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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 backwards and forwards, 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 pre-occupation 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and when it was a question of lifting or anything that did not require perseverance, Lasse had to allow himself to be superseded.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 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 honour. 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 favour 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,* so the name suits him

* An ordinary expression in Danish for a mean, deceitful person.

just right. It was him that let his son-in-law have both his daughters, and work off their price on his daily wage too! If they'd been alive now, they'd have got hard labour, 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.

"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 fore-finger, 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 learnt 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 backwards and forwards. 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 kronas, 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.