

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 clod-hopper. 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 to 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 towards 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 neighbourliness 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 honour 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 quarrelled 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 get 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 grey 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 recognised 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 towards 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 necessities.

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-labourers' 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-labourers' 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 wakened 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.