Pelle sprang upon a heap of road-metal.

"Comrades!" he cried, in a powerful voice. "This is merely a change, as the fox said when they flayed his skin off. They have deprived us of clothes and food and drink, and comfort at home, and now they want to find a way of depriving us of our skins too! The question to-day is—forward or back? Perhaps this is the great time of trial, when we shall enter into possession of all we have desired! Hold together, comrades! Don't scatter and don't give way! Things are difficult enough now, but remember, we are well on in the winter, and it promises to break up early. The night is always darkest before daybreak! And shall we be afraid to suffer a little—we, who have suffered and been patient for hundreds of years? Our wives are sitting at home and fretting—perhaps they will be angry with us. We might at least have accepted what was offered us, they may say. But we can't go on seeing our dear ones at home fading away in spite of our utmost exertions! Hitherto the poor man's labor has been like an aimless prayer to Heaven: Deliver us from hunger and dirt, from misery, poverty, and cold, and give us bread, and again bread! Deliver our children from our lot—let not their limbs wither and their minds lapse into madness! That has been our prayer, but there is only one prayer that avails, and that is, to defy the wicked! We are the chosen people, and for that reason we must cry a halt! We will no longer do as we have done—for our wives' sakes, and our children's, and theirs again! Ay, but what is posterity to us? Of course it is something to us—precisely to us! Were your parents as you are? No, they were ground down into poverty and the dust, they crept submissively before the mighty. Then whence did we get all that makes us so strong and causes us to stand together? Time has stood still, comrades! It has placed its finger on our breast and he said, 'Thus you shall do!' Here where we stand, the old time ceases and the new time begins; and that is why we have thrown down our tools, with want staring us in the face—such a thing as has never been seen before! We want to revolutionize life—to make it sweet for the poor man! And for all time! You, who have so often staked your life and welfare for a florin—you now hold the whole future in your hands! You must endure, calmly and prudently! And you will never be forgotten, so long as there are workers on the earth! This winter will be the last through which we shall have to endure—for yonder lies the land toward which we have been wandering! Comrades! Through us the day shall come!"

Pelle himself did not know what words he uttered. He felt only that something was speaking through him—something supremely mighty, that never lies. There was a radiant, prophetic ring in his voice, which carried his hearers off their feet; and his eyes were blazing. Before their eyes a figure arose from the hopeless winter, towering in radiance, a figure that was their own, and yet that of a young god. He rose, new-born, out of misery itself, struck aside the old grievous idea of fate, and in its place gave them a new faith—the radiant faith in their own might! They cried up to him—first single voices, then all. He gathered up their cries into a mighty cheer, a paean in honor of the new age!

Every day they stationed themselves there, not to work, but to stand there in dumb protest. When the foreman called for workers they stood about in silent groups, threatening as a gloomy rock. Now and again they shouted a curse at those who had left them in the lurch. The city did nothing. They had held out a helping hand to the needy, and the latter had struck it away—now they must accept the consequences. The contractor had received permission to suspend the work entirely, but he kept it going with a few dozen strike-breakers, in order to irritate the workers.

All over the great terrace a silence as of death prevailed, except in that corner where the little gang was at work, a policeman beside it, as though the men had been convicts. The wheelbarrows lay with their legs in the air; it was as though the pest had swept over the works.

The strike-breakers were men of all callings; a few of the unemployed wrote down their names and addresses, in order to insert them in *The Working Man*. One of Stolpe's fellow-unionists was among them; he was a capable pater-familias, and had taken part in the movement from its earliest days. "It's a pity about him," said Stolpe; "he's an old mate of mine, and he's always been a good comrade till now. Now they'll give it him hard in the paper—we are compelled to. It does the trade no good when one of its representatives goes and turns traitor."

Madame Stolpe was unhappy. "It's such a nice family," she said; "we have always been on friendly terms with them; and I know they were hungry a long time. He has a young wife, father; it's not easy to stand out."

"It hurts me myself," replied Stolpe. "But one is compelled to do it, otherwise one would be guilty of partisanship. And no one shall come to me and say that I'm a respecter of persons."

"I should like to go and have a talk with them," said Pelle. "Perhaps they'd give it up then."

He got the address and went there after working hours. The home had been stripped bare. There were four little children. The atmosphere was oppressive. The man, who was already well on in years, but was still powerful, sat at the table with a careworn expression eating his supper, while the children stood round with their chins on the edge of the table, attentively following every bite he took. The young wife was going to and fro; she brought him his simple food with a peculiarly loving gesture.

Pelle broached the question at issue. It was not pleasant to attack this old veteran. But it must be done.

"I know that well enough," said the man, nodding to himself. "You needn't begin your lecture—I myself have been in the movement since the first days, and until now I've kept my oath. But now it's done with, for me. What do you want here, lad? Have you a wife and children crying for bread? Then think of your own!"

"We don't cry, Hans," said the woman quietly.

"No, you don't, and that makes it even worse! Can I sit here and look on, while you get thinner day by day, and perish with the cold? To hell with the comrades and their big words—what have they led to? Formerly we used to go hungry just for a little while, and now we starve outright—that's the difference! Leave me alone, I tell you! Curse it, why don't they leave me in peace?"

He took a mouthful of brandy from the bottle. His wife pushed a glass toward him, but he pushed it violently away.

"You'll be put in the paper to-morrow," said Pelle, hesitating. "I only wanted to tell you that."

"Yes, and to write of me that I'm a swine and a bad comrade, and perhaps that I beat my wife as well. You know yourself it's all lies; but what is that to me? Will you have a drink?"

No, Pelle wouldn't take anything. "Then I will myself," said the man, and he laughed angrily. "Now you can certify that I'm a hog—I drink out of the bottle! And another evening you can come and listen at the keyhole—perhaps then you'll hear me beating my wife!"

The woman began to cry.

"Oh, damn it all, they might leave me in peace!" said the man defiantly.

Pelle had to go with nothing effected.

XXV

The “Ark” was now freezing in the north wind; all outward signs of life were stripped from it. The sounds that in summer bubbled up from its deep well-like shaft were silent now; the indistinguishable dripping of a hundred waste-pipes, that turned the court into a little well with green slimy walls, was silent too. The frost had fitted them all with stoppers; and where the toads had sat gorging themselves in the cavities of the walls—fantastic caverns of green moss and slimy filaments—a crust of ice hung over all; a grimy glacier, which extended from the attics right down to the floor of the court.

Where were they now, the grimy, joyful children? And what of the evening carouse of the hearse-driver, for which his wife would soundly thrash him? And the quarrelsome women’s voices, which would suddenly break out over this or that railing, criticizing the whole court, sharp as so many razors?

The frost was harder than ever! It had swept all these things away and had locked them up as closely as might be. The hurdy-gurdy man lay down below in his cellar, and had as visitor that good friend of the north wind, the gout; and down in the deserted court the draught went shuffling along the dripping walls. Whenever any one entered the tunnel-entry the draught clutched at his knees with icy fingers, so that the pain penetrated to the very heart.

There stood the old barrack, staring emptily out of its black windows. The cold had stripped away the last shred of figured curtain, and sent it packing to the pawn-shop. It had exchanged the canary for a score of firewood, and had put a stop to the day-long, lonely crying of the little children behind the locked doors—that hymn of labor, which had ceased only in the evening, when the mothers returned from the factories. Now the mothers sat with their children all day long, and no one but the cold grudged them this delight. But the cold and its sister, hunger, came every day to look in upon them.

On the third floor, away from the court, Widow Johnsen sat in the corner by the stove. Hanne’s little girl lay cowering on the floor, on a tattered patchwork counterpane. Through the naked window one saw only ice, as though the atmosphere were frozen down to the ground. Transparent spots had formed on the window-panes every time the child had breathed on them in order to look out, but they had soon closed up again. The old woman sat staring straight into the stove with big, round eyes; her little head quivered continually; she was like a bird of ill omen, that knew a great deal more than any one could bear to hear.

“Now I’m cold again, grandmother,” said the child quietly.

“Don’t keep from shivering, then you’ll be warm,” said the old woman.

“Are you shivering?”

“No, I’m too old and stiff for it—I can’t shiver any more. But the cold numbs my limbs, so that I can’t feel them. I could manage well enough if it wasn’t for my back.”

“You lean your back against the cold stove too!”

“Yes, the cold grips my poor back so.”

“But that’s stupid, when the stove isn’t going.”

“But if only my back would get numb too!” said the old woman piteously.

The child was silent, and turned her head away.

Over the whole of the wall were tiny glittering crystals. Now and again there was a rustling sound under the wall-paper.

“Grandmother, what’s that funny noise?” asked the child.

“That’s the bugs—they are coming down,” said the old woman. “It’s too cold for them up there in the attics, and they don’t like it here. You should see them; they go to Olsen’s with the warm wall; they stay there in the cold.”

“Is the wall at Olsen’s always warm, then?”

“Yes, when there’s fire in the boiler of the steam mill.”

Then the child was silent a while, wearily turning her head from side to side. A dreadful weariness was stamped on her face. “I’m cold,” she complained after a time.

“See if you can’t shiver!”

“Hadn’t I better jump a bit?”

“No, then you’d just swallow down the cold—the air is like ice. Just keep still, and soon mother will be here, and she’ll bring something!”

"She never gets anything," said the child. "When she gets there it's always all over."

"That's not true," said Madam Johnsen severely. "There's food enough in the soup kitchens for all; it's just a matter of understanding how to go about it. The poor must get shame out of their heads. She'll bring something to-day!"

The child stood up and breathed a hole in the ice on the window-pane.

"Look now, whether it isn't going to snow a little so that the poor man can get yet another day's employment," said the old woman.

No, the wind was still blowing from the north, although it commonly shuffled along the canal; but now, week after week, it blew from the Nicolai tower, and played the flute on the hollow bones of poverty. The canals were covered with ice, and the ground looked horribly hard. The naked frost chased the people across it like withered leaves. With a thin rustling sound they were swept across the bridges and disappeared.

A great yellow van came driving by. The huge gates of the prison opened slowly and swallowed it. It was the van containing the meat for the prisoners. The child followed it with a desolate expression.

"Mother isn't coming," she said. "I am so hungry."

"She will soon come—you just wait! And don't stand in the light there; come here in the corner! The light strikes the cold right through one."

"But I feel colder in the dark."

"That's just because you don't understand. I only long now for the pitch darkness."

"I long for the sun!" retorted the child defiantly.

There was a creaking of timber out in the yard. The child ran out and opened the door leading to the gallery. It was only the people opposite, who were tearing a step away.

But then came mother, with a tin pail in her hand, and a bundle under her arm; and there was something in the pail—it looked heavy. Tra-la- la! And the bundle, the bundle! What was in that? "Mother, mother!" she cried shrilly, leaning far over the rickety rail.

Hanne came swiftly up the stairs, with open mouth and red cheeks; and a face peeped out of every little nest.

"Now Widow Hanne has taken the plunge," they said. They knew what a point of honor it had been with her to look after her mother and her child unaided. She was a good girl.

And Widow Hanne nodded to them all, as much as to say, "Now it's done, thank God!"

She stood leaning over the table, and lifted the cover off the pail. "Look!" she said, as she stirred the soup with a ladle: "there's pearl barley and pot-herbs. If only we had something we could warm it up with!"

"We can tear away a bit of the woodwork like other people," said the mother.

"Yes," replied Hanne breathlessly, "yes, why not? If one can beg one can do that!"

She ran out onto the gallery and tore away a few bits of trellis, so that the sound re-echoed through the court. People watched her out of all the dark windows. Widow Hanne had knocked off the head of her pride!

Then they sat down to their soup, the old woman and the child. "Eat!" said Hanne, standing over them and looking on with glowing eyes. Her cheeks were burning. "You look like a flower in the cold!" said her mother. "But eat, yourself, or you'll starve to death."

No, Hanne would not eat. "I feel so light," she said, "I don't need any food." She stood there fingering her bundle; all her features were quivering, and her mouth was like that of a person sick of a fever.

"What have you there?" asked Madam Johnsen.

"Clothes for you and little Marie. You were so cold. I got them downstairs from the old clothes woman—they were so cheap."

"Do you say you bought them?"

"Yes—I got them on credit."

"Well, well, if you haven't given too much for them! But it will do one good to have something warm on one's back!"

Hanne undid the bundle, while the others looked on in suspense. A light summer dress made its appearance, pleated and low-necked, blue as little Marie's eyes, and a pair of thin kid shoes. The child and the old woman gazed wonderingly at the dress. "How fine!" they said. They had forgotten everything, and were all admiration. But Hanne stood staring with horror, and suddenly burst into sobs.

"Come, come, Hanne!" said her mother, clapping her on the back. "You have bought a dress for yourself—that's not so dreadful! Youth will have its rights."

"No, mother, no, I didn't buy it at all! I knew you both needed something to keep you warm, so I went into a fine house and asked if they hadn't any cast-off things, and there was a young lady—she gave me this—and she was so kind. No, I didn't know at all what was in the bundle—I really didn't know, dear mother!"

"Well, well, they are fine enough!" said the old woman, spreading the dress out in front of her. "They are fine things!" But Hanne put the things together and threw them into the corner by the stove.

"You are ill!" said her mother, gazing at her searchingly; "your eyes are blazing like fire."

The darkness descended, and they went to bed. People burned no useless lights in those days, and it was certainly best to be in bed. They had laid the feather-bed over themselves cross-wise, when it comfortably covered all three; their daytime clothes they laid over their feet. Little Marie lay in the middle. No harm could come to her there. They talked at random about indifferent matters. Hanne's voice sounded loud and cheerful in the darkness as though it came from a radiant countryside.

"You are so restless," said the mother. "Won't you try to sleep a little? I can feel the burning in you from here!"

"I feel so light," replied Hanne; "I can't lie still." But she did lie still, gazing into space and humming inaudibly to herself, while the fever raged in her veins.

After a time the old woman awoke; she was cold. Hanne was standing in the middle of the room, with open mouth; and was engaged in putting on her fine linen underclothing by the light of a candle-end.

Her breath came in short gasps and hung white on the air.

"Are you standing there naked in the cold?" said Madam Johnsen reproachfully. "You ought to take a little care of yourself."

"Why, mother, I'm so warm! Why, it's summer now!"

"What are you doing, child?"

"I am only making myself a little bit smart, mother dear!"

"Yes, yes—dance, my baby. You've still got the best of your youth before you, poor child! Why didn't you get a husband where you got the child from?"

Hanne only hummed a tune to herself, and proceeded to don the bright blue summer costume. It was a little full across the chest, but the decolletage sat snugly over her uncovered bosom. A faint cloud of vapor surrounded her person like a summer haze.

Her mother had to hook up the dress at the back. "If only we don't wake Marie!" she whispered, entirely absorbed by the dress. "And the fine lace on the chemise—you can always let that peep out of the dress a little—it looks so pretty like that. Now you really look like a summer girl!"

"I'll just run down and show it to Madam Olsen," said Hanne, pressing her hand to her glowing cheeks.

"Yes, do—poor folks' joys must have their due," replied the old woman, turning over to the wall.

Hanne ran down the steps and across the yard and out into the street. The ground was hard and ringing in the frost, the cold was angry and biting, but the road seemed to burn Hanne through her thin shoes. She ran through the market, across the bridge, and into the less crowded quarter of the city—right into Pelle's arms. He was just going to see Father Lasse.

Pelle was wearied and stupefied with the continual battle with hard reality. The bottomless depths of misery were beginning to waste his courage. Was it really of any use to hold the many together? It only made the torture yet harder for them to bear. But in a moment everything looked as bright as though he had fallen into a state of ecstasy, as had often happened lately. In the midst of the sternest realities it would suddenly happen that his soul would leap within him and conjure up the new age of happiness before his eyes, and the terrible dearth filled his arms to overflowing with abundance! He did not feel the cold; the great dearth had no existence; violent spiritual excitement and insufficient nourishment made the blood sing continually in his ears. He accepted it as a happy music from a contented world. It did not surprise him that he should meet Hanne in summer clothing and attired as for a ball.

“Pelle, my protector!” she said, grasping his hand. “Will you go to the dance with me?”

“That’s really the old Hanne,” thought Pelle delightedly—“the careless Princess of the ‘Ark,’ and she is feverish, just as she used to be then.” He himself was in a fever. When their eyes met they emitted a curious, cold, sparkling light. He had quite forgotten Father Lasse and his errand, and went with Hanne.

The entrance of “The Seventh Heaven” was flooded with light, which exposed the merciless cold of the street. Outside, in the sea of light, thronged the children of the terrible winter, dishevelled and perishing with the cold. They stood there shuddering, or felt in their pockets for a five-öre piece, and if they found it they slipped through the blood- red tunnel into the dancing-hall.

But it was cold in there too; their breath hung like white powder on the air; and crystals of ice glittered on the polished floor. Who would dream of heating a room where the joy of life was burning? and a thousand candles? Here carelessness was wont to give of its abundance, so that the lofty room lay in a cloud and the musicians were bathed in sweat.

But now the cold had put an end to that. Unemployed workers lounged about the tables, disinclined for movement. Winter had not left the poor fellows an ounce of frivolity. Cerberus Olsen might spare himself the trouble of going round with his giant arms outspread, driving the two or three couples of dancers with their five-öre pieces indoors toward the music, as though they had been a whole crowd. People only toiled across the floor in order to have the right to remain there. Good Lord! Some of them had rings and watches, and Cerberus had ready cash—what sort of dearth was that? The men sat under the painted ceiling and the gilded mirrors, over a glass of beer, leaving the girls to freeze—even Elvira had to sit still. “Mazurka!” bellowed Cerberus, going threateningly from table to table. They slunk into the hall like beaten curs, dejectedly danced once round the floor, and paid.

But what is this? Is it not Summer herself stepping into the hall? All glowing and lightly clad in the blue of forget-me-nots, with a rose in her fair hair? Warmth lies like fleeting summer upon her bare shoulders, although she has come straight out of the terrible winter, and she steps with boldly moving limbs, like a daughter of joy. How proudly she carries her bosom, as though she were the bride of fortune—and how she burns! Who is she? Can no one say?

Oh, that is Widow Hanne, a respectable girl, who for seven long years faithfully trod her way to and from the factory, in order to keep her old mother and her child!

But how comes it then that she has the discreet Pelle on her arm? He who has sold his own youth to the devil, in order to alleviate poverty? What does he want here on the dancing-floor? And Hanne, whence did she get her finery? She is still out of employment! And how in all the world has she grown so beautiful?

They whisper behind her, following her as she advances; and in the midst of the hall she stands still and smiles. Her eyes burn with a volcanic fire. A young man rushes forward and encircles her with his arm. A dance with Hanne! A dance with Hanne!

Hanne dances with a peculiar hesitation, as though her joy had brought her from far away. Heavily, softly, she weighs on the arms of her partners, and the warmth rises from her bare bosom and dispels the cold of the terrible winter. It is as though she were on fire! Who could fail to be warmed by her?

Now the room is warm once more. Hanne is like a blazing meteor that kindles all as it circles round; where she glides past the fire springs up and the blood runs warmly in the veins. They overturn the chairs in their eagerness to dance with her. “Hi, steward! Five kroner on my watch—only be quick!” “Ach, Hanne, a dance with me!”—“Do you remember we were at the factory together?”—“We used to go to school together!”

Hanne does not reply, but she leaves Pelle and lays her naked arm upon their shoulders, and if they touch it with their cheeks the fire streams through them. They do not want to let her go again; they hold her fast embraced, gliding along with her to where the musicians are sitting, where all have to pay. No word passes her lips, but the fire within her is a promise to each of them, a promise of things most precious. “May I see you home to-night?” they whisper, hanging on her silent lips.

But to Pelle she speaks as they glide along. “Pelle, how strong you are! Why have you never taken me? Do you love me?” Her hand is clasping his shoulder as she whirls along beside him. Her breath burns in his ear.

“I don’t know!” he says uneasily. “But stop now—you are ill.”

“Hold me like that! Why have you never been stronger than I? Do you want me, Pelle? I’ll be yours!”

Pelle shakes his head. “No, I love you only like a sister now.”

“And now I love you! Look—you are so distant to me—I don’t understand you—and your hand is as hard as if you came from another world! You are heavy, Pelle! Have you brought me happiness from a foreign land with you?”

“Hanne, you are ill! Stop now and let me take you home!”

“Pelle, you were not the right one. What is there strange about you? Nothing! So let me alone—I am going to dance with the others as well!”

Hitherto Hanne has been dancing without intermission. The men stand waiting for her; when one releases her ten spring forward, and this evening Hanne wants to dance with them all. Every one of them should be permitted to warm himself by her! Her eyes are like sparks in the darkness; her silent demeanor excites them; they swing her round more and more wildly. Those who cannot dance with her must slake the fire within them with drink. The terrible winter is put to flight, and it is warm as in Hell itself. The blood is seething in their brains; it injects the whites of their eyes, and expresses itself in wanton frolic, in a need to dance till they drop, or to fight.

“Hanne is wild to-night—she has got her second youth,” says Elvira and the other girls maliciously.

Hold your tongues. No one shall criticize Hanne’s behavior! It is wonderful to touch her; the touch of her skin hurts one, as though she was not flesh and blood, but fire from Heaven! They say she has not had a bite of food for a week. The old woman and the child have had all there was. And yet she is burning! And see, she has now been dancing without a break for two whole hours! Can one understand such a thing? Hanne dances like a messenger from another world, where fire, not cold, is the condition of life. Every dancer leaves his partner in the lurch as soon as she is free! How lightly she dances! Dancing with her, one soars upward, far away from the cold. One forgets all misery in her eyes.

But she has grown paler and paler; she is dancing the fire out of her body while others are dancing it in! Now she is quite white, and Olsen’s Elvira comes up and tugs at her dress, with anxiety in her glance. “Hanne, Hanne!” But Hanne does not see her; she is only longing for the next pair of arms—her eyes are closed. She has so much to make up for! And who so innocent as she? She does not once realize that she is robbing others of their pleasure. Is she suffering from vertigo or St. Vitus’s dance, in her widowhood?

Hold your tongue! How beautiful she is! Now she is growing rosy again, and opening her eyes. Fire darts from them; she has brought Pelle out of his corner and is whispering something to him, blushing as she does so; perhaps that precious promise that hitherto no one has been able to draw from her. Pelle must always be the lucky man!

“Pelle, why don’t you dance with me oftener? Why do you sit in the corner there always and sulk? Are you angry with me as you used to be, and why are you so hard and cold? And your clothes are quite stiff!”

“I come from outside all this—from the terrible winter, Hanne, where the children are crying for bread, and the women dying of starvation, and the men go about with idle hands and look on the ground because they are ashamed of their unemployment!”

“But why? It is still summer. Only look how cheerful every one is! Take me, then, Pelle!”

Hanne grows red, redder than blood, and leans her head on his shoulder. Only see how she surrenders herself, blissful in her unashamed ecstasy! She droops backward in his arms, and from between her lips springs a great rose of blood, that gushes down over the summer-blue dress.

Fastened to the spot by his terrible burden, Pelle stands there unable to move. He can only gaze at Hanne, until Cerberus takes her in his giant’s arms and bears her out. She is so light in her summer finery—she weighs nothing at all!

“Mazurka!” he bellows, as he returns, and goes commandingly along the ranks of dancers.

XXVI

At the end of January, Pelle obtained a place as laborer in the “Denmark” machine works. He was badly paid, but Ellen rejoiced, none the less; with nothing one could only cry—with a little one could grow strong again. She was still a little pale after her confinement, but she looked courageous. At the first word of work her head was seething with comprehensive plans. She began at once to redeem various articles and to pay off little debts; she planned out a whole system and carried it out undeviatingly.

The new sister was something for Young Lasse; he understood immediately that she was some one given to him in order to amuse him in his loneliness.

During the confinement he had remained with his grandparents, so that the stork should not carry him away when it came with his little sister —for he was dear to them! But when he returned home she was lying asleep in her cradle. He just touched her eyelids, to see if she had eyes like his own. They snatched his fingers away, so he could not solve the exciting problem that day.

But sister had eyes, great dark eyes, which followed him about the room, past the head of the bed and round the other side, always with the same attentive expression, while the round cheeks went out and in like those of a sucking animal. And Young Lasse felt very distinctly that one was under obligations when eyes followed one about like that. He was quite a little man already, and he longed to be noticed; so he ran about making himself big, and rolling over like a clown, and playing the strong man with the footstool, while his sister followed him with her eyes, without moving a muscle of her face. He felt that she might have vouchsafed him a little applause, when he had given himself so much trouble.

One day he inflated a paper bag and burst it before her face. That was a help. Sister forgot her imperturbability, gave a jump, and began to roar. He was smacked for that, but he had his compensation. Her little face began to quiver directly he approached her, in order to show her something; and she often began to roar before he had performed his trick. “Go away from your sister Lasse Frederik!” said his mother. “You are frightening her!”

But things were quite different only a month later. There was no one who understood Young Lasse’s doings better than sister. If he did but move his plump little body, or uttered a sound, she twittered like a starling.

Ellen’s frozen expression had disappeared; now that she had something to work at again. The cold had weaned her from many of her exactions, and others were gratified by the children. The two little ones kept her very busy; she did not miss Pelle now. She had become accustomed to his being continually away from home, and she had taken possession of him in her thoughts, in her own fashion; she held imaginary conversations with him as she went about her work; and it was a joy to her to make him comfortable during the short time that he was at home.

Pelle conceived his home as an intimate little world, in which he could take shelter when he was weary. He had redeemed that obscure demand in Ellen’s eyes—in the shape of two dear little creatures that gave her plenty to do. Now it was her real self that advanced to meet him. And there was a peculiar loyalty about her, that laid hold of his heart; she no longer resented his small earnings, and she did not reproach him because he was only a workman.

He had been obliged to resign his position as president of his Union on account of his longer hours. There was no prospect at present of his being able to return to his vocation; but the hard bodily labor agreed with him.

In order to help out his small earnings, he busied himself with repairs in the evenings. Ellen helped him, and they sat together and gossiped over their work. They ignored the labor movement—it did not interest Ellen, and he by no means objected to a brief rest from it. Young Lasse sat at the table, drawing and putting in his word now and then. Often, when Pelle brought out the work, Ellen had done the greater part of it during the day, and had only left what she did not understand. In return he devised little ways of pleasing her.

In the new year the winter was not so severe. Already in February the first promise of spring was perceptible. One noticed it in Ellen.

“Shan’t we pack a picnic-basket and go out to one of the beer-gardens on Sunday? It would do the children good to get into the air,” she would say.

Pelle was very willing. But on Sunday there was a meeting of the party leaders and a meeting concerning the affairs of the factory—he must be present at both. And in the evening he had promised to speak before a trade union.

“Then we’ll go out ourselves, the children and I!” said Ellen peacefully. When they came home it seemed they had amused themselves excellently; Pelle was no longer indispensable.

* * *

The hard winter was over at last. It was still freezing—especially at night—but the people knew it was over in spite of that. And the ice in the canals knew it also. It began to show fractures running in all directions, and to drift out toward the sea. Even the houses gave one a feeling of spring; they were brighter in hue; and the sun was shining into the sky overhead; if one looked for it one could see it glowing above the roofs. Down in the narrow lanes and the well-like courtyards the children stamped about in the snowy slush and sang to the sun which they could not see.

People began to recover from the long privations of the winter. The cold might return at any moment; but all were united in their belief in the spring. The starlings began to make their appearance, and the moisture of the earth rose again to the surface and broke its way through the hard crust, in dark patches; and business ventured to raise its head. A peculiar universal will seemed to prevail in all things. Down under the earth it sprouted amid frost and snow, and crept forth, young, and seemingly brought forth by the cold itself; and in all things frozen by winter the promise unfolded itself—in spite of all.

The workmen’s quarter of the city began to revive; now it was once more of some use to go about looking for work. It did one good to get out and walk in the daylight for a while. And it also did one good once more to fill one’s belly every day and to fetch the household goods home from the pawn-shop, and to air one’s self a little, until one’s turn came round again.

But things did not go as well as they should have done. It looked as though the cold had completely crippled the sources of commercial activity. The spring came nearer; the sun rose higher every day, and began to recover its power; but business showed no signs of real recovery as yet; it did no more than supply what was needed from day to day. There was no life in it, as there had been of old! At this time of the year manufacturers were glad as a rule to increase their stocks, so as to meet the demands of the summer; it was usual to make up for the time lost during the winter; the workers would put forth their utmost strength, and would work overtime.

Many anxious questions were asked. What was the matter? Why didn’t things get going again? *The Working Man* for the present offered no explanation, but addressed a covert warning to certain people that they had best not form an alliance with want.

Gradually the situation assumed more definite outlines; the employers were making preparations of some kind, for which reason they did not resume business with any great vigor. In spite of their privations during the winter, the workers had once again returned some of their own representatives to Parliament, and now they were getting ready to strike a blow at the municipal elections. That was the thing to do now! And in the forefront of the battle stood the ever-increasing organization which now included all vocations and the whole country a single body, and which claimed a decisive voice in the ordering of conditions! The poor man was made to feel how little he could accomplish without those who kept everything going!

In the meantime there were rumors that a lock-out was being prepared, affecting every occupation, and intended to destroy the Federation at one blow. But that was inconceivable. They had experienced only small lock-outs, when there was disagreement about some particular point. That any one could think of setting the winter’s distress in opposition to the will of Nature, when every man was willing to work on the basis of the current tariff—no, the idea was too fiendish!

But one distinction was being made. Men who had done any particular work for the movement would find it more difficult to obtain employment. They would be degraded, or simply replaced by others, when they applied for their old places after the standstill of the winter. Uncertainty prevailed, especially in those trades which had the longest connection with the labor organization; one could not but perceive this to be a consequence of combination. For that reason the feeling of insecurity increased. Every one felt that the situation was unendurable and untenable, and foresaw some malicious stroke. Especially in the iron industry relations were extremely strained; the iron-founders were always a hard-handed lot; it was there that one first saw what was about to develop.

Pelle anxiously watched events. If a conflict were to occur just now, it would mean a defeat of the workers, who were without supplies and were stripped to the buff. With the winter had ceased even the small chance of employment on the ramparts; it was obvious that an assault would shatter their cohesion. He did not express his anxieties to them. They were at bottom like little children; it would do no good for them to suffer too great anxiety. But to the leaders he insisted that they must contrive to avoid a conflict, even if it entailed concessions. For the first time Pelle proposed a retreat!

One week followed another, and the tension increased, but nothing happened. The employers were afraid of public opinion. The winter had struck terrible blows; they dared not assume the responsibility for declaring war.

In the “Denmark” machine-works the tension was of long standing. At the time when the farmers were compelled, by the conditions of the world- market, to give up the cultivation of cereals for dairy-farming, the directors of the factory had perceived in advance that the future would lie in that direction, and had begun to produce dairy machinery. The factory succeeded in constructing a centrifugal separator which had a great sale, and this new branch of industry absorbed an ever-increasing body of workers. Hitherto the best-qualified men had been selected; they were continually improving the manufacture, and the sales were increasing both at home and abroad. The workers gradually became so skilled in their specialty that the manufacturers found themselves compelled to reduce their wages—otherwise they would have earned too much. This had happened twice in the course of the years, and the workers had received the hint that was necessary to meet competition in foreign markets. But at the same time the centrifugal separators were continually increasing in price, on account of the great demand for them. The workers had regarded the lowering of their wages as something inevitable, and took pains yet further to increase their skill, so that their earnings had once more come to represent a good average wage.

Now, immediately after the winter slackness, there were rumors in circulation that the manufacturers intended once more to decrease the rate of pay. But this time the men had no intention of accommodating themselves to the decrease. Their resentment against the unrighteousness of this proceeding went to their heads; they were very near demonstrating at the mere rumor. Pelle, however, succeeded in persuading them that they were confronted by nothing more than foolish gossip for which no one was responsible. Afterward, when their fear had evaporated and all was again going as usual, they came to him and thanked him.

But on the next pay-day there was a notice from the office to the effect that the current rate of wages was not in accordance with the times—it was to be improved. This sounded absolutely innocent, but every one knew what lay behind it.

It was one of the first days of spring. The sun was shining into the vast workshop, casting great shafts of light across it, and in the blue haze pulleys and belts were revolving. The workers, as they stood at their work, were whistling in time with the many wheels and the ringing of metal. They were like a flock of birds, who have just landed on a familiar coast and are getting the spring.

Pelle was carrying in some raw material when the news came and extinguished all their joy. It was passed on a scrap of paper from man to man, brief and callous. The managers of the factory wanted to have nothing to do with the organization, but silently went behind it. All had a period of fourteen days in which to subscribe to the new tariff. “No arguments, if you please—sign, or go!” When the notice came to Pelle all eyes were turned upon him as though they expected a signal; tools were laid down, but the machinery ran idly for a time. Pelle read the notice and then bent over his work again.

During the midday pause they crowded about him. “What now?” they asked; and their eyes were fixed upon him, while their hands were trembling. “Hadn’t we better pack up and go at once? This shearing will soon be too much for us, if they do it every time a little wool has grown on us.”

“Wait!” said Pelle. “Just wait! Let the other side do everything, and let us see how far they will go. Behave as if nothing had happened, and get on with your work. You have the responsibility of wives and children!”

They grumblingly followed his advice, and went back to their work. Pelle did not wonder at them; there had been a time when he too would throw down his work if any one imposed on him, even if everything had gone to the devil through it. But now he was responsible for many—which was enough to make a man prudent. “Wait!” he told them over and over again. “To-morrow we shall know more than we do to-day—it wants thinking over before we deal with it!”

So they put the new tariff aside and went to work as though nothing had happened. The management of the factory treated the matter as settled; and the directors went about with a contented look. Pelle wondered at his comrades’ behavior; after a few days they were in their usual spirits, indulging in all kinds of pastimes during their meal-time.

As soon as the whistle sounded at noon the machinery stopped running, and the workers all dropped their tools. A few quickly drew their coats on, intending to go home for a mouthful of warm food, while some went to the beer-cellars of the neighborhood. Those who lived far from their homes sat on the lathe-beds and ate their food there. When the food was consumed they gathered together in groups, gossiping, or chaffing one another. Pelle often made use of the midday rest to run over to the “Ark” in order to greet Father Lasse, who had obtained work in one of the granaries and was now able to get along quite nicely.

One day at noon Pelle was standing in the midst of a group of men, making a drawing of a conceited, arrogant foreman with a scrap of chalk on a large iron plate. The drawing evoked much merriment. Some of his comrades had in the meantime been disputing as to the elevating machinery of a submarine. Pelle rapidly erased his caricature and silently sketched an elevation of the machinery in question. He had so often seen it when the vessel lay in the harbor at home. The others were obliged to admit that he was right.

There was a sudden silence as one of the engineers passed through the workshop. He caught sight of the drawing and asked whose work it was.

Pelle had to go to the office with him. The engineer asked him all sorts of questions, and was amazed to learn that he had never had lessons in drawing. “Perhaps we could make use of you upstairs here,” he said. “Would you care for that?”

Pelle’s heart gave a sudden leap. This was luck, the real genuine good fortune that seized upon its man and lifted him straightway into a region of dazzling radiance! “Yes,” he stammered, “yes, thank you very much!” His emotion was near choking him.

“Then come to-morrow at seven—to the drawing-office,” said the engineer. “No, what’s to-day? Saturday. Then Monday morning.” And so the affair was settled, without any beating about the bush! There was a man after Pelle’s own heart!

When he went downstairs the men crowded about him, in order to hear the result. “Now your fortune’s made!” they said; “they’ll put you to machine-drawing now, and if you know your business you’ll get independent work and become a constructor. That’s the way Director Jeppesen got on; he started down here on the moulding-floor, and now he’s a great man!” Their faces were beaming with delight in his good fortune. He looked at them, and realized that they regarded him as capable of anything.

He spent the rest of the day as in a dream, and hurried home to share the news with Ellen. He was quite confused; there was a surging in his ears, as in childhood, when life suddenly revealed one of its miracles to him. Ellen flung her arms round his neck in her joy; she would not let him go again, but held him fast gazing at him wonderingly, as in the old days. “I’ve always known you were intended for something!” she said, looking at him with pride. “There’s no one like you! And now, only think. But the children, they must know too!” And she snatched little sister from her sleep, and informed her what had happened. The child began to cry.

“You are frightening her, you are so delighted,” said Pelle, who was himself smiling all over his face.

“But now—now we shall mix with genteel people,” said Ellen suddenly, as she was laying the table. “If only I can adapt myself to it! And the children shall go to the middle-class school.”

When Pelle had eaten he was about to sit down to his cobbling. “No!” said Ellen decidedly, taking the work away, “that’s no work for you any longer!”

“But it must be finished,” said Pelle; “we can’t deliver half-finished work!”

“I’ll soon finish it for you; you just put your best clothes on; you look like a—”

“Like a working-man, eh?” said Pelle, smiling.

Pelle dressed himself and went off to the “Ark” to give Father Lasse the news. Later he would meet the others at his father-in-law’s. Lasse was at home, and was eating his supper. He had fried himself an egg over the stove, and there was beer and brandy on the table. He had rented a little room off the long corridor, near crazy Vinslev’s; there was no window, but there was a pane of glass over the door leading into the gloomy passage. The lime was falling from the walls, so that the cob was showing in great patches.

“Well, well,” said Lasse, delighted, “so it’s come to this! I’ve often wondered to myself why you had been given such unprofitable talents—such as lying about and painting on the walls or on paper—you, a poor laborer’s son. Something must be intended by that, I used to tell myself, in my own mind; perhaps it’s the gift of God and he’ll get on by reason of it! And now it really seems as if it’s to find its use.”

“It’s not comfortable for you here, father!” said Pelle. “But I shall soon take you away from here, whether you like it or not. When we’ve paid off a few of the winter’s debts we shall be moving into a three-roomed apartment, and then you’ll have a room for your own use; but you mustn’t go to work any longer then. You must be prepared for that.”

“Yes, yes, I’ve nothing against living with you, so long as I’m not taking the bread out of others’ mouths. Ah, no, Pelle, it won’t be difficult for me to give up my work; I have overworked myself ever since I could crawl; for seventy years almost I’ve toiled for my daily bread— and now I’m tired! So many thanks for your kind intentions. I shall pass the time well with the children. Send me word whenever you will.”

The news was already known in the “Ark,” and the inmates came up to wish him luck as he was leaving. “You won’t he running in here any more and gossiping with us when once you are settled in your new calling,” they said. “That would never do! But don’t quite forget all about us just because we are poor!”

“No, no, Pelle has been through so many hungry times with us poor folks; he’s not one of those who forget old friendship!” they themselves replied.

Only now, when he had left the “Ark,” did he realize that there was something to which he was bidding farewell. It was the cordial community with all his kind, their radiant faith in him, and his own belief in his mission there; he had known a peculiar joy in the half-embittered recklessness, the community of feeling, and the struggle. Was he not, so to speak, the Prince of poverty, to whom they all looked up, and of whom they all expected that he would lead them into a strange world? And could he justify himself for leaving them all in the lurch because of his own good fortune? Perhaps he was really appointed to lead the movement—perhaps he was the only one who could do so!

This belief had always been faintly glimmering in the back of his mind, had stood behind his endurance in the conflict, and behind all the gladness with which he bore privation. Was he in his arrogance to repudiate the place that had formed him? No, he was not so blatant as all that! There was plenty beside himself capable of seeing the movement through—and Fortune had tapped him on the shoulder. “March forward, Pelle!” an inward voice exhorted him. “What have you to consider? You have no right to thrust success away from you? Do you want to ruin yourself without profiting others? You have been a good comrade, but here your ways divide. God Himself has given you talent; even as a child you used to practise it; no one will gain by your remaining poor. Choose your own path!”

Yes, Pelle had chosen readily enough! He knew very well that he must accept this good fortune, whatever the world might say to it. Only it hurt him to leave the others behind! He was bound to poverty by such intimate ties; he felt the solidarity of the poor so keenly that it hurt him to tear himself away. Common cares had made him a man, and the struggle had given him a peculiar and effective strength. But now he would attend no more meetings! It would be droll indeed if he were to have nothing more to do with the Cause, but were to belong to the other side—he, Pelle, who had been a flaming torch! No, he would never leave them in the lurch, that he knew; even if he were to climb ever so high—and he entertained no doubts as to that—he would always feel for his old comrades and show them the way to obtain good relations between worker and employer.

Ellen saw how serious he was—perhaps she guessed that he was feeling remorseful. She would help him to get over that.

“Can’t we have your father here to-morrow?” she said. “He can lie on the long chair in the living-room until we move into our new home. It isn’t right to let him stay where he is, and in your new situation you couldn’t do it.”

XXVII

The unrest increased in the workshops round about; no one who had anything to do with the organization felt really secure. It was evidently the intention of the employers to drive the workers to extremes, and thereby to force them to break the peace. “They want to destroy the trades unions, so that they can scrape the butter off our bread again,” said the workers. “They think it’ll be easier now that the winter has made us thankful for a dry crust! But that’s an infernal lie!”

The masses grew more and more embittered; everywhere they were ready for a fight, and asked nothing better than to plunge into it. The women wept and shuddered; most of them understood only that the sufferings of the winter were going to begin all over again. They took desperate steps to prevent this; they threw their shawls over their heads and rushed off to the offices, to the manufacturers, and pleaded with them to avert the disaster. The central Committee counselled a peaceful demeanor and caution. Everything depended upon their having the right on their side in the opinion of the public.

It was easy for Pelle to follow all that was happening, although he now stood outside the whole movement. He went to work in his good clothes and elastic-sided boots, and did not need to arrive before seven, while the others had to be there at six—which at once altered his point of view.

He would soon be trusted with rule and compasses; for the present he was kept busy copying a few worn-out working-drawings, or “filling in.” He felt in a curiously exalted frame of mind—as though he had been slightly intoxicated; this was the first time in his life that he had been employed on work that was of a clean nature and allowed him to wear good clothes. It was particularly curious to survey life from where he stood; a new perspective lay open before him. The old life had nothing in prospect but a miserable old age; but this led upward. Here he could achieve what he willed—even the highest place! What if he finally crept up to the very topmost point, and established an eight-hour day and a decent day’s wage? Then he would show them that one could perfectly well climb up from below without forgetting his origin and becoming a bloodsucker! They should still drink to the health of Pelle, their good comrade, although he would have left their ranks.

At home there was much to be done; as soon as he crossed the threshold he was the prisoner of Ellen’s hundred and one schemes. He must have a new suit of clothes—a gray suit for the office, and more linen; and at least twice a week he must go to the barber; he could no longer sit down and scrape himself with an old razor with an edge like a saw. Pelle was made to feel that it was not so easy after all to become an “upper- classer,” as he called it.

And all this cost money. There was the same searching, the same racking of one’s brains to find the necessary shillings as during the dearth of the winter famine; but this time it was quite amusing; there was a cheerful purpose in it all, and it would only last until he had properly settled down. Lasse looked very respectable; he was wearing Pelle’s second-best suit, which Ellen had cleaned for him, and a black watered silk cravat, with a white waterproof collar, and well-polished slippers on his feet. These last were his old watertight boots—those in which Pelle had left Stone Farm. They were still in existence, but had been cut down to form house-slippers. The legs of them now formed part of a pair of clogs.

Lasse was happiest with the children, and he looked quite an aged grandfather now, with his wrinkled face and his kind glance, which was now a little weak-sighted. When Young Lasse hid himself in the opposite corner of the room Father Lasse could not see him, and the young rascal took advantage of the fact; he could never understand those eyes, which could not see farther than across the table, and was always asking questions about them.

“It’s because I have seen too much misery in my life,” the old man would always reply.

Otherwise he was quite overflowing with happiness, and his old worn-out body manifested its gratitude, for he began to put on flesh again; and his cheeks had soon grown quite full. He had a peculiar knack for looking after the children; Pelle and Ellen could feel quite easy as they went about their multitudinous affairs. There were a hundred things that had to be seen to before they could move into the new home. They thought of raising a loan of a few hundred kroner. “Father will go security for us,” said Ellen.

“Yes, then I should have the means of taking proper drawing-lessons,” said Pelle; “I particularly need to get thoroughly grounded.”

On Saturday the term of the old tariff expired. The temper of the workers was badly strained, but each completed his work, and contained himself and waited. At noon the foreman went round asking each man for his answer. They refused all information, as agreed, but in the afternoon three men formed a deputation and entered the office, asking if they could speak with the manager. As he entered Munck, the engine-driver, stepped forward as spokesman, and began: “We have come in the name of our comrades.” He could get no further; the manager let fly at him, pointing to the stairs, and crying, “I don’t argue with my work-people!”

So they went down again. The men stared up at them—this was quick work! The burly Munck moved his lips, as though he were speaking, but no one could hear a word on account of the frightful din of the machinery. With a firm stride he went through the shop, picked up a hammer, and struck three blows on the great steel gong. They sounded like the stroke of doom, booming through the whole factory. At the same moment the man’s naked, blackened arms were lifted to strike the belts from the live pulleys. The machinery ceased running, and the roar of it died away; it was as still as though Death had passed through the workshop. The dense network of belts that crossed the shop in all directions quivered and hung slack; the silence yawned horribly in the great room.

The foremen ran from bench to bench, shouting and hardly knowing what to do. Word was sent to the office, while the workers went to their buckets and washed themselves, silent and melancholy as a funeral procession. Their faces were uncommunicative. Did they perhaps foresee that those three blows were the signal for a terrible conflict? Or were they merely following their first angry impulse? They knew enough, at all events; it was stamped upon their faces that this was fate—the inevitable. They had summoned the winter because they were driven to it, and the winter would return once more to ravage his victims.

They reappeared, washed and clean, each with his bundle under his arm, and stood in silence waiting their turn to be paid. The foreman ran to and fro apportioning the wages with nervous hands, comparing time-sheets and reckoning the sum due to each. The manager came down the stairs of his office, proud and unapproachable, and walked through the shop; the workers made way for him. He looked sharply around him, as though he would imprint the likeness of every individual worker on his mind, laid his hand on the shoulder of one of the foremen, and said in a loud voice, so that all heard him, “Make haste, now, Jacobsen, so that we can be rid of these fellows quickly!” The workers slowly turned their serious faces toward him, and here and there a fist was clenched. They left the factory one by one, as soon as they were paid.

Outside they gathered in little groups, and relieved their feelings by giving vent to significant exclamations. “Did you see the old man? He was savage, he was; he’ll hold out quite a while before we get back again!”

Pelle was in a curious frame of mind; he knew that now the fight had begun; first blood had been drawn, and one blow would follow on another. Young Lasse, who heard his step on the stairs, ran into his arms as he reached home; but Pelle did not notice him.

“You are so solemn!” said Ellen, “has anything happened?” He told her quietly.

“Good God!” she cried, shuddering. “Now the unemployment will begin all over again! Thank God it doesn’t affect us!” Pelle did not reply. He sat down in silence to his supper; sat hanging his head as though ashamed of himself.

XXVIII

A most agitating time followed. For a number of years the conflict had, so to speak, been preparing itself, and the workers had made ready for it, had longed for it, had sought to precipitate it, in order to determine once for all whether they were destined always to be slaves and to stand still, or whether there was a future for them. Now the conflict had come—and had taken them all by surprise; they would willingly have concluded peace just now.

But there was no prospect of a peaceful solution of any kind. The employers found the occasion favorable for setting their house in order; the matter was to be fought out now! This was as good as telling the men to go. Every morning there was news of a fresh lot of workers turned into the streets, or leaving of their own accord.

One trade involved another. The iron-masters made common cause with the "Denmark" factory, and declared a lock-out of the machine-smiths; then the moulders and pattern-makers walked out, and other branches of the industry joined the strike; they all stood by one another.

Pelle could survey them all from his point of vantage. Old memories of battle rose to his mind; his blood grew warm, and he caught himself, up in the drawing-office, making plans of campaign for this trade or that. His was the quick-fighting blood that assumes the offensive, and he noted their blunders; they were not acting with sufficient energy. They were still exhausted, and found it hard to reconcile themselves to another period of unemployment. They made no counter-attack that could do any damage. The employers, who were acting energetically under the leadership of the iron industry, enjoyed from the beginning a considerable ascendancy. The "Denmark" factory was kept running, but the trade was on its last legs.

It was kept alive by the help of a few strike-breakers, and every one of the officials of the company who had the requisite knowledge was set to work downstairs; even the manager of the machine department had donned a blouse and was working a lathe. It was a matter of sapping the courage of the strikers, while proving to them that it was possible to do without them.

In the drawing-office and the counting-house all was confusion; the strike-breakers had all to be obtained from abroad; while others ran away and had to be replaced. Under these circumstances Pelle had to look after himself and assimilate what he could. This did not suit him; it was a long way to the top, and one couldn't learn quickly enough.

One day he received the summons to come downstairs and lend a hand in the centrifugal separator department. The workers had made common cause with the machine-smiths. This summons aroused him from delightful dreams of the future. He was swiftly awakened. "I am no strike-breaker!" he replied, offended.

Then the engineer himself came up. "Do you realize that you are refusing to perform your duty?" he said.

"I can't take work away from my comrades," replied Pelle, in a low voice.

"They may think that very nice of you. But now those men down there are no longer your comrades. You are a salaried employee, and as such you must serve the firm wherever you are asked to do so."

"But I can't do that! I can't strike the bread out of other folks' hands."

"Then your whole future is at stake. Think a moment, man! I am sorry for you, for you might have done something here; but I can't save you from the results of your own obstinacy. We require absolute obedience here."

The engineer stood waiting for his answer, but Pelle had nothing to say.

"Now, I'll go so far as to give you till to-morrow to think over it—although that's against the rules of the factory. Now think it over well, and don't hang on to this stupid sentimentality of yours. The first thing is to stand by those you belong to, through thick and thin. Well, till to-morrow."

Pelle went. He did not want to go home before the usual time, only to be met with a string of unseasonable questions. They would come soon enough in any case. So he strolled through the mercantile quarter and gazed at the shipping. Well, now his dream of success was shattered—and it had been a short one. He could see Ellen's look of disappointment, and an utter mental depression came over him. He was chiefly sorry for her; as for him, there was nothing to be said—it was fate! It never occurred to him for a moment to choose between his comrades and the future; he had quite forgotten that the engineer had given him time for reflection.

At the usual time he strolled homeward. Ellen welcomed him cheerfully and light-heartedly; she was living in a continual thrill of delight; and it was quite touching to see what trouble she was taking to fit herself for a different stratum of society. Her movements were delightful to watch, and her mouth had assumed an expression which was intended to betoken refinement. It suited her delightfully, and Pelle was always seized by a desire to kiss her lips and so disarrange the expression; but to-day he sat down to his supper in silence. Ellen was accustomed to put aside his share of the midday dinner, and to warm it up for him when he came home in the evening; at midday he ate bread-and- butter in the office.

“When we have once got properly settled we’ll all have dinner at six o’clock; that is much more comfortable.”

“That’s what the fine folks do, I’ve been told,” said Lasse. “That will be pleasant, to give it a try.”

Lasse was sitting with Young Lasse on his knee, telling him funny stories. Little Lasse laughed, and every time he laughed his sister screeched with delight in her cradle, as though she understood it all. “What is it to be now, then—the story of the old wife? Then you must listen carefully, or your ears won’t grow! Well, then, the old wife.”

“Wife!” said Young Lasse, with the very accent of the old man.

“Yes, the old wife!” repeated Lasse, and then all three laughed.

“‘What shall I do first?’ said the old wife, when she went to work; ‘eat or sleep? I think I’ll eat first. What shall I do first?’ asked the old wife, when she had eaten; ‘shall I sleep first or work? I think I’ll sleep first.’ And then she slept, until it was evening, and then she went home and went to bed.”

Ellen went up to Pelle and laid her hand on his shoulder.

“I’ve been to see my former mistress, and she is going to help me to turn my wedding-dress into a visiting-dress,” she said. “Then we shall only need to buy a frock-coat for you.”

Pelle looked up slowly. A quiver passed over his features. Poor thing! She was thinking about visiting-dresses! “You can save yourself the trouble,” he said, in a low voice. “I’ve finished with the office. They asked me to turn strike-breaker, so I left.”

“Ach, ach!” said Lasse, and he was near letting the child fall, his withered hands were trembling so. Ellen gazed at Pelle as though turned to stone. She grew paler and paler, but not a sound came from her lips. She looked as though she would fall dead at his feet.

XXIX

Pelle was once more among his own people; he did not regret that fortune had withdrawn her promise; at heart he was glad. After all, this was where he belonged. He had played a great part in the great revolt—was he to be excluded from the battle?

The leaders welcomed him. No one could draw the people as he could, when it came to that; the sight of him inspired them with a cheerful faith, and gave them endurance, and a fearless pugnacity. And he was so skilled, too, in making plans!

The first thing every morning he made his way to the lock-out office, whence the whole campaign was directed; here all the many threads ran together. The situation for the moment was considered, men who had precise knowledge of the enemy’s weak points were called together, in order to give information, and a comprehensive plan of campaign was devised. At secret meetings, to which trustworthy members of the various trades were invited, all sorts of material for offence was collected— for the attack upon the employers, and for carrying on the newspaper agitation. It was a question of striking at the blood-suckers, and those who were loose in the saddle! There were trades which the employers kept going for local reasons—these must be hunted out and brought to a standstill, even at the cost of increasing unemployment. They were making energetic preparations for war, and it was not the time to be squeamish about their weapons. Pelle was in his element. This was something better than ruining a single shoemaker, even if he was the biggest in the city! He was rich in ideas, and never wavered in carrying them into execution. Warfare was warfare!

This was the attacking side; but, permeated as he was by a sense of community, he saw clearly that the real battle was for maintenance. The utmost foresight and widely comprehensive instructions were required if the masses were to last out the campaign; in the long run it would be a question of endurance! Foreign strike-breakers had to be kept at a distance by prompt communications to the party newspapers of the different countries, and by the setting of pickets in the railway stations and on the steamers. For the first time the workers took the telegraph into their own service. The number of the foreign strikebreakers must by every possible means be kept down, and in the first place supplies must be assured, so that the unemployed masses could keep famine at bay.

In a vision, Pelle had beheld the natural solidarity of the workers extended over the whole earth, and now this vision was of service to him. The leaders issued a powerful manifesto to the workers of Denmark; pointing to the abyss from which they had climbed and to the pinnacles of light toward which they were striving upward; and warning them, in impressive phrases, to stand firm and to hold together. A statement as to the origin of the lock-out and the intention which lay behind it was printed and distributed throughout the country, with appeal for assistance and support, in the name of freedom! And by means of appeals to the labor parties of foreign countries they reminded the people of the vast solidarity of labor. It was a huge machine to set in motion; federation had increased from one small trade union until it comprehended the whole kingdom, and now they were striving to comprehend the laboring populations of the whole world, in order to win them over as confederates in the campaign. And men who had risen from the masses and were still sharing the same conditions, were managing all this! They had kept step with the rapid growth of the movement, and they were still growing.

The feeling that they were well prepared inspired them with courage and the prospect of a favorable result. From the country offers of employment for the locked-out workers daily reached the central office. Money was sent too—and assistance in the form of provisions; and many families outside the capital offered to take in the children of unemployed parents. Remittances of money came from abroad, and the liberal circles of the capital sympathized with the workers; and in the workers’ quarter of the city shopkeepers and publicans began to collect for the Federation.

The workers displayed an extraordinary readiness to undergo sacrifices. Books of coupons were circulated everywhere in the workshops, and thousands of workers gave each week a fourth part of their modest wages. The locked-out workers left their work with magnificent courage; the sense of community made them heroic. Destitute though they were as a result of the hard winter, they agreed, during the first two weeks, to do without assistance. Many of them spared the treasury altogether, helping themselves as well as they could, seeking a little private employment, or going out into the country to work on the land. The young unmarried men went abroad.

The employers did what they could to cope with all these shifts. They forbade the merchants and contractors to supply those who worked at home on their own account with materials for their work; and secret agents were despatched all over the country to the small employers and the farmers, in order to prejudice them against the locked-out workers; and the frontier of the country was covered with placards.

Their intention was obvious enough—an iron ring was to be drawn round the workers, and once imprisoned therein they could do nothing but keep starvation at bay until they had had enough, and surrendered. This knowledge increased their resistance. They were lean with wandering through the wilderness, but they were just in the mood for a fight. Many of them had not until now understood the entire bearings of the campaign; the new ideas had been stirring within them, but in a fragmentary and isolated condition—as an expression of a dumb feeling that the promised land was at hand at last. Often it was just one single word that had fixed itself in their minds, and had to serve to express the whole position. Any one might approach them with plausible arguments and strike it from under them, and shatter the theory to which they had clung; but faith itself remained, and the far-reaching concord; deep in their hearts was the dim, immovable knowledge that they were chosen to enter into the time of promise.

And now everything was gradually becoming plain to them. The battle shed light both backward and forward. It illumined their existence in all its harshness. Life was the same as it had always been, but now it was revealed so plainly that all could see it. All the many whips and scorns of life had been bound together in one vast scourge—the scourge of famine—which was to drive them back into the midst of poverty! Want was to be set upon them in its compactest form! This was the last, most extreme weapon; it confirmed them in the certainty that they were now on the right track, and near the goal. The night was always darkest before the break of day!

There were all sorts of things that they could understand now. People used to go about saying that the Germans were the hereditary enemy, and that the Fatherland was taking the lead of all other countries. But now the employers were sending to Germany for troops of hirelings, and were employing them to drive their own countrymen into a state of poverty. All that talk about patriotic feeling had been only fine words! There were only two nations—the oppressors and the oppressed!

That was how things appeared on closer inspection! One could never be very sure of what those above one told one—and yet all teaching came from them! A brave lot the clergy were—they knew very well which master they had to serve! No, the people ought to have had their own schools, where the children would learn the new ideas instead of religion and patriotism! Then there would long ago have been an end of the curse of poverty! So they profited by the campaign and their compulsory idleness in order to think things over, and to endeavor to solve all manner of problems.

The specter of hunger presently began to go from house to house, but the result was not what was expected; it awakened only hatred and defiance. It was precisely in this direction that they were invincible! In the course of time they had learned to suffer—they had learned nothing more thoroughly; and this came to their help now. They had an inexhaustible fund to draw upon, from which they could derive their strength to resist; they were not to be defeated. Weren’t they nearly ready to surrender? Very well—another thousand workers on the streets! But the distress, to all appearance, became no greater than before; they had learned to endure their privations in decency—that was their share in the increasing culture. One saw no obtrusive signs of want; they compromised with it in secret, and appeared full of courage. This weakened the faith of their opponents in the infallible nature of their means.

They even adopted hunger as their own weapon, boycotting the employers and their dependents, striking the enemy a blow they were familiar with! Many a great employer’s door was marked with a cross, and all behind it were doomed to ruin.

It was as though the courage of the people increased in proportion as famine threatened them more closely. No one could tell how long this would last; but they would make hay as long as the sun shone! Their clothes were still tidy, and in the early spring there were many excursions; the people went forth singing, with banners at their head, and singing they came home.

This was the first time they had ever enjoyed their freedom, although there was work enough to be done—it was their first holiday! As they held the whip hand through their purchasing capacity, they boycotted all the business concerns of their own quarter which did not array themselves on the side of the workers. Their hatred was aroused; it was “for us or against us”; all must declare themselves by taking sides. The small shopkeepers concealed their convictions—if they had any—and rivalled one another in friendliness toward the workers. On their counters lay books of coupons for those who would contribute to the funds, and some of them gave a percentage of their own takings. There was plenty of time to keep a strict eye on such; the people’s hatred was aroused at last, and it grew more and more bitter.

The leaders held back and counselled prudence. But there was something intoxicating in this battle for bare life—and for happiness! Something that went to the head and tempted them to hazard all on the cast of the dice. The leaders had given great attention to the problem of restricting the number of idle hands—it was difficult for them to procure sufficient funds. But those workers who still had work to do forsook it, in order to join themselves, in blind solidarity, to their locked-out comrades. They thought it was required of them!

One day the masons made an unexpected demand that an hour should be struck off the day’s work. They received a refusal. But that evening they knocked off at six instead of seven. The men were unreasonable: to demand shorter hours in the slack season following on a hard winter!

This move took the leaders by surprise. They feared that it might diminish the general sympathy for the workers. It surprised them particularly that the prudent and experienced Stolpe had not opposed this demand. As president of the organization for many years, he had great influence over the men; he must try to persuade them to go to work again. Pelle opened negotiations with him.

“That is not my business,” Stolpe replied. “I did not propose the cessation of work, but at the general meeting the majority was in favor of it—and with that there’s no more to be said. I don’t oppose my comrades.”

“But that’s perverse of you,” said Pelle. “You are the responsible person, and your trade has the most favorable conditions of labor—and you ought to remember the conflict in which we are engaged.”

“Yes, the conflict! Of course we thought of it. And you are right, I have a good and comfortable home, because my craft is in a good position; and we masons have obtained good conditions, and we earn good money. But are we to enjoy ourselves and look on while the others are fighting for dry bread? No, we are with them when it comes to a fight!”

“But the support you were giving—it was ten thousand kroner a week, and now we shall have to do without it! Your action may have incalculable consequences for us. You must put an end to this, father-in-law! You must see that the majority doesn’t have its way.”

“That would be diplomatic, wouldn’t it? But you seem anxious to side with our opponents! We hold the suffrage in honor, and it is the suffrage that is to reform society. If once one begins to meddle with the voting-papers!—”

“But that isn’t necessary in the least! The people aren’t really clear as to what they are doing—you can’t expect any quickness of perception from them! You could demand a fresh vote—if I could first have a talk with them about the campaign!”

“So you think we couldn’t see what we were doing!” replied Stolpe, much offended. “But we can accept the consequences—we can do that! And you want to get up on the platform and talk them silly, and then they are to vote the other way round! No, no nonsense here! They voted according to their convictions—and with that the matter’s settled, whether it’s right or wrong! It won’t be altered!”

Pelle had to give in; the old man was not to be moved from his point of view. The masons increased the unemployed by a few thousand men.

The employers profited by this aggression, which represented them to the public in a favorable aspect, in order to strike a decisive blow. The universal lock-out was declared.

XXX

At home matters were going badly with Pelle. They had not yet recovered from the winter when he was drawn into the conflict; and the preparations for his new position had plunged them into debt. Pelle received the same relief as the other locked-out workers—ten to twelve kroner a week—and out of this Ellen had to provide them with food and firing. She thought he ought, as leader, to receive more than the others, but Pelle did not wish to enjoy other conditions than those allotted to the rest.

When he came home, thoroughly exhausted after his strenuous day, he was met by Ellen’s questioning eyes. She said nothing, but her eyes obstinately repeated the same question day after day. It was as though they asked him: “Well, have you found employment?” This irritated him, for she knew perfectly well that he was not looking for work, that there was none to look for. She knew what the situation was as well as he did, but she persistently behaved as though she knew nothing of all that he and his comrades were endeavoring to achieve, and when he turned the conversation on to that subject she preserved a stubborn silence; she did not wish to hear anything about it.

When the heat of battle rose to Pelle’s head, there was no one with whom he would rather have shared his opinions and his plans of campaign. In other directions she had urged him on, and he had felt this as a confirmation and augmentation of his own being; but now she was silent. She had him and her home and the children, and all else besides was nothing to her. She had shared the privations of the winter with him and had done so cheerfully; they were undeserved. But now he could get work whenever he wished. She had resumed her dumb opposition, and this had an oppressive effect upon him; it took something from the joy of battle.

When he reached home and related what had been said and done during the day, he addressed himself to Lasse. She moved about the home immersed in her own cares, as though she were dumb; and she would suddenly interrupt his conversation with the statement that this or that was lacking. So he weaned himself from his communicative habits, and carried on all his work away from home. If there was writing to be done, or if he had negotiations to accomplish, he selected some tavern where he would be free of her constraining presence. He avoided telling her of his post of confidence, and although she could not help hearing about it when away from home she behaved as if she knew nothing. For her he was still merely Pelle the working-man, who shirked supporting his wife and children. This obstinate attitude pained him; and the bitterness of his home life made him throw himself with greater energy into the struggle. He became a hard and dangerous opponent.

Lasse used to gaze at them unhappily. He would willingly have intervened, but he did not know how to set about it; and he felt himself superfluous. Every day he donned his old clothes and went out in order to offer his services as casual laborer, but there were plenty of idle hands younger than his. And he was afraid of obtaining employment that might take the bread out of other folks’ mouths. He could not understand the campaign, and he found it difficult to understand what was forbidden ground; but for Pelle he felt an unconditional respect. If the lad said this or the other, then it was right; even if one had to go hungry for it—the lad was appointed to some special end.

One day he silently left the house; Pelle scarcely noticed it, so absorbed was he. “He must have gone back to the old clothes woman at the ‘Ark,’” he thought; “it’s by no means amusing here.”

Pelle had charge of the external part of the campaign; he knew nothing of bookkeeping or administration, but simply threw himself into the fight. Even as a child of eight he had been faced with the problem of mastering life by his own means, and he had accomplished it, and this he profited by now. He enjoyed the confidence of the masses; his speech sounded natural to them, so that they believed in him even when they did not understand him. If there was any one who did not wish to follow where Pelle led, he had to go just the same; there was no time just now for lengthy argument; where civil words didn’t answer he took more energetic means.

The campaign consisted in the first place of the federation of the masses, and Pelle was continually away from home; wherever anything was afoot, there he put in an appearance. He had inaugurated a huge parade, every morning all the locked-out workers reported themselves at various stations in the city, and there the roll was called, every worker being entered according to his Union. By means of this vast daily roll-call of nearly forty thousand men it was possible to discover which of them had deserted in order to act as strike-breakers. A few were always absent, and those who had a good excuse had to establish it in order to draw their strike-pay. Pelle was now here, now there, and always unexpected, acting on impulse as he did. “Lightning Pelle,” they called him, on account of the suddenness of his movements. His actions were not based upon long deliberations; nevertheless, he had a radical comprehension of the entire movement; one thing grew out of another, naturally, until the whole was more than any conscious intelligence could comprehend. And Pelle grew with it, and by virtue of his impulsiveness was a summary of it all.

There was plenty to be done; at the roll-call all those who failed to attend had to be entered, and those who knew anything about them must give information. This man had gone abroad; that one had gone into the country, to look for work; so far, so good. If any fell away and acted as strike-breaker, instructions were immediately given for his punishment. In this way Pelle kept the ranks closed. There were many weak elements among them—degenerate, ignorant fellows who didn’t understand the importance of the movement, but a strong controlling hand and unfailing justice made it a serious matter for them to break away.

At the outset he had organized with Stolpe’s assistance a large body of the best workers as pickets or watchmen. These were zealous, fanatical members of the various trades, who had taken part in the organization of their own professional organization, and knew every individual member thereof. They stationed themselves early in the morning in the neighborhood of the various places of employment, marking those who went to work there and doing their best to prevent them. They were in constant conflict with the police, who put every possible obstacle in their way.

Morten he met repeatedly. Privation had called him out of his retirement. He did not believe that the campaign would lead to better conditions, and on that account he took no part in it. But want he knew as did no other; his insight in that direction was mysteriously keen. The distribution of relief in the form of provisions could not have been entrusted to better hands. He superintended the whole business of distribution, but what he liked best was to stand, knife in hand, cutting up pork for the families of locked-out workers. The portions were strictly weighed; none the less, the women always thronged about him. There was a blessing in that faint smile of his—they felt sure his portions were the biggest!

Morten and Pelle were in disagreement on almost every point. Even now, when everything depended on a strict cohesion, Morten could never be trusted to behave with severity. “Remember, they aren’t of age yet,” he would say continually. And it could not be gainsaid that there were many to whom the conflict was unintelligible—they understood nothing of it, although otherwise they were thoughtful and intelligent enough. These were mostly people who had come in from the provinces at a somewhat advanced age; indeed some had been small employers there. For them trades unionism was a sort of lynch law, and they profited by the strike in all simplicity in order to obtain well-paid employment. When they were reviled as strikebreakers or “gentlemen,” they laughed like little children who are threatened with a revolver. Slow-witted as they were, in this respect, they took the consequences to heart, although they could not see the reason for them. These must be compelled to obey.

The iron industry was doing its utmost to keep going, as a trade which must fulfill its contracted engagements, under penalty of seeing the business fall into foreign hands. This industry had if possible to be disabled. The pickets were at work, and *The Working Man* published the names and addresses of the strike-breakers. When these left the factory they encountered a crowd of people who treated them with scorn and contempt; they had to be escorted by the police. But the resentment aroused by their treachery followed them home even to the barracks they lived in. The wives and children of the locked-out workers resumed the battle and carried on hostilities against the families of the strike-breakers, so that they had to move. One saw them of a night, with all their possessions on a handcart, trudging away to seek a new home under cover of the darkness. But the day revealed them, and again they were fugitives, until the police took them in hand and found lodging for them.

One day a large factory by the North Bridge resumed operations with the help of foreign labor and strike-breakers. Pelle set to work to prepare a warm reception for the workers when they went homeward, but in the course of the day a policeman who was friendly to the workers tipped him the wink that two hundred police would be concealed in a neighboring school, ready for the workers' departure.

In the afternoon people began to collect—unemployed workers, poor women, and children. They came early, for it well might be that the workers would be released an hour before their time, in order to avoid a clash, and they were missing nothing by waiting there. Finally several thousand people stood before the gates of the factory, and the police were moving to and fro through the crowd, which stood many men deep, but they had to give up the effort to drive them asunder. The street urchins began to make an uproar, and to egg the watchers on. They felt the need of warming themselves a little, so they gradually began to bait the police.

"Hullo, there!" suddenly shouted a mighty voice. "In the school over there are two hundred police, waiting for us to make a disturbance, so that they can come and use their truncheons on us. Hadn't we better leave them where they are? I think it's quite as well they should go back to school for a time!"

"Hurrah!" they cried. "Hurrah! Long live 'Lightning'!" A movement went through the crowd. "That's Pelle!" The whisper passed from mouth to mouth, and the women stood on tiptoe to see him.

Pelle and Stolpe were standing against a wall, surrounded by a few dozen pickets. The police went up to them and reprimanded them. They had orders to hinder the picketing, but they had no desire to meddle with Pelle. They lived in the workers' quarter, were at home there, and a word from him would make the city impossible for them.

The usual time for stopping work came round, but the workers were not released from the factory. The crowd used its wits to keep itself warm; punning remarks concerning strike-breakers and capitalists buzzed through the air. But suddenly an alarm ran through the crowd. The street urchins, who are always the first to know everything, were whistling between their fingers and running down the side streets. Then the crowd began to move, and the police followed at a quick march, keeping to the middle of the street. The factory had discharged the workers by a back door. They were moving down Guldberg Street by now, disheartened and with never a glance behind them, while a whole escort of police accompanied them. They were soon overtaken and brought home to the accompaniment of a sinister concert, which now and again was interrupted by cries of, "Three cheers for the gentlemen!"

The pickets walked in a long file, close to the procession, zealously occupied in noting each individual worker, while Pelle moved in the midst of the crowd, endeavoring to prevent over-hasty action. There was need to be careful. Several men were still in prison because during the winter they had come to blows with the strike-breakers, and the police had received stringent orders from the authorities. The press of the propertied classes was daily calling for stricter measures, demanding that every meeting in the streets, and especially before the gates of a factory, should be broken up by the police.

Now and then a strike-breaker parted from the squad and ran into the door of his dwelling, followed by a long whistle.

Among the workers was a solitary, elderly man, still powerful, whom Pelle recognized. He kept at the extreme edge of the police, walking heavily, with bowed head, along the pavement close to the houses. His hair was quite gray, and his gait was almost crippled. This was Mason Hansen, Stolpe's old comrade and fellow-unionist, whom Pelle had interviewed in the winter, in the hope of persuading him to refrain from strikebreaking.

"It's going badly with him," thought Pelle, involuntarily keeping his eyes on him. The results of strike-breaking had dealt hardly with him.

By St. Hans Street he turned the corner, winking at the policeman who was about to follow him, and went down the street alone, looking neither to right nor left, embarrassed, and with hanging head. Every time a child cried aloud, he started. Then he stood as though riveted to the ground, for in front of his door a heap of poverty-stricken household goods lay in the gutter. A crowd of gaping children stood round the heap, and in the midst of the group stood a youngish woman, with four children, who were keeping tearful watch over the heap of trash. The man pressed through the crowd and exchanged a few words with the woman, then clenched his fists and shook them threateningly at the tenement house.

Pelle went up to him. "Things aren't going well with you, comrade," he said, laying his hand on the other's shoulder. "And you are much too good for what you are doing. You had better come with me and re-enter the organization.”

The man slowly turned his head. “Oh, it’s you!” he said, shaking Pelle’s hand away with a jerk. “And you seem as cool and impudent as ever. Poverty hasn’t dealt hardly with you! It’s not at all a bad business, growing fat on the pence of the workers, eh?”

Pelle grew crimson with anger, but he controlled himself. “Your insults don’t hurt me,” he said. “I have gone hungry for the Cause while you have been playing the turncoat. But that will be forgotten if you’ll come with me.”

The man laughed bitterly, pointing at the tenement-house. “You’d better go and give them a medal. Three months now they’ve tormented me and made hell hot for my wife and children, in order to drive us away. And as that didn’t answer, they went to the landlord and forced him to give me notice. But Hansen is obstinate—he wouldn’t be shown the door. So now they’ve got the bailiffs to turn me out, see?” He gave a hollow laugh. “But these few sticks, why, we can soon carry them up again, damn it all! Shall we begin, mother?”

“I’ll willingly speak to the landlord. Remember, you are an old unionist.”

“An old—yes, I was in it from the very beginning.” The man drew himself proudly erect. “But for all that I don’t let my wife and children starve. So you want to go begging favors for me, eh? You be gone—at once, will you? Be off, to the devil, or I’ll beat you to a jelly with this!” He seized a table-leg; his eyes were quite blood-shot. His young wife went up to him and took his hand. “Hansen!” she said quietly. He let his weapon fall. Pelle felt the woman’s pleading eyes upon him, and went.

XXXI

When Pelle, tired to death, made his way homeward in the evening, he had lost the feeling of invincibility and his thoughts turned to Ellen.

In the daytime he felt neither hesitation nor certainty. When he set to work it was always with thousands behind him. He felt the great body of workers at his back, whether he was fighting in the open or waiting with close-buttoned coat to deal with the leaders of the opposing camp. But when he went home to Ellen he had only himself to rely on for support. And he could not get near her. Strongly as he was drawn by the life away from home, she still held the secret of his life in her hands. She was strong and would not be swept aside. He was forced to ponder over her nature and to search for a solution.

Pelle had to deal with countless numbers of families, and what he saw was not always edifying. Home was a conception which was only now forcing its way downward from the middle classes. Even in periods of normal employment the workers earned little enough when it came to providing a decent family life, and the women knew nothing of making a comfortable home. The man might be tidy and well-dressed when one met him out of doors, but if you went to his home it was always the same thing; a dark, grimy den and a worn-out wife, who moved about scolding amidst a swarm of children. Wages were enough for one only to live in comfort. The man represented the household out of doors. He must take sandwiches to his work, and he must have something decent too when he got home. The others managed with a little bread and coffee; it was of no use to talk of regular family meals. And the man must have clothes; he was the visible portion of the household, and he supported it. It was of no use to look for anything further in the way of ideas from these women; they saw nothing but unemployment and the want at home, and when the husband showed himself they drove him out of the house with their scolding ways. “You go out and meddle with everything you can think of that doesn’t concern us—politics and big talk—instead of doing your work properly and leaving the fools to squabble among themselves!” The result was that they did their work for the organization in the taverns. Many of them held positions of confidence, and Pelle went to the taverns to confer with them. They were dejected, when they arrived, and had before all else to be thawed out.

There Pelle came to them, with his brilliant hopes. When they lamented in their dejection, he promised great things of the future. “Our wives will soon see that we are in the right. The day will soon come when we shall be able to go home with a proper week’s wages, that will be enough for the whole family.”

“And suppose it doesn’t come off?” they would say.

“It will come off—if only we hold out!” he cried, smiting the table.

Yes, he might well see the bright side of things. He had a wife who came from a long-established home, who kept things clean and tidy for him, and knew how to make much do the work of little; the daughter of an old unionist who had grown up in the midst of the movement—a wife who saw her husband’s doings with understanding eyes; yes, he might well smile! As to the last, Pelle was silent.

In this particular she had accepted neither inheritance nor teaching; she was as she was, and she would never be different, whatever might pass over her head. Pelle was sacrificing wife and children to a fixed idea, in order not to leave a few indifferent comrades in the lurch! That, and the strike, and the severe condemnation of those who would not keep step, was, and remained, for her, so much tavern nonsense. It was something the workers had got into their heads as a result of talking when they were not precisely sober.

That was what it was, and it filled her heart with pain and mortification that she and hers should be set aside for people who were nothing to them. And this pain made her beautiful, and justified her in her own eyes.

She did not complain in words, and she was always careful to set before Pelle whatever the house could provide. He always found everything in order, and he understood what efforts it must cost her—considering the smallness of the means which she had at her disposal. There was no weak point in her defences; and this made the position still more oppressive; he could not evoke an explosion, a ventilation of her grievances; it was impossible to quarrel with her and make friends again.

Often he wished that Ellen would become neglectful, like so many others. But she was always attentive; the more the circumstances enabled her to condemn him, the more correctly did she behave.

If only he could have explained her lack of comprehension by supposing that her mind was barren and self-seeking! But in his eyes she had always been quite simple and single-minded, and yet her nature was to him a continual enigma! It was true she was not excessively benevolent or sympathetic where others were concerned; but on the other hand she asked nothing for herself—her thoughts were all for him and the children. He must admit that she had, without a thought, sacrificed everything to him—her home, her whole world—and that she had a right to ask something in return.

And she was still unchangeably the same. She was indifferent where she herself was concerned, if only Pelle and the children had something she was contented; she herself needed so little, yet she seemed to take enough when he watched her eating. Pelle often wondered that she retained her healthy appearance, although the food she ate was so inferior. Perhaps she helped herself in secret—but he drove the thought away, and was ashamed. She was always completely indifferent as to what she ate; she did not notice what it was, but served him and the children with the best of it—especially himself—yet she seemed to thrive. Yes, even now she gave the best to him. It was as though she was fulfilling some deep-rooted law of her nature, which was independent of their relations to one another. In this nothing could alter her habits. She might have been compared to a great beautiful bitch that lies attentively marking the appetite of her young, although none can tell, from her deliberate quiet, that her own bowels are twisted with hunger. If they left anything, she noticed it. “I have eaten,” she would say, so quietly that she succeeded as a rule in deceiving them. Yes, it made him feel desperate to think about it; the more he thought of it the more unendurable it was. She was sacrificing herself for him, yet she must condemn all his doings! She knew how to defy starvation far better than he—and she did not understand why they must go hungry!

But from all these painful deliberations she emerged always more prominently capable, incomprehensible, and beautiful in all her strangeness! And he would hurry home, full of burning longing and devotion, continually hoping that this time she would come to him glowing with love, to hide her eyes, full of confusion, on his shoulder. The disappointment only flung him yet more violently into the struggle; the longing of his heart for a tender, careless hand made his own hard.

He was always exerting himself to find some means of making money. At first, of course, there was no way, and he became so completely absorbed in the conflict that finally the question no longer occupied his mind. It lurked in his consciousness, like a voluptuous wish that merely tinged his daily existence; it was as though something within his mind had taken possession of his talent for design, and was always designing beautiful paper money and displaying it to his imagination.

One day when he reached home he found Widow Rasmussen tending the children and working on a pair of canvas shoes. Drunken Valde had left her again—had flown out into the spring! Ellen had gone out to work. A sudden pain shot through him. Her way of doing this, without saying a word to him, was like a blow in the face, and at first he was angry. But disloyalty was foreign to his nature. He had to admit that she was within her rights; and with that his anger evaporated, leaving him bewildered; something within him seemed tottering; surely this was a topsy-turvy world! “I might as well stay at home and look after the children,” he thought bitterly.

“I’ll stay with the children now, Madam Rasmussen!” he said. The woman put her work together.

“Yes, they’ve got a lot to go through,” she said, standing in the doorway. “I don’t myself understand what it’s all about, but one must always do something! That’s my motto. For things can’t be worse than they are. ‘Widow’! Pooh! They won’t let us behave ourselves! A man can scarcely look after himself, let alone a family, in this accursed world —and one needn’t call one’s self Madam to get children! Here have I been knocking about all my life, ruining my health and happiness, and have I earned as much from all my blackguards as would pay for the rags I’ve worn? No; I’ve had to beg them nicely of the fine folks for whom I do washing! Yes, they are ready to skin one alive—Madam Rasmussen has proved that. So I say, one must always try something! To-day the boy comes home and says, ‘Mother, they’ve put up the price of firewood again—an öre the two dozen!’ ‘What does that matter to us, boy? Can we buy two dozen at once?’ I say. ‘Yes, mother, but then the one dozen will cost an öre more.’ And eggs, they cost one krone twenty a score where the rich folks buy them—but here! ‘No, my dear madam, if you take two eggs you must pay fifteen öre!’ That makes eight öre for an egg, for if one takes the smallest quantity the profits aren’t in proportion. It’s hard to be poor. If it’s never going to be better, may the devil take him that’s made it all! That was a fine swear!”

Pelle sat playing with Young Lasse. Madam Rasmussen’s words had aroused something in him. That was the eternal complaint, the old, old cry! Whenever he heard it, the world of the poor man became even more plainly visible for what it was—and he ought to know it! It was a frightful abyss that he looked down into; it was bottomless; and it seemed forever to reveal fresh depths. And he was right—he was right.

He sat carelessly drawing something for the child on a scrap of paper, thinking of things quite different; but involuntarily the drawing took shape from within his hand. “That’s money, that’s money!” cried Young Lasse, clapping his hands. Pelle waked up and examined his drawing; sure enough, there was a rough sketch of a ten-kroner note! It flattered his father’s heart that the child had recognized it; and he was seized by the desire to see how like it was. But where in all the world was he to get a “blue”? Pelle, who at this time superintended the collection and distributing of millions, did not possess ten kroner! The pipe! The pipe! That was what the boy got his idea from! His old Christmas present, queerly enough, had a ten-kroner note on the bowl—and that gave him an idea! He got it out and compared it; it was a long time since he had smoked the pipe—he couldn’t afford it. He began eagerly to fill in the drawing while Young Lasse stood by, amusing himself by watching the rapid movements of the pencil. “Father is clever—Father draw!” he said, and wanted to wake his sister so that she could take part in the game.

No, the result was not good! The design would have to be cut in wood and printed in color for the appearance really to be similar. But then Ellen came home, and he hid it away.

“Won’t you give up going out to work?” he said. “I’ll provide what is absolutely necessary.”

“Why?” she retorted resolutely. “I’m not too good to do anything!” There was no tone in her voice from which he could elicit anything; so he got ready to go to the meeting.

Now, when Ellen went out to work, he ran home as often as he had time in order to look after the children. He had obtained a piece of hard wood and a ten-kroner note. With great care he transferred the design onto the wood, and began to engrave it while he sat there chattering to the children. This task occupied unused faculties; it engrossed him as an artistic exercise, which lingered at the back of his mind and automatically continued to carry itself out, even when he was away from home. This work filled his mind with a peculiar beauty so long as he was engaged on it. A warm, blissful world was evoked by the sight of this ten-kroner note, which shone ever more plainly out of the darkness and swept all privations aside. When Pelle sat at this work his mind soared above all oppression as though intoxicated; unhappy things no longer existed for him. He became an optimist and mentally made Ellen all sorts of costly presents.

It was all fundamentally so simple—it was only a misunderstanding—nothing more! He must speak to her, and she would see at once what a happy life they were going to live—if only they held out. Silence had filled her with resentment. Fortune! Fortune! It was nearer than ever now, greater and more splendid than on that other occasion when it had knocked at their door! Why, he did not know—that did not seem very clear!

But when he heard her step on the stairs his dream was shattered. He was awake. He concealed his work, ashamed to think that she should come home from work and find him at play.

At times he was oppressed by a feeling of the unattainable in his relations with Ellen. Even to himself he could not explain the contradiction between the constant longing for more ample and stable conditions, for triumph and victory, and his impotency at home, where his fortunes were declining. He wearied himself in trying to puzzle it out, and he was seized by a desire that he might become indifferent to the whole matter. He felt no inclination to drink, but none the less something was working convulsively within him; a certain indifference as to his own welfare, causing him to run risks, not caring whether he might not commit some stupidity that would do him harm. And at such times a voice cried loudly within him, especially when he was confronted by the bitter utterances of want. “That is my old complaint,” he thought, and he became observant. In his childhood it had been a sort of seizure; now it had become a voice.

XXXII

Early one morning Pelle wandered into the city. He had risen before Ellen, in order to avoid the painfulness of sitting down to breakfast with her. Ellen tried all sorts of ruses in order to give him a proper breakfast, and it was not difficult to persuade his stomach; but afterward he felt ashamed that he should have been cared for at the cost of others; and cunning though he was too, he could not get the better of her save by slipping away while she was still asleep.

His fasting condition endowed the city, and the whole of life, with a curiously unsubstantial aspect. Before him lay a long day full of terrific labors, and behind him was the fresh triumph of the day before.

As matters now stood, the employers in the iron industry had conceived the cunning idea of founding a blackleg Union for smiths and mechanics, and of giving it a name closely resembling that of the genuine Union. Then they sent circulars to the men, stating that work would be resumed on the following day. Many of the men were not accustomed to read, and regarded the circular as an order from their own Union, while others were enticed by the high wages offered by the new society. There was great confusion among the workers of these trades. As soon as the trick was exposed every respectable man drew back; but there was a great deal of disappointment, and they felt horribly ashamed before their comrades.

Pelle was furious at this trick, which affected him more especially, as the leader in open battle; he had suffered a defeat, and he meditated revenge. In spite of all the efforts of the pickets, it was not possible to procure a full list of the strikebreakers; his chagrin on this account burned in his heart, like a shameful sense of impotency; hitherto he had been noted for getting to the bottom of anything he undertook! He resolved then and there to meet ruse with ruse. He set a trap for his opponents, so that they themselves should deliver the strikebreakers into his hands. One morning he published his list in *The Working Man* with the proud remark, “Look, the enemy has no more!” Did the employers really fall into the trap, or was the fate of the strike-breakers really indifferent to them? Next morning their organ protested, and gave the number of the black-legs and their names into the bargain!

This was a smack! A good one this; it brought a light to the thin, impassive faces. There was an answer to the trick of the other day! This Pelle was a deuce of a fellow! Three cheers for “Lightning Pelle!” Hip, hip, hurrah!

Pelle was the deuce of a fellow as he strode along ruddy and full of pugnacity, with the echoes from the side-streets and the tenement-houses mingled with his own vigorous footsteps. Streets and houses were white with the night’s hoar frost, and overhead the air was full of a peculiar glow that came from the city—a light flowing from hidden sources. He had left all his cares at home; on every hand working-folk were greeting him, and his greeting in return was like an inspiriting song. He did not know them, but they knew him! The feeling that his work—however deep the scars it might leave—was arousing gratitude, had an uplifting effect upon him.

The city was in its morning mood. The lock-out lay like a paralyzing hand upon everything; business was slack, and the middle classes were complaining, but there was no prospect of peace; both sides were irreconcilable. The workers had lost nothing through the rash cessation of the masons. Sympathy for the lower classes had become a political principle; and contributions were still pouring in from the country. Considerable sums came from abroad. The campaign was now costing the workers half a million kroner a week; and the help from outside was like a drop in the ocean. But it had the effect of a moral support, and it stimulated the self-taxation to which all were subject. The hundred thousand households of the poor parted with their last possessions in order to continue the struggle; they meant to force a decision that should affect their whole future. The employers tried to hinder the great National Federation by calling the attention of the authorities to an ancient statute concerning mendicancy; but that merely aroused merriment. A little laughter over such expedients was permissible.

The workers had become accustomed to starvation. They went no more into the forest, but strolled thoughtfully through the streets like people who have too much time on their hands, so that the city’s face wore a peculiar stamp of meditative poverty. Their loitering steps aroused no echo, and in the houses the quietness gave one food for reflection. The noisy, ever-hungry children were scattered over the face of the country

—they at least had plenty to eat. But the place was empty for the lack of them!

Pelle met several squads of workers; they were on the way to the various roll-calls. They raised their heads as he passed; his footsteps echoed loudly enough for all! It was the hope and the will of forty thousand men that passed there—Pelle was the expression of them all. They stared at his indomitable figure, and drew themselves up. “A devil of a chap!” they told one another joyfully; “he looks as if he could trample ’em all underfoot! Look at him—he scarcely makes way for that great loaded wagon! Long live Pelle, boys!”

The tavern-keepers stood on their cellar stairs gaping up at the morning sky—this was a time of famine for them! In the tavern windows hung cards with the inscription: “Contributions received here for the locked- out workers!”

On the Queen Luise Bridge Pelle encountered a pale, fat little man in a shabby coat. He had flabby features and a great red nose. “Good morning, General!” cried Pelle gaily; the man made a condescending movement with his hand. This was *The Working Man’s* man of straw; a sometime capitalist, who for a small weekly wage was, as far as the public was concerned, the responsible editor of the paper. He served various terms of imprisonment for the paper, and for a further payment of five kroner a week he also worked out in prison the fines inflicted on the paper. When he was not in jail he kept himself alive by drinking. He suffered from megalomania, and considered that he led the whole labor movement; for which reason he could not bear Pelle.

In the great court-yard of *The Working Man* building the dockers were assembled to answer the roll. The president of their Union met Pelle in the doorway; he was the very man whom Pelle and Howling Peter had rescued down by the harbor—now he was working for the new ideas!

“Well, how goes it?” asked Pelle, shaking his hand.

“Splendid! A thousand men all but seven!”

“But where’s the joyful Jacob? Is he ill?”

“He’s in jail,” replied the other gloomily. “He couldn’t bear to see his old folks starving—so he broke into a grocery, he and his brother—and now they’re both in prison.”

For a moment the lines on Pelle’s forehead were terribly deep and gloomy; he stood gazing blindly into space; the radiant expression left his countenance, which was filled with a pitying gravity. The docker stared at him—was he going to sleep on his feet? But then he pulled himself together.

“Well, comrades, are you finding the days too long?” he cried gaily.

“Ach, as for that! It’s the first time one’s had the time to get to know one’s own wife and children properly!” they replied. “But for all that it would be fine to get busy again!”

It was obvious that idleness was at last beginning to depress them; there was a peculiar pondering expression on their impassive features, and their eyes turned to him with a persistent questioning. They asked that this undertaking of his should be settled one way or the other. They were not weakening; they always voted for the continuance of the campaign, for that which they sought depended thereon; but they gazed into his face for a look that might promise success.

He had to answer many singular questions; privation engendered in the most fantastic ideas, which revealed the fact that their quiet, controlled bearing was the product of the observation and the energy of the many.

“Shall we deprive the rich of all their wealth and power?” asked one man, after long pondering and gazing at Pelle. The struggle seemed to have dealt hardly with him; but it had lit a spark in his eyes.

“Yes, we are going now to take our rights as men, and we shall demand that the worker shall be respected,” Pelle replied. “Then there’ll be no more talk of poor man and gentleman!”

“But suppose they try to get on top of us again? We must make short work of them, so that they can’t clamber on our backs and ride us again.”

“Do you want to drive them all onto the Common and shoot them? That’s not necessary,” said his neighbor. “When this is settled no one will dare to take the food out of our mouths again.”

“Won’t there be any more poverty then?” asked the first speaker, turning to Pelle.

“No, once we get our affairs properly in going order; then there will be comfort in every home. Don’t you read your paper?”

Yes, he read it, but there was no harm in hearing the great news confirmed by Pelle himself. And Pelle could confirm it, because he never harbored a doubt. It had been difficult to get the masses to grasp the new conception of things—as difficult as to move the earth! Something big must happen in return!

A few of the men had brought out sandwiches and began to eat them as they debated. “Good digestion!” said Pelle, nodding farewell to them. His mouth was watering, and he remembered that he had had nothing to eat or drink. But he had no time to think about it; he must go to Stolpe to arrange about the posting of the pickets.

Over the way stood Marie in a white cap, with a basket over her arm; she nodded to him, with rosy cheeks. Transplantation had made her grow; every time he saw her she was more erect and prettier.

At his parents’-in-law the strictest economy prevailed. All sorts of things—household possessions—had disappeared from that once so comfortable home; but there was no lack of good spirits. Stolpe was pottering about waiting for his breakfast; he had been at work early that morning.

“What’s the girl doing?” he asked. “We never see her now.”

“She has such a lot to do,” said Pelle apologetically. “And now she’s going out to work as well.”

“Well, well, with things as they are she’s not too fine to lend a hand. But we don’t really know what’s amiss with her—she’s a rebellious nature! Thank God she’s not a man—she would have brought dissolution into the ranks!”

Breakfast consisted of a portion of coffee and bread-and-butter and porridge. Madam Stolpe could not find her fine new silver coffee-service, which her children had given her on her silver-wedding day. “I must have put it away,” she said.

“Well, well, that’ll soon be found again, mother!” said Stolpe. “Now we shall soon have better times; many fine things will make their appearance again then, we shall see!”

“Have you been to the machine-works this morning, father-in-law?” asked Pelle.

“Yes, I’ve been there. But there is nothing more for the pickets to do. The employers have quartered all the men in the factory; they get full board and all there. There must be a crowd of foreign strike-breakers there—the work’s in full swing.”

This was an overwhelming piece of news! The iron-masters had won the first victory! This would quickly have a most depressing effect on the workers, when they saw that their trade could be kept going without them.

“We must put a bridle on them,” said Pelle, “or they’ll get off the course and the whole organization will fall to pieces. As for those fellows in there, we must get a louse under their shirts somehow.”

“How can we do that when they are locked in, and the police are patrolling day and night in front of the gates? We can’t even speak to them.” Stolpe laughed despairingly.

“Then some one must slink in and pretend he’s in want of employment!”

Stolpe started. “As a strike-breaker? You’ll never in this life get a respectable man to do that, even if it’s only in jest! I wouldn’t do it myself! A strike-breaker is a strike-breaker, turn and twist it how you will.”

“A strike-breaker, I suppose, is one who does his comrades harm. The man who risks his skin in this way deserves another name.”

“I won’t admit that,” said Stolpe. “That’s a little too abstract for me; anyhow, I’m not going to argue with you. But in my catechism it says that he is a strike-breaker who accepts employment where assistance is forbidden—and that I stick to!”

Pelle might talk as much as he liked; the old man would not budge an inch. “But it would be another matter if you wanted to do it yourself,” said Stolpe. “You don’t have to account to any one for what you do—you just do what comes into your head.”

“I have to account to the Cause for my doings,” said Pelle sharply, “and for that very reason I want to do it myself!”

Stolpe contracted his arms and stretched them out again. “Ah, it would be good to have work again!” he cried suddenly. “Idleness eats into one’s limbs like the gout. And now there’s the rent, mother—where the devil are we to get that? It must be paid on the nail on Saturday, otherwise out we go—so the landlord says."

"We'll soon find that, father!" said Madam Stolpe. "Don't you lose heart!"

Stolpe looked round the room. "Yes, there's still a bit to take, as Hunger said when he began on the bowels. But listen, Pelle—do you know what? I'm your father-in-law-to be sure—but you haven't a wife like mine!"

"I'm contented with Ellen as she is," said Pelle.

There was a knock; it was Stolpe's brother, the carpenter. He looked exhausted; he was thin and poorly dressed; his eyes were surrounded by red patches. He did not look at those whose hands he took.

"Sit down, brother," said Stolpe, pushing a chair toward him.

"Thanks—I must go on again directly. It was—I only wanted to tell you—well…." He stared out of the window.

"Is anything wrong at home?"

"No, no, not that exactly. I just wanted to say—I want to give notice that I'm deserting!" he cried suddenly.

Stolpe sprang to his feet; he was as white as chalk. "You think what you are doing!" he cried threateningly.

"I've had time enough to think. They are starving, I tell you—and there's got to be an end of it. I only wanted to tell you beforehand so that you shouldn't hear it from others—after all, you're my brother."

"Your brother—I'm your brother no longer! You do this and we've done with one another!" roared Stolpe, striking the table. "But you won't do it, you shan't do it! God damn me, I couldn't live through the shame of seeing the comrades condemning my own brother in the open street! And I shall be with them! I shall be the first to give you a kick, if you are my brother!" He was quite beside himself.

"Well, well, we can still talk it over," said the carpenter quietly. "But now you know—I didn't want to do anything behind your back." And then he went.

Stolpe paced up and down the room, moving from one object to another. He picked them up and put them down again, quite unthinkingly. His hands were trembling violently; and finally he went to the other room and shut himself in. After a time his wife entered the room. "You had better go, Pelle! I don't think father is fit for company to-day. He's lying there quite gray in the face—if he could only cry even! Oh, those two brothers have always been so much to each other till now! They were so united in everything!"

Pelle went; he was thinking earnestly. He could see that Stolpe, in his integrity, would consider it his duty to treat his brother more harshly than others, dearly as he loved him; perhaps he himself would undertake the picketing of the place where his brother went to work.

Out by the lakes he met a squad of pickets who were on their way out of the city; he accompanied them for some distance, in order to make certain arrangements. Across the road a young fellow came out of a doorway and slunk round the corner. "You there, stop!" cried one of the comrades. "There he is—the toff!" A few pickets followed him down Castle Street and came back leading him among them. A crowd began to form round the whole party, women and children speedily joining it.

"You are not to do anything to him," said Pelle decisively.

"God knows no one wants to touch him!" they retorted. For a while they stood silently gazing at him, as though weighing him in their minds; then one after another spat at him, and they went their way. The fellow went silently into a doorway and stood there wiping the spittle from his face with his sleeve. Pelle followed him in order to say a kind word to him and lead him back into the organization. The lad pulled himself up hastily as Pelle approached.

"Are you coming to spit at me?" he said contemptuously. "You forgot it before—why didn't you do it then?"

"I don't spit at people," said Pelle, "but your comrades are right to despise you. You have left them in the lurch. Come with me, and I'll enter you in the organization again, and no one shall molest you."

"I am to go about as a culprit and be taunted—no, thanks!"

"Do you prefer to injure your own comrades?"

"I ask for permission to look after my old mother. The rest of you can go to the devil. My mother isn't going to hang about courtyards singing, and picking over the dustbins, while her son plays the great man! I leave that to certain other people!"

Pelle turned crimson. He knew this allusion was meant for Father

Lasse; the desperate condition of the old man was lurking somewhere in his mind like an ingrowing grief, and now it came to the surface. “Dare you repeat what you said?” he growled, pressing close up to the other.

“And if I were married I shouldn’t let my wife earn my daily bread for me—I should leave that to the pimps!”

Oho! That was like the tattlers, to blacken a man from behind! Evidently they were spreading all sorts of lying rumors about him, while he had placed all that he possessed at their disposal. Now Pelle was furious; the leader could go to hell! He gave the fellow a few sound boxes on the ear, and asked him which he would rather do—hold his mouth or take some more?

Morten appeared in the doorway—this had happened in the doorway of the house in which he worked. “This won’t do!” he whispered, and he drew Pelle away with him. Pelle could make no reply; he threw himself on Morten’s bed. His eyes were still blazing with anger at the insult, and he needed air.

“Things are going badly here now,” said Morten, looking at him with a peculiar smile.

“Yes, I know very well you can’t stand it—all the same, they must hold together.”

“And supposing they don’t get better conditions?”

“Then they must accept the consequences. That’s better than the whole Cause should go to the wall!”

“Are those the new ideas? I think the ignorant have always had to take the consequences! And there has never been lacking some one to spit on them!” said Morten sadly.

“But, listen!” cried Pelle, springing to his feet. “You’ll please not blame me for spitting at anybody—the others did that!” He was very near losing his temper again, but Morten’s quiet manner mastered him.

“The others—that was nothing at all! But it was you who spat seven times over into the poor devil’s face—I was standing in the shop, and saw it.”

Pelle stared at him, speechless. Was this the truth-loving Morten who stood there lying?

“You say you saw me spit at him?”

Morten nodded. “Do you want to accept the applause and the honor, and sneak out of the beastliness and the destruction? You have taken a great responsibility on yourself, Pelle. Look, how blindly they follow you—at the sight of your bare face, I’m tempted to say. For I’m not myself quite sure that you give enough of yourself. There is blood on your hands—but is any of it your own blood?”

Pelle sat there heavily pondering; Morten’s words always forced his thoughts to follow paths they had never before known. But now he understood him; and a dark shadow passed over his face, which left its traces behind it. “This business has cost me my home,” he said quietly. “Ellen cares nothing for me now, and my children are being neglected, and are drifting away from me. I have given up splendid prospects for the future; I go hungry every day, and I have to see my old father in want and wretchedness! I believe no one can feel as homeless and lonely and forsaken as I do! So it has cost me something—you force me to say it myself.” He smiled at Morten, but there were tears in his eyes.

“Forgive me, my dear friend!” said Morten. “I was afraid you didn’t really know what you were doing. Already there are many left on the field of battle, and it’s grievous to see them—especially if it should all lead to nothing.”

“Do you condemn the Movement, then? According to you, I can never do anything wise!”

“Not if it leads to an end! I myself have dreamed of leading them on to fortune—in my own way; but it isn’t a way after their own heart. You have power over them—they follow you blindly—lead them on, then! But every wound they receive in battle should be yours as well—otherwise you are not the right man for the place. And are you certain of the goal?”

Yes, Pelle was certain of that. “And we are reaching it!” he cried, suddenly inspired. “See how cheerfully they approve of everything, and just go forward!”

“But, Pelle!” said Morten, with a meaning smile, laying his hand on his shoulder, “a leader is not Judge Lynch. Otherwise the parties would fight it out with clubs!”

“Ah, you are thinking of what happened just now!” said Pelle. “That had nothing to do with the Movement! He said my father was going about the backyards fishing things out of dustbins—so I gave him a few on the jaw. I have the same right as any one else to revenge an insult." He did not mention the evil words concerning Ellen; he could not bring himself to do so.

"But that is true," said Morten quietly.

"Then why didn't you tell me?" asked Pelle.

"I thought you knew it. And you have enough to struggle against as it is—you've nothing to reproach yourself with."

"Perhaps you can tell me where he could be found?" said Pelle, in a low voice.

"He is usually to be found in this quarter."

Pelle went. His mind was oppressed; all that day fresh responsibilities had heaped themselves upon him; a burden heavy for one man to bear. Was he to accept the responsibility for all that the Movement destroyed as it progressed, simply because he had placed all his energies and his whole fortune at its disposal? And now Father Lasse was going about as a scavenger. He blushed for shame—yet how could he have prevented it? Was he to be made responsible for the situation? And now they were spitting upon Ellen—that was the thanks he got!

He did not know where to begin his search, so he went into the courts and backyards and asked at random. People were crowding into a courtyard in Blaagaard Street, so Pelle entered it. There was a missionary there who spoke with the sing-song accent of the Bornholmer, in whose eyes was the peculiar expression which Pelle remembered as that of the "saints" of his childhood. He was preaching and singing alternately. Pelle gazed at him with eyes full of reminiscence, and in his despairing mood he was near losing control of himself and bellowing aloud as in his childish years when anything touched him deeply. This was the very lad who had said something rude about Father Lasse, and whom he—young as he was— had kicked so that he became ruptured. He was able to protect his father in those days, at all events!

He went up to the preacher and held out his hand. "It's Peter Kune! So you are here?"

The man looked at him with a gaze that seemed to belong to another world. "Yes, I had to come over here, Pelle!" he said significantly. "I saw the poor wandering hither from the town and farther away, so I followed them, so that no harm should come to them. For you poor are the chosen people of God, who must wander and wander until they come into the Kingdom. Now the sea has stayed you here, and you can go no farther; so you think the Kingdom must lie here. God has sent me to tell you that you are mistaken. And you, Pelle, will you join us now? God is waiting and longing for you; he wants to use you for the good of all these little ones." And he held Pelle's hand in his, gazing at him compellingly; perhaps he thought Pelle had come in order to seek the shelter of his "Kingdom."

Here was another who had the intention of leading the poor to the land of fortune! But Pelle had his own poor. "I have done what I could for them," he said self-consciously.

"Yes, I know that well; but that is not the right way, the way you are following! You do not give them the bread of life!"

"I think they have more need of black bread. Look at them—d'you think they get too much to eat?"

"And can you give them food, then? I can give them the joy of God, so that they forget their hunger for a while. Can you do more than make them feel their hunger even more keenly?"

"Perhaps I can. But I've got no time to talk it over now; I came to look for my old father."

"Your father, I have met in the streets lately, with a sack on his back — he did not look very cheerful. And I met him once over yonder with Sort the shoemaker; he wanted to come over here and spend his old age with his son."

Pelle said nothing, but ran off. He clenched his fists in impotent wrath as he rushed out of the place. People went about jeering at him, one more eagerly than the other, and the naked truth was that he—young and strong and capable as he was in his calling—could not look after his wife and children and his old father, even when he had regular work. Yes, so damnable were the conditions that a man in the prime of his youth could not follow the bidding of nature and found a family without plunging those that were dependent on him into want and misery! Curse it all, the entire system ought to be smashed! If he had power over it he would want to make the best use of it!

In Stone Street he heard a hoarse, quavering voice singing in the central courtyard of one of the houses. It was Father Lasse. The rag-bag lay near him, with the hook stuck into it. He was clasping the book with one hand, while with the other he gesticulated toward the windows as he sang. The song made the people smile, and he tried to make it still more amusing by violent gestures which ill-suited his pitiful appearance.

It cut Pelle to the heart to see his wretched condition. He stepped into a doorway and waited until his father should have finished his song. At certain points in the course of the song Lasse took off his cap and smacked it against his head while he raised one leg in the air. He very nearly lost his equilibrium when he did this, and the street urchins who surrounded him pulled at his ragged coat-tails and pushed one another against him. Then he stood still, spoke to them in his quavering voice, and took up his song again.

“O listen to my song, a tale of woe:
I came into the world as do so many:
My mother bore me in the street below,
And as for father, why, I hadn’t any!
Till now I’ve faithfully her shame concealed:
I tell it now to make my song complete.
O drop a shilling down that I may eat,
For eat I must, or soon to Death I yield.

“Into this world without deceit I came,
That’s why you see me wear no stockings now.
A poor old man who drudges anyhow,
I have a wealthy brother, more’s the shame.
But he and I are opposites in all;
While I rake muck he rakes his money up:
Much gold is his and many a jewelled cup,
And all he fancies, that is his at call.

“My brother, he has built a palace splendid,
And silver harness all his horses bear.
Full twenty crowns an hour he gets, I hear,
By twiddling thumbs and wishing day were ended!
Gold comes to him as dirt to Lasse, blast him!
And everywhere he turns there money lies.
’Twill all be mine when once my brother dies—
If I but live—so help me to outlast him!

“Luck tried to help me once, but not again!
Weary with toiling I was like to swoon.
When God let fall milk-porridge ’stead of rain!
And I, poor donkey, hadn’t brought a spoon!
Yes, Heaven had meant to help me, me accurst!
I saw my luck but couldn’t by it profit!
Quickly my brother made a banquet of it—
Ate my milk-porridge till he nearly burst!

“Want bears the sceptre here on earth below,
And life is always grievous to the poor.
But God, who rules the world, and ought to know,
Says all will get their rights when life is o’er.
Therefore, good people, hear me for His sake—
A trifle for the poor man’s coffin give,
Wherein his final journey he must take;
Have mercy on my end while yet I live!

“Yet one thing God has given me—my boy.
And children are the poor man’s wealth, I know.
O does he think of me, my only joy,
Who have no other treasure here below?
Long time have we been parted by mishap:
I’m tired of picking rags and sick of song;
God who sees all reward you all ere long:
O drop a trifle in poor Lasse’s cap!”

When Lasse had finished his song the people clapped and threw down coins wrapped in paper, and he went round picking them up. Then he took his sack on his back and stumped away, bent almost double, through the gateway.

“Father!” cried Pelle desperately. “Father!”

Lasse stood up with a jerk and peered through the gateway with his feeble eyes. “Is that you, lad? Ach, it sounded like your voice when you were a child, when any one was going to hurt you and you came to me for help.” The old man was trembling from head to foot. “And now I suppose you’ve heard the whole thing and are ashamed of your old father?” He dared not look at his son.

“Father, you must come home with me now—do you hear?” said Pelle, as they entered the street together.

“No, that I can’t do! There’s not enough even for your own mouths—no, you must let me go my own way. I must look after myself—and I’m doing quite well.”

“You are to come home with me—the children miss you, and Ellen asks after you day after day.”

“Yes, that would be very welcome.… But I know what folks would think if I were to take the food out of your children’s mouths! Besides—I’m a rag-picker now! No, you mustn’t lead me into temptation.”

“You are to come with me now—never mind about anything else. I can’t bear this, father!”

“Well, then, in God’s name, I must publish my shame before you, lad—if you won’t let me be! See now, I’m living with some one—with a woman. I met her out on the refuse-heaps, where she was collecting rubbish, just as I was. I had arranged a corner for myself out there—for the night, until I could find a lodging—and then she said I was to go home with her—it wouldn’t be so cold if there were two of us. Won’t you come home with me, so that you can see where we’ve both got to? Then you can see the whole thing and judge for yourself. We live quite close.”

They turned into a narrow lane and entered a gateway. In the backyard, in a shed, which looked like the remains of an old farm cottage, was Lasse’s home. It looked as though it had once been used as a fuel-shed; the floor was of beaten earth and the roof consisted of loose boards. Under the roof cords were stretched, on which rags, paper, and other articles from the dustbins were hung to dry. In one corner was a mean- looking iron stove, on which a coffee-pot was singing, mingling its pleasant fragrance with the musty stench of the rubbish. Lasse stretched himself to ease his limbs.

“Ach, I’m quite stiff!” he said, “and a little chilled. Well, here you see my little mother—and this is my son, Pelle, my boy.” He contentedly stroked the cheeks of his new life’s partner.

This was an old, bent, withered woman, grimy and ragged; her face was covered with a red eruption which she had probably contracted on the refuse-heaps. But a pair of kind eyes looked out of it, which made up for everything else.

“So that is Pelle!” she said, looking at him. “So that’s what he is like! Yes, one has heard his name; he’s one of those who will astonish the world, although he hasn’t red hair.”

Pelle had to drink a cup of coffee. “You can only have bread-and-butter with it; we old folks can’t manage anything else for supper,” said Lasse. “We go to bed early, both of us, and one sleeps badly with an over-full stomach.”

“Well, now, what do you think of our home?” said Father Lasse, looking proudly about him. “We pay only four kroner a month for it, and all the furniture we get for nothing—mother and I have brought it all here from the refuse-heaps, every stick of it, even the stove. Just look at this straw mattress, now—it’s really not bad, but the rich folks threw it away! And the iron bedstead—we found that there; I’ve tied a leg to it. And yesterday mother came in carrying those curtains, and hung them up. A good thing there are people who have so much that they have to throw it on the dust-heap!”

Lasse was quite cheerful; things seemed to be going well with him; and the old woman looked after him as if he had been the love of her youth. She helped him off with his boots and on with his list slippers, then she brought a long pipe out of the corner, which she placed between his lips; he smiled, and settled down to enjoy himself.

“Do you see this pipe, Pelle? Mother saved up for this, without my knowing anything about it—she has got such a long one I can’t light it myself! She says I look like a regular pope!” Lasse had to lean back in his chair while she lit the pipe.

When Pelle left, Lasse accompanied him across the yard. “Well, what do you think of it?” he said.

“I am glad to see things are going so well with you,” said Pelle humbly.

Lasse pressed his hand. “Thanks for that! I was afraid you would be strict about it. As quite a little boy, you used to be deucedly strict in that direction. And see now, of course, we could marry—there is no impediment in either case. But that costs money—and the times are hard. As for children coming, and asking to be brought into the world respectably, there’s no danger of that.”

Pelle could not help smiling; the old man was so much in earnest.

“Look in on us again soon—you are always welcome,” said Lasse. “But you needn’t say anything of this to Ellen—she is so peculiar in that respect!”

XXXIII

No, Pelle never told Ellen anything now. She had frozen his speech. She was like the winter sun; the side that was turned away from her received no share of her warmth. Pelle made no claims on her now; he had long ago satisfied himself that she could not respond to the strongest side of his nature, and he had accustomed himself to the idea of waging his fight alone. This had made him harder, but also more of a man.

At home the children were ailing—they did not receive proper care, and the little girl was restless, especially during the night. The complaining and coughing of the children made the home uncomfortable. Ellen was dumb; like an avenging fate she went about her business and cared for the children. Her expressive glance never encountered his; although he often felt that her eyes were resting on him. She had grown thin of late, which lent her beauty, a fanatical glow, and a touch of malice. There were times when he would have given his life for an honest, burning kiss as a token of this woman’s love.

He understood her less and less, and was often filled with inexplicable anxiety concerning her. She suffered terribly through the condition of the children; and when she quieted them, with a bleeding heart, her voice had a fateful sound that made him shudder. Sometimes he was driven home by the idea that she might have made away with herself and the children.

One day, when he had hurried home with this impression in his mind, she met him smiling and laid on the table five and twenty kroner.

“What’s that?” asked Pelle, in amazement.

“I’ve won that in the lottery!” she said.

So that was why her behavior had been so peculiarly mysterious during the last few days—as though there had been something which he must not on any account get to know. She had ventured her last shilling and was afraid he would find it out!

“But where did you get the money?” he asked.

“I borrowed it from my old friend, Anna—we went in for it together. Now we can have the doctor and medicine for the children, and we ourselves can have anything we want,” she said.

This money worked a transformation in Ellen, and their relations were once more warmly affectionate. Ellen was more lovingly tender in her behavior than ever before, and was continually spoiling him. Something had come over her that was quite new; her manner showed a sort of contrition, which made her gentle and loving, and bound Pelle to his home with the bonds of ardent desire. Now once more he hurried home. He took her manner to be an apology for her harsh judgment of him; for here, too, she was different, and began to interest herself in his work for the Cause, inciting him, by all sorts of allusions, to continue it. It was evident that in spite of her apparent coldness she had kept herself well informed concerning it. Her manner underwent a most extraordinary transformation. She, the hard, confident Ellen, became mild and uncertain in her manner. She no longer kept sourly out of things, and had learned to bow her head good-naturedly. She was no longer so self-righteous.

One day, toward evening, Pelle was sitting at home before the looking-glass, and shaving himself; he had cut off the whole of his fine big moustache and was now shaving off the last traces of it. Ellen was amused to see how his face was altered. “I can scarcely recognize you!” she said. He had thought she would have opposed its removal, and have put his moustache before the Cause; but she was pleasant about the whole matter. He could not at all understand this alteration in her.

When he had finished he stood up and went over to Young Lasse, but the child cried out in terror. Then he put on his old working-clothes, made his face and head black, and made his way to the machine-works.

The factory was in full swing now; they were working alternate shifts, day and night, with the help of interned strike-breakers, the “locked- in” workers, as the popular wit called them.

The iron-masters had followed up their victory and had managed to set yet another industry in motion again. If this sort of thing went much further the entire iron industry would one day be operated without the locked-out workers, who could stand outside and look on. But now a blow was about to be struck! Pelle’s heart was full of warmth and joy as he left home, and he felt equal for anything.

He slipped through the pickets unnoticed, and succeeded in reaching the door of the factory. "They're asleep—the devils!" he thought angrily, and was very near spoiling the whole thing by administering a reprimand. He knocked softly on the door and was admitted. The doorkeeper took him to the foreman, who was fortunately a German.

Pelle was given employment in the foundry, with very good wages. He was also promised that he should receive a bonus of twenty-five kroner when he had been there a certain time. "That's the Judas money," said the foreman, grinning. "And then as soon as the lock-out is over you'll of course be placed in the forefront of the workers. Now you are quite clear about this—that you can't get out of here until then. If you want to send something to your wife, we'll see to that."

He was shown to a corner where a sack full of straw lay on the floor; this was his dwelling-place and his refuge for the night.

In the factory the work went on as best it might. The men rushed at their work as in a frolic, drifted away again, lounged about the works, or stood here and there in groups, doing as they chose. The foremen did not dare to speak to them; if they made a friendly remark they were met with insults. The workers were taking advantage of the fact that they were indispensable; their behavior was sheer tyranny, and they were continually harping on the fact that they would just as soon go as stay. These words made them the masters of the situation.

They were paid big wages and received abundance to eat and to drink. And the working day or shift was shorter than usual. They did not understand the real significance of this change of life, but went about playing the bally. But there was a peculiar hesitation visible in their faces, as though they were not quite sure of one another. The native workers, who were in the minority, kept to themselves—as though they felt an inward contempt for those fellows who had travelled so far to fish in the troubled waters of their distress.

They were working three shifts, each of eight hours' duration.

"Oho!" thought Pelle, "why, this, good God, is the eight-hours' day! This is surely the State of the future!" At the very moment of his arrival one shift was completed, and the men immediately proceeded to make the most infernal uproar, hammering on metal and shouting for food and brandy. A huge cauldron full of beef and potatoes was dragged in. Pelle was told off to join a mess of ten men.

"Eat, matey!" they said. "Hungry, ain't you? How long had you been out of work before you gave in?"

"Three months," said Pelle.

"Then you must be peckish. Here with the beef! More beef here!" they cried, to the cook's mate. "You can keep the potatoes and welcome! We've eaten enough potatoes all our lives!"—"This is Tom Tiddler's land, with butter sauce into the bargain! This is how we've always said it ought to be—good wages and little to do, lots to eat and brandy to drink! Now you can see it was a good thing we held out till it came to this—now we get our reward! Your health! Here, damme, what's your name, you there?"

"Karlsen," said Pelle.

"Here's to you, Karlsen! Well, and how are things looking outside? Have you seen my wife lately? She's easy to recognize—she's a woman with seven children with nothing inside their ribs! Well, how goes it with the strikers?"

After eating they sat about playing cards, and drinking, or they loafed about and began to quarrel; they were a sharp-tongued crew; they went about actuated by a malicious longing to sting one another. "Come and have a game with us, mate—and have a drink!" they cried to Pelle. "Damn it all, how else should a man kill the time in this infernal place? Sixteen hours' sleep a day—no, that's more than a chap can do with!"

There was a deafening uproar, as though the place had been a vast tavern, with men shouting and abusing one another; each contributed to the din as though he wanted to drown it by his own voice. They were able to buy drink in the factory, and they drank what they earned. "That's their conscience," thought Pelle. "At heart they are good comrades." There seemed to be some hope of success for his audacious maneuver. A group of Germans took no part in the orgy, but had set up a separate colony in the remotest corner of the hall. They were there to make money!

In one of the groups a dispute broke out between the players; they were reviling one another in no measured language, and their terms of abuse culminated in the term "strike-breaker." This made them perfectly furious. It was as though an abscess had broken; all their bottled-up shame and anger concerning their infamous position burst forth. They began to use knives and tools on one another. The police, who kept watch on the factory day and night, were called in, and restored tranquillity. A wounded smith was bandaged in the office, but no arrest was made. Then a sudden slackness overcame them.

They constantly crowded round Pelle. He was a new man; he came from outside. “How are things going out there?” was the constant question.

“Things are going very well out there. It’s a worse lookout for us in here,” said Pelle.

“Going very well, are they? We’ve been told they are near giving in.”

“Who told you that?”

“The bosses of the factory here.”

“Then they were fooling you, in order to keep you here.”

“That’s a lie! And what d’you mean by saying it’s a worse look-out for us? Out with it, now!”

“We shall never get regular work again. The comrades are winning—and when they begin work again they’ll demand that we others shall be locked out.”

“The devil—and they’ve promised us the best positions!” cried a great smith. “But you’re a liar! That you are! And why did you come here if they are nearly winning outside? Answer me, damn it all! A man doesn’t come slinking into this hell unless he’s compelled!”

“To leave his comrades in the lurch, you might add,” replied Pelle harshly. “I wanted to see how it feels to strike the bread away from the mouths of the starving.”

“That’s a lie! No one would be so wicked! You are making fools of us, you devil!”

“Give him a thrashing,” said another. “He’s playing a crooked game. Are you a spy, or what do you want here? Do you belong to those idiots outside?”

It had been Pelle’s plan to put a good face on a crooked job, and cautiously to feel his way; but now he grew angry.

“You had better think what you’re doing before you call honorable men idiots,” he retorted violently. “Do you know what you are? Swine! You lie there eating your fill and pouring the drink down your throats and living easy on the need of your comrades! Swine, that you are—Judases, who have sold a good cause for dirty money! How much did you get? Five and twenty kroner, eh? And out there they are loyally starving, so that all of us—yes, you too—can live a little more like human beings in the future!”

“You hold your jaw!” said the big smith. “You’ve no wife and children—you can easily talk!”

“Aren’t you the fellow who lives in Jaegersborg Street?” Pelle demanded. “Perhaps you are sending what you earn to your wife and children? Then why are they in want? Yesterday they were turned out of doors; the organization took them in and found a roof to go over their heads— although they were a strike-breaker’s family!” Pelle himself had made this possible.

“Send—damn and blast it all—I’ll send them something! But if one lives this hell of a life in here the bit of money one earns all goes in rot- gut! And now you’re going to get a thrashing!” The smith turned up his shirt-sleeves so that his mighty muscles were revealed. He was no longer reasonable, but glared at Pelle like an angry bull.

“Wait a bit,” said an older man, stepping up to Pelle. “I think I’ve seen you before. What is your real name, if I may make bold to ask?”

“My name? You are welcome to know it. I am Pelle.”

This name produced an effect like that of an explosion. They were dazzled. The smith’s arms fell slack; he turned his head aside in shame. Pelle was among them! They had left him in the lurch, had turned their backs on him, and now he stood there laughing at them, not the least bit angry with them. What was more, he had called them comrades; so he did not despise them! “Pelle is here!” they said quietly; further and further spread the news, and their tongues dwelt curiously on his name. A murmur ran through the shops. “What the devil—has Pelle come?” they cried, stumbling to their legs.

Pelle had leaped onto a great anvil. “Silence!” he cried, in a voice of thunder; “silence!” And there was silence in the great building. The men could hear their own deep breathing.

The foremen came rushing up and attempted to drag him down. “You can’t make speeches here!” they cried.

“Let him speak!” said the big smith threateningly. “You aren’t big enough to stop his mouth, not by a long chalk!” He seized a hammer and stationed himself at the foot of the anvil.

“Comrades!” Pelle began, in an easy tone, “I have been sent here to you with greetings from those outside there—from the comrades who used to stand next to you at work, from your friends and fellow-unionists. Where are our old comrades?—they are asking. We have fought so many battles by their side, we have shared good and evil with them—are we to enter into the new conditions without them? And your wives and children are asking after you! Outside there it is the spring! They don’t understand why they can’t pack the picnic basket and go out into the forest with father!”

“No, there’s no picnic basket!” said a heavy voice.

“There are fifty thousand men accepting the situation without grumbling,” Pelle earnestly replied. “And they are asking after you—they don’t understand why you demand more than they do. Have you done more for the movement than they have?—they ask. Or are you a lot of dukes, that you can’t quietly stand by the rank and file? And now it’s the spring out there!” he cried once more. “The poor man’s winter is past, and the bright day is coming for him! And here you go over to the wrong side and walk into prison! Do you know what the locked-out workers call you? They call you the locked-in workers!”

There were a few suppressed smiles at this. “That’s a dam’ good smack!” they told, one another. “He made that up himself!”

“They have other names for us as well!” cried a voice defiantly.

“Yes, they have,” said Pelle vigorously. “But that’s because they are hungry. People get unreasonable then, you know very well—and they grudge other folks their food!”

They thronged about him, pressing closer and closer. His words were scorching them, yet were doing them good. No one could hit out like Pelle, and yet at the same time make them feel that they were decent fellows after all. The foreign workers stood round about them, eagerly listening, in order that they, too, might catch a little of what was said.

Pelle had suddenly plunged into the subject of the famine, laying bare the year-long, endless despair of their families, so that they all saw what the others had suffered—saw really for the first time. They were amazed that they could have endured so much, but they knew that it was so; they nodded continually, in agreement; it was all literally true. It was Pelle’s own desperate struggle that was speaking through him now, but the refrain of suffering ran through it all. He stood before them radiant and confident of victory, towering indomitably over them all.

Gradually his words became keen and vigorous. He reproached them with their disloyalty; he reminded them how dearly and bitterly they had bought the power of cohesion, and in brief, striking phrases he awakened the inspiriting rhythm of the Cause, that lay slumbering in every heart. It was the old, beloved music, the well-known melody of the home and labor. Pelle sounded it with a new accent. Like all those that forsake their country, they had forgotten the voice of their mother—that was why they could not find their way home; but now she was calling them, calling them back to the old dream of a Land of Fortune! He could see it in their faces, and with a leap he was at them: “Do you know of anything more infamous than to sell your mother-country? That is what you have done—before ever you set foot in it—you have sold it, with your brothers, your wives, and your children! You have foresworn your religion—your faith in the great Cause! You have disobeyed orders, and have sold yourselves for a miserable Judas-price and a keg of brandy!”

He stood with his left hand on the big smith’s shoulder, his right hand he clenched and held out toward them. In that hand he was holding them; he felt that so strongly that he did not dare to let it sink, but continued to hold it outstretched. A murmuring wave passed through the ranks, reaching even to the foreign workers. They were infected by the emotion of the others, and followed the proceedings with tense attention, although they did not understand much of the language. At each sally they nodded and nudged one another, until now they stood there motionless, with expectant faces; they, too, were under the spell of his words. This was solidarity, the mighty, earth-encircling power! Pelle recognized the look of wonder on their faces; a cold shudder ran up and down his spine. He held them all in his hand, and now the blow was to be struck before they had time to think matters over. Now!

“Comrades!” he cried loudly. “I told those outside that you were honorable men, who had been led into the devil’s kitchen by want, and in a moment of misunderstanding. And I am going in to fetch your friends and comrades out, I said. They are longing to come out to you again, to come out into the spring! Did I lie when I spoke well of you?”

“No, that you didn’t!” they replied, with one voice. “Three cheers for Pelle! Three cheers for ‘Lightning’!”

“Come along, then!” Swiftly he leaped down from the anvil and marched through the workshop, roaring out the Socialist marching-song. They followed him without a moment’s consideration, without regret or remorse; the rhythm of the march had seized them; it was as though the warm spring wind were blowing them out into the freedom of Nature. The door was unlocked, the officials of the factory were pushed aside. Singing in a booming rhythm that seemed to revenge itself for the long days of confinement, they marched out into North Bridge Street, with Pelle at their head, and turned into the Labor Building.

XXXIV.

That was a glorious stroke! The employers abandoned all further idea of running the works without the Federation. The victory was the completer in that the trades unions gave the foreign workers their passage-money, and sent them off before they had time for reflection. They were escorted to the steamers, and the workers saw them off with a comradely "Hurrah!"

Pelle was the hero of the day. His doings were discussed in all the newspapers, and even his opponents lowered their swords before him.

He took it all as a matter of course; he was striving with all his might toward a fresh goal. There was no excuse for soaring into the clouds; the lock-out was still the principal fact, and a grievous and burdensome fact, and now he was feeling its whole weight. The armies of workers were still sauntering about the streets, while the nation was consuming its own strength, and there was no immediate prospect of a settlement. But one day the springs would run dry—and what then?

He was too deeply immersed in the conflict to grow dizzy by reason of a little flattery; and the general opinion more than ever laid the responsibility for the situation on him. If this terrible struggle should end in defeat, then his would be the blame! And he racked his brains to find a means of breaking down the opposition of the enemy. The masses were still enduring the conditions with patience, but how much longer would this last? Rumors, which intended mischief, were flying about; one day it was said that one of the leaders, who had been entrusted with making collections, had run off with the cash-box; while another rumor declared that the whole body of workers had been sold to the employers! Something must happen! But what?

One afternoon he went home to see his family before going to a meeting. The children were alone. "Where is mother?" he asked, taking Young Lasse on his knee. Little Sister was sitting upright in her cradle, playing.

"Mother made herself fine and went out into the city," replied the child. "Mother so fine!"

"So? Was she so fine?" Pelle went into the bed-room; he looked into the wardrobe. Ellen's wedding-dress was not there.

"That is curious," he thought, and began to play with the children. The little girl stretched her tiny arms toward him. He had to take her up and sit with a child on either knee. The little girl kept on picking at his upper lip, as though she wanted to say something. "Yes, father's moustache has fallen off, Little Sister," said Young Lasse, in explanation.

"Yes, it has flown away," said Pelle. "There came a wind and—phew!—away it went!" He looked into the glass with a little grimace—that moustache had been his pride! Then he laughed at the children.

Ellen came home breathless, as though she had been running; a tender rosiness lay over her face and throat. She went into the bedroom with her cloak on. Pelle followed her. "You have your wedding-dress on," he said wonderingly.

"Yes, I wanted something done to it, so I went to the dressmaker, so that she could see the dress on me. But run out now, I'll come directly; I only want to put another dress on."

Pelle wanted to stay, but she pushed him toward the door. "Run away!" she said, pulling her dress across her bosom. The tender red had spread all over her bosom—she was so beautiful in her confusion!

After a time she came into the living-room and laid some notes on the table before him.

"What's this again?" he cried, half startled by the sight of all this money.

"Yes, haven't I wonderful luck? I've won in the lottery again! Haven't you a clever wife?" She was standing behind him with her arm across his shoulders.

Pelle sat there for a moment, bowed down as though he had received a blow on the head. Then he pushed her arm aside and turned round to her. "You have won again already, you say? Twice? Twice running?" He spoke slowly and monotonously, as though he wanted to let every word sink in.

"Yes; don't you think it's very clever of me?" She looked at him uncertainly and attempted to smile.

“But that is quite impossible!” he said heavily. “That is quite impossible!” Suddenly he sprang to his feet, seizing her by the throat. “You are lying! You are lying!” he cried, raging. “Will you tell me the truth? Out with it!” He pressed her back over the table, as though he meant to kill her. Young Lasse began to cry.

She stared at him with wondering eyes, which were full of increasing terror. He released her and averted his face in order not to see those eyes; they were full of the fear of death. She made no attempt to rise, but fixed him with an intolerable gaze, like that of a beast that is about to be killed and does not know why. He rose, and went silently over to the children, and busied himself in quieting them. He had a horrible feeling in his hands, almost as when once in his childhood he had killed a young bird. Otherwise he had no feeling, except that everything was so loathsome. It was the fault of the situation … and now he would go.

He realized, as he packed his things, that she was standing by the table, crying softly. He realized it quite suddenly, but it was no concern of his…. When he was ready and had kissed the children, a shudder ran through her body; she stepped before him in her old energetic way.

“Don’t leave me—you mustn’t leave me!” she said, sobbing. “Oh—I only wanted to do what was best for you—and you didn’t see after anything. No, that’s not a reproach—but our daily bread, Pelle! For you and the children! I could no longer look on and see you go without everything— especially you—Pelle! I love you so! It was out of love for you—above all, out of love for you!”

It sounded like a song in his ears, like a strange, remote refrain; the words he did not hear. He put her gently aside, kissed the boy once more, and stroked his face. Ellen stood as though dead, gazing at his movements with staring, bewildered eyes. When he went out to the door she collapsed.

Pelle left his belongings downstairs with the mangling-woman, and he went mechanically toward the city; he heard no sound, no echo; he went as one asleep. His feet carried him toward the Labor House, and up the stairs, into the room whence the campaign was directed. He took his place among the others without knowing what he did, and there he sat, gazing down at the green table-cloth.

The general mood showed signs of dejection. For a long time now the bottom of the cash-box had been visible, and as more and more workers were turned into the street the product of self-imposed taxation was gradually declining. And the readiness of those outside the movement to make sacrifices was rapidly beginning to fail. The public had now had enough of the affair. Everything was failing, now they would have to see if they could not come to some arrangement. Starvation was beginning to thrust its grinning head among the fifty thousand men now idle. The moment had come upon which capital was counting; the moment when the crying of children for bread begins to break the will of the workers, until they are ready to sacrifice honor and independence in order to satisfy the little creatures’ hunger. And the enemy showed no sign of wishing for peace!

This knowledge had laid its mark on all the members of the Council; and as they sat there they knew that the weal or woe of hundreds of thousands depended on them. No one dared accept the responsibility of making a bold proposal in this direction or that. With things as they stood, they would have, in a week or two, to give up the fight! Then nearly a quarter of a million human beings would have suffered torment for nothing! A terrible apathy would be the result of that suffering and of the defeat; it would put them back many years. But if the employers could not long withstand the pressure which the financial world was beginning to exert on them, they would be throwing away the victory if they gave up the fight now.

The cleverest calculations were useless here. A blind, monstrous Pate would prevail. Who could say that he had lifted the veil of the future and could point out the way?

No one! And Pelle, the blazing torch, who had shown them the road regardless of all else—he sat there drowsing as though it meant nothing to him! Apparently he had broken down under his monstrous labors.

The secretary came in with a newspaper marked with red pencil. He passed it to the chairman, who stared for a while at the underlined portion, then he rose and read it out; the paper was quivering in his hands.

“About thirty working women—young and of good appearance—can during the lock-out find a home with various bachelors. Good treatment guaranteed. The office of the paper will give further information.”

Pelle sprang up out of his half-slumber; the horrible catastrophe of his own home was blindingly clear now! “So it’s come to that!” he cried. “Now capital has laid its fingers on our wives—now they are to turn whore! We must fight on, fight, fight! We must strike one last blow—and it must be a heavy one!”

“But how?” they asked.

Pelle was white with enforced calm. His mind had never been so radiantly clear. Now Ellen should be revenged on those who took everything, even the poor man’s one ewe lamb!

“In the first place we must issue an optimistic report—this very day!” he said, smiling. “The cash-box is nearly empty—good! Then we will state that the workers have abundant means to carry on the fight for another year if need be, and then we’ll go for them!”

Born of anger, an old, forgotten phantasy had flashed into his mind as a definite plan.

“Hitherto we have fought passively,” he continued, “with patience as our chief weapon! We have opposed our necessities of life to the luxuries of the other side; and if they strike at us in order to starve us to skin and bone and empty our homes of our last possessions, we answered them by refusing to do the work which was necessary to their comfort! Let us for once strike at their vital necessities! Let us strike them where they have struck us from the beginning! In the belly! Then perhaps they’ll turn submissive! Hitherto we have kept the most important of the workers out of the conflict—those on whom the health and welfare of the public depend, although we ourselves have benefited nothing thereby. Why should we bake their bread? We, who haven’t the means to eat it! Why should we look after their cleanliness? We, who haven’t the means to keep ourselves clean! Let us bring the dustmen and the street-cleaners into the line of fire! And if that isn’t enough we’ll turn off their gas and water! Let us venture our last penny—let us strike the last blow!”

Pelle’s proposal was adopted, and he went westward immediately to the president of the Scavengers’ Union. He had just got up and was sitting down to his midday meal. He was a small, comfortable little man, who had always a twinkle in his eye; he came from the coal country. Pelle had helped him at one time to get his organization into working order, and he knew that he could count on him and his men.

“Do you remember still, how I once showed you that you are the most important workers in the city, Lars Hansen?”

The president nodded. “Yes, one would have to be a pretty sort of fool to forget that! No, as long as I live I shall never forget the effect your words had on us despised scavengers! It was you who gave us faith in ourselves, and an organization! And even if we aren’t quite the most important people, still—”

“But that’s just what you are—and now it’s your turn to prove it! Could you suspend work this night?”

Lars Hansen sat gazing thoughtfully into the lamp while he chewed his food. “Our relations with the city are rather in the nature of a contract,” he said slowly and at length. “They could punish us for it, and compel us to resume work. But if you want it, irrespective, why of course we’ll do it. There can be only one view as to that among comrades! What you may gain by it you yourself know best.”

“Thanks!” said Pelle, holding out his hand. “Then that is settled—no more carts go out. And we must bring the street-cleaners to a standstill too!”

“Then the authorities will put other men on—there are plenty to be found for that work.”

“They won’t do that—or we’ll put a stop to it if they do!”

“That sounds all right! It’ll be a nasty business for the swells! It’s all the same to the poor, they haven’t anything to eat. But suppose the soldiers are ordered to do it! Scavenging must be done if the city isn’t to become pestilential!”

A flash of intelligence crossed Pelle’s face. “Now listen, comrade! When you stop working, deliver up all the keys, so that the authorities can’t touch you! Only put them all in a sack and give them a good shake-up!”

Lars Hansen broke into a resounding laugh. “That will be the deuce of a joke!” he groaned, smacking his thighs. “Then they’ll have to come to us, for no one else will be able to sort them out again so quickly! I’ll take them the keys myself—I’ll go upstairs as innocent as anything!”

Pelle thanked him again. “You’ll save the whole Cause,” he said quietly. "It's the bread and the future happiness of many thousands that you are now holding in your hands." He smiled brightly and took his leave. As soon as he was alone his smile faded and an expression of deathly weariness took its place.

* * *

Pelle walked the streets, strolling hither and thither. Now all was settled. There was nothing more to strive for. Everything within him seemed broken; he had not even strength to decide what he should do with himself. He walked on and on, came out into the High Street, and turned off again into the side streets. Over the way, in the Colonial Stores, he saw Karl, smiling and active, behind the counter serving customers. "You ought really to go in and ask him how he's getting on," he thought, but he strolled on. Once, before a tenement-house, he halted and involuntarily looked up. No, he had already done his business here—this was where the president of the Scavengers' Union lived. No, the day's work was over now—he would go home to Ellen and the children!

Home? No home for him now—he was forsaken and alone! And yet he went toward the north; which road he went by he did not know, but after a time he found himself standing before his own door and staring at the rusty little letter box. Within there was a sound of weeping; he could hear Ellen moving to and fro, preparing everything for the night. Then he turned and hastened away, and did not breathe easily until he had turned the corner of the street.

He turned again and again, from one side street into another. Inside his head everything seemed to be going round, and at every step he felt as if it would crack. Suddenly he seemed to hear hasty but familiar steps behind him. Ellen! He turned round; there was no one there. So it was an illusion! But the steps began again as soon as he went on. There was something about those steps—it was as though they wanted to say something to him; he could hear plainly that they wanted to catch up with him. He stopped suddenly—there was no one there, and no one emerged from the darkness of the side streets.

Were these strange footsteps in his own mind, then? Pelle found them incomprehensible; his heart began to thump; his terrible exhaustion had made him helpless. And Ellen—what was the matter with her? That reproachful weeping sounded in his ears! Understand—what was he to understand? She had done it out of love, she had said! Ugh—away with it all! He was too weary to justify her offence.

But what sort of wanderer was this? Now the footsteps were keeping time with his now; they had a double sound. And when he thought, another creature answered to him, from deep within him. There was something persistent about this, as there was in Morten's influence; an opinion that made its way through all obstacles, even when reduced to silence. What was wanted of him now—hadn't he worked loyally enough? Was he not Pelle, who had conducted the great campaign? Pelle, to whom all looked up? But there was no joy in the thought now; he could not now hear the march of his fifty thousand comrades in his own footsteps! He was left in the lurch, left alone with this accursed Something here in the deserted streets—and loneliness had come upon him! "You are afraid!" he thought, with a bitter laugh.

But he did not wish to be alone; and he listened intently. The conflict had taken all that he possessed. So there was a community—mournful as it was—between him and the misery around him here. What had he to complain of?

The city of the poor lay about him, terrible, ravaged by the battle of unemployment—a city of weeping, and cold, and darkness, and want! From the back premises sounded the crying of children—they were crying for bread, he knew—while drunken men staggered round the corners, and the screaming of women sounded from the back rooms and the back yards. Ugh— this was Hell already! Thank God, victory was near!

Somewhere he could plainly hear voices; children were crying, and a woman, who was moving to and fro in the room, was soothing them, and was lulling the youngest to sleep—no doubt she had it in her arms. It all came down to him so distinctly that he looked up. There were no windows in the apartment! They were to be driven out by the cold, he thought indignantly, and he ran up the stairs; he was accustomed to taking the unfortunate by surprise.

"The landlord has taken out the doors and windows; he wanted to turn us into the street, but we aren't going, for where should we go? So he wants to drive us out through the cold—like the bugs! They've driven my husband to death—" Suddenly she recognized Pelle. "So it's you, you accursed devil!" she cried. "It was you yourself who set him on! Perhaps you remember how he used to drink out of the bottle? Formerly he always used to behave himself properly. And you saw, too, how we were turned out of St. Hans Street—the tenants forced us to go—didn't you see that? Oh, you torturer! You've followed him everywhere, hunted him like a wild beast, taunted him and tormented him to death! When he went into a tavern the others would stand away from him, and the landlord had to ask him to go. But he had more sense of honor than you! 'I'm infected with the plague!' he said, and one morning he hanged himself. Ah, if I could pray the good God to smite you!" She was tearless; her voice was dry and hoarse.

"You have no need to do that," replied Pelle bitterly. "He has smitten me! But I never wished your husband any harm; both times, when I met him, I tried to help him. We have to suffer for the benefit of all—my own happiness is shattered into fragments." He suddenly found relief in tears.

"They just ought to see that—the working men—Pelle crying! Then they wouldn't shout 'Hurrah!' when he appears!" she cried scornfully.

"I have still ten kroner—will you take them?" said Pelle, handing her the money.

She took it hesitating. "You must need that for your wife and children — that must be your share of your strike pay!"

"I have no wife and children now. Take it!"

"Good God! Has your home gone to pieces too? Couldn't even Pelle keep it together? Well, well, it's only natural that he who sows should reap!"

Pelle went his way without replying. The unjust judgment of this woman depressed him more than the applause of thousands would have pleased him. But it aroused a violent mental protest. Where she had struck him he was invulnerable; he had not been looking after his own trivial affairs; but had justly and honorably served the great Cause, and had led the people to victory. The wounded and the fallen had no right to abuse him. He had lost more than any one—he had lost everything!

With care-laden heart, but curiously calm, he went toward the North Bridge and rented a room in a cheap lodging house.

XXXV

The final instructions issued to the workers aroused terrible indignation in the city. At one blow the entire public was set against them; the press was furious, and full of threats and warnings. Even the independent journals considered that the workers had infringed the laws of human civilization. But *The Working Man* quietly called attention to the fact that the conflict was a matter of life or death for the lower classes. They were ready to proceed to extremities; they still had it in their power to cut off the water and gas—the means of the capital’s commercial and physical life!

Then the tide set in against the employers. Something had to give somewhere! And what was the real motive of the conflict? Merely a question of power! They wanted to have the sole voice—to have their workers bound hand and foot. The financiers, who stood at the back of the big employers, had had enough of the whole affair. It would be an expensive game first and last, and there would be little profit in destroying the cohesion of the workers if the various industries were ruined at the same time.

Pelle saw how the crisis was approaching while he wandered about the lesser streets in search of Father Lasse. Now the Cause was progressing by its own momentum, and he could rest. An unending strain was at last lifted from his shoulders, and now he wanted time to gather together the remnants of his own happiness—and at last to do something for one who had always sacrificed himself for him. Now he and Lasse would find a home together, and resume the old life in company together; he rejoiced at the thought. Father Lasse’s nature never clashed with his; he had always stood by him through everything; his love was like a mother’s.

Lasse was no longer living in his lair behind Baker Street. The old woman with whom he was living had died shortly before this, and Lasse had then disappeared.

Pelle continued to ask after him, and, well known as he was among the poor, it was not difficult for him to follow the old man’s traces, which gradually led him out to Kristianshavn. During his inquiries he encountered a great deal of misery, which delayed him. Now, when the battle was fighting itself to a conclusion, he was everywhere confronted by need, and his old compassion welled up in his heart. He helped where he could, finding remedies with his usual energy.

Lasse had not been to the “Ark” itself, but some one there had seen him in the streets, in a deplorable condition; where he lived no one knew. “Have you looked in the cellar of the Merchant’s House over yonder?” the old night watchman asked him. “Many live there in these hard times. Every morning about six o’clock I lock the cellar up, and then I call down and warn them so that they shan’t be pinched. If I happen to turn away, then they come slinking up. It seems to me I heard of an old man who was said to be lying down there, but I’m not sure, for I’ve wadding in my ears; I’m obliged to in my calling, in order not to hear too much!” He went to the place with Pelle.

The Merchant’s House, which in the eighteenth century was the palace of one of the great mercantile families of Kristianshavn, was now used as a granary; it lay fronting on one of the canals. The deep cellars, which were entirely below the level of the canal, were now empty. It was pitch dark down there, and impracticable; the damp air seemed to gnaw at one’s vocal cords. They took a light and explored among the pillars, finding here and there places where people had lain on straw. “There is no one here,” said the watchman. Pelle called, and heard a feeble sound as of one clearing his throat. Far back in the cellars, in one of the cavities in the wall, Father Lasse was lying on a mattress. “Yes, here I lie, waiting for death,” he whispered. “It won’t last much longer now; the rats have begun to sniff about me already.” The cold, damp air had taken his voice away.

He was altogether in a pitiful condition, but the sight of Pelle put life into him in so far as he was able to stand on his feet. They took him over to the “Ark,” the old night watchman giving up his room and going up to Widow Johnsen;—there he slept in the daytime, and at night went about his duties; a possible arrangement, although there was only one bed.

When Lasse was put into a warm bed he lay there shivering; and he was not quite clear in his mind. Pelle warmed some beer; the old man must go through a sweating cure; from time to time he sat on the bed and gazed anxiously at his father. Lasse lay there with his teeth chattering; he had closed his eyes; now and again he tried to speak, but could not.

The warm drink helped him a little, and the blood flowed once more into his dead, icy hands, and his voice returned.

“Do you think we are going to have a hard winter?” he said suddenly, turning on his side.

“We are going on toward the summer now, dear father,” Pelle replied. “But you must not lie with your back uncovered.”

“I’m so terribly cold—almost as cold as I was in winter; I wouldn’t care to go through that again. It got into my spine so. Good God, the poor folks who are at sea!”

“You needn’t worry about them—you just think about getting well again; to-day we’ve got the sunshine and it’s fine weather at sea!”

“Let a little sunshine in here to me, then,” said Lasse peevishly.

“There’s a great wall in front of the window, father,” said Pelle, bending down over him.

“Well, well, it’ll soon be over, the little time that’s still left me! It’s all the same to the night watchman—he wakes all night and yet he doesn’t see the sun. That is truly a curious calling! But it is good that some one should watch over us while we sleep.” Lasse rocked his head restlessly to and fro.

“Yes, otherwise they’d come by night and steal our money,” said Pelle jestingly.

“Yes, that they would!” Lasse tried to laugh. “And how are things going with you, lad?”

“The negotiations are proceeding; yesterday we held the first meeting.”

Lasse laughed until his throat rattled. “So the fine folks couldn’t stomach the smell any longer! Yes, yes, I heard the news of that when I was lying ill down there in the darkness. At night, when the others came creeping in, they told me about it; we laughed properly over that idea of yours. But oughtn’t you to be at your meeting?”

“No, I have excused myself—I don’t want to sit there squabbling about the ending of a sentence. Now I’m going to be with you, and then we’ll both make ourselves comfortable.”

“I am afraid we shan’t have much more joy of one another, lad!”

“But you are quite jolly again now. To-morrow you will see—”

“Ah, no! Death doesn’t play false. I couldn’t stand that cellar.”

“Why did you do it, father? You knew your place at home was waiting for you.”

“Yes, you must forgive my obstinacy, Pelle. But I was too old to be able to help in the fight, and then I thought at least you won’t lay a burden on them so long as this lasts! So in that way I have borne my share. And do you really believe that something will come of it?”

“Yes, we are winning—and then the new times will begin for the poor man!”

“Yes, yes; I’ve no part in such fine things now! It was as though one served the wicked goblin that stands over the door: Work to-day, eat to-morrow! And to-morrow never came. What kindness I’ve known has been from my own people; a poor bird will pull out its own feathers to cover another. But I can’t complain; I have had bad days, but there are folks who have had worse. And the women have always been good to me. Bengta was a grumbler, but she meant it kindly; Karna sacrificed money and health to me—God be thanked that she didn’t live after they took the farm from me. For I’ve been a landowner too; I had almost forgotten that in all my misery! Yes, and old Lise—Begging Lise, as they called her—she shared bed and board with me! She died of starvation, smart though she was. Would you believe that? ‘Eat!’ she used to say; ‘we have food enough!’ And I, old devil, I ate the last crust, and suspected nothing, and in the morning she was lying dead and cold at my side! There was not a scrap of flesh on her whole body; nothing but skin over dry bones. But she was one of God’s angels! We used to sing together, she and I. Ach, poor people take the bread out of one another’s mouths!”

Lasse lay for a time sunk in memories, and began to sing, with the gestures he had employed in the courtyard. Pelle held him down and endeavored to bring him to reason, but the old man thought he was dealing with the street urchins. When he came to the verse which spoke of his son he wept.

“Don’t cry, father!” said Pelle, quite beside himself, and he laid his heavy head against that of the old man. “I am with you again!”

Lasse lay still for a time, blinking his eyes, with his hand groping to and fro over his son’s face.

"Yes, you are really here," he said faintly, "and I thought you had gone away again. Do you know what, Pelle? You have been the whole light of my life! When you came into the world I was already past the best of my years; but then you came, and it was as though the sun had been born anew! 'What may he not bring with him?' I used to think, and I held my head high in the air. You were no bigger than a pint bottle! 'Perhaps he'll make his fortune,' I thought, 'and then there'll be a bit of luck for you as well!' So I thought, and so I've always believed—but now I must give it up. But I've lived to see you respected. You haven't become a rich man—well, that need not matter; but the poor speak well of you! You have fought their battles for them without taking anything to fill your own belly. Now I understand it, and my old heart rejoices that you are my son!"

When Lasse fell asleep Pelle lay on the sofa for a while. But he did not rest long; the old man slept like a bird, opening his eyes every moment. If he did not see his son close to his bed he lay tossing from side to side and complaining in a half-slumber. In the middle of the night he raised his head and held it up in a listening attitude. Pelle awoke.

"What do you want, father?" he asked, as he tumbled onto his feet.

"Ach, I can hear something flowing, far out yonder, beyond the sea-line.… It is as though the water were pouring into the abyss. But oughtn't you to go home to Ellen now? I shall be all right alone overnight, and perhaps she's sitting worrying as to where you are."

"I've sent to Ellen to tell her that I shouldn't be home overnight," said Pelle.

The old man lay considering his son with a pondering glance, "Are you happy, too, now?" he asked. "It seems to me as though there is something about your marriage that ought not to be."

"Yes, father, it's quite all right," Pelle replied in a half-choking voice.

"Well, God be thanked for that! You've got a good wife in Ellen, and she has given you splendid children. How is Young Lasse? I should dearly like to see him again before I go from here—there will still be a Lasse!"

"I'll bring him to you early in the morning," said Pelle. "And now you ought to see if you can't sleep a little, father. It is pitch dark still!"

Lasse turned himself submissively toward the wall. Once he cautiously turned his head to see if Pelle was sleeping; his eyes could not see across the room, so he attempted to get out of bed, but fell back with a groan.

"What is it, father?" cried Pelle anxiously, and he was beside him in a moment.

"I only wanted just to see that you'd got something over you in this cold! But my old limbs won't bear me any more," said the old man, with a shamefaced expression.

Toward morning he fell into a quiet sleep, and Pelle brought Madam Johnsen to sit with the old man, while he went home for Young Lasse. It was no easy thing to do; but the last wish of the old man must be granted. And he knew that Ellen would not entrust the child to strange hands.

Ellen's frozen expression lit up as he came; an exclamation of joy rose to her lips, but the sight of his face killed it. "My father lies dying," he said sadly—"he very much wants to see the boy." She nodded and quietly busied herself in making the child ready. Pelle stood at the window gazing out.

It seemed very strange to him that he should be here once more; the memory of the little household rose to his mind and made him weak. He must see Little Sister! Ellen led him silently into the bedroom; the child was sleeping in her cradle; a deep and wonderful peace brooded over her bright head. Ellen seemed to be nearer to him in this room here; he felt her compelling eyes upon him. He pulled himself forcibly together and went into the other room—he had nothing more to do there. He was a stranger in this home. A thought occurred to him—whether she was going on with *that*? Although it was nothing to him, the question would not be suppressed; and he looked about him for some sign that might be significant. It was a poverty-stricken place; everything superfluous had vanished. But a shoemaker's sewing machine had made its appearance, and there was work on it. Strike-breaking work! he thought mechanically. But not disgraceful—for the first time he was glad to discover a case of strike-breaking. She had also begun to take in sewing—and she looked thoroughly overworked. This gave him downright pleasure.

"The boy is ready to go with you now," she said.

Pelle cast a farewell glance over the room. “Is there anything you need?” he asked.

“Thanks—I can look after myself,” she replied proudly.

“You didn’t take the money I sent you on Saturday!”

“I can manage myself—if I can only keep the boy. Don’t forget that you told me once he should always stay with me.”

“He must have a mother who can look him in the face—remember that, Ellen!”

“You needn’t remind me of that,” she replied bitterly.

Lasse was awake when they arrived. “Eh, that’s a genuine Karlsen!” he said. “He takes after our family. Look now, Pelle, boy! He has the same prominent ears, and he’s got the lucky curl on his forehead too! He’ll make his way in the world! I must kiss his little hands—for the hands, they are our blessing—the only possession we come into the world with. They say the world will be lifted up by the hands of poor; I should like to know whether that will be so! I should like to know whether the new times will come soon now. It’s a pity after all that I shan’t live to see it!”

“You may very well be alive to see it yet, father,” said Pelle, who on the way had bought *The Working Man*, and was now eagerly reading it. “They are going ahead in full force, and in the next few days the fight will be over! Then we’ll both settle down and be jolly together!”

“No, I shan’t live to see that! Death has taken hold of me; he will soon snatch me away. But if there’s anything after it all, it would be fine if I could sit up there and watch your good fortune coming true. You have travelled the difficult way, Pelle—Lasse is not stupid! But perhaps you’ll he rewarded by a good position, if you take over the leadership yourself now. But then you must see that you don’t forget the poor!”

“That’s a long way off yet, father! And then there won’t be any more poor!”

“You say that so certainly, but poverty is not so easily dealt with—it has eaten its way in too deep! Young Lasse will perhaps be a grown man before that comes about. But now you must take the boy away, for it isn’t good that he should see how the old die. He looks so pale—does he get out into the sun properly?”

“The rich have borrowed the sun—and they’ve forgotten to pay it back,” said Pelle bitterly.

Lasse raised his head in the air, as though he were striving against something. “Yes, yes! It needs good eyes to look into the future, and mine won’t serve me any longer. But now you must go and take the boy with you. And you mustn’t neglect your affairs, you can’t outwit death, however clever you may be.” He laid his withered hand on Young Lasse’s head and turned his face to the wall.

Pelle got Madam Johnsen to take the boy home again, so that he himself could remain with the old man. Their paths had of late years lain so little together; they had forever been meeting and then leading far apart. He felt the need of a lingering farewell. While he moved to and fro, and lit a fire to warm up some food, and did what he could to make Father Lasse comfortable, he listened to the old man’s desultory speech and let himself drift hack into the careless days of childhood. Like a deep, tender murmur, like the voice of the earth itself, Lasse’s monotonous speech renewed his childhood; and as it continued, it became the never-silent speech of the many concerning the conditions of life. Now, in silence he turned again from the thousands to Father Lasse, and saw how great a world this tender-hearted old man had supported. He had always been old and worn-out so long as Pelle could remember. Labor so soon robs the poor man of his youth and makes his age so long! But this very frailty endowed him with a superhuman power—that of the father! He had borne his poverty greatly, without becoming wicked or self-seeking or narrow; his heart had always been full of the cheerfulness of sacrifice, and full of tenderness; he had been strong even in his impotence. Like the Heavenly Father Himself, he had encompassed Pelle’s whole existence with his warm affection, and it would be terrible indeed when his kindly speech was no longer audible at the back of everything.

His departing soul hovered in ever-expanding circles over the way along which he had travelled—like the doves when they migrate. Each time he had recovered a little strength he took up the tale of his life anew. “There has always been something to rejoice over, you know, but much of it has been only an aimless struggle. In the days when I knew no better I managed well enough; but from the moment when you were born my old mind began to look to the future, and I couldn’t feel at peace any more. There was something about you that seemed like an omen, and since then it has always stuck in my mind; and my intentions have been restless, like the Jerusalem shoemaker's. It was as though something had suddenly given me—poor louse!—the promise of a more beautiful life; and the memory of that kept on running in my mind. Is it perhaps the longing for Paradise, out of which they drove us once?—I used to think. If you'll believe me, I, poor old blunderer as I am, have had splendid dreams of a beautiful, care-free old age, when my son, with his wife and children, would come and visit me in my own cozy room, where I could entertain them a little with everything neat and tidy. I didn't give up hoping for it even right at the end. I used to go about dreaming of a treasure which I should find out on the refuse-heaps. Ah, I did so want to be able to leave you something! I have been able to do so miserably little for you."

"And you say that, who have been father and mother to me? During my whole childhood you stood behind everything, protecting me; if anything happened to me I always used to think; 'Father Lasse will soon set that right!' And when I grew up I found in everything that I undertook that you were helping me to raise myself. It would have gone but ill indeed with everything if you hadn't given me such a good inheritance!"

"Do you say that?" cried Lasse proudly. "Shall I truly have done my share in what you have done for the Cause of the poor? Ah, that sounds good, in any case! No, but you have been my life, my boy, and I used to wonder, poor weak man as I was, to see how great my strength was in you! What I scarcely dared to think of even, you have had the power to do! And now here I lie, and have not even the strength to die. You must promise me that you won't burden yourself on my account with anything that's beyond your ability—you must leave the matter to the poor-law authorities. I've kept myself clear of them till now, but it was only my stupid pride. The poor man and the poor-laws belong together after all. I have learned lately to look at many things differently; and it is good that I am dying—otherwise I should soon be alive and thinking but have no power. If these ideas had come to me in the strength of my youth perhaps I should have done something violent. I hadn't your prudence and intelligence, to be able to carry eggs in a hop-sack…."

On the morning of the third day there was a change in Lasse, although it was not easy to say where the alteration lay. Pelle sat at the bedside reading the last issue of *The Working Man*, when he noticed that Lasse was gazing at him. "Is there any news?" he asked faintly.

"The negotiations are proceeding," said Pelle, "but it is difficult to agree upon a basis…. Several times everything has been on the point of breaking down."

"It's dragging out such a long time," said Lasse dejectedly; "and I shall die to-day, Pelle. There is something restless inside me, although I should dearly like to rest a little. It is curious, how we wander about trying to obtain something different to what we have! As a little boy at home in Tommelilla I used to run round a well; I used to run like one possessed, and I believed if I only ran properly I should be able to catch my own heels! And now I've done it; for now there is always some one in front of me, so that I can't go forward, and it's old Lasse himself who is stopping the way! I am always thinking I must overtake him, but I can't find my old views of the world again, they have altered so. On the night when the big employers declared the lock-out I was standing out there among the many thousands of other poor folks, listening. They were toasting the resolution with champagne, and cheering, and there my opinions were changed! It's strange how things are in this world. Down in the granary cellar there lay a mason who had built one of the finest palaces in the capital, and he hadn't even a roof over his head."

A sharp line that had never been there before appeared round his mouth. It became difficult for him to speak, but he could not stop. "Whatever you do, never believe the clergy," he continued, when he had gathered a little strength. "That has been my disadvantage—I began to think over things too late. We mustn't grumble, they say, for one thing has naturally grown out of another, big things out of little, and all together depends on God's will. According to that our vermin must finally become thorough-bred horse for the rich—and God knows I believe that is possible! They have begun by sucking the blood of poverty—but only see how they prance in front of the carriage! Ah, yes—how will the new period take shape? What do you think about it?"

"It will be good for us all, father," replied Pelle, with anxiety in his voice. "But it will be sad for me, because you will no longer have your part in it all. But you shall have a fine resting-place, and I will give you a great stone of Bornholm granite, with a beautiful inscription."

"You must put on the stone: 'Work to-day, eat to-morrow!'" replied

Lasse bitterly.

All day long he lay there in a half-sleep. But in the evening twilight he raised his head. “Are those the angels I hear singing?” he whispered. The ring had gone out of his voice.

“No, those are the little children of the factory women, their mothers will be coming home directly to give them the breast; then they’ll stop.”

Lasse sighed. “That will be poor food if they have to work all day. They say the rich folks drink wine at twelve and fifteen kroner a bottle; that sounds as if they take the milk away from the little children and turn it into costly liquors.”

He lay there whispering; Pelle had to bend his head till it was almost against his mouth. “Hand in hand we’ve wandered hither, lad, yet each has gone his own way. You are going the way of youth, and Lasse—but you have given me much joy.”

Then the loving spirit, which for Pelle had burned always clear and untroubled amid all vicissitudes, was extinguished. It was as though Providence had turned its face from him; life collapsed and sank into space, and he found himself sitting on a chair—alone. All night long he sat there motionless beside the body, staring with vacant eyes into the incomprehensible, while his thoughts whispered sadly to the dead of all that he had been. He did not move, but himself sat like a dead man, until Madam Johnsen came in the morning to ask how matters were progressing.

Then he awoke and went out, in order to make such arrangements as were necessary.

XXXVI

On Saturday, at noon, it was reported that the treaty of peace was signed, and that the great strike was over. The rumor spread through the capital with incredible speed, finding its way everywhere. “Have you heard yet? Have you heard yet? Peace is concluded!” The poor were busy again; they lay huddled together no longer, but came out into the light of day, their lean faces full of sunlight. The women got out their baskets and sent the children running to make a few purchases for Sunday—for now the grocer would give them a little credit! People smiled and chattered and borrowed a little happiness! Summer had come, and a monstrous accumulation of work was waiting to be done, and at last they were going to set to work in real earnest! The news was shouted from one back door to the next; people threw down what they had in their hands and ran on with the news. It occurred to no one to stand still and to doubt; they were only too willing to believe!

Later in the afternoon *The Working Man* issued a board-sheet confirming the rumor. Yes, it was really true! And it was a victory; the right of combination was recognized, and Capital had been taught to respect the workers as a political factor. It would no longer be possible to oppress them. And in other respects the *status quo* was confirmed.

“Just think—they’ve been taught to respect us, and they couldn’t refuse to accept the *status quo!*” And they laughed all over their faces with joy to think that it was confirmed, although no one knew what it was!

The men were in the streets; they were flocking to their organizations, in order to receive orders and to learn the details of the victory. One would hardly have supposed from their appearance that the victory was theirs; they had become so accustomed to gloom that it was difficult to shake it off.

There was a sound of chattering in backyards and on staircases. Work was to be resumed—beautiful, glorious labor, that meant food and drink and a little clothing for the body! Yes, and domestic security! No more chewing the cud over an empty manger; now one could once more throw one’s money about a little, and then, by skimping and saving, with tears and hardship, make it suffice! To-night father would have something really good with his bread and butter, and to-morrow, perhaps, they could go out into the forest with the picnic-basket! Or at all events, as soon as they had got their best clothes back from the pawn-shop! They must have a bit of an airing before the winter came, and they had to go back into pawn! They were so overjoyed at the mere thought of peace that they quite forgot, for the moment, to demand anything new!

Pelle had taken part in the concluding negotiations; after Father Lasse’s burial he was himself again. Toward evening he was roaming about the poor quarter of the city, rejoicing in the mood of the people; he had played such an important part in the bitter struggle of the poor that he felt the need to share their joy as well. From the North Bridge he went by way of the Lakes to West Bridge; and everywhere swarms of people were afoot. In the side-streets by West Bridge all the families had emerged from their dwellings and established themselves on the front steps and the pavements; there they sat, bare-headed in the twilight, gossiping, smoking, and absorbing refreshments. It was the first warm evening; the sky was a deep blue, and at the end of the street the darkness was flooded with purple. There was something extravagant about them all; joy urged their movements to exceed the narrow every-day limits, and made them stammer and stagger as though slightly intoxicated.

Now they could all make their appearance again, all those families that had hidden themselves during the time of want; they were just as ragged, but that was of no consequence now! They were beaming with proud delight to think that they had come through the conflict without turning to any one for help; and the battles fought out in the darkness were forgotten.

Pelle had reached the open ground by the Gasworks Harbor; he wanted to go over to see his old friends in the “Ark.” Yonder it lay, lifting its glowing mass into the deep night of the eastern sky. The red of the sinking sun fell over it. High overhead, above the crater of the mass, hung a cloud of vapor, like a shadow on the evening sky. Pelle, as he wandered, had been gazing at this streak of shadow; it was the dense exhalation of all the creatures in the heart of the mass below, the reek of rotting material and inferior fuel. Now, among other consequences of victory, there would be a thorough cleansing of the dens of poverty. A dream floated before him, of comfortable little dwellings for the workers, each with its little garden and its well-weeded paths. It would repay a man then to go home after the day’s fatigue!

It seemed to him that the streak of smoke yonder was growing denser and denser. Or were his eyes merely exaggerating that which was occupying his thoughts? He stood still, gazing—then he began to run. A red light was striking upward against the cloud of smoke—touched a moment, and disappeared; and a fresh mass of smoke unrolled itself, and hung brooding heavily overhead.

Pelle rushed across the Staple Square, and over the long bridge. Only too well did he know the terrible bulk of the “Ark”—and there was no other exit than the tunnel! And the timber-work, which provided the sole access to the upper stories! As he ran he could see it all clearly before his eyes, and his mind began to search for means of rescue. The fire brigade was of course given the alarm at once, but it would take time to get the engines here, and it was all a matter of minutes! If the timber staging fell and the tunnel were choked all the inmates would be lost—and the “Ark” did not possess a single emergency-ladder!

Outside, in front of the “Ark,” was a restless crowd of people, all shouting together. “Here comes Pelle!” cried some one. At once they were all silent, and turned their faces toward him. “Fetch the fire-escape from the prison!” he shouted to some of the men in passing, and ran to the tunnel-entry.

From the long corridors on the ground floor the inmates were rushing out with their little children in their arms. Some were dragging valueless possessions—the first things they could lay hands on. All that was left of the timber-work after the wreckage of the terrible winter was now brightly blazing. Pelle tried to run up the burning stairs, but fell through. The inmates were hanging half out of their windows, staring down with eyes full of madness; every moment they ran out onto the platforms in an effort to get down, but always ran shrieking back.

At her third-story window Widow Johnsen stood wailing, with her grandchild and the factory-girl’s little Paul in her arms. Hanne’s little daughter stared silently out of the window, with the deep, wondering gaze of her mother. “Don’t be afraid,” Pelle shouted to the old woman; “we are coming to help you now!” When little Paul caught sight of Pelle he wrenched himself away from Madam Johnsen and ran out onto the gallery. He jumped right down, lay for a moment on the flagstones, turned round and round, quite confused, and then, like a flash of lightning, he rushed by Pelle and out into the street.

Pelle sent a few of the men into the long corridor, to see whether all were out. “Break in the closed doors,” he said; “there may possibly be children or sick people inside.” The inmates of the first and second stories had saved themselves before the fire had got a hold on the woodwork.

Pelle himself ran up the main staircase up to the lofts and under the roof, in order to go to the assistance of the inmates of the outbuildings over the attics. But he was met by the inmates of the long roof-walk. “You can’t get through any longer,” said the old rag-picker; “Pipman’s whole garret is burning, and there are no more up here. God in heaven have mercy on the poor souls over there!”

In spite of this, Pelle tried to find a way over the attics, but was forced to turn back.

The men had fetched the fire-escape, and had with difficulty brought it through the entry and had set it up! The burning timbers were beginning to fall; fragments of burning woodwork lay all around, and at any moment the whole building might collapse with a crash. But there was no time to think of one’s self. The smoke was rolling out of Vinslev’s corridor and filling the yard. There was need of haste.

“Of course, it was the lunatic who started the fire,” said the men, as they held the ladder.

It reached only to the second story, but Pelle threw a rope up to Madam Johnsen, and she fastened it to the window-frame, so that he was able to clamber up. With the rope he lowered first the child and then the old woman to his comrades below, who were standing on the ladder to receive them. The smoke was smarting in his eyes and throat, and all but stifled him; he could see nothing, but he heard a horrible shrieking all about him.

Just above him a woman was wailing. “Oh, Pelle, help me!” she whimpered, half choking. It was the timid seamstress, who had moved thither; he recognized her emotional voice. “She loves me!” suddenly flashed upon his mind.

“Catch the rope and fasten it well to the window-frame, and I’ll come up and help you!” he said, and he swung the end of the rope up toward the fourth story. But at the same moment a wild shriek rang out. A dark mass flew past his head and struck the flagstones with a dull thud. The flames darted hissing from the window, as though to reach after her, and then drew back.

For a moment he hung stupefied over the window-sill. This was too horrible. Was it not her gentle voice that he now heard singing with him? And then the timbers fell with a long cracking sound, and a cloud of hot ashes rose in the air and filled the lungs as with fire. “Come down!” cried his comrades, “the ladder is burning!”

A deafening, long-drawn ringing told him that the fire-brigade was near at hand.

But in the midst of all the uproar Pelle’s ears had heard a faint, intermittent sound. With one leap he was in Madam Johnsen’s room; he stood there listening; the crying of a child reached him from the other side of the wall, where the rooms opened on to the inner corridor. It was horrible to hear it and to stand there and be able to do nothing. A wall lay between, and there was no thoroughfare on the other side. In the court below they were shouting his name. Devil take them, he would come when he was ready. There he stood, obstinate and apathetic, held there by that complaining, childish voice. A blind fury arose in him; sullenly he set his shoulder against that accursed wall, and prepared himself for the shock. But the wall was giving! Yet again he charged it — a terrible blow—and part of the barrier was down!

He was met by a rush of stifling heat and smoke; he had to hold his breath and cover his face with his hands as he pressed forward. A little child lay there in a cradle. He stumbled over to it and groped his way back to the wall. The fire, now that it had access to the air, suddenly leaped at him with an explosive force that made him stagger. He felt as though a thirsty bull had licked his cheek. It bellowed at his heels with a voice of thunder, but was silent when he slammed the door. Half choking he found his way to the window and tried to shout to those below, but he had no voice left; only a hoarse whisper came from his throat.

Well, there he stood, with a child in his arms, and he was going to die! But that didn’t matter—he had got through the wall! Behind him the fire was pressing forward; it had eaten a small hole through the door, and had thus created the necessary draught. The hole grew larger; sparks rose as under a pair of bellows, and a dry, burning heat blew through the opening. Small, almost imperceptible flames were dancing over the polished surface; very soon the whole door would burst into a blaze. His clothes smelt of singeing; his hands were curiously dry like decaying wood, and he felt as if the hair at the back of his head was curling. And down below they were shouting his name. But all that was of no consequence; only his head was so heavy with the smoke and heat! He felt that he was on the point of falling. Was the child still alive? he wondered. But he dared not look to see; he had spread his jacket over its face in order to protect it.

He clutched the window-frame, and directed his dying thoughts toward Ellen and the children. Why was he not with them? What nonsense had it been that induced him to leave them? He could no longer recollect; but if it had not been all up with him now he would have hurried home to them, to play with Young Lasse. But now he must die; in a moment he would fall, suffocated—even before the flames could reach him.

There was some slight satisfaction in that—it was as though he had played a trick on some one.

Suddenly something shot up before his dying gaze and called him back. It was the end of a fire-escape, and a fireman rose out of the smoke just in front of him, seized the child, and handed it down. Pelle stood there wrestling with the idea that he must move from where he was; but before it had passed through his mind a fireman had seized him by the scruff of his neck and had run down the ladder with him.

The fresh air aroused him. He sprang up from the stretcher on which the fireman had laid him and looked excitedly about him. At the same moment the people began quite senselessly to shout his name and to clap their hands, and Madam Johnsen pushed her way through the barrier and threw herself upon him. “Pelle!” she cried, weeping; “oh, you are alive, Pelle!”

“Yes, of course I’m alive—but that’s nothing to cry about.”

“No, but we thought you were caught in there. But how you look, you poor boy!” She took him with her to a working-man’s home, and helped him to set himself to rights. When he had once seen a looking-glass he understood! He was unrecognizable, what with smoke and ashes, which had burnt themselves into his skin and would not come off. And under the grime there was a bad burn on one of his cheeks. He went to one of the firemen and had a plaster applied.

“You really want a pair of eyebrows too,” said the fireman. “You’ve been properly in the fire, haven’t you?”

“Why did the fire-engines take so long?” asked Pelle.

“Long? They were ten minutes getting here after the alarm was given. We got the alarm at eight, and now it’s half-past.”

Pelle was silent; he was quite taken aback; he felt as though the whole night must have gone by, so much had happened. Half an hour—and in that time he had helped to snatch several people out of the claws of death and had seen others fall into them. And he himself was singed by the close passage of death! The knowledge was lurking somewhere at the back of his mind, an accomplished but elusive fact; when he clenched his fist cracks appeared in the skin, and his clothes smelt like burnt horn. In the court the firemen were working unceasingly.

Some, from the tops of their ladders in the court, were pouring streams of water upon the flames; others were forcing their way into the body of the building and searching the rooms; and from time to time a fireman made his appearance carrying a charred body. Then the inmates of the “Ark” were called inside the barrier in order to identify the body. They hurried weeping through the crowd, seeking one another; it was impossible for the police to assemble them or to ascertain how many had failed to escape.

Suddenly all eyes were directed toward the roof of the front portion of the building, where the fire had not as yet entirely prevailed. There stood the crazy Vinslev, playing on his flute; and when the cracking of the fire was muffled for a moment one could hear his crazy music “Listen! Listen! He is playing the march!” they cried. Yes, he was playing the march, but it was interwoven with his own fantasies, so that the well-known melody sounded quite insane on Vinslev’s flute.

The firemen erected a ladder and ran up to the roof in order to save him, but he fled before them. When he could go no farther he leaped into the sea of flame.

The market-place and the banks of the canal were thick with people; shoulder to shoulder they stood there, gazing at the voluptuous spectacle of the burning “Ark.” The grime and poverty and the reek of centuries were going up in flames. How it rustled and blazed and crackled! The crowd was in the best of spirits owing to the victory of Labor; no one had been much inclined to sleep that night; and here was a truly remarkable display of fireworks, a magnificent illumination in honor of the victory of the poor! There were admiring cries of “Ah!” people hissed in imitation of the sound of rockets and clapped their hands when the flames leaped up or a roof crashed in.

Pelle moved about in the crowd, collecting the bewildered inmates of the “Ark” by the gates of the prison, so that those who had relatives could find them. They were weeping, and it was difficult to console them. Alas, now the “Ark” was burnt, the beloved place of refuge for so many ruined souls! “How can you take it to heart so?” said Pelle consolingly. “You will be lodged overnight by the city, and afterward you will move into proper dwelling-houses, where everything is clean and new. And you needn’t cry over your possessions, I’ll soon get up a collection, and you’ll have better things than you had before.”

Nevertheless they wept; like homeless wild beasts they whimpered and rambled restlessly to and fro, seeking for they knew not what. Their forest fastness, their glorious hiding-place, was burning! What was all the rest of the city to them? It was not for them; it was as though there was no place of refuge left for them in all the world! Every moment a few of them slipped away, seeking again to enter the site of the fire, like horses that seek to return to the burning stable. Pelle might have spared his efforts at consolation; they were races apart, a different species of humanity. In the dark, impenetrable entrails of the “Ark” they had made for themselves a world of poverty and extremest want; and they had been as fantastically gay in their careless existence as though their world had been one of wealth and fortune. And now it was all going up in flame!

The fire was unsparing; its purifying flames could not be withstood. The flames tore off great sheets of the old wallpapers and flung them out half-burned into the street. There were many layers pasted together, many colors and patterns, one dimly showing through another, making the most curious and fantastic pictures. And on the reverse side of these sheets was a layer as of coagulated blood; this was the charred remnant of the mysterious world of cupboards and chimney-corners, the fauna of the fireplace, that had filled the children’s sleep with dreams, and in the little mussel-shaped bodies was contained the concentrated exhalation of the poor man’s night! And now the “Ark” must have been hot right through to the ground, for the rats were beginning to leave. They came in long, winding files from the entry, and up out of the cellars of the old iron merchant and the old clothes dealer, headed by the old, scabby males which used to visit the dustbins in the middle of the day. The onlookers cheered and drove them back again.

About ten o’clock the fire was visibly decreasing and the work of clearance could begin. The crowd scattered, a little disappointed that all was over so soon. The “Ark” was an extinct bonfire! There could not have been a sackful of sound firewood in all that heap of lumber!

Pelle took Madam Johnsen and her little grand-daughter to his lodgings with him. The old woman had been complaining all the time; she was afraid of being given over to the public authorities. But when she heard that she was to go with Pelle she was reassured.

On the High Bridge they met the first dust-carts on their way outward. They were decked out with green garlands and little national flags.

XXXVII

The next day broke with a lofty, radiant Sabbath sky. There was something about it that reminded one of Easter—Easter morning, with its hymns and the pure winds of resurrection. *The Working Man* rung in the day with a long and serious leading article—a greeting to the rosy dawn—and invited the working-classes to attend a giant assembly on the Common during the afternoon. All through the forenoon great industry prevailed—wardrobes had to be overhauled, provision-baskets packed, and liquid refreshment provided. There was much running across landings and up and down stairs, much lending and borrowing. This was to be not merely a feast of victory; it was also intended as a demonstration—that was quite clear. The world should see how well they were still holding together after all these weeks of the lock-out! They were to appear in full strength, and they must look their best.

In the afternoon the people streamed from all sides toward the Labor Building; it looked as though the whole city was flocking thither. In the big court-yard, and all along the wide street as far as High Street, the trades unions were gathered about their banners. The great review had all been planned beforehand, and all went as by clockwork by those who were accustomed to handling great masses of men; there was no running from side to side; every one found his place with ease. Pelle and Stolpe, who had devised the programme, went along the ranks setting all to rights.

With the men there were no difficulties; but the women and children had of course misunderstood their instructions. They should have gone direct to the Common, but had turned up here with all their impedimenta. They stood crowding together on both the side-walks; and when the procession got under way they broke up and attached themselves to its sides. They had fought through the campaign, and their place was beside their husbands and fathers! It was a bannered procession with a double escort of women and children! Had the like ever been seen?

No, the city had never seen such a going forth of the people! Like a giant serpent the procession unrolled itself; when its head was at the end of the street the greater part of its body was still coiled together. But what was the matter in front there? The head of the procession was turning toward the wrong side—toward the city, instead of taking the direct way to the Common, as the police had ordered! That wouldn’t do! That would lead to a collision with the police! Make haste and get Pelle to turn the stream before a catastrophe occurs!—Pelle? But there he is, right in front! He himself has made a mistake as to the direction! Ah, well, then, there is nothing to be said about it. But what in the world was he thinking of?

Pelle marches in the front rank beside the standard-bearer. He sees and hears nothing, but his luminous gaze sweeps over the heads of the crowd. His skin is still blackened by the smoke of the fire; it is peeling off his hands; his hair and moustache seem to have been cropped very strangely; and the skin is drawn round the burn on his cheek. He is conscious of one thing only: the rhythmic tread of fifty thousand men! As a child he has known it in dreams, heard it like a surging out of doors when he laid his head upon his pillow. This is the great procession of the Chosen People, and he is leading them into the Promised Land! And where should their road lie if not through the capital?

At the North Wall the mounted police are drawn up, closing the inner city. They are drawn up diagonally across the thoroughfare, and were backing their horses into the procession, in order to force it to turn aside. But they were swept aside, and the stream flowed on; nothing can stop it.

It passes down the street with difficulty, like a viscous mass that makes its way but slowly, yet cannot be held back. It is full of a peaceful might. Who would venture to hew a way into it? The police are following it like watchful dogs, and on the side-walks the people stand pressed against the houses; they greet the procession or scoff at it, according as they are friends or foes. Upstairs, behind the big windows, are gaily clad ladies and gentlemen, quizzing the procession with half- scornful, half-uneasy smiles. What weird, hungry, unkempt world is this that has suddenly risen up from obscurity to take possession of the highway? And behind their transparent lace curtains the manufacturers gaze and grumble. What novel kind of demonstration is this? The people have been forgiven, and instead of going quietly back to their work they begin to parade the city as though to show how many they are—yes, and how thin starvation has made them!

It is a curious procession in every way. If they wanted to demonstrate how roughly they have been handled, they could not have done better! They all bear the marks of battle—they are pale and sallow and ill- clad; their Sunday best hangs in the great common wardrobe still; what they wear to-day is patched and mended. Hunger has refined their features; they are more like a procession of ghosts who have shaken off the heavy bonds of earth and are ready to take possession of the world of the spirit, than people who hope to conquer the Promised Land for themselves and posterity. Such a procession of conquerors! They are all limping! A flock with broken wings, that none the less are seeking to fly. And whither are they going?

One of their choirs breaks into song: "We are bound for the Land of Fortune!"

And where does that land lie? has any of your watchers seen it? Or was it not merely a deceitful dream, engendered by hunger? Eat enough, really enough, for once, good people, and then let us talk together! What is it yonder? The emptiness that gave birth to you and even yet surges crazily in your starving blood? Or the land of the living? Is this then the beginning of a new world for you? Or is the curse eternal that brings you into the world to be slaves?

There is a peculiar, confident rhythm in their tread which drowns all other sounds, and seems to say, "We are the masters, poor as we look to the eye! We have used four million kroner in waging the war, and twenty millions have been wasted because they brought the work of our hands to a standstill! We come from the darkness, and we go toward the light, and no one can hold us back! Behind us lie hunger and poverty, ignorance and slavery, and before us lies a happy existence, radiant with the rising sun of Freedom! From this day onward a new age begins; we are its youthful might, and we demand power for ten thousand families! The few have long enough prevailed!"

Imperturbably they march onward, despite the wounds that must yet be smarting; for see, they limp! Why should they still doubt?

Listen, they are singing! Hoarsely the sound emerges from ten thousand throats, as though the song had grown rusty, or must first tear itself free. A new instrument this, that has not yet been tuned by the master— its first notes are discords! But the song runs to and fro along the procession in rhythmical waves, it is an army on the march, and their eyes kindle and blaze with the growing sense of their power, the consciousness that they are the many! And the sound grows mighty, a storm that rolls above the housetops, "Brother, soon will dawn the day!"

Touch not the humblest of them now! A vast, intoxicating power has descended upon them; each one has grown beyond himself, and believes himself capable of performing miracles. There are no loose particles; the whole is a mighty avalanche. Touch but one of them and the might of the mass will pour into him. He will be oblivious of consequences, but will behave as though urged by destiny—as though the vast being of which he forms a part will assume all responsibility, and constitutes the law!

It is intoxicating to walk in the ranks, to be permitted to bear the Union banners; even to look on fills one with strength and joy. Mothers and children accompany the men, although they have for the most part to walk in the gutters. It is great sport to fall out and watch the whole mighty procession go by, and then, by taking a short cut, again to station one's self at the head. Stand at a street-corner, and it will take hours for the whole to pass you. *Trapp, trapp! Trapp, trapp!* It gets into one's blood, and remains there, like an eternal rhythm.

One Union passes and another comes up; the machinists, with the sturdy Munck at their head, as standard-bearer, the same who struck the three blows of doom that summoned five and forty thousand men to the battle for the right of combination! Hurrah for Munck! Here are the house- painters, the printers, the glove-makers, the tinsmiths, the cork-cutters, the leather-dressers, and a group of seamen with bandy legs. At the head of these last marches Howling Peter, the giant transfigured! The copper-smiths, the coal-miners, the carpenters, the journeymen bakers, and the coach-builders! A queer sort of procession this! But here are the girdlers and there the plasterers, the stucco-workers, and the goldsmiths, and even the sand-blasters are here! The tailors and the shoemakers are easy to recognize. And there, God bless me, are the slipper-makers, close at their heels; they wouldn't be left in the cold! The gilders, the tanners, the weavers, and the tobacco-workers! The file-cutters, the bricklayers'-laborers, the pattern-makers, the coopers, the book-binders, the joiners and shipbuilders! What, is there no end to them? Hi, make way for the journeymen glaziers! Yes, you may well smile—they are all their own masters! And here come the gasworkers, and the water-company's men, and the cabinet-makers, who turn in their toes like the blacksmiths, and march just in front of them, as though these had anything to learn from them! Those are the skilful ivory-turners, and those the brush-makers; spectacled these, and with brushes growing out of their noses—that is, when they are old. Well, so it is all over at last! The tail consists of a swarm of frolicsome youngsters.

But no—these are the milk-boys, these young vagabonds! And behind them come the factory-girls and behind them it all begins again—the pianoforte-makers, the millers, the saddlers, and the paper-hangers—banners as far as one can see! How big and how gay the world is, after all! How many callings men pursue, so that work shall never fail them! Ah, here are the masons, with all the old veterans at their head—those have been in the movement since the beginning! Look, how steady on his leg is old Stolpe! And the slaters, with the Vanishing Man at their head—they look as if they don't much care about walking on the level earth! And here are the sawyers, and the brewers, and the chair-makers! Year by year their wages have been beaten down so that at the beginning of the struggle they were earning only half as much as ten years ago; but see how cheerful they look! Now there will be food in the larder once more. Those faded-looking women there are weavers; they have no banner; eight öre the hour won't run to flags. And finally a handful of newspaper-women from *The Working Man*. God how weary they look! Their legs are like lead from going up and down so many stairs. Each has a bundle of papers under her arm, as a sign of her calling.

Trapp, trapp, trapp, trapp! On they go, with a slow, deliberate step. Whither? Where Pelle wills. "*Brother, soon will dawn the day!*" One hears the song over and over again; when one division has finished it the next takes it up. The side-streets are spewing their contents out upon the procession; shrunken creatures that against their will were singed in the struggle, and cannot recover their feet again. But they follow the procession with big eyes and break into fanatical explanations.

A young fellow stands on the side-walk yonder; he has hidden himself behind some women, and is stretching his neck to see. For his own Union is coming now, to which he was faithless in the conflict. Remorse has brought him hither. But the rhythm of the marching feet carries him away, so that he forgets all and marches off beside them. He imagines himself in the ranks, singing and proud of the victory. And suddenly some of his comrades seize him and drag him into the ranks; they lift him up and march away with him. A trophy, a trophy! A pity he can't be stuck on a pole and carried high overhead!

Pelle is still at the head of the procession, at the side of the sturdy Munck. His aspect is quiet and smiling, but inwardly he is full of unruly energy; never before has he felt so strong! On the side-walks the police keep step with him, silent and fateful. He leads the procession diagonally across the King's New Market, and suddenly a shiver runs through the whole; he is going to make a demonstration in front of Schloss Amalienborg! No one has thought of that! Only the police are too clever for them the streets leading to the castle are held by troops.

Gradually the procession widens out until it fills the entire market-place. A hundred and fifty trades unions, each with its waving standard! A tremendous spectacle! Every banner has its motto or device. Red is the color of all those banners which wave above the societies which were established in the days of Socialism, and among them are many national flags—blue, red, and white—the standards of the old guilds and corporations. Those belong to ancient societies which have gradually joined the movement. Over all waves the standard of the millers, which is some hundreds of years old! It displays a curious-looking scrawl which is the monogram of the first absolute king!

But the real standard is not here, the red banner of the International, which led the movement through the first troubled years. The old men would speedily recognize it, and the young men too, they have heard so many legends attaching to it. If it still exists it is well hidden; it would have too great an effect on the authorities—would be like a red rag to a bull.

And as they stand staring it suddenly rises in the air—slashed and tattered, imperishable as to color. Pelle stands on the box of a carriage, solemnly raising it in the air. For a moment they are taken by surprise; then they begin to shout, until the shouts grow to a tempest of sound. They are greeting the flag of brotherhood, the blood-red sign of the International—and Pelle, too, who is raising it in his blistered hands—Pelle, the good comrade, who saved the child from the fire; Pelle, who has led the movement cause to victory!

And Pelle stands there laughing at them frankly, like a great child. This would have been the place to give them all a few words, but he has not yet recovered his mighty voice. So he waves it round over them with a slow movement as though he were administering an oath to them all. And he is very silent. This is an old dream of his, and at last it has come to fulfillment!

The police are pushing into the crowd in squads, but the banner has disappeared; Munck is standing with an empty stave in his hands, and is on the point of fixing his Union banner on it.

“You must take care to get these people away from here, or we shall hold you responsible for the consequences,” says the police inspector, with a look that promises mischief. Pelle looks in the face. “He’d like to throw me into prison, if only he had the courage,” he thought, and then he sets the procession in motion again.

Out on the Common the great gathering of people rocked to and fro, in restless confusion. From beyond its confines it looked like a dark, raging sea. About each of the numerous speakers’ platforms stood a densely packed crowd, listening to the leaders who were demonstrating the great significance of the day. But the majority did not feel inclined to-day to stand in a crowd about a platform. They felt a longing to surrender themselves to careless enjoyment, after all the hardships they had endured; to stand on their heads in the grass, to play the clown for a moment. Group upon group lay all over the great Common, eating and playing. The men had thrown off their coats and were wrestling with one another, or trying to revive the gymnastic exercises of their boyhood. They laughed more than they spoke; if any one introduced a serious subject it was immediately suppressed with a punning remark. Nobody was serious to-day!

Pelle moved slowly about, delighting in the crowd, while keeping a look- out for Madam Johnsen and the child, who were to have met him out here. Inwardly, at the back of everything, he was in a serious mood, and was therefore quiet. It must be fine to lie on one’s belly here, in the midst of one’s own family circle, eating hard-boiled eggs and bread-and-butter—or to go running about with Young Lasse on his shoulders! But what did it profit a man to put his trust in anything? He could not begin over again with Ellen; the impossible stood between them. To drive Young Lasse out of his thoughts—that would be the hardest thing of all; he must see if he could not get him away from Ellen in a friendly manner. As for applying to the law in order to get him back, that he would not do.

The entire Stolpe family was lying in a big circle, enjoying a meal; the sons were there with their wives and children; only Pelle and his family were lacking.

“Come and set to!” said Stolpe, “or you’ll be making too long a day of it.”

“Yes,” cried Madam Stolpe, “it is such a time since we’ve been together. No need for us to suffer because you and Ellen can’t agree!” She did not know the reason of the breach—at all events, not from him—but was none the less friendly toward him.

“I am really looking for my own basket of food,” said Pelle, lying down beside them.

“Now look here, you are the deuce of a fellow,” said Stolpe, suddenly laughing. “You intended beforehand to look in and say how-d’ye-do to Brother Christian,[1] hey? It wasn’t very wise of you, really—but that’s all one to me. But what you have done to-day no one else could do. The whole thing went like a dance! Not a sign of wobbling in the ranks! You know, I expect, that they mean to put you at the head of the Central Committee? Then you will have an opportunity of working at your wonderful ideas of a world-federation. But there’ll be enough to do at home here without that; at the next election we must win the city—and part of the country too. You’ll let them put you up?”

[1] The king was so called.

“If I recover my voice. I can’t speak loudly at present.”

“Try the raw yolk of an egg every night,” said Madam Stolpe, much concerned, “and tie your left-hand stocking round your throat when you go to bed; that is a good way. But it must be the left-hand stocking.”

“Mother is a Red, you know,” said Stolpe. “If I go the right-hand side of her she doesn’t recognize me!”

The sun must have set—it was already beginning to grow dark. Black clouds were rising in the west. Pelle felt remorseful that he had not yet found the old woman and her grandchild, so he took his leave of the Stolpes.

He moved about, looking for the two; wherever he went the people greeted him, and there was a light in their eyes. He noticed that a policeman was following him at some little distance; he was one of the secret hangers-on of the party; possibly he had something to communicate to him. So Pelle lay down in the grass, a little apart from the crowd, and the policeman stood still and gazed cautiously about him. Then he came up to Pelle. When he was near he bent down as though picking something up. “They are after you,” he said, under his breath; “this afternoon there was a search made at your place, and you’ll be arrested, as soon as you leave here.” Then he moved on.

Pelle lay there some minutes before he could understand the matter. A search—but what was there at his house that every one might not know of? Suddenly he thought of the wood block and the tracing of the ten-kroner note. They had sought for some means of striking at him and they had found the materials of a hobby!

He rose heavily and walked away from the crowd. On the East Common he stood still and gazed back hesitatingly at this restless sea of humanity, which was now beginning to break up, and would presently melt away into the darkness. Now the victory was won and they were about to take possession of the Promised Land—and he must go to prison, for a fancy begotten of hunger! He had issued no false money, nor had he ever had any intention of doing so. But of what avail was that? He was to be arrested—he had read as much in the eyes of the police-inspector. Penal servitude—or at best a term in prison!

He felt that he must postpone the decisive moment while he composed his mind. So he went back to the city by way of the East Bridge. He kept to the side-streets, in order not to be seen, and made his way toward St. Saviour’s churchyard; the police were mostly on the Common.

For a moment the shipping in the harbor made him think of escape. But whither should he flee? And to wander about abroad as an outlaw, when his task and his fate lay here could he do it? No, he must accept his fate!

The churchyard was closed; he had to climb over the wall in order to get in. Some one had put fresh flowers on Father Lasse’s grave. Maria, he thought. Yes, it must have been she! It was good to be here; he no longer felt so terribly forsaken. It was as though Father Lasse’s untiring care still hovered protectingly about him.

But he must move on. The arrest weighed upon his mind and made him restless. He wandered through the city, keeping continually to the narrow side-streets, where the darkness concealed him. This was the field of battle—how restful it was now! Thank God, it was not they who condemned him! And now happiness lay before them—but for him!

Cautiously he drew near his lodging—two policemen in plain clothes were patrolling to and fro before the house. After that he drew back again into the narrow side-streets. He drifted about aimlessly, fighting against the implacable, and at last resigning himself.

He would have liked to see Ellen—to have spoken kindly to her, and to have kissed the children. But there was a watch on his home too—at every point he was driven back into the solitude to which he was a stranger. That was the dreadful part of it all. How was he going to live alone with himself, he who only breathed when in the company of others? Ellen was still his very life, however violently he might deny it. Her questioning eyes still gazed at him enigmatically, from whatever corner of existence he might approach. He had a strong feeling now that she had held herself ready all this time—that she had sat waiting for him, expecting him. How would she accept this?

From Castle Street he saw a light in Morten’s room. He slipped into the yard and up the stairs. Morten was reading.

“It’s something quite new to see you—fireman!” he said, with a kindly smile.

“I have come to say good-bye,” said Pelle lightly.

Morten looked at him wonderingly. “Are you going to travel?”

“Yes … I—I wanted….” he said, and sat down.

He gazed on the floor in front of his feet. “What would you do if the authorities were sneaking after you?” he asked suddenly. Morten stared at him for a time. Then he opened a drawer and took out a revolver. “I wouldn’t let them lay hands on me,” he said blackly. “But why do you ask me?”

“Oh, nothing.… Will you do me a favor, Morten? I have promised to take up a collection for those poor creatures from the ‘Ark,’ but I’ve no time for it now. They have lost all their belongings in the fire. Will you see to the matter?”

“Willingly. Only I don’t understand——”

“Why, I have got to go away for a time,” said Pelle, with a grim laugh. “I have always wanted to travel, as you know. Now there’s an opportunity.”

“Good luck, then!” said Morten, looking at him curiously as he pressed his hand. How much he had guessed Pelle did not know. There was Bornholm blood in Morten’s veins; he was not one to meddle in another’s affairs.

And then he was in the streets again. No, Morten’s way out was of no use to him—and now he would give in, and surrender himself to the authorities! He was in the High Street now; he had no purpose in hiding himself any longer.

In North Street he saw a figure dealing with a shop-door in a very suspicious manner; as Pelle came up it flattened itself against the door. Pelle stood still on the pavement; the man, too, was motionless for a while, pressing himself back into the shadow; then, with an angry growl, he sprang out, in order to strike Pelle to the ground.

At that very moment the two men recognized one another. The stranger was Ferdinand.

“What, are you still at liberty?” he cried, in amazement. “I thought they had taken you!”

“How did you know that?” asked Pelle.

“Ach, one knows these things—it’s part of one’s business. You’ll get five to six years, Pelle, till you are stiff with it. Prison, of course —not penal servitude.”

Pelle shuddered.

“You’ll freeze in there,” said Ferdinand compassionately. “As for me, I can settle down very well in there. But listen, Pelle—you’ve been so good, and you’ve tried to save me—next to mother you are the only person I care anything about. If you would like to go abroad I can soon hide you and find the passage-money.”

“Where will you get it?” asked Pelle, hesitating.

“Ach, I go in for the community of goods,” said Ferdinand with a broad smile. “The prefect of police himself has just five hundred kroner lying in his desk. I’ll try to get it for you if you like.”

“No,” said Pelle slowly, “I would rather undergo my punishment. But thanks for your kind intentions—and give my best wishes to your old mother. And if you ever have anything to spare, then give it to Widow Johnsen. She and the child have gone hungry since Hanne’s death.”

And then there was nothing more to do or say; it was all over.… He went straight across the market-place toward the court-house. There it stood, looking so dismal! He strolled slowly past it, along the canal, in order to collect himself a little before going in. He walked along the quay, gazing down into the water, where the boats and the big live-boxes full of fish were just visible. By Holmens Church he pulled himself together and turned back—he must do it now! He raised his head with a sudden resolve and found himself facing Marie. Her cheeks glowed as he gazed at her.

“Pelle,” she cried, rejoicing, “are you still at liberty? Then it wasn’t true! I have been to the meeting, and they said there you had been arrested. Ach, we have been so unhappy!”

“I shall be arrested—I am on the way now.”

“But, Pelle, dear Pelle!” She gazed at him with tearful eyes. Ah, he was still the foundling, who needed her care! Pelle himself had tears in his eyes; he suddenly felt weak and impressible. Here was a human child whose heart was beating for him—and how beautiful she was, in her grief at his misfortune!

She stood before him, slender, but generously formed; her hair—once so thin and uncared-for—fell in heavy waves over her forehead. She had emerged from her stunted shell into a glorious maturity. “Pelle,” she said, with downcast eyes, gripping both his hands, “don’t go there to-night—wait till tomorrow! All the others are rejoicing over the victory to-night—and so should you! … Come with me, to my room, Pelle, you are so unhappy.” Her face showed him that she was fighting down her tears. She had never looked so much a child as now.

“Why do you hesitate? Come with me! Am I not pretty? And I have kept it all for you! I have loved you since the very first time I ever saw you, Pelle, and I began to grow, because I wanted to be beautiful for you. I owe nothing to any one but you, and if you don’t want me I don’t want to go on living!”

No, she owed nothing to any one, this child from nowhere, but was solely and entirely her own work. Lovely and untouched she came to him in her abandonment, as though she were sent by the good angel of poverty to quicken his heart. Beautiful and pure of heart she had grown up out of wretchedness as though out of happiness itself, and where in the world should he rest his head, that was wearied to death, but on the heart of her who to him was child and mother and beloved?

“Pelle, do you know, there was dancing to-day in the Federation building after the meeting on the Common, and we young girls had made a green garland, and I was to crown you with it when you came into the hall. Oh, we did cry when some one came up and called out to us that they had taken you! But now you have won the wreath after all, haven’t you? And you shall sleep sweetly and not think of to-morrow!”

And Pelle fell asleep with his head on her girlish bosom. And as she lay there gazing at him with the eyes of a mother, he dreamed that Denmark’s hundred thousand workers were engaged in building a splendid castle, and that he was the architect. And when the castle was finished he marched in at the head of the army of workers; singing they passed through the long corridors, to fill the shining halls. But the halls were not there —the castle had turned into a prison! And they went on and on, but could not find their way out again.

IV. DAYBREAK

I

Out in the middle of the open, fertile country, where the plough was busy turning up the soil round the numerous cheerful little houses, stood a gloomy building that on every side turned bare walls toward the smiling world. No panes of glass caught the ruddy glow of the morning and evening sun and threw back its quivering reflection; three rows of barred apertures drank in all the light of day with insatiable avidity. They were always gaping greedily, and seen against the background of blue spring sky, looked like holes leading into the everlasting darkness. In its heavy gloom the mass of masonry towered above the many smiling homes, but their peaceable inhabitants did not seem to feel oppressed. They ploughed their fields right up to the bare walls, and wherever the building was visible, eyes were turned toward it with an expression that told of the feeling of security that its strong walls gave.

Like a landmark the huge building towered above everything else. It might very well have been a temple raised to God’s glory by a grateful humanity, so imposing was it; but if so, it must have been in by-gone ages, for no dwellings—even for the Almighty—are built nowadays in so barbaric a style, as if the one object were to keep out light and air! The massive walls were saturated with the dank darkness within, and the centuries had weathered their surface and made on it luxuriant cultures of fungus and mould, and yet they still seemed as if they could stand for an eternity.

The building was no fortress, however, nor yet a temple whose dim recesses were the abode of the unknown God. If you went up to the great, heavy door, which was always closed you could read above the arch the one word *Prison* in large letters and below it a simple Latin verse that with no little pretentiousness proclaimed:

> “I am the threshold to all virtue and wisdom;
> Justice flourishes solely for my sake.”

One day in the middle of spring, the little door in the prison gate opened, and a tall man stepped out and looked about him with eyes blinking at the light which fell upon his ashen-white face. His step faltered and he had to lean for support against the wall; he looked as if he were about to go back again, but he drew a deep breath and went out on to the open ground.

The spring breeze made a playful assault upon him, tried to ruffle his prison-clipped, slightly gray hair, which had been curly and fair when last it had done so, and penetrated gently to his bare body like a soft, cool hand. “Welcome, Pelle!” said the sun, as it peeped into his distended pupils in which the darkness of the prison-cell still lay brooding. Not a muscle of his face moved, however; it was as though hewn out of stone. Only the pupils of his eyes contracted so violently as to be almost painful, but he continued to look earnestly before him. Whenever he saw any one, he stopped and gazed eagerly, perhaps in the hope that it was some one coming to meet him.

As he turned into the King’s Road some one called to him. He turned round in sudden, intense joy, but then his head dropped and he went on without answering. It was only a tramp, who was standing half out of a ditch in a field a little way off, beckoning to him. He came running over the ploughed field, crying hoarsely: “Wait a little, can’t you? Here have I been waiting for company all day, so you might as well wait a little!”

He was a broad-shouldered, rather puffy-looking fellow, with a flat back and the nape of his neck broad and straight and running right up into his cap without forming any projection for the back of his head, making one involuntarily think of the scaffold. The bone of his nose had sunk into his purple face, giving a bull-dog mixture of brutality and stupid curiosity to its expression.

“How long have you been in?” he asked, as he joined him, breathless. There was a malicious look in his eyes.

“I went in when Pontius Pilate was a little boy, so you can reckon it out for yourself,” said Pelle shortly.

“My goodness! That was a good spell! And what were you copped for?”

“Oh, there happened to be an empty place, so they took me and put me in —so that it shouldn’t stand empty, you know!”

The tramp scowled at him. “You’re laying it on a little too thick! You won’t get any one to believe that!” he said uncertainly. Suddenly he put himself in front of Pelle, and pushed his bull-like forehead close to the other’s face. “Now, I’ll just tell you something, my boy!” he said. “I don’t want to touch any one the first day I'm out, but you'd better take yourself and your confounded uppishness somewhere else; for I've been lying here waiting for company all day."

"I didn't mean to offend any one," said Pelle absently. He looked as if he had not come back to earth, and appeared to have no intention of doing anything.

"Oh, didn't you! That's fortunate for you, or I might have taken a color-print of your doleful face, however unwillingly. By the way, mother said I was to give you her love."

"Are you Ferdinand?" asked Pelle, raising his head.

"Oh, don't pretend!" said Ferdinand. "Being in gaol seems to have made a swell of you!"

"I didn't recognize you," said Pelle earnestly, suddenly recalled to the world around him.

"Oh, all right—if you say so. It must be the fault of my nose. I got it bashed in the evening after I'd buried mother. I was to give you her love, by the way."

"Thank you!" said Pelle heartily. Old memories from the "Ark" filled his mind and sent his blood coursing through his veins once more. "Is it long since your mother died?" he asked sympathetically.

Ferdinand nodded. "It was a good thing, however," he said, "for now there's no one I need go and have a bad conscience about. I'd made up my mind that she deserved to have things comfortable in her old age, and I was awfully careful; but all the same I was caught for a little robbery and got eight months. That was just after you got in—but of course you know that."

"No! How could I know it?"

"Well, I telegraphed it over to you. I was just opposite you, in Wing A, and when I'd reckoned out your cell, I bespoke the whole line one evening, and knocked a message through to you. But there was a sanctimonious parson at the corner of your passage, one of those moral folk—oh, you didn't even know that, then? Well, I'd always suspected him of not passing my message on, though a chap like that's had an awful lot of learning put into him. Then when I came out I said to myself that there must be an end to all this, for mother'd taken it very much to heart, and was failing. I managed to get into one of the streets where honest thieves live, and went about as a colporteur, and it all went very well. It would have been horribly mean if she'd died of hunger. And we had a jolly good time for six months, but then she slipped away all the same, and I can just tell you that I've never been in such low spirits as the day they put her underground in the cemetery. Well, I said to myself, there lies mother smelling the weeds from underneath, so you can just as well give it all up, for there's nothing more to trouble about now. And I went up to the office and asked for a settlement, and they cheated me of fifty subscribers, the rogues!

"Of course I went to the police: I was stupid enough to do that at that time. But they're all a lot of rogues together. They thought it wouldn't do to believe a word that I said, and would have liked to put me in prison at once; but for all they poked about they couldn't find a peg to hang their hat upon. 'He's managing to hide it well this time, the sly fellow!' they said, and let me go. But there soon was something, for I settled the matter myself, and you may take your oath my employers didn't get the best of the arrangement. You see there are two kinds of people—poor people who are only honest when they let themselves be robbed, and all the others. Why the devil should one go about like a shorn sheep and not rob back! Some day of course there'll be a bust-up, and then—'three years, prisoner!' I shall be in again before long."

"That depends upon yourself," said Pelle slowly.

"Oh, well, of course you can do *something*; but the police are always getting sharper, and the man isn't born who won't fall into the trap sooner or later."

"You should try and get some honest employment again. You've shown that you can succeed."

Ferdinand whistled. "In such a paltry way as that! Many thanks for the good advice! You'd like me to look after a bloated aristocrat's geese and then sit on the steps and eat dry bread to the smell of the roast bird, would you? No, thank you! And even if I did—what then? You may be quite sure they'd keep a good watch on a fellow, if he tried an honest job, and it wouldn't be two days before the shadow was there. 'What's this about Ferdinand? I hear things are not all square with him. I'm sorry, for he's really worked well; but he'd better look out for another place.'

That's what the decent ones would do; the others would simply wait until his wages were due and take something off—because he'd been in once. They could never be sure that he hadn't stolen something from them, could they? and it's best to be careful! If you make a fuss, you're called a thief to your face. I've tried it, let me tell you! And now you can try it yourself. You'll be in again as soon as ever the spring comes! The worst of it is that it gets more every time; a fellow like me may get five years for stealing five krones (five shillings). Isn't that a shame? So it's just as well to do something to make it worth while. It wouldn't matter if you could only get a good hit at it all. It's all one to me now that mother's dead. There's a child crying, but it's not for me. There isn't a soul that would shed a tear if I had to lay my head on the block. They'd come and stare, that's what they'd do—and I should get properly into the papers!

"Wicked? Of course I'm wicked! Sometimes I feel like one great sore, and would like to let them hear all about it. There's no such thing as gentle hands. That's only a lie, so I owe nothing to anybody. Several times while I've been in there I've made up my mind to kill the warder, just so as to have a hit at something; for he hadn't done me any harm. But then I thought after all it was stupid. I'd no objection to kick the bucket; it would be a pleasant change anyhow to sitting in prison all one's life. But then you'd want to do something first that would make a stir. That's what I feel!"

They walked on at a good pace, their faces turned in the direction of the smoky mist of the town far ahead, Ferdinand chewing his quid and spitting incessantly. His hardened, bulldog face with its bloodshot eyes was entirely without expression now that he was silent.

A peasant lad came toward them, singing at the top of his voice. He must have been about twelve or fourteen years of age.

"What are you so happy about, boy?" asked Ferdinand, stopping him.

"I took a heifer into the town, and I got two krones (two shillings) for the job," answered the boy, smiling all over his face.

"You must have been up early then," said Pelle.

"Yes, I left home at three last night. But now I've earned a day's wages, and can take it easy the rest of the day!" answered the boy, throwing the two-krone piece into the air and catching it again.

"Take care you don't lose it," said Ferdinand, following the coin with covetous eyes.

The boy laughed merrily.

"Let's see whether it's a good one. They're a fearful lot of thieves on the market in there."

The boy handed him the coin. "Ah, yes, it's one of those that you can break in half and make two of," said Ferdinand, doing a few juggling tricks with it. "I suppose I may keep one?" His expression had become lively and he winked maliciously at Pelle as he stood playing with the coin so that it appeared to be two. "There you are; that's yours," he said, pressing the piece of money firmly into the boy's hand. "Take good care of it, so that you don't get a scolding from your mother."

The boy opened his empty hand in wonderment. "Give me my two-krone!" he said, smiling uncertainly.

"What the devil—I've given it you once!" said Ferdinand, pushing the boy aside roughly and beginning to walk on.

The boy followed him and begged persistently for his money. Then he began to cry.

"Give him his money!" said Pelle crossly. "It's not amusing now."

"Amusing?" exclaimed Ferdinand, stopping abruptly and gazing at him in amazement. "Do you think I play for small sums? What do I care about the boy! He may take himself off; I'm not his father."

Pelle looked at him a moment without comprehending; then he took a paper containing a few silver coins out of his waistcoat pocket, and handed the boy two krones. The boy stood motionless with amazement for a moment, but then, seizing the money, he darted away as quickly as he could go.

Ferdinand went on, growling to himself and blinking his eyes. Suddenly he stopped and exclaimed: "I'll just tell you as a warning that if it wasn't you, and because I don't want to have this day spoiled, I'd have cracked your skull for you; for no one else would have played me that trick. Do you understand?" And he stood still again and pushed his heavy brow close to Pelle's face.

Quick as thought, Pelle seized him by his collar and trousers, and threw him forcibly onto a heap of stones. "That's the second time to-day that you've threatened to crack my skull," he said in fury, pounding

Ferdinand's head against the stones. For a few moments he held him down firmly, but then released him and helped him to rise. Ferdinand was crimson in the face, and stood swaying, ready to throw himself upon Pelle, while his gaze wandered round in search of a weapon. Then he hesitatingly drew the two-krone piece out of his pocket, and handed it to Pelle in sign of subjection.

"You may keep it," said Pelle condescendingly.

Ferdinand quickly pocketed it again, and began to brush the mud off his clothes. "The skilly in there doesn't seem to have weakened you much," he said, shaking himself good-naturedly as they went on. "You've still got a confounded hard hand. But what I can't understand is why you should be so sorry for a hobbledehoy like that. He can take care of himself without us."

"Weren't you once sorry too for a little fellow when some one wanted to take his money away from him?"

"Oh, that little fellow in the 'Ark' who was going to fetch the medicine for his mother? That's such a long time ago!"

"You got into difficulties with the police for his sake! It was the first time you were at odds with the authorities, I think."

"Well, the boy hadn't done anything; I saw that myself. So I hobbled the copper that was going to run him in. His mother was ill—and my old 'un was alive; and so I was a big idiot! You'll see you won't get far with your weak pity. Do we owe any one anything, I should like to know?"

"Yes, *I* do," said Pelle, suddenly raising his face toward the light. "But I can't say you've much to thank any one for."

"What confounded nonsense!" exclaimed Ferdinand, staring at him. "Have they been good to you, did you say? When they shut you up in prison too, perhaps? You're pretending to be good, eh? You stop that! You'll have to go farther into the country with it. So you think you deserved your house-of-correction turn, while another was only suffering the blackest injustice? Nonsense! They know well enough what they're doing when they get hold of me, but they might very well have let you off. You got together fifty thousand men, but what did you all do, I should like to know? You didn't make as much disturbance as a mouse in a pair of lady's unmentionables. Well-to-do people are far more afraid of me than of you and all your fellows together. Injustice! Oh, shut up and don't slobber! You give no quarter, and you don't ask any either: that's all. And by the way, you might do me the favor to take back your two-krone. *I* don't owe any one anything."

"Well, borrow it, then," said Pelle. "You can't go to town quite without money."

"Do take it, won't you?" begged Ferdinand. "It isn't so easy for you to get hold of any as for any one else, and it was a little too mean the way I got it out of you. You've been saving it up in there, a halfpenny a day, and perhaps gone without your quid, and I come and cheat you out of it! No, confound it! And you gave mother a little into the bargain; I'd almost forgotten it! Well, never mind the tin then! I know a place where there's a good stroke of business to be done."

A little above Damhus Lake they turned into a side road that led northward, in order to reach the town from the Nörrebro side. Far down to the right a great cloud of smoke hung in the air. It was the atmosphere of the city. As the east wind tore off fragments of it and carried them out, Ferdinand lifted his bull-dog nose and sniffed the air. "Wouldn't I like to be sitting in the 'Cupping-Glass' before a horse-steak with onions!" he said.

By this time the afternoon was well advanced. They broke sticks out of a hedge and went on steadily, following ditches and dikes as best they could. The plough was being driven over the fields, backward and forward, turning up the black earth, while crows and sea-birds fought in the fresh furrows. The ploughmen put the reins round their waist each time they came to the end of their line, threw the plough over and brought it into position for a new furrow, and while they let their horses take breath, gazed afar at the two strange spring wayfarers. There was such a foreign air about their clothes that they must be two of that kind of people that go on foot from land to land, they thought; and they called after them scraps of foreign sentences to show they knew something about them. Ah, yes! They were men who could look about them! Perhaps by to-morrow those two would be in a foreign country again, while other folk never left the place they were once in!

They passed a white house standing in stately seclusion among old trees, a high hawthorn hedge screening the garden from the road. Ferdinand threw a hasty glance over the gate. The blinds were all down!

He began to be restless, and a little farther on he suddenly slipped in behind a hedge and refused to go any farther. “I don’t care to show myself in town empty-handed,” he said. “And besides evening’s the best time to go in at full speed. Let’s wait here until it’s dark. I can smell silver in that house we passed.”

“Come on now and let those fancies alone,” said Pelle earnestly. “A new life begins from to-day. I’ll manage to help you to get honest work!”

Ferdinand broke into laughter. “Good gracious me! You help others! You haven’t tried yet what it is to come home from prison! You’ll find it hard enough to get anywhere yourself, my good fellow. New life, ha, ha! No; just you stay here and we’ll do a little business together when it gets dark. The house doesn’t look quite squint-eyed. Then this evening we can go to the ‘Cupping-Glass’ and have a jolly good spree, and act the home-coming American. Besides it’s not right to go home without taking something for your family. Just you wait! You should see ‘Laura with the Arm’ dance! She’s my cupboard-love, you know. She can dance blindfold upon a table full of beer-mugs without spilling a drop. There might be a little kiss for you too.—Hang it!—you don’t surely imagine you’ll be made welcome anywhere else, do you? I can tell you there’s no one who’ll stand beckoning you home.—Very well, then go to the devil, you fool, and remember me to your monthly nurse! When you’re tired of family life, you can ask for me at my address, the ‘Cupping-Glass’.” His hoarse, hollow voice cut through the clear spring air as he shouted the last words with his hand to his mouth.

Pelle went on quickly, as though anxious to leave something behind him. He had had an insane hope of being received in some kind way or other when he came out—comrades singing, perhaps, or a woman and two children standing on the white highroad, waiting for him! And there had only been Ferdinand to meet him! Well, it had been a damper, and now he shook off the disappointment and set out at a good pace. The active movement set his pulses beating. The sky had never before been so bright as it was to-day; the sun shone right into his heart. There was a smiling greeting in it all—in the wind that threw itself into his very arms, in the fresh earth and in the running water in the ditches. Welcome back again, Pelle!

How wide and fair the world looks when you’ve spent years within four bare walls! Down in the south the clouds were like the breast of a great bright bird, one of those that come a long way every year with summer in the beat of their strong wings; and on all sides lay the open, white roads, pointing onward with bright assurances.

For the fourth time he was setting out to conquer the world, and this time it was in bitter earnest. There had always before proved to be something more behind, but now he felt that what he should now set out upon would be decisive; if he was victorious now, he would conquer eternity. This time it must be either for weal or woe, and all that he possessed he was now bringing into the field. He had never before been so heavily equipped. Far off he could still make out the dome of the prison, which stood there like a huge mill over the descent to the nether world, and ground misery into crime in the name of humanity. It sucked down every one who was exposed to life’s uncertainty; he had himself hung in the funnel and felt how its whirling drew him down.

But Pelle had been too well equipped. Hitherto he had successfully converted everything into means of rising, and he took this in the same way. His hair was no longer fair, but, on the other hand, his mind was magically filled with a secret knowledge of the inner nature of things, for he had sat at the root of all things, and by listening had drawn it out of the solitude. He had been sitting moping in the dark mountain like Prince Fortune, while Eternity sang to him of the great wonder. The spirits of evil had carried him away into the mountains; that was all. And now they had set him free again, believing that he had become a troll like all his predecessors. But Pelle was not bewitched. He had already consumed many things in his growth, and this was added to the rest. What did a little confinement signify as compared with the slow drip, drip, of centuries? Had he not been born with a caul, upon which neither steel nor poison made any impression?

He sat down on an elevation, pulled off his cap, and let the cool breeze play upon his forehead. It was full of rich promises; in its vernal wandering over the earth it had gathered up all that could improve and strengthen, and loaded him with it. Look around you, Pelle!

On all sides the soil was being prepared, the plough-teams nodded up the gentle inclines and disappeared down the other side. A thin vapor rose from the soil; it was the last of the cold evaporating in the declining spring day. Some way down a few red cottages smilingly faced the sunset, and still farther on lay the town with its eternal cloud of smoke hanging over it.

What would his future be like down there? And how did matters stand? Had the new made its way to the front, or would he once more have to submit to an extortioner, get only the bare necessaries of life out of his work, and see the rest disappear into some one else’s pocket? A number of new factories had grown up, and now formed quite a belt about the city, with their hundreds of giant chimneys stretching up into the sky. But something must be going on, since they were not smoking. Was it a wages conflict?

He was now going to lay plans for his life, build it up again upon the deep foundation that had been laid in his solitude; and yet he knew absolutely nothing of the conditions down in the town! Well, he had friends in thousands; the town was simply lying waiting to receive him with open arms, more fond of him than ever because of all he had suffered. With all his ignorance he had been able to lead them on a little way; the development had chosen him as its blind instrument, and it had been successful; but now he was going to lead them right into the land, for now he felt the burden of life within him.

Hullo! if he wasn’t building castles in the air just as in the old days, and forgetting all that the prison cell had taught him so bitterly! The others’ good indeed! He had been busily concerned for the homes of others, and had not even succeeded in building his own! What humbug! Down there were three neglected beings who would bring accusations against him, and what was the use of his sheltering himself behind the welfare of the many? What was the good of receiving praise from tens of thousands and being called benefactor by the whole world, if those three whose welfare had been entrusted to him accused him of having failed them? He had often enough tried to stifle their accusing voices, but in there it was not possible to stifle anything into silence.

Pelle still had no doubt that he was chosen to accomplish something for the masses, but it had become of such secondary importance when he recollected that he had neglected his share of that which was the duty of every one. He had mistaken small for great, and believed that when he accomplished something that no one else could do, he might in return pay less attention to ordinary every-day duties; but the fates ordained that the burden of life should be laid just where every one could help. And now he was coming back like a poor beggar, who had conquered everything except the actual, and therefore possessed nothing, and had to beg for mercy. Branded as a criminal, he must now begin at the beginning, and accomplish that which he had not been able to do in the days of his power. It would be difficult to build his home under these circumstances, and who was there to help him? Those three who could have spoken for him he had left to their own devices as punishment for an offence which in reality was his own.

He had never before set out in such a poverty-stricken state. He did not even come like one who had something to forgive: his prison-cell had left him nothing. He had had time enough there to go carefully over the whole matter, and everything about Ellen that he had before been too much occupied to notice or had felt like a silent opposition to his projects, now stood out clearly, and formed itself, against his will, into the picture of a woman who never thought of herself, but only of the care of her little world and how she could sacrifice herself. He could not afford to give up any of his right here, and marshalled all his accusations against her, bringing forward laws and morals; but it all failed completely to shake the image, and only emphasized yet more the strength of her nature. She had sacrificed *everything* for him and the children, her one desire being to see them happy. Each of his attacks only washed away a fresh layer of obstructing mire, and made the sacrifice in her action stand out more clearly. It was because she was so unsensual and chaste that she could act as she had done. Alas! she had had to pay dearly for *his* remissness; it was the mother who, in their extreme want, gave her own body to nourish her offspring.

Pelle would not yield, but fought fiercely against conviction. He had been robbed of freedom and the right to be a human being like others, and now solitude was about to take from him all that remained to sustain him. Even if everything joined together against him, he was not wrong, he *would* not be wrong. It was he who had brought the great conflict to an end at the cost of his own—and he had found Ellen to be a prostitute! His thoughts clung to this word, and shouted it hoarsely, unceasingly—prostitute! prostitute! He did not connect it with anything, but only wanted to drown the clamor of accusations on all sides which were making him still more naked and miserable.

At first letters now and then came to him, probably from old companions- in-arms, perhaps too from Ellen: he did not know, for he refused to take them. He hated Ellen because she was the stronger, hated in impotent defiance everything and everybody. Neither she nor any one else should have the satisfaction of being any comfort to him; since he had been shut up as an unclean person, he had better keep himself quite apart from them. He would make his punishment still more hard, and purposely increased his forlornness, kept out of his thoughts everything that was near and dear to him, and dragged the painful things into the foreground. Ellen had of course forgotten him for some one else, and had perhaps turned the children's thoughts from him; they would certainly be forbidden to mention the word "father." He could distinctly see them all three sitting happily round the lamp; and when some turn in the conversation threatened to lead it to the subject of himself, a coldness and stillness as of death suddenly fell upon them. He mercilessly filled his existence with icy acknowledgment on all points, and believed he revenged himself by breathing in the deadly cold.

After a prolonged period of this he was attacked with frenzy, dashed himself blindly against the walls, and shouted that he wanted to get out. To quiet him he was put into a strait-waistcoat and removed to a pitch-dark cell. On the whole he was one of the so-called defiant prisoners, who meant to kick against the pricks, and he was treated accordingly.

But one night when he lay groaning after a punishment, and saw the angry face of God in the darkness, he suddenly became silent. "Are you a human being?" it said, "and cannot even bear a little suffering?" Pelle was startled. He had never known that there was anything particularly human in suffering. But from that night he behaved quietly, with a listening expression, as if he heard something through the walls. "Now he's become quiet," said the gaoler, who was looking at him through the peep-hole. "It won't be long before he's an idiot!"

But Pelle had only come out on the other side; he was staring bravely into the darkness to see God's face once more, but in a gentler guise. The first thing he saw was Ellen again, sitting there beautiful, exculpated, made more desirable by all his accusations. How great and fateful all petty things became here! What was the good of defending himself? She was his fate, and he would have to surrender unconditionally. He still did not comprehend her, but he had a consciousness of greater laws for life, laws that raised *her* and made him small. She and hers passed undefiled through places where he stuck fast in the surface mire.

She seemed to him to grow in here, and led his thoughts behind the surface, where they had never been before. Her unfailing mother-love was like a beating pulse that rose from the invisible and revealed hidden mystical forces—the perceptible rhythm of a great heart which beat in concealment behind everything. Her care resembled that of God Himself; she was nearer to the springs of life than he.

The springs of life! Through her the expression for the first time acquired a meaning for him. It was on the whole as if she re-created him, and by occupying himself with her ever enigmatical nature, his thoughts were turned further and further inward. He suspected the presence of strong currents which bore the whole thing; and sometimes in the silence of his cell he seemed to hear his existence flowing, flowing like a broad stream, and emptying itself out there where his thoughts had never ventured to roam. What became of the days and the years with all that they had held? The ever present Ellen, who had never herself given a thought to the unseen, brought Pelle face to face with infinity.

While all this was going on within him, they sang one Sunday during the prison service Grundtvig's hymn, "The former days have passed away." The hymn expressed all that he had himself vaguely thought, and touched him deeply; the verses came to him in his narrow pen like waves from a mighty ocean, which rolled ages in to the shore in monotonous power. He suddenly and strongly realized the passage of generations of human beings over the earth, and boldly grasped what he had until now only dimly suspected, namely, his own connection with them all, both those who were living then and all those who had gone before. How small his own idea of union had been when measured by this immense community of souls, and what a responsibility was connected with each one! He understood now how fatal it was to act recklessly, then break off and leave everything. In reality you could never leave anything; the very smallest thing you shirked would be waiting for you as your fate at the next milestone. And who, indeed, was able to overlook an action? You had to be lenient continually, and at last it would turn out that you had been lenient to yourself.

Pelle was taking in wisdom, and his own heart confirmed it. The thought of Ellen filled his mind more and more; he had lost her, and yet he could not get beyond her. Did she still love him? This question pursued him day and night with ever increasing vehemence, until even his life seemed to depend upon it. He felt, as he gazed questioningly into his solitude, that he would be worthless if he did not win her back. New worlds grew up before him; he could dimly discern the great connection between things, and thought he could see how deep down the roots of life stretched, drawing nourishment from the very darkness in which he dwelt. But to this he received no answer.

He never dreamt of writing to her. God had His own way of dealing with the soul, a way with which one did not interfere. It would have to come like all the rest, and he lulled himself with the foolish hope that Ellen would come and visit him, for he was now in the right mood to receive her. On Sundays he listened eagerly to the heavy clang of the gate. It meant visitors to the prisoners; and when the gaoler came along the corridor rattling his keys, Pelle's heart beat suffocatingly. This repeated itself Sunday after Sunday, and then he gave up hope and resigned himself to his fate.

After a long time, however, fortune favored him and brought him a greeting.

Pelle took no personal part in the knocking that every evening after the lights were out sounded through the immense building as if a thousand death-ticks were at work. He had enough of his own to think about, and only knocked those messages on that had to pass through his cell. One day, however, a new prisoner was placed in the cell next to his, and woke him. He was a regular frequenter of the establishment, and immediately set about proclaiming his arrival in all directions. It was Druk-Valde, "Widow" Rasmussen's idler of a sweetheart, who used to stand all the winter through in the gateway in Chapel Road, and spit over the toes of his well-polished shoes.

Yes, Valde knew Pelle's family well; his sweetheart had looked after the children when Ellen, during the great conflict, began to go out to work. Ellen had been very successful, and still held her head high. She sewed uppers and had a couple of apprentices to help her, and she was really doing pretty well. She did not associate with any one, not even with her relatives, for she never left her children.

Druk-Valde had to go to the wall every evening; the most insignificant detail was of the greatest importance. Pelle could see Ellen as if she were standing in the darkness before him, pale, always clad in black, always serious. She had broken with her parents; she had sacrificed everything for his sake! She even talked about him so that the children should not have forgotten him by the time he came back. "The little beggars think you're travelling," said Valde.

So everything was all right! It was like sunshine in his heart to know that she was waiting faithfully for him although he had cast her off. All the ice must melt and disappear; he was a rich man in spite of everything.

Did she bear his name? he asked eagerly. It would be like her—intrepid as she was—defiantly to write "Pelle" in large letters on the door- plate.

Yes, of course! There was no such thing as hiding there! Lasse Frederik and his sister were big now, and little Boy Comfort was a huge fellow for his age—a regular little fatty. To see him sitting in his perambulator, when they wheeled him out on Sundays, was a sight for gods!

Pelle stood in the darkness as though stunned. Boy Comfort, a little fellow sitting in a perambulator! And it was not an adopted child either; Druk-Valde so evidently took it to be his. Ellen! Ellen!

He went no more to the wall. Druk-Valde knocked in vain, and his six months came to an end without Pelle noticing it. This time he made no disturbance, but shrank under a feeling of being accursed. Providence must be hostile to him, since the same blow had been aimed at him twice. In the daytime he sought relief in hard work and reading; at night he lay on his dirty, mouldy-smelling mattress and wept. He no longer tried to overthrow his conception of Ellen, for he knew it was hopeless: she still tragically overshadowed everything. She was his fate and still filled his thoughts, but not brightly; there was indeed nothing bright or great about it now, only imperative necessity.

And then his work! For a man there was always work to fall back upon, when happiness failed him. Pelle set to work in earnest, and the man who was at the head of the prison shoemaking department liked to have him, for he did much more than was required of him. In his leisure hours he read diligently, and entered with zest into the prison school-work, taking up especially history and languages. The prison chaplain and the teachers took an interest in him, and procured books for him which were generally unobtainable by the prisoners.

When he was thoroughly tired out he allowed his mind to seek rest in thoughts of his home. His weariness cast a conciliatory light over everything, and he would lie upon his pallet and in imagination spend happy hours with his children, including that young cuckoo who always looked at him with such a strangely mocking expression. To Ellen alone he did not get near. She had never been so beautiful as now in her unapproachableness, but she received all his assurances in mysterious silence, only gazing at him with her unfathomable eyes. He had forsaken her and the home; he knew that; but had he not also made reparation? It was *her* child he held on his knee, and he meant to build the home up again. He had had enough of an outlaw’s life, and needed a heart upon which to rest his weary head.

All this was dreaming, but now he was on his way down to begin from the beginning. He did not feel very courageous; the uncertainty held so many possibilities. Were the children and Ellen well, and was she still waiting for him? And his comrades? How would his fate shape itself?

Pelle was so little accustomed to being in the fresh air that it affected him powerfully, and, much against his will, he fell asleep as he leaned back upon the bank. The longing to reach the end of his journey made him dream that he was still walking on and making his entry into the city; but he did not recognize it, everything was so changed. People were walking about in their best clothes, either going to the wood or to hear lectures.

“Who is doing the work, then?” he asked of a man whom he met.

“Work!” exclaimed the man in surprise. “Why, the machines, of course! We each have three hours at them in the day, but it’ll soon be changed to two, for the machines are getting more and more clever. It’s splendid to live and to know that there are no slaves but those inanimate machines; and for that we have to thank a man called Pelle.”

“Why, that’s me!” exclaimed Pelle, laughing with pleasure.

“You! What absurdity! Why, you’re a young man, and all this happened many years ago.”

“It is me, all the same! Don’t you see that my hair is gray and my forehead lined? I got like that in fighting for you. Don’t you recognize me?” But people only laughed at him, and he had to go on.

“I’ll go to Ellen!” he thought, disheartened. “She’ll speak up for me!” And while the thought was in his mind, he found himself in her parlor.

“Sit down!” she said kindly. “My husband’ll be here directly.”

“Why, I’m your husband!” he exclaimed, hardly able to keep back his tears; but she looked at him coldly and without recognition, and moved toward the door.

“I’m Pelle!” he said, holding out his hand beseechingly. “Don’t you know me?”

Ellen opened her lips to cry out, and at that moment the husband appeared threateningly in the doorway. From behind him Lasse Frederik and Sister peeped out in alarm, and Pelle saw with a certain amount of satisfaction that there were only the two. The terrible thing, however, was that the man was himself, the true Pelle with the good, fair moustache, the lock of hair on his forehead and the go-ahead expression. When he discovered this, it all collapsed and he sank down in despair.

Pelle awoke with a start, bathed in perspiration, and saw with thankfulness the fields and the bright atmosphere: he was at any rate still alive! He rose and walked on with heavy steps while the spring breeze cooled his brow.

His road led him to Nörrebro. The sun was setting behind him; it must be about the time for leaving off work, and yet no hooter sounded from the numerous factories, no stream of begrimed human beings poured out of the side streets. In the little tea-gardens in the Frederikssund Road sat workmen’s families with perambulator and provision-basket; they were dressed in their best and were enjoying the spring day. Was there after all something in his dream? If so, it would be splendid to come back! He asked people what was going on, and was told that it was the elections. “We’re going to take the city to-day!” they said, laughing triumphantly.

From the square he turned into the churchyard, and went down the somber avenue of poplars to Chapel Road. Opposite the end of the avenue he saw the two little windows in the second floor; and in his passionate longing he seemed to see Ellen standing there and beckoning. He ran now, and took the stairs three or four at a time.

Just as he was about to pull the bell-cord, he heard strange voices within, and paused as though paralyzed. The door looked cold and as if it had nothing to do with him; and there was no door-plate. He went slowly down the stairs and asked in the greengrocer's cellar below whether a woman who sewed uppers did not live on the second floor to the left. She had been forsaken by her husband and had two children— *three*, he corrected himself humbly; what had become of them?

The deputy-landlord was a new man and could give him no information; so he went up into the house again, and asked from door to door but without any result. Poor people do not generally live long in one place.

Pelle wandered about the streets at haphazard. He could think of no way of getting Ellen's address, and gave it up disheartened; in his forlorn condition he had the impression that people avoided him, and it discouraged him. His soul was sick with longing for a kind word and a caress, and there was no one to give them. No eyes brightened at seeing him out again, and he hunted in vain in house after house for some one who would sympathize with him. A sudden feeling of hatred arose in him, an evil desire to hit out at everything and go recklessly on.

Twilight was coming on. Below the churchyard wall some newspaper-boys were playing "touch last" on their bicycles. They managed their machines like circus-riders, and resembled little gauchos, throwing them back and running upon the back wheel only, and bounding over obstacles. They had strapped their bags on their backs, and their blue cap-bands flapped about their ears like pennons.

Pelle seated himself upon a bench, and absently followed their reckless play, while his thoughts went back to his own careless boyhood. A boy of ten or twelve took the lead in breakneck tricks, shouting and commanding; he was the chief of the band, and maintained the leadership with a high hand. His face, with its snub nose, beamed with lively impudence, and his cap rested upon two exceptionally prominent ears.

The boys began to make of the stranger a target for their exuberant spirits. In dashing past him they pretended to lose control of their machine, so that it almost went over his foot; and at last the leader suddenly snatched off his cap. Pelle quietly picked it up, but when the boy came circling back with measured strokes as though pondering some fresh piece of mischief he sprang up and seized him by the collar.

"Now you shall have a thrashing, you scamp!" he said, lifting him off his bicycle. "But it'll be just as well if you get it from your parents. What's your father's name?"

"He hasn't got a father!" cried the other boys, flocking round them threateningly. "Let him go!"

The boy opened his lips to give vent to a torrent of bad language, but stopped suddenly and gazed in terror at Pelle, struggling like a mad thing to get away. Pelle let him go in surprise, and saw him mount his bicycle and disappear howling. His companions dashed after him like a flight of swallows. "Wait a little, Lasse Frederik!" they cried. Pelle stood a little while gazing after them, and then with bent head walked slowly into Nörrebro Street.

It was strange to be walking again in this street, which had played so great a part in his life. The traffic was heavier here than in other places, and the stone paving made it more so. A peculiar adamantine self-dependence was characteristic of this district where every step was weighted with the weight of labor.

The shops were the same, and he also recognized several of the shopkeepers. He tried to feel at home in the crowd, and looked into people's faces, wondering whether any one would recognize him. He both wished and feared it, but they hurried past, only now and then one of them would wonder a little at his strange appearance. He himself knew most of them as well as if it had been yesterday he had had to do with those thousands, for the intermediate years had not thrust new faces in between him and the old ones. Now and again he met one of his men walking on the pavement with his wife on his arm, while others were standing on the electric tramcars as drivers and conductors. Weaklings and steady fellows—they were his army. He could name them by name and was acquainted with their family circumstances. Well, a good deal of water had run under the bridge since then!

He went into a little inn for travelling artisans, and engaged a room.

“It’s easy to see that you’ve been away from this country for a day or two,” said the landlord. “Have you been far?”

Oh, yes, Pelle had seen something of the world. And here at home there had been a good many changes. How did the Movement get on?

“Capitally! Yes, awfully well! Our party has made tremendous progress; to-day we shall take the town!”

“That’ll make a difference in things, I suppose?”

“Oh, well, I wouldn’t say that for certain. Unemployment increases every year, and it’s all the same who represents the town and sits in parliament. But we’ve got on very well as far as prices go.”

“Tell me—there was a man in the Movement a few years ago called Pelle; what’s become of him?”

The landlord scratched his parting. “Pelle! Pelle! Yes, of course. What in the world was there about him? Didn’t he make false coins, or rob a till? If I remember right, he ended by going to prison. Well, well, there are bad characters in every movement.”

A couple of workmen, who were sitting at a table eating fried liver, joined in the conversation. “He came a good deal to the front five or six years ago,” said one of them with his mouth full. “But there wasn’t much in him; he had too much imagination.”

“He had the gift of the gab, anyhow,” said the other. “I still distinctly remember him at the great lock-out. He could make you think you were no end of a fine fellow, he could! Well, that’s all past and gone! Your health, comrade!”

Pelle rose quietly and went out. He was forgotten; nobody remembered anything about him, in spite of all that he had fought for and suffered. Much must have passed over their heads since then, and him they had simply forgotten.

He did not know what to do with himself, more homeless here in this street, which should have been his own, than in any other place. It was black with people, but he was not carried with the stream; he resembled something that has been washed up to one side and left lying.

They were all in their best clothes. The workmen came in crowds on their way either from or to the polling-booths, and some were collected and accompanied thither by eager comrades. One man would shout to another across the road through his hollowed hand: “Hi, Petersen! I suppose you’ve voted?” Everywhere there was excitement and good humor: the city was to be taken!

Pelle went with the stream over Queen Louise’s Bridge and farther into the city. Here the feeling was different, opinions were divided, people exchanged sharp words. Outside the newspaper-offices stood dense crowds impeding the wheel-traffic as they waited patiently for the results that were shown in the windows. Every time a contested district came in, a wave of movement passed through the crowd, followed by a mighty roar if a victory was recorded. All was comparatively quiet; people stood outside the offices of the papers that bore the color of their party. Only the quarrelsome men gathered about their opponents and had their hats bashed in. Within the offices the members of the staff were passing busily backward and forward, hanging up the results and correcting them.

All the *cafés* and restaurants were full of customers. The telephone rang incessantly, and messengers kept coming with lists from the telegram bureaus; men fought over the results in front of the great blackboard and chances were discussed at the tables and much political nonsense was talked.

Pelle had never seen the city so excited, not even during the great lock-out. Class faced class with clenched fists, the workmen even more eager than the upper class: they had become out-and-out politicians. He could see that the Movement had shifted its center of gravity over this. What was necessary was to gain seats; to-day they expected to get the upper hand in the city and a firm footing out in the country. Several of the old leaders were already in parliament and brought forward their practical experience in the debate; their aim now was nothing less than to usurp the political power. This was bold enough: they must have been successful, after all. He still possessed his old quickness of hearing as regards the general feeling, and perceived a change in the public tone. It had become broader, more democratic. Even the upper classes submitted to the ballot now, and condescended to fight for a majority of votes.

Pelle could see no place for himself, however, in this conflict. “Hi, you there! I suppose you’ve voted?” men shouted to him as they passed. Voted! He had not even the right to vote! In the battle that was now being fought, their old leader was not even allowed to take part as an ordinary soldier.

Out of the road! They marched in small bands on their way to the polling-booths or the Assembly Rooms, taking up the whole pavement, and Pelle readily moved out of their way. This time he did not come like a king’s son for whom the whole world stood waiting.

He was of the scum of the earth, neither more nor less, one who had been thrown aside and forgotten. If he succeeded in recalling himself to their remembrance, it would only be the bringing up of the story of a criminal. There was the house where the Stolpes lived. Perhaps they knew where Ellen was. But what did it matter to him? He had not forgotten Lasse Frederik’s terror-stricken face. And there was the corner house where Morten had managed the business. Ah, it was long since their ways had parted! Morten had in reality always envied him; he had not been able to bear his tremendous success. Now he would be able to crow over him!

Anger and bitterness filled his heart, and his head was confused, and his thoughts, bred of malice, were like clumsy faultfinders. For years the need of associating with human beings had been accumulating within him; and now the whole thing gave way like an avalanche. He could easily pick a quarrel with some one, just to make himself less a matter of indifference to the rest of the world. Why shouldn’t he go to the “Cupping-Glass”? He would be expected there at any rate.

Outside Griffenfeldt Street there was a crowd. A number of people had gathered round a coal-heaver, who was belaboring a lamp-post with the toes of his wooden shoes, at the same time using abusive language. He had run against it and had a bruise on his forehead. People were amusing themselves at his expense.

As the light from the lamp fell upon the coal-blackened face of the drunken man, Pelle recognized him. It was Merry Jacob. He pushed his way angrily through the crowd and took him by the shoulder. “What’s the matter with you, Jacob? Have you become a drunkard?” he said hotly. “How’s that?”

“It’s got no business to get in the way of an organized workman,” Jacob said indistinctly, kicking the air to the great delight of the onlookers, who encouraged him to continue. “I’m a member of my organization, and don’t owe anything; you can see for yourselves!” He pulled out of his breast-pocket a little book in a black leather cover, and turned over its pages. “Just look for yourselves! Member’s subscription paid, isn’t it? Strike subscription paid, isn’t it? Shown on entrance, isn’t it? Just you shut up! Take it and pass it round; we must have our papers in order. You’re supporting the election fund, I suppose? Go up and vote, confound you! The man who won’t give his mite is a poor pal. Who says thief? There’s no one here that steals. I’m an honest, organized—” He suddenly began to weep, and the saliva dropped from the corners of his mouth onto his coat, while he made fearful grimaces.

Pelle managed to get him into a courtyard, and washed his wound at the pump. The cold water made him shiver, and his head lolled weakly. “Such a snotty blackleg!” he murmured. “I’ll get the chairman to give him a doing in the paper.”

Suddenly he recognized Pelle. He started, and consciousness struggled to obtain control over his dulled senses. “Why, is that you, master?” he asked shamefacedly, seizing Pelle’s hand. “So you’ve come back! I suppose you think me a beast, but what can I do?”

“Just come along!” said Pelle sharply, anxious to get away from the crowd of spectators.

They went down Meinung Street, Jacob staggering along in silence, and looking askance at his former leader. He walked a little awkwardly, but it came from his work; the meeting with Pelle had made him almost sober. “I’m sure you think I’m a beast,” he said again at last in a pitiful voice. “But you see there’s no one to keep me straight.”

“It’s the fault of the brandy,” said Pelle shortly.

“Well, you may be right, but a fellow needs a kind word now and then, and you have to take it where you can get it. Your pals look down upon you and chuck you out of their set.”

“What’s the matter, then?” asked Pelle.

“What’s the matter? Six times five’s the matter, because I wouldn’t let my old father starve during the lockout. We had a jolly good time then. I was a good son! Didn’t mind the fat purses of the bigwigs and a little bread and water—and the devil and his standpipe! But now they're singing another tune: That man! Why, he's been punished for theft! End of him. No one asks why; they've become big men, you see. In olden days I was always called Merry Jacob, and the fellows liked to be in my shift. Do you know what they call me now? Thieving Jacob. Well, they don't say it right out, for if they did, some one 'ud crack their heads for them; but that is my name. Well, I say to myself, perhaps you saw everything topsy-turvy in those days; perhaps, after all, you're nothing but a thief. And then I have to drink to become an honest man again."

"And get in rages with the lamp-posts! Don't you think you'd do better to hit out at those who wrong you?"

Jacob was silent and hung his head; the once strong, bold fellow had become like a dog that any one might kick. If it were so dreadful to bear six times five among one's own people, what could Pelle say? "How is your brother?" he asked, in order to divert Jacob's thoughts to something brighter. "He was a splendid fellow."

"He hung himself," answered Jacob gloomily. "He couldn't stand it any longer. We broke into a house together, so as to be equal about it; and the grocer owed the old man money—he'd worked for it—and they meant to cheat him out of it. So the two old things were starving, and had no fire either; and we got them what they'd a right to, and it was so splendidly done too. But afterward when there was a row at the works, agitation and election fuss and all that kind of thing, they just went and left him and me out. We weren't the right sort, you see; we hadn't the right to vote. He couldn't get even with the business in any other way than by putting a rope over the lamp-hook in the ceiling. I've looked at the matter myself all round, you see, but I can't make anything of it." He walked on a little without speaking, and then said: "Would you hit out properly now? There's need of a kind word."

Pelle did not answer; it was all too sad. He did not even hear the question.

"It was chiefly what you said that made me believe in a better time coming," Jacob continued persistently, "or perhaps my brother and me would have done differently and things might have gone better with both of us. Well, I suppose you believed it yourself, but what do you think now? Do you still believe in that about the better time? For I should like to be an honest man again."

Of course Pelle still believed in it.

"For there aren't many who'd give a brass farthing for that story now; but if *you* say so—I've got faith in you all the same. Others wouldn't have the brains to think of anything for themselves, and it was like the cork going off, so to speak, for us poor people when you went away; everything went flat. If anything happens, it doesn't do for a poor devil to look on; and every time any one wants to complain, he gets a voting-paper pushed into his hand and they say: Go and vote and things will be altered! But confound it, that can't rouse a fellow who's not learnt anything from the time he was small. They'd taken a lot of trouble about me now—whitewashing me so that I could use my right to vote; but they can't make me so that no one looks down on me. And so I say, Thank you for nothing! But if you still believe in it, so will I, for I've got faith in you. Here's my hand on it!"

Jacob was the same simple, good-hearted fellow that he had been in former days when he lived in the attic in the "Ark." There might very well have been a little more evil in him. But his words warmed Pelle's heart. Here was some one who needed him, and who still believed in him although he had been maimed in the fight. He was the first of the disabled ones, and Pelle was prepared to meet with more and to hear their accusations. Many of them would turn against him now that he was powerless, but he would have to put up with that. He felt as though he had the strength for it now.

Pelle went into the street again, letting his feet carry him where they would, while he thought of the past and the future. They had been so certain that a new age would dawn upon them at once! The new, great truth had been so self-evident that it seemed as if all the old conditions must fall before it as at a magic word; and now the everyday reality had worn the gloss off it. As far as he could see, nothing particular had happened, and what was there to happen? That was not the way to overturn systems. From Merry Jacob's opinion he could draw his own, but he was no longer despondent, he did not mind what happened. He would have had no objection to challenge the opinion of his old comrades at once, and find out how he stood.

He had passed through several side streets when he suddenly found himself in front of a large, well-lighted building with a broad flight of steps, up which people were flocking. It was one of the working-men's halls, and festivities were being held in it to celebrate the elections. Pelle went, by force of habit, with the stream.

He remained at the back of the hall, and used his eyes as though he had just dropped down from some other planet; strange feelings welled up within him when he found himself once more among the people. For a moment he felt a vehement desire to cry: Here I am! and stretch out his arms to them all; but he quickly controlled it, and his face regained its stony composure.

This then was his army from the conflict. They were decidedly better clothed than on the day when he led them in triumph into the city as its true citizens; they carried their heads higher too, did not get behind one another, but claimed room for themselves. They had more to eat, he could see, for their faces shone more; and their eyes had become indolent in expression, and no longer looked hungrily out into uncertainty but moved quietly and unhesitatingly from place to place. They were prepared for another long march, and perhaps it was as well; great things did not happen in the twinkling of an eye.

He was aroused from his thoughts by discovering that the people nearest to him were turning and gazing at him. The number of faces looking round at him increased, and the words, "Pelle is here!" passed in a murmur through the crowd. Hundreds of eyes were directed toward him questioningly and searchingly, some of them in evident expectation of something unusual happening at once.

The movement became general—a wave that carried him resistlessly to the front of the hall and up onto the platform. A great roar like the breaking of surf arose on all sides of him and stupefied his sensitive brain in which silence sat always putting together a fine new world about which no one else knew. Suddenly everything was still, so still that the solitude was again audible to his ear.

Pelle spoke quietly and with confidence. His words were a greeting to them from a world they as yet did not know, the great solitude through which man must move alone—without loud-voiced companions to encourage him—and listen until he hears his own heart beat within it. He sits in a cell again, like the first original germ of life, alone and forsaken; and over him a spider skilfully spins its web. At first he is angry with the busy insect, and tears down the web; but the insect begins again patiently. And this suddenly becomes a consolatory lesson to him never to give up; he becomes fond of the little vigilant creature that makes its web as skilfully as if it had a great responsibility, and he asks himself whether it is at all conscious of his existence. Is it sorry for him in his forsaken condition, since it does not move to another place, but patiently builds its web up again, finer and finer, as if it had only been torn down because it was not made well enough? He bitterly regrets his conduct, and would give much for a sign that the little insect is not angry with him, for no one can afford to offend another; the smallest creature is of vital importance to you. In the loneliness of the prison cell you learn solidarity. And one day when he is sitting reading, the spider, in its busy efforts to carry its thread past him, drops down and uses his shoulder as a temporary attachment. Never before has such confidence been shown him notwithstanding everything; the little insect knew how a hardened criminal should be taken. It taught him that he had both a heart and a soul to take care of. A greeting to his comrades from the great silence that was waiting to speak to them one by one.

He spoke from the depths of his soul, and saw surprise in their faces. What in the world did he want? Did he want them all to go to prison only because he himself had been there? Was that all that was left of the old Pelle—Lightning, as he was then called? He was certainly rather weak in the legs; there wasn't much of *his* eloquence left! They quickly lost interest and began to talk together in undertones; there came only a little desultory applause here and there from the corners.

Pelle felt the disappointment and indifference, and smiled. He no longer had need of storms of approbation; he listened for it now within himself. This much he had learned by standing up there, namely, that he had not done with the men below; he was, in fact, only just beginning with them. His work had been swept away: well then he would build up a new one that was better. He had sat in his prison-cell and learned long-suffering.

He took a seat below the platform among the leaders of the meeting, and felt that he was really a stranger there. It was out of compassion they had drawn him into the meeting; he read in their eyes that the work that had been done was done without him, and that he came at an inopportune moment. Would they have to reckon with him, the hare-brained fellow, now again, or did he mean to emigrate? Alas, he did not give much impetus to the Movement! but if they only knew how much wisdom he had gained in his solitude!

He did not talk, but looked on absently, trying to listen through the noise for something lasting. They laughed and drank and made speeches — for him too; but all this was so unnecessary! They had gained confidence, they spoke quite openly, there was a certain emancipation in their general behavior; taken as a whole, they made a good impression. But the miracle? the incomprehensible? He missed a little anxiety behind the prosperity, the deep, silent pondering that would show that they had gazed into a new world. Did they not hear the undertone at all, since they were making such a noise—the unceasing, soft rhythm that was in his own ears continually and contained the whole thing? The stillness of the cell had made his hearing acute; the boisterous laughter, which expressed their pleasure in life, caused him suffering.

Beside a large blackboard on the platform stood one of the leaders, writing up the victories of the day, amid the rejoicing of the crowd. Pelle slipped out unnoticed, and was standing on the steps, breathing in the quiet night air, when a young man came up to him and held out his hand. It was his brother-in-law, Frederik Stolpe. “I just wanted to wish you welcome back,” he said, “and to thank you for what you said in there.”

“How is Ellen?” Pelle asked in a low voice.

“She’s only pretty well. She lives at 20, Victoria Street, and takes in washing. I think she would be glad to see you.” He looked searchingly at Pelle. “If you like, I can easily arrange for you to meet at my place.”

“Thank you!” Pelle answered, “but I’ll go out to her early to-morrow morning.” He no longer needed to go by circuitous routes.

II

Pelle was awakened by a distant sound resembling thunder, that came nearer and nearer out of the night and kept close to the prison. He lay still and listened shudderingly in the hope of hearing the reassuring step of the watchman passing his door, while fancies chased one another in his heavy head like riderless horses. The hollow, threatening sound grew ever louder and clearer, until it suddenly shattered the stillness of the night with a thunderous roar, which seemed to bring everything crashing down. It was as though a great gulf had opened and swallowed everything.

In one panic-stricken bound he was at the window, his heart beating tumultuously; but the next moment he was ashamed of his mistake. It had been the same terrifying Doomsday that he had dreaded in the days of his childhood, when the lightning zig-zagged among the rocks at home; and yet it was nothing but the noise of the first farm-carts as they passed from the highroad onto the stone paving of the town. It was the solitude brooding in his imagination, making it start in fear at every sound. But that would wear off.

He stretched himself and shook off the nightmare. Free! No gaoler was coming like a bad spirit to shatter the night's happy dream of freedom. He *was* free! His pallet had not to be hooked up to the wall at a certain hour; he could lie as long as he wanted to, the whole day, if he liked. But now he had more important things to do; life was waiting. He hastily put on his clothes.

In the street the lamplighter was lighting every other lamp. An endless procession of carts was pouring in from the country to supply the town. Pelle threw open the window and looked out over the wakening city while he dressed himself. He was accustomed to sleep in a silence that was only broken by the soft squeaking of the mice under the heat-grating; and the night-noises of the city—the rumble of the electric trams, the shouts of night-wanderers—all these unwonted sounds that pierced the darkness so startlingly, had filled, his sleep with feverish dreams and caused a series of ugly, deformed visions to pass through his brain.

He now felt quite rested, however, and greeted the city with awakened pleasure. Yes, he had slept more than sufficiently; the noise called him and he must go down and give a helping hand to keep it going. For years he had done nothing but hoard; now he would set to work again with strength and courage. As soon as he was dressed he went out. It was too early to visit Ellen, but he could not bear to stay in any longer. It was early morning. The first tram-car came in, filled with workmen, some even hanging on to the steps both of the motor-wagon and the two cars following it. And there was the first peasant with milk: they were not even up yet in the ice-dairy! Every quarter of an hour trams came in with workmen, and the market-carts continued to drive in from the country laden with vegetables, corn or pigs' carcasses. The street was like a feeding-tube through which nourishment was continually being drawn into the city.

On the top of swaying loads of straw sat Zealand peasants nodding. They had come all the way from the Frederikssund quarter, and had been driving all night. Here and there came a drover with a few animals intended for the cattle-market. The animals did not like the town, and constantly became restive, hitching themselves round lamp-posts or getting across the tram-lines. The newspaper-women trudged from street- door to street-door with their aprons laden with morning papers, and he heard them toiling up the stairs as though their feet were weighted with lead. And beneath all this could be heard the endless tramp-tramp of workmen hastening to their work.

There was a peculiarly familiar sound in those footsteps, which suddenly reminded him that he no longer belonged to their party, but had marked out his own way for good and evil.

Why was he not still a small, impersonal fraction of this great stream which day after day mechanically followed the same round in the mill? Solitude had made his view of mankind a new and wondering one; he now, in every strange face he met, involuntarily sought for a little of that which makes each individual a world in himself. But these men were all alike, he thought; they came hurrying out of the darkness of the side streets, and were not fully awake and steady on their feet until they joined the throng, but then they did walk capitally. He recognized the firm beat again: he had himself taught it to them.

Daylight came stealing in over Vesterbro, gray and heavy with spring moisture and the city smoke. That part of the town was not quite awake yet; the step sounding in the main street was that of the belated night-wanderer. He turned down Victoria Street, looking about him in surprise; he had never been here before. He read the door-plates: Artists' Bureau, Artisan Heim, Lodging for Artists, Masseur & Chiropodist, Costumes for Hire. Most of the announcements were in foreign languages. There was also a Gymnasium for Equilibrists and a Conservatorium for Singing and Music, Dancing and Deportment. Nor did there seem to be a scarcity of pawnbrokers and dealers in second-hand goods. How had Ellen drifted into this strange atmosphere of perfumes and old clothes and foreign countries? Behind the windows in the low rooms he saw wonderful dresses thrown over chair-backs—burnouses and red fezes; and a little dark figure with a long pigtail and bare feet in yellow slippers, glided noiselessly past him in the old-fashioned, palatial doorway of No. 20.

He mounted the stairs with a beating heart. The steps were worn and groaned ominously when trodden on. The door of the flat stood ajar, and he heard the sound of sweeping in the front room, while farther in a child was talking to itself or its doll. He had to stand a little while on the landing to take breath and to regain his composure.

Ellen was sweeping under the sofa with quick movements. She rose and gazed at him in bewilderment; the broom fell from her hand and she swayed to and fro. Pelle caught her, and she leaned inert and helpless against him, and remained thus for a considerable time, pale and with closed eyes. When at last he turned her inanimate face toward him and kissed it, she burst into tears.

He spoke gently and reassuringly to her as to a child. She kept her eyes closed, as she had always done when anything overwhelmed her. She lay back on his arm, and he felt her body tremble at the sound of his voice. Her tears seemed to soften her, and from the yielding of her body now he could see how stiffly she must have held herself, and was filled with joy. It had all been for his sake, and with a tremendous effort of her will she had defied fate until he came. She now placed it all at his feet and lay prostrate. How tired she must be! But now she and the children should have a good time; he would live for her now!

He had laid her on the sofa and sat bending over her and telling her quietly how he had repented and longed for her. She made no answer, but held his hand in a convulsive grasp, now and then opening her eyes and stealing a glance at him. Suddenly she discovered how worn and lined his face was, and as she passed her hand over it as if to soften the features, she broke into a storm of weeping.

"You have suffered so, Pelle!" she exclaimed vehemently, passing her trembling fingers through his iron-gray hair. "I can feel by your poor head how badly they've treated you. And I wasn't even with you! If I could only do something really nice to make you look happy!"

She drew his head down onto her bosom and stroked it as a mother might her child's, and Pelle's face changed as would a child's when taken to its mother's breast. It was as though the well of life flowed through him, the hardness of his expression disappeared, and life and warmth took its place. "I didn't think you'd come back to us," said Ellen. "Ever since Lasse Frederik met you yesterday I've been expecting you to come."

Pelle suddenly noticed how exhausted she looked. "Haven't you been to bed all night?" he asked.

She smilingly shook her head. "I had to take care that the street-door wasn't locked. Whenever any one came home, I ran down and unlocked it again. You mustn't be angry with the boy for being afraid of you just at first. He was sorry for it afterward, and ran about the town all the evening trying to find you."

A clear child's voice was calling from the bedroom more and more persistently: "Man! Good-morning, man!"

It was Sister, sitting up in Ellen's bed and playing with a feather that she had pulled out of the corner of the down-quilt. She readily allowed herself to be kissed, and sat there with pouting mouth and the funniest little wrinkled nose. "You're man!" she said insinuatingly.

"Yes, that's true enough," answered Pelle, laughing: "but what man?"

"Man!" she repeated, nodding gravely.

Sister shared Ellen's bed now. At the foot of the big bed stood her own little cot, which had also been Lasse Frederik's, and in it lay——. Well, Pelle turned to the other side of the room, where Lasse Frederik lay snoring in a small bed, with one arm beneath his head. He had kicked off the quilt, and lay on his stomach in a deep sleep, with his limbs extended carelessly. The little fellow was well built, thought Pelle.

"Now, lazy-bones, you'd better be thinking of getting up!" cried Pelle, pulling him by the leg.

The boy turned slowly. When he saw his father, he instantly became wide awake, and raised his arm above his head as though to ward off a blow.

"There's no box on the ears in the air, my boy," said Pelle, laughing. "The game only begins to-day!"

Lasse Frederik continued to hold his arm in the same position, and lay gazing indifferently out into the front room, as if he had no idea to what his father was referring; but his face was scarlet.

"Don't you even say good-morning to your father?" said Ellen, whereupon he sullenly extended his hand and then turned his face to the wall. He was vexed at his behavior of the day before, and perhaps expected a blowing-up. On a nail above his head hung his blouse and cap.

"Is Lasse Frederik a milk-boy?" asked Pelle.

"Yes," said Ellen, "and he's very good at it. The drivers praise him."

"Isn't he going to get up then, and go? I've met several milk-carts."

"No, for we're on strike just now," murmured the boy without turning round.

Pelle became quite interested. "What fellows you are! So you're on strike, are you? What's it for—is it wages?"

The boy had to explain, and gradually turned his face round, but did not look at his father.

Ellen stood in the doorway and listened to them smilingly. She looked frail. "Lasse Frederik's the leader," she said gently.

"And he's lying here instead of being out on the watch for blacklegs?" exclaimed Pelle quite irritably. "You're a nice leader!"

"Do you suppose any boy would be so mean as to be a blackleg?" said Lasse Frederik. "No, indeed! But people fetch their own milk from the carts."

"Then you must get the drivers to join you."

"No, we don't belong to a real union, so they won't support us."

"Well then, make a union! Get up, boy, and don't lie there snoring when there's anything of this sort on! Do you imagine that anything in this world is to be got by sleeping?"

The boy did not move. He did not seem to think there was any reason for taking his father very seriously; but he met a reproachful look from Ellen, and he was out of bed and dressed in a trice. While they sat in the front room, drinking their coffee, Pelle gave him a few hints as to how he should proceed in the matter. He was greatly interested, and went thoroughly into the subject; it seemed to him as though it were only yesterday that he had occupied himself with the people. How many pleasant memories of the fight crowded into his mind! And now every child knew that the meanest thing on earth was to become a blackleg! How he had fought to make even intelligent fellow-workmen understand this! It was quite comical to think that the strike—which filled the workmen with horror the first time he had employed it—was now a thing that children made use of. Time passed with a fleet foot out here in the day; and if you wanted to keep pace you must look sharp!

When the boy had gone, Ellen came to Pelle and stroked his hair. "Welcome home!" she said softly, and kissed his furrowed brow.

He pressed her hand. "Thank you for having a home for me," he answered, looking into her eyes; "for if you hadn't, I think I should have gone to the dogs."

"The boy has had his share in that, you know! He's worked well, or it might have gone badly with me many a time. You mustn't be angry with him, Pelle, even if he is a little sullen to you. You must remember how much he's gone through with the other boys. Sometimes he's come home quite disheartened."

"Because of me?" asked Pelle in a low voice.

"Yes, for he couldn't bear them to say anything about you. At one time he was always fighting, but now I think he's taught them to leave him alone; for he never gave in. But it may have left its marks on him."

She lingered by him; there was something she wanted to say to him, but she had a difficulty in beginning. "What is it?" he asked, in order to help her, his heart beating rapidly. He would have liked to get over this without speech.

She drew him gently into the bedroom and up to the little cot. “You haven’t looked at Boy Comfort,” she said.

He bent in embarrassment over the little boy who lay and gazed at him with large, serious eyes. “You must give me a little time,” he said.

“It’s little Marie’s boy,” said Ellen, with a peculiar intonation.

He stood up quickly, and looked in bewilderment at her. It was a little while before he comprehended.

“Where is Marie?” he asked with difficulty.

“She’s dead, Pelle,” answered Ellen, and came to his aid by holding out her hand to him. “She died when the child was born.”

A gray shadow passed across Pelle’s face.

III

The house in which Pelle and his wife lived—the “Palace,” the inhabitants of the street called it—was an old, tumble-down, three-storied building with a mansard roof. Up the middle of the façade ran the remains of some fluted pilasters through the two upper stories, making a handsome frame to the small windows. The name “Palace” had not been given to the house entirely without reason; the old woman who kept the ironmonger’s shop in the back building could remember that in her childhood it had been a general’s country-house, and stood quite by itself. At that time the shore reached to where Isted Street now runs, and the fruit-gardens went right into Council House Square. Two ancient, worm-eaten apple-trees, relics of that period, were still standing squeezed in among the back buildings.

Since then the town had pushed the fruit-gardens a couple of miles farther back, and in the course of time side streets had been added to the bright neighborhood of Vesterbro—narrow, poor-men’s streets, which sprang up round the scattered country-houses, and shut out the light; and poor people, artistes and street girls ousted the owners and turned the luxuriant summer resort into a motley district where booted poverty and shoeless intelligence met.

The “Palace” was the last relic of a vanished age. The remains of its former grandeur were still to be seen in the smoke-blackened stucco and deep windows of the attics; but the large rooms had been broken up into sets of one or two rooms for people of small means, half the wide landing being boarded off for coal-cellars.

From Pelle’s little two-roomed flat, a door and a couple of steps led down into a large room which occupied the entire upper floor of the side building, and was not unlike the ruins of a former banqueting-hall. The heavy, smoke-blackened ceiling went right up under the span roof and had once been decorated; but most of the plaster had now fallen down, and the beams threatened to follow it.

The huge room had been utilized, in the course of time, both as a brewery and as a warehouse; but it still bore the stamp of its former splendor. The children of the property at any rate thought it was grand, and picked out the last remains of panelling for kindling-wood, and would sit calling to one another for hours from the high ledges above the brick pillars, upon which there had once stood busts of famous men.

Now and again a party of Russian or Polish emigrants hired the room and took possession of it for a few nights. They slept side by side upon the bare floor, each using his bundle for a pillow; and in the morning they would knock at the door of Ellen’s room, and ask by gestures to be allowed to come to the water-tap. At first she was afraid of them and barricaded the door with her wardrobe cupboard; but the thought of Pelle in prison made her sympathetic and helpful. They were poor, needy beings, whom misery and misfortune had driven from their homes. They could not speak the language and knew nothing about the world; but they seemed, like birds of passage, to find their way by instinct. In their blind flight it was at the “Palace” that they happened to alight for rest.

With this exception the great room lay unused. It went up through two stories, and could have been made into several small flats; but the owner of the property—an old peasant from Glostrup—was so miserly that he could not find it in his heart to spend money on it, notwithstanding the great advantage it would be to him. *Ellen* had no objection to this! She dried her customers’ washing there, and escaped all the coal- dust and dirt of the yard.

Chance, which so often takes the place of Providence in the case of poor people, had landed her and her children here when things had gone wrong with them in Chapel Road. Ellen had at last, after hard toil, got her boot-sewing into good working order and had two pupils to help her, when a long strike came and spoiled it all for her. She struggled against it as well as she could, but one day they came and carried her bits of furniture down into the street. It was the old story: Pelle had heard it several times before. There she stood with the children, mounting guard over her belongings until it grew dark. It was pouring with rain, and they did not know what to do. People stopped as they hurried by, asked a few questions and passed on; one or two advised her to apply to the committee for housing the homeless. This, however, both Ellen and Lasse Frederik were too proud to do. They took the little ones down to the mangling-woman in the cellar, and themselves remained on guard over their things, in the dull hope that something would happen, a hope of which experience never quite deprives the poor.

After they had stood there a long time something really did happen. Out of Nörrebro Street came two men dashing along at a tremendous pace with a four-wheeled cart of the kind employed by the poor of Copenhagen when they move—preferably by night—from one place to another. One of the men was at the pole of the cart, while the other pushed behind and, when the pace was at its height, flung himself upon his stomach on the cart, putting on the brake with the toes of his boots upon the road so as to twist the cart into the gutter. Upon the empty cart sat a middle-aged woman, singing, with her feet dangling over the side; she was big and wore an enormous hat with large nodding flowers, of the kind designed to attract the male sex. The party zig-zagged, shouting and singing, from one side of the street to the other, and each time the lady shrieked.

"*There's* a removing cart!" said Lasse Frederik, and as he spoke the vehicle pulled up in the gutter just in front of them.

"What are you doing, Thorvald?" said one of the men; then, staring straight into Ellen's face, "Have you hurt your eye?"

The woman had jumped down from the cart. "Oh, get out of the way, you ass!" she said, pushing him aside. "Can't you see they've been turned out? Is it your husband that's chucked you out?" she asked, bending sympathetically over Ellen.

"No, the landlord's turned us out!" said Lasse Frederik.

"What a funny little figure! And you've got nowhere to sleep to-night? Here, Christian, take and load these things on the cart, and then they can stand under the gateway at home for the night. They'll be quite spoilt by the rain here."

"Yes," answered Christian, "the chair-legs have actually begun to take root!" The two men were in a boisterous humor.

"Now you can just come along with me," said the woman, when the things were piled upon the cart, "and I'll find you a place to sleep in. And then to-morrow Providence'll perhaps be at home himself!"

"She's a street-woman," whispered Lasse Frederik again and again, pulling Ellen's dress; but Ellen did not care now, if only she could avoid having to accept poor relief. She no longer held her head so high.

It was "Queen Theresa" herself they had met, and in a sense this meeting had made their fortune. She helped Ellen to find her little flat, and got her washing to do for the girls of the neighborhood. It was not very much, though the girls of Vesterbro went in for fine clothes as far as they could; but it afforded her at any rate a livelihood.

Pelle did not like Ellen going on with all this dirty work; he wanted to be the one to provide for the family. Ellen moreover had had her turn, and she looked tired and as if she needed to live a more comfortable life. It was as though she fell away now that he was there and able once more to assume the responsibility; but she would not hear of giving up the washing. "It's never worth while to throw away the dirty water until you've got the clean!" she said.

Every morning he set out furnished with a brand-new trades-union book, and went from workshop to workshop. Times were bad for his branch of trade; many of his old fellow-workmen had been forced to take up other occupations—he met them again as conductors, lamplighters, etc.; machinery had made them unnecessary, they said. It was the effect of the great lock-out; it had killed the little independent businesses that had formerly worked with one or two men, and put wind into the sails of large industries. The few who could manage it had procured machines and become manufacturers; the rest were crowded out and sat in out-of-the- way basements doing repairs. To set to work again, on the old conditions was what had been farthest from Pelle's thoughts; and he now went about and offered to become an apprentice again in order to serve his new master, the machinery, and was ready to be utilized to the utmost. But the manufacturers had no use for him; they still remembered him too well. "You've been too long away from the work," said one and another of them meaningly.

Well, that was only tit for tat; but he felt bitterly how even his past rose up against him. He had fought and sacrificed everything to improve the conditions in his branch; and the machines were the discouraging answer that the development gave to him and his fellows.

He was not alone in his vain search in this bright springtime. A number of other branches had had the same fate as his own. Every new day that dawned brought him into a stream of men who seemed to be condemned to wear out the pavement in their hopeless search for work—people who had been pushed out by the machines and could not get in again. “There must be something wrong with them,” Pelle thought while he stood and listened to always the same story of how they had suddenly been dropped, and saw the rest of the train steaming away. It must have been their own fault that they were not coupled on to a new one; perhaps they were lazy or drunkards. But after a time he saw good, tried men standing in the row, and offering their powers morning after morning without result; and he began to realize with a chill fear that times were changing.

He would certainly have managed to make both ends meet if there had been anything to be got. The prices were all right; their only defect was that they were not eatable. Altogether it seemed as if a change for the worse had overtaken the artisan; and to make it still more serious the large businesses stood in the way of his establishing himself and becoming independent. There was not even a back door left open now! Pelle might just as well put that out of his head first as last; to become a master now required capital and credit. The best thing that the future held was an endless and aimless tramp to and from the factory.

At one stroke he was planted in the middle of the old question again; all the circumstances passed before him, and it was useless to close his eyes. He was willing enough to mind his own affairs and did not seek for anything; but the one thing was a consequence of the other, and whether he wished it or not, it united in a general view of the conditions.

The union had stood the test outwardly. The workmen were well organized and had vindicated their right to negotiate; their corporations could no longer be disregarded. Wages were also to some extent higher, and the feeling for the home had grown in the workmen themselves, many of them having removed from their basements into new two- or three-roomed flats, and bought good furniture. They demanded more from life, but everything had become dearer, and they still lived from hand to mouth. He could see that the social development had not kept pace with the mechanical; the machines wedged themselves quietly but inexorably in between the workmen and the work, and threw more and more men out of employment. The hours of labor were not greatly shortened. Society did not seem to care to protect the workers, but it interested itself more in disabled workmen than before, and provision for the poor was well organized. Pelle could not discover *any* law that had a regulating effect, but found a whole number of laws that plastered up the existing conditions. A great deal of help was given, always just on the borders of starvation; and more and more men had to apply for it. It did not rob them of their rights as citizens, but made them a kind of politically *kept* proletariat.

It was thus that the world of adventure which Pelle had helped to conquer appeared now when he returned and looked at it with new eyes. The world had not been created anew, and the Movement did not seem to have produced anything strong and humanly supporting. It seemed as if the workmen would quietly allow themselves to be left out of the game, if only they received money for doing nothing! What had become of their former pride? They must have acquired the morals of citizens, since they willingly agreed to accept a pension for rights surrendered. They were not deficient in power; they could make the whole world wither and die without shedding a drop of blood, only by holding together. It was a sense of responsibility that they lacked; they had lost the fundamental idea of the Movement.

Pelle looked at the question from all sides while he trudged up and down in his vain search. The prospect obtruded itself upon him, and there were forces at work, both within and without, trying to push him into the Movement and into the front rank among the leaders, but he repelled the idea: he was going to work for his home now.

He managed to obtain some repairs for the neighbors, and also helped Ellen to hang up clothes and turn the mangle. One must pocket one’s pride and be glad *she* had something. She was glad of his help, but did not want any one to see him doing this woman’s work.

“It’s not work for a man,” she said, looking at him with eyes which said how pleased she was to have his company.

They liked being together, enjoyed it in their own quiet way without many words. Much had happened, but neither Pelle nor Ellen were in a hurry. Neither of them had a facility in speaking, but they found their way to an understanding through the pauses, and drew nearer to one another in the silences. Each knew what the other had suffered without requiring to have it told: time had been at work on them both.

There was no storm in their new companionship. The days passed quietly, made sad by the years that had gone by. In Ellen’s mind was neither jubilation nor reproach. She was cautious with regard to him—almost as shy as the first time they met; behind all her goodness and care lay the same touch of maidenly reserve as at that time. She received his caresses silently, she herself giving chiefly by being something for him. He noticed how every little homely action she did for him grew out of her like a motherly caress and took him into her heart. He was grateful for it, but it was not that of which he stood most in need.

When they sat together in the twilight and the children played upon the floor, she was generally silent, stealing glances at him now and then; but as soon as he noticed these, the depth of her expression vanished. Was she again searching for his inner being as she had done in their earliest time together? It was as though she were calling to something within him, but would not reveal herself. It was thus that mother might sit and gaze searchingly into her child’s future. Did she not love him then? She had given him all that she possessed, borne him children, and had faithfully waited for him when all the rest of the world had cast him off; and yet he was not sure that she had ever loved him.

Pelle had never met with love in the form of something unmanageable; the Movement had absorbed the surplus of his youth. But now he had been born anew together with the spring, and felt it suddenly as an inward power. He and Ellen would begin now, for now she was everything! Life had taught him seriousness, and it was well. He was horrified at the thoughtless way in which he had taken Ellen and made her a mother without first making her a bride. Her woman’s heart must be immeasurably large since she had not gone to pieces in consequence, but still stood as unmoved as ever, waiting for him to win her. She had got through it by being a mother.

Would he ever win her? Was she really waiting still, or was she contented with things as they were?

His love for her was so strong that everything about her was transfigured, and he was happy in the knowledge that she was his fate. Merely a ribbon or a worn check cotton apron—any little thing that belonged to her—acquired a wonderfully warm hue, and filled his mind with sweetness. A glance or a touch made him dizzy with happiness, and his heart went out to her in waves of ardent longing. It awoke no response; she smiled gently and pressed his hand. She was fond of him and refused him nothing, but he nevertheless felt that she kept her innermost self hidden from him. When he tried to see in, he found it closed by a barrier of kindness.

IV

Pelle was like a man returning home after years of exile, and trying to bring himself into personal relations with everything; the act of oblivion was in force only up to the threshold; the real thing he had to see to himself. The land he had tilled was in other hands, he no longer had any right to it; but it was he who had planted, and he must know how it had been tended and how it had thriven.

The great advance had taken on a political character. The Movement had in the meantime let the demand of the poorest of the people for bread drop, and thrown them over as one would throw over ballast in order to rise more quickly. The institutions themselves would be won, and then they would of course come back to the starting-point and begin again quite differently. It might be rather convenient to turn out those who most hindered the advance, but would it lead to victory? It was upon them indeed that everything turned! Pelle had thoroughly learned the lesson, that he who thinks he will outwit others is outwitted himself. He had no faith in those who would climb the fence where it was lowest.

The new tactics dated from the victorious result of the great conflict. He had himself led the crowds in triumph through the capital, and if he had not been taken he would probably now be sitting in parliament as one of the labor members and symbolizing his promotion to citizenship. But now he was out of it all, and had to choose his attitude toward the existing state of things; he had belonged to the world of outcasts and had stood face to face with the irreconcilable. He was not sure that the poor man was to be raised by an extension of the existing social ethics. He himself was still an outlaw, and would probably never be anything else. It was hard to stoop to enter the doorway through which you had once been thrown out, and it was hard to get in. He did not intend to take any steps toward gaining admission to the company of respectable men; he was strong enough to stand alone now.

Perhaps Ellen expected something in that way as reparation for all the wrong she had suffered. She must have patience! Pelle had promised himself that he would make her and the children happy, and he persuaded himself that this would be best attained by following his own impulses.

He was not exactly happy. Pecuniarily things were in a bad way, and notwithstanding all his planning, the future continued to look uncertain. He needed to be the man, the breadwinner, so that Ellen could come to him for safety and shelter, take her food with an untroubled mind from his hand, and yield herself to him unresistingly.

He was not their god; that was where the defect lay. This was noticeable at any rate in Lasse Frederik. There was good stuff in the boy, although it had a tang of the street. He was an energetic fellow, bright and pushing, keenly alert with regard to everything in the way of business. Pelle saw in him the image of himself, and was only proud of him; but the boy did not look upon him with unconditional reliance in return. He was quick and willing, but nothing more; his attitude was one of trial, as if he wanted to see how things would turn out before he recognized the paternal relationship.

Pelle suffered under this impalpable distrust, which classed him with the “new fathers” of certain children; and he had a feeling that was at the same time painful and ridiculous, that he was on trial. In olden days the matter might have been settled by a good thrashing, but now things had to be arranged so that they would be lasting; he could no longer buy cheaply. When helping Lasse Frederik in organizing the milk- boys, he pocketed his pride and introduced features from the great conflict in order to show that he was good for something too. He could see from the boy’s expression that he did not believe much of it, and intended to investigate the matter more closely. It wounded his sensitive mind and drove him into himself.

One day, however, when he was sitting at his work, Lasse Frederik rushed in. “Father, tell me what you did to get the men that were locked into the factory out!” he cried breathlessly.

“You wouldn’t believe it if I did,” said Pelle reproachfully.

“Yes, I would; for they called you the ‘Lightning!’” exclaimed the boy in tones of admiration. “And they had to put you in prison so as to get rid of you. The milk-driver told me all about it!”

From that day they were friends. At one stroke Pelle had become the hero of the boy’s existence. He had shaved off his beard, had blackened his face, and had gone right into the camp of his opponents, and nothing could have been finer. He positively had to defend himself from being turned into a regular robber-captain with a wide-awake hat and top-boots! Lasse Frederik had a lively imagination!

Pelle had needed this victory. He must have his own people safely at his back first of all, and then have a thorough settlement of the past. But this was not easy, for little Boy Comfort staggered about everywhere, warped himself toward him from one piece of furniture to another with his serious eyes fixed steadily upon him, and crawled the last part of the way. Whenever he was set down, he instantly steered for Pelle; he would come crawling in right from the kitchen, and would not stop until he stood on his feet by Pelle's leg, looking up at him. "See how fond he is of you already!" said Ellen tenderly, as she put him down in the middle of the floor to try him. "Take him up!" Pelle obeyed mechanically; he had no personal feeling for this child; it was indeed no child, but the accusation of a grown-up person that came crawling toward him. And there stood Ellen with as tender an expression as if it were her own baby! Pelle could not understand how it was that she did not despise him; he was ashamed whenever he thought of his struggle to reconcile himself to this "little cuckoo." It was a good thing he had said so little!

His inability to be as naturally kind to the child as she was tormented him; and when, on Saturday evening, she had bathed Boy Comfort and then sat with him on her lap, putting on his clean clothes, Pelle was overwhelmed with self-accusation. He had thoughtlessly trodden little Marie of the "Ark" underfoot, and she whom he had cast off when she most needed him, in return passed her beneficent hand over his wrong-doing. As though she were aware of his gloomy thoughts, she went to him and placed the warm, naked child in his arms, saying with a gentle smile: "Isn't he a darling?" Her heart was so large that he was almost afraid; she really took more interest in this child than in her own.

"I'm his mother, of course!" she said naturally. "You don't suppose he can do without a real mother, do you?"

Marie's fate lay like a shadow over Pelle's mind. He had to talk to Ellen about it in order to try to dispel it, but she did not see the fateful connection; she looked upon it as something that had to be. "You were so hunted and persecuted," she said quietly, "and you had no one to look to. So it had to happen like that. Marie told me all about it. It was no one's fault that she was not strong enough to bear children. The doctor said there was a defect in her frame; she had an internal deformity." Alas! Ellen did not know how much a human being should be able to help, and she herself took much more upon her than she need.

There was, nevertheless, something soothing in these sober facts, although they told him nothing about the real thing. It is impossible to bear for long the burden of the irreparable, and Pelle was glad that Ellen dwelt so constantly and naturally on Marie's fate; it brought it within the range of ordinary things for him too. Marie had come to her when she could no longer hide her condition, and Ellen had taken her in and kept her until she went to the lying-in hospital. Marie knew quite well that she was going to die—she could feel it, as it were—and would sit and talk about it while she helped Ellen with her boot-sewing. She arranged everything as sensibly as an experienced mother.

"How old-fashioned she was, and yet so child-like!" Ellen would exclaim with emotion.

Pelle could not help thinking of his life in the "Ark" when little Marie kept house for him and her two brothers—a careful housekeeper of eleven years! She was deformed and yet had abundant possibilities within her; she resembled poverty itself. Infected by his young strength, she had shot up and unfolded into a fair maiden, at whom the young dandies turned to look when she went along the street to make her purchases. He had been anxious about her, alone and unprotected as she was; and yet it was he himself who had become the plunderer of the poor, defenceless girl. Why had he not carried his cross alone, instead of accepting the love of a being who gave herself to him in gratitude for his gift to her of the joy of life? Why had he been obliged, in a difficult moment, to take his gift back? Boy Comfort she had called her boy in her innocent goodness of heart, in order that Pelle should be really fond of him; but it was a dearly-bought Comfort that cost the life of another! For Pelle the child was almost an accusation.

There was much to settle up and some things that could not be arranged! Pelle sometimes found it burdensome enough to be responsible for himself.

About this time Morten was often in his thoughts. "Morten has disappointed me at any rate," he thought; "he could not bear my prosperity!" This was a point on which Pelle had right upon his side!

Morten must come to him if they were to have anything more to do with one another. Pelle bore no malice, but it was reasonable and just that the one who was on the top should first hold out his hand.

In this way he thought he had obtained rest from that question in any case, but it returned. He had taken the responsibility upon himself now, and was going to begin by sacrificing his only friend on a question of etiquette! He would have to go to him and hold out a hand of reconciliation!

This at last seemed to be a noble thought!

But Pelle was not allowed to feel satisfied with himself in this either. He was a prey to the same tormenting unrest that he had suffered in his cell, when he stole away from his work and sat reading secretly—he felt as if there were always an eye at the peephole, which saw everything that he did. He would have to go into the question once more.

That unselfish Morten envious? It was true he had not celebrated Pelle’s victory with a flourish of trumpets, but had preferred to be his conscience! That was really at the bottom of it. He had intoxicated himself in the noise, and wanted to find something with which to drown Morten’s quiet warning voice, and the accusation was not far to seek—*envy!* It was he himself, in fact, who had been the one to disappoint.

One day he hunted him up. Morten’s dwelling was not difficult to find out; he had acquired a name as an author, and was often mentioned in the papers in connection with the lower classes. He lived on the South Boulevard, up in an attic as usual, with a view over Kalvebod Strand and Amager.

“Why, is that you?” he said, taking Pelle’s hands in his and gazing into his stern, furrowed face until the tears filled his eyes. “I say, how you have changed!” he whispered half tearfully, and led him into his room.

“I suppose I have,” Pelle answered gloomily. “I’ve had good reason to, anyhow. And how have you been? Are you married?”

“No, I’m as solitary as ever. The one I want still doesn’t care about me, and the others *I* don’t want. I thought you’d thrown me over too, but you’ve come after all.”

“I had too much prosperity, and that makes you self-important.”

“Oh, well, it does. But in prison—why did you send my letters back? It was almost too hard.”

Pelle looked up in astonishment. “It would never have occurred to the prisoner that he could hurt anybody, so you do me an injustice there,” he said. “It was myself I wanted to punish!”

“You’ve been ill then, Pelle!”

“Yes, ill! You should only know what one gets like when they stifle your right to be a human being and shut you in between four bare walls. At one time I hated blindly the whole world; my brain reeled with trying to find out a really crushing revenge, and when I couldn’t hit others I helped to carry out the punishment upon myself. There was always a satisfaction in feeling that the more I suffered, the greater devils did it make the others appear. And I really did get a hit at them; they hated with all their hearts having to give me a transfer.”

“Wasn’t there any one there who could speak a comforting word—the chaplain, the teachers?”

Pelle smiled a bitter smile. “Oh, yes, the lash! The jailer couldn’t keep me under discipline; I was what they call a difficult prisoner. It wasn’t that I didn’t want to, but I had quite lost my balance. You might just as well expect a man to walk steadily when everything is whirling round him. They saw, I suppose, that I couldn’t come right by myself, so one day they tied me to a post, pulled my shirt up over my head and gave me a thrashing. It sounds strange, but that did it; the manner of procedure was so brutal that everything in me was struck dumb. When such a thing as *that* could happen, there was nothing more to protest against. They put a wet sheet round me and I was lifted onto my pallet, so that was all right. For a week I had to lie on my face and couldn’t move for the pain; the slightest movement made me growl like an animal. The strokes had gone right through me and could be counted on my chest; and there I lay like a lump of lead, struck down to the earth in open- mouthed astonishment. ‘This is what they do to human beings!’ I groaned inwardly; ‘this is what they do to human beings!’ I could no longer comprehend anything.”

Pelle’s face had become ashen gray; all the blood had left it, and the bones stood out sharply as in a dead face. He gulped two or three times to obtain control over his voice.

“I wonder if you understand what it means to get a thrashing!” he said hoarsely. “Fire’s nothing; I’d rather be burnt alive than have it again. The fellow doesn’t beat; he’s not the least angry; nobody’s angry with you; they’re all so seriously grieved on your account. He places the strokes carefully down over your back as if he were weighing out food, almost as if he were fondling you. But your lungs gasp at each stroke and your heart beats wildly; it’s as if a thousand pincers were tearing all your fibers and nerves apart at once. My very entrails contracted in terror, and seemed ready to escape through my throat every time the lash fell. My lungs still burn when I think of it, and my heart will suddenly contract as if it would send the blood out through my throat. Do you know what the devilish part of corporal punishment is? It’s not the bodily pain that they inflict upon the culprit; it’s his inner man they thrash—his soul. While I lay there brooding over my mutilated spirit, left to lick my wounds like a wounded animal, I realized that I had been in an encounter with the evil conscience of Society, the victim of their hatred of those who suffer.”

“Do you remember what gave occasion to the punishment?” Morten asked, as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

“It was some little thing or other—I think I called out. The solitude and the terrible silence got upon my nerves, and I suppose I shouted to make a little life in the horrible emptiness. I don’t remember very clearly, but I think that was my crime.”

“You’d have been the better anyhow for a kind word from a friend.” Morten was still thinking of his despised letters.

“Yes, but the atmosphere of a cell is not suited for friendly relations with the outside world. You get to hate all who are at liberty—those who mean well by you too—and you chop off even the little bit of branch you’re sitting on. Perhaps I should never have got into touch with life again if it hadn’t been for the mice in my cell. I used to put crumbs of bread down the grating for them, and when I lay there half dead and brooding, they ran squeaking over my hand. It was a caress anyhow, even if it wasn’t from fellow-men.”

Morten lived in a small two-roomed flat in the attics. While they sat talking, a sound came now and then from the other room, and each time a nervous look came into Morten’s face, and he glanced in annoyance at the closed door. Gradually he became quite restless and his attention was fixed on these sounds. Pelle wondered at it, but asked no questions.

Suddenly there came the sound of a chair being overturned. Morten rose quickly and went in, shutting the door carefully behind him. Pelle heard low voices—Morten’s admonishing, and a thin, refractory, girlish voice. “He’s got a girl hidden in there,” thought Pelle. “I’d better be off.”

He rose and looked out of the large attic window. How everything had changed since he first came to the capital and looked out over it from Morten’s old lodging! In those days he had had dreams of conquering it, and had carried out his plan too; and now he could begin from the beginning! An entirely new city lay spread out beneath him. Where he had once run about among wharves and coal-bunkers, there now stood a row of palatial buildings with a fine boulevard. And everything outside was new; a large working-men’s district had sprung up where there had once been timber-yards or water. Below him engines were drawing rows of trucks filled with ballast across the site for the new goods-station yard; and on the opposite side of the harbor a new residential and business quarter had grown up on the Iceland Quay. And behind it all lay the water and the green land of Amager. Morten had had the sense to select a high branch for himself like the nightingales.

He had got together a good number of books again, and on his writing-table stood photographs of well-known men with autograph inscriptions. To all appearances he seemed to make his way in the world of books. Pelle took down some of Morten’s own works, and turned over their leaves with interest. He seemed to hear Morten’s earnest voice behind the printed words. He would begin to read him now!

Morten came in. “You’re not going, are you?” he asked, drawing his hand across his forehead. “Do stay a little while and we’ll have a good talk. You can’t think how I’ve missed you!” He looked tired.

“I’m looking forward tremendously to reading your books,” said Pelle enthusiastically. “What a lot you’ve written! You haven’t given that up.”

“Perhaps solitude’s taught you too to like books,” said Morten, looking at him. “If so, you’ve made some good friends in there, Pelle. All that there isn’t worth much; it’s only preliminary work. It’s a new world ours, you must remember.”

“I don’t think *The Working Man* cares much about you.”

“No, not much,” answered Morten slowly.

"They say you only write in the upper-class papers."

"If I didn't I should starve. *They* don't grudge me my food, at any rate! Our own press still has no use for skirmishers, but only for men who march to order!"

"And it's very difficult for you to subordinate yourself to any one," said Pelle, smiling.

"I have a responsibility to those above me," answered Morten proudly. "If I give the blind man eyes to see into the future, I can't let myself be led by him. Now and then *The Working Man* gets hold of one of my contributions to the upper-class press: that's all the connection I have with my own side. My food I have to get from the other side of the boundary, and lay my eggs there: they're pretty hard conditions. You can't think how often I've worried over not being able to speak to my own people except in roundabout ways. Well, it doesn't matter! I can afford to wait. There's no way of avoiding the son of my father, and in the meantime I'm doing work among the upper classes. I bring the misery into the life of the happily-situated, and disturb their quiet enjoyment. The upper classes must be prepared for the revolution too."

"Can they stand your representations?" asked Pelle, in surprise.

"Yes, the upper classes are just as tolerant as the common people were before they rose: it's an outcome of culture. Sometimes they're almost too tolerant; you can't quite vouch for their words. When there's something they don't like, they always get out of it by looking at it from an artistic point of view."

"How do you mean?"

"As a display, as if you were acting for their entertainment. 'It's splendidly done,' they say, when you've laid bare a little of the boundless misery. 'It's quite Russian. Of course it's not real at all, at any rate not here at home.' But you always make a mark on some one or other, and little by little the food after all becomes bitter to their taste, I think. Perhaps some day I shall be lucky enough to write in such a way about the poor that no one can leave them out. But you yourself—what's your attitude toward matters? Are you disappointed?"

"Yes, to some extent. In prison, in my great need, I left the fulfilment of the time of prosperity to you others. All the same, a great change has taken place."

"And you're pleased with it?"

"Everything has become dearer," said Pelle slowly, "and unemployment seems on the way to become permanent."

Morten nodded. "That's the answer capital gives," he said. "It multiplies every rise in wages by two, and puts it back on the workmen again. The poor man can't stand very many victories of that kind."

"Almost the worst thing about it is the development of snobbery. It seems to me that our good working classes are being split up into two—the higher professions, which will be taken up into the upper classes; and the proletariat, which will be left behind. The whole thing has been planned on too small a scale for it to get very far."

"You've been out and seen something of the world, Pelle," said Morten significantly. "You must teach others now."

"I don't understand myself," answered Pelle evasively, "and I've been in prison. But what about you?"

"I'm no good as a rallier; you've seen that yourself. They don't care about me. I'm too far in advance of the great body of them, and have no actual connection—you know I'm really terribly lonely! Perhaps, though, I'm destined to reach the heights before you others, and if I do I'll try to light a beacon up there for you."

Morten sat silent for a little while, and then suddenly lifted his head.

"But you *must*, Pelle!" he said. "You say you're not the right man, but there's simply no one but you. Have you forgotten that you fired the Movement, that you were its simple faith? They one and all believed in you blindly like children, and were capable of nothing when you gave up. Why, it's not you, but the others—the whole Movement— who've been imprisoned! How glad I am that you've come back full of the strength gained there! You were smaller than you are now, Pelle, and even then something happened; now you may be successful even in great things."

Pelle sat and listened in the deepening twilight, wondering with a pleased embarrassment. It was Morten who was nominating him—the severe, incorruptible Morten, who had always before been after him like his evil conscience.

"No, I'm going to be careful now," he said, "and it's your own fault, Morten. You've gone and pricked my soul, and I'm awake now; I shan't go at anything blindly again. I have a feeling that what we two are joining in is the greatest thing the world has ever seen. It reaches further into the future than I can see, and so I'm working on myself. I study the books now—I got into the way of that in prison—and I must try to get a view out over the world. Something strange too has happened to me: I understand now what you meant when you said that man was holy! I'm no longer satisfied with being a small part of the whole, but think I must try to become a whole world by myself. It sounds foolish, but I feel as if I were in one of the scales and the rest of the world in the other; and until I can send the other scale up, I can't think of putting myself at the head of the multitude."

Evening had closed in before they were aware of it. The electric light from the railway-station yard threw its gleam upon the ceiling of the attic room and was reflected thence onto the two men who sat leaning forward in the half-darkness, talking quietly. Neither of them noticed that the door to the other room had opened, and a tall, thin girl stood on the threshold gazing at them with dilated pupils. She was in her chemise only, and it had slipped from one thin shoulder; and her feet were bare. The chemise reached only to her knees, leaving exposed a pair of sadly emaciated legs. A wheezing sound accompanied her breathing.

Pelle had raised his head to say something, but was silent at sight of the lean, white figure, which stood looking at him with great eyes that seemed to draw the darkness into them. The meeting with Morten had put him into an expectant frame of mind. He still had the call sounding in his ears, and gazed in amazement at the ghostly apparition. The delicate lines, spoiled by want, the expression of childlike terror of the dark— all this twofold picture of wanness stamped with the stamp of death, and of an unfulfilled promise of beauty—was it not the ghost of poverty, of wrong and oppression, a tortured apparition sent to admonish him? Was his brain failing? Were the horrible visions of the darkness of his cell returning? "Morten!" he whispered, touching his arm.

Morten sprang up. "Why, Johanna! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" he exclaimed reproachfully. He tried to make the girl go back into the other room, and to close the door; but she pushed past him out into the room.

"I *will* see him!" she cried excitedly. "If you don't let me, I shall run away! He's hidden my clothes," she said to Pelle, gazing at him with her sunken eyes. "But I can easily run away in my chemise. I don't care!" Her voice was rough and coarse from the damp air of the back yards.

"Now go back to bed, Johanna!" said Morten more gently. "Remember what the doctor said. You'll catch cold and it'll all be wasted."

"What do I care!" she answered, breaking into a coarse laugh. "You needn't waste anything on me; I've had no children by you." She was trembling with cold, but remained obstinately standing, and answered Morten's remonstrances with a torrent of abusive epithets. At last he gave it up and sat down wearily. The two men sat and looked at her in silence.

The child was evidently uncomfortable at the cessation of resistance, and became confused beneath their silent gaze. She tossed her head and looked defiantly from the one to the other, her eyes glowing with an unnatural brightness. Suddenly she sank upon the floor and began to cry.

"*This* won't do," said Pelle gravely.

"I can't manage her," answered Morten hopelessly, "but you are strong enough."

Pelle stooped and took her up in his arms. She kicked and bit him. "She's got a fit," he said to Morten. "We must take her out to the pump." She instantly became quiet and let him carry her to bed. The fever was raging in her, and he noticed how her body was racked with every breath she drew; it sounded like a leaky pump.

When Morten, with a few kind words, covered her up, she began to weep convulsively, but turned her face to the wall and stuffed the quilt into her mouth in order to hide it. She gradually became quieter and at last fell asleep; and the two men stole out of the room and closed the door after them.

Morten looked tired out, for he was still not strong. "I've let myself in for something that I'm not equal to," he said despondently.

"Who is the poor child?" asked Pelle softly.

"I don't know. She came to me this spring, almost dead drunk and in a fearful state; and the next day she regretted it and went off, but I got hold of her again. She's one of those poor creatures who have no other home than the big timber-yards, and there she's made a living by going from one to another of the bigger lads. I can get nothing out of her, but I’ve found out in other ways that she’s lived among timber-stacks and in cellars for at least two years. The boys enticed dissolute men out there and sold her, taking most of the money themselves and giving her spirits to encourage her. From what I can make out there are whole organized bands which supply the dissolute men of the city with boys and girls. It makes one sick to think of it! The child must be an orphan, but won’t, as I said, tell me anything. Once or twice I’ve heard her talk in her sleep of her grandmother; but when I’ve referred to it, she sulks and won’t speak.”

“Does she drink?” asked Pelle.

Morten nodded. “I’ve had some bad times with her on that account,” he said. “She shows incredible ingenuity when it’s a case of getting hold of liquor. At first she couldn’t eat hot food at all, she was in such a state. She’s altogether fearfully shattered in soul and body, and causes me much trouble.”

“Why don’t you get her into some home?”

“Our public institutions for the care of children are not calculated to foster life in a down-trodden plant, and you’ll not succeed with Johanna by punishment and treatment like any ordinary child. At times she’s quite abnormally defiant and unmanageable, and makes me altogether despair; and then when I’m not looking, she lies and cries over herself. There’s much good in her in spite of everything, but she can’t let it come out. I’ve tried getting her into a private family, where I knew they would be kind to her; but not many days had passed before they came and said she’d run away. For a couple of weeks she wandered about, and then came back again to me. Late one evening when I came home, I found her sitting wet and shivering in the dark corner outside my door. I was quite touched, but she was angry because I saw her, and bit and kicked as she did just now. I had to carry her in by force. Her unhappy circumstances have thrown her quite off her balance, and I at any rate can’t make her out. So that’s how matters stand. I sleep on the sofa in here, but of course a bachelor’s quarters are not exactly arranged for this. There’s a lot of gossip too among the other lodgers.”

“Does that trouble you?” asked Pelle in surprise.

“No, but the child, you see—she’s terribly alive to that sort of thing. And then she doesn’t comprehend the circumstances herself. She’s only about eleven or twelve, and yet she’s already accustomed to pay for every kindness with her weak body. Can’t you imagine how dreadful it is to look into her wondering eyes? The doctor says she’s been injured internally and is probably tuberculous too; he thinks she’ll never get right. And her soul! What an abyss for a child! For even one child to have such a fate is too much, and how many there are in the hell in which we live!”

They were both silent for a little while, and then Morten rose. “You mustn’t mind if I ask you to go,” he said, “but I must get to work; there’s something I’ve got to finish this evening. You won’t mind, will you? Come and see me again as soon as you can, and thanks for coming this time!” he said as he pressed Pelle’s hand.

“I’d like you to keep your eyes open,” he said as he followed him to the door. “Perhaps you could help me to find out the history of the poor thing. You know a lot of poor people, and must have come in some way or other into her life, for I can see it in her. Didn’t you notice how eager she was to have a look at you? Try to find out about it, will you?”

Pelle promised, but it was more easily said than done. When his thoughts searched the wide world of poverty to which he had drawn so close during the great lock-out, he realized that there were hundreds of children who might have suffered Johanna’s fate.

V

Pelle had got out his old tools and started as shoemaker to the dwellers in his street. He no longer went about seeking for employment, and to Ellen it appeared as if he had given up all hope of getting any. But he was only waiting and arming himself: he was as sanguine as ever. The promise of the inconceivable was still unfulfilled in his mind.

There was no room for him up in the small flat with Ellen doing her washing there, so he took a room in the high basement, and hung up a large placard in the window, on which he wrote with shoemaker's ink, "Come to me with your shoes, and we will help one another to stand on our feet." When Lasse Frederik was not at work or at school, he was generally to be found downstairs with his father. He was a clever fellow and could give a hand in many ways. While they worked they talked about all sorts of things, and the boy related his experiences to his father.

He was changing very rapidly and talked sensibly about everything. Pelle was afraid he was getting too little out of his childhood. "Aren't you going up to play with them?" he asked, when the boys of the neighborhood rushed shouting past the basement window; but Lasse Frederik shook his head. He had played at being everything, from a criminal to a king, so there was nothing more to be had in that direction. He wanted something real now, and in the meantime had dreams of going to sea.

Although they all three worked, they could only just make ends meet; there was never anything over for extras. This was a sorrow to Ellen especially; Pelle did not seem to think much about it. If they only put something eatable before him, he was contented and did not mind what it was.

It was Ellen's dream that they should still, by toiling early and late, be able to work themselves up into another stratum; but Pelle was angry when she worked on after the time for leaving off. He would rather they were a little poor, if only they could afford to be human beings. Ellen did not understand it, but she saw that his mind was turned in another direction; he who had hitherto always fallen asleep over books would now become so absorbed in them that he did not hear the children playing round him. She had actually to rouse him when there was anything she wanted; and she began to fear this new power which had come in place of the old. It seemed like a curse that something should always work upon him to take him beyond her. And she dared not oppose it; she had bitter experience from former times.

"What are you looking for in those books?" she asked, sitting down beside him. Pelle looked up absently. His thoughts were in far-off regions where she had never been. What was he looking for? He tried to tell her, but could not explain it. "I'm looking for myself!" he said suddenly, striking boldly through everything. Ellen gazed at him, wondering and disappointed.

But she tried again. This time nothing should come between them and destroy her world. She no longer directly opposed anything; she meant to *go with him* and be where he was. "Tell me what you are doing and let me take part in it," she said.

Pelle had been prepared to some extent to go into this by himself, and was glad to meet with a desire for development in her too. For the present the intellectual world resembled more or less a wilderness, and it was good to have a companion with him in traversing it.

He explained to her the thoughts that occupied him, and discussed them with her; and Ellen observed wonderingly that it was all about things that did not concern their own little well-being. She took great pains to comprehend this flight away from the things that mattered most; it was like children who always wanted what they ought not to have.

In the evening, when Boy Comfort and Sister had been put to bed, Pelle would take a book and read aloud. Ellen was occupied with some mending or other, and Lasse Frederik, his ears standing out from his head, hung over a chair-back with his eyes fixed upon his father. Although he did not understand the half of it, he followed it attentively until Nature asserted herself, and he fell asleep.

Ellen understood this very well, for she had great difficulty herself in keeping her eyes open. They were not stories that Pelle read. Sometimes he would stop to write something down or to discuss some question or other. He would have the most extraordinary ideas, and see a connection between things that seemed to Ellen to be as far apart as the poles; she could not help thinking that he might very well have studied to be a pastor. It suited him, however; his eyes became quite black when he was explaining some subject that he was thoroughly interested in, and his lips assumed an expression that made her long to kiss them. She had to confess to herself that in any case it was a very harmless evening occupation, and was glad that what was interesting him this time kept him at home at any rate.

One day Pelle became aware that she was not following him. She did not even believe in what he was doing; she had never believed in him blindly. “She’s never really loved me either: that’s why!” he thought despondently. Perhaps that explained why she took Boy Comfort as calmly as if he were her own child: she was not jealous! Pelle would willingly have submitted to a shower of reproaches if afterward she had given him a kiss wetted with hot tears; but Ellen was never thrown off her balance.

Happy though they were, he noticed that she, to a certain extent, reckoned without him, as if he had a weakness of which it was always well to take account. Her earlier experiences had left their mark upon her.

Ellen had been making plans with regard to the old room and the two small ante-rooms at the end of it. She was tired of washing; it paid wretchedly and gave a great deal of work, and she received very little consideration. She now wanted to let lodgings to artistes. She knew of more than one woman in their street who made a nice living by taking in artistes. “If I’d only got a couple of hundred krones (10 or 11 pounds) to start it with, I’m sure I should make it pay,” she said. “And then you’d have more time and quiet for reading your books,” she added coaxingly.

Pelle was against the plan. The better class of artistes took rooms at the artiste hotels, and the people *they* might expect to get had not much to pay with. He had seen a good deal of them from his basement window, and had mended shoes for some of them: they were rather a soleless tribe. She said no more about it, but he could see that she was not convinced. She only dropped the subject because he was against it and it was he who would have to procure the money.

He could not bear to think this; he had become cautious about deciding for others. The money might be obtained, if in no other way, by giving security in his furniture and tools. If the plan did not succeed, it would be certain ruin; but perhaps Ellen thought him a wet blanket.

One day he threw down his leather apron and went out to raise the money. It was late when he came home, and Ellen was standing at the door waiting for him with a face of anxiety.

“Here’s the money, my dear! What’ll you give me for it?” he said gaily, and counted out into her hand a hundred and eighty krones (£10) in notes. Ellen gazed in surprise at the money; she had never held so large a sum in her hands before.

“Wherever did you get all that money from?” she asked at last.

“Well, I’ve trudged all day from place to place,” said Pelle cheerfully, “and at last I was directed to a man in Blaagaard Street. He gave me two hundred krones (£11) on the furniture.”

“But there’s only one hundred and eighty (£10) here!”

“Oh, well, he took off twenty krones (£1 2_s_.). The loan’s to be repaid in instalments of twenty krones (£1 2_s_.) a month for fifteen months. I had to sign a statement that I had borrowed three hundred krones (£16 10_s_.), but then we shan’t have to pay any interest.”

Ellen stared at him in amazement. “Three hundred krones, and we’ve only got a hundred and eighty, Pelle!” But she suddenly threw her arms round his neck and kissed him passionately. “Thank you!” she whispered. He felt quite dazed; it was not like her to be so vehement.

She had plenty to do, after hiring the room, in putting it in order. The loose beams had to be fixed up, and the walls plastered and whitewashed a little. The old peasant was willing enough to let it, but he would not hear of going to any expense. Ellen at last succeeded, however, in getting him to agree to pay half the repairs on condition that she took the room for a year and payed the rent in advance. “We can get my brother Frederik to do some of the repairs on Sunday morning,” she said to Pelle, “and then perhaps we shall get it done for nothing.” She was altogether very energetic.

There was need for it too. The rent swallowed up the hundred krones (£5 10_s_.), and then there were all the things that had to be got. She bought a quantity of cheap print, and hung it up so as to divide one side of the room into a number of small compartments each provided with a second-hand bed and hay mattress, and a washing-stand. “Artistes are not so particular,” she said, “and I’m sure they’ll be glad to have the room to practise in.” Finally there were the two little anterooms, which were to be furnished a little better for more particular artistes. There was not nearly enough money, and some of the things had to be taken on credit.

At last it was all ready to receive the guests. It looked quite smart for the amount spent on it, and Pelle could not but admire her cleverness in making a little go a long way. The only thing now left to do was to catch the birds, but here Ellen’s practical sense ceased to act; she had no idea how to proceed. “We must advertise,” she said, and counted up her remaining pence.

Pelle laughed at her. A lot of good it would be to advertise for people who were goodness knows where on railways and steamers! “What shall we do then?” she said, looking anxiously to him for help. After all, he was the man for it all.

Well, first of all there must be a German placard down on the street-door, and then they must make the rooms known. Pelle had studied both German and English in the prison, and he made up the placard himself. He had cards printed, and left them in the artistes’ tavern at the corner of Vesterbro Street, went there himself two or three times after midnight when the artistes gathered there when their work was finished, and stationed himself at the stage-entrances of the music-halls. He soon came to look upon it as a task to be performed, like everything with which he occupied himself; and this *should* succeed!

Ellen looked on wondering and helpless. She had all at once grown frightened, and followed each of his movements with anxious attention.

Soon, however, things began to move. The girls whose washing Ellen had done took an interest in the undertaking, and sent lodgers to her; and Lasse Frederik, who had the run of the circus stables, often returned with some Russian groom or other who did a turn as a rustic dancer or a Cossack horseman. Sometimes there lived with her people from the other side of the world where they walk with their heads down—fakirs and magicians from India and Japan, snake-charmers from Tetuan, people with shaven heads or a long black pigtail, with oblique, sorrowful eyes, loose hips and skin that resembled the greenish leather that Pelle used for ladies’ boots. Sister was afraid of them, but it was the time of his life to Lasse Frederik. There were fat Tyrolese girls, who came three by three; they jodeled at the music-halls, and looked dreadful all day, much to Ellen’s despair. Now and then a whole company would come, and then trapezes and rings creaked in the great room, Spanish dancers went through their steps, and jugglers practised new feats.

They were all people who should preferably not be seen off the stage. Ellen often went to the circus and music-halls now, but could never quite believe that the performers were the same men and women who went about at home looking like scarecrows. Most of them required nothing except that the lodging should be cheap; they boarded themselves, and goodness knows what they lived on. Some of them simply lighted a fire on a sheet of iron on the floor and made a mixture of rice or something of the sort. They could not eat Danish food, Pelle said. Sometimes they went away without paying, and occasionally took something with them; and they often broke things. There was no fortune to be made out of them, but in the meantime Ellen was satisfied as long as she could keep it going, so that it paid the rent and instalments on the loan and left her a little for her trouble. It was her intention to weed out the more worthless subjects, and raise the whole tone of the business when it had got into good order.

“You really might refuse the worst work now, and save yourself a little,” she said to Pelle when he was sitting over some worn-out factory shoes that had neither sole nor upper. Most boots and shoes had done service somewhere else before they reached this neighborhood; and when they came to Pelle there was not much left of them. “Say no to it!” said Ellen. “It’s far too hardly earned for you! And we shall get on now without having to take everything.” In the kindness of her heart she wanted him to be able to read his books, since he had a weakness for them. Her intention was good, but Pelle had no thought of becoming an aesthetic idler, who let his wife keep him while he posed as a learned man. There were enough of them in the neighborhood, and the inhabitants looked up to them; but they were not interesting. They were more or less another form of drunkard.

To Pelle books were a new power, grown slowly out of his sojourn in prison. He had sat there alone with his work, thrown on himself for occupation, and he had examined himself in every detail. It was like having companionship when he brought to light anything new and strange in himself; and one day he chanced upon the mistiness of his own being, and discovered that it consisted of experience that others had gone through before him. The Bible, which always lay on the prisoner’s table for company, helped him; its words had the sound of a well-known voice that reminded him strongly of Father Lasse’s in his childhood. From the Bible he went on further and discovered that the serious books were men who sat in solitude like himself, and spoke out.

Was solitude so dreadful then when you had such company? Pelle was no longer able to comprehend his own fear of it. As a child he had been a creature in the widest sense, and found companionship in everything; he could converse with trees, animals, and stones. Those fibers had withered, and no longer conveyed nourishment; but then he became one with the masses, and thought and felt exactly as they did. That was crumbling away too now; he was being isolated distinctly, bit by bit, and he was interested in discovering a plan in it. He had made Nature subject to him even as a child, and had afterward won the masses! It was solitude now that had to be taken, and he himself was going about in the midst of it, large and wonderful! It was already leaving indelible traces in his mind, although he had seen nothing of it yet. He felt strangely excited, very much as he had felt when, in his childhood, he arrived in Bornholm with his father and could see nothing, but heard the movement of thronging life behind the mist. A new and unknown world, full of wonders and throbbing with anticipation, would meet him in there.

Pelle’s action was not due to his own volition. He might as well try to lift himself up by his hair as determine that now he would be a human being by himself. It was an awakening of new powers. He no longer let sunshine and rain pass unnoticed over his head. A strange thing happened to him—he looked wonderingly at everything that he had formerly passed by as commonplace, and saw it all in a new, brilliant light. He had to go all over it from the beginning, look at every detail. How wonderfully everything was connected, sorrow and joy and apparent trifles, to make him, Pelle, who had ruled over hundreds of thousands and yet had to go to prison in order to feel himself rich! Something had been ignited in him that could never be extinguished, a sacred fire to which everything must bear fuel, whether it would or not. He could not be conquered now; he drew strength from infinity itself.

The bare cell—three paces one way and six the other—with its tiny window and the mysterious peephole in the door which was like a watchful eye upon one always, how much it had held! It had always been the lot of the poor man to create worlds out of the void, beautiful mirages which suddenly broke and threw him back even poorer and more desolate. But this lasted. All the threads of life seemed to be joined together in the bare cell. It was like the dark, underground place in large buildings where the machinery is kept that admits and excludes light and heat to the whole block. There he discovered how rich and varied life is.

Pelle went about in a peculiarly elevated frame of mind. He felt that something greater and finer than himself had taken up its abode within him and would grow on to perfection there.

It was a new being that yet was himself; it remained there and drew nourishment from everything that he did. He went about circumspectly and quietly, with an introspective expression as though he were weighing everything: there was so much that was not permissible because it might injure *it*! There were always two of them now—Pelle and this wonderful, invisible ego, which lay securely and weightily within him like a living thing, with its roots in the darkness.

Pelle’s relations to books were deeply grounded: he had to find out what the world meant now. He was a little distrustful of works of fiction; you got at their subject-matter too easily, and that could not be right. They were made up, too! He needed real stuff, facts. There were great spaces in his brain that longed to be filled with a tangible knowledge of things. His favorite reading was historical works, especially social history; and at present he read everything that came in his way, raw and unsweetened; it would have to sort itself out. It was a longing that had never been satisfied, and now seemed insatiable.

He minded his work punctiliously, however. He had made it a principle never to touch a book as long as any work lay waiting unfinished on the floor. In prison he had dreamt of a reasonable working-day of—for instance—eight hours, so that he would have time and strength to occupy himself with intellectual matters; but now he took it off his night’s sleep instead. This was at any rate a field out of which they need not try to keep him; he would have his share in the knowledge of the times. He felt it was a weapon. The poor man had long enough retired willingly into the corner for want of enlightenment, and whenever he put out his head he was laughed back again. Why did he not simply wrest the prerogative from the upper classes? It cost only toil, and in that coin he was accustomed to pay! He was scarcely deficient in ability; as far as Pelle could see at present, almost all the pioneers of the new state of things came from the lower classes.

He discovered with pleasure that his inward searching did not carry him away from the world, for far in there he came out again into the light — the light itself! He followed the secret laws for his own inward being, and found himself once more deep in the question of the welfare of the multitude. His practical sense required this confirmation of the conditions. There were also outward results. Even now history could no longer be used to light him and his ideas home; he knew too much. And his vision grew from day to day, and embraced an ever-widening horizon. Some day he would simply take the magic word from the trolls and wake the giant with it!

He worked hard and was as a rule full of confidence. When the last of the artistes came home from their *café*, he was often sitting working by the light of his shoemaker’s lamp. They would stop before the open basement window and have a chat with him in their broken Danish. His domestic circumstances were somewhat straitened; the instalments in repayment of the loan, and the debt on the furniture still swallowed all that they were able to scrape together, and Pelle had no prospect of getting better work. But work is the bearer of faith, and he felt sure that a way would open out if only he kept on with it unweariedly.

He took Ellen’s unspoken mistrust of his projects quietly. He felt himself to be greater than she in this; she could not reach up to the level of his head!

VI

Pelle was awake as early as four o’clock, although he had gone to bed late. He slept lightly at this time, when the summer night lay lightly upon his eyelids. He stole out into the kitchen and washed himself under the tap, and then went down to his work. The gray spirit of the night was still visible down in the street, but a tinge of red was appearing above the roofs. “The sun’s rising now over the country,” he thought, recalling the mornings of his childhood, the fields with their sheen of silvery dew, and the sun suddenly coming and changing them into thousands of sparkling diamond drops. Ah, if one could once more run bare-footed, if a little shrinkingly, out into the dewy grass, and shout a greeting to the dawning day: “Get up, Sun! Pelle is here already!” The night-watchman came slowly past the open window on his way home. “Up already?” he exclaimed in a voice hoarse with the night air, as he nodded down to Pelle. “Well, it’s the early bird that catches the worm! You’ll be rich one of these days, shoemaker!” Pelle laughed; he *was* rich!

He thought of his wife and children while he worked. It was nice to think of them sleeping so securely while he sat here at work; it emphasized the fact that he was their bread-winner. With every blow of his hammer the home grew, so he hammered away cheerfully. They were poor, but that was nothing in comparison with the fact that if he were taken away now, things would go to pieces. He was the children’s Providence; it was always “Father’s going to,” or “Father said so.” In their eyes he was infallible. Ellen too began to come to him with her troubles; she no longer kept them to herself, but recognized that he had the broader back.

It was all so undeserved—as if good spirits were working for him. Shameful though it was that the wife should work to help to keep the family, he had not been able to exempt her from it. And what had he done for the children? It was not easy to build everything up at once from a bare foundation, and he was sometimes tempted to leave something alone so as to accomplish the rest the more quickly. As it was now, he was really nothing! Neither the old Pelle nor the new, but something indeterminate, in process of formation, something that was greatly in need of indulgence! A removing van full of furniture on its way to a new dwelling.

He often enough had occasion to feel this from outside; both old enemies and old friends looked upon him as a man who had gone very much down in the world. Their look said: “Is that really all that remains of that stalwart fellow we once knew?” His own people, on the other hand, were lenient in their judgment. “Father hasn’t got time,” Sister would say in explanation to herself when she was playing about down in his work-room —“but he will have some day!” And then she would picture to herself all the delightful things that would happen then. It affected Pelle strangely; he would try to get through this as quickly as possible.

It was a dark and pathless continent into which he had ventured, but he was now beginning to find his way in it. There were ridges of hills that constantly repeated themselves, and a mountain-top here and there that was reached every time he emerged from the thicket. It was good to travel there. Perhaps it was the land he and the others had looked for. When he had got through, he would show it to them.

Pelle had a good memory, and remembered all that he read. He could quote much of it verbatim, and in the morning, before the street had wakened, he used to go through it all in his mind while he worked. It surprised him to find how little history concerned itself with his people; it was only in quite recent times that they had been included. Well, that did not trouble him! The Movement *was* really something new, and not one of history’s everlasting repetitions. He now wanted to see its idea in print, and one day found him sitting with a strange solemnity in the library with Marx and Henry George in front of him. Pelle knew something about this subject too, but this was nevertheless like drawing up a net from the deep; a brilliant world of wonders came up with it. There were incontrovertible logical proofs that he had a right apprehension, though it had been arrived at blindly. The land of fortune was big enough for all; the greater the number that entered it, the larger did it become. He felt a desire to hit out again and strike a fresh blow for happiness!

Suddenly an avalanche seemed to fall from the top to the bottom of the house, a brief, all-pervading storm that brought him back to his home. It was only Lasse Frederik ushering in the day; he took a flight at each leap, called a greeting down to his father, and dashed off to his work, buttoning the last button of his braces as he ran. A little later Ellen came down with coffee.

"Why didn't you call me when you got up?" she said sulkily. "It's not good to sit working so long without having had something to eat."

Pelle laughed and kissed her good-morning. "Fine ladies don't get up until long after their husbands," he said teasingly.

But Ellen would not be put off with a jest. A proper wife would be up before her husband and have something ready for him. "I *will* have you call me!" she said decidedly, her cheeks very red. It suited her to get roused now and then.

While he drank his coffee, she sat and talked to him about her affairs, and they discussed the plans for the day, after which she went upstairs to help the children to dress.

Later in the morning Pelle laid aside his work, dressed himself and went out to deliver it. While he was out he would go into the Library and look up something in the large dictionaries.

The street lived its own quiet life here close up to the greater thoroughfares—the same life day after day. The fat second-hand dealer from Jutland was standing as usual at his door, smoking his wooden pipe. "Good-morning, shoemaker!" he cried. A yellow, oblique-eyed oriental in slippers and long black caftan was balancing himself carelessly on the steps of the basement milk-shop with a bowl of cream in one hand and a loaf of bread in the other. Above on the pavement two boys were playing hopscotch, just below the large red lamp which all night long advertised its "corn-operator" right up to the main thoroughfare. Two girls in cycling costume came out of a gateway with their machines; they were going to the woods. "Good-day, Pelle! How is Ellen's business getting on?" they asked familiarly. They were girls for whom she had washed.

Pelle was fond of this busy part of the town where new shops with large plate-glass windows stood side by side with low-roofed cottages where retail business was carried on behind ordinary windows with wallflowers and dahlias in them as they might be in any provincial town. A string was stretched above the flower-pots, with a paper of safety-pins or a bundle of shoelaces hanging from it. There were poor people enough here, but life did not run in such hard grooves as out at Nörrebro. People took existence more easily; he thought them less honorable, but also less self-righteous. They seemed to be endowed with a more cheerful temperament, did not go so steadily and methodically to and from their fixed work, but, on the other hand, had several ways of making a living.

There was everywhere a feeling of breaking up, which corresponded well with Pelle's own condition; the uncertainty of life enveloped everything in a peculiarly tense atmosphere. Poverty did not come marching in close columns of workmen; its clothing was plentiful and varied; it might appear in the last woollen material from the big houses of old Copenhagen, or in gold-rimmed spectacles and high hat. Pelle thought he knew all the trades, but here there were hundreds of businesses that could not be organized; every day he discovered new and remarkable trades. He remembered how difficult it had been to organize out here; life was too incalculable.

There was room here for everything; next door to one another lived people whom the Movement had not yet gathered in, and people who had been pushed up out of it in obstinate defiance. There was room here for him too; the shadow he had dreaded did not follow him. The people had seen too much of life to interfere in one another's affairs; respectable citizenship had not been able to take possession of the poor man. There was something of the "Ark" about this part of the town, only not its hopelessness; on the contrary, all possibilities were to be found here. The poor man had conquered this ground from the rich citizens, and it seemed as if the development had got its direction from them. Here it was the proletariat whose varied nature forced its way upward, and leavened—so to speak—the whole. In the long side streets, which were full of second-hand dealers and pawnbrokers, existence had not resolved itself into its various constituents. Girls and gamblers were next-door neighbors to old, peaceable townsfolk, who lived soberly on the interest of their money, and went to church every Sunday with their hymn-books in their hands. The ironmonger had gold watches and antique articles among the lumber in his cellar.

Pelle went along Vesterbro Street. The summer holidays were just over, and the pavement on the Figaro side was crowded with sunburnt people— business-men, students and college girls—who were conspicuous in the throng by their high spirits. They had just returned to town, and still had the scent of fresh breeze and shore about them: it was almost as good as a walk in the country. And if he wanted to go farther out into the world, he could do that too; there were figures enough in the Vesterbro neighborhood to arrest his fancy and carry him forth. It was like a quay on which people from all parts of the world had agreed to meet—artists, seamen and international agents. Strange women came sailing through the crowd, large, exotic, like hot-house fruits; Pelle recognized them from the picture of the second-hand dealer's daughter in the "Ark," and knew that they belonged to the international nursing corps. They wore striped costumes, and their thick, fair hair emitted a perfume of foreign lands, of many ports and routes, like the interior of steamers; and their strong, placid faces were big with massage. They floated majestically down the current like full-rigged vessels. In their wake followed some energetic little beings who also belonged to the show, and had decked themselves out to look like children, with puffed sleeves, short skirts, and hair tied up with ribbons. Feeble old men, whom the sun had enticed out, stood in silent wonder, following the lovely children with their eyes.

Pelle felt a peculiar pleasure in being carried along with this stream which flowed like life itself, broad and calm. The world was greater than he had thought, and he took no side for or against anything, but merely wondered over its variety.

He came home from the library at two, with a large volume of statistics under his arm. Ellen received him with red eyes.

"Have your lodgers been making things unpleasant for you again?" he asked, looking into her face. She turned her head away.

"Did you get the money for your work?" she asked instead of answering.

"No, the man wasn't in the shop himself. They're coming here to pay."

"Then we haven't got a farthing, and I've got no dinner for you!" She tried to smile as she spoke, but her heavy eyelids quivered.

"Is that all?" said Pelle, putting his arm round her. "Why didn't you make me some porridge? I should have liked a good plateful of that."

"I have made it, but you'll get hardly anything else, and that's no food for a man."

He took her round the waist with both hands, lifted her up and put her carefully down upon the kitchen table. "That's porridge, my dear!" he said merrily. "I can hardly walk, I'm so strong!"

But there was no smile to be coaxed out of Ellen; something had happened that she did not want to tell him. At last he got out of her that the two musical clowns had gone off without paying. They had spoiled her good bed-clothes by lying in them with their clothes on, and had made them so filthy that nothing could be done with them. She was unwilling to tell Pelle, because he had once advised her against it; but all at once she gave in completely. "You mustn't laugh at me!" she sobbed, hiding her face on his shoulder.

Pelle attempted to comfort her, but it was not so easily done. It was not the one misfortune but the whole fiasco that had upset her so; she had promised herself so much from her great plan. "It isn't all lost yet," he said to comfort her. "We'll just keep on and you'll see it'll be all right."

Ellen was not to be hoodwinked, however. "You know you don't mean it," she said angrily. "You only say it because of me! And the second-hand dealer sent up word this morning that if he didn't soon get the rest of his money, he'd take all the furniture back again."

"Then let him take it, and that'll be an end of the matter."

"But then we shall lose all that we've paid!" she exclaimed quickly, drying her eyes.

Pelle shrugged his shoulders. "That can't be helped."

"Wouldn't it be better to get the things sold little by little? We only owe a third on them."

"We can't do that; it's punishable. We've got a contract for the hire of the furniture, and as long as we owe a farthing on it, it's his. But we're well and strong all of us; what does it matter?"

"That's true enough," answered Ellen, trying to smile, "but the stronger we are, the more food we need."

A girl came running up with a pair of boots that were to be soled as quickly as possible. They were "Queen Theresa's," and she was going to wear them in the evening. “That’ll bring us in a few pence!” said Ellen, brightening. “I’ll help you to get them done quickly.”

They seated themselves one on each side of the counter, and set to work. It reminded them of the early days of their married life. Now and then they stopped to laugh, when Ellen had forgotten some knack. In an hour and a half the boots were ready, and Pelle went himself with them to make sure of the money.

“You’ll most likely find her in the tavern,” said Ellen. “The artistes generally have their dinner at this hour, and she’s probably there.”

It was a busy time in the artistes’ restaurant. At the small tables sat bony, close-cropped men of a peculiar rubicund type, having dinner with some girl or other from the neighborhood. They were acrobats, clowns, and wrestlers, people of a homogeneous type, dressed in loud checks, with enormous cuffs and boots with almost armor-plated toes. They chewed well and looked up stupidly at the call of the girls; they wore a hard, brutal mask for a face, and big diamond rings on their fingers. Some of them had such a powerful lower jaw that they looked as if they had developed it for the purpose of taking blows in a boxing-match. In the adjoining room some elegant young men were playing billiards while they secretly kept an eye on what was going on at the tables. They had curls on their forehead, and patent leather shoes.

“Queen Theresa” was not there, so Pelle went to Dannebrog Street, where she lived, but found she was not at home. He had to hand in the boots to a neighbor, and go back empty-handed.

Well, it was no more than might have been expected. When you needed a thing most, chance played with you as a cat played with a mouse. Pelle was not nearly so cheerful as he appeared to be when he faced Ellen. The reality was beginning to affect him. He went out to Morten, but without any faith in the result; Morten had many uses for what he earned.

“You’ve just come at the right moment!” said Morten, waving two notes in the air. “I’ve just had twenty krones (a guinea) sent me from *The Working Man*, and we can divide them. It’s the first money I’ve got from that quarter, so of course I’ve spat upon it three times.”

“Then they’ve found their way to you, after all!” exclaimed Pelle joyfully.

Morten laughed. “I got tired of seeing my work repeated in their paper,” he said, “when they’ll have nothing to do with me up there; and I went up to them and drew their attention to the paragraph about piracy. You should have seen their expression! Goodness knows it’s not pleasant to have to earn your bread on wretchedness, so to speak, but it’s still more painful when afterward you have to beg for your hard-earned pence. You mustn’t think I should do it either under other circumstances; I’d sooner starve; but at any rate I won’t be sweated, by my own side! It’s a long time since you were here.”

“I’ve been so busy. How’s Johanna?” The last words were spoken in a whisper.

“Not well just now; she’s keeping her bed. She’s always asking after you.”

“I’ve been very busy lately, and unfortunately I can’t find out anything about her. Is she just as cross?”

“When she’s in a bad temper she lets me understand that she could easily help to put us on the right track if she wanted to. I think it amuses her to see us fooled.”

“A child can’t be so knowing!”

“Don’t be so sure of that! Remember she’s not a child; her experiences have been too terrible. I have an idea that she hates me and only meditates on the mischief she can do me. You can’t imagine how spiteful she can be; it’s as though the exhalations from down there had turned to poison in her. If any one comes here that she notices I like, she reviles them as soon as they’re gone, says some poisonous thing about them in order to wound me. You’re the only one she spares, so I think there must be some secret link between you. Try to press her on the subject once more.”

They went in to her. As the door opened she slipped hastily down beneath the clothes—she had been listening at the door—and pretended to be asleep. Morten went back to his work and closed the door after him.

“Well, Johanna,” said Pelle, seating himself on the edge of the bed. “I’ve got a message for you. Can you guess who it’s from?”

“From grandmother!” she exclaimed, sitting up eagerly; but the next moment she was ashamed at having been outwitted, and crept down under the clothes, where she lay with compressed lips, and stole distrustful glances at Pelle. There was something in the glance and the carriage of her head that awakened dormant memories in him, but he could not fix them.

“No, not grandmother,” he said. “By-the-bye, where is she now? I should like to speak to her. Couldn’t you go out to her with me when you get well?”

She looked at him with sparkling eyes and a mocking expression. “Don’t you wish you may get it!” she answered.

“Tell me where she lives, Johanna,” Pelle went on, taking her thin hand in his, “there’s a good girl!”

“Oh, yes, at night!”

Pelle frowned. “You must be very heartless, when you can leave your old grandmother and not even like others to help her. I’m certain she’s in want somewhere or other.”

Johanna looked at him angrily. “I whipped her too,” she exclaimed malignantly, and then burst into a laugh at Pelle’s expression. “No, I didn’t really,” she said reassuringly. “I only took away her stick and hid her spectacles so that she couldn’t go out and fetch the cream. So she was obliged to send me, and I drank up all the cream and put water in the can. She couldn’t see it, so she scolded the milk people because they cheated.”

“You’re making all this up, I think,” said Pelle uncertainly.

“I picked the crumb out of the loaf too, and let her eat the crust,” Johanna continued with a nod.

“Now stop that,” said Pelle, stroking her damp forehead. “I know quite well that I’ve offended you.”

She pushed away his hand angrily. “Do you know what I wish?” she said suddenly. “I wish you were my father.”

“Would you like me to be?”

“Yes, for when you became quite poor and ill, I’d treat you just as well as I’ve treated grandmother.” She laughed a harsh laugh.

“I’m certain you’ve only been kind to grandmother,” said Pelle gravely.

She looked hard at him to see whether he meant this too, and then turned her face to the wall. He could see from the curve of her body that she was struggling to keep back her tears, and he tried to turn her round to him; but she stiffened herself.

“I won’t live with grandmother!” she whispered emphatically, “I won’t!”

“And yet you’re fond of her!”

“No, I’m not! I can’t bear her! She told the woman next door that I was only in the way! It was that confounded child’s fault that she couldn’t get into the Home, she said; I heard her myself! And yet I went about and begged all the food for her. But then I left her!” She jerked the sentences out in a voice that was quite hoarse, and crumpled the sheet up in her hands.

“But do tell me where she is!” said Pelle earnestly. “I promise you you shan’t go to her if you don’t want to.”

The child kept a stubborn silence. She did not believe in promises.

“Well, then, I must go to the police to find her, but I don’t want to do that.”

“No, because you’ve been in prison!” she exclaimed, with a short laugh.

A pained expression passed over Pelle’s face. “Do you think that’s so funny?” he said, winking his eyes fast. “I’m sure grandmother didn’t laugh at it.”

Johanna turned half round. “No, she cried!” she said. “There was no one to give us food then, and so she cried.”

It began to dawn upon him who she was. “What became of you two that day on the common? We were going to have dinner together,” he said.

“When you were taken up? Oh, we couldn’t find you, so we just went home.” Her face was now quite uncovered, and she lay looking at him with her large gray eyes. It was Hanne’s look; behind it was the same wondering over life, but here was added to it a terrible knowledge. Suddenly her face changed; she discovered that she had been outwitted, and glared at him.

“Is it true that you and mother were once sweethearts?” she suddenly asked mischievously.

Pelle’s face flushed. The question had taken him by surprise. “I’ll tell you everything about your mother if you’ll tell me what you know,” he said, looking straight at her.

“What is it you want to know?” she asked in a cross-questioning tone. “Are you going to write about me in the papers?”

“My dear child, we must find your grandmother! She may be starving.”

“I think she’s at the ‘Generality,’” said the child quietly. “I went there on Thursday when the old things had leave to go out and beg for a little coffee; and one day I saw her.”

“Didn’t you go up to her then?”

“No; I was tired of listening to her lamentations!”

Johanna was no longer stiff and defiant. She lay with her face turned away and answered—a little sullenly—Pelle’s questions, while she played nervously with his fingers. Her brief answers made up for him one connected, sad story.

Widow Johnsen was not worth much when once the “Ark” was burnt down. She felt old and helpless everywhere else, and when Pelle went to prison, she collapsed entirely. She and the little girl suffered want, and when Johanna felt herself in the way, she ran away to a place where she could be comfortable. Her grandmother had also been in her way. She had her mother’s whimsical, dreamy nature, and now she gave up everything and ran away to meet the wonderful. An older playfellow seduced her and took her out to the boys of the timber-yard. There she was left to take care of herself, often slept out in the open, and stole now and then, but soon learned to earn money for herself. When it became cold she went as scullery-maid to the inns or maid-of-all-work to the women in Dannebrog Street. Strange to say, she always eluded the police. At first there were two or three times when she started to return to her grandmother, but went no farther than the stairs; she was afraid of being punished, and could not endure the thought of having to listen to the old lady’s complaints. Later on she became accustomed to her new way of living, and no longer felt any desire to leave it, probably because she had begun to take strong drink. Now and again, however, she stole in to the Home and caught a glimpse of her grandmother. She could not explain why she did it, and firmly maintained that she could not endure her. The old woman’s unreasonable complaint that she was an encumbrance to her had eaten deeply into the child’s mind. During the last year she had been a waitress for some time at a sailors’ tavern down in Nyhavn with an innkeeper Elleby, the confidence-man who had fleeced Pelle on his first arrival in the city. It was Elleby’s custom to adopt young girls so as to evade the law and have women-servants for his sailors; and they generally died in the course of a year or two: he always wore a crape band round his sleeve. Johanna was also to have been adopted, but ran away in time.

She slowly confessed it all to Pelle, coarse and horrible as it was, with the instinctive confidence that the inhabitants of the “Ark” had placed in him, and which had been inherited by her from her mother and grandmother. What an abyss of horrors! And he had been thinking that there was no hurry, that life was richer than that! But the children, the children! Were they to wait too, while he surveyed the varied forms of existence—wait and go to ruin? Was there on the whole any need of knowledge and comprehensiveness of survey in order to fight for juster conditions? Was anything necessary beyond the state of being good? While he sat and read books, children were perhaps being trodden down by thousands. Did this also belong to life and require caution? For the first time he doubted himself.

“Now you must lie down and go to sleep,” he said gently, and stroked her forehead. It was burning hot and throbbed, and alarmed he felt her pulse. Her hand dropped into his, thin and worn, and her pulse was irregular. Alas, Hanne’s fever was raging within her!

She held his hand tight when he rose to go. “Were you and mother sweethearts, then?” she asked in a whisper, with a look of expectation in the bright eyes that she fixed upon him. And suddenly he understood the reiterated question and all her strange compliance with his wishes.

For a moment he looked waveringly into her expectant eyes. Then he nodded slowly. “Yes, Johanna; you’re my little daughter!” he said, bending down over her. Her pale face was lighted with a faint smile, and she shyly touched his stubbly chin and then turned over to go to sleep.

In a few words Pelle told Morten the child’s previous history—Madam Johnsen and her husband’s vain fight to get on, his horrible death in the sewer, how Hanne had grown up as the beautiful princess of the “Ark”—

Hanne who meant to have happiness, and had instead this poor child!

“You’ve never told me anything about Hanne,” said Morten, looking at him.

“No,” said Pelle slowly. “She was always so strangely unreal to me, like an all too beautiful dream. Do you know she danced herself to death! But you must pretend to the child that I’m her father.”

Morten nodded. “You might go out to the Home for me, and hear about the old lady. It’s a pity she should have to spend her old age there!” He looked round the room.

“You can’t have her here, however,” said Pelle.

“It might perhaps be arranged. She and the child belong to one another.”

Pelle first went home to Ellen with the money and then out to the Home.

Madam Johnsen was in the infirmary, and could not live many days. It was a little while before she recognized Pelle, and she seemed to have forgotten the past. It made no impression whatever on her when he told her that her grandchild had been found. She lay most of the time, talking unintelligibly; she thought she still had to get money for the rent and for food for herself and the child. The troubles of old age had made an indelible impression upon her. “She gets no pleasure out of lying here and being comfortable,” said an old woman who lay in the next bed to hers. “She’s always trying and trying to get things, and when she’s free of that, she goes to Jutland.”

At the sound of the last word, Madam Johnsen fixed her eyes upon Pelle. “I should so like to see Jutland again before I die,” she said. “Ever since I came over here in my young days, I’ve always meant to use the first money I had over on an excursion home; but I never managed it. Hanne’s child had to live too, and they eat a lot at her age.” And so she was back in her troubles again.

The nurse came and told Pelle that he must go now, and he rose and bent over the old woman to say farewell, strangely moved at the thought that she had done so much for him, and now scarcely knew him. She felt for his hand and held it in both hers like a blind person trying to recognize, and she looked at him with her expressionless eyes that were already dimmed by approaching death. “You still have a good hand,” she said slowly, with the far-sounding voice of old age. “Hanne should have taken you, and then things would have been very different.’”

VII

People wondered, at the library, over the grave, silent working-man who took hold of books as if they were bricks. They liked him and helped him to find what he wanted.

Among the staff there was an old librarian who often came and asked Pelle if there were anything he could help him with. He was a little wizened man with gold spectacles and thin white hair and beard that gave a smiling expression to his pale face. He had spent his time among the stacks of books during the greater part of his life; the dust of the books had attacked his chest, and every minute his dry cough sounded through the room.

Librarian Brun was a bachelor and was said to be very rich. He was not particularly neat or careful in his dress, but there was something unspoiled about his person that made one think he could never have been subjected to the world’s rough handling. In his writings he was a fanatical worshipper of the ego, and held up the law of conscience as the only one to which men should be subject. Personally he was reserved and shy, but something drew him to Pelle, who, he knew, had once been the soul in the raising of the masses; and he followed with wonder and curiosity the development of the new working-man. Now and then he brought one of his essays to Pelle and asked him to read it. It often treated of the nature of personality, took as its starting-point the ego of some philosopher or other, or of such and such a religion, and attempted to get at the questions of the day. They conversed in whispers on the subject. The old, easily-approached philosopher, who was read by very few, cherished an unrequited affection for the general public, and listened eagerly to what a working-man might be able to make out of his ideas. Quiet and almost timid though his manner was, his views were strong, and he did not flinch from the thought of employing violent measures; but his attitude toward the raising of the lower classes was sceptical. “They don’t know how to read,” he said. “The common people never touch a real book.” He had lived so long among books that he thought the truths of life were hidden away in them.

They gradually became well acquainted with one another. Brun was the last descendant of an old, decayed family, which had been rich for many generations. He despised money, and did not consider it to be one of the valuable things of life. Never having known want, he had few pretensions, and often denied himself to help others. It was said that he lived in a very Spartan fashion, and used a large proportion of his income for the relief of the poor. On many points he agreed with the lower classes, not only theoretically but purely organically; and Pelle saw, to his amazement, that the dissolution of existing conditions could also take place from the upper grades of society. Perhaps the future was preparing itself at both extremities!

One day Brun carefully led the conversation on to Pelle’s private affairs: he seemed to know something about them. “Isn’t there anything you want to start?” he asked. “I should be so glad if you would allow me to help you.”

Pelle was not yet clear as to what was to be done about the future. “At present,” he said, “the whole thing is just a chaos to me.”

“But you must live! Will you do me the favor of taking a loan from me at any rate, while you’re looking about you? Money is necessary to make one capable and free,” he continued, when Pelle refused it. “It’s a pity, but so it is. You don’t *take* what you want anyhow, so you must either get the money in the way that offers, or do without.”

“Then I’ll do without,” said Pelle.

“It seems to me that’s what you and yours have always done, and have you ever succeeded in heaping coals of fire on the head of society by it? You set too high a value upon money; the common people have too great respect for the property of others. And upon my word it’s true! The good old poor man could scarcely find it in his heart to put anything into his own miserable mouth; his wife was to have all the good pieces. So he is mourned as lost to our side; he was so easy to get wealth by. His progeny still go about with a good deal of it.”

“Money makes you dependent,” Pelle objected.

“Not always,” answered Brun, laughing. “In my world people borrow and take on credit without a thought: the greater the debt, the better it is; they never treat a man worse than when they owe him money. On that point we are very much more emancipated than you are, indeed that’s where the dividing line goes between the upper classes and the common people. This fear of becoming indebted to any one, and carefulness to do two services in return for one, is all very nice and profitable in your own world; but it's what you'll be run down by in your relations to us. We don't know it at all; how otherwise would those people get on who have to let themselves be helped from their cradle to their grave, and live exclusively upon services received?"

Pelle looked at him in bewilderment. "Poor people have nothing but their sense of honor, and so they watch over it," he said.

"And you've really never halted at this sense of honor that works so splendidly in our favor?" asked Brun in surprise. "Just examine the existing morals, and you'll discover that they must have been invented by us—for your use. Yes, you're surprised to hear me say that, but then I'm a degenerate upper-class man, one of those who fall outside the established order of things. I saw your amazement at my not having patted you on the shoulder and said: 'Poor but proud! Go on being so, young man!' But you mustn't draw too far-reaching conclusions from that; as I told you, I'm not that sort. Now mayn't I give you a helping hand?"

No, Pelle was quite determined he should not. Something had been shattered within him, and the knowledge made him restive.

"You're an obstinate plebeian," said Brun, half vexed.

On his way home Pelle thought it all over. Of course he had always been quite aware that the whole thing resembled a gentleman's carriage, in which he and others like him had to be the horses; the laws and general arrangement were the reins and harness, which made them draw the carriage well. The only thing was that it was always denied from the other side; he was toiling at history and statistics in order to furnish incontrovertible proof of this. But here was some one who sat in the carriage himself, and gave evidence to the effect that it was right enough; and this was not a book, but a living man with whom he stood face to face. It gave an immense support to his belief.

There was need enough for it too, for at home things were going badly. The letting of rooms was at a standstill, and Ellen was selling the furniture as fast as she could. "It's all the same to me what the law is!" was her reply to Pelle's warnings. "There surely can be no sense in our having to make the furniture-dealer a present of all we've paid upon it, just because he has a scrap of paper against us. When the furniture's sold, he shall have the rest of what we owe him."

He did not get the whole, however, for in the first place they had to live. The remainder of the debt hung like a threat over them; if he discovered that the furniture was sold, it might end badly for them. "Remember I've been in prison before," said Pelle.

"They surely can't punish you for what I've done?" said Ellen, looking at him in terror. "Pelle, Pelle, what have I done! Why didn't I do what you told me!" For a time she collapsed, but then suddenly rose energetically, saying: "Then we must get it paid at once. It's surely possible to find twenty krones (a guinea)!" And hastening up to their flat, she quickly returned in her hat and jacket.

"What are you going to do?" asked Pelle in amazement.

"What am I going to do? I'm going to 'Queen Theresa.' She *can* get it! Don't be afraid!" she said, bending down and kissing him. She soon returned with the money. "I may pay it back by *washing*," she said cheerfully.

So that matter was settled, and they would have been glad if the loan had been the same. It scarcely moved, however; the instalments ate themselves up in some wonderful way. Two or three times they had had to ask for a postponement, and each time the usurer added the amount of the instalment to the sum still owing; he called it punishment interest.

Pelle read seldom; he felt no wish to do so. He was out early and late looking for a job. He fetched and took back furniture in the town for the second-hand dealer, and did anything else that came to hand.

One evening Ellen came up with a newspaper cutting that "Queen Theresa" had sent her, an advertisement of a good, well-paid situation for a trustworthy man, who had been trained as a shoemaker. "It's this morning's," said Ellen anxiously, "so I only hope it isn't too late. You must go out there at once." She took out Pelle's Sunday clothes quickly, and helped him to make himself tidy. It was for a boot-factory in Borger Street. Pelle took the tram in order to get there quickly, but he had no great hopes of getting the place. The manufacturer was one of his most bitter opponents among the employers at the time when he was organizing the trade—a young master-shoemaker who had had the good sense to follow the development and take the leap over to manufacturer.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said. "Well, well, old differences shan't stand between us if we can come to an agreement in other ways. What I want is a man who'll look a little after everything, a kind of right- hand man who can take something off my shoulders in a general way, and superintend the whole thing when I'm travelling. I think you'll do capitally for that, for you've got influence with the men; and I'd like things to go nicely and smoothly with them, without giving in to them too much, you understand. One may just as well do things pleasantly; it doesn't cost an atom more, according to my experience, and now one belongs to the party one's self."

"Do you?" said Pelle, hardly able to believe his ears.

"Yes! Why shouldn't an employer be a fellow-partisan? There's nothing to be afraid of when once you've peeped in behind the scenes; and it has its advantages, of course. In ten years' time every sensible man will be a social democrat."

"That's not at all unlikely," said Pelle, laughing.

"No, is it! So one evening I said to my wife: 'I say, you know it won't do soon to own that you don't belong to the party; in other countries millionaires and counts and barons already belong to it.' She didn't quite like it, but now she's quite satisfied. They're quite nice people, as she said herself. There are even persons of rank among them. Well, it wasn't conviction that drove me at first, but now I agree because what they say's very sensible. And upon my word it's the only party that can thrash the anarchists properly, don't you think so? In my opinion all should unite in fighting against them, and that'll be the end of it, I suppose. I've reflected a good deal upon politics and have come to the conclusion that we employers behaved like asses from the beginning. We oughtn't to have struggled against the Movement; it only drove it to extremes. Just see how well-behaved it's become since we began to take off our hats to it! You *become* what you're *treated* as, let me tell you. You wouldn't have acted so harshly if we others had been a little kinder to you. Don't you allow that? You're exactly like every one else: you want to have good food and nice clothes—be considered respectable people. So it was wise to cut off the lower end; you can't rise when you've too much lumber as ballast. Fellows who pull up paving- stones and knock you down are no company for me. You must have patience and wait until the turn comes to your party to come in for a share: those are my politics. Well, what do you think about the job?"

"I don't understand the machines," said Pelle.

"You'll soon get into that! But it's not that that matters, if only you know how to treat the workmen, and that of course you do. I'll pay you thirty-five krones (£2) a week—that's a good weekly wage—and in return you'll have an eye to my advantage of course. One doesn't join the party to be bled—you understand what I mean? Then you get a free house—in the front building of course—so as to be a kind of vice-landlord for the back building here; there are three stairs with one-roomed flats. I can't be bothered having anything to do with that; there's so much nonsense about the mob. They do damage and don't pay if they can help it, and when you're a little firm with them they fly to the papers and write spiteful letters. Of course I don't run much risk of that, but all the same I like things to go smoothly, partly because I aspire to become a member of the management. So you get eighteen hundred krones (£100) a year and a flat at four hundred (£22), which makes two thousand two hundred krones (£l22)—a good wage, though perhaps I oughtn't to say so myself; but good pay makes good work. Well, is it a bargain?"

Pelle wanted to have till the next day to think it over.

"What do you want to think over? One ought never to think over things too much; our age requires action. As I said before, an expert knowledge is not the main thing; it's your authority that I chiefly want. In other words, you'll be my confidential man. Well, well, then you'll give me your answer to-morrow."

Pelle went slowly homeward. He did not know why he had asked time to think it over; the matter was settled. If you wanted to make a home, you must take the consequences of it and not sneak away the first time a prospect offered of making it a little comfortable for your wife and children. So now he was the dog set to watch his companions.

He went down the King's New Market and into the fashionable quarter. It was bright and gay here, with the arc-lamps hanging like a row of light- birds above the asphalt, now and then beating their wings to keep themselves poised. They seemed to sweep down the darkness of night, and great shadows flickered through the street and disappeared. In the narrow side streets darkness lay, and insistent sounds forced their way out of it—a girl's laugh, the crying of a lonely child, the ceaseless bickering of a cowed woman. But people strolled, quietly conversing, along the pavement in couples and heard nothing. They had got out their winter coats, and were luxuriating in the first cold weather.

Music sounded from the large *cafés*, which were filled to overflowing. People were sitting close together in small select companies, and looked gay and happy. On the tables round which they sat, stood the wine-cooler with the champagne bottle pointing obliquely upward as though it were going to shoot down heaven itself to them. How secure they appeared to feel! Had they no suspicion that they were sitting upon a thin crust, with the hell of poverty right beneath them? Or was that perhaps why they were enjoying themselves—to-day your turn, to-morrow mine? Perhaps they had become reconciled to the idea, and took what they could get without listening too carefully to the hoarse protests of the back streets!

Under one of the electric lamp-posts on the Town Hall Square a man was standing selling papers. He held one out to Pelle, saying: "A halfpenny if you can afford it, if not you can have it for nothing!" He was pale, with dark shadows under his eyes, and he had a dark beard. He looked as if he were suffering from some internal complaint which was slowly consuming him. Pelle looked at him, and saw to his surprise that it was Peter Dreyer, his comrade of long ago!

"Do you go about selling newspapers?" he exclaimed in astonishment, holding out his hand.

Peter Dreyer quietly returned his greeting. He had the same heavy, introspective look that he had had when Pelle met him in the garret in Jager Street, but looked even more perplexed.

"Yes, I've become a newspaper man," he said, "but only after working hours. It's a little paper that I write and print myself. It may perhaps do you good to read it."

"What's it about?"

"About you and me."

"It's anarchistic, I suppose?" said Pelle, looking at the title of the paper. "You were so strange last time I met you."

"Well, you can read it. A halfpenny if you can afford it, if not gratis!" he cried, holding out a copy to the passers-by. A policeman was standing a little way off observing him. He gradually drew nearer.

"I see you're under observation!" said Pelle, drawing his attention to the policeman.

"I'm used to that. Once or twice they've seized my inoffensive little paper."

"Then it can't have been altogether inoffensive?" said Pelle, smiling.

"I only advise people to think for themselves."

"That advice may be dangerous enough too, if it's followed."

"Oh, yes. The mean thing is that the police pursue me financially. As soon as I've got work with any master, a policeman appears and advises him to discharge me. It's their usual tactics! They aim at the stomach, for that's where they themselves have their heart."

"Then it must be very hard for you to get on," said Pelle sympathetically.

"Oh, I get along somehow. Now and then they put me in prison for no lawful reason, and when a certain time has passed they let me out again—the one with just as little reason as the other. They've lost their heads. It doesn't say much for machinery that's exclusively kept going to look after us. I've a feeling that they'd like to put me out of the way, if it could be done; but the country's not large enough to let any one disappear in. But I'm not going to play the hunted animal any longer. Although I despise our laws, which are only a mask for brute force, I'm very careful to be on the right side; and if they use violence against me again, I'll not submit to it."

"The conditions are so unequal," said Pelle, looking seriously at him.

"No one need put up with more than he himself likes. But there's something wanting in us here at home—our own extreme consequence, self- respect; and so they treat us as ignominiously as they please."

They went on together. On the pavement outside one of the large *cafés* stood an anaemic woman with a child upon her arm, offering for sale some miserable stalks which were supposed to represent flowers. Peter Dreyer pointed silently from her to the people in the *café*. His face was distorted.

"I've no objection to people enjoying life," said Pelle; "on the contrary, I'm glad to see that there are some who are happy. I hate the system, but not the people, you see, unless it were those who grudge us all anything, and are only really happy in the thought that others are in want."

"And do you believe there's any one in there who seriously doesn't grudge others anything? Do you believe any of them would say: 'I'm fortunate enough to earn twenty-five thousand krones (£1,400) a year and am not allowed to use more than five thousand (£300), so the rest belongs to the poor'? No, they're sitting there abusing the poor man while they drink up the surplus of his existence. The men abuse the workmen, and their wives the servant girls. Just go in among the tables and listen! The poor are bestial, unreliable, ungrateful in spite of everything that is done for them; they are themselves to blame for their misery. It gives a spice to the feast to some of them, others dull their uneasy conscience with it. And yet all they eat and drink has been made by the poor man; even the choicest dainties have passed through his dirty hands and have a piquant flavor of sweat and hunger. They look upon it as a matter of course that it should be so; they are not even surprised that nothing is ever done in gratitude for kind treatment—something to disagree with them, a little poison, for instance. Just think! There are millions of poor people daily occupied in making dainties for the rich man, and it never occurs to any of them to revenge themselves, they are so good-natured. Capital literally sleeps with its head in our lap, and abuses us in its sleep; and yet we don't cut its throat!"

At Victoria Street they stopped. The policeman had followed them and stopped on the other side of the street when they stopped. Pelle drew the other's attention to the fact.

Peter looked across carelessly. "He's like an English bloodhound," he said quietly—"a ferocious mouth and no brain! What vexes me most is that we ourselves produce the dogs that are to hunt us; but we shall soon begin to agitate among the military." He said good-night and turned toward Enghave Road, where he lived.

Ellen met Pelle at the top of the street. "How did you get on?" she asked eagerly. "Did you get the place?"

He quietly explained matters to her. She had put her arm round him. "You great big man," she said, looking up at him with a happy face. "If you only knew how proud I am of you! Why, we're rich now, Pelle—thirty-five krones (2 Pounds) a week! Aren't you glad yourself?"

"Yes, I'm glad that you and the children will be a little comfortable for once."

"Yes, but you yourself—you don't seem to be very delighted, and yet it's a good place you're getting."

"It won't be an easy place for me, but I must make the best of it," he answered.

"I don't see why not. You're to be on the side of the manufacturer, but that's always the way with that kind of position; and he's got a right too to have his interests looked after."

When they got in Ellen brought him his supper, which had been standing on the stove to keep warm. Now and then she looked at him in wonder; there was something about him to-day that she did not understand. He had on the whole become a little peculiar in his views about things in the prison, and it was not to be wondered at. She went to him and stroked his hair.

"You'll be satisfied on your own account too, soon," she said. "It's fortunate for us that he can't be bothered to look after things himself."

"He's taken up with politics," answered Pelle absently. "At present he's thinking of getting into the Town Council by the help of the working-men's votes."

"Then it's very wise of him to take you," Ellen exclaimed vivaciously. "You understand these matters and can help him. If we save, we may perhaps have so much over that we could buy the business from him some day."

She looked happy, and treated him to a little petting, now in one way and now in another. Her joy increased her beauty, and when he looked at her it was impossible for him to regret anything. She had sacrificed everything for him, and he could do nothing without considering her. He must see her perfectly happy once more, let it cost what it might, for he owed her everything. How beautiful she was in her unaffectedness! She still had a fondness for dressing in black, and with her dark hair about her pale face, she resembled one of those Sisters who have suffered much and do everything out of compassion.

It struck him that he had never heard her really laugh; she only smiled.

He had not awakened the strongest feeling in her yet, he had not succeeded in making her happy; and therefore, though she had shared his bed and board, she had kept the most beautiful part to herself, like an unapproachable virgin. But now her cheeks glowed with happy expectation, and her eyes rested upon him eagerly; he no longer represented for her the everyday dullness, he was the fairy-story that might take her by surprise when the need was greatest. He felt he could hardly pay too dearly for this change. Women were not made for adversity and solitude; they were flowers that only opened fully when happiness kissed them. Ellen might shift the responsibility over onto his shoulders.

The next day he dressed himself carefully to go out and make the final agreement with the manufacturer. Ellen helped him to button his collar, and brushed his coat, talking, as she did so, with the lightheartedness of a bird, of the future. “What are we going to do now? We must try and get rid of this flat and move out to that end of the town,” she said, “or else you’ll have too far to walk.”

“I forgot to tell you that we shall live out there,” said Pelle. “He has three stairs with one-roomed apartments, and we’re to be the vice-landlord of them. He can’t manage the tenants himself.” Pelle had not forgotten it, but had not been able to bring himself to tell her that he was to be watch-dog.

Ellen looked at him in petrified astonishment. “Does that go with the post?” she gasped.

Pelle nodded.

“You mustn’t do it!” she cried, suddenly seizing him by the arms. “Do you hear, Pelle? You mustn’t do it!” She was greatly disturbed and gazed beseechingly at him. “I don’t understand you at all.”

He looked at her in bewilderment and murmured something in self-defence.

“Don’t you see that he only wants to make use of you?” she continued excitedly. “It’s a Judas post he’s offered you, but we won’t earn our bread by turning poor people into the street. I’ve seen my own bits of furniture lying in the gutter. Oh, if you’d gone there!” She gazed shudderingly straight before her.

“I can’t understand what you can have been thinking about—you who are generally so sensible,” she said when she had once more calmed down, looking reproachfully at him; but the next instant she understood it all, and sank down weeping.

“Oh, Pelle, Pelle!” she exclaimed, and hid her face.

VIII

Pelle read no more and no longer went to the library. He had enough to do to keep things going. There was no question now of trying to get a place; winter was at the door, and the army of the unemployed grew larger every day. He stayed at home, worked when there was anything to do, and for the rest minded the children for Ellen while she washed. He talked to Lasse Frederik as he would to a comrade, but it was nice to have to look after the little ones too. They were grateful for it, and he discovered that it gave him much pleasure. Boy Comfort he was very fond of now, his only sorrow being that the boy could not talk yet. His dumbness was always a silent accusation.

"Why don't you bring books home?" Ellen would say when she came up from the wash-house to look after them, with her arms bare and tiny drops in her hair from the steam down there. "You've plenty of time now."

No, what did he want with books? They did perhaps widen his horizon a little, but what lay behind it became so very much greater again; and he himself only grew smaller by reading. It was impossible in any case to obtain any reassuring view of the whole. The world followed its own crooked course in defiance of all wisdom. There was little pleasure in absorbing knowledge about things that one could not remedy; poor people had better be dull.

He and Morten had just been to Madam Johnsen's funeral. She had not succeeded in seeing Jutland. Out of a whole life of toil there had never been ten krones (10s.) over for a ticket home; and the trains ran day after day with hundreds of empty places. With chilling punctuality they whirled away from station to station. Heaven knows how many thousand empty seats the trains had run with to Jutland during the years in which the old woman longed to see her home! And if she had trudged to the railway-station and got into the train, remorseless hands would have removed her at the first station. What had she to do with Jutland? She longed to go there, it was true, but she had no money!

Was it malice or heartless indifference? A more fiendish sport can at any rate hardly be imagined than this running with empty places. It was they that made the journey so terribly vivid—as though the devil himself were harnessed to the train and, panting with wantonness, dragging it along through the country to places that people were longing to see. It must be dreadful to be the guard and call the names of the stations in to those seats for the people left behind!

And Sister walked about the floor so pale and thin! There was no strength in her fair hair, and when she was excited, her breath whistled in her windpipe with that painful sound that was practically inseparable from the children of the poor neighborhoods. It was always the vitiated air of the back-yards that had something to say now—depressing, like almost everything his understanding mastered. All she wanted was sunshine, and all the summer it had been poured down in open-handed generosity, only it went over the heads of poor people like everything else. It had been a splendid year for strawberries, but the large gardeners had decided to let half of them rot on their stalks in order to keep up the prices and save the money spent on picking them. And here were the children hungering for fruit, and ailing for want of it! Why? No, there was no possible answer to be given to that question.

And again—everywhere the same! Whenever he thought of some social institution or other, the same melancholy spectacle presented itself—an enormous rolling stock, only meant for a few, and to a great extent running empty; and from the empty places accusing eyes gazed out, sick and sad with hunger and want and disappointed hope. If one had once seen them, it was impossible to close one's eyes to them again.

Sometimes his imagination took another direction, and he found himself planning, for instance, kingdoms in which trains were used according to the need for them, and not according to the purse, where the food was eaten by those who were hungry, and the only poor people were those who grudged others things.

But he pulled himself up there; it was too idiotic! A voice from the unseen had called him and his out into the day, and then nothing had happened! It had only been to fool them.

Brun often came down to see him. The old librarian missed his young friend.

"Why do you never come in to us now?" he asked.

"What should I do there?" answered Pelle shortly. "The poor man has no use for knowledge; he's everlastingly damned."

He had broken with all that and did not care either about the librarian's visits. It was best for every one to look after himself; the great were no company for such as he. He made no attempt to conceal his ill humor, but Brun took no notice. The latter had moved out into Frederiksberg Avenue in October, and dropped in almost every afternoon on his way home from the library. The children took care to be down there at that time, for he always brought something for them.

Neither Pelle nor Ellen demanded much of life now. They had settled down in resignation side by side like a pair of carthorses that were accustomed to share manger and toil. It would have been a great thing now to have done with that confounded loan, so that they need not go about with their lives in their hands continually; but even that was requiring too much! All that could be scraped together went every month to the money-lender, and they were no nearer the end. On the one hundred and eighty krones (£10) that Pelle had received they had now in all paid off one hundred and twenty (£7), and yet they still owed two hundred and forty (more than £13). It was the "punishment interest" that made it mount up whenever they came only a day or two too late with the instalments or whatever it might be. In any case it was an endless screw that would go on all their life pumping out whatever they could scrape together into the money-lender's pocket.

But now Pelle meant to put an end to this. He had not paid the last instalment and meant to pay no more, but let things go as they liked. "You ought to borrow of Herr Brun and pay off that money-lender," said Ellen, "or else he'll only come down on us and take our furniture." But Pelle was obstinate and would not listen to reason. The consciousness that a parasite had fastened upon him and sucked him dry in spite of all his resistance, made him angry. He would like to see them touching his things!

When the money-lender came to fetch his instalment, Pelle shut the door in his face. For the rest he took everything with the calmness of resignation; but when the subject cropped up, he fired up and did not know what he said. Ellen had to keep silence and let his mood work itself out.

One afternoon he sat working at the basement window. The librarian was sitting on the chair by the door, with a child on each knee, feeding them with dates. Pelle was taking no notice, but bent over his work with the expression of a madman who is afraid of being spoken to. His work did not interest him as it had formerly done, and progressed slowly; a disturbing element had entered, and whenever he could not instantly find a tool, he grew angry and threw the things about.

Brun sat watching him anxiously, though apparently taken up with the children. A pitying expression would have made Pelle furious. Brun guessed that there was some money trouble, but dared not offer his assistance; every time he tried to begin a conversation Pelle repelled him with a cunning look which said: "You're seeking for an opportunity to come with your money, but you won't get it!" Something or other had gone wrong with him, but it would all come right in the end.

A cab stopped outside the door, and three men stepped out and went into the house. A little while after Ellen burst into the workshop. "Pelle!" she cried, without noticing Brun, "they've come to take away our things!" She broke into a fit of weeping, and seeing their mother crying, the children began to cry too.

Pelle rose and seized a hammer. "I'll soon get *them* out!" he said between his teeth in a low tone as he moved toward the door. He did not hurry, but went with lowered head, not looking at any one.

Brun seized him by the arm and stopped him.

"You forget that there's something called Prison!" he said with peculiar emphasis.

Pelle gazed at him in astonishment, and for a moment it looked as if he were going to strike the old man; then the hammer dropped from his hand and he broke down.

IX

Now and then a comrade from the good old days would come up and want Pelle to go with him to a meeting. Old fighting memories wakened within him. Perhaps it was there the whole point lay. He threw off his leather apron and went. Ellen’s eyes followed him to the door, wondering that he could still wish to have anything to do with that after what *he* had got out of it.

But it was not there after all! He remembered the tremendous ferment in men’s minds during the Movement, and it seemed to him that the excitement had died down. People only came forward before the elections, otherwise they went about their own business as if there had never been any rallying idea. They were all organized, but there was nothing new and strong in that fact; they were born—so to speak—in organization, and connected nothing great and elevating with it. His old associates had cooled down remarkably; they must have discovered that success was neither so romantic nor so easy as they had thought. They had no longer simply to open the gate into the land of success and stream through it; there was a long and difficult road before that. So they each arranged his own matters, and disposed of the doubtful future for small present advantages which were immediately swallowed up by the existing conditions.

The Movement had not reached to the bottom. There was an accusation against himself in this fact; it had not been designed with sufficient breadth. Even at that time it had passed over the heads of the inhabitants of the “Ark,” and now a large proletariat was left with their own expectations of the future. The good old class of the common people had split up into a class of petty tradesmen—who seemed to be occupied solely in establishing themselves—and this proletariat.

But there was nothing new in this. One stratum moved up and revealed a new one below; it had always been thus in history. Was it then everlastingly determined that at the bottom of existence there should always be the same innumerable crowd of those who were thrust down, who bore the burden of the whole, the great hunger reserve? Was it only possible to be happy when one knew how to push the difficulties down, just as one might push the folds of a material until at last they were heaped up in one place? It was the old question over again. Formerly he had had his clear faith with which to beat down doubt, but now he could not be content with a blind hope; he required to be shown an expedient. If the Movement had failed through having been begun crookedly, the causes with which one had to do were practical causes, and it was possible to do the whole thing over again.

There were also others engaged in taking the whole thing up from the bottom, and through Peter Dreyer he came into contact with young men of an entirely new type. They had emerged from the Movement, shot up surprisingly out of its sediment, and now made new ambitious claims upon life. By unknown paths they had reached the same point as he himself had done, and demanded first and foremost to be human beings. The sacredness of the ego filled them, and made them rebel at all yokes; they began from within by shaking them off, did not smoke or drink, would be slaves to nothing. They kept out of the Movement and had their own places of meeting out about the South Boulevard, where they read and discussed new social forms. They were intelligent, well-paid working-men, who persistently shared the conditions of the proletariat; fanatics who gave away their week’s wages if they met a man who was poorer than themselves; hot-headed enthusiasts who awaited revolution. Several of them had been in prison for agitating against the social order. There were also country people among them—sons of the men who stood in the ditches and peat-pits out there. “The little man’s children,” Morten called them.

These were the offspring of those who had made the Movement; that was how it should go on. By being contented they kept themselves free from the ensnaring expedients of capitalism, they despised the petty tradesman’s inclination for comfort, and were always ready for action. In them the departure was at any rate a fact!

They wanted to get hold of Pelle. “Come over to us!” Peter Dreyer often said.

Pelle, however, was not easily enticed out; he had his home where he hid himself like a snail in its shell. He had the responsibility for this little world of five people, and he had not even succeeded in securing it. His strength and industry were not enough even to keep one little home above water; a benefactor was needed for that! It was not the time to tend jealously one’s own honor when wife and children would be the sufferers; and now that it was all arranged he felt deeply grateful to the old librarian. It was nevertheless a disgraceful fact which did not encourage him to have anything to do with the affairs of others.

The violent language used by the young men frightened him too. He had rebelled against the old conditions just as they had done, but he met with different experiences. From the time he could crawl he had struggled to accommodate himself to the great connection of things; even the life of the prison had not placed him outside it, but had only united him the more closely with the whole. He had no inclination to cut the knot, but demanded that it should be untied.

“You’re no good,” said Morten and the others when they tried to rouse him, “for you can’t hate.” No, the cold in his mind was like the night-frost; it melted at the first sunbeam. When he looked back there were redeeming ties that held the whole together in spite of all the evil; and now the old librarian had brought him close up to the good in the other side of the cleft too. He had settled down to his shoemaking again and refused to be roused by the others’ impatience; but he looked as if he had an eternity in which to unravel his affairs.

Sister was often down with him and filled the workshop with her chatter. At about eight, when it began to grow light, he heard her staggering step on the stair, and she remained with him until Ellen took her up in the evening by main force to put her to bed. She dragged all the tools together and piled them up in front of Pelle on the bench so that he could hardly move, and called it helping. Then she rested, standing with her hands upon the edge of the bench and talking to him. “Sister’s clever!” she said appreciatively, pointing with satisfaction to her work. “Big girl!” And if he did not answer she repeated it and did not leave off until he had praised her.

“Yes, you’re very clever!” he said, “but can you put the things back in their places?”

The child shook her head. “Sister’s tired,” she declared with decision, and immediately after brought another tool and pushed it slowly up onto the heap while she kept her eyes upon his face to see whether she might do it. “Sister’s helping!” she repeated in explanation; but Pelle pretended not to hear.

For a time she was quiet, but then came to him with her pinafore full of old boots and shoes that she had pulled out from behind the stove. He tried to look stern, but had to bend down over his work. It made the little girl feel uncertain. She emptied her pinafore onto the platform, and sitting on her heels with her hands on her little knees, she tried to see what his expression was. It was not satisfactory, so she got up and, putting her hands on his knee, said, with an ingratiating look into his face: “You’re so clever, father! You can do everything! You’re the cleverest in the whole world!” And after a little pause—“We’re both clever, aren’t we, father?”

“Oh, that’s it, is it!” exclaimed Pelle. “One of us is very conceited at any rate!”

“It’s not me!” answered the child confidently, shaking her head.

“You seem to be very happy together,” said Ellen when she came down with Boy Comfort on her arm to fetch Anna. The child did not want to go up with her, and pushed round into the corner behind Pelle’s chair; and Boy Comfort struggled to be put down onto the floor to play with the lasts. “Well, then,” said Ellen, sitting down, “we’ll all stay here together.”

She looked quiet and resigned; her defeat had told upon her. She no longer spoke of the future, but was glad that they had escaped from the clutches of the money-lender; the thought of it filled her with a quiet but not altogether unspoiled happiness. She no longer dreamed of anything better, but was grateful for what she possessed; and it seemed to Pelle that something had died within her together with the dissatisfaction. It was as though she had at last given everything she had; her resignation to the gray everyday life made her dull and ordinary. “She needs sunshine,” he thought.

And again his thoughts wandered in their search for a way out into the future—his one idea—in the same track that they had followed a hundred times before. He did not even enter it fully, but merely recognized that the problem was being worn threadbare. In his trade there was no compromise; there was only room for extortioners and extortionized, and he was not suited for either part. When he took up other possibilities, however, his thoughts returned of themselves to his work, like a roving dog that always comes back and snuffs at the same scent. There was something in him that with fatalistic obstinacy made him one with his trade, in spite of its hopelessness; he had staked everything there, and there the question should be solved. Behind the fatalism of the common people lies the recognition that there is plan and perspective in their life too; such and such a thing is so because it must be so. And this recognition Pelle had no reason to do away with.

He grew confused with the continual dwelling of his thoughts on the same subject, but it seemed to possess him, was with him while he slept, and seized him as soon as he awoke. There was an old dream that persistently haunted him at this time—a forgotten youthful idea from his earliest participation in the rising, the plan for a common workshop that would make the court shoemaker superfluous. The plan had been laid aside at the time as impossible, but now he took it up again and went over it step by step. He could easily find some capable, reliable fellow-workmen who would stand by him through thick and thin with regard to work and profits; and there would be no difficulty about discipline, for during the past years the workmen had learned to subordinate themselves to their own people. Here was a way for the small man to assert himself within his trade and join the development; what one was not able to do could be done by several joining together, namely, turn the modern technics to account and divide the work into sections. He arranged it all most carefully, and went over it again and again to make sure that every detail was correct. When he slept he dreamed of his system of profit-sharing, and then it was a fact. He stood working in a bright room among comrades; there was no master and no servant, the machinery whirred, and the workmen sang and whistled while they minded it. Their hours of labor were short, and they all had happy homes waiting for them.

It was hard to wake up and know the reality. Alas! all the cleverest and most industrious hands in the world had no influence in their several trades—could not so much as sew a single stitch—until capital started them. If that refused its support, they could do nothing at all, but were cut off, as it were, at once.

Machinery cost money. Pelle could get the latter from Brun, the old man having often enough offered him capital to start something or other; but he already owed him money, and capital might run his undertaking down. It was at its post, and allowed no activity of that kind beside it. He was seized with uncertainty; he dared not venture the stakes.

The old philosopher came almost daily. Pelle had become a part of his life, and he watched his young friend’s condition with anxiety. Was it the prison life—or was it perhaps the books—that had transformed this young man, who had once gone ahead with tempestuous recklessness, into a hesitating doubter who could not come to a decision? Personality was of doubtful value when it grew at the expense of energy. It had been the old man’s hope that it would have developed greater energy through being replanted in fresh, untouched soil, and he tried to rouse Pelle out of his lethargy.

Pelle gave an impatient jerk. They were poking him up on all sides, wanting him to come to a decision, and he could not see his way to it. Of course he was half asleep; he knew it himself. He felt that he wanted rest; his entity was working for him out there in the uncertainty.

“I don’t know anything,” he said, half irritated, “so what can be the use? I thought books would lead me to a place from which I could bring everything together; but now I’m all abroad. I know too much to dash on blindly, and too little to find the pivot on which the whole thing turns. It doesn’t matter what I touch, it resolves itself into something *for* and something *against*.” He laughed in desperation.

One day Brun brought him a book. “This book,” he said with a peculiar smile, “has satisfied many who were seeking for the truth. Let’s see whether it can satisfy you too!” It was Darwin’s “Origin of Species.”

Pelle read as in a mist. The point lay here—the whole thing powerfully put into one sentence! His brain was in a ferment, he could not lay the book down, but went on reading all night, bewitched and horrified at this merciless view. When Ellen in surprise came down with his morning coffee, he had finished the book. He made no reply to her gentle reproaches, but drank the coffee in silence, put on his hat and went out into the deserted streets to cool his burning brow.

It was very early and the working-men had not yet turned out; at the morning coffee-rooms the shutters were just being taken down; warmly-clad tram-men were tramping through the streets in their wooden-soled boots; slipshod, tired women ran stumbling along to their early jobs, shivering with cold and weary of life, weary before they had begun their day. Here and there a belated woman toiled along the street carrying a clothes-basket, a mother taking her baby to the crêche before she went to her work.

Suddenly the feeling of rebellion came over Pelle, hot, almost suffocating him. This cruelly cold doctrine of the right of the strong, which gave him the choice between becoming brutal or going to the dogs — this was the key to an understanding of life? It pronounced a sentence of death upon him and his fellows, upon the entire world of the poor. From this point of view, the existing conditions were the only ones possible—they were simply ideal; the sweater and the money-lender, whom he hated, were in the most harmonious agreement with the fundamental laws of life! And the terrible thing was that from this standpoint the social fabric was clearly illuminated: he could not deny it. He who best learned to accommodate himself to the existing state of things, conquered; no matter how vile the existing state of things might be.

The book threw at once a dazzling light upon society, but where was his own class in this doctrine—all the poor? They were not taken into account! Society was thus in reality only those in possession, and here he had their religion, the moral support for the uncompromising utilization. It had always been difficult to understand how men could misuse others; but here it was a sacred duty to give stones for bread. The greatest oppressor was in reality nearest to life’s holy, maternal heart; for he was appointed to carry on the development.

The poor had no share in this doctrine. When a bad workman was in difficulties, the others did not press him until he had to go down, not even when he himself was to blame for his lack of means. The poor did not let the weak fall, but took him under their wing. They placed themselves outside the pale of the law and gave themselves no chance; the race could not be won with a wounded comrade on one’s back. But in this fact there lay the admission that they did not belong to the existing order of things, but had the right to demand their own time of happiness. A new age must come, in which all that was needed in order that they might share in it—kindness of heart, solidarity—was predominant. Thus even the great union he had helped to effect pointed in the right direction. It had been the opposite of one against all—it had built upon the law of reciprocity.

And the poor man was not a miserable wretch, condemned by the development to be ruined, a visionary, who, as a consequence of an empty stomach, dreamed of a Utopia. Pelle had passed his childhood in the country and gone about with the rest of creation in all kinds of weather. He had seen the small singing-birds throw themselves in whole clouds at the hawk when it had seized one of their number, and pursue it until it dropped its prey in confusion. When he caught an ant in a split straw, the other ants flocked to the straw and gnawed their comrade out: they could not be frightened away. If he touched them, they squirted their poison against his hand and went on working. Their courage amused him, the sprinklings of poison were so tiny that he could not see them; but if he quickly raised his hand to his nose, he detected a sharp acid smell. Why did they not leave their comrade in his dilemma, when there were so many of them and they were so busy? They did not even stop to have a meal until they had liberated him.

The poor man must stick to the union idea; he had got hold of the right thing this time! And now all at once Pelle knew which way they ought to go. If they were outside the existing conditions and their laws, why not arrange their own world upon the laws that were theirs? Through the organizations they had been educated in self-government; it was about time that they took charge of their own existence.

The young revolutionaries kept clear of the power of money by going without things, but that was not the way. Capital always preached contentment to the poor; he would go the other way, and conquer production by a great flanking movement.

He was not afraid now of using the librarian’s money. All doubt had been chased away. He was perfectly clear and saw in broad outlines a world- wide, peaceful revolution which was to subvert all existing values. Pelle knew that poverty is not confined to any country. He had once before brought forward an invincible idea. His system of profit-sharing must be the starting-point for a world-fight between Labor and Capital!

X

Two days later Pelle and the librarian went to Frederiksberg Street to look at a business that was to be disposed of. It was a small matter of half a score of workmen, with an electrical workshop in the basement and a shop above. The whole could be had by taking over the stock and machinery at a valuation. The rent was rather high, but with that exception the conditions were favorable.

“I think we’ll arrange that the purchase and working capital shall bear interest and be sunk like a four per cent. credit-association loan,” said Brun.

“It’s cheap money,” answered Pelle. “A good result won’t say much about the circumstances when we haven’t got the same conditions as other businesses.”

“Not so very cheap. At that price you can get as many as you want on good security; and I suppose the workman ought to be regarded as the best security in an undertaking that’s built upon labor,” said the old man, smiling. “There’ll be a big fall in discount when you come into power, Pelle! But the bare capital costs no more now either, when there are no parasites at it; and it’s just parasites that we’re going to fight.”

Pelle had no objection to the cheap money; there were still plenty of difficulties to overcome. If they got on, it would not be long before private speculation declared war on him.

They agreed that they would have nothing to do with agents and branches; the business was to rest entirely upon itself and communicate directly with the consumers. What was made in the workshop should merely cover the expenses of the shop above, the rest of the surplus being divided among the workmen.

“According to what rules?” asked Brun, with a searching glance at Pelle.

“Equal!” he answered without hesitation. “We won’t have anything to do with agreements. We made a great mistake, when we began the Movement, in giving in to the agreement system instead of doing away with it altogether. It has increased the inequality. Every one that works has a right to live.”

“Do you think the capable workman will submit to sharing equally with those that are less capable?” asked Brun doubtfully.

“He must learn to!” said Pelle firmly. “How could he otherwise maintain that all work is of equal value?”

“Is that your own opinion?”

“Most decidedly. I see no reason, for instance, for making any difference between a doctor and a sewer-cleaner. It’s impossible to say which of them is of the greater use in matters of health; the point is that each shall do what he can.”

“Capital!” exclaimed Brun. “Capital!” The old philosopher was in the best of spirits. Pelle had considered him awkward and unpractical, and was astonished to find that his views on many points were so practical.

“It’s because this is something new,” said the old man, rubbing his hands. “I’d done with the old before I came into the world; there was nothing that stimulated me; I was said to be degenerated. Yes, indeed! All the same, the old bookworm’s going to show his ancestors that there’s vigorous blood flowing in his veins too. We two have found the place from which the world can be rocked, my dear Pelle; I think we’ve found it! And now we’ll set to work.”

There was enough to do indeed, but they were realities now, and Pelle had a pleasant feeling of once more having his feet upon the ground. This was something different from riding alone through space upon his own thought, always in danger of falling down; here he opened up his road, so to speak, with his hands.

It had been arranged that the present owner of the business should carry it on a little longer, while Pelle made himself at home in it all, learned to understand the machinery, and took lessons in book-keeping. He was always busy, used his day and at night slept like a log. His brain was no longer in a perpetual ferment like a caldron, for sleep put out the fire beneath it.

The essential thing was that they should be a party that could entirely rely upon one another, and Pelle unhesitatingly discharged those of his comrades who were not suited for work under new forms, and admitted others.

The first man he applied to was Peter Dreyer. Ellen advised him not to do so. “You know he’s on bad terms with the police,” she said. “You may have difficulties enough without that.” But Pelle needed some one beside him who was able to look at things from a new point of view, and quite understood what was essential; egoists were of no good, and this must be the very thing for a man who had grown restive at the old state of things.

Pelle had come home from his book-keeping course to have his dinner. Ellen was out with Boy Comfort, but she had left the meal ready for him. It was more convenient to eat it in the kitchen, so he sat upon the kitchen table, reading a book on the keeping of accounts while he ate.

In the front room sat Lasse Frederik, learning his lessons with fingers in both ears in order to shut out the world completely. This was not so easy, however, for Sister had a loose tooth, and his fingers were itching to get at it. Every other minute he broke off his reading to offer her something or other for leave to pull it out; but the little girl always made the same answer: “No, father’s going to.”

He then gave up setting about it honorably, and tried to take her unawares; and at last he persuaded her to let him tie a piece of cotton round the tooth and fasten it to the doorhandle. “There! Now we’ve only got to burn through the cotton,” he said, lighting a piece of candle, “or else father’ll never be able to get the tooth out. It loosens it tremendously!” He talked on about all kinds of things to divert her attention, like a conjuror, and then suddenly brought the candle close to her nose, so that she quickly drew back. “Look, here’s the tooth!” he cried triumphantly, showing it to Sister, who, however, screamed at the top of her voice.

Pelle heard it all, but quietly went on eating. They would have to make it up by themselves. It was not long before Lasse Frederik was applying a plaster to his exploit; he talked to her and gave her her toys to put her into good humor again. When Pelle went in, they were both lying on the floor with their heads under the bed. They had thrown the tooth right into the wall, and were shouting together:

“Mouse, mouse!
Give me a gold tooth
Instead of a bone tooth!”

“Are you going to do anything now, father?” asked Sister, running up to him.

Yes, he had several things to do.

“You’re always so busy,” she said sulkily. “Are you going to keep on all your life?”

Pelle’s conscience smote him. “No, I’m not very busy,” he said quickly. “I can stay with you for a little. What shall we do?”

Little Anna brought her large rag doll, and began to drag chairs into position.

“No, that’s so stupid!” said Lasse Frederik. “Tell us about the time you minded the cows, father! About the big mad bull!” And Pelle told them stories of his childhood—about the bull and Father Lasse, the farmer of Stone Farm and Uncle Kalle with his thirteen children and his happy disposition. The big farm, the country life, the stone-quarry and the sea—they all made up a fairy-story for the two children of the pavement; the boy Pelle’s battle with the great oxen for the supremacy, his wonderful capture of the twenty-five-öre piece—each incident was more exciting than the one before it. Most exciting of all was the story of the giant Eric, who became an idiot from a blow. “That was in those days,” said Pelle, nodding; “it wouldn’t happen like that now.”

“What a lot you have seen!” said Ellen, who had come home while they were talking, and was sitting knitting. “I can hardly understand how you managed—a little fellow like that! How I should like to have seen you!”

“Father’s big!” exclaimed Sister appreciatively. Lasse Frederik was a little more reserved. It was so tiresome always to be outdone, and he would like to have found room for a parenthesis about his own exploits. “I say, there’s a big load of corn in the cabman’s gateway,” he said, to show that he too understood country life.

“That’s not corn,” said Pelle; “it’s hay—clover hay. Don’t you even know what corn’s like?”

“We call it corn,” answered the boy confidently, “and it is corn too, for it has those tassels at the ends.”

“The ears, you mean! But those are on coarse grass too, and, besides, corn is descended from grass. Haven’t you ever really been into the country?”

“We were once going, and meant to stay a whole week, but it went wrong with mother’s work. I’ve been right out to the Zoological Gardens, though.”

Pelle suddenly realized how much the children must lose by living their life in the city. “I wonder if we shouldn’t think about moving out of town,” he said that evening when he and Ellen were alone.

“If you think so,” Ellen answered. She herself had no desire to move into the country, indeed she had an instinctive horror of it as a place to live in. She did not understand it from the point of view of the children either; there were so many children who got on capitally in town, and he surely did not want them to become stupid peasants! If he thought so, however, she supposed it was right; he was generally right.

Then it was certainly time they gave notice; there was not much more than a month to April removing-day.

On Sundays they packed the perambulator and made excursions into the surrounding country, just as in the old days when Lasse Frederik was the only child and sat in his carriage like a little crown-prince. Now he wheeled the carriage in which Boy Comfort sat in state; and when Sister grew tired she was placed upon the apron with her legs hanging down. They went in a different direction each time, and came to places that even Lasse Frederik did not know. Close in to the back of the town lay nice old orchards, and in the midst of them a low straw-thatched building, which had evidently once been the dwelling-house on a farm. They came upon it quite by chance from a side-road, and discovered that the town was busy building barracks beyond this little idyll too, and shutting it in. When the sun shone they sat down on a bank and ate their dinner; Pelle and Lasse Frederik vied with one another in performing feats of strength on the withered grass; and Ellen hunted for winter boughs to decorate the house with.

On one of their excursions they crossed a boggy piece of ground on which grew willow copse; behind it rose cultivated land. They followed the field roads with no definite aim, and chanced upon an uninhabited, somewhat dilapidated house, which stood in the middle of the rising ground with a view over Copenhagen, and surrounded by a large, overgrown garden. On an old, rotten board stood the words “To let,” but nothing was said as to where application was to be made.

“That’s just the sort of house you’d like,” said Ellen, for Pelle had stopped.

“It would be nice to see the inside,” he said. “I expect the key’s to be got at the farm up there.”

Lasse Frederik ran up to the old farmhouse that lay a little farther in at the top of the hill, to ask. A little while after he came back accompanied by the farmer himself, a pale, languid, youngish man, who wore a stand-up collar and was smoking a cigar.

The house belonged to the hill farm, and had been built for the parents of the present owner. The old people had had the odd idea of calling it “Daybreak,” and the name was painted in large letters on the east gable. The house had stood empty since they died some years ago, and looked strangely lifeless; the window-panes were broken and looked like dead eyes, and the floors were covered with filth.

“No, I don’t like it!” said Ellen.

Pelle showed her, however, that the house was good enough, the doors and windows fitted well, and the whole needed only to be overhauled. There were four rooms and a kitchen on the ground floor, and some rooms above, one of these being a large attic facing south. The garden was more than an acre in extent, and in the yard was an out-house fitted up for fowls and rabbits, the rent was four hundred krones (£22).

Pelle and Lasse Frederik went all over it again and again, and made the most wonderful discoveries; but when Pelle heard, the price, he grew serious. “Then we may as well give it up,” he said.

Ellen did not answer, but on the way home she reckoned it out to herself; she could see how disappointed he was. “It’ll be fifteen krones (17 s.) more a month than we now pay,” she suddenly exclaimed. “But supposing we could get something out of the garden, and kept fowls! Perhaps, too, we might let the upper floor furnished.”

Pelle looked gratefully at her. “I’ll undertake to get several hundred krones’ worth out of the garden,” he said.

They were tired out when they got home, for after all it was a long way out. “It’s far away from everything,” said Ellen. “You’d have to try to buy a second-hand bicycle.” Pelle suddenly understood from the tone of her voice that she herself would be lonely out there.

“We’d better put it out of our thoughts,” he said, “and look for a three-roomed flat in town. The other is unpractical after all.”

When he returned from his work the following evening, Ellen had a surprise for him. “I’ve been out and taken the house,” she said. “It’s not so far from the tram after all, and we get it for three hundred krones (£16 10s.) the first year. The man promised to put it all into good order by removing-day. Aren’t you glad?”

“Yes, if only you’ll be happy there,” said Pelle, putting his arms round her.

The children were delighted. They were to live out there in the bright world into which they had peeped, as a rule, only on very festive occasions—to wander about there every day, and always eat the food they brought with them in the open air.

A week later they moved out. Pelle did not think they could afford to hire men to do the removing. He borrowed a four-wheeled hand-cart—the same that had carried Ellen’s furniture from Chapel Road—and in the course of Saturday evening and Sunday morning he and Lasse Frederik took out the things. “Queen Theresa” gave Ellen a helping hand with the packing. The last load was done very quickly, as they had to be out of the town before church-time. They half ran with it, Boy Comfort having been placed in a tub on the top of the load. Behind came Ellen with little Anna, and last of all fat “Queen Theresa” with some pot plants that had to be taken with special care. It was quite a procession.

They were in a tremendous bustle all day. The cleaning had been very badly done and Ellen and “Queen Theresa” had to do it all over again. Well, it was only what they might have expected! When you moved you always had to clean two flats, the one you left and the one you went into. There had not been much done in the way of repairs either, but that too was what one was accustomed to. Landlords were the same all the world over. There was little use in making a fuss; they were there, and the agreement was signed. Pelle would have to see to it by degrees.

By evening the house was so far in order that it could be slept in. “Now we’ll stop for to-day,” said Ellen. “We mustn’t forget that it’s Sunday.” They carried chairs out into the garden and had their supper there, Pelle having laid an old door upon a barrel for a table. Every time “Queen Theresa” leaned forward with her elbows on the table, the whole thing threatened to upset, and then she screamed. She was a pastor’s daughter, and her surroundings now made her melancholy. “I haven’t sat like this and had supper out of doors since I ran away from home as a fifteen-year-old girl,” she said, wiping her eyes.

“Poor soul!” said Ellen, when they had gone with her along the road to the tram. “She’s certainly gone through a good deal. She’s got no one to care about her except us.”

“Is she really a pastor’s daughter?” asked Pelle. “Women of that kind always pretend to be somebody of a better class who has been unfortunate.”

“Oh, yes, it’s true enough. She ran away from home because she couldn’t stand it. She wasn’t allowed to laugh, but had to be always praying and thinking about God. Her parents have cursed her.”

They went for a little walk behind the farm to see the evening sky. Ellen was very talkative, and already had a thousand plans in her head. She was going to plant a great many fruit-bushes and make a kitchen-garden; and they would keep a number of fowls and rabbits. Next summer she would have early vegetables that could be sold in town.

Pelle was only half attending as he walked beside her and gazed at the glowing evening sky, which, with its long fiery lines, resembled a distant prairie-fire. There was quiet happiness within him and around him. He was in a solemn mood, and felt as though, after an absence of many years, he had once more entered the land of his childhood. There was a familiar feeling in the soft pressure of the earth beneath his feet; it was like a caress that made him strong and gave him new life. Here, with his feet on the soil, he felt himself invincible.

“You’re so silent!” said Ellen, taking his arm so as to walk beside him upon the dike.

“I feel as if you had just become my bride,” he said, taking her into his arms.

XI

Brun came in every morning before he went to the library to see how the work was progressing; he was greatly interested in it, and began to look younger. He was always urging Pelle on, and suggesting plans for extensions. “If money’s wanted, just let me know,” he said. He longed to see the effect of this new system, and was always asking Pelle whether he noticed anything. When he heard that the boot and shoe manufacturers had held a meeting to decide what should be their attitude to the undertaking, he laughed and wanted to turn on more steam, quite indifferent to what it might cost. The old philosopher had become as impatient as a child; an interest had come into his old-man’s existence, and he was afraid of not getting the whole of it. “It’s all very well for you to take your time,” he said, “but remember that I’m old and sickly into the bargain.”

He treated Pelle as a son, and generally said “thou” to him.

Pelle held back. So much depended upon the success of this venture, and he watched it anxiously; it was as though he had been chosen to question the future. Within the Movement his undertaking was followed with attention; the working-men’s papers wrote about it, but awaited results. There were opinions for and against.

He wanted to give a good answer, and decided on his measures with much care; he immediately dismissed such workmen as were not suited to the plan. It made bad blood, but there was no help for that. He was busy everywhere, and where he could not go himself, Lasse Frederik went, for the boy had given up his other occupations and helped in the shop and ran errands. Ellen wanted to help too. “We can keep a servant, and then I’ll learn book-keeping and keep the accounts and mind the shop.”

Pelle would not agree to this, however. He was not going to have her working for their maintenance any more. A woman’s place was with her children!

“Nowadays the women take part in all kinds of work,” Ellen urged.

It did not matter; he had his own opinion on the subject. It was enough that the men should do the producing. Would she have them stand on the pavement and watch the women doing the work? It was very possible it did not sound liberal-minded, but he did not care. Women were like beautiful flowers, whatever people said about their being man’s equal. They wore their happiness off when they had to work for their living; he had seen enough to know that.

She did not like standing and looking on while the two men were so busy, so she attacked the garden, and sowed herbs and planted cabbage in the beds that lay like thick down quilts upon the earth; and when it happened that things came up, she was happy. She had bought a gardening book, and puzzled her head about the various kinds and their treatment. Pelle came to her assistance after working hours, and everything that he handled flourished. This made Ellen a little angry. She did exactly what he did, but it was just as if the plants made a difference between them. “I’ve got the countryman’s hand,” he said, laughing.

All Sunday they were busy. The whole family was in the garden, Lasse Frederik digging, Pelle pruning the espalier round the garden door, and Ellen tying it up. The children were trying to help everybody and were mostly a hindrance. One or other of them was always doing something wrong, treading on the beds or pulling up the plants. How extraordinarily stupid they were! Regular town children! They could not even understand when they were told! Pelle could not comprehend it, and sometimes nearly lost patience.

One day when little Anna came to him unsuspectingly to show him a flowering branch of an apple-tree which she had broken off, he was angry and took her roughly by the arm; but when he saw the frightened expression in her face, he remembered the man with the strange eyes, who had taught him in his childhood to manage the cattle without using anything but his hands, and he was ashamed of himself. He took the little ones by the hand, went round the garden with them and told them about the trees and bushes, which were alive just like themselves, and only wanted to do all they could for the two children. The branches were their arms and legs, so they could imagine how dreadful it was to pull them off. Sister turned pale and said nothing, but Boy Comfort, who at last had decided, to open his mouth and had become quite a chatterbox, jabbered away and stuck out his little stomach like a drummer. He was a sturdy little fellow, and Ellen’s eyes followed him proudly as he went round the garden.

The knowledge that everything was alive had a remarkable effect upon the two children. They always went about hand in hand, and kept carefully to the paths. All round them the earth was breaking and curious things coming up out of it. The beans had a bucket turned over them to protect them, and the lettuces put up folded hands as if they were praying for fine weather. Every morning when the children made their round of the garden, new things had come up. "'Oook, 'ook!" exclaimed Boy Comfort, pointing to the beds. They stood at a safe distance and talked to one another about the new wonders, bending over with their hands upon their backs as if afraid that the new thing would snatch at their fingers. Sometimes Boy Comfort's chubby hand would come out involuntarily and want to take hold of things; but he withdrew it in alarm as if he had burnt himself, saying "Ow!" and then the two children would run as fast as they could up to the house.

For them the garden was a wonder-world full of delights—and full of terrors. They soon became familiar with the plants in their own way, and entered into a kind of mystic companionship with them, met them in a friendly way and exchanged opinions—like beings from different worlds, meeting on the threshold. There was always something mysterious about their new friends, which kept them at a distance; they did not give much information about themselves. When they were asked: "Who called you?" they answered quickly: "Mother Ellen!" But if they were asked what it looked like down in the earth, they made no answer whatever. The garden continued to be an inexhaustible world to the children, no matter how much they trotted about in it. Every day they went on new journeys of discovery in under elder and thorn bushes; there were even places which they had not yet got at, and others into which they did not venture at all. They went near to them many times in the course of the day, and peeped over the gooseberry bushes into the horrible darkness that sat in there like an evil being and had no name. Out in the brilliant sunshine on the path they stood and challenged it, Sister spitting until her chin and pinafore were wet, and Boy Comfort laboriously picking up stones and throwing them in. He was so fat that he could not bend down, but had to squat on his heels whenever he wanted to pick up anything. And then suddenly they would rush away to the house in a panic of fear.

It was not necessary to be a child to follow the life in the garden. A wonderful power of growing filled everything, and in the night it crackled and rustled out in the moonlight, branches stretched themselves in fresh growths, the sap broke through the old bark in the form of flowers and new "eyes." It was as though Pelle and Ellen's happy zeal had been infectious; the half-stifled fruit-trees that had not borne for many years revived and answered the gay voices by blossoming luxuriantly. It was a race between human beings and plants as to who should accomplish the most, and between the plants themselves as to which could make the best show. "The spring is lavishing its flowers and green things upon us," said Pelle. He had never seen a nest that was so beautiful as his; he had at last made a home.

It was pleasant here. Virginia creeper and purple clematis covered the whole front of the house and hung down before the garden door, where Ellen liked to sit with her work, keeping an eye on the little ones playing on the grass, where she liked best to sit with Pelle on Sundays, when the Copenhagen families came wandering past on their little country excursions. They often stopped outside the hedge and exclaimed: "Oh, what a lovely home!"

The work in Pelle's workshop began, as in all other places, at six in the morning; but it stopped at four, so that those who cared about it could easily make something of the day. Pelle had reduced the working hours to nine, and dared not venture any further for the present.

Some of the hands liked this arrangement, and employed the afternoon in going out with their wives and children; but others would rather have had an hour longer in bed in the morning. One day the latter came and declared that now they were in the majority and would have it changed.

"I can't agree to that," answered Pelle. "Being early up is the workman's privilege, and I'm not going to give it up."

"But we've taken the votes on it," they said. "This is a democratic institution, isn't it?"

"I've taken no oath to the vote," Pelle answered quietly, "and in the meantime I should advise those who are dissatisfied with the conditions here to try somewhere else."

There was always something like this going on, but he did not take it for more than it was worth. They had acquired consciousness of their power, but most of them had not yet discovered its aim. They used it blindly, in childish pleasure at seeing it unfold, like boys in unfurling their banner, tyrannized a little by way of a change, and took their revenge for the subjection of old times by systematically demanding the opposite to what they had. They reeled a little; the miracle of the voting-paper had gone to their heads. It was an intelligible transition; the feeling of responsibility would get hold of them in time.

Another day two of the most skilful workmen came and asked to have piece-work introduced again. “We won’t stand toiling to make money for our comrades,” they said.

“Are they idle?” asked Pelle.

“No, but we work quicker.”

“Then they’re more thorough on the whole. The one generally balances the other.”

“That’s all very well, but it doesn’t benefit us.”

“It benefits the consumers, and under the new conditions that’s the same thing. We must maintain the principle that all who do their duty are equally good; it’s in our own interests.”

They were satisfied for the time. They were two clever fellows, and it was only that they had not got hold of the new feature in the arrangement.

In this way there was considerable trouble. The workmen were short-sighted, and saw only from their hands to their own mouths. Impatience had also something to do with it. They had shorter hours and higher wages, but had not as much to do as in other places. It was new of course, and had to answer to their dreams; but there would be no fortunes to be made out of it as Pelle was working it. He was a little more precise than was necessary when you were pressed on all sides by vulgar competition.

There were, for instance, still a number of people who kept to the good old handsewn boots and shoes, and willingly paid half as much again for them. A good many small shoemakers availed themselves of this by advertising handsewn foot-wear, and then passed the measures on to a factory. It was a good business for both factory and shoemaker, but Pelle would have nothing to do with such transactions. He put his trade- mark on the sole of everything that went out of his workshop.

Pelle took all this with dignified calmness. What right had he to demand perspicuity of these people? It was *his* business to educate them to it. If only they were willing, he was satisfied. Some day he supposed he would take them so far that they would be able to take over the business jointly, or make it self-supporting; but until then they would have to fall in with his plans.

Part of a great, far-off dream was nevertheless being realized in his undertaking, modest though it was at present; and if it were successful, the way to a new age for the petty tradesmen was open. And what was of still more importance, his own home was growing through this work. He had found the point where the happiness of the many lay in the lengthening of his own; he had got the right way now! Sometimes in the evening after a troublesome day he felt a little tired of the difficulties; but when he bicycled down toward the town in the early morning, while the mists of night drifted across the fields and the lark sang above his head, he was always in good spirits. Then he could follow the consequences of his labor, and see the good principles victorious and the work growing. Kindred enterprises sprang up in other parts of the town, in other towns, still farther out. In the far distance he could see that all production was in the hands of the working-men themselves.

Peter Dreyer supported him like a good comrade, and took a good deal of the worry off his shoulders. He unselfishly put all his strength into it, but he did not share Pelle’s belief in the enormous results that would come from it. “But, dear me, this is capitalistic too!” he said— “socialist capitalism! Just look up to the pavement! there goes a man with no soles to his shoes, and his feet are wet, but all the same he doesn’t come down here and get new shoes, for we want money for them just like all the others, and those who need our work most simply have none. That thing”—he went on, giving a kick to one of the machines— “turns ten men into the street! There you have the whole thing!”

Pelle defended his machines, but Peter would not give in. “The whole thing should have been altered first,” he said angrily. “As it is, they are inventions of the devil! The machines have come a day or two too early, and point their mouths at us, like captured cannons!”

“The machines make shoes for ten times as many people as we could make for with our hands,” said Pelle, “and that can hardly be called a misfortune. It’s only the distribution that’s all wrong.”

Peter Dreyer shrugged his shoulders; he would not discuss the question of distribution any more. If they meant to do anything to alter it he was willing to help. There had been enough nonsense talked about it. Those who had money could buy up all that they made, while the barefooted would be no better off than before. It was a deadlock. Did he think it would revolutionize the world if every man received the entire proceeds of his work? That only meant justice in the existing conditions, so long as diamonds continued to be more valuable than bread. “I don’t see that those who happen to have work should have a better right to live than those who can’t get any,” he said wrathfully. “Or perhaps you don’t know the curse of unemployment! Look at them wandering about in thousands, summer and winter, a whole army of shadows! The community provides for them so that they can just hang together. Good heavens, that isn’t helping the poor, with all respect to the honorable workman! Let him keep his vote, since it amuses him! It’s an innocent pleasure. Just think if he demanded proper food instead of it!”

Yes, Pelle was well enough acquainted with the great hunger reserve; he had very nearly been transferred into it himself. But here he nevertheless caught a glimpse of the bottom. There was a peaceable strength in what he was doing that might carry them on a long way. Peter Dreyer acknowledged it himself by working so faithfully with him. It was only that he would not admit it.

At first they had to stand a good deal, but by degrees Pelle learned to turn things off. Peter, who was generally so good and amenable, spoke in an angry, vexed tone when the conversation touched upon social conditions; it was as though he was at the end of his patience. Though he earned a very good amount, he was badly dressed and looked as if he did not get sufficient food; his breakfast, which he ate together with the others in the workshop, generally consisted of bread and margarine, and he quenched his thirst at the water-tap. At first the others made fun of his prison fare, but he soon taught them to mind their own business: it was not safe to offend him. Part of his earnings he used for agitation, and his comrades said that he lived with a humpbacked woman and her mother. He himself admitted no one into his confidence, but grew more and more reticent. Pelle knew that he lived in one of the Vesterbro back streets, but did not know his address. When he stood silent at his work, his expression was always gloomy, sometimes terribly sad. He seemed to be always in pain.

The police were always after him. Pelle had once or twice received a hint not to employ him, but firmly refused to submit to any interference in his affairs. It was then arbitrarily decided that Peter Dreyer should report himself to the authorities every week.

“I won’t do it!” he said. “It’s quite illegal. I’ve only been punished for political offences, and I’ve been so careful that they shouldn’t be able to get at me for any formal mistake, and here they’re having this triumph! I won’t!” He spoke quietly and without excitement, but his hands shook.

Pelle tried an appeal to his unselfishness. “Do it for my sake then,” he said. “If you don’t they’ll shut you up, and you know I can’t do without you.”

“Would you go and report yourself then if you were told to?” Peter asked.

“Yes. No one need be ashamed of submitting to superior brute force.”

So he went. But it cost him an enormous effort, and on that day in the week it was better to leave him alone.

XII

Marie’s fate lay no longer like a heavy burden upon Pelle; time had taken the bitterness out of it. He could recall without self-reproach his life with her and her two brothers in the “Ark,” and often wondered what had become of the latter. No one could give him any information about them.

One day, during the midday rest, he went on his bicycle out to Morten with a message from Ellen. In Morten’s sitting-room, a hunched-up figure was sitting with its back to the window, staring down at the floor. His clothes hung loosely upon him, and his thin hair was colorless. He slowly raised a wasted face as he looked toward the door. Pelle had already recognized him from his maimed right hand, which had only the thumb and one joint of the forefinger. He no longer hid it away, but let it lie upon his thin knee.

“Why, good-day, Peter!” exclaimed Pelle in surprise, holding out his hand to take the other’s left hand. Peter drew the hand out of his pocket and held it out. It was a dead, maimed lump with some small protuberances like rudiments of knuckles, that Pelle found in his hand. Peter looked into his face without moving a muscle of his own, and there was only a little gleam in his eyes when Pelle started.

“What in the world are you starting for?” he said dryly. “I should think any one might have known that a fellow couldn’t mind a shearing-machine with one hand. I knew it just as well as everybody else in the factory, and expected it every day; and at last I had to shut my eyes. Confound it, I often thought, won’t there soon be an end to it? And then one day there it was!”

Pelle shivered. “Didn’t you get any accident insurance?” he asked in order to say something.

“Of course I did! The whole council gathered on account of my humble self, and I was awarded three thousand krones (£170) as entirely invalided. Well, the master possessed nothing and had never insured me, so it never got beyond the paper. But anyhow it’s a great advance upon the last time, isn’t it? Our party has accomplished something!” He looked mockingly at Pelle. “You ought to give a cheer for paper reforms!”

Peter was a messenger and a kind of secretary in a revolutionary association for young men. He had taught himself to read and sat with other young men studying anarchistic literature. The others took care of him like brothers; but it was a marvel that he had not gone to the dogs. He was nothing but skin and bone, and resembled a fanatic that is almost consumed by his own fire. His intelligence had never been much to boast of, but there were not many difficulties in the problem that life had set him. He hated with a logic that was quite convincing. The strong community had passed a sham law, which was not even liable for the obligations that it admitted that it had with regard to him. He had done with it now and belonged to the destructionists.

He had come up to Morten to ask him to give a reading at the Club. “It’s not because we appreciate authors—you mustn’t imagine that,” he said with a gloomy look. “They live upon us and enjoy a meaningless respect for it. It’s only manual labor that deserves to be honored; everything else sponges on us. I’m only telling you so that you shan’t come imagining something different.”

“Thank you,” said Morten, smiling. “It’s always nice to know what you’re valued at. And still you think you can make use of me?”

“Yes, you’re one of the comparatively better ones among those who work to maintain the capitalists; but we’re agreed at the Club that you’re not a real proletariat writer, you’re far too much elaborated. There have never been proletariat writers; and it’s of no consequence either, for entertainment shouldn’t be made out of misery. It’s very likely you’ll hear all about that up there.”

“That’s all right. I’ll be sure to come,” answered Morten.

“And if you’ll write us a cantata for our anniversary festival—it’s the day of the great Russian massacre—I’ll see that it’s accepted. But it mustn’t be the usual hallelujah!”

“I’m glad I met you,” he said to Pelle with his unchanging expression of gloom. “Have you seen anything of Karl?”

“No, where is he?” asked Pelle eagerly.

“He’s a swell now. He’s got a business in Adel Street; but he won’t enjoy it long.”

“Why not? Is there anything wrong with his affairs?”

“Nothing more than that some day we’ll pull the whole thing down upon all your heads. There’ll soon be quite a number of us. I say, you might speak one evening in our association, and tell us something about your prison life. I think it would interest them. We don’t generally have outsiders, for we speak for ourselves; but I don’t think there’d be any difficulty in getting you introduced.”

Pelle promised.

“He’s a devil-may-care fellow, isn’t he?” exclaimed Morten when he had shut the door on Peter, “but he’s no fool. Did you notice that he never asked for anything? They never do. When they’re hungry they go up to the first person they meet and say: ‘Let me have something to eat!’ It’s all the same to them what’s put into their mouths so long as it’s satisfying, and they never thank gratefully. Nothing affects them. They’re men who put the thief above the beggar. I don’t dislike it really; there’s a new tone in it. Perhaps our well-behaved ruminant’s busy doing away with one stomach and making up the spare material into teeth and claws.”

“If only they’d come forward and do work!” said Pelle. “Strong words don’t accomplish much.”

“How’s it going with your peaceable revolution?” asked Morten with a twinkle in his eye. “Do you see any progress in the work?”

“Oh, yes, it’s slow but sure. Rome wasn’t built in a day. I didn’t think though that you were interested in it.”

“I think you’re on the right tack, Pelle,” answered Morten seriously. “But let the young ones light the fire underneath, and it’ll go all the quicker. That new eventualities crop up in this country is no disadvantage; the governing body may very well be made aware that there’s gunpowder under their seats. It’ll immensely strengthen their sense of responsibility! Would you like to see Johanna? She’s been wanting very much to see you. She’s ill again unfortunately.”

“Ellen sent me out to propose that she should come to stay with us in the country. She thinks the child must be a great trouble to you and cannot be properly looked after here either.”

“It’s very kind of your wife to think of it, but hasn’t she enough to do already?”

“Oh, Ellen can manage a great deal,” said Pelle heartily. “You would be giving her a pleasure.”

“Then I’ll say ‘Thank you’ for the offer,” exclaimed Morten. “It’ll be a great relief to me, if only she can stand the moving. It isn’t that she gives me any trouble now, for we get on capitally together. Johanna is good and manageable, really a splendid character in spite of her spoiling. You won’t have any difficulty with her. And I think it’ll be good for her to be away from me here, and be somewhere where there’s a woman to see to her—and children. She doesn’t get much attention here.”

They went in to her and found her asleep, her pale face covered with large drops of moisture. “It’s exhaustion,” whispered Morten. “She’s not got much strength yet.” Their presence made her sleep disturbed, and she tossed from side to side and then, suddenly opening her eyes, gazed about her with an expression of wild terror. In a moment she recognized them and smiled; and raising herself a little she held out both her hands to Pelle with a charming expression of childish coquetry.

“Tell me about the house out there and Boy Comfort,” she said, making room for him on the edge of the bed. “It’s so tiresome here, and Mr. Morten’s so serious.” And she threw a glance of defiance at him.

“Is he?” said Pelle. “That must be because he writes books.”

“No, but I must keep up a little dignity,” said Morten, assuming a funny, schoolmasterish expression. “This young lady’s beginning to be saucy!”

Johanna lay and laughed to herself, her eyes travelling from one to the other of them. “He ought to have a pair of spectacles, and then he’d be like a real one,” she said. She spoke hardly above a whisper, it was all she had strength for; but her voice was mischievous.

“You must come to us if he’s so bad,” said Pelle, “and then you can play with the children and lie in the sunshine out in the garden. You don’t know how lovely it is there now? Yes, I’m really in earnest,” he continued, as she still smiled. “Ellen asked me to come and say so.”

She suddenly became grave and looked from the one to the other; then looking down, and with her face turned away, she asked: “Will Morten be there too?”

“No, Johanna, I must stay here, of course; but I’ll come out to see you.”

“Every day?” Her face was turned to the wall, and she scratched the paper with her nails.

“I shall come and see my little sweetheart just as often as I can,” said Morten, stroking her hair.

The red blood suffused her neck in a sudden wave, and was imperceptibly absorbed in the paleness of her skin, like a dying ember. Hanne’s blood came and went in the same way for the merest trifle. Johanna had inherited her mother’s bashfulness and unspeakable charm, and also her capricious temper.

She lay with her back turned toward them and made no reply to their persuasions. It was not easy to say whether she even heard them, until suddenly she turned to Morten with an expression of hatred on her face. “You don’t need to trouble,” she said, with glowing eyes; “you can easily get rid of me!”

Morten only looked at her sorrowfully, but Pelle was angry. “You ought to be ashamed of yourself for taking it like that,” he said. “Is that all the thanks Morten gets for what he’s done? I must say you’re a grateful child!”

Johanna took the scolding without moving a muscle of her face, but when he ceased she quietly took his hand and laid it over her delicate, thin face, which it quite covered. There she lay peeping out at him and Morten between the large fingers, with a strangely resigned expression that was meant to be roguish. “I know it was horrid of me,” she said dully, moving Pelle’s middle finger backward and forward in front of her eyes so that she squinted; “but I’ll do what you tell me. Elle-Pelle, Morten-Porten—I can talk the P-language!” And she laughed an embarrassed laugh.

“You don’t know how much better and happier you’ll be when you get out to Pelle’s,” said Morten.

“I could easily get up and do the work of the house, so that you didn’t need to have a woman,” she whispered, gazing at him passionately with her big eyes. “I’m well enough now.”

“My dear child, that’s not what I mean at all! It’s for your sake. Don’t you understand that?” said Morten earnestly, bending over her.

Johanna’s gaze wandered round hopelessly, as if she had given up all thought of being understood any more.

“I don’t think we’ll move her against her will,” said Morten, as he went down with Pelle. “She is so capricious in her moods. I think, too, I should miss her, for she’s a good little soul. When she’s up she goes creeping about and is often quite touching in her desire to make me comfortable. And suddenly recollections of her former life awaken in her and darken her mind; she’s still very mistrustful and afraid of being burdensome. But she needs the companionship of women, some one to whom she can talk confidentially. She has too much on her mind for a child.”

“Couldn’t you both move out to us? You can have the two upstairs rooms.”

“That’s not a bad idea,” exclaimed Morten. “May I have two or three days to think it over? And my love to Ellen and the children!”

XIII

When the workshop closed, Pelle often went on working for an hour or two in the shop, getting the accounts straight and arranging the work for the following day in the intervals of attending to customers. A little before six he closed the shop, mounted his bicycle and hastened home with longing for the nest in his heart.

Every one else seemed to feel as he did. There was a peculiar homeward current in the traffic of the streets. Cyclists overtook him in whole flocks, and raced in shoals in front of the trams, which looked as if they squirted them away from the lines as they worked their way along with incessant, deafening ringing, bounding up and down under the weight of the overfilled platforms.

Crowds of men and women were on their way out, and met other crowds whose homes were in the opposite quarter. On the outskirts of the town the factory whistles were crowing like a choir of giant cocks, a single one beginning, the others all joining in. Sooty workmen poured out of the gates, with beer-bottles sticking out of coat-pockets and dinner handkerchiefs dangling from a finger. Women who had been at work or out making purchases, stood with their baskets on their arms, waiting for their husbands at the corner of the street. Little children tripping along hand in hand suddenly caught sight of a man far off in the crowd, and set off at a run to throw themselves at his legs.

Sister often ran right across the fields to meet her father, and Ellen stood at the gate of “Daybreak” and waited. “Good-day, Mr. Manufacturer!” she cried as he approached. She was making up for so much now, and was glowing with health and happiness. It was no use for Pelle to protest, and declare that in his world there were only workmen; she would not give up the title. He was the one who directed the whole thing, and she did not mind about the fellowship. She was proud of him, and he might call himself an errand-boy if he liked; men must always have some crochet or other in their work, or else it would not satisfy them. The arrangement about the equal division she did not understand, but she was sure that her big, clever husband deserved to have twice as much as any of the others. She did not trouble her head about that, however; she lived her own life and was contented and happy.

Pelle had feared that she would tire of the country, and apparently she did not take to it. She weeded and worked in the garden with her customary energy, and by degrees acquired a fair knowledge of the work; but it did not seem to afford her any peculiar enjoyment. It was no pleasure to her to dig her fingers into the mould. Pelle and the children throve here, and that determined her relations to the place; but she did not strike root on her own account. She could thrive anywhere in the world if only they were there; and their welfare was hers. She grew out from them, and had her own wonderful growth inward.

Within her there were strange hidden forces that had nothing to do with theories or systems, but produced the warmth that bore up the whole. Pelle no longer desired to force his way in there. What did he care about logical understanding between man and woman? It was her heart with which he needed to be irradiated. He required to be understood by his friends. His great satisfaction in being with, for instance, Morten, was that in perfect unanimity they talked until they came to a stopping-place, and if they were then silent their thoughts ran on parallel lines and were side by side when they emerged once more. But even if he and Ellen started from the same point, the shortest pause would take their thoughts in different directions; he never knew where she would appear again. No matter how well he thought he knew her, she always came up just as surprisingly and unexpectedly behind him. And was it not just that he loved? Why then contend with it on the basis of the claims of a poor logic?

She continued to be just as unfathomable, no matter how much of her he thought he had mastered. She became greater and greater with it, and she brought him a new, strange world—the mysterious unknown with which he had always had to strive, allowed itself to be tenderly embraced. He no longer demanded the whole of her; in his inmost soul probably every human being was lonely. He guessed that she was going through her own development in concealment, and wondered where she would appear again.

It had formerly been a grief to him that she did not join the Movement; she was not interested in political questions and the suffrage. He now dimly realized that that was just her strength, and in any case he did not wish her otherwise. She seldom interfered definitely with what he did, and why should she? She exerted a silent influence upon everything he did, stamped each of his thoughts from the moment they began to shoot up. For the very reason that she did not know how to discuss, she could not be refuted; what to him was downright logic had no effect whatever upon her. He did not get his own thoughts again stale from her lips, and did not wish to either; her wonderful power over him lay in the fact that she rested so securely on her own, and answered the most crushing arguments with a smile. Pelle was beginning to doubt as to the value of superiority of intellect; it seemed to have undisputed rule over the age, but did not accomplish chiefly good. As compared with Ellen's nature, it seemed to him poor. The warmth in a kiss convinced her better than a thousand sensible reasons, and yet she seldom made a mistake.

And she herself gave out warmth. They went to her, both he and the children, when there was anything wrong. She did not say much, but she warmed. She still always seemed to him like a pulse that beat, living and palpable, out from the invisible, with a strangely tranquil speech. When his head was hot and tired with adverse happenings, there was nothing more delightful than to rest it upon her bosom and listen, only half awake, to the dull, soothing murmur within like that of the earth's springs when, in his childhood, he laid his ear to the grass.

The spring was beautiful, and they were much out in it; when no one could see them they walked hand-in-hand along the dikes like two young lovers. Then Pelle talked and showed her things. Look! there it grew in that way, and here in quite a different way. Was it not strange? He lived over again all his childhood's excitement in spring. Ellen listened to him, smiling; she was not astonished at anything so natural as that things grew; she was merely *transformed!* The earth simply sent up its juices into her too.

The fresh air and the work in the garden tanned her bare arms, and gave strength and beauty to her figure, while her easy circumstances freed her from care. One day a new being showed in her eyes, and looked at Pelle with the inquisitiveness of a kid. “Shall we play?” it said. Was it he or the spring that set fire to her? No matter! The pleasure was his! The sunshine entered the innermost corners of his soul, the musty corners left by the darkness of his prison-cell, and cured him completely; her freedom from care infected him, and he was entirely happy. It was Ellen who had done it all; at last she had taken upon herself to be the messenger between joy and him!

She became gentler and more vigorous in disposition every day. The sun and the wind across the open country called forth something in her that had never been there before, an innocent pleasure in her own body and a physical appetite that made her teeth white and gleaming. She was radiant with delight when Pelle brought her little things to adorn herself with; she did not use them for the children now! “Look!” she said once, holding up a piece of dark velvet to her face which in the evening gave out again the warmth of the sun, as hay its scent. “You must give me a dress like this when we become rich.” And her eyes sparkled as she looked at him, full of promises of abundant returns. He thought he belonged to the soil, and yet it was through her that he first really came into contact with it! There was worship of nature in the appetite with which she crunched the first radishes of the year and delighted in their juicy freshness; and when in the evening he sprang from his bicycle and took her in his arms, she herself exhaled the fresh perfume of all that had passed through the spring day—the wind and the products of the soil. He could smell in her breath the perfume of wild honey, mixed with the pollen and nectar of wild flowers; and she would close her eyes as though she herself were intoxicated with it.

Their dawning affection became passionate first love out here. Ellen was always standing at the gate waiting for him. As soon as Pelle had had his supper, the children dragged him round the garden to show him what had taken place during the day. They held his hands and Ellen had to walk by herself. Pelle and she had an intense desire to be close together, but the little ones would not submit to be set aside. “He's our father!” they said; and Pelle and Ellen were like two young people that are kept cruelly apart by a remorseless fate, and they looked at one another with eyes that were heavy with expression.

When the little ones had gone to bed they stole away from it all, leaving Lasse Frederik in charge of the house. He had seen an artist sitting outside the hedge and painting the smoky city in the spring light, and had procured himself a paintbox. He sat out there every evening now, daubing away busily. He did not mean to be a sailor now!

They went up past the farm and on toward the evening sun, walked hand- in-hand in the dewy grass, gazing silently in front of them. The ruddy evening light colored their faces and made their eyes glow. There was a little grove of trees not far off, to which they often went so as to be quite away from the world. With their arms round one another they passed into the deep twilight, whispering together. Now and then she bent her head back for him to kiss her, when an invisible ray would strike her eye and be refracted into a rainbow-colored star, in the darkness.

A high dike of turfs ran along the edge of the wood, and low over it hung hazel and young beech trees. In under the branches there were little bowers where they hid themselves; the dead leaves had drifted together in under the dike and made a soft couch. The birds above their heads gave little sleepy chirps, turned on the branch and twittered softly as though they dreamed the day’s melodies over again. Sometimes the moon peeped in at them with a broad smile. The heavy night- exhalations of the leaves lulled them to sleep, and sometimes they were only wakened by the tremor that passes through everything when the sun rises. Pelle would be cold then, but Ellen’s body was always warm although she had removed some of her clothing to make a pillow for their heads.

She still continued to be motherly; her devotion only called forth new sides of her desire for self-sacrifice. How rich she was in her motherliness! She demanded nothing but the hard ground, and could not make herself soft enough: everything was for him. And she could make herself so incomprehensibly soft! Providence had thrown all His riches and warmth into her lap; it was no wonder that both life and happiness had made their nesting-place there.

Their love increased with the sunshine, and made everything bright and good; there was no room for any darkness. Pelle met all troubles with a smile. He went about in a state of semi-stupor, and even his most serious business affairs could not efface Ellen’s picture from his mind. Her breath warmed the air around him throughout the day, and made him hasten home. At table at home they had secret signs that referred to their secret world. They were living in the first love of youth with all its sweet secrecy, and smiled at one another in youthful, stealthy comprehension, as though the whole world were watching them and must learn nothing. If their feet touched under the table, their eyes met and Ellen would blush like a young girl. Her affection was so great that she could not bear it to be known, even to themselves. A red flame passed over her face, and her eyes were veiled as though she hid in them the unspeakable sweetness of her tryst from time to time. She rarely spoke and generally answered with a smile; she sang softly to herself, filled with the happiness of youth.

* * *

One afternoon when he came cycling home Ellen did not meet him as usual. He became anxious, and hurried in. The sofa was made into a bed, and Ellen was standing by it, bending over Johanna, who lay shivering with fever. Ellen raised her head and said, “Hush!” The children were sitting in a corner gazing fearfully at the sick girl, who lay with closed eyes, moaning slightly.

“She came running out here this afternoon,” whispered Ellen, looking strangely at him; “I can’t think why. She’s terribly ill! I’ve sent Lasse Frederik in to Morten, so that he may know she’s with us.”

“Have you sent for the doctor?” asked Pelle, bending down over Johanna.

“Yes. Lasse Frederik will tell Morten to bring his doctor with him. He must know her best. I should think they’ll soon be here.”

A shivering fit came over Johanna. She lay working her tongue against the dry roof of her mouth, now and then uttering a number of disconnected words, and tossing to and fro upon the bed. Suddenly she raised herself in terror, her wide-open eyes fixed upon Pelle, but with no recognition in them. “Go away! I won’t!” she screamed, pushing him away. His deep voice calmed her, however, and she allowed herself to be laid down once more, and then lay still with closed eyes.

“Some one has been after her,” said Ellen, weeping. “What can it be?”

“It’s the old story,” Pelle whispered with emotion. “Morten says that it constantly reappears in her.—Take the children out into the garden, Ellen. I’ll stay here with her.”

Ellen went out with the little ones, who could hardly be persuaded to come out of their corner; but it was not long before their chattering voices could be heard out on the grass.

Pelle sat with his hand on Johanna's forehead, staring straight before him. He had been rudely awakened to the horror of life once more. Convulsive tremors passed through her tortured brow. It was as if he held in his hand a fluttering soul that had been trodden in the mire beneath heavy heels—a poor crushed fledgeling that could neither fly nor die.

He was roused by the sound of a carriage driving quickly up to the garden gate, and went out to meet the men.

The doctor was very doubtful about Johanna's condition. "I'm afraid that the fits will increase rather than decrease," he said in a whisper. "It would be better if she were sent to the hospital as soon as she's able to be moved."

"Would it be better for her?" asked Ellen.

"No, not exactly for her, but—she'll be a difficult patient, you know!"

"Then she shall remain here," said Ellen; "she shall be well looked after."

Lasse Frederik had to take his bicycle and ride to the chemist's, and immediately after the doctor drove away.

They sat outside the garden door, so that they could hear any sound from the sick girl, and talked together in low tones. It was sad to see Morten; Johanna's flight from him had wounded him deeply.

"I wonder why she did it?" said Pelle.

"She's been strange ever since you came up and proposed that she should come out to you," said Morten sadly. "She got it into her head that she was a burden to me and that I would like to get rid of her. Two or three days ago she got up while I was out, and began working in the house—I suppose as a return for my keeping her. She's morbidly sensitive. When I distinctly forbade her she declared that she wouldn't owe me anything and meant to go away. I knew that she might very likely do it in spite of her being ill, so I stayed at home. At midday to-day I just went down to fetch milk, and when I came up she was gone. It was a good thing she came out here; I think she'd do anything when once the idea's taken her that she's a burden."

"She must be very fond of you," said Ellen, looking at him.

"I don't think so," answered Morten, with a sad smile. "At any rate, she's hidden it well. My impression is that she's hated me ever since the day we spoke of her coming out here.—May I stay here for the night?"

"If you can put up with what we have," answered Ellen. "It won't be a luxurious bed, but it'll be something to lie down on."

Morten did not want a bed, however. "I'll sit up and watch over Johanna," he said.

XIV

The house was thus transformed into a nursing home. It was a hard hit at their careless happiness, but they took it as it came. Neither of them demanded more of life than it was capable of.

Ellen was with the sick girl day and night until the worst was over; she neglected both Pelle and the children to give all her care to Johanna.

“You’ve got far too much to do,” said Pelle anxiously. “It’ll end in your being ill too. Do let us have help!” And as Ellen would not hear of it, he took the matter into his own hands, and got “Queen Theresa” to be out there during the day.

In the course of a few days Morten arranged his affairs, got rid of his flat, and moved out to them. “You won’t be able to run away from me, after all,” he said to Johanna, who was sitting up in bed listening to the carrying upstairs of his things. “When you’re well enough you shall be moved up into the big attic; and then we two shall live upstairs and be jolly again, won’t we?”

She made no answer, but flushed with pleasure.

Ellen now received from Morten the amount he usually spent in a month on food and house-rent. She was quite disconcerted. What was she to do with all that money? It was far too much! Well, they need no longer be anxious about their rent.

Johanna was soon so far recovered as to be able to get up for a little. The country air had a beneficial effect upon her nerves, and Ellen knew how to keep her in good spirits. Old Brun made her a present of a beautiful red and yellow reclining chair of basket work; and when the sun shone she was carried out onto the grass, where she lay and watched the children’s play, sometimes joining in the game from her chair, and ordering them hither and thither. Boy Comfort submitted to it good- naturedly, but Sister was a little more reserved. She did not like this stranger to call Pelle “father”; and when she was in a teasing mood she would stand a little way off and repeat again and again: “He’s not your father, for he’s mine!” until Ellen took her away.

Johanna mostly lay, however, gazing into space with an expression of the utmost weariness. For a moment her attention would be attracted by anything new, but then her eyes wandered away again. She was never well enough to walk about; even when she felt well, her legs would not support her. Brun came out to “Daybreak” every afternoon to see her. The old man was deeply affected by her sad fate, and had given up his usual holiday trip in order to keep himself acquainted with her condition. “We must do something for her,” he said to the doctor, who paid a daily visit at his request. “Is there nothing that can be done?”

The doctor shook his head. “She couldn’t be better off anywhere than she is here,” he said.

They were all fond of her, and did what they could to please her. Brun always brought something with him, expensive things, such as beautiful silk blankets that she could have over her when she lay out in the garden, and a splendid coral necklace. He got her everything that he could imagine she would like. Her eyes sparkled whenever she received anything new, and she put everything on. “Now I’m a princess in all her finery,” she whispered, smiling at him; but a moment after she had forgotten all about it. She was very fond of the old man, made him sit beside her, and called him “grandfather” with a mournful attempt at roguishness. She did not listen to what he told her, however, and when the little ones crept up and wanted him to come with them to play in the field, he could quite well go, for she did not notice it.

Alas! nothing could reconcile her child’s soul to her poor, maltreated body, neither love nor trinkets. It was as though it were weary of its covering and had soared as far out as possible, held captive by a thin thread that would easily wear through. She grew more transparent every day; it could be clearly seen now that she had the other children beside her. They ate and throve for her as well as themselves! When Ellen was not on the watch, Boy Comfort would come and eat up Johanna’s invalid food, though goodness knew he wasn’t starved! Johanna herself looked on calmly; it was all a matter of such indifference to her.

It was an unusually fine summer, dry and sunny, and they could nearly always be in the garden. They generally gathered there toward evening; Ellen and “Queen Theresa” had finished their house work, and sat by Johanna with their sewing, Brun kept them company with his cheerful talk, and Johanna lay and dozed with her face toward the garden gate. They laughed and joked with her to keep her in good spirits. Brun had promised her a trip to the South if she would make haste to use her legs, and told her about the sun down there and the delicious grapes and oranges that she would be allowed to pick herself. She answered everything with her sad smile, as though she knew all too well what awaited her. Her thick, dark hair overshadowed more and more her pale face; it was as if night were closing over her. She seemed to be dozing slowly out of existence, with her large eyes turned toward the garden gate.

Morten was often away on lecturing tours, sometimes for several days at a time. When at last he entered the gate, life flashed into her face. He was the only one who could recall her spirit to its surroundings; it was as though it only lingered on for him. She was no longer capricious with him. When she had the strength for it, she sat up and threw her arms round his neck; her tears flowed silently, and her longing found free vent. Ellen understood the child’s feelings, and signed to the others to leave the two together. Morten would then sit for hours beside her, telling her all that he had been doing; she never seemed to grow weary, but lay and listened to him with shining eyes, her transparent hand resting upon his arm. Every step he took interested her; sometimes a peculiar expression came into her eyes, and she fell suspiciously upon some detail or other. Her senses were morbidly keen; the very scent of strange people about him made her sullen and suspicious.

“The poor, poor child! She loves him!” said Ellen one day to Pelle, and suddenly burst into tears. “And there she lies dying!” Her own happiness made her so fully conscious of the child’s condition.

“But dearest Ellen!” exclaimed Pelle in protest. “Don’t you think I can see? That’s of course why she’s always been so strange to him. How sad it is!”

The child’s sad fate cast a shadow over the others, but the sun rose high in the heavens and became still stronger.

“Pelle,” said Ellen, stroking his hair, “the light nights will soon be over!”

Morten continued obstinately to believe that little Johanna would recover, but every one else could see distinctly what the end was to be. Her life oozed away with the departing summer. She became gentler and more manageable every day. The hatred in her was extinguished; she accepted all their kindness with a tired smile. Through her spoiled being there radiated a strange charm, bearing the stamp of death, which seemed to unfold itself the more as she drew nearer to the grave.

Later in the autumn her nature changed. Suddenly, when Pelle or Morten approached, her eyes would fill with horror and she would open her mouth to cry out; but when she recognized them, she nestled down in their arms, crying pitifully. She could no longer go into the garden, but always kept her bed. She could not bear the noise of the children; it tortured her and carried her thoughts back to the narrow streets: they had to keep out of doors all day. Delirious attacks became more frequent, and her thin, languid voice became once more rough and hoarse. She lay fighting with boys and roughs and high hats, defended herself with nicknames and abusive epithets, and snarled at every one, until she at last gave in and asked for brandy, and lay crying softly to herself. Old Brun never dared show himself at her bedside; she took him for an old chamberlain that the street-boys had set onto her, and received him with coarse demands.

This insight into the child’s terrible existence among the timber-stacks affected them all. It seemed as if the malignity of life would not relax its hold on this innocent victim, but would persecute her as long as life remained, and made all their love useless. Morten stayed with her during the days in which she fought her battle with death; he sat watching her from a corner, only venturing nearer when she dozed. Ellen was the only one who had the strength to meet it. She was with Johanna night and day, and tried to make death easier for her by her unwearying care; and when the fits came over the child, she held her in her arms and sought to calm her with a mother’s love.

She had never been in a death-chamber before, but did not quail; and the child died upon her breast.

* * *

Johanna’s death had completely paralyzed Morten. As long as he possibly could he had clung to the belief that her life might be saved; if not, it would be so unreasonably unjust; and when her hopeless condition became apparent to him, he collapsed. He did nothing, but wandered about dully, spoke to no one and ate very little. It was as though he had received a blow on the head from a heavy hand.

After the funeral he and Pelle walked home together while the others drove. Pelle talked of indifferent matters in order to draw Morten's thoughts away from the child, but Morten did not listen to him.

"My dear fellow, you can't go on like this," said Pelle suddenly, putting his arm through Morten's. "You've accompanied the poor child along the road as far as you could, and the living have some claim on you too."

Morten raised his head. "What does it matter whether I write a few pages more or less?" he said wearily.

"Your pen was given you to defend the defenceless with; you mustn't give up," said Pelle.

Morten laughed bitterly. "And haven't I pleaded the cause of the children as well as I could, and been innocent enough to believe that there, at any rate, it was only necessary to open people's eyes in order to touch their hearts? And what has been gained? The addition, at the most, of one more volume to the so-called good literature. Men are practical beings; you can with the greatest ease get them to shed theater tears; they're quite fond of sitting in the stalls and weeping with the unfortunate man; but woe to him if they meet him again in the street! The warmest words that have ever been spoken to me about my descriptions of children were from an old gentleman whom I afterward found to be trying to get hold of little children."

"But what are you going to do?" said Pelle, looking at him with concern.

"Yes, what am I going to do—tell me that! You're right in saying I'm indifferent, but can one go on taking part in a battle that doesn't even spare the children? Do you remember my little sister Karen, who had to drown herself? How many thousand children are there not standing behind her and Johanna! They call this the children's century, and the children's blood is crying out from the earth! They're happy when they can steal away. Fancy if Johanna had lived on with her burden! The shadows of childhood stretch over the whole of life."

"Yes, and so does the sunshine of childhood!" exclaimed Pelle. "That's why we mustn't fail the poor little ones. We shall need a race with warm hearts."

"That's just what I've thought," said Morten sadly. "Do you know, Pelle, I *loved* that child who came to me from the very lowest depth. She was everything to me; misery has never come so cruelly near to me before. It was a beautiful dream of mine—a foolish dream—that she would live. I was going to coax life and happiness into her again, and then I would have written a book about all that triumphs. I don't know whether you understand me—about misery that becomes health and happiness beneath the sunshine of kindness. She was that; life could hardly be brought lower! But did you notice how much beauty and delicacy there was after all buried beneath the sewer-mud in her? I had looked forward to bringing it out, freed from all want and ugliness, and showing the world how beautiful we are down here when the mud is scraped off us. Perhaps it might have induced them to act justly. That's what I dreamed, but it's a bitter lot to have the unfortunates appointed to be one's beloved. My only love is irretrievably dead, and now I cannot write about anything that triumphs. What have I to do with that?"

"I think it's Victor Hugo who says that the heart is the only bird that carries its cage," said Pelle, "but your heart refuses to take it when there is most use for it."

"Oh, no!" said Morten with a little more energy. "I shan't desert you; but this has been a hard blow for me. If only I had a little more of your clear faith! Well, I must be glad that I have you yourself," he added, holding out his hand to Pelle with a bright smile.

The librarian came across the fields to meet them. "It's taken you two Dioseuri a long time," he said, looking at them attentively. "Ellen's waiting with the dinner."

The three men walked together up the bare stubblefield toward the house. "The best of the summer's over now," said Brun, looking about with a sigh. "The wheel has turned on one more cog!"

"Death isn't the worst thing that can happen to one," answered Morten, who was still in a morbid mood.

"That's the sort of thing one says while one's young and prosperous—and doesn't mean seriously. To-morrow life will have taken you and your sorrow into its service again. But I have never been young until now that I've learned to know you two, so I count every fleeting hour like a miser

—and envy you who can walk so quickly,” he added with a smile.

They walked up more slowly, and as they followed the hedge up toward the house they heard a faint whimpering in the garden. In a hole in an empty bed, which the two children had dug with their spades, sat Boy Comfort, and Sister was busy covering him with earth; it was already up to his neck. He was making no resistance, but only whimpered a little when the mould began to get near his mouth.

Pelle gave the alarm and leaped the hedge, and Ellen at the same moment came running out. “You might have suffocated little brother!” she said with consternation, taking the boy in her arms.

“I was only planting him,” said Anna, offended at having her work destroyed. “He wanted to be, and of course he’d come up again in the spring!” The two children wanted a little brother, and had agreed that Boy Comfort should sacrifice himself.

“You mustn’t do such things,” said Ellen quietly. “You’ll get a little brother in the spring anyhow.” And she looked at Pelle with a loving glance.

XV

Work went on steadily in the cooperative works. It made no great stir; in the Movement they had almost forgotten that it existed at all. It was a long and difficult road that Pelle had set out on, but he did not for a moment doubt that it led to the end he had in view, and he set about it seriously. Never had his respiration been so slow.

At present he was gaining experience. He and Peter Dreyer had trained a staff of good workmen, who knew what was at stake, and did not allow themselves to be upset even if a foreign element entered. The business increased steadily and required new men; but Pelle had no difficulty with the new forces; the undertaking was so strong that it swallowed them and remodelled them.

The manufacturers at any rate remembered his existence, and tried to injure him at every opportunity. This pleased him, for it established the fact that he was a danger to them. Through their connections they closed credit, and when this did not lead to anything, because he had Brun's fortune to back him up, they boycotted him with regard to materials by forcing the leather-merchants not to sell to him. He then had to import his materials from abroad. It gave him a little extra trouble, and now it was necessary to have everything in order, so that they should not come to a standstill for want of anything.

One day an article was lacking in a new consignment, and the whole thing was about to come to a standstill. He managed to obtain it by stratagem, but he was angry. "I should like to hit those leather-merchants back," he said to Brun. "If we happen to be in want of anything, we're obliged to get it by cunning. Don't you think we might take the shop next door, and set up a leather business? It would be a blow to the others, and then we should always have what we want to use. We shouldn't get rich on it, so I think the small masters in out-of-the-way corners would be glad to have us."

Brun had no objection to making a little more war to the knife. There was too little happening for his taste!

The new business opened in October. Pelle would have had Peter Dreyer to be at the head of it, but he refused. "I'm sure I'm not suited for buying and selling," he said gloomily, so Pelle took one of the young workmen from the workshop into the business, and kept an eye upon it himself.

It at once put a little more life into things; there was always plenty of material. They now produced much more than they were able to sell in the shop, and Pelle's leather shop made the small masters independent of private capital. Many of them sold a little factory foot-wear in addition to doing repairs, and these now took their goods from him. Out in the provinces his boots and shoes had already gained a footing in many places; it had come about naturally, in the ordinary sequence of things. The manufacturers followed them up there too, wherever they could; but the consequence was that the workmen patronized them and forced them in again to the shops of which they themselves were the customers. A battle began to rage over Pelle's boots and shoes.

He knew, however, that it was only the beginning. It would soon come to a great conflict, and were his foundations sufficiently strong for that? The manufacturers were establishing a shop opposite his, where the goods were to be sold cheap in order to ruin his sales, and one day they put the prices very much down on everything, so as to extinguish him altogether.

"Let them!" said Brun. "People will be able to get shoes cheap!" Pelle was troubled, however, at this fresh attack. Even if they held out, it might well exhaust their economic strength.

The misfortune was that they were too isolated; they were as yet like men washed up onto an open shore; they had nothing to fall back upon. The employers had long since discovered that they were just as international as the workmen, and had adopted Pelle's old organization idea. It was not always easy, either, to get materials from abroad; he noticed the connection. Until he had got the tanners to start a cooperative business, he ran the risk of having his feet knocked away from under him at any moment. And in the first place he must have the great army of workmen on his side; that was whither everything pointed.

One day he found himself once more after many years on the lecturer's platform, giving his first lecture on cooperation. It was very strange to stand once more before his own people and feel their faces turned toward him. At present they looked upon him as one who had come from abroad with new ideas, or perhaps only a new invention; but he meant to win them! Their very slowness promised well when once it was overcome. He knew them again; they were difficult to get started, but once started could hardly be stopped again. If his idea got proper hold of these men with their huge organizations and firm discipline, it would be insuperable. He entered with heart and soul into the agitation, and gave a lecture every week in a political or trade association.

"Pelle, how busy you are!" said Ellen, when he came home. Her condition filled him with happiness; it was like a seal upon their new union. She had withdrawn a little more into herself, and over her face and figure there was thrown a touch of dreamy gentleness. She met him at the gate now a little helpless and remote—a young mother, to be touched with careful hands. He saw her thriving from day to day, and had a happy feeling that things were growing for him on all sides.

They did not see much of Morten. He was passing through a crisis, and preferred to be by himself. He was always complaining that he could not get on with his work. Everything he began, no matter how small, stuck fast.

"That's because you don't believe in it any longer," said Pelle. "He who doubts in his work cuts through the branch upon which he is himself sitting."

Morten listened to him with an expression of weariness. "It's much more than that," he said, "for it's the men themselves I doubt, Pelle. I feel cold and haven't been able to find out why; but now I know. It's because men have no heart. Everything growing is dependent upon warmth, but the whole of our culture is built upon coldness, and that's why it's so cold here."

"The poor people have a heart though," said Pelle. "It's that and not common sense that keeps them up. If they hadn't they'd have gone to ruin long ago—simply become animals. Why haven't they, with all their misery? Why does the very sewer give birth to bright beings?"

"Yes, the poor people warm one another, but they're blue with cold all the same! And shouldn't one rather wish that they had no heart to be burdened with in a community that's frozen to the very bottom? I envy those who can look at misery from a historical point of view and comfort themselves with the future. I think myself that the good will some day conquer, but it's nevertheless fearfully unreasonable that millions shall first go joyless to the grave in the battle to overcome a folly. I'm an irreconcilable, that's what it is! My mind has arranged itself for other conditions, and therefore I suffer under those that exist. Even so ordinary a thing as to receive money causes me suffering. It's mine, but I can't help following it back in my thoughts. What want has been caused by its passing into my hands? How much distress and weeping may be associated with it? And when I pay it out again I'm always troubled to think that those who've helped me get too little—my washerwoman and the others. They can scarcely live, and the fault is mine among others! Then my thoughts set about finding out the others' wants and I get no peace; every time I put a bit of bread into my mouth, or see the stores in the shops, I can't help thinking of those who are starving. I suffer terribly through not being able to alter conditions of which the folly is so apparent. It's of no use for me to put it down to morbidness, for it's not that; it's a forestalling in myself. We must all go that way some day, if the oppressed do not rise before then and turn the point upward. You see I'm condemned to live in all the others' miseries, and my own life has not been exactly rich in sunshine. Think of my childhood, how joyless it was! I haven't your fund to draw from, Pelle, remember that!"

No, there had not been much sunshine on Morten's path, and now he cowered and shivered with cold.

One evening, however, he rushed into the sitting-room, waving a sheet of paper. "I've received a legacy," he cried. "Tomorrow morning I shall start for the South."

"But you'll have to arrange your affairs first," said Pelle.

"Arrange?" Morten laughed. "Oh, no! You're always ready to start on a journey. All my life I've been ready for a tour round the world at an hour's notice!" He walked to and fro, rubbing his hands. "Ah, now I shall drink the sunshine—let myself be baked through and through! I think it'll be good for my chest to hop over a winter."

"How far are you going?" asked Ellen, with shining eyes.

"To Southern Italy and Spain. I want to go to a place where the cold doesn't pull off the coats of thousands while it helps you on with your furs. And then I want to see people who haven't had a share in the blessings of mechanical culture, but upon whom the sun has shone to make up for it—sunshine-beings like little Johanna and her mother and grandmother, but who've been allowed to live. Oh, how nice it'll be to see for once poor people who aren't cold!"

"Just let him get off as quickly as possible," said Ellen, when Morten had gone up to pack; "for if he once gets the poor into his mind, it'll all come to nothing. I expect I shall put a few of your socks and a little underclothing into his trunk; he's got no change. If only he'll see that his things go to the wash, and that they don't ruin them with chlorine!"

"Don't you think you'd better look after him a little while he's packing?" asked Pelle. "Or else I'm afraid he'll not take what he'll really want. Morten would sometimes forget his own head."

Ellen went upstairs with the things she had looked out. It was fortunate that she did so, for Morten had packed his trunk quite full of books, and laid the necessary things aside. When she took everything out and began all over again, he fidgeted about and was quite unhappy; it had been arranged so nicely, the fiction all together in one place, the proletariat writings in another; he could have put his hand in and taken out anything he wanted. But Ellen had no mercy. Everything had to be emptied onto the floor, and he had to bring every stitch of clothing he possessed and lay them on chairs, whence she selected the necessary garments. At each one that was placed in the trunk, Morten protested meekly: it really could not be worth while to take socks with him, nor yet several changes of linen; you simply bought them as you required them. Indeed? Could it not? But it was worth while lugging about a big trunk full of useless books like any colporteur, was it?

Ellen was on her knees before the trunk, and was getting on with her task. Pelle came up and stood leaning against the door-jamb, looking at them. "That's right! Just give him a coating of paint that will last till he gets home again!" he said, laughing. "He may need it badly."

Morten sat upon a chair looking crestfallen. "Thank goodness, I'm not married!" he said. "I really begin to be sorry for you, Pelle." It was evident that he was enjoying being looked after.

"Yes, now you can see what a domestic affliction I have to bear," Pelle answered gravely.

Ellen let them talk. The trunk was now cram full, and she had the satisfaction of knowing that he would not be going about like a tramp. There were only his toilet articles left now; even those he had forgotten. She drew a huge volume out of the pocket for these articles inside the lid of the trunk to make room for his washing things; but at that Morten sprang forward. "I *must* have that with me, whatever else is left out," he said with determination. It was Victor Hugo's "Les Misérables," Morten's Bible.

Ellen opened it at the title-page to see if it really was so necessary to travel about with such a monster; it was as big as a loaf.

"There's no room for it," she declared, and quietly laid it on one side, "that's to say if you want things to wash yourself with; and you're sure to meet plenty of unhappy people wherever you go, for there's always enough of them everywhere."

"Then perhaps Madam will not permit me to take my writing things with me?" questioned Morten, in a tone of supplication.

"Oh, yes!" answered Ellen, laughing, "and you may use them too, to do something beautiful—that's to say if it's us poor people you're writing for. There's sorrow and misery enough!"

"When the sun's shone properly upon me, I'll come home and write you a book about it," said Morten seriously.

The following day was Sunday. Morten was up early and went out to the churchyard. He was gone a long time, and they waited breakfast for him. "He's coming now!" cried Lasse Frederik, who had been up to the hill farm for milk. "I saw him down in the field."

"Then we can put the eggs on," said Ellen to Sister, who helped her a little in the kitchen.

Morten was in a solemn mood. "The roses on Johanna's grave have been picked again," he said. "I can't imagine how any one can have the heart to rob the dead; they are really the poorest of us all."

"I'm glad to hear you say that!" exclaimed Pelle. "A month ago you thought the dead were the only ones who were well off."

"You're a rock!" said Morten, smiling and putting his hands on the other's shoulders. "If everything else were to change, we should always know where you were to be found."

"Come to table!" cried Ellen, "but at once, or the surprise will be cold." She stood waiting with a covered dish in her hand.

"Why, I believe you've got new-laid eggs there!" exclaimed Pelle, in astonishment.

"Yes, the hens have begun to lay again the last few days. It must be in Morten's honor."

"No, it's in honor of the fine weather, and because they're allowed to run about anywhere now," said Lasse Frederik.

Morten laughed. "Lasse Frederik's an incorrigible realist," he said. "Life needs no adornment for him."

Ellen looked well after Morten. "Now you must make a good breakfast," she said. "You can't be sure you'll get proper food out there in foreign countries." She was thinking with horror of the messes her lodgers in the "Palace" had put together.

The carriage was at the door, the trunk was put up beside the driver, and Morten and Pelle got into the carriage, not before it was time either. They started at a good pace, Lasse Frederik and Sister each standing on a step all the way down to the main road. Up at the gable window Ellen stood and waved, holding Boy Comfort by the hand.

"It must be strange to go away from everything," said Pelle.

"Yes, it might be strange for you," answered Morten, taking a last look at Pelle's home. "But I'm not going away from anything; on the contrary, I'm going to meet things."

"It'll be strange at any rate not having you walking about overhead any more, especially for Ellen and the children. But I suppose we shall hear from you?"

"Oh, yes! and you'll let me hear how your business gets on, won't you?"

The train started. Pelle felt his heart contract as he stood and gazed after it, feeling as though it were taking part of him with it. It had always been a dream of his to go out and see a little of the world; ever since "Garibaldi" had appeared in the little workshop at home in the provincial town he had looked forward to it. Now Morten was going, but he himself would never get away; he must be content with the "journey abroad" he had had. For a moment Pelle stood looking along the lines where the train had disappeared, with his thoughts far away in melancholy dreams; then he woke up and discovered that without intending it he had been feeling his home a clog upon his feet. And there were Ellen and the children at home watching for his coming, while he stood here and dreamed himself away from them! They would do nothing until he came, for Sunday was his day, the only day they really had him. He hurried out and jumped onto a tram.

As he leaped over the ditch into the field at the tramway terminus, he caught sight of Brun a little farther along the path. The old librarian was toiling up the hill, his asthma making him pause every now and then. "He's on his way to us!" said Pelle to himself, touched at the thought; it had not struck him before how toilsome this walk over ploughed fields and along bad roads must be for the old man; and yet he did it several times in the week to come out and see them.

"Well, here I am again!" said Brun. "I only hope you're not getting tired of me."

"There's no danger of that!" answered Pelle, taking his arm to help him up the hill. "The children are quite silly about you!"

"Yes, the children—I'm safe enough with them, and with you too, Pelle; but your wife makes me a little uncertain."

"Ellen's rather reserved, but it's only her manner; she's very fond of you," said Pelle warmly. "Any one who takes the children on his knee wins Ellen's heart."

"Do you really think so? I've always despised woman because she lacks personality—until I got to know your wife. She's an exceptional wife you've got, Pelle; hers is a strong nature, so strong that she makes me uncertain. Couldn't you get her to leave off calling me Mr. Brun?"

"I'll tell her," said Pelle, laughing; "but I'm not sure it'll be of any use."

"This *Mr. Brun* is beginning to be an intolerable person, let me tell you; and in your house I should like to get away from him. Just imagine what it means to be burdened all your life with a gentleman like that, who doesn't stand in close relationship to anybody at all. Others are called 'Father,' 'Grandfather'—something or other human; but all conditions of life dispose of me with a 'Mr. Brun'! 'Thank you, Mr. Brun!' 'Many thanks, Mr. Brun!'" The old man had worked himself up, and made the name a caricature.

"These are bad roads out here," he said suddenly, stopping to take breath. "It's incomprehensible that these fields should be allowed to lie here just outside the town—that speculation hasn’t got hold of them.”

“I suppose it’s because of the boggy ground down there,” said Pelle. “They’ve begun to fill it in, however, at the north end, I see.”

Brun peered in that direction with some interest, but gave it up, shaking his head.

“No, I can’t see so far without glasses; that’s another of the blessings bestowed by books. Yes, it is! Old people in the country only make use of spectacles when they want to look at a book, but I have to resort to them when I want to find my way about the world: that makes a great difference. It’s the fault of the streets and those stupid books that I’m shortsighted; you don’t get any outlook if you don’t live in the country. The town shuts up all your senses, and the books take you away from life; so I’m thinking of moving out too.”

“Is that wise now just before the winter? It wouldn’t do for you to go in and out in all kinds of weather.”

“Then I’ll give up the library,” answered Brun. “I shan’t miss it much; I’ve spent enough of my life there. Fancy, Pelle! it occurred to me last night that I’d helped to catalogue most of the literature of the world, but haven’t even seen a baby dressed! What right have people like me to have an opinion?”

“I can’t understand that,” said Pelle. “Books have given me so much help.”

“Yes, because you had the real thing. If I were young, I would go out and set to work with my hands. I’ve missed more through never having worked with my body till I was hot and tired, than you have through not knowing the great classic writers. I’m discovering my own poverty, Pelle; and I would willingly exchange everything for a place as grandfather by a cozy fireside.”

The children came running across the field. “Have you got anything for us to-day?” they cried from a long distance.

“Yes, but not until we get into the warmth. I daren’t unbutton my coat out here because of my cough.”

“Well, but you walk so slowly,” said Boy Comfort. “Is it because you’re so old?”

“Yes, that’s it,” answered the old man, laughing. “You must exercise a little patience.”

Patience, however, was a thing of which the children possessed little, and they seized hold of his coat and pulled him along. He was quite out of breath when they reached the house.

Ellen looked severely at the children, but said nothing. She helped Brun off with his coat and neckerchief, and after seeing him comfortably seated in the sitting-room, went out into the kitchen. Pelle guessed there was something she wanted to say to him, and followed her.

“Pelle,” she said gravely, “the children are much too free with Mr. Brun. I can’t think how you can let them do it.”

“Well, but he likes it, Ellen, or of course I should stop them. It’s just what he likes. And do you know what I think he would like still better? If you would ask him to live with us.”

“That I’ll never do!” declared Ellen decidedly. “It would look so extraordinary of me.”

“But if he wants a home, and likes us? He’s got no friends but us.”

No—no, Ellen could not understand that all the same, with the little they had to offer. And Brun, who could afford to pay for all the comforts that could be had for money! “If he came, I should have to have new table-linen at any rate, and good carpets on the floors, and lots of other things.”

“You can have them too,” said Pelle. “Of course we’ll have everything as nice as we can, though Brun’s quite as easily pleased as we are.”

That might be so, but Ellen was the mistress of the house, and there were things she could not let go. “If Mr. Brun would like to live with us, he shall be made comfortable,” she said; “but it’s funny he doesn’t propose it himself, for he can do it much better than we can.”

“No, it must come from us—from *you,* Ellen. He’s a little afraid of you.”

“Of me?” exclaimed Ellen, in dismay. “And I who would—why, there’s no one I’d sooner be kind to! Then I’ll say it, Pelle, but not just now.” She put up her hands to her face, which was glowing with pleasure and confusion at the thought that her little home was worth so much.

Pelle went back to the sitting-room. Brun was sitting on the sofa with Boy Comfort on his knee. “He’s a regular little urchin!” he said. “But he’s not at all like his mother. He’s got your features all through.”

“Ellen isn’t his mother,” said Pelle, in a low voice.

“Oh, isn’t she! It’s funny that he should have those three wrinkles in his forehead like you; they’re like the wave-lines in the countenance of Denmark. You both look as if you were always angry.”

“So we were at that time,” said Pelle.

“Talking of anger”—Brun went on—“I applied to the police authorities yesterday, and got them to promise to give up their persecution of Peter Dreyer, on condition that he ceases his agitation among the soldiers.”

“We shall never get him to agree to that; it would be the same thing as requiring him to swear away his rights as a man. He has taught himself, by a great effort, to use parliamentary expressions, and nobody’ll ever get him to do more. In the matter of the Cause itself he’ll never yield, and there I agree with him. If you mayn’t even fight the existing conditions with spiritual weapons, there’ll be an end of everything.”

“Yes, that’s true,” said Brun, “only I’m sorry for him. The police keep him in a perpetual state of inflammation. He can’t have any pleasure in life.”

XVI

Pelle was always hoping that Peter Dreyer would acquire a calmer view of life. It was his intention to start a cooperative business in the course of the spring at Aarhus too, and Peter was appointed to start it. But his spirit seemed incurable; every time he calmed down a little, conditions roused him to antagonism again. This time it was the increase of unemployment that touched him.

The senseless persecution, moreover, kept him in a state of perpetual irritation. Even when he was left alone, as now, he had the feeling that they were wondering how they could get him to blunder—apparently closed their eyes in order to come down upon him with all the more force. He never knew whether he was bought or sold.

The business was now so large that they had to move the actual factory into the back building, and take the whole of the basement for the repairing workshop. Peter Dreyer managed this workshop, and there was no fault to find with his management; he was energetic and vigilant. He was not capable, however, of managing work on a large scale, for his mind was in constant oscillation. In spite of his abilities he was burning to no purpose.

“He might drop his agitation and take up something more useful,” said Brun, one evening when he and Pelle sat discussing the matter. “Nothing’s accomplished by violence anyhow! And he’s only running his head against a brick wall himself!”

“You didn’t think so some time ago,” said Pelle. It was Brun’s pamphlets on the rights of the individual that had first roused Peter Dreyer’s attention.

“No, I know that. I once thought that the whole thing must be smashed to pieces in order that a new world might arise out of chaos. I didn’t know you, and I didn’t think my own class too good to be tossed aside; they were only hindering the development. But you’ve converted me. I was a little too quick to condemn your slowness; you have more connectedness in you than I. Our little business in there has proved to me that the common people are wise to admit their heritage from and debt to the upper class. I’m sorry to see Peter running off the track; he’s one of your more talented men. Couldn’t we get him out here? He could have one of my rooms. I think he needs a few more comforts.”

“You’d better propose it to him yourself,” said Pelle.

The next day Brun went into town with Pelle and proposed it, but Peter Dreyer declined with thanks. “I’ve no right to your comforts as long as there are twenty thousand men that have neither food nor firing,” he said, dismissing the subject. “But you’re an anarchist, of course,” he added scornfully, “and a millionaire, from what I hear; so the unemployed have nothing to fear!” He had been disappointed on becoming personally acquainted with the old philosopher, and never disguised his ill-will.

“I think you know that I *have* already placed my fortune at the disposal of the poor,” said Brun, in an offended tone, “and my manner of doing so will, I hope, some day justify itself. If I were to divide what I possess to-day among the unemployed, it would have evaporated like dew by to-morrow, so tremendous, unfortunately, is the want now.”

Peter Dreyer shrugged his shoulders. The more reason was there, he thought, to help.

“Would you have us sacrifice our great plan of making all want unnecessary, for one meal of food to the needy?” asked Pelle.

Yes, Peter saw only the want of to-day; it was such a terrible reality to him that the future must take care of itself.

A change had taken place in him, and he seemed quite to have given up the development.

“He sees too much,” said Pelle to Brun, “and now his heart has dominated his reason. We’d better leave him alone; we shan’t in any case get him to admit anything, and we only irritate him. It’s impossible to live with all that he always has before his eyes, and yet keep your head clear; you must either shut your eyes and harden yourself, or let yourself be broken to pieces.”

Peter Dreyer’s heart was the obstruction. He often had to stop in the middle of his work and gasp for breath. “I’m suffocated!” he would say.

There were many like him. The ever-increasing unemployment began to spread panic in men’s minds. It was no longer only the young, hot-headed men who lost patience. Out of the great compact mass of organization, in which it had hitherto been impossible to distinguish the individual beings, simple-minded men suddenly emerged and made themselves ridiculous by bearing the truth of the age upon their lips. Poor people, who understood nothing of the laws of life, nevertheless awakened, disappointed, out of the drowsiness into which the rhythm had lulled them, and stirred impatiently. Nothing happened except that one picked trade after another left them to become middle-class.

The Movement had hitherto been the fixed point of departure; from it came everything that was of any importance, and the light fell from it over the day. But now suddenly a germ was developed in the simplest of them, and they put a note of interrogation after the party-cry. To everything the answer was: When the Movement is victorious, things will be otherwise. But how could they be otherwise when no change had taken place even now when they had the power? A little improvement, perhaps, but no change. It had become the regular refrain, whenever a woman gave birth to a child in secret, or a man stole, or beat his wife:—It is a consequence of the system! Up and vote, comrades! But now it was beginning to sound idiotic in their ears. They were voting, confound it, with all their might, but all the same everything was becoming dearer! Goodness knows they were law-abiding enough. They were positively perspiring with parliamentarianism, and would soon be doing nothing but getting mandates. And what then? Did any one doubt that the poor man was in the majority—an overwhelming majority? What was all this nonsense then that the majority were to gain? No, those who had the power would take good care to keep it; so they might win whatever stupid mandates they liked!

Men had too much respect for the existing conditions, and so they were always being fooled by them. It was all very well with all this lawfulness, but you didn’t only go gradually from the one to the other! How else was it that nothing of the new happened? The fact was that every single step toward the new was instantly swallowed up by the existing condition of things, and turned to fat on its ribs. Capital grew fat, confound it, no matter what you did with it; it was like a cat, which always falls upon its feet. Each time the workmen obtained by force a small rise in their wages, the employers multiplied it by two and put it onto the goods; that was why they were beginning to be so accommodating with regard to certain wage-demands. Those who were rather well off, capital enticed over to its side, leaving the others behind as a shabby proletariat. It might be that the Movement had done a good piece of work, but you wanted confounded good eyes to see it.

Thus voices were raised. At first it was only whiners about whom nobody needed to trouble—frequenters of public-houses, who sat and grumbled in their cups; but gradually it became talk that passed from mouth to mouth; the specter of unemployment haunted every home and made men think over matters once more on their own account; no one could know when his turn would come to sweep the pavement.

Pelle had no difficulty in catching the tone of all this; it was his own settlement with the advance on coming out of prison that was now about to become every one’s. But now he was another man! He was no longer sure that the Movement had been so useless. It had not done anything that marked a boundary, but it had kept the apparatus going and strengthened it. It had carried the masses over a dead period, even if only by letting them go in a circle. And now the idea was ready to take them again. Perhaps it was a good thing that there had not been too great progress, or they would probably never have wakened again. They might very well starve a little longer, until they could establish themselves in their own world; fat slaves soon lost sight of liberty.

Behind the discontented fussing Pelle could hear the new. It expressed itself in remarkable ways. A party of workmen—more than two hundred — who were employed on a large excavation work, were thrown out of work by the bankruptcy of the contractor. A new contractor took over the work, but the men made it a condition for beginning work again that he should pay them the wages that were due to them, and also for the time they were unemployed. “We have no share in the cake,” they said, “so you must take the risk too!” They made the one employer responsible for the other! And capriciously refused good work at a time when thousands were unemployed! Public opinion almost lost its head, and even their own press held aloof from them; but they obstinately kept to their determination, and joined the crowd of unemployed until their unreasonable demand was submitted to.

Pelle heard a new tone here. For the first time the lower class made capital responsible for its sins, without any petty distinction between Tom, Dick, and Harry. There was beginning to be perspective in the feeling of solidarity.

The great weariness occasioned by wandering in a spiritual desert came once more to the surface. He had experienced the same thing once before, when the Movement was raised; but oddly enough the breaking out came that time from the bottom of everything. It began with blind attacks on parliamentarianism, the suffrage, and the paroles; there was in it an unconscious rebellion against restraint and treatment in the mass. By an incomprehensible process of renewal, the mass began to resolve itself into individuals, who, in the midst of the bad times, set about an inquiry after the ego and the laws for its satisfaction. They came from the very bottom, and demanded that their shabby, ragged person should be respected.

Where did they come from? It was a complete mystery! Did it not sound foolish that the poor man, after a century's life in rags and discomfort, which ended in his entire effacement in collectivism, should now make his appearance with the strongest claim of all, and demand his soul back?

Pelle recognized the impatience of the young men in this commotion. It was not for nothing that Peter Dreyer was the moving spirit at the meetings of the unemployed. Peter wanted him to come and speak, and he went with him two or three times, as he wanted to find out the relation of these people to his idea; but he remained in the background and could not be persuaded to mount the platform. He had nothing to do with these confused crowds, who turned all his ideas upside down. In any case he could not give them food to-day, and he had grown out of the use of strong language.

"Go up and say something nice to them! Don't you see how starved they are?" said Peter Dreyer, one evening. "They still have confidence in you from old days. But don't preach coöperation; you don't feed hungry men with music of the future."

"Do you give them food then?" asked Pelle.

"No, I can't do that, but I give them a vent for their grievances, and get them to rise and protest. It's something at any rate, that they no longer keep silence and submit."

"And if to-morrow they get something to eat, the whole turmoil's forgotten; but they're no further on than they were. Isn't it a matter of indifference whether they suffer want today, as compared with the question whether they will do so eternally?"

"If you can put the responsibility upon those poor creatures, you must be a hard-hearted brute!" said Peter angrily.

Well, it was necessary now to harden one's heart, for nothing would be accomplished with sympathy only! The man with eyes that watered would not do for a driver through the darkness.

It was a dull time, and men were glad when they could keep their situations. There was no question of new undertakings before the spring. But Pelle worked hard to gain adherents to his idea. He had started a discussion in the labor party press, and gave lectures. He chose the quiet trade unions, disdained all agitation eloquence, and put forward his idea with the clearness of an expert, building it up from his own experience until, without any fuss, by the mere power of the facts, it embraced the world. It was the slow ones he wanted to get hold of, those who had been the firm nucleus of the Movement through all these years, and steadfastly continued to walk in the old foot-prints, although they led nowhere. It was the picked troops from the great conflict that must first of all be called upon! He knew that if he got them to go into fire for his idea with their unyielding discipline, much would be gained.

It was high time for a new idea to come and take them on; they had grown weary of this perpetual goose-step; the Movement was running away from them. But now he had come with an idea of which they would never grow weary, and which would carry them right through. No one would be able to say that he could not understand it, for it was the simple idea of the home carried out so as to include everything. Ellen had taught it to him, and if they did not know it themselves, they must go home to their wives and learn it. *They* did not brood over the question as to which of the family paid least or ate most, but gave to each one according to his needs, and took the will for the deed. The world would be like a good, loving home, where no one oppressed the other—nothing more complicated than that.

Pelle was at work early and late. Scarcely a day passed on which he did not give a lecture or write about his coöperation idea. He was frequently summoned into the provinces to speak. People wanted to see and hear the remarkable manufacturer who earned no more than his work- people.

In these journeys he came to know the country, and saw that much of his idea had been anticipated out there. The peasant, who stiffened with horror at the word “socialist,” put the ideas of the Movement into practice on a large scale. He had arranged matters on the coöperative system, and had knitted the country into supply associations.

“We must join on there when we get our business into better order,” said Pelle to Brun.

“Yes, if the farmers will work with us,” said Brun doubtfully. “They’re conservative, you know.”

This was now almost revolutionary. As far as Pelle could see, there would soon be no place as big as his thumb-nail for capital to feed upon out there. The farmers went about things so quickly! Pelle came of peasant stock himself, and did not doubt that he would be able to get in touch with the country when the time came.

The development was preparing on several sides; they would not break with that if they wanted to attain anything.

It was like a fixed law relating to growth in existence, an inviolable divine idea running through it all. It was now leading him and his fellows into the fire, and when they advanced, no one must stay behind. No class of the community had yet advanced with so bright and great a call; they were going to put an end forever to the infamy of human genius sitting and weighing the spheres in space, but forgetting to weigh the bread justly.

He was not tired of the awakening discontent with the old condition of things; it opened up the overgrown minds, and created possibility for the new. At present he had no great number of adherents; various new currents were fighting over the minds, which, in their faltering search, were drawn now to one side, now to the other. But he had a buoyant feeling of serving a world-idea, and did not lose courage.

Unemployment and the awakening ego-feeling brought many to join Peter Dreyer. They rebelled against the conditions, and now saw no alternative but to break with everything. They sprang naked out of nothing, and demanded that their personality should be respected, but were unable as yet to bear its burdens; and their hopeless view of their misery threatened to stifle them. Then they made obstruction, their own broken- down condition making them want to break down the whole. They were Pelle’s most troublesome opponents.

Up to the present they had unfortunately been right, but now he could not comprehend their desperate impatience. He had given them an idea now, with which they could conquer the world just by preserving their coherence, and if they did not accept this, there must be something wrong with them. Taking this view of the matter, he looked upon their disintegrating agitation with composure; the healthy mind would be victorious!

Peter Dreyer was at present agitating for a mass-meeting of the unemployed. He wanted the twenty thousand men, with wives and children, to take up their position on the Council House Square or Amalienborg Palace Square, and refuse to move away until the community took charge of them.

“Then the authorities can choose between listening to their demands, and driving up horses and cannon,” he said. Perhaps that would open up the question.

“Take care then that the police don’t arrest you,” said Pelle, in a warning voice; “or your people will be left without a head, and you will have enticed them into a ridiculous situation which can only end in defeat.”

“Let them take care, the curs!” answered Peter threateningly. “I shall strike at the first hand that attempts to seize me!”

“And what then? What do you gain by striking the policemen? They are only the tool, and there are plenty of them!”

Peter laughed bitterly. “No,” he said, “it’s not the policemen, nor the assistant, nor the chief of police! It’s no one! That’s so convenient, no one can help it! They’ve always stolen a march upon us in that way; the evil always dives and disappears when you want to catch it. ‘It wasn’t me!’ Now the workman’s demanding his right, the employer finds it to his advantage to disappear, and the impersonal joint stock company appears. Oh, this confounded sneaking out of a thing! Where is one to apply? There’s no one to take the blame! But something *shall* be done now! If I hit the hand, I hit what stands behind it too; you must hit what you can see. I’ve got a revolver to use against the police; to carry arms against one’s own people shall not be made a harmless means of livelihood unchallenged.”

XVII

One Saturday evening Pelle came home by train from a provincial town where he had been helping to start a coöperative undertaking.

It was late, but many shops were still open and sent their brilliant light out into the drizzling rain, through which the black stream of the streets flowed as fast as ever. It was the time when the working women came from the center of the city—pale typists, cashiers with the excitement of the cheap novel still in their eyes, seamstresses from the large businesses. Some hurried along looking straight before them without taking any notice of the solitary street-wanderers; they had something waiting for them—a little child perhaps. Others had nothing to hurry for, and looked weariedly about them as they walked, until perhaps they suddenly brightened up at sight of a young man in the throng.

Charwomen were on their way home with their basket on their arm. They had had a long day, and dragged their heavy feet along. The street was full of women workers—a changed world! The bad times had called the women out and left the men at home. On their way home they made their purchases for Sunday. In the butchers’ and provision-dealers’ they stood waiting like tired horses for their turn. Shivering children stood on tiptoe with their money clasped convulsively in one hand, and their chin supported on the edge of the counter, staring greedily at the eatables, while the light was reflected from their ravenous eyes.

Pelle walked quickly to reach the open country. He did not like these desolate streets on the outskirts of the city, where poverty rose like a sea-birds’ nesting-place on both sides of the narrow cleft, and the darkness sighed beneath so much. When he entered an endless brick channel such as these, where one- and two-roomed flats, in seven stories extended as far as he could see, he felt his courage forsaking him. It was like passing through a huge churchyard of disappointed hopes. All these thousands of families were like so many unhappy fates; they had set out brightly and hopefully, and now they stood here, fighting with the emptiness.

Pelle walked quickly out along the field road. It was pitch-dark and raining, but he knew every ditch and path by heart. Far up on the hill there shone a light which resembled a star that hung low in the sky. It must be the lamp in Brun’s bedroom. He wondered at the old man being up still, for he was soon tired now that he had given up the occupation of a long lifetime, and generally went to bed early. Perhaps he had forgotten to put out the lamp.

Pelle had turned his coat-collar up about his ears, and was in a comfortable frame of mind. He liked walking alone in the dark. Formerly its yawning emptiness had filled him with a panic of fear, but the prison had made his mind familiar with it. He used to look forward to these lonely night walks home across the fields. The noises of the city died away behind him, and he breathed the pure air that seemed to come straight to him out of space. All that a man cannot impart to others arose in him in these walks. In the daily struggle he often had a depressing feeling that the result depended upon pure chance. It was not easy to obtain a hearing through the thousand-voiced noise. A sensation was needed in order to attract attention, and he had presented himself with only quite an ordinary idea, and declared that without stopping a wheel it could remodel the world. No one took the trouble to oppose him, and even the manufacturers in his trade took his enterprise calmly and seemed to have given up the war against him. He had expected great opposition, and had looked forward to overcoming it, and this indifference sometimes made him doubt himself. His invincible idea would simply disappear in the motley confusion of life!

But out here in the country, where night lay upon the earth like great rest, his strength returned to him. All the indifference fell away, and he saw that like the piers of a bridge, his reality lay beneath the surface. Insignificant though he appeared, he rested upon an immense foundation. The solitude around him revealed it to him and made him feel his own power. While they overlooked his enterprise he would make it so strong that they would run their head against it when they awoke.

Pelle was glad he lived in the country, and it was a dream of his to move the workmen out there again some day. He disliked the town more and more, and never became quite familiar with it. It was always just as strange to go about in this humming hive, where each seemed to buzz on his own account, and yet all were subject to one great will—that of hunger. The town exerted a dull power over men’s minds, it drew the poor to it with lies about happiness, and when it once had them, held them fiendishly fast. The poisonous air was like opium; the most miserable beings dream they are happy in it; and when they have once got a taste for it, they had not the strength of mind to go back to the uneventful everyday life again. There was always something dreadful behind the town’s physiognomy, as though it were lying in wait to drag men into its net and fleece them. In the daytime it might be concealed by the multitudinous noises, but the darkness brought it out.

Every evening before Pelle went to bed he went out to the end of the house and gazed out into the night. It was an old peasant-custom that he had inherited from Father Lasse and his father before him. His inquiring gaze sought the town where his thoughts already were. On sunny days there was only smoke and mist to be seen, but on a dark night like this there was a cheerful glow above it. The town had a peculiar power of shedding darkness round about it, and lighting white artificial light in it. It lay low, like a bog with the land sloping down to it on all sides, and all water running into it. Its luminous mist seemed to reach to the uttermost borders of the land; everything came this way. Large dragon-flies hovered over the bog in metallic splendor; gnats danced above it like careless shadows. A ceaseless hum rose from it, and below lay the depth that had fostered them, seething so that he could hear it where he stood.

Sometimes the light of the town flickered up over the sky like the reflection from a gigantic forge-fire. It was like an enormous heart throbbing in panic in the darkness down there; his own caught the infection and contracted in vague terror. Cries would suddenly rise from down there, and one almost wished for them; a loud exclamation was a relief from the everlasting latent excitement. Down there beneath the walls of the city the darkness was always alive; it glided along like a heavy life-stream, flowing slowly among taverns and low music-halls and barracks, with their fateful contents of want and imprecations. Its secret doings inspired him with horror; he hated the town for its darkness which hid so much.

He had stopped in front of his house, and stood gazing downward. Suddenly he heard a sound from within that made him start, and he quickly let himself in. Ellen came out into the passage looking disturbed.

“Thank goodness you’ve come!” she exclaimed, quite forgetting to greet him. “Anna’s so ill!”

“Is it anything serious?” asked Pelle, hurriedly removing his coat.

“It’s the old story. I got a carriage from the farm to drive in for the doctor. It was dear, but Brun said I must. She’s to have hot milk with Ems salts and soda water. You must warm yourself at the stove before you go up to her, but make haste! She keeps on asking for you.”

The sick-room was in semi-darkness, Ellen having put a red shade over the lamp, so that the light should not annoy the child. Brun was sitting on a chair by her bed, watching her intently as she lay muttering in a feverish doze. He made a sign to Pelle to walk quietly. “She’s asleep!” he whispered. The old man looked unhappy.

Pelle bent silently over her. She lay with closed eyes, but was not asleep. Her hot breath came in short gasps. As he was about to raise himself again, she opened her eyes and smiled at him.

“What’s the matter with Sister? Is she going to be ill again?” he said softly. “I thought the sun had sent that naughty bronchitis away.”

The child shook her head resignedly. “Listen to the cellar-man!” she whispered. He was whistling as hard as he could down in her windpipe, and she listened to him with a serious expression. Then her hand stole up and she stroked her father’s face as though to comfort him.

Brun, however, put her hand down again immediately and covered her up close. “We very nearly lost that doll!” he said seriously. He had promised her a large doll if she would keep covered up.

“Shall I still get it?” she asked in gasps, gazing at him in dismay.

“Yes, of course you’ll get it, and if you make haste and get well, you shall have a carriage too with india rubber tires.”

Here Ellen came in. “Mr. Brun,” she said, “I’ve made your room all ready for you.” She laid a quieting hand upon the child’s anxious face.

The librarian rose unwillingly. “That’s to say Mr. Brun is to go to bed,” he said half in displeasure. “Well, well, goodnight then! I rely upon your waking me if things become worse.”

“How good he is!” said Ellen softly. “He’s been sitting here all the time to see that she kept covered up. He’s made us afraid to move because she’s to be kept quiet; but he can’t help chattering to her himself whenever she opens her eyes.”

Ellen had moved Lasse Frederik’s bed down into their bedroom and put up her own here so as to watch over the child. “Now you should go to bed,” she said softly to Pelle. “You must be tired to death after your journey, and you can’t have slept last night in the train either.”

He looked tired, but she could not persuade him; he meant to stay up there. “I can’t sleep anyhow as things are,” he whispered, “and to-morrow’s Sunday.”

“Then lie down on my bed! It’ll rest you a little.”

He lay down to please her, and stared up at the ceiling while he listened to the child’s short, rattling respiration. He could hear that she was not asleep. She lay and played with the rattling sound, making the cellar-man speak sometimes with a deep voice, sometimes with a high one. She seemed quite familiar with this dangerous chatter, which had already cost her many hours of illness and sounded so painful to Pelle’s ear. She bore her illness with the wonderful resignation that belonged to the dwellers in the back streets. She did not become unreasonable or exacting, but generally lay and entertained herself. It was as though she felt grateful for her bed; she was always in the best spirits when she was in it. The sun out here had made her very brown, but there must be something in her that it had not prevailed against. It was not so easy to move away from the bad air of the back streets.

Whenever she had a fit of coughing, Pelle raised her into a sitting posture and helped her to get rid of the phlegm. She was purple in the face with coughing, and looked at him with eyes that were almost starting out of her head with the violent exertion. Then Ellen brought her the hot milk and Ems salts, and she drank it with a resigned expression and lay down again.

“It’s never been so bad before,” whispered Ellen, “so what can be the use? Perhaps the country air isn’t good for her.”

“It ought to be though,” said Pelle, “or else she’s a poor little poisoned thing.”

Ellen’s voice rang with the possibility of their moving back again to the town for the sake of the child. To her the town air was not bad, but simply milder than out here. Through several generations she had become accustomed to it and had overcome its injurious effects; to her it seemed good as only the air of home can be. She could live anywhere, but nothing must be said against her childhood’s home. Then she became eager.

The child had wakened with their whispering, and lay and looked at them. “I shan’t die, shall I?” she asked.

They bent over her. “Now you must cover yourself up and not think about such things,” said Ellen anxiously.

But the child continued obstinately. “If I die, will you be as sorry about me as you were about Johanna?” she asked anxiously, with her eyes fixed upon them.

Pelle nodded. It was impossible for him to speak.

“Will you paint the ceiling black to show you’re sorry about me? Will you, father?” she continued inexorably, looking at him.

“Yes, yes!” said Ellen desperately, kissing her lips to make her stop talking. The child turned over contentedly, and in another moment she was asleep.

“She’s not hot now,” whispered Pelle. “I think the fever’s gone.” His face was very grave. Death had passed its cold hand over it; he knew it was only in jest, but he could not shake off the impression it had made.

They sat silent, listening to the child’s breathing, which was now quiet. Ellen had put her hand into Pelle’s, and every now and then she shuddered. They did not move, but simply sat and listened, while the time ran singing on. Then the cock crew below, and roused Pelle. It was three o’clock, and the child had slept for two hours. The lamp had almost burned dry, and he could scarcely see Ellen’s profile in the semi-darkness. She looked tired.

He rose noiselessly and kissed her forehead. “Go downstairs and go to bed,” he whispered, leading her toward the door.

Stealthy footsteps were heard outside. It was Brun who had been down to listen at the door. He had not been to bed at all. The lamp was burning in his sitting-room, and the table was covered with papers. He had been writing.

He became very cheerful when he heard that the attack was over. “I think you ought rather to treat us to a cup of coffee,” he answered, when Ellen scolded him because he was not asleep.

Ellen went down and made the coffee, and they drank it in Brun’s room. The doors were left ajar so that they could hear the child.

“It’s been a long night,” said Pelle, passing his hand across his forehead.

“Yes, if there are going to be more like it, we shall certainly have to move back into town,” said Ellen obstinately.

“It would be a better plan to begin giving her a cold bath in the morning as soon as she’s well again, and try to get her hardened,” said Pelle.

“Do you know,” said Ellen, turning to Brun, “Pelle thinks it’s the bad air and the good air fighting for the child, and that’s the only reason why she’s worse here than in town.”

“So it is,” said Brun gravely; “and a sick child like that gives one something to think about.”

XVIII

The next day they were up late. Ellen did not wake until about ten, and was quite horrified; but when she got up she found the fire on and everything in order, for Lasse Frederik had seen to it all. She could start on breakfast at once.

Sister was quite bright again, and Ellen moved her into the sitting-room and made up a bed on the sofa, where she sat packed in with pillows, and had her breakfast with the others.

"Are you sorry Sister's getting well, old man?" asked Boy Comfort.

"My name isn't 'old man.' It's 'grandfather' or else 'Mr. Brun,'" said the librarian, laughing and looking at Ellen, who blushed.

"Are you sorry Sister's getting well, grandfather?" repeated the boy with a funny, pedantic literalness.

"And why should I be sorry for that, you little stupid?"

"Because you've got to give money!"

"The doll, yes! That's true! You'll have to wait till tomorrow, Sister, because to-day's Sunday."

Anna had eaten her egg and turned the shell upside down in the egg-cup so that it looked like an egg that had not been touched. She pushed it slowly toward Brun.

"What's the matter now?" he exclaimed, pushing his spectacles up onto his forehead. "You haven't eaten your egg!"

"I can't," she said, hanging her head.

"Why, there must be something wrong with her!" said the old man, in amazement. "Such a big, fat egg too! Very well, then *I* must eat it." And he began to crack the egg, Anna and Boy Comfort following his movements with dancing eyes and their hands over their mouths, until his spoon went through the shell and he sprang up to throw it at their heads, when their merriment burst forth. It was a joke that never suffered by repetition.

While breakfast was in progress, the farmer from the hill farm came in to tell them that they must be prepared to move out, as he meant to sell the house. He was one of those farmers of common-land, whom the city had thrown off their balance. He had lived up there and had seen one farm after another grow larger and make their owners into millionaires, and was always expecting that his turn would come. He neglected the land, and even the most abundant harvest was ridiculously small in comparison with his golden dreams; so the fields were allowed to lie and produce weeds.

Ellen was just as dismayed as Pelle at the thought of having to leave "Daybreak." It was their home, their nest too; all their happiness and welfare were really connected with this spot.

"You can buy the house of course," said the farmer. "I've had an offer of fifteen thousand (L850) for it, and I'll let it go for that."

After he had gone they sat and discussed the matter. "It's very cheap," said Brun. "In a year or two you'll have the town spreading in this direction, and then it'll be worth at least twice as much."

"Yes, that may be," said Pelle; "but you've both to get the amount and make it yield interest."

"There's eight thousand (L450) in the first mortgage, and the loan institution will lend half that. That'll make twelve thousand (L675). That leaves three thousand (L175), and I'm not afraid of putting that in as a third mortgage," said Brun.

Pelle did not like that. "There'll be need for your money in the business," he said.

"Yes, yes! But when you put the house into repair and have it re-valued, I'm certain you can get the whole fifteen thousand in the Loan Societies," said Brun. "I think it'll be to your advantage to do it."

Ellen had taken pencil and paper, and was making calculations. "What percentage do you reckon for interest and paying off by instalments?" she asked.

"Five," said the old man. "You do all the work of keeping it up yourselves."

"Then I would venture," she said, looking dauntlessly at them. "It would be nice to own the house ourselves, don't you think so, Pelle?"

"No, I think it's quite mad," Pelle answered. "We shall be saddled with a house-rent of seven hundred and fifty kroner (over £40)."

Ellen was not afraid of the house-rent; the house and garden would bear that. "And in a few years we can sell the ground for building and make a lot of money." She was red with excitement.

Pelle laughed. "Yes, speculation! Isn't that what the hill farmer has gone to pieces over?" Pelle had quite enough on his hands and had no desire to have property to struggle with.

But Ellen became only more and more bent upon it. "Then buy it yourself!" said Pelle, laughing. "I've no desire to become a millionaire."

Ellen was quite ready to do it. "But then the house'll be *mine*," she declared. "And if I make money on it, I must be allowed to spend it just as I like. It's not to go into your bottomless common cash-box!" The men laughed.

"Brun and I are going for a walk," said Pelle, "so we'll go in and write a contract note for you at once."

They went down the garden and followed the edge of the hill to the south. The weather was clear; it had changed to slight frost, and white rime covered the fields. Where the low sun's rays fell upon them, the rime had melted and the withered green grass appeared. "It's really pretty here," said Brun. "See how nice the town looks with its towers—only one shouldn't live there. I was thinking of that last night when the child was lying there with her cough. The work-people really get no share of the sun, nor do those who in other respects are decently well off. And then I thought I'd like to build houses for our people on the ridge of the hill on both sides of 'Daybreak.' The people of the new age ought to live in higher and brighter situations than others. I'll tell you how I thought of doing it. I should in the meantime advance money for the plots, and the business should gradually redeem them with its surplus. That is quite as practical as dividing the surplus among the workmen, and we thereby create values for the enterprise. Talking of surplus—you've worked well, Pelle! I made an estimate of it last night and found it's already about ten thousand (£555) this year. But to return to what we were talking about—mortgage loans are generally able to cover the building expenses, and with amortization the whole thing is unencumbered after some years have passed."

"Who's to own it?" asked Pelle. He was chewing a piece of grass and putting his feet down deliberately like a farmer walking on ploughed land.

"The cooperative company. It's to be so arranged that the houses can't be made over to others, nor encumbered with fresh loan. Our cooperative enterprises must avoid all form of speculation, thereby limiting the field for capital. The whole thing should be self-supporting and be able to do away with private property within its boundaries. You see it's your own idea of a community within the community that I'm building upon. At present it's not easy to find a juridical form under which the whole thing can work itself, but in the meantime you and I will manage it, and Morten if he will join us. I expect he'll come home with renewed strength."

"And when is this plan to be realized? Will it be in the near future?"

"This very winter, I had thought; and in this way we should also be able to do a little for the great unemployment. Thirty houses! It would be a beginning anyhow. And behind it lies the whole world, Pelle!"

"Shall you make the occupation of the houses obligatory for our workmen?"

"Yes, cooperation makes it an obligation. You can't be half outside and half inside! Well, what do you think of it?"

"It's a strong plan," said Pelle. "We shall build our own town here on the hill."

The old man's face shone with delight. "There's something in me after all, eh? There's old business-blood in my veins too. My forefathers built a world for themselves, and why should I do less than they? I ought to have been younger, Pelle!"

They walked round the hill and came to the farm from the other side. "The whole piece wouldn't really be too large if we're to have room to extend ourselves," said Pelle, who was not afraid of a large outlay when it was a question of a great plan.

"I was thinking the same thing," answered Bran. "How much is there here? A couple of hundred acres? There'll be room for a thousand families if each of them is to have a fair-sized piece of land."

They then went in and took the whole for a quarter of a million (£14,000).

"But Ellen!" exclaimed Pelle, when they were on their way home again.

"How are we going to come to terms with her?"

"Bless my soul! Why, it was her business we went upon! And now we've done business for ourselves! Well, I suppose she'll give in when she hears what's been done."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Pelle, laughing. "Perhaps when you tackle her."

"Well, did you get the house?" asked Ellen, from the house door, where she was standing to receive them.

"Yes, we got much more," said Brun airily. "We bought the whole concern."

"Is that a fact, Pelle?"

Pelle nodded.

"What about my house then?" she asked slowly.

"Well, we bought that together with all the rest," said Brun. "But as far as that goes it can easily be separated from the rest, only it's rather soon to break up the cooperation before it's started." He waited a little, expecting that Ellen would say something, and when she continued silent he went on, rather shortly: "Well, then there's nothing more to be said about that? Fair play's a jewel, and to-morrow I'll make arrangements for the conveyance of the house to you for the fifteen thousand (£850). And then we must give up the whole concern, Pelle. It won't do for the man at the head of it to live on his private property; so that plan's come to nothing!"

"Unless Ellen and I live in separate houses," said Pelle slyly. "I might build just the other side of the boundary, and then we could nod to one another at any rate."

Ellen looked at him gravely. "I only think it's rather strange that you settle my affairs without asking me first," she said at length.

"Yes, it was inconsiderate of us," answered Brun, "and we hope you'll forget all about it. You'll give up the house then?"

"I'm pretty well obliged to when Pelle threatens to move out," Ellen answered with a smile. "But I'm sorry about it. I'm certain that in a short time there'd have been money to make over it."

"It'll be nice, won't it, if the women are going to move into our forsaken snail-shells?" said Brun half seriously.

"Ellen's always been an incorrigible capitalist," Pelle put in.

"It's only that I've never had so much money that I shouldn't know what it was worth," answered Ellen, with ready wit.

Old Brun laughed. "That was one for Mr. Brun!" he said. "But since you've such a desire for land-speculation, Mistress Ellen, I've got a suggestion to make. On the ground we've bought there's a piece of meadow that lies halfway in to town, by the bog. We'll give you that. It's not worth anything at present, and will have to be filled in to be of any value; but it won't be very long before the town is out there wanting more room."

Ellen had no objection to that. "But then," she said, "I must be allowed to do what I like with what comes out of it."

XIX

The sun held out well that year. Remnants of summer continued to hang in the air right into December. Every time they had bad weather Ellen said, “Now it’ll be winter, I’m sure!” But the sun put it aside once more; it went far down in the south and looked straight into the whole sitting- room, as if it were going to count the pictures.

The large yellow Gloire de Dijon went on flowering, and every day Ellen brought in a large, heavy bunch of roses and red leaves. She was heavy herself, and the fresh cold nipped her nose—which was growing sharper— and reddened her cheeks. One day she brought a large bunch to Pelle, and asked him: “How much money am I going to get to keep Christmas with?”

It was true! The year was almost ended!

After the new year winter began in earnest. It began with much snow and frost, and made it a difficult matter to keep in communication with the outside world, while indoors people drew all the closer to one another. Anna should really have been going to school now, but she suffered a good deal from the cold and was altogether not very strong, so Pelle and Ellen dared not expose her to the long wading through the snow, and taught her themselves.

Ellen had become a little lazy about walking, and seldom went into town; the two men made the purchases for her in the evening on their way home. It was a dull time, and no work was done by artificial light, so they were home early. Ellen had changed the dinner-hour to five, so that they could all have it together. After dinner Brun generally went upstairs to work for another couple of hours. He was busy working out projects for the building on the Hill Farm land, and gave himself no rest. Pelle’s wealth of ideas and energy infected him, and his plans grew and assumed ever-increasing dimensions. He gave no consideration to his weak frame, but rose early and worked all day at the affairs of the coöperative works. He seemed to be vying with Pelle’s youth, and to be in constant fear that something would come up behind him and interrupt his work.

The other members of the family gathered round the lamp, each with some occupation. Boy Comfort had his toy-table put up and was hammering indefatigably with his little wooden mallet upon a piece of stuff that Ellen had put between to prevent his marking the table. He was a sturdy little fellow, and the fat lay in creases round his wrists. The wrinkles on his forehead gave him a funny look when one did not recall the fact that he had cost his mother her life. He looked as if he knew it himself, he was so serious. He had leave to sit up for a little while with the others, but he went to bed at six.

Lasse Frederik generally drew when he was finished with his lessons. He had a turn for it, and Pelle, wondering, saw his own gift, out of which nothing had ever come but the prison, repeated in the boy in an improved form. He showed him the way to proceed, and held the pencil once more in his own hand. His chief occupation, however, was teaching little Anna, and telling her anything that might occur to him. She was especially fond of hearing about animals, and Pelle had plenty of reminiscences of his herding-time from which to draw.

“Have animals really intelligence?” asked Ellen, in surprise. “You really believe that they think about things just as we do?”

It was nothing new to Sister; she talked every day to the fowls and rabbits, and knew how wise they were.

“I wonder if flowers can think too,” said Lasse Frederik. He was busy drawing a flower from memory, and it *would* look like a face: hence the remark.

Pelle thought they could.

“No, no, Pelle!” said Ellen. “You’re going too far now! It’s only us people who can think.”

“They can feel at any rate, and that’s thinking in a way, I suppose, only with the heart. They notice at once if you’re fond of them; if you aren’t they don’t thrive.”

“Yes, I do believe that, for if you’re fond of them you take good care of them,” said the incorrigible Ellen.

“I’m not so sure of that,” said Pelle, looking at her teasingly. “You’re very fond of your balsam, but a gardener would be sure to tell you that you treat it like a cabbage. And look how industriously it flowers all the same. They answer kind thoughts with gratitude, and that’s a nice way of thinking. Intelligence isn’t perhaps worth as much as we human beings imagine it to be. You yourself think with your heart, little mother.” It was his pet name for her just now.

After a little interlude such as this, they went on with their work. Pelle had to tell Sister all about the animals in her alphabet-book— about the useful cow and the hare that licked the dew off the clover and leaped up under the very nose of the cowherd. In the winter it went into the garden, gnawed the bark off the young trees and ate the farmer’s wife’s cabbage. “Yes, I must acknowledge that,” Ellen interposed, and then they all laughed, for puss had just eaten her kail.

Then the child suddenly left the subject, and wanted to know whether there had always, always been a Copenhagen. Pelle came to a standstill for a moment, but by a happy inspiration dug Bishop Absalom out of his memory. He took the opportunity of telling them that the capital had a population of half a million.

“Have you counted them, father?” exclaimed Sister, in perplexity, taking hold of his sleeve.

“Why, of course father hasn’t, you little donkey!” said Lasse Frederik. “One might be born while he was counting!”

Then they were at the cock again, which both began and ended the book. He stood and crowed so proudly and never slept. He was a regular prig, but when Sister was diligent he put a one-öre piece among the leaves. But the hens laid eggs, and it was evident that they were the same as the flowers; for when you were kind to them and treated them as if they belonged to the family, they were industrious in laying, but if you built a model house for them and treated them according to all established rules, they did not even earn as much as would pay for their food. At Uncle Kalle’s there was a hen that came into the room among all the children and laid its egg under the bed every single day all through the winter, when no other hens were laying. Then the farmer of Stone Farm bought it to make something by it. He gave twenty kroner (a guinea) for it and thought he had got a gold mine; but no sooner did it come to Stone Farm than it left off laying winter eggs, for there it was not one of the family, but was only a hen that they wanted to make money out of.

“Mother’s balsam flowers all the winter,” said Sister, looking fondly at the plant.

“Yes, that’s because it sees how industrious we all are,” said Lasse Frederik mischievously.

“Will you be quiet!” said Pelle, hitting out at him.

Ellen sat knitting some tiny socks. Her glance moved lingeringly from one to another of them, and she smiled indulgently at their chatter. They were just a lot of children!

“Mother, may I have those for my doll?” asked Anna, taking up the finished sock.

“No, little sister’s to have them when she comes.”

“If it *is* a girl,” put in Lasse Frederik.

“When’s little sister coming?”

“In the spring when the stork comes back to the farm; he’ll bring her with him.”

“Pooh! The stork!” said Lasse Frederik contemptuously. “What a pack of nonsense!”

Sister too was wiser than that. When the weather was fine she fetched milk from the farm, and had learned a few things there.

“Now you must go to bed, my child,” said Ellen, rising. “I can see you’re tired.” When she had helped the child into bed she came back and sat down again with her knitting.

“Now I think you should leave off work for to-day,” said Pelle.

“Then I shouldn’t be ready in time,” answered Ellen, moving her knitting-needles more swiftly.

“Send it to a machine-knitter. You don’t even earn your bread anyhow with that handicraft; and there must be a time for work and a time for rest, or else you’d not be a human being.”

“Mother can make three öre (nearly a halfpenny) an hour by knitting,” said Lasse Frederik, who had made a careful calculation.

What did it matter? Ellen did not think she neglected anything else in doing it.

“It is stupid though!” exclaimed Lasse Frederik suddenly. “Why doesn’t wool grow on one’s legs? Then you’d have none of the bother of shearing the wool off sheep, carding it, spinning it, and knitting stockings.”

“Oh, what nonsense you’re talking!” said Ellen, laughing.

“Well, men were hairy once,” Lasse Frederik continued. “It was a great pity that they didn’t go on being it!”

Pelle did not think it such a pity, for it meant that they had taken over the care of themselves. Animals were born fully equipped. Even water-haters like cats and hens were born with the power of swimming; but men had to acquire whatever they had a use for. Nature did not equip them, because they had become responsible for themselves; they were the lords of creation.

“But then the poor ought to be hairy all over their bodies,” Ellen objected. “Why doesn’t Nature take as much care of the poor as of the animals? They can’t do it themselves.”

“Yes, but that’s just what they *can* do!” said Pelle, “for it’s they who produce most things. Perhaps you think it’s money that cultivates the land, or weaves materials, or drags coal out of the earth? It had to leave that alone; all the capital in the world can’t so much as pick up a pin from the ground if there are no hands that it can pay to do it. If the poor were born hairy, it would simply stamp him as an inferior being. Isn’t it a wonder that Nature obstinately lets the poor men’s children be born just as naked as the king’s, in spite of all that we’ve gone through of want and hardship? If you exchange the prince’s and the beggar’s new-born babies, no one can say which is which. It’s as if Providence was never tired of holding our stamp of nobility up before us.”

“Do you really think then that the world can be transformed?” said Ellen, looking affectionately at him. It seemed so wonderful that this Pelle, whom she could take in her arms, occupied himself with such great matters. And Pelle looked back at her affectionately and wonderingly. She was the same to-day as on the day he first got to know her, perhaps as the day the world was created! She put nothing out on usury, but had been born with all she had. The world could indeed be transformed, but she would always remain as she was.

The post brought a letter from Morten. He was staying at present in Sicily, and thought of travelling along the north coast of Africa to the south of Spain. “And I may make an excursion in to the borders of the Desert, and try what riding on a camel is like,” he wrote. He was well and in good spirits. It was strange to think that he was writing with open doors, while here they were struggling with the cold. He drank wine at every meal just as you drank pale ale here at home; and he wrote that the olive and orange harvests were just over.

“It must be lovely to be in such a place just for once!” said Ellen, with a sigh.

“When the new conditions gain a footing, it’ll no longer be among unattainable things for the working-man,” Pelle answered.

Brun now came down, having at last finished his work. “Ah, it’s good to be at home!” he said, shaking himself; “it’s a stormy night.”

“Here’s a letter from Morten,” said Pelle, handing it to him.

The old man put on his spectacles.

XX

As soon as it was possible to get at the ground, the work of excavating for the foundations of the new workmen’s houses was begun with full vigor. Brun took a great interest in the work, and watched it out in the cold from morning till evening. He wore an extra great-coat, and woollen gloves outside his fur-lined ones. Ellen had knitted him a large scarf, which he was to wrap round his mouth. She kept an eye on him from the windows, and had to fetch him in every now and then to thaw him. It was quite impossible, however, to keep him in; he was far too eager for the work to progress. When the frost stopped it, he still wandered about out there, fidgety and in low spirits.

On weekdays Pelle was never at home in daylight, but on Sunday he had to go out with him and see what had been done, as soon as day dawned. The old man came and knocked at Pelle’s door. “Well, Pelle!” he said. “Will you soon be out of bed?”

“He must really be allowed to lie there while he has his coffee!” cried Ellen from the kitchen.

Brun ran once round the house to pass the time. He was not happy until he had shown it all to Pelle and got him to approve of the alterations. This was where he had thought the road should go. And there, where the roads crossed, a little park with statuary would look nice. New ideas were always springing up. The librarian’s imagination conjured up a whole town from the bare fields, with free schools and theaters and comfortable dwellings for the aged. “We must have a supply association and a school at once,” he said; “and by degrees, as our numbers increase, we shall get all the rest. A poor-house and a prison are the only things I don’t think we shall have any use for.”

They would spend the whole morning out there, walking about and laying plans. Ellen had to fetch them in when dinner-time came. She generally found them standing over some hole in earnest conversation—just an ordinary, square hole in the earth, with mud or ice at the bottom. Such holes were always dug for houses; but these two talked about them as if they were the beginning of an entirely new earth!

Brun missed Pelle during the day, and watched for him quite as eagerly as Ellen when the time came for him to return from work. “I shall soon be quite jealous of him,” said Ellen, as she drew Pelle into the kitchen to give him her evening greeting in private. “If he could he’d take you quite away from me.”

When Pelle had been giving a lecture, he generally came home after Brun had gone to rest, and in the morning when he left home the old man was not up. Brun never went to town. He laid the blame on the weather, but in reality he did not know what he would do with himself in there. But if a couple of days passed without his seeing Pelle, he became restless, lost interest in the excavating, and wandered about feebly without doing anything. Then he would suddenly put on his boots, excuse himself with some pressing errand, and set off over the fields toward the tram, while Ellen stood at the window watching him with a tender smile. She knew what was drawing him!

One would have thought there were ties of blood between these two, so dependent were they on one another. “How’s the old man?” was Pelle’s first question on entering; and Brun could not have followed Pelle’s movements with tenderer admiration in his old days if he had been his father. While Pelle was away the old man went about as if he were always looking for something.

Ellen did not like his being out among the navvies in all kinds of weather. In the evening the warmth of the room affected his lungs and made him cough badly.

“It’ll end in a regular cold,” she said. She wanted him to stay in bed for a few days and try to get rid of the cold before it took a firm hold.

It was a constant subject of argument between them, but Ellen did not give in until she got her way. When once he had made this concession to the cold, it came on in earnest. The warmth of bed thawed the cold out of his body and made both eyes and nose run.

“It’s a good thing we got you to bed in time,” said Ellen. “And now you won’t be allowed up until the worst cold weather is over, even if I have to hide your clothes.” She tended him like a child and made “camel tea” for him from flowers that she had gathered and dried in the summer.

When once he had gone to bed he quite liked it and took delight in being waited on, discovering a need of all kinds of things, so as to receive them from Ellen’s hands.

"Now you're making yourself out worse than you are!" she said, laughing at him.

Brun laughed too. "You see, I've never been petted before," he said. "From the time I was born, my parents hired people to look after me; that's why I'm so shrivelled up. I've had to buy everything. Well, there's a certain amount of justice in the fact that money kills affection, or else you'd both eat your cake and have it."

"Yes, it's a good thing the best can't be had for money," said Ellen, tucking the clothes about his feet. He was propped up with pillows, so that he could lie there and work. He had a map of the Hill Farm land beside him, and was making plans for a systematic laying out of the ground for building. He wrote down his ideas about it in a book that was to be appended to the plans. He worked from sunrise until the middle of the day, and during that time it was all that Ellen could do to keep the children away from him; Boy Comfort was on his way up to the old man every few minutes.

In the afternoon, when she had finished in the kitchen, she took the children up for an hour. They were given a picture-book and were placed at Brun's large writing-table, while Ellen seated herself by the window with her knitting and talked to the old man. From her seat she could follow the work out on the field, and had to give him a full description of how far they had got with each plot.

There were always several hundred men out there standing watching the work—a shivering crowd that never diminished. They were unemployed who had heard that something was going on out here, and long before the dawn of day they were standing there in the hope of coming in for something. All day they streamed in and out, an endless chain of sad men. They resembled prisoners condemned hopelessly to tread a huge wheel; there was a broad track across the fields where they went.

Brun was troubled by the thought of these thousands of men who came all this way to look for a day's work and had to go back with a refusal. "We can't take more men on than there are already," he said to Pelle, "or they'll only get in one another's way. But perhaps we could begin to carry out some of our plans for the future. Can't we begin to make roads and such like, so that these men can get something to do?"

No, Pelle dared not agree to that.

"In the spring we shall want capital to start the tanners with a cooperative tannery," he said. "It'll be agreed on in their Union at an early date, on the presupposition that we contribute money; and I consider it very important to get it started. Our opponents find fault with us for getting our materials from abroad. It's untenable in the long run, and must come to an end now. As it is, the factory's hanging in the air; they can cut us off from the supply of materials, and then we're done. But if we only have our own tannery, the one business can be carried out thoroughly and can't be smashed up, and then we're ready to meet a lock-out in the trade."

"The hides!" interpolated Brun.

"There we come to agriculture. That's already arranged coöperatively, and will certainly not be used against us. We must anyhow join in there as soon as ever we get started—buy cattle and kill, ourselves, so that besides the hides we provide ourselves with good, cheap meat."

"Yes, yes, but the tannery won't swallow everything! We can afford to do some road-making."

"No, we can't!" Pelle declared decisively. "Remember we've also got to think of the supply associations, or else all our work is useless; the one thing leads to the other. There's too much depending on what we're doing, and we mustn't hamper our undertaking with dead values that will drag it down. First the men and then the roads! The unemployed to-day must take care of themselves without our help."

"You're a little hard, I think," said Brun, somewhat hurt at Pelle's firmness, and drumming on the quilt with his fingers.

"It's not the first time that I've been blamed for it in this connection," answered Pelle gravely; "but I must put up with it."

The old man held out his hand. "I beg your pardon! It wasn't my intention to find fault with you because you don't act thoughtlessly. Of course we mustn't give up the victory out of sympathy with those who fight. It was only a momentary weakness, but a weakness that might spoil everything—that I must admit! But it's not so easy to be a passive spectator of these topsy-turvy conditions. It's affirmed that the workmen prefer to receive a starvation allowance to doing any work; and judging by what they've hitherto got out of their work it's easy to understand that it’s true. But during the month that the excavations here have been going on, at least a thousand unemployed have come every day ready to turn to; and we pay them for refraining from doing anything! They can at a pinch receive support, but at no price obtain work. It’s as insane as it’s possible to be! You feel you’d like to give the machinery a little push and set it going again.”

“It wants a good big push,” said Pelle. “They’re not trifles that are in the way.”

“They look absurdly small, at any rate. The workmen are not in want because they’re out of work, as our social economists want us to believe; but they’re out of work because they’re in want. What a putting of the cart before the horse! The procession of the unemployed is a disgrace to the community; what a waste—also from a purely mercantile point of view—while the country and the nation are neglected! If a private business were conducted on such principles, it would be doomed from the very first.”

“If the pitiable condition arose only from a wrong grasp of things, it would be easily corrected,” said Pelle; “but the people who settle the whole thing can’t at any rate be charged with a lack of mercantile perception. It would be a good thing if they had the rest in as good order! Believe me, not a sparrow falls to the ground unless it is to the advantage of the money-power; if it paid, in a mercantile sense, to have country and people in perfect order, it would take good care that they were so. But it simply can’t be done; the welfare of the many and the accumulation of property by the few are irreconcilable contradictions. I think there is a wonderful balance in humanity, so that at any time it can produce exactly enough to satisfy all its requirements; and when one claims too much, others let go. It’s on that understanding indeed that we want to remove the others and take over the management.”

“Yes, yes! I didn’t mean that I wanted to protect the existing state of affairs. Let those who make the venture take the responsibility. But I’ve been wondering whether *we* couldn’t find a way to gather up all this waste so that it should benefit the cooperative works?”

“How could we? We *can’t* afford to give occupation to the unemployed.”

“Not for wages! But both the Movement and the community have begun to support them, and what would be more natural than that one required work of them in return? Only, remember, letting it benefit them!”

“You mean that, for instance, unemployed bricklayers and carpenters should build houses for the workmen?” asked Pelle, with animation.

“Yes, as an instance. But the houses should be ensured against private speculation, in the same way as those we’re building, and always belong to the workmen. As *we* can’t be suspected of trying to make profits, we should be suitable people for its management, and it would help on the cooperative company. In that way the refuse of former times would fertilize the new seed.”

Pelle sat lost in thought, and the old man lay and looked at him in suspense. “Well, are you asleep?” he asked at last impatiently.

“It’s a fine idea,” said Pelle, raising his head. “I think we should get the organizations on our side; they’re already beginning to be interested in cooperation. When the committee sits, I’ll lay your plan before them. I’m not so sure of the community, however, Brun! They have occasional use for the great hunger-reserve, so they’ll go on just keeping life in it; if they hadn’t, it would soon be allowed to die of hunger. I don’t think they’ll agree to have it employed, so to speak, against themselves.”

“You’re an incorrigible pessimist!” said Brun a little irritably.

“Yes, as regards the old state of things,” answered Pelle, with a smile.

Thus they would discuss the possibilities for the fixture in connection with the events of the day when Pelle sat beside the old man in the evening, both of them engrossed in the subject. Sometimes the old man felt that he ran off the lines. “It’s the blood,” he said despondently. “I’m not, after all, quite one of you. It’s so long since one of my family worked with his hands that I’ve forgotten it.”

During this time he often touched upon his past, and every evening had something to tell about himself. It was as though he were determined to find a law that would place him by Pelle’s side.

Brun belonged to an old family that could be traced back several hundred years to the captain of a ship, who traded with the Tranquebar coast. The founder of the family, who was also a whaler and a pirate, lived in a house on one of the Kristianshavn canals. When his ship was at home, she lay to at the wharf just outside his street-door. The Bruns' house descended from father to son, and was gradually enlarged until it became quite a mansion. In the course of four generations it had become one of the largest trading-houses of the capital. At the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, most of the members of the family had gone over into the world of stockbrokers and bankers, and thence the changes went still further. Brun's father, the well-known Kornelius Brun, stuck to the old business, his brothers making over their share to him and entering the diplomatic service, one of them receiving a high Court appointment.

Kornelius Brun felt it his duty to carry on the old business, and in order to keep on a level with his brothers as regarded rank, he married a lady of noble birth from Funen, of a very old family heavily burdened with debt. She bore him three children, all of whom—as he himself said — were failures. The first child was a deaf mute with very small intellectual powers. It fortunately died before it attained to man's estate. Number two was very intelligent and endowed with every talent, but even as a boy exhibited perverse tendencies. He was very handsome, had soft, dark hair, and a delicate, womanish complexion. His mother dressed him in velvet, and idolized him. He never did anything useful, but went about in fine company and spent large sums of money. In his fortieth year he died suddenly, a physical and moral wreck. The announcement of the death gave a stroke as the cause; but the truth was that rumors had begun to circulate of a scandal in which he was implicated together with some persons of high standing. It was at the end of the seventies, at the time when the lower class movement began to gather way. An energetic investigation was demanded from below, and it was considered inadvisable to hush the story up altogether, for fear of giving support to the assertion of the rottenness and onesidedness of the existing conditions. When an investigation became imminent, and it was evident that Brun would be offered up upon the altar of the multitude in order to shield those who stood higher, Kornelius Brun put a pistol into his son's hand—or shot him; the librarian was unable to say which.

"Those were two of the fruits upon the decaying family tree," said Brun bitterly, "and it can't be denied that they were rather worm-eaten. The third was myself. I came fifteen years after my youngest brother. By that time my parents had had enough of their progeny; at any rate, I was considered from the beginning to be a hopeless failure, even before I had had an opportunity of showing anything at all. Perhaps they felt instinctively that I should take a wrong direction too. In me too the disintegrating forces predominated; I was greatly deficient, for instance, in family feeling. I remember when still quite little hearing my mother complain of my plebeian tendencies; I always kept with the servants, and took their part against my parents. My family looked more askance at me for upholding the rights of our inferiors than they had done at the idiot who tore everything to pieces, or the spendthrift who made scandals and got into debt. And I dare say with good reason! Mother gave me plenty of money to amuse myself with, probably to counteract my plebeian tendencies; but I had soon done with the pleasures and devoted myself to study. Things of the day did not interest me, but even as a boy I had a remarkable desire to look back; I devoted myself especially to history and its philosophy. Father was right when he derided me and called it going into a monastery; at an age when other young men are lovers, I could not find any woman that interested me, while almost any book tempted me to a closer acquaintance. For a long time he hoped that I would think better of it and take over the business, and when I definitely chose study, it came to a quarrel between us. 'When the business comes to an end, there's an end of the family!' he said, and sold the whole concern. He had been a widower then for several years, and had only me; but during the five years that he lived after selling the business we didn't see one another. He hated me because I didn't take it over, but what could I have done with it? I possessed none of the qualities necessary for the carrying on of business in our day, and should only have ruined the whole thing. From the time I was thirty, my time has been passed among bookshelves, and I've registered the lives and doings of others. It's only now that I've come out into the daylight and am beginning to live my own life; and now it'll soon be ended!"

"It's only now that life's beginning to be worth living," said Pelle, "so you've come out just at the right time."

"Ah, no!" said Brun despondently. "I'm not in the ascendant! I meet young men and my mind inclines to them; but it's like evening and morning meeting in the same glow during the light nights. I've only got my share in the new because the old must bend to it, so that the ring may be completed. You go in where I go out."

"It must have been a melancholy existence to be always among books, books, without a creature that cared for you," put in Ellen. "Why didn't you marry? Surely we women aren't so terrible that there mightn't have been *one* that you liked?"

"No, you'd think not, but it's true nevertheless," answered Brun, with a smile. "The antipathy was mutual too; it's always like that. I suppose it wasn't intended that an old fellow like me should put children into the world! It's not nice, though, to be the end of something."

Ellen laughed. "Yes, but you haven't always been old!"

"Yes, I have really; I was born old. I'm only now beginning to feel young. And who knows?" he exclaimed with grim humor. "I may play Providence a trick and make my appearance some day with a little wife on my arm."

"Brun's indulging in fancies," said Pelle, as they went down to bed. "But I suppose they'll go when he's about again."

"He's not had much of a time, poor old soul!" said Ellen, going closer to Pelle. "It's a shame that there are people who get no share in all the love there is—just as great a shame as what you're working against, I think!"

"Yes, but we can't put that straight!" exclaimed Pelle, laughing.

XXI

In the garden at “Daybreak” the snow was disappearing from day to day. First it went away nearest the house, and gave place to a little forest of snowdrops and crocuses. The hyacinths in the grass began to break through the earth, coming up like a row of knuckles that first knocked at the door.

The children were always out watching the progress made. They could not understand how the delicate crocus could push straight up out of the frozen ground without freezing to death, but died when it came into the warm room. Every day they wrapped some snowdrops in paper and laid them on Brun’s table—they were “snowdrop-letters”—and then hovered about in ungovernable excitement until he came in from the fields, when they met him with an air of mystery, and did all they could to entice him upstairs.

Out in the fields they were nearly finished with the excavations, and were only waiting for the winter water to sink in order to cart up gravel and stone and begin the foundations; the ground was too soft as yet.

Old Brun was not so active now after his confinement to bed; although there was not much the matter with him, it had weakened him. He allowed Pelle a free hand with the works, and said Yea and Amen to everything he proposed. “I can’t keep it all in my head,” he would say when Pelle came to suggest some alteration; “but just do as you like, my son, and it’s sure to be right.” There were not enough palpable happenings down there to keep his mind aglow, and he was too old to hear it grow and draw strength from that. His faith, however, merely shifted from the Cause over to Pelle; he saw him alive before him, and could lean upon his youthful vigor.

He had given up his work on the plans. He could not keep at it, and contented himself with going the round of the fields two or three times a day and watching the men. The sudden flame of energy that Pelle’s youth had called to life within him had died down, leaving a pathetic old man, who had been out in the cold all his life, and was now luxuriating in a few late rays of evening sun. He no longer measured himself by Pelle, and was not jealous of his taking the lead in anything, but simply admired him and kept carefully within the circle of those for whom Pelle acted providence. Ellen treated him like a big child who needed a great deal of care, and the children of course looked upon him as their equal.

When he went his round of the fields, he generally had Boy Comfort by the hand; the two could both keep pace with one another and converse together. There was one thing that interested them both and kept them in great excitement. The stork was expected every day back at the Hill Farm, and when it came it would bring a baby to Mother Ellen. The expectation was not an unmixed pleasure. The stork always bit the mother in the leg when he came with a baby for her. Boy Comfort’s own mother died of the bite; he was wise enough to know that now. The little fellow looked upon Ellen as his mother, and went about in a serious, almost depressed, mood. He did not talk to the other children of his anxiety, for fear they would make fun of him; but when he and the old man walked together in the fields they discussed the matter, and Brun, as the older and wiser, came to the conclusion that there was no danger. All the same, they always kept near the house so as to be at hand.

One day Pelle stayed at home from work, and Ellen did not get up as usual. “I’m going to lie here and wait for the stork,” she said to Boy Comfort. “Go out and watch for it.” The little boy took a stick, and he and Brun tramped round the house; and when they heard Ellen cry out, they squeezed one another’s hands. It was such a disturbed day, it was impossible to keep anything going straight; now a carriage drove up to the door with a fat woman in it, now it was Lasse Frederik who leaped upon his bicycle and raced down the field-path, standing on the pedals. Before Boy Comfort had any idea of it, the stork had been there, and Ellen was lying with a baby boy on her arm. He and Brun went in together to congratulate her, and they were both equally astonished. The old man had to be allowed to touch the baby’s cheek.

“He’s still so ugly,” said Ellen, with a shy smile, as she lifted the corner of the shawl from the baby’s head. Then she had to be left quiet, and Brun took Boy Comfort upstairs with him.

Pelle sat on the edge of the bed, holding Ellen’s hand, which in a few hours had become white and thin. “Now we must send for ‘Queen Theresa,’” she said.

“Shan’t we send for your mother too?” asked Pelle, who had often proposed that they should take the matter into their own hands, and go and see the old people. He did not like keeping up old quarrels.

Ellen shook her head. “They must come of their own accord,” she said decidedly. She did not mind for herself, but they had looked down upon Pelle, so it was not more than fair that they should come and make it up.

“But I *have* sent for them,” said Pelle. “That was what Lasse Frederik went about. You mustn’t have a baby without help from your mother.”

In less than a couple of hours Madam Stolpe had arrived. She was much moved, and to hide it she began turning the house inside out for clean cloths and binders, scolding all the time. A nice time, indeed, to send for anybody, when it was all over!

Father Stolpe was harder. He was not one to come directly he was whistled for! But two or three evenings after the baby had arrived, Pelle ran up against him hanging about a little below the house. Well, he was waiting for mother, to take her home, and it didn’t concern anybody else, he supposed. He pretended to be very determined, but it was comparatively easy to persuade him to come in; and once in, it was not long before Ellen had thawed him. She had, as usual, her own manner of procedure.

“Let me tell you, father, that it’s not me that sent for you, but Pelle; and if you don’t give him your hand and say you’ve done him an injustice, we shall never be good friends again!”

“Upon my word, she’s the same confounded way of taking the bull by the horns that she always had!” said Stolpe, without looking at her. “Well, I suppose I may as well give in at once, and own that I’ve played the fool. Shall we agree to let bygones be bygones, son-in-law?” extending his hand to Pelle.

When once the reconciliation was effected, Stolpe became quite cheerful. “I never dreamt I should see you so soon, least of all with a baby!” he said contentedly, stroking Ellen’s face with his rough hand.

“No, she’s always been his darling, and father’s often been tired of it,” said Madam Stolpe. “But men make themselves so hard!”

“Rubbish, mother!” growled Stolpe. “Women will always talk nonsense!”

Time had left its mark upon them both. There had been a certain amount of unemployment in his trade, and Stolpe was getting on in years and had a difficulty in keeping up with the young men on the scaffolding. Their clothes showed that they were not so prosperous as formerly; but Stolpe was still chairman of his trade union and a highly respected man within the Movement.

“And now, my boy,” he said suddenly, placing his hands on Pelle’s shoulders, “you must explain to me what it is you’re doing this time. I hear you’ve begun to stir up men’s feelings again.”

Pelle told him about his great plan for coöperative works. The old man knew indeed a good deal about it; it appeared that he had followed Pelle’s movements from a distance.

“That’s perhaps not so out of the way,” he said. “We might squeeze capital out of existence just as quietly, if we all bestirred ourselves. But you must get the Movement to join you; and it must be made clear that every one who doesn’t support his own set is a black-leg.”

“*I have* got a connection, but it goes rather slowly,” said Pelle.

“Then we must stir them up a little. I say, that queer fellow—Brun, I think you call him—doesn’t he live with you?”

“He isn’t a queer fellow,” said Pelle, laughing. “We can go up and see him.”

Brun and Stolpe very soon found something to talk about. They were of the same age, and had witnessed the first days of the Movement, each from his own side. Madam Stolpe came several times and pulled her husband by the coat: they ought to be going home.

“Well, it’s not worth while to quarrel with your own wife,” said Stolpe at last; “but I shall come again. I hear you’re building out here, and I should like to see what our own houses’ll be like.”

“We’ve not begun yet,” answered Pelle. “But come out on Sunday, and Brun and I will show it all to you.”

“I suppose it’s masters who’ll get it?” asked Stolpe.

“No, we thought of letting the unemployed have the work if they could undertake it, and have a man to put at the head,” said Brun. “Perhaps you could undertake it?”

“Why, of course I can!” answered Stolpe, with a feeling of his own importance. “I’m the man to build houses for workmen! I was member of the party when it numbered only one man.”

“Yes, Stolpe’s the veteran of the Movement,” said Pelle.

“Upon my word, it’d be awfully nice if it was me!” exclaimed Stolpe when Pelle accompanied the old couple down to the tram. “I’ll get together a set of workmen that have never been equalled. And what houses we shall put up! There won’t be much papier-mâché there!”

XXII

It still sometimes happened that Pelle awoke in the night not knowing where he was. He was oppressed with a stifling anxiety, dreaming that he was in prison, and fancying he could still smell the rank, mouldy odor of the cell. He gradually came to his senses and knew where he was; the sounds of breathing around him, and the warm influence of the darkness itself, brought him back to his home. He sat up joyfully, and struck a match to get a glimpse of Ellen and the little ones. He dared not go to sleep again, for sleep would instantly take him back to the prison; so he dressed quietly and stole out to see the day awaken.

It was strange with these dreams, for they turned everything upside down. In the prison he always dreamed he was free and living happily; nothing less would do there. There the day was bad and the night good, and here it was the reverse. It was as though something within one would always have everything. “That must be the soul!” he thought as he wandered eastward to meet the first gleam of day. In the country at home, the old people in his childhood believed that dreams were the soul wandering about by itself; some had seen it as a white mouse creeping out of the sleeper’s mouth to gather fresh experiences for him. It was true, too, that through dreams the poor man had hitherto had everything; they carried him out of his prison. Perhaps the *roles* were exchanged during the darkness of night. Perhaps the rich man’s soul came during the night and slipped into the poor man’s body to gather suffering for his master.

There was spring in the air. As yet it was only perceptible to Pelle in a feeling of elation, a desire to expand and burst all boundaries. He walked with his face toward the opening day, and had a feeling of unconquerable power. Whence this feeling came he knew not, but it was there. He felt himself as something immense that was shut into a small space and would blow up the world if it were let loose. He walked on quickly. Above his head rose the first lark. Slowly the earth drew from its face the wonderful veil of rest and mystery that was night.

Perhaps the feeling of strength came from his having taken possession of his spirit and commanding a view of the world. The world had no limits, but neither had his powers; the force that could throw him out of his course did not exist. In his own footfall he heard the whole future; the Movement would soon be concluded when it had taken in the fact that the whole thing must be included. There was still a little difficulty; from that side they still made it a condition for their cooperation that Pelle should demand a public recognition of his good character. Pelle laughed and raised his face to the morning breeze which came like a cold shiver before the sunrise. Outsider! Yes, there was some truth in it. He did not belong to the existing state of things; he desired no civil rights there. That he was outside was his stamp of nobility; his relations to the future were contained in that fact. He had begun the fight as one of the lowest of the people, and as such he would triumph. When he rose there should no longer be a pariah caste.

As he walked along with the night behind him and his face to the light, he seemed to have just entered into youth with everything before him—everything to look forward to! And yet he seemed to have existed since the morning of time, so thoroughly did he know the world of darkness that he left. Was not man a wonderful being, both in his power to shrink up and become nothing, and in his power to expand and fill everything? He now understood Uncle Kalle’s smile on all occasions; he had armed himself with it in order that life should not draw too deep furrows in his gentle nature. The poor man had been obliged to dull himself; he would simply bleed to death if he gave himself up to stern reality. The dullness had been like a hard shell that protected the poor; and now they came with their heart quite safe in spite of everything. They could very well lead when times were good.

Pelle had always a vague feeling of being chosen. Even as a child it made him look with courage in the face of a hard world, and filled his bare limbs with elasticity. Poor and naked he came into the world, apparently without a gift of any kind; and yet he came as a bright promise to the elderly, work-bowed Father Lasse. Light radiated from him, insignificant and ordinary though he was; God had given him the spark, the old man always said, and he always looked upon the boy as a little miracle of heaven. The boy Pelle wondered a little at it, but was happy in his father’s pleasure. He himself knew some very different miracles at that time, for instance the calf of the fair with two heads, and the lamb with eight legs. He had his own demands to make of life’s wonderful riches, and was not struck with surprise at a very ordinary, big-eared urchin such as one might see any day.

And now he was just showing that Father Lasse had been right. The greatest miracles were in himself—Pelle, who resembled hundreds of millions of other workmen, and had never yet had more than just enough for his food. Man was really the most wonderful of all. Was he not himself, in all his commonplace naturalness, like a luminous spark, sprung from the huge anvil of divine thought? He could send out his inquiring thought to the uttermost borders of space, and back to the dawn of time. And this all-embracing power seemed to have proceeded from nothing, like God Himself! The mere fact that he, who made so much noise, had to go to prison in order to comprehend the great object of things, was a marvel! There must have been far-reaching plans deposited in him, since he shut himself in.

When he looked out over the rising, he felt himself to be facing a world-thought with extraordinarily long sight. The common people, without knowing it, had been for centuries preparing themselves for an entry into a new world; the migration of the masses would not be stopped until they had reached their goal. A law which they did not even know themselves, and could not enter into, led them the right way; and Pelle was not afraid. At the back of his unwearied labor with the great problem of the age was the recognition that he was one of those on whom the nation laid the responsibility for the future; but he was never in doubt as to the aim, nor the means. During the great lock-out the foreseeing had feared the impossibility of leading all these crowds into the fire. And then the whole thing had opened out of itself quite naturally, from an apparently tiny cause to a steadily ordered battle all along the line. The world had never before heard a call so great as that which he and his followers brought forward! It meant nothing less than the triumph of goodness! He was not fond of using great words, but at the bottom of his heart he was convinced that everything bad originated in want and misery. Distrust and selfishness came from misusage; they were man’s defence against extortion. And the extortion came from insecure conditions, from reminders of want or unconscious fear of it. Most crimes could easily be traced back to the distressing conditions, and even where the connection was not perceptible he was sure that it nevertheless existed. It was his experience that every one in reality was good: the evil in them could nearly always be traced back to something definite, while the goodness often existed in spite of everything. It would triumph altogether when the conditions became secure for everybody. He was sure that even the crimes that were due to abnormity would cease of themselves when there were no longer hidden reminders of misery in the community.

It was his firm belief that he and his followers should renew the world; the common people should turn it into a paradise for the multitude, just as it had already made it a paradise for the few. It would require a great and courageous mind for this, but his army had been well tested. Those who, from time immemorial, had patiently borne the pressure of existence for others, must be well fitted to take upon themselves the leadership into the new age.

Pelle at last found himself in Strand Road, and it was too late to return home. He was ravenously hungry and bought a couple of rolls at a baker’s, and ate them on his way to work.

At midday Brun came into the works to sign some papers and go through accounts with Pelle. They were sitting up in the office behind the shop. Pelle read out the items and made remarks on them, while the old man gave his half attention and merely nodded. He was longing to get back to “Daybreak.”

“You won’t mind making it as short as possible?” he said, “for I don’t feel quite well.” The harsh spring winds were bad for him and made his breathing difficult. The doctor had advised a couple of months in the Riviera—until the spring was over; but the old man could not make up his mind. He had not the courage to set out alone.

The shop-bell rang, and Pelle went in to serve. A young sunburnt man stood on the other side of the counter and laughed.

“Don’t you know me?” he asked, holding out his hand to Pelle. It was Karl, the youngest of the three orphans in the “Ark.”

“Why, of course I know you!” answered Pelle, delighted. “I’ve been to Adel Street to look for you; I was told you had your business there.”

That had been a long time ago! Now Karl Anker was manager of a large supply association over on Funen. He had come over to order some boots and shoes from Pelle for the association. “It’s only a trial,” he said. “If it succeeds I’ll get you a connection with the cooperative association, and that’s a customer that takes something, I can tell you!”

Pelle had to make haste to take down the order, as Karl had to catch a train.

“It’s a pity you haven’t got time to see our works,” said Pelle. “Do you remember little Paul from the ‘Ark’? The factory-girl’s child that she tied to the stove when she went to work? He’s become a splendid fellow. He’s my head man in the factory. He’d like to see you!”

When Karl was gone and Pelle was about to go in to Brun in the office, he caught sight of a small, somewhat deformed woman with a child, walking to and fro above the workshop windows, and taking stolen glances down. They timidly made way for people passing, and looked very frightened. Pelle called them into the shop.

“Do you want to speak to Peter Dreyer?” he asked.

The woman nodded. She had a refined face with large, sorrowful eyes. “If it won’t disturb him,” she said.

Pelle called Peter Dreyer and then went into the office, where he found Brun had fallen asleep.

He heard them whispering in the shop. Peter was angry, and the woman and the child cried; he could hear it in the tones of their whisper. It did not last more than a minute, and then Peter let them out. Pelle went quickly into the shop.

“If it was money,” he said hurriedly, “you know you’ve only got to tell me.”

“No, it was the big meeting of unemployed this afternoon. They were begging me to stop at home, silly creatures! Goodness knows what’s come to them!” Peter was quite offended. “By the by—I suppose you haven’t any objection to my going now? It begins in an hour’s time.”

“I thought it had been postponed,” said Pelle.

“Yes, but that was only a ruse to prevent its being prohibited. We’re holding it in a field out by Nörrebro. You ought to come too; it’ll be a meeting that’ll be remembered. We shall settle great matters to-day.” Peter was nervous, and fidgeted with his clothes while he spoke.

Pelle placed his hands on his shoulders and looked into his eyes. “You’d better do what those two want,” he said earnestly. “I don’t know them, of course; but if their welfare’s dependent on you, then they too have a claim upon you. Give up what you were going to do, and go out for a walk with those two! Everything’s budding now; take them to the woods! It’s better to make two people happy than a thousand unhappy.”

Peter looked away. “We’re not going to do anything special, so what is there to make such a fuss about?” he murmured.

“You *are* going to do something to-day; I can see it in you. And if you can’t carry it through, who’ll have to take the consequences? Why, the women and children! You *can’t* carry it through! Our strength doesn’t lie in that direction.”

“You go your way and let me go mine,” said Peter, gently freeing himself.

Two policemen were standing on the opposite pavement, talking together, while they secretly kept an eye on the shop. Pelle pointed to them.

“The police don’t know where the meeting’s to be held, so they’re keeping watch on me,” said Peter, shrugging his shoulders. “I can easily put those two on the wrong track.”

The policemen crossed the street and separated outside the shop. One of them stood looking at the articles exhibited in the window for a little while, and then quickly entered the shop. “Is Peter Dreyer here?” he asked haughtily.

“I’m he,” answered Peter, withdrawing behind the counter. “But I advise you not to touch me! I can’t bear the touch of a policeman’s hands.”

“You’re arrested!” said the policeman shortly, following him.

Pelle laid his hand upon his arm. “You should go to work with a little gentleness,” he said. But the man pushed him roughly away. “I’ll have no interference from you!” he cried, blowing his whistle. Peter started, and for a moment his thoughts were at a standstill; then he leaped like a cat over the iron railing, of the workshop steps. But the other policeman was there to receive him, and he sprang once more into the shop, close up to his pursuer. He had his revolver in his hand. “I’ve had enough of this, confound you!” he hissed.

Two shots sounded, one immediately after the other. The policeman just managed to turn round, but fell forward with his head under the counter, and Peter dropped upon the top of him. It looked as if he had tripped over the policeman’s leg; but when Pelle went to help him up he saw that the blood was trickling from a hole in his temple. The policeman was dead.

Peter opened his eyes with difficulty when Pelle raised his head. “Take me away!” he whispered, turning his head toward the dead man with an expression of loathing. He still kept a convulsive hold upon his revolver.

Pelle took it from him, and carried him in to the sofa in the office. “Get me a little water!” said Pelle to the old librarian, who was standing trembling at the door, but the old man did not hear him.

Peter made a sign that he needed nothing now. “But those two,” he whispered. Pelle nodded. “And then—Pelle—comrade—” He tried to fix his dying gaze upon Pelle, but suddenly started convulsively, his knees being drawn right up to his chin. “Bloodhounds!” he groaned, his eyes converging so strongly that the pupils disappeared altogether; but then his features fell once more into their ordinary folds as his head sank back, and he was dead.

The policeman came in. “Well, is he dead?” he asked maliciously. “He’s made fools of us long enough!”

Pelle took him by the arm and led him to the door. “He’s no longer in your district,” he said, as he closed the door behind him and followed the man into the shop, where the dead policeman lay upon the counter. His fellow-policeman had laid him there, locked the outer door, and pulled down the blinds.

“Will you stop the work and tell the men what has happened?” said Pelle quietly to Brun. “There’s something else I must see to. There’ll be no more work done here to-day.”

“Are you going?” asked the old man anxiously.

“Yes, I’m going to take Peter’s meeting for him, now that he can’t do it himself,” answered Pelle in a low voice.

They had gone down through the workshop, where the men were standing about, looking at one another. They had heard the shots, but had no idea what they meant. “Peter is dead!” said Pelle. His emotion prevented him from saying anything more. Everything seemed suddenly to rush over him, and he hastened out and jumped onto a tram-car.

Out on one of the large fields behind Nörrebro a couple of thousand unemployed were gathered. The wind had risen and blew gustily from the west over the field. The men tramped backward and forward, or stood shivering in their thin clothes. The temper of the crowd was threatening. Men continued to pour out from the side streets, most of them sorry figures, with faces made older by want of work. Many of them could no longer show themselves in the town for want of clothes, and took this opportunity of joining the others.

There was grumbling among them because the meeting had not begun. Men asked one another what the reason was, and no one could tell. Suppose Peter Dreyer had cheated them too, and had gone over to the corporation!

Suddenly a figure appeared upon the cart that was to be used as a platform, and the men pressed forward on all sides. Who in the world was it? It was not Peter Dreyer! Pelle? What smith? Oh, him from The Great Struggle—“the Lightning”! Was he still to the fore? Yes, indeed he was! Why, he’d become a big manufacturer and a regular pillar of society. What in the world did he want here? He had plenty of cheek!

Suddenly a storm of shouts and hisses broke out, mingled with a little applause.

Pelle stood looking out over the crowd with an expression of terrible earnestness. Their demonstration against him did not move him; he was standing here in the stead of a dead man. He still felt Peter’s heavy head on his arm.

When comparative quiet was restored he raised his head. “Peter Dreyer is dead!” he said in a voice that was heard by every one. Whispers passed through the crowd, and they looked questioningly at one another as though they had not heard correctly. He saw from their expression how much would go to pieces in their lives when they believed it.

“It’s a lie!” suddenly cried a voice, relieving the tension. “You’re hired by the police to entice us round the corner, you sly fellow!”

Pelle turned pale. "Peter Dreyer is lying in the factory with a bullet through his head," he repealed inexorably. "The police were going to arrest him, and he shot both the policeman and himself!"

For a moment all the life in the crowd seemed to be petrified by the pitiless truth, and he saw how they had loved Peter Dreyer. Then they began to make an uproar, shouting that they would go and speak to the police, and some even turned to go.

"Silence, people!" cried Pelle in a loud voice. "Are you grown men and yet will get up a row beside the dead body of a comrade?"

"What do you know about it?" answered one. "You don't know what you're talking about!"

"I do know at any rate that at a place out by Vesterbro there sits a woman with a child, waiting for Peter, and he will not come. Would you have more like them? What are you thinking of, wanting to jump into the sea and drown yourselves because you're wet through? Will those you leave behind be well off? For if you think so, it's your duty to sacrifice yourselves. But don't you think rather that the community will throw you into a great common pit, and leave your widows and fatherless children to weep over you?"

"It's all very well for you to talk!" some one shouted. "Yours are safe enough!"

"I'm busy making yours safe for you, and you want to spoil it by stupidity! It's all very well for me to talk, you say! But if there's any one of you who dares turn his face to heaven and say he has gone through more than I have, let him come up here and take my place."

He was silent and looked out over the crowd. Their wasted faces told him that they were in need of food, but still more of fresh hope. Their eyes gazed into uncertainty. A responsibility must be laid upon them—a great responsibility for such prejudiced beings—if possible, great enough to carry them on to the goal.

"What is the matter with you?" he went on. "You suffer want, but you've always done that without getting anything for it; and now when there's some purpose in it, you won't go any further. We aren't just from yesterday, remember! Wasn't it us who fought the great battle to its end together? Now you scorn it and the whole Movement and say they've brought nothing; but it was then we broke through into life and won our right as men.

"Before that time we have for centuries borne our blind hope safely through oppression and want. Is there any other class of society that has a marching route like ours? Forced by circumstances, we prepared for centuries of wandering in the desert and never forgot the country; the good God had given us some of His own infinite long-suffering to carry us through the toilsome time. And now, when we are at the border, you've forgotten what we were marching for, and sacrifice the whole thing if only *you* can be changed from thin slaves to fat slaves!"

"There are no slaves here!" was the threatening cry on all sides.

"You're working horses, in harness and with blinkers on! Now you demand good feeding. When will the scales fall from your eyes, so that you take the responsibility upon yourselves? You think you're no end of fine fellows when you dare to bare your chest to the bayonets, but are we a match for brutality? If we were, the future would not be ours."

"Are you scoffing at Peter Dreyer?" asked a sullen voice.

"No, I am not. Peter Dreyer was one of those who go on in advance, and smear the stones on the road with their hearts' blood, so that the rest of us may find our way. But you've no right to compare yourselves with him. He sank under the weight of a tremendous responsibility; and what are you doing? If you want to honor Peter's memory as it deserves, go quietly home, and join the Movement again. There you have work to do that will transform the world when you all set about it. What will it matter if your strength ebbs and you suffer hunger for a little longer while you're building your own house? You were hungry too when you were building for others.

"You referred to Peter Dreyer, but we are none of us great martyrs; we are everyday, ordinary men, and there's where our work lies. Haven't the thousands who have suffered and died in silence a still greater claim to be followed? They have gone down peacefully for the sake of the development, and have the strongest right to demand our belief in a peaceable development. It is just we that come from the lowest stratum who must preserve the historic development; never has any movement had so long and sad a previous history as ours! Suffering and want have taught us to accept the leadership, when the good has justice done to it; and you want to throw the whole thing overboard by an act of violence."

They listened to him in silence now. He had caught their minds, but it was not knowledge they absorbed. At present they looked most like weary people who are told that they still have a long way to go. But he *would* get them through!

"Comrades!" he cried earnestly, "perhaps we who are here shall not live to see the new, but it's through us that it'll some day become reality. Providence has stopped at us, and has appointed us to fight for it. Is that not an honor? Look! we come right from the bottom of everything—entirely naked; the old doesn't hang about our clothes, for we haven't any; we can clothe ourselves in the new. The old God, with His thousands of priests as a defence against injustice, we do not know; the moral of war we have never understood—we who have always been its victims. We believe in the Good, because we know that without the victory of goodness there will be no future. Our mind is light and can receive the light; we will lift up our little country and show that it has a mission on the earth. We who are little ourselves will show how the little ones keep up and assert themselves by the principle of goodness. We wish no harm to any one, therefore the good is on our side. Nothing can in the long run keep us down! And now go home! Your wives and children are perhaps anxious on your account."

They stood for a moment as though still listening, and then dispersed in silence.

When Pelle sprang down from the cart, Morten came up and held out his hand. "You are strong, Pelle!" he said quietly.

"Where have you come from?" exclaimed Pelle in glad surprise.

"I came by the steamer this afternoon, and went straight up to the works. Brun told me what had happened and that you were here. It must have been a threatening meeting! There was a detachment of police over there in one of the side streets. What was going on?"

"They'd planned some demonstration or other, and would in that case have met with harsh treatment, I suppose," said Pelle gravely.

"It was well you got them to change their minds. I've seen these demonstrations in the South, where the police and the soldiers ride over the miserable unemployed. It's a sad sight."

They walked up across the fields toward "Daybreak." "To think that you're home again!" said Pelle, with childlike delight. "You never wrote a word about coming."

"Well, I'd meant to stay away another couple of months. But one day I saw the birds of passage flying northward across the Mediterranean, and I began to be so homesick. It was just as well I came too, for now I can see Brun before he goes."

"Oh, is he going away, after all? That's been settled very quickly. This morning he couldn't make up his mind."

"It's this about Peter. The old man's fallen off very much in the last six months. But let's walk quicker! I'm longing to see Ellen and the children. How's the baby?"

"He's a little fatty!" said Pelle proudly. "Nine pounds without his clothes! Isn't that splendid? He's a regular sunshine baby."

XXIII

It is spring once more in Denmark.

It has been coming for a long time. The lark came before the frost was out of the ground, and then the starling appeared. And one day the air seemed suddenly to have become high and light so that the eye could once more see far out; there was a peculiar broad airiness in the wind—the breath of spring. It rushed along with messages of young, manly strength, and people threw back their shoulders and took deep breaths. “Ah! the south wind!” they said, and opened their minds in anticipation.

There he comes riding across the sea from the south, in the middle of his youthful train. Never before has his coming been so glorious! Is he not like the sun himself? The sea glitters under golden hoofs, and the air is quivering with sunbeam-darts caught and thrown in the wild gallop over the waves. Heigh-ho! Who’ll be the first to reach the Danish shore?

Like a broad wind the spring advances over islands and belts, embracing the whole in arrogant strength. He sings in the children’s open mouths as in a shell, and is lavish of his airy freshness. Women’s teeth grow whiter with his kiss, and vie with their eyes in brightness; their cheeks glow beneath his touch, though they remain cool—like sun-ripe fruit under the morning dew. Men’s brains whirl once more, and expand into an airy vault, as large as heaven itself, giddy with expectancy. From high up comes the sound of the passage birds in flight; the air is dizzy with its own infinitude.

Bareheaded and with a sunny smile the spring advances like a young giant intoxicated with his own strength, stretches out his arms and wakens everything with his song. Nothing can resist him. He touches lightly the heart of the sleeping earth, calling merrily into her dull ears to awake. And deep down the roots of life begin to stir and wake, and send the sap circulating once more. Hedgehogs and field-mice emerge sleepily and begin to busy themselves in the hedges. From the darkness below old decayed matter ferments and bubbles up, and the stagnant water in the ditches begins to run toward the sea.

Men stand and gaze in amazement after the open-handed giant, until they feel the growth in themselves and can afford something. All that was impossible before has suddenly become possible, and more besides. The farmer has long since had his plough in the earth, and the sower straps his basket on: the land is to be clothed again.

The days lengthen and become warmer; it is delightful to watch them and know that they are going upward. One day Ellen opens wide the double doors out to the garden; it is like a release. But what a quantity of dirt the light reveals!

“We shall have to be busy now, Petra Dreyer!” says Ellen. The little deformed sewing-woman smiles with her sad eyes, and the two women begin to sweep floors and wash windows. Now and then a little girl comes in from the garden complaining that she is not allowed to play with Anna’s big doll. Boy Comfort is in the fields from morning to night, helping Grandfather Stolpe to build the new workmen’s houses. A fine help his is! When Ellen fetches him in to meals, he is so dirty that she nearly loses all patience.

“I wonder how Old Brun is!” says Ellen suddenly, in the middle of her work. “We haven’t heard from him now for three days. It’s quite sad to think he’s so far away. I only hope they’ll look after him properly.”

Pelle is tremendously busy, and they do not see much of him. The Movement has taken up his idea now in earnest, and he is to have the management of it all, so that he has his hands full. “Have I got a husband or not?” says Ellen, when she gets hold of him now and again.

“It’ll soon be better,” he answers. “When once we’ve got the machinery properly started, it’ll go by itself.”

Morten is the only one who has not set seriously to work on anything, and in the midst of all the bustle has an incongruous effect. “He’s thinking!” says Ellen, stopping in the middle of beating a carpet. “Thank goodness we’re not all authors!”

Pelle would like to draw him into the business. “There’s so much to write and lecture about,” he says, “and you could do all that so much better than I.”

“Oh, no, I couldn’t,” says Morten. “Your work’s growing in me too. I’m always thinking about it and have thought of giving a hand too, but I can’t. If I ever contribute anything to your great work, it’ll be in some other way.”

"You're doing nothing with your book about the sun either," says Pelle anxiously.

"No, because whenever I set to work on it, it mixes up so strangely with your work, and I can't keep the ideas apart. At present I feel like a mole, digging blindly in the black earth under the mighty tree of life. I dig and search, and am continually coming across the thick roots of the huge thing above the surface. I can't see them, but I can hear sounds from above there, and it hurts me not to be able to follow them into their strong connection up in the light."

* * *

One Sunday morning at the end of May they were sitting out in the garden. The cradle had been moved out into the sun, and Pelle and Ellen were sitting one on either side, talking over domestic matters. Ellen had so much to tell him when she had him to herself. The child lay staring up into the sky with its dark eyes that were the image of Ellen's. He was brown and chubby; any one could see that he had been conceived in sunshine and love.

Lasse Frederik was sitting by the hedge painting a picture that Pelle was not to see until it was finished. He went to the drawing-school now, and was clever. He had a good eye for figures, and poor people especially he hit off in any position. He had a light hand, and in two or three lines could give what his father had had to work at carefully. "You cheat!" Pelle often said, half resentfully. "It won't bear looking closely at." He had to admit, however, that it was a good likeness.

"Well, can't I see the picture soon?" he called across. He was very curious.

"Yes, it's finished now," said Lasse Frederik, coming up with it.

The picture represented a street in which stood a solitary milk-cart, and behind the cart lay a boy with bleeding head. "He fell asleep because he had to get up so early," Lasse Frederik explained; "and then when the cart started he tumbled backward." The morning emptiness of the street was well done, but the blood was too brilliantly red.

"It's very unpleasant," said Ellen, with a shudder. "But it's true."

Morten came home from town with a big letter which he handed to Pelle, saying: "Here's news for you from Brun." Pelle went into the house to read it undisturbed, and a little while after came out again.

"Yes, important news this time," he said with some emotion. "Would you like to hear it?" he asked, sitting down.

"DEAR PELLE:

"I am sitting up in bed to write to you. I am poorly, and have been for some days; but I hope it is nothing serious. We all have to die some day, but I should like to start on the great voyage round the world from your home. I long to see 'Daybreak' and all of you, and I feel very lonely. If the business could do without you for a few days, I should be so glad if you would come down here. Then we could go home together, for I should not like to venture on the journey by myself.

"The sun is just going down, and sends its last rays in to me. It has been gray and gloomy all day, but now the sun has broken through the clouds, and kisses the earth and me, poor old man, too, in farewell. It makes me want to say something to you, Pelle, for my day was like this before I knew you—endlessly long and gray! When you are the last member of a dying family, you have to bear the gray existence of the others too.

"I have often thought how wonderful the hidden force of life is. Intercourse with you has been like a lever to me, although I knew well that I should not accomplish anything more, and had no one to come after me. I feel, nevertheless, through you, in alliance with the future. You are in the ascendant and must look upon me as something that is vanishing. But look how life makes us all live by using us each in his own way. Be strong in your faith in the future; with you lies the development. I wish with all my heart that I were an awakening proletary and stood in the dawn of day; but I am nevertheless glad because my eyes will be closed by the new in you.

"I have imagined that life was tiresome and dull and far too well known. I had it arranged in my catalogues. And look how it renews itself! In my old age I have experienced its eternal youth. Formerly I had never cared about the country; in my mind it was a place where you waded either in dust or mud. The black earth appeared to me horrible rather than anything else; it was only associated in my mind with the churchyard. That shows how far I was from nature. The country was something that farmers moved about in—those big, voracious creatures, who almost seemed like a kind of animal trying to imitate man. Rational beings could not possibly live out there. That was the view in my circle, and I had myself a touch of the same complaint, although my university training of course paraphrased and veiled it all to some extent. All this about our relations to nature seemed to me very interesting aesthetically, but with more or less of a contradictory, not to say hostile, character. I could not understand how any one could see anything beautiful in a ploughed field or a dike. It was only when I got to know you that something moved within me and called me out; there was something about you like the air from out there.

"Now I also understand my forefathers! Formerly they seemed to me only like thick-skinned boors, who scraped together all the money that two generations of us have lived upon without doing a pennyworth of good. They enabled us, however, to live life, I have always thought, and I considered it the only excuse for their being in the family, coarse and robust as they were. Now I see that it was they who lived, while we after them, with all our wealth, have only had a bed in life's inn.

"For all this I thank you. I am glad to have become acquainted through you with men of the new age, and to be able to give my fortune back. It was made by all those who work, and gathered together by a few; my giving it back is merely a natural consequence. Others will come to do as I am doing, either of their own free will or by compulsion, until everything belongs to everybody. Then only can the conflict about human interests begin. Capitalism has created wonderful machines, but what wonderful men await us in the new age! Happy the man who could have lived to see it!

"I have left all my money to you and Morten. As yet there is no institution that I could give it to, so you must administer it in the name of cooperation. You two are the best guardians of the poor, and I know you will employ it in the best manner. I place it with confidence in your hands. The will is at my lawyer's; I arranged it all before I left home.

"My greetings to all at 'Daybreak'—Ellen, the children, and Morten. If the baby is christened before I get home, remember that he is to be called after me. But I am hoping that you will come."

Ellen drew a deep breath when Pelle had finished the letter. "I only hope he's not worse than he makes out," she said. "I suppose you'll go?"

"Yes, I'll arrange what's necessary at the works to-morrow early, and take the morning express."

"Then I must see to your things," exclaimed Ellen, and went in.

Pelle and Morten went for a stroll along the edge of the hill, past the half-finished houses, whose red bricks shone in the sun.

"Everything seems to turn out well for you, Pelle," said Morten suddenly.

"Yes," said Pelle; "nothing has succeeded in injuring me, so I suppose what Father Lasse and the others said is right, that I was born with a caul. The ill-usage I suffered as a child taught me to be good to others, and in prison I gained liberty; what might have made me a criminal made a man of me instead. Nothing has succeeded in injuring me! So I suppose I may say that everything has turned out well."

"Yes, you may, and now I've found a subject, Pelle! I'm not going to hunt about blindly in the dark; I'm going to write a great work now."

"I congratulate you! What will it be about? Is it to be the work on the sun?"

"Yes, both about the sun and about him who conquers. It's to be a book about you, Pelle!"

"About me?" exclaimed Pelle.

"Yes, about the naked Pelle with the caul! It's about time to call out the naked man into the light and look at him well, now that he's going to take over the future. You like to read about counts and barons, but now I'm going to write a story about a prince who finds the treasure and wins the princess. He's looked for her all over the world and she wasn't there, and now there's only himself left, and there he finds her, for he's taken her heart. Won't that be a good story?"

"I think it's a lot of rubbish," said Pelle, laughing. "And you'll have to lay the lies on thick if you're going to make me into a prince. I don't think you'll get the workpeople to take it for a real book; it'll all be so well known and ordinary."

“They’ll snatch at it, and weep with delight and pride at finding themselves in it. Perhaps they’ll name their children after it out of pure gratitude!”

“What are you going to call it then?” asked Pelle.

“I’m going to call it ‘PELLE THE CONQUEROR.’”

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PELLE THE CONQUEROR — COMPLETE ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE

THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE

PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

> This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE

PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™’s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation’s EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state’s laws.

The Foundation’s business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation’s website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.