

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 forwards or backwards—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 storey'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 towards 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 Phil'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 tenkroner 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 on to 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.

"Ay, 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 kroners 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 backwards and forwards. "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 kroners 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-neighbour 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 durstn'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 kronas 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 kronas 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 neighbour 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 downwards 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 homewards, 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!