

"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 towards 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 travelling-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."

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.

"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 for 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 afterwards," said Lasse after a little. "And I should like you to thank Karna nicely for having put everything into 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 vapour 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 on to 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 outhouses, and there stopped, while Pelle went on along the dikes with his sack on his back, up towards 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 outhouses. Every spot down there shone so familiarly towards 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 towards 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 towards the world.

Before him lay the land sloping richly towards 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 backwards and forwards, 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 on to his back, and set off downwards 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

