

DITTE
DAUGHTER OF MAN

DITTE DAUGHTER OF MAN

BY
MARTIN ANDERSEN NEXÖ

//

*TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH
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THE FALL

CHAPTER I

AMONG STRANGERS

“**Y**OU won’t be altogether among strangers either,” Lars Peter had said by way of comfort, the evening before Ditte was to go off to her first place. “The Hill Farm woman was called Man before she was married; her grandfather and old Sören Man’s father must have been sort of half-cousins. It’s a bit distant of course—and perhaps you’d better not make any remark about it—wait and see if they come forward. It’s always a mistake to claim relations above you.”

It was indeed distant—no doubt about that; and he only mentioned it as a sort of consolation—for want of something better. Lars Peter knew only too well what relationship is worth when you’re the under-dog. And Ditte wasn’t such a fool either.

All the same her father’s words helped her along the last and hardest bit of the road out. It was no light thing to have to tramp to her first place, with no companion of any kind. Ditte’s heart was in her mouth when she thought of the new life she was going to—how would she manage it? And the farm people—how would they receive her? Perhaps too there would be a big dog who would drive her off, so that she couldn’t get into the farm at all, but would

have to wait in the road till somebody happened to come. Then of course she would be scolded for coming too late. Oh no, she would get in all right, but which door was she to go to—the scullery or the fine front door? And was she to say, I am the new little girl? No; she must mind and say Good day first, or else they would think her badly brought up, and that would reflect on her home.

It wasn't at all easy, and here her father's comforting words stood her in good stead. When you were one of the family—though it might be distant—it was another thing; then you came half on a visit, as it were! The thought gave her a firmer foothold at once, and Ditte wouldn't have been surprised to hear her new mistress cry in astonishment, Well, is that Ditte! You take after our side of the family, you do indeed!

When Ditte presently stood in the Hill Farm scullery with her bundle under her arm, the reality presented itself rather differently. She had no chance of saying anything, for Karen, the mistress of the house, just looked her up and down with a dissatisfied air and said: "So you're the rag and bone man's eldest? You're a bit undersized for your age, aren't you? Put you down to a bit of work and we shall lose sight of you altogether."

Nothing was said about relationship, and Ditte was not surprised either! now she was once here she could afford to look realities in the face. Perhaps the farm people here simply knew nothing about the relationship; there are so many poor people that it isn't easy

to remember all about them! At any rate Ditte was illegitimate and so didn't count.

For that matter it was quite correct about the relationship, but, as Lars Peter had said, it was a bit distant. A son from the Naze Farm had got tired of the drudgery at home and had gone northwestward along the coast until he found this place and settled down. Probably this happened at a time when the Mans still got most of their living from the sea. At all events the farm was badly placed for agriculture—right out among the dunes where nothing could grow. It was built at the upper end of a fold in the sloping cliffs—as though with the object of hiding it from the land side; it had no view of its own fields or of the country behind them. Coming from the land, one scarcely noticed that there was a farm here. On the other hand, there was more than enough to be seen of the sea; the three-winged farm buildings lay open on that side, with their two arms conspicuously stretching out as though to embrace as much of the sea as came in view at the bottom of the ravine. There must have been a reason for this at one time; now at any rate it was a topsy-turvy state of things. From the windows of the living room, where according to the laws of nature one ought to be able to keep an eye on man and beast, there was always the sea and nothing else in sight; from the cold, exposed farmyard it was the same. Outside boats glided casually by, appearing from behind one corner of the cliff and vanishing again behind the other; ships passed by far out, whose voyage none could guess; in clear weather

a blue bank loomed far away—land nobody knew or cared to learn anything about. There was other land near by, which it was more profitable to think about.

At one time, then, there had been an object and a use for this; from these windows they could keep an eye on boat and nets—and on strange craft. In the course of time many a skipper had anchored off here at night and had sold part of his cargo of corn to the Mans on the hill; and a few of them had come here against their will. In those days there was a good reason for the mill too, which now stood in ruins above the farm buildings as a sort of monument to the foolishness of the Hill Farm people. Nobody but a lunatic could have built the mill; for who would think of driving right out to the seashore to get his corn ground?

“Go to the Hill Farm mill, it can grind sand into corn,” was the derisive comment when anybody proposed to do something really mad. But he who first gave rise to the saying was not altogether out of his senses for all that. His back soon began to be bent by dragging the heavy sacks from the beach up to the mill at dead of night, and his face showed ugly traces of his secret work. People were afraid of him. But he amassed the dollars that the family could afterwards spend. And he bought the land that became the Hill Farm fields, and started farming—chiefly, no doubt, to prevent questions being asked about all the corn ground at his mill.

But the sea is so uncertain, and—somehow or other

—people grew more honest by degrees. Little by little farming became the family's means of livelihood.

Now they were farmers and nothing else. The earth clung heavily to their wooden shoes, they wanted to feel the firm ground under them, it made them giddy to look at the rolling sea and they hated its wide expanse. They never went down to the shore if they could help it; the days were long past when they had any business there; it was quite enough to have the sea always staring them in the face. It lay there flaunting its aggravating uselessness; it couldn't grow anything and it only sent them chilly showers. If only that fourth wing had been built! A proper farmyard was square and closed in, that was the order of nature. But here from the cradle to the grave they had to stare at a gaping void, with the constant feeling of being on the point of slipping out into the unknown. The farmyard was like a tilted sieve: if anything started rolling it kept on till it reached the beach. And then somebody had to go down to the detested water's edge and bring the thing up again.

The people of the farm had to admit that in the long run it is not a good thing to be shut off from one's own belongings and kept constantly face to face with something one cannot bear the sight of. That outlook had the same effect on them as the walls of his cell on a convict and made them unbalanced and unruly. There were many disorderly fellows among them, and the farm kept gossip busy. This again contributed to their feeling of isolation.

But they didn't altogether let things slide, the owners of the Hill Farm. Any one of them might now and again bring his fist down on the table with an oath that now the gap should be closed with a new wing, or the whole shanty moved up to the top of the hill. Then he would have the horse put in, to set about it at once—and come back from the town with a skinful. This went on regularly from father to son: the cramped daily life—and the violent excesses in one way or another. When the Hill Farm folks let themselves go, they always took a stride that split their breeches—so people used to say.

Apart from this the heritage was nothing to speak of. There was less and less to take over, and when Karen came into it, every one knew that her share was more vices than dollars. She had had to raise a new loan on the farm simply to keep her eldest son at the seminary.

No, the only heritage they could be sure of was the crazy turn that showed up in all the Hill Farm people. And the strangest thing about this inheritance was that it was catching: strangers who married into the family got just as queer in the head as the people of the place. On the other hand, it wore off with those of the children who left home early enough; they gradually became like other people; and the casual offshoots round about, they also turned out well. So it was a queer twist that stuck to the place itself—a sort of curse maybe. It had the property of destroying initiative; the Hill Farm people did not care to begin anything new or to keep up the old either, but let every-

thing go to the dogs. "The farm is going to be moved anyhow," they said, "so what's the use of it?"

Now there was a widow in possession, a pretty sharp woman for looking after things—according to Hill Farm ways, of course—but otherwise a weird sort of creature that nobody could make out. She was a good deal talked about, and the better part of the family kept her at a distance. For money there was none, and it didn't add to one's reputation either to be seen about with her. She revenged herself on them by associating beneath her.

Pride was not one of Karen's faults—nobody could say that of her. She made friends with crofters and horse-dealers and was not afraid of going to the laborers' wives' birthday coffee parties on the Common. So it is quite possible she had no idea that she was related to the rag and bone man. She hadn't much family feeling; it was never very strong among the Mans; they had been too long on the earth and had become too numerous for that. They only kept count of those who stood higher in the world or who had something to leave.

The connection between the Naze and the Hill Farm had worn rather thin in course of time. They did not visit each other, but met at intervals of years at weddings and funerals—just enough to know who was alive and who was dead. When the sea had devoured so much of the Naze Farm that it degenerated into a small holding and no inheritance could any longer be expected from that quarter, even this kind of connection ceased of its own accord. Nobody thought of invit-

ing crofters to anything; at the most their presence might be tolerated at a funeral. The Hill Farm people no longer had eyes for the quarter from whence they had come.

It was somewhat different with the inhabitants of the Naze cottage. They had their reasons for holding on and had managed in a difficult and roundabout fashion to find out what went on at the Farm over here—though they were not a penny the better off for it. Sören and Maren never forgot that they had farmer relations out here; that was their weak point, and they used to boast about it when things went too hard with them. Not that they really expected anything; early in life they had both reached the point where they gave up looking for gifts of fortune.

All the same there were plenty of instances of a hundred dollars or even more than that falling straight into the laps of poor people. Granny knew all about such happenings, far beyond the borders of the parish, and time after time she would recount them to Ditte. It was a queer feeling to be rolling in good fortune like this—and then to know that she herself would never have any chance. “You’ll never get a prize, Ditte,” said Granny; “for you are illegitimate, and they don’t inherit.” “Then they don’t have to inherit all the bad things either,” Ditte answered with a decisive nod; she had early learnt how to console herself. But Granny was not quite so sure about that as she was about the other thing.

Well, Ditte didn’t mind about not being an heiress—she would get on all right just the same. Perhaps she

would marry somebody with lots of money—a poor fellow whom she had accepted for love and nothing else. And then, when she had said Yes, he would throw off his shabby old greatcoat and appear in fine clothes. “My father is rich enough for us both!” he would say; “I only wanted to find out if you loved me for my own sake.” Or perhaps she would find something on the road, a purse with lots of money in it—which nobody had lost, so that she would not have to give it up to the police.—There were plenty of other ways besides inheriting. . . .

Whether the Hill Farm people were aware of the relationship or not—at any rate they didn’t give any sign of it but insisted that the new little girl should make herself useful. And after all this was no surprise to Ditte. Any one would have to be pretty low down in the world to come up to one of the rag and bone man’s family and say, We’re related, you and I. All the same it was a secret satisfaction to know that she had relations above her—it gave her something tangible in the direction of her longings. There was a beaten track to fortune, others of her family had gone along it before her.

For the present, at all events, the farm was no disappointment to her. Ditte was not troubled by the atmosphere of gossip and bad repute; and there was just enough excitement in it to keep her childish spirit from losing its buoyancy. Ditte had promised herself a great deal in her new world, so much that she shuddered to plunge into it. And for the present she had no reason to feel that she had been cheated; here

were dark riddles enough. The darkness here seemed to come to life about one, sometimes it positively caught one by the legs.

But the daylight had also its story. They kept a cask of meat here as at the "Crow's Nest," only much bigger; you didn't have to run out and buy something for every meal. There were hens here who went and laid their eggs in all sorts of impossible places; pigs that stood stretching up all day long with their feet in the trough—which was always empty no matter how much you poured into it; there were young calves whose eyes turned to strange blue lights in the twilight of the cowshed, when they were allowed to lick one's hand. Ditte recognized it all with an odd kind of gladness; it gave her the same sensation below the heart as when hot tallow from the candle ran over her fingers. The milk-strainer was hung up to dry on the scullery doorpost, and such implements as the scythe-sharpener and the hoe were thrust into the eaves of the outhouses. The ax stuck fast in the block, so fast that it could hardly be jerked out, and the scythes hung in the big hawthorn outside the farmyard, with the sharp blades against the trunk—all these precautions lest children should come to any harm.

This was the "Crow's Nest" over again, only much bigger. Even Pers the cat had his absolute double here—a regular sluggard who lay all day long on a warm stone basking in the sun. But at night nobody saw him, except the rats and mice. His likeness to Pers was positively uncanny, and he was just as affectionate with her. It was almost as if they had known

each other always, and if she had not known better . . . but then she had herself seen the innkeeper pounce on Pers with his huge goblin's claws and shove him into a sack—for stealing his fish. First he gave the sack a couple of whacks against the stone quay and then hove it into the harbor—and there were stones in the sack. It wasn't even certain that Pers had stolen the innkeeper's fine plaice: Fore-and-Aft Jakob was prowling about close by and was, by no means so foolish as they made out. At any rate the "Ogre" need not have left his basket on the ground. But Pers had to die—in spite of the children's tears. And now it almost seemed as if he had risen from the grave. Even in his wild appetite for fish he was as like the real Pers as two peas. Every morning he went down to the beach and jumped out on to one of the rocks. There he lay in wait for flounders and other small fish that kept in the shallow water, and when they came near enough he slipped a paw under them and pulled them up on to the rock. It was funny to watch the struggle between his fear of water and his dainty appetite and how it made him shiver all over. That was all the fish he got, for they never ate fish at the Hill Farm. They thought it gave you tapeworm.

CHAPTER II

HOMESICKNESS

EVERY morning about four Ditte woke up at the sound of shambling footsteps on the cobblestones leading to the door of her little room. This was the middle-aged day-laborer, who always called her when he came in the morning. Ditte didn't like him; his mouth was always dirty—with chewing tobacco and bad language, and they said he was not good to his wife and children. She was out of bed in a second. "I *am* up!" she shouted, hanging on to the door-bolt with all her weight. If she was not before him, he would push the upper half-door wide open and stand there grinning, with his dirty mouth gaping wide and showing his black teeth.

As soon as she heard him go up to the house again, she let go of the bolt and slipped into her thin clothes, with her heart beating wildly against her gray shift, while she stood plaiting her hair and gazing out at the day through the open half-door. She held one of the plaits in her mouth while her fingers were busy with the other, blinking out towards the sea, where daybreak lay sparkling with a thousand fires. The strong morning air streamed in on her from every side, a strange blending of fragrance, light and freshness, and flowed through her from the roots of her hair

to the tips of her toes. It made her sneeze and drop the plait out of her mouth.

Then she was out on the cobblestones, with her hair combed straight and two thin plaits hanging down her back, rather blue with the cold and wide awake. She was like a bird that suddenly shoots out of the darkness under the bushes and is struck flat by the light. She stole a glance up at the house—and suddenly started off round the corner.

“Now I’m hanged if the lass isn’t off to the sea again,” said the laborer, who was sitting in the kitchen munching his breakfast. “She must be quite mad about that water; one would think she had fishes’ blood in her.”

“Well, let her,” answered the servant girl—“it don’t hurt anybody. Neither the mistress nor the son is up yet.”

Ditte shot away on her bare feet through the sharp wet bent-grass, right out to the high cliff where she had the sea spread out beneath her, in a marvelous rose-colored calm or gray and lashed into foam, according to the weather. Which it might be didn’t matter, Ditte didn’t care about the sea, not a bit. It had never done her any good; it had filled Granddad with rheumatism and had brought uneasiness into Granny’s life and her own too. But there was this about it, that it washed the fishing hamlet too; it was the same water in both places and you could have sailed there, if the Hill Farm had had a boat. Ditte didn’t mind what the sea looked like; it had eaten up the land at the Naze Farm and made them poor, and in stormy weather it had

shaken Granny's cottage and sent its spray right up to its windows. She knew of pleasanter things. But if she was lucky, she might be in time to see the boats returning from their night's fishing. The distance was too great for her to distinguish one from another; but her father's boat was among them and she was sure he would be looking out in her direction. She chose one of them for his and followed it till it disappeared behind the Naze, where the fishing hamlet lay hidden.

This kind of nonsense was not to the taste of Karen of the Hill Farm, and at first she had tried to put a stop to it. But as it was no use and the girl was well-behaved and willing in other ways, she explained it as a sort of craze and gave up fighting against it. The child's father and grandfather and perhaps many more generations had been seafaring men, so the attraction was not to be wondered at.

Except in this one matter Ditte was not good at asserting herself; Lars Peter's fear that she might be too determined in standing up for her rights and so make difficulties for herself proved to be quite unfounded. Ditte's bravery did not take this form; she was governed by one feeling only—a desire to suit herself to her surroundings and above all to her mistress, and to do her duty as well as she was able. An angry word or look was enough to plunge her into black despair and make her feel the most wretched creature on earth.

Ditte was not one of those who want a thing said twice; as a rule she knew what to do without being

told. She came from the lowest depths—and was therefore in the habit of doing more than might rightly be asked of her; there is often a fatal connection between the two things. From her birth it had been only too forcibly brought home to her that she had to serve others; everything in her existence accorded with this state of things, and she had a positive yearning to make herself useful. If she neglected anything it was never intentional.

And now she was even going to get wages for her work—she was grown up! For the present she was engaged to mind the cows and sheep and for the summer she was to have homespun for a dress, a pair of wooden shoes, a pound of wool, a holland shift—and five crowns in cash if she worked well. The innkeeper had settled it all for them and got his fee for the hiring.

She did not spare herself, and by the time she drove the cows on to the Common, late in the forenoon, she was already tired. She had been up with the sun and had helped to milk and get the breakfast for the farm hands, had scoured pans and pails and run after one thing and another. They were everlastingly whistling and calling for the “little girl”; she had to save everybody’s legs.

But on the Common she could make up for it by taking things easily—only she had to be careful not to fall asleep. The Common was a wide, low-lying tract behind the high coast-line; the underground water which could not escape into the sea collected here. Originally it had all been a lake, which had become

overgrown in course of time; when the cows moved over the pasture it set up a wavy motion which often spread far on either side. Grass and rushes alternated with swamp and low clumps of birch, aspen and alder where the ground rose; each little group of trees was encircled by its wreath of heather. The center of the little thicket was high and dry, and here Ditte made herself comfortable in cozy nests of dry rushes spread over broken brushwood, and she brought flowers and last year's bullrushes—and thousand-year-old musselshells which showed up gleaming white in the coal-black mole-casts. By standing on the tips of her toes she could look over the top of the foliage and keep an eye on the cattle—it was all on such a small scale that she could make herself quite snug.

Here and there were peat-cuttings. The pits with their black edges and the dark bog-water reminded her of sorrow and death—of earth thrown upon a black coffin—and intruded brutally upon the delicate, care-free shimmer of sunshine and plant-life and humming insects. They gave a note of capricious insecurity to all existence. One might go about here humming to one's self—and suddenly burst out crying, without its seeming absurd. And that might be just as well now and then.

There was plenty to play with and Ditte busied herself to the best of her ability. Her nests were full of promising things which she came across while driving the cattle—speckled bird's eggs, pretty feathers, a dead mole with the softest of skins. But playing with all these treasures was not quite in her line; she couldn't

make up any story about them, hadn't the necessary imagination. She had never had time to play, and so the sources of it had dried up within her. The days were long gone by when Granny had only to paint a face on one of Sören Man's old wooden shoes and put a cloth round it for Ditte to find a playmate at once. From those days she was separated by a long and toilsome existence.

So she just sat and looked at the things, put one down and took up another—and was tired of it. Her mistress had given her some knitting to take out; she was to knit so many rows. She usually knitted twice as much as she need have done, but still it did not help her to kill time—she was too quick with her fingers. And then her thoughts came upon her—her sad thoughts.

Loneliness and the longing for home lay heavily upon her—especially at first, and she often cried the hours away. She missed her father and her younger brothers and sisters, and all the little things she had to do for them. Her head was all too full of worries, there was always something that troubled her—had Povl's wooden shoes been mended before they had gone too far?—did Sister Else still get enough to eat? She was so fond of dawdling over her food and chattering away the time, especially in the morning. And then all of a sudden it was schooltime and she had to leave everything and run! She often left her lunch behind her and they always had to watch her. And her father—was there anybody to look after him? Did he get his beer boiling hot when he came back freezing

after his night at sea? And were his sea clothes properly hung up to dry?

Ditte could not help thinking of all these things—and all in vain; her powerlessness made her cry. A holiday was not to be thought of: who would look after the cows and do all the work that was waiting for her when she brought them home towards evening? And she never had a message from home. So she always imagined the worst—her father was drowned, or one of the children was ill and wanted nursing. Her little heart bled all in vain.

When her loneliness and longing oppressed her she could not bear to stay on the low ground among the bushes, but had to go up to the fields above, where she had a view of the cottages across the Common, the mill by the farm—and above all the high road! There were always people going along it; if she was lucky she might recognize somebody from the neighborhood of the fishing hamlet. And then it was just as if some one had given her a kindly thought—it brought her comfort. Was it God, perhaps?

In Ditte's world they did not altogether believe in God, but left the question open. The life of a poor man did not exactly furnish any obvious proof of his existence; if there was a God, he kept pretty much to the grand folks. And it was always they who trotted him out and used his name when they wanted to do the poor people down. That was the way Granny had looked at it—and Lars Peter: the only two Ditte had any reason to trust fully. At any rate it was no use turning to him with one's troubles; experience

showed that sufficiently clearly. Of course the parson said you ought to cast all your sorrows upon the Lord, but at the same time he gravely warned you against giving him the blame for your misery.

But Ditte felt instinctively compelled to turn her face up towards the light, especially when any unexpected good thing happened to her. For the bad things one blamed one's self—since they were not to be avoided; but one had to have somewhere to turn in one's gratitude. And so it came to be Heaven, after all. Anyhow Granny was up there, for she *was* in Heaven, there couldn't be any doubt about that. And so, perhaps, she would have to find room there for God too—for Granny's sake! Ditte thought a great deal about Granny at this time, and sometimes even called to her aloud. She felt the need of one, at any rate, who could see how sorrowful she was.

One day, when she was lying in her most unhappy mood, Granny suddenly stood bending over her. "Come now, little Ditte," she said, "we're going to fly home to the hamlet." "But you haven't any wings," said Ditte, crying worse than ever, for Granny was more humpbacked than before. "That doesn't matter, child, we'll just draw our legs well up under us—right up under our skirts!" And then they really flew, up over the hills and down through the dales; when they came too near the ground, they just drew their legs still higher up under their skirts. And all of a sudden they were over the hamlet; Lars Peter stood below with a big net ready to catch them. "Ditte!" he called out.

Ditte woke and jumped up in a fright; somebody was calling to her from the fields above. It was Karl, the son at the Hill Farm, and he was driving the cows out of the corn. She was paralyzed with fright and hadn't even the sense to run and help him. Then he came slowly down towards her; he always dragged his feet heavily when he walked, as if he was tired of everything. "You must have fallen asleep," he said—with a touch of sarcasm. Then he noticed that she had been crying and looked at her seriously; but said nothing.

Ditte was ashamed of having cried and slept, and hastily wiped the tears from her face. Not that she was afraid of him; he was an inoffensive young man of seventeen—a comical age for a fellow, she thought. It was difficult to take him seriously, although he was the son and therefore the real master of the farm; well, he didn't expect it either, but only wanted to be left in peace. He went to prayer meetings, perhaps she could ask him . . . ? Ditte did not altogether like Granny's not having any wings.

"Do you think old women get into Heaven?" she asked, turning half away; it was a silly sort of question to ask all the same.

"I'm sure I don't know," he answered slowly. "I suppose it depends on what they have been like." He stared in front of him with a look of profound reflection, as though it had to be thought out thoroughly, so as not to do any one an injustice.

Well, Granny had been good—better than anybody could say. So if that was all it depended on . . .

He stood a while staring at the same spot and pondering. "We must not judge—either one way or the other," he said with a deep sigh.

Ditte burst out laughing; he looked so comic when he sighed.

"It's nothing to laugh at," he said, and went away offended.

A little way off he stopped. "You may be glad it wasn't Mother who came and found the cows in the corn," he said.

"Why, aren't you going to tell your mother?" Ditte asked in astonishment—it had never occurred to her that she would get off free.

"No, why should I?"

Well, why? Why indeed?—"But the farm is to be yours," it suddenly struck her.

"Well—yes!" He smiled a little at the idea—to Ditte's great surprise. She had never thought he could.

She stood looking after him and quite forgot all her own troubles. He walked like an old man—or one born under a curse. He couldn't have had much joy in life—it was said that his mother still used to beat him. And far worse things than that were said! Ditte shuddered—she refused to think about it all.

But it wasn't always so easy to escape it. The women from the Common would find an excuse to come across and question her, apparently about quite innocent things. And when they had got an answer, they nodded and pursed their lips—as though they had heard the most terrible things confirmed. But Ditte

was not inclined to gossip about the people she served; she determined to keep guard on her tongue.

One day she sat watching the road, in the hope of catching sight of some acquaintance. A couple came driving past, a farmer and his wife—no doubt going to town to do some shopping. They beckoned to her and pulled up; she did not know them, but ran up all the same.

Had she seen a one-horse trap go by, with a big bay mare—a good while ago? She hadn't? Where did she belong? Weren't those the Hill Farm cattle she was minding?—they thought they knew them.—They fed you well there, didn't they?—or was it only so-so?—How was it now—the farm belonged to a widow, didn't it? Yes, now they remembered, Karen Bakkegaards¹ she was called, and she lost her husband about ten years ago—what a sad thing! But she didn't break her heart over it, not she.—Wasn't there a son of hers at the farm—and a regular day-laborer?—yes, of course, it was Rasmus Rytter from the Common here. Did he sleep at the farm?—oh, he went home at night. But perhaps he stayed sometimes—when there was a lot of work to be done?

They questioned her by turns and Ditte answered in all good faith. But when the woman wanted to know about the arrangements indoors and asked where Karen Bakkegaards had her bedroom and whether she slept alone in the house, Ditte pricked up her ears. Something in the woman's face told her that she had made a fool of herself again, a regular silly fool. Sud-

¹ Bakkegaard = Hill Farm.

denly she left the cart and dashed off into the meadow; then turned round and made faces at them, boiling with rage. "You're nothing but a pair of dirty liars!" she screamed hoarsely. "And you must be nasty yourselves, or you wouldn't be such gossipmongers!" The farmer threatened her with his whip and made as though he would jump out of the cart. But Ditte ran, up along the bank and across the fields. When she got to the marshland she lay down and recovered her breath and was quite terrified at what she had done. Supposing they came after her! Farmers were not the sort to trifle with, they always had the law on their side. Perhaps they would go straight to the authorities and complain about her when they got to town.

She couldn't get rid of this thought, it kept working in her and filled her with dismay. Who was there to help her, in her terribly forsaken state? There was nothing for it—she must go home!

It had happened to Ditte before that she had had to leave everything and rush off across the fields. Then she was like one possessed, so that she didn't even think of taking the road, but ran straight across country. Presently something or other stopped her—she ran into a swamp or was caught among thorns; her bare feet were bleeding and there were great rents in her dress. The fit had passed off and she had to pay for it; she crept back feeling very small and set herself to bathe her wounded feet and mend her dress—thankful that the damage was no worse.

After one of these desperate races she had peace.

Her ungovernable homesickness had worked itself out, and as she sat on the edge of the swamp with her sore feet in the water, sewing at her dress, everything sank within her. All her rebelliousness slipped away and left a little woman filled with the sweet languor that comes of a good cry. For a little while she need think of nothing and could abandon herself freely to her own concerns. She sat marveling at herself, and examined her legs, one of which had a birthmark high up on the thigh, and her slender sunburnt arms. Sun and wind had tanned her all over through her thin clothes. But she didn't like her color and stretched herself in the shallow, tepid water to wash the moldiness away. It had collected on her skin like old shadows.

Below her navel ran a dark stripe which she remembered of old, for Granny had noticed it when Ditte was little and had prophesied that she would be apt to have children and lots of them. But under her armpits there was a little reddish curly hair, and that was new and exciting. Ditte took her growing breasts in her hands and was quite proud to find how heavy they were already—especially when she bent forward. But then her back didn't please her, the action made a whole row of knobs stand out on it. She would have given something to be able to see herself from behind, to know whether her back was still crooked.

Suddenly she would be seized by a fear that somebody might come or that somebody might be spying on her from the fields above. She snatched her clothes and fled shrieking into the bushes to dress herself.

There was nothing much to spy upon, after all—a

loose-limbed figure that belonged neither to a child nor to a grown-up girl and certainly had no power of reflecting the daylight in a warm glow! Ditte was scarcely destined to turn the head of any man. The most beautiful thing about her was still her heart—and that is not in demand. Nature has therefore wisely ordained that it shall be hidden well out of the way.

CHAPTER III

DITTE'S MISTRESS

KAREN BAKKEGAARDS and Ditte were in the scullery after dinner mixing rye-meal and plaster of Paris for the rats; all the others were taking their midday nap, the servant girl Sine too. Karen stood stirring the dry mixture together; she was heavy in her movements, and every time she changed her position her body gave off a strong smell which hurt Ditte's nose and made her shudder. The mixture was put up in little paper packets, which Ditte then placed in the worst rat-holes in the barn and threshing-floor—there were plenty of them. The farm was still, with a stillness that made one sleepy; Ditte had been up early and could have lain down on the stone floor and dropped off to sleep.

“There”—her mistress gave her the last packets in her apron. “When they've got through all that they're not likely to ask for any more.”

“Is it very poisonous?” asked Ditte.

“Poisonous—no, it's the most harmless stuff in the world, as far as that goes. But when the rats have had their fill of it, they have to go straight off and drink—for it's dry eating, you see. And as soon as the water gets to the plaster it turns it stiff. Just like a lump of stone in their bellies—that's how it's done!”

Ditte gave a little horrified moan. "Oh, but it must be a frightful death," she said.

Karen swayed from side to side in annoyance. "Pooh!—why should it be? The main thing is to get rid of the vermin, so it doesn't matter how it's done. There are many kinds of death, and they all lead the same way. . . . When is it you're expecting your mother to come out?"

The question took Ditte by surprise and hurt her—chiefly perhaps on account of the line of thought it betrayed. "It will be a little while yet," she whispered.

"Do you think she got hold of the money?" Karen went on; she was in a talkative mood to-day.

Ditte didn't know. She would have liked best to have held her tongue; that was what she generally did when any one questioned her about the crime, but her mistress *had* to be answered. "Granny had it on her," she said quietly.

"Yes, stupid fool! She ought to have put it in the savings bank and not sat hatching it. Then you'd have had it now—for it was to come to you. And there'd have been much more of it too." Karen reckoned it up. "Five hundred dollars it would have come to now—a thousand crowns! A lot of money for a poor girl like you, when you came to get married. The Sands Farm people must have had a fair bit—that's where it came from, wasn't it?"

Ditte was longing to slip out; the subject tortured her, and the acrid smell—of sweat and other things—that surrounded her mistress, took away her breath.

She felt giddy and faint standing close to this stout female, whose tread was so heavy and who took such a firm grasp of everything—she felt like some tiny creature that might at any moment be trodden upon inadvertently. “Shall I drive the cows out now?” she asked, making for the door.

Karen glanced at the grandfather’s clock in the next room. “Yes, you run off now—but call Rasmus Rytter first.”

That was the worst thing Ditte could be asked to do. She was terrified of Rasmus, and it was impossible to wake him. They used to say it was a trick of his—he slept so soundly just to make the girls come right up to him. Sine came out of her room behind the scullery and Ditte looked beseechingly at her, but the girl was scarcely awake yet and did not understand. “Cut off with you; what are you waiting for?” said the mistress.

Ditte crossed the yard slowly and hesitatingly and began calling through the open barn-door; Karen Bakkegaards stood at the scullery-door watching her movements attentively. “Look at the silly girl,” she said in annoyance; “I’m blessed if she don’t think she can bring the man to life with shouting.”

“She’s afraid of him,” said Sine with reluctance; she didn’t like this business.

“Afraid—pooh! I’ll teach her to give herself airs!—You’ve got to climb right up to him in the hay and give him a shake; but take care he don’t pull off your cherub’s wings,” she cried derisively.

Ditte was still standing at the barn-door; she glanced

doubtfully from the dark barn to her mistress and back again. "Shall I have to come and help you?" Karen called. Then at last she slipped inside, but it was evident that she was just hiding.

Karen fumbled with her wooden shoes; she was so wild that she couldn't get into them. Now she'd give the girl a lesson! But Sine was already across the yard. "Just you get the cows out and clear off, I'll call him," she said, and pushed Ditte out of the barn on the other side. Her mistress was in no very gracious mood when she came back: Such nonsense; the idea of having to put up with the likes of that. You got nothing but hysterical nincompoops nowadays, who shrieked if they saw an earwig. It did them good to learn something in time—girls of that sort! But Sine was used to this and took no notice; her mistress might keep on as long as she liked, she was bound to get tired sooner or later.

And this time Karen came to a full stop fairly soon. Suddenly they heard the rumbling of a cart; it came down over the hill at a tremendous pace, swung into the yard and up to the front door without drawing rein. The driver pulled up with a jerk and cracked his whip gaily; he was a dealer. "Is there anything for sale to-day?" he called to Karen Bakkegaards, who was standing at the scullery-door putting on her wooden shoes.

"Yes, we have a fat calf," she replied, coming forward.

Ditte caught a glimpse of the visitor as she let the cows out of the shed, but she would have known him

by the noise he made—nobody else drove like that. It was Uncle Johannes, and he was in a stiff hat and a fine brown dust-coat—a regular town outfit. *He* was not doing so badly, anyhow!

Ditte knew something of what it meant to be talked about. Her people had never been able to get away from it, the shadow followed them wherever they went. "Ah, that's the rag and bone man's girl—the folks who used to be at Sands Farm," people would say, and put such a lot into the expression. Then they knew all about it and the gossip was well started—about Maren the witch, and Sörine Man's crime, and the dog butcher. Ditte knew it all only too well; it was easy enough to see when people were talking about you. As a rule they didn't take any trouble to hide it.

And you may be sure they didn't leave anything out. The rag and bone man's family had to answer for a good deal more than could justly be laid at their door, and much more than they cared about. Nobody grudged them anything in this way. Rumors, which nobody would answer for and nobody really believed in either, cropped up casually, went their round and disappeared again—and every one took a delight in passing them on. It seemed as if the injustice people had done to the rag and bone man were the cause of their hatred. Perhaps they wanted to find an acceptable excuse for their ill-feeling towards the family and quieted their evil conscience by inventing every possible bad thing about them; in his tireless struggle against the light man is wont to look for the source

of evil outside himself. In any case Lars Peter and his belongings were pariahs, once and for all; they were to be bullied to make up for their ill-success. In this case there was no need to keep very close to the truth—for we know that reality surpasses the wildest imagination. Besides the family were entitled to put all evil reports to shame by their conduct.

They used this right to the best of their ability, with industry, orderly behavior and fair dealing. It had often been difficult enough to adapt one's self to existence without giving public opinion a handle against one; and Ditte could not understand how other people could be so indifferent about what was said of them. Her mistress was also talked about; but she took no trouble to shame the gossips, not she. She was not humbled by what they said, but rather looked down on other people; she laughed at what they said and did exactly as she pleased. Ditte did not understand this contempt for everything decent and nice; it must be what was meant by taking pride in one's disgrace.

Although Karen Bakkegaards had been a widow for some ten years, her married life was still constantly talked about. She had been a good and attractive girl when young, and there was nothing against the man she married either; it could even be said that he was a God-fearing man. But, whatever the reason may have been, whether they did not suit each other, or other forces were at work—her marriage left her quite a different woman from her former self. Some thought that the marriage had been like an ill-assorted pair of horses, each of them good in single harness, and that

they had spoilt each other. Others stuck to it that there was bad blood in the family, and that it came out when she had reached the right age. It wasn't the first time one had seen first-rate girls turn into crazy scolds when they had a house and home to look after. At any rate they hated each other as only man and wife can hate, and they poisoned each other's existence whenever they had the chance. And at this game *she* came out best. For the farm was hers, so she could easily make him feel that he hadn't brought anything into it. And she didn't mind letting him know what a pauper he was when everybody could hear it. They had three sons all the same, so there must have been moments now and then when they were not altogether cat and dog. But they can't have been so very many.

After they had been married some years he got consumption—from not being able to get even with her, some said, while others had it that she had intentionally given him damp sheets to sleep in. Whether from regret or some other reason, she bought brandy and sweet punch to give him pluck with the beasts, and drank with him herself to make him take more. And she succeeded, too, in killing the consumption, but the man was a wreck. To begin with he had never been able to touch strong drink, and now he always went about fuddled. "My wife's so fond of me that she keeps me in spirits," he used to say; and then Karen laughed in a way that folks never forgot.

This was not a pleasant home for the boys to grow up in, and it almost came as a relief to them when,

one winter's morning, they found their father hanging in the barn. So they were fatherless and the farm had no master. And a widow's bed strikes rather colder than a marriage bed—even if they lie back to back; Karen would have been quite ready to marry again, especially if she could thereby have got a little more money for the farm.

But nobody was quite bold enough to take the place of the suicide; and so it was that she had to struggle with everything and with her three sons too. This didn't improve her temper, and as the sons grew up and wanted to have a say, she got on worse and worse with them. So they began to leave home; the eldest studied for a teacher and now had a school near the capital; the second took a place as a farm hand. If he *had* to obey others, he said, then he preferred to be under strangers.

People thought it a strange thing to say. Was there anything more natural for a son than to submit to his mother and obey her—if he was fond of her, of course. But, whatever may have been the reason, the sons at the Hill Farm had no liking for their mother. Only the youngest, Karl, stayed at home, not because he liked it any better than the others, but because he hadn't the power to shake himself free of his mother's rule. He was a poor creature, ready to cry if you looked at him. He never laughed, but always went about with a look of weariness and guilt. It was whispered that his mother had an unnatural power over him, and that it was remorse for this that sat heavy on him and drove him to the prayer meetings.

Ditte had sharp ears—she heard everything that was said. A lot of it she didn't understand, but she interpreted it in her own way, and together with the daily life it made up an oppressive feeling which was always hanging over her. Nothing was comfortable at the Hill Farm; they all kept their thoughts to themselves and there was no room for sharing any joy. The mistress blamed the sea for it, that cursed sea; when she had had a drop too much she would come out into the farmyard and let herself go about it. But her son thought that God had turned his face away from the farm. Sine alone was rosy-cheeked and unconcerned and went about her work without bothering; and Ditte liked her company best.

With her mistress she didn't know how to get on. She offered her a genuine, natural respect, since her mistress was the providence from whom everything, good as well as evil, was derived; hers was the hand that chastened and that graciously provided food. And Karen was generous about food—as a good farm wife should be; she was always going about with a carving-knife in her hand, and there were big grease-stains on her protruding stomach. She was greedy herself and did not grudge the others their food. This made up for a good deal; the Hill Farm had a name for a good larder. But there were so many other odors given off by her powerful frame which turned Ditte's head and made her shudder.

Ditte had been taught that she ought not only to do her duty by those whose bread she ate, but also to be fond of them. She did her duty to the full, but it was

not in her to be fond of her mistress. Even when she sat out in the meadows eating her good lunch, she could not get so far as that. She felt that she was in a way disloyal and was sorry about it.

CHAPTER IV

A WELCOME VISITOR

DITTE had finished her knitting, and had emptied her basket, although it was not near the lunch hour; but it passed the time—and time was heavy on her hands. It was the loneliness that was so difficult to get through; she didn't care about playing and wasn't made for it either—not now, at any rate, and the beasts were no company. She was interested in them as far as her duty went, took care that they didn't do any damage or come to any harm themselves, and she was fond of them in a way. She showed it especially when some young calf or other had got hurt, by chafing itself against the wire fence or by a scratch from the horns of one of the older beasts. Then she was really busy and could not do enough as long as there was need. But she never got intimate with them; cows were cows and sheep were sheep—just like nature in general; a thing one took for granted. Their affairs only concerned her so far as they were part of her daily work; they might be funny enough at times—the beasts—but she didn't see so very much in them.

Ditte was a sociable little body; she liked to hear a couple of voices chattering all the time, and one of them had to be her own. It was at least as amusing to talk one's self as to listen—if only one had some-

body to talk to. She sat up at the top end of the field looking out over the landscape, sick at heart of tedium and longing. "If only something would happen, something really amusing!" she thought, and repeated it aloud again and again, as though to fill the void. And suddenly she was silent, stretching forward. She would not believe her eyes and shut them tight; but when she opened them, there it was again. Far away down the highroad a boy came running; he turned into the meadows, shouting and making signs. He had his bag of school-books over his shoulder! Ditte was too much taken aback to run and meet him, but sat where she was and burst out crying, she was so happy.

Kristian threw himself down on the grass at her feet, said nothing but just lay panting. "You've played truant," said Ditte as soon as she had collected herself—trying to look severe. But she couldn't hit the right tone; to-day she was more inclined to be grateful to the runaway. And the rascal put out his tongue for an answer. Nor did he make any reply to all the questions she asked, but lay getting his breath, with the black soles of his bare feet sticking up in the air. They had all kinds of marks on them; there was a deep cut in one heel, most likely from a piece of glass he had trodden on. Ditte examined the wound, which was black with dirt. "You must have a rag on that," she said, pressing it slightly; "or else it'll gather."

"Pooh—it's only something I did yesterday when I ran home from school, it's healed already. I only run on my toes!"

He was on his feet again; he had not come to lie down and be lazy. He took a rapid survey of the ground. "Let's go down there," he said, pointing to the marsh; it was not exciting up here.

Ditte showed him her hiding-place in the bushes. "That's fun," Kristian admitted; "but the entrance ought to be hidden, so that nobody can find the nest—or else there isn't anything in it. That's the way every bird does, you know." Well, Ditte was not a bird and didn't want to hide; she was only thinking about the sun and the wind. But Kristian showed her how to intertwine the branches so that the entrance could not be seen at all. "Then you can play at being some one who has done something and has to hide," he said. Ditte looked at him in surprise; she could not make out what pleasure there could be in that.

But how crazy he was about everything, that boy. Even in the quiet, passive cows he saw something new. Ditte's mind had never found much to feed upon in these meadows, but Kristian looked at everything in wonder—as though it had just dropped from the sky and wasn't all familiar and a matter of course.

The little pools made him quite beside himself. The first thing to be done was to make a bridge over to one of the many tufts—*islands*, he called them. This was done with the help of a couple of poles and some birch twigs; Ditte had to find the materials. In this way you could connect all the islands with one another and travel right round the world.

"This is fine!" he said, and repeated it so often that Ditte was quite irritated at last.

"I think it's nicer at home," she said.

"That's because you're a silly," Kristian answered. "But you can come home and stay there instead of me."

He had never talked to her like this before; but here she was so decidedly insignificant that all her self-respect had vanished. No, she would not have minded changing places, but of course it was no use thinking about it.

"Where do you get your dinner?" asked Kristian suddenly in the middle of their play.

Ditte was struck dumb and stared at him for a moment; then she started to run up the hill. "Come on, hurry!" she cried. When it was getting on for noon she had to keep an eye on the old mill from the fields above, but to-day she had forgotten all about it. Oh, but the shutter was not thrown open yet.

"That's a rotten signal," said Kristian; "when you're down there with the cows you can't see the mill. Why don't they make some sound—for you're within hearing all the time?"

"Make a sound?" Ditte looked at him stupidly.

"Yes, hammer on something, of course."

They sat there watching the shutter. Kristian had calmed down now and could answer questions sensibly; Ditte's expression was all curiosity. "Has anybody had babies at the village?" she asked, watching his lips eagerly.

"Yes, Martha!" Kristian answered, nodding.

"That's not true, Kristian—you're telling me lies!" Ditte counted up and saw that it wouldn't do.

“Well, but she’s going to—Lars Jensen’s widow says so. I heard her say it myself!”

Pooh—Ditte looked disappointed—was that all! “Hasn’t anything at all happened since I came away?” she asked. “Who is Johanne keeping company with? With Anton, I suppose? Anybody could see that it wouldn’t last very long with Peter.”

That stupid Kristian didn’t know anything about it. On the other hand he could tell her that the village had got a new kind of sea-going decked boat, with a proper fore-castle to sleep in. But that didn’t interest Ditte.

Did little Povl ask after her much? Lars Jensen’s widow was good to him, wasn’t she? Kristian said yes to both questions at once. He wouldn’t separate them, because then he would have had to explain that Lars Jensen’s widow was not with them at all, and that would have been too longwinded.—But why hadn’t Kristian got his lunch in his bag?—the questions came thick and fast now. Kristian had eaten up his lunch on the way out; there was nothing strange about that—nothing new, at any rate. But he preferred to tell her that he had dropped it as he ran—it sounded better and made a good excuse for being hungry. And hungry he was—as hungry as a house—as hungry as from here to the hamlet! Why on earth didn’t they throw open that shutter?

Ditte’s eyes went over him searchingly. His hair wanted cutting, but she could manage that in the afternoon with her work scissors. And his jacket ought to have been let out in the sleeves—now it was too late. It was easy to see that things were left to take care

of themselves. Anyhow he was looking bonny—his cheeks were no thinner. And he seemed pleased too, she noticed that with satisfaction.

“Oh, and the Ogre’s wife’s dead,” he said casually.

Ditte gave a start. “The innkeeper’s wife? Why didn’t you tell me that long ago?”

“Oh, I suppose I forgot it. You can’t remember everything.”

Ditte began a regular cross-examination, but at that moment the shutter was thrown open at the mill. “There,” she said, rising to her feet; “now you can stay here and mind the cows while I run home to dinner. Then I shan’t have to take them with me.”

Kristian stared at her dumbfounded. “Mayn’t I come too?” he asked, ready to cry.

“No, that wouldn’t do at all. It would look as if you were hungry and had come just to get something to eat.”

“But so I have.” Kristian was not at all willing to stand on ceremony.

“I dare say—but it won’t do to show it,” Ditte explained decisively. “But if you’re sensible I shan’t be long—and I’ll put something in my pocket for you.”

So Kristian had to be patient. He lay on his stomach and thrust his fist into his mouth to stave off his hunger, which had become quite unconscionable since there was food in the offing. And Ditte shot off home to the farm.

Karen Bakkegaards had been out to open the shutter herself. She saw the child running up without her cows and stayed outside the yard waiting for her.

"What's the matter with you to-day?" she asked with a sneer. "Are you off your head, or are you so starved that you hadn't time to bring the cows up?"

Ditte's face flushed like fire. "My brother's out there," she said. "So I thought I needn't—"

"Oh, and is he built that way that he don't have to have any food? I suppose you're not so well off at home that you can bring your own food with you? Well, he needn't have it if he don't like it."

"He can quite well wait till he gets home," Ditte wanted to say, but burst out crying instead. It had been hard enough to sacrifice Kristian to appearances; she knew his appetite and what a bad hand he was at going without his food for long at a time. And now all she had done was to tread on her mistress's corns—that was all she got out of being well behaved. "He *is* so terribly hungry," she said in the midst of her sobs.

"A nice fuss to make about things—silly brats! But I suppose that's good manners, not to say when you're hungry—poorhouse manners, that is!" Karen kept on scolding till they reached the house.

But she didn't really mean it. Ditte was let off her midday duties and was allowed to run off with some food for her brother as soon as she had finished; and it was a pretty good basket she had with her. "If he leaves anything, he can take it home with him," said Karen. "You don't live too well at home, do you?"

Karen Bakkegaards was nothing of a softy; this was the first time she had had a kindly thought for Ditte's home. She was not very indulgent towards poverty;

it was people's own fault if they were poor. But as we know she was free with her food.

After Kristian's visit Ditte calmed down more. All the fancied ills and misfortunes that her timid imagination had conjured up when thinking of her home were blown away by the wind of reality. She had had a real live greeting from home—Kristian, out at elbows as usual and the same old vagabond. This last was not altogether good; she was worried about his always yielding to the truant impulse and she kept an eye on the road. But in her heart she hoped soon to see him running here again.

CHAPTER V

DITTE VISITS HOME

THE only one Ditte could stand up to was the son. With the others she did not count as a person, but only as a piece of household goods. If over some hard job she complained of backache, her mistress only said: "Your back—pooh! Why you haven't anything but a row of bones!" And the others were like that too; they could make use of one, but they didn't take one seriously. Sine perhaps could see the child in her and was patient with her; but Ditte would rather have been treated like a grown-up.

With Karl it was another thing. He was seventeen and his face looked as cheerful as an undertaker's. He dragged his feet as if they had lead in them, and seemed as if his heart was broken already. Ditte could see well enough there was something or other that troubled him, but that was no reason for going about like a man who was going to be hanged. She had lots of worries of her own and it wasn't always easy to find a way out of them; but that didn't make her hang her head all the time.

It was too comic to watch how careful he was to shuffle aside if anything came in his way. Ditte could not resist the temptation of planting herself in his path to tease him, she went for him whenever she could. If she met him with a bucket of water, she

would spill some quite accidentally over his feet; and if *she* had made his bed, you may be sure there was something wrong with it. Either the bottom of it would fall out, or else she had slipped something into it so that he couldn't stop scratching himself and had to get up and shake out the sheets in the middle of the night.

Ditte had found one on whom she could revenge herself in a good-natured way for all she had to submit to; and she availed herself of it to the full. Karl put up with her teasing and behaved almost as if he didn't notice it. It made no difference in his behavior to her, either one way or the other. Ditte wouldn't have minded if he had got wild and landed her one on the ear; but the most he could do was to look unhappy.

The other two sons seldom came home. Ditte had seen one of them—the teacher—once at the farm; the other—the farm hand—had not been home at all during the summer.

At midday one Saturday just before harvest the teacher came on a visit. When Ditte came dawdling home he was standing out in the yard, bareheaded and erect and looking cheerful—a bright contrast to all the rest. He and his mother had either had a tiff already or were very near it; you could feel that in the air. He stood looking out to sea, as though quite taken up by the view; his mother busied herself at the pump with the pans and things and threw him challenging glances. When any of the others came near she screened her eyes with her hand in imitation of her son's attitude of gazing. He saw it but took no notice.

"Well, what do you make of it? Perhaps you can tell us what they're going to have for dinner in Sweden?" Ditte heard her mistress say.

"Sweden is not in that direction, mother," he answered with a laugh. "You'll have to go round to the other side."

"You don't say so—how clever you are! But what are you staring at then?"

"Oh, I think the sea is shining so gaily to-day," he said teasingly. "No farm in the country is so beautifully situated. The only pity is that it's like pearls before swine." And he laughed heartily.

"Is there something shining, did you say?" She came right up to him and stood looking out from his position, putting on a stupidly innocent expression. "Yes, you're right—now I can see it; blame me if it don't shine like cat's dirt in the moonlight! Oh, but it's lovely! Good Lord Almighty!" And she clapped her thighs with delight. "Why didn't they think of it and put the farm right out in the sea—the old people; then we shouldn't have had to worry about food or drink! But p'raps we'd better go in now and feed—those of us that can't live on the sight of a lot of silly water." She turned and went in; her son followed her smiling.

To-day Rasmus Rytter was good enough not to come out with any of his dirty stories; he sat with his head in his plate and his hand shook a little. Even Karen Bakkegaards herself was half afraid of her son; she was not so loud and free-and-easy as usual. The son talked all the time in a bright and cheerful way, told

amusing stories from the capital and laughed at them, not a bit put out when the others didn't join in. Karl, of course, never laughed, and Rasmus Rytter and the mistress only when there was something smutty in it. As for Sine, nothing ever took hold of her, neither fun nor sadness; and it would have looked pretty strange if the youngster had tried to put a word in. But there was nothing to stop her fixing her eyes on the teacher, and she did so all through the meal. When he spoke the room brightened up, and Ditte thought she could breathe there much more freely to-day. It was easy to see that he had to do with children and understood their way of thinking.

"Have you any brothers and sisters?" he turned suddenly to Ditte. She blushed in her awkwardness, for she was not used to any one addressing her at table. When he heard that she had not been home yet, he became serious. "That's not right of you," he turned to his mother straight away.

"Oh, she ain't got nothing to complain about here," the woman answered, trying to shut him up.

"I'm not even sure that it's in accordance with the law to keep a newly confirmed child away from her home a whole summer," he continued. "At any rate it's not just."

"You needn't come teaching me the law—nor what's right and just neither," Karen answered, rising angrily from the table.

But they must have talked it over privately afterwards, mother and son, for as soon as Ditte had finished her midday work, her mistress came and told her

she might run home for a bit if she liked, the cattle could stay in the paddock.

"You're free till to-morrow evening—understand that!" the teacher called after her. Karen Bakkegaards made some objection or other, but Ditte didn't hear it. She was well on the way.

She hadn't been so happy and light of foot the whole summer. She was going home! Not only that, but she was going to sleep at home—a whole night! She kept repeating it to herself as she darted away—a whole night! That had been the worst of all—never to sleep under her father's roof, never to be able to tuck in the little ones and listen to their quiet, reliant breathing.

Sister Else was washing up when Ditte dashed into the kitchen, making her drop a plate in her fright. She had to stand on a stool to reach the sink, but was already quite a good little housewife; Ditte had a look at her washing-up and praised it. The little girl flushed with delight at her praise.

Lars Peter appeared from the garret, looking half-asleep. "Hullo, is that you, my girl!" he said joyously. "I thought I heard your voice." Ditte threw her arms round his neck and nearly knocked him down.

"Well, well—let a man get properly awake first," he said smiling and putting out his arms to steady himself. "This daytime sleep isn't worth what you get at night after all. It seems to cling about your head so."

Here Povl came rushing in from the harbor; some of the other children had told him that Big Sister had come home. "Have you got something for me?" he cried, before he was inside the door.

No, Ditte really hadn't anything—what was it to be?

"You know you promised me that when you went into service you would spend a whole crown on something for me," the boy said reproachfully. Well, it must have been something she had promised him lightly, just to keep him quiet. At any rate she couldn't recall it.

"But I'll really remember it next time," she said seriously, confirming her promise by a look.

"Yes, it doesn't do to promise the little ones anything thoughtlessly," said Lars Peter. "They have a better memory than the rest of us."

"I know, you say you'll give us things, but you never do it," Povl chimed in.

"Where's Kristian?" asked Ditte, taking the disappointed youngster on her lap.

"Kristian—he's at work; he's quite a man now," said her father. "He's been working for the innkeeper all the summer."

"He never said anything to me about that when he came to see me."

"What—has he been to see you? I never heard about that. Did you, children?" Lars Peter was quite surprised.

Yes, Sister Else knew about it. Kristian had confided in her—since she was now mistress of the house.

"You haven't said anything to me about it," said her father reprovingly.

"No, and why should she?" Ditte broke in bravely—"if Kristian had told it as a secret. Does he get anything for it?"

Lars Peter laughed. "The innkeeper isn't a man to give money if he can help it—he's better at taking it, he is. But the lad gets his food, and it's time he learned to do something and obey orders. It isn't so easy to keep an eye on him always, when you have to go to sea at night and get your sleep in the daytime. Have you heard that the innkeeper's wife's dead?"

Yes, Kristian had told her that. What did she die of?

H'm, well—Lars Peter glanced at the little ones. "You can go out and play for a bit, children," he said. The two little ones slowly dragged themselves out of the door, looking very aggrieved. "Well, you see, they wanted so much to have a child—and when you come to think of it, it's a very sad story. For even supposing people are bad—and it's no disparagement to say the innkeeper is that—you can't help admitting that we all want to have children—most of us anyhow. They must have done quite a lot for it; I've been told the innkeeper and his chapel folk used to kneel and pray to the Lord that he would look down in his mercy and bless her womb. But the Lord don't seem to have thought a child would be very well off in their care—something of the sort; anyway nothing came of all their hocus-pocus. And then it was that fellow came last autumn—the missionary the innkeeper brought down here to lead revival meetings. And so he and the wife prayed together in private and he laid hands on her and blessed her. And, one way or another, she was got with child."

"Then it was a miracle!" said Ditte solemnly.

“Yes, p'raps you can call it that—there's lots of things it isn't easy to grasp. All the same the innkeeper can't have had the right kind of faith when it came to the point, for he wasn't going to believe in any miracles. You know he was never very kind to her, but now he turned real bad. He beat her and kicked her, I'm told, and he did it in the nastiest way; they say he always went for the part of her body where she carried the child.”

Ditte gave a moan. “How could he?” she whispered, shrinking together. Her voice was hoarse.

“Yes, how could he? He was jealous of course—and you know what a devil he is when anything crosses him. It made her sick—and she died; and they say that when she was laid in her coffin, he wouldn't allow them to give her linen and thread in her grave so that she could deliver the child when her time came. That's always the custom when any one dies and is buried with a child unborn; but he was the hardest of the hard. ‘Let her stay as she is till Doomsday!’ that's what he said.

“And now it's on his own head, as is only just, since he's but a man—for all the talk of his fearing neither God nor the Devil. Folks that pass the churchyard at night have heard her complaining, ever since she was buried. And a week ago the innkeeper was driving home from town at night and couldn't get the horses past the churchyard. They stood there shaking with terror, and the sweat was steaming off them, and a voice kept calling from the grave for ‘swaddling-clothes—swaddling clothes!’ He had to tear his shirt into strips and lay

them on the grave before the voice stopped and he could get past with his horses. But he's been in a bad way since. Of course he's always running round as usual, but he's not the same man."

"Poor, poor woman," said Ditte. There were big tears in her eyes.

"Yes, you may well say that—there's a lot of evil in the world. But to keep up a quarrel beyond the grave—that's about the worst thing I've come across!—Well, but we mustn't make ourselves miserable over it," Lars Peter raised his voice. "Slip out now to the children—I know they want you. I'll have to go down and get the boat ready for to-night."

Ditte took Povl and Else by the hand and went out to visit friends and acquaintances. She would rather have left it undone, but that wouldn't do—they might have said she was too proud. The old folks at "Gingerbread House" were glad to see her. "My, how big you've grown!" they said, feeling her up and down. As for them, they were smaller than ever; those two dear people seemed to grow the wrong way. There was the usual smell of apples and lavender about the place.

They paid a visit to Lars Jensen's widow too. She was not a widow any longer, by the way, as the inn-keeper had paired her off with a new fisherman who had arrived at the village—his way of getting over the housing difficulty. But the children never called her anything but Lars Jensen's widow. She was quite touched by the visit, good soul. "Well, I couldn't be a mother to you, you see," she said, "but it's nice to see you so friendly all the same. For now I've got a hus-

band of my own on my hands, as you may have heard. I can't tell you exactly what he's like, for I've scarcely got acquainted with him yet, I haven't. It seems a bit strange to have a perfect stranger shoved in on one like that; to begin with you bite and kick and won't have anything to do with one another. But that passes off too—like everything else in this world." They had to stay and have coffee, and then went on with their round.

It was fun to go round like this and be treated like a grown-up and made a fuss of; Ditte quite felt that she was somebody.

But there had to be an end of this showing-off. It was Saturday and the house wanted properly putting in order; Else could only manage the most necessary everyday work. Ditte put on an old skirt and a rough apron and set to work at the house-cleaning.

It did her good to be at home again; it was unspeakably soothing to be looked at with eyes beaming with affection and pride—and admiration! How stout she had got and how rosy her cheeks were, and how she had grown and filled out. "You'll soon be a grown-up girl," said Lars Peter proudly; "before one can look round you'll be here with a sweetheart on your arm." The children hung round her, glad and boastful to have a grown-up sister who came home with the air of a strange world about her and talked big about things.

Povl was the one who clung to her most, so that she could scarcely get on with her work; he wanted to be on her lap the whole time. He had to make up for all the months when he had missed her. And it satisfied something in Ditte's heart to have him about her again

and be able to help him; his little body was grateful to her touch and she loved his continual "Oh, but Ditte *must!*" whenever he wanted something done.

Of course they would all sleep in the same bed. "You'll never manage it," said their father; "remember you've all grown." But Ditte was just as bent on it as the others, she was a regular child. "Aren't you coming?" they called out from the bed, and Ditte longed to crawl in among them. But she also wanted to sit up a little while and have some grown-up talk with her father.

"Well, how are you getting on?" he asked, when they had got rid of the others. "You look strong and healthy, so you can't be starved or overworked."

No, Ditte had nothing to complain of—as far as that went. But all the same she would like to come home and stay the winter; there was plenty for her to do here, and the Hill Farm was so far away.

"Yes, to be sure, we miss you every day—in more ways than one," said Lars Peter. "But as to bringing you home—a girl of your age—that would never do for poor people like us. Folks wouldn't like it."

"But Rasmus Olsen's Martha has always been at home," Ditte objected.

"Well, it's another thing with her," said Lars Peter hesitatingly; "and she's had to give up things for it too, I'm sure. No, the innkeeper doesn't like poor people being helped by their children; he couldn't even stand the sight of Kristian at home here. But if it's too far off, perhaps we can find you a place nearer home. There's a talk that the innkeeper's going to fit up a hotel

and bring holiday visitors, like they have in other places. Perhaps you could get a job there.”

No; then Ditte would rather stay where she was.

“And for another thing, it’s too soon to be changing your place,” said Lars Peter, “it gives you a bad name—whether you deserve it or not. Farmers never like those that change too often.”

“But why not—when they’re the cause of it themselves?”

“Because it shows too much independence—and that’s what they can’t stand. But if you keep the same place a long time, it shows that you’re ready to put up with a good deal—and that they always like.—But to talk about something else, do you ever see anything of Uncle Johannes? I hear he’s not a stranger at the Hill Farm.”

Ditte had only seen him once and didn’t think he had been there oftener. “Is there anything between him and Karen Bakkegaards perhaps?” she asked inquisitively.

“Well, at any rate the gossip goes that he’s courting your mistress—and that she doesn’t altogether dislike him. Whether it’s true or not I can’t guarantee; but he has cheek enough to aim that high. It’ll be a case of young and old; and that’s not a good thing, they say.”

Ditte was waked the next morning by somebody pulling her nose. She opened her eyes in bewilderment; Kristian and Povl were leaning over the bed, staring at her with mischief in their eyes, and Sister Else stood by the bedside with coffee. “You’re going to have coffee

in bed!" they cried, laughing heartily at her confused expression. She was not used to being called in that way.

It was getting late—she could see that by the sun. The little rascals had arranged the day before that she was to have a long sleep, and they slipped out of the bedclothes without her noticing it. "You are a nice lot!" she said, sitting up in bed; "I wanted to get up early and put the house straight."

"But it *is* straight!" they cried, delighted at the way they had taken her in.

While Ditte was dressing she had to tell them all about the Hill Farm and the cattle and the cat that was like Pers and the elderly laborer with his tobacco-stained mouth and black horse's teeth. "And then he's so fond of kissing," said Ditte—"he can hardly let one alone."

"Ugh, what a beast!" Kristian had to go and spit out of the open window. In doing so he caught sight of the boats out at sea. "Father's coming!" he cried, and rushed away—out of the kitchen door and down across the sandhills with loud yells of joy. The other two were also on the move; but Povl, who imitated everything Kristian did, had to go and spit out of the window before he did anything else. He had to crawl up on the bedstead to reach—and then got it all down his clothes; Ditte of course had to wipe him, and all that delayed them. At last he escaped and toddled off to the harbor—Ditte could follow him from the window; he stumbled and rolled every moment, he was in such a hurry. He was the same funny little fatty as ever.

Ditte would have gone down to the beach too, but there was a knock on the wall. It was Mother Doriom; Ditte went in to her. "I could hear you were come," she sneezed—"I could hear your voice." She coughed between every word and the phlegm gurgled in her like a pot of potatoes on the boil. She was lying in a fearful state as usual; Ditte tried to prop her head up a little, and the pillows were like clammy oilcloth to the touch.

"Well, here one has to lie and rot and yet can't manage to die," she complained. "There's nobody to look after one, and one's no use to anybody. The son's away at sea and never comes home, and his wife does nothing but gad about. She's in the family way again, they say—my eyes aren't good enough to see such things. And what does it matter—if only one could die soon. If it wasn't for Fore-and-Aft Jakob I might lie here and perish; he's the only one that looks after me. Come here and I'll tell you something, but don't you breathe a word to anybody. Jakob's going to find the *word* soon—and then he'll shoot the Ogre."

"I wish he would," said Ditte. "Then we'd be free of him."

"Yes, that's right. But don't you say anything about it, or you may spoil it all."

"Shan't I open the window a little?" Ditte was nearly choked with the stench.

"Oh, no, oh no, don't!" The old woman had a fit of coughing at the bare idea.

Ditte looked round helplessly; she thought she ought to lend a hand here, but there was neither beginning

nor end to it. "You just leave it all alone," said the old woman. "I'm used to it now and it suits me best." Ditte was on the point of being sick, but she didn't see how she could go off and leave the old woman lying like that. It wasn't her way to shirk things. But just then she heard her father's voice calling her from the daylight outside.

"You're gasping for breath, aren't you?" he said. "Some of us that can stand a lot get seasick if we put our head in at the door. But there's nothing to be done. Every now and then the place is cleaned out, but it's just the same again directly. She ought properly to go to the hospital, but the innkeeper won't have it. Of course he's afraid of people finding out what a state she's in. They say she's got great holes in her from the dirt and vermin and her thighs have grown quite together."

"Where are the twins?" asked Ditte.

"Oh, one of them fell into the harbor the other day and was drowned. The mother was down there at the slip rinsing clothes and it must have happened right beside her. But she didn't notice anything and went home thinking the child hadn't been with her—she's as careless as that. He was found afterwards under a lighter; and the other we took and sent up country for a while to some of their relations."

"But why won't the innkeeper help them at all?"

"Oh, you see, he hates them because the son went to sea instead of stopping here to work."

But to-day was Sunday—everything showed it. The sun spread a holiday brilliance over the sandhills, the

harbor and the water; the fishermen's cabins glistened in the calm sunshine. The poles for drying nets stood idly against the blue sky, like fellows who were keeping Sunday with their hands in their pockets. It was one of those days that call for something really out of the way—an excursion! Lars Peter gave up his sleep. "Oh come!" he answered gaily to Ditte's objections. "A sleep more or less, what's it matter? In one's young days one thought nothing of it. And there's time enough to sleep when one's dead."

It would be fine to make a trip inland to Lake Arre; then they could see the "Crow's Nest" at the same time—there were a lot of attractions in that direction. Lars Peter was all for it; but the children wanted to go somewhere they had never been before. There was to be a fête at a fishing hamlet about eight miles to the south—to raise money for the harbor.

Lars Peter caught at the idea at once; perhaps there would be a chance of finding something or other—he was pretty tired of being here. "And then we shall see the holiday folks too," he said delightedly. "I've heard there are so many of them down there that the fishermen have had to give up their huts to them and take to the sheds and pigstyes. And they must be a queer lot. They eat their fish with two forks, I'm told, and they have breakfast when we have dinner, and dinner when we have supper. So I suppose their supper comes about the time we're drinking our morning coffee!" The children laughed; it sounded crazy to them. "Yes, and then they've got nothing to do

but go courting each other's wives. It must be quite the thing, too, for it doesn't seem to make them any the worse friends. And they're always in the way! The fishermen down there are not altogether pleased, but of course it brings money to the place." It all sounded very promising.

But how were they to get there? Sailing was the easiest and most natural way, but the girls were not specially keen on that. And it was too far to walk. So it had to be seen whether they could borrow Big Klaus; Lars Peter thought it was worth trying. The innkeeper had been a little more amenable since that affair of the churchyard.

Ah, a drive! to have a drive again with Big Klaus—that was something worth talking about! The girls said "Ah" and made big eyes, and the two boys frisked about like young colts. Kristian was sent off to ask for the trap, and before they knew where they were he had brought it to the door.

Well, now they had to hurry up. The children were in their best clothes, but had to be gone over once more; they did their best to keep tidy, but one never knew how it would be. Kristian's knees were black, quite rough and scabby; it wouldn't come off, he said. "Come here, I'll get it off fast enough," said Ditte, getting out the soft soap and scrubbing-brush; but Kristian made a bolt.

"Do you think I want to have legs like a girl?" he asked in a hurt tone.

Ditte packed a basket with bread, butter and fat in pots, cold fish and whatever else there was to be

found. "Now we only want a couple of bottles of beer," she said.

"We'll buy them down there—and coffee too!" said her father with careless generosity. "We're going to have a good time to-day."

"But you haven't any money!" Ditte objected prudently.

Faith, that was true enough, Lars Peter had never thought of that. "You get so used never to have a penny in your pocket, that it's like a vice," he said with a laugh. "Oh, Kristian, just run across to Rasmus Olsen's and ask them to lend your father a dollar."

"I wonder if they've got it," said Ditte, glancing over to Rasmus Olsen's cabin.

"Yes, that's all right; you see, Rasmus Olsen's crew fell in with a boat from Hundested under Hesselö last night and sold them some of their catch," said Lars Peter under his breath. "You have to play a trick like that once in a while to get a bit of ready money."

Kristian came running back; they could see by his pace that he had succeeded. He held a clear bottle in his hand, sparkling in the sun. "If it isn't a dram!" said Lars Peter warmly. "My word, that's decent of Rasmus Olsen, though!"

"And what do you think?" said Povl, pulling Ditte by the skirt; "over in 'Gingerbread House' they're making doughnuts, and I believe they're for us." Yes, Ditte had already smelt them.

"But how do they know we're going for a picnic?" she asked in surprise.

It was no secret. The trap was surrounded by

children, and women put their heads out of all the doors to see what was going on. It wasn't every day that such a swell turn-out could be seen in the hamlet.

It was quite strange to see Big Klaus again. He was old—and ill-used; he had lost a lot of flesh since Ditte last saw him. She found one or two hunks of stale bread for him, but Big Klaus only smelt at it; it had to be soaked in water before he could chew it. But he knew them still, and he was specially pleased to see Lars Peter. Every time he came near, the old horse whinnied—it was quite touching. "He'd like to be petted all the time," he said mournfully, patting his nose. Then Big Klaus shoved his head in between his arm and his chest and stood perfectly still.

The children really felt a little sorry for him at the thought of the long drive; there seemed to be no life in him, his big frame was like an old house that might collapse at any moment. But Lars Peter said it would be all right, and as soon as they were in the trap the horse began to pull quite well. Lars Peter walked at the side until they were out of the loose sand of the dunes; and Fore-and-Aft Jakob, who had turned up on the scene, pushed behind of his own accord. It was quite clever of him.

"But the doughnuts!" said Povl, when they stopped at the end of the dunes for their father to get in. "We've forgotten all about them." Ditte looked back at the house; *she* had remembered them, but it wouldn't have done to go and ask for them, even if they knew they were meant for them. But at that moment the little woman appeared in the doorway, beckoning.

Kristian was out of the trap in a jiffy, and came back laden with a heavy basket. "There's gooseberry fool in it as well," he said. "And I was to wish you all a happy outing."

So they went on, slowly but surely. As soon as Big Klaus had got some warmth in his joints he went along very well; he had still some of his old pace left, which got rid of the miles better than many a canter.

It was grand to be out in the country again, and driving too. There were cornfields on every side, small holdings each with its homestead and telling its tale of a busy life. Now and then they had a glimpse of the surface of Lake Arre far away, and it reminded them of the "Crow's Nest." Time had done its work, had wiped out all that was casual, leaving only the essential behind. It had been a property after all, the "Crow's Nest" had, with its land, however poor, with cow and pig and hens that laid eggs. One had been one's own master, so long as one kept out of debt. They didn't talk about it, but all had the same thoughts; that could be seen by the way they stretched their necks on reaching the top of a hill, trying to get a glimpse of the smoke of the "Crow's Nest." If it hadn't been for Big Klaus, Lars Peter would have gone round that way. "Perhaps we ought to have stayed there," he said half aloud. He was not addressing any one, but the children thought much the same. Even little Povl sat quite still, as though he felt at home again.—After all the land was something different from the sea.

On the way down to the fishing hamlet stood a huge building, hung all over with wooden birdcages right up

to the roof. "That's the bathing hotel," explained Lars Peter—"it's one like that the innkeeper wants to build at home. Goodness knows how it can pay—it's only open about a month in the year." Big Klaus had to stop while they took a look at it.

"What are all those funny birdcages for?" asked Ditte.

"Those? They're what they call ferandahs. They lie about in them when they're too lazy to move."

"Does it cost much to live there?" asked Kristian when they had started again.

"What are you thinking of, boy? They pay more a day for one person than we spend in a week—the whole lot of us."

"Where do they get all the money from?" Else then asked.

"Ah, where do they get it from, tell me that. The likes of us have hard work to scrape together enough for what's barely necessary. But there's some folks that have an easy time of it all through."

They kept on asking questions, endlessly; Lars Peter could hardly keep pace with them. Only little Povl never spoke but used his eyes. "What a lot that boy sees!" said Ditte, giving him a kiss.

They did not put up at the inn but drove in among the dunes and took the horse out. "They generally steal some of your chaff at the inn," said Lars Peter in explanation; but the real reason was that he wanted to save the tip. Big Klaus got his nosebag on and a cloth over him to keep off the flies, and they went on to look about them.

The harbor was not so good as the one at home, but the beach was finer. It stretched on both sides like a half-moon, ending in high promontories; the sand was like a floor to walk on. On the sands were little wooden houses on wheels, to be driven out into the water when any one wanted to bathe. "They're for those who are so particular that they'd die if anybody saw them undressed," said Lars Peter, laughing. "But they're not all so squeamish as that."

No indeed they were not, for there were people lying stretched on the sands with nothing on but a cloth about their loins, men and women together; some of them had burrowed right into the sand like pigs or hens. And down by the water there were naked couples walking arm in arm. Some of the brown naked men had nobody on their arm but went about strutting like cocks, with their arms crossed, showing off their muscles. Every moment they flung out their arms, worked the muscles, and then crossed them again. It was quite comical. But the funniest thing of all was a naked man who ran along the beach as fast as he could, backwards and forwards. He kept his elbows in to his sides and his head thrown back, and his wet hair hung down his back.

The children laughed aloud. "He can't be right in the head," they said.

"And he knows it himself," answered their father. "You can see he's doing it for his health. But that's what they're like—a lot of half-crazy chaps, most of them. It'll upset things in our hamlet when we get the likes of them to deal with."

The fête itself was nothing much. They had made some ropes of green and hung them between poles so as to make a square, and inside the square was a pulpit where a man stood and shouted something about The Danish Path to Fame and Might! He was bare-headed and sweating; the sun gleamed on his big bald forehead. Booths and trials of strength and suchlike that they were accustomed to see at fairs, were not to be found.

"That fellow's too clever for us," said Lars Peter, and they went on, he and Ditte ahead and the three little ones close behind. Even Kristian never ran off by himself, but kept close to the others; it was all too strange here—too fine and Copenhagenish; one felt out of it.

In one of the arbors of the hotel they ate the food they had brought and the doughnuts, which were still warm. A man in a white jacket with a cloth over his arm served the beer and the coffee. Ditte thought it queer work for a man. But it was great fun to be having a meal at an hotel!

And then it was time to put the horse in. The sun had already begun to think about bedtime; it must have been something like five o'clock. Ditte had to be back at the farm that evening, and it wouldn't do for her to come too late.

CHAPTER VI

THE MAID WITH THE ROSY CHEEKS

AUTUMN set in with cold and sleet; the cattle stood with their backs to the wind most of the day instead of feeding, and Ditte froze. It was difficult to keep them out now; they only thought of one thing—coming home again. On all the other farms the cattle had long ago been brought in, but the Hill Farm was slow to make a change, in this as in everything else. But one morning they woke up to find a fall of snow—it was early in October. It disappeared again in the course of an hour or two, but all the same it gave them the reminder they always waited for.

The summer pasturage had been good and they were in pretty good condition, the cattle—smooth in the coat and fairly fat. Now was the time when they would lose flesh; at the Hill Farm they went on the old-fashioned plan—sufficient unto the season was the evil thereof. Feeding-stuffs were never bought, and comparatively little of the good pasture had been brought home as hay. Karen had been more than usually indifferent about everything this summer, and her son was too green and too slack to do things of his own accord.

Ditte's days were harder now. Apart from clearing out the cowsheds and the rest of the roughest work,

which was done by the son, it was her task to look after the cattle and to help with all sorts of work in the rest of her time. But she was glad of the change. Her mind needed occupation from outside herself; the loneliness of the pastures had only impoverished her existence.

Throughout the summer she had made efforts to understand the life about her—people and things. But it was not easy while she spent her time alone; there were not enough chances of picking up anything. Was Karen Bakkegaards poor? It came natural to her to regard all farmers as rich, but here a good many things pointed to the opposite, amongst others the relations between other farmers and the Hill Farm. As a rule farmers were as thick as thieves; each had his faults which made him indulgent to others. But they all agreed in keeping the Hill Farm at a distance.

Why did so many people look scared as soon as Karen Bakkegaard was mentioned? Was it only on account of the husband's horrible death? And why did she herself have that strange shuddering feeling in her mistress's company?—for she was not really afraid of her. But it must be that strong, bewildering smell. What did it come from?

And above all, was there anything between her mistress and Uncle Johannes? That was after all the most exciting thing, and she kept her eyes and ears open. For a long while there was nothing to be noticed; but a few days after the cattle were brought in, he came again. He and the mistress suddenly appeared in the half light of the cowshed and inspected

the animals. He had to give his opinion about each one of them. From their way with each other and the glances they exchanged it could be seen that they had been together since his last visit here, and that there was more between them than they wanted to have known. So after all it was true that they met round about in secret. He nodded to Ditte but did not take any further notice of her; she understood that she was not to claim relationship there either.

At dinner one end of the table was specially laid for him—with a tablecloth! He had roast pork and sausages and other delicacies, and Karen waited on him herself. It was strange to see that big, middle-aged female attending on the swarthy whippersnapper and watching his eyes like a dog, to guess his wants. Sine and the laborer exchanged glances. The son sat with his head in his plate, looking embarrassed. It was always his way to feel shame for others.

Suddenly he raised his head and did a thing that was quite unlike him. "Tell me now—aren't you and the little girl relations?" he asked, looking across at Johannes. Rasmus Rytter cleared his throat. "Ow, blast it!" he said, shaking his fingers as if he had burnt himself. The mistress looked at him sharply. "You're getting old, aren't you?" she said.

But Johannes was not a man to be put out so easily; he just stared back—with an impudent grin. "Oh, more or less; that's to say she was out at nurse at my brother's," he answered as jauntily as might be. Ditte sat shivering, with the feeling that she was being thrown

about like a missile. But then, thank goodness, the subject dropped.

After dinner Karen Bakkegaards and Johannes went up into the parlor—just like two regular sweethearts! A queer couple they made, though, for they sat the whole afternoon playing cards and drinking coffee with rum in it—Karen with her pipe between her teeth, the same one she smoked her husband to death with, according to Rasmus Rytter's story. Johannes never smoked anything but cigars, he was quite the gentleman.

After that he came regularly, and the woman was away just as regularly too. She drove herself, and everybody knew where she was going. She met him and others of his kidney in the hotels round about in the nearest market towns, and nice goings-on there must have been. Well, for that matter Karen had never been exactly a Sunday-school child; but until now she had always kept within her own four walls. Now she threw all shame to the winds and gave a free rein to her dissolute nature.

It was an old custom that those farm servants who were not changing their places had a holiday on the Sunday after hiring day, and on the first Sunday in November Sine and Ditte left the farm by church time in the morning. They had got their wages and were going into Frederiksværk to shop. It was all Sine could do to get her fifty crowns in time; she had to pretend to her mistress that she owed the money in the town. "Oh, you're only going to put it in the sav-

ings-bank, I suppose?" Karen had said, but she had to find it. Ditte's five crowns was not such a big sum, there was no difficulty about them.

"Ah, it's a lot of money for you," said Sine; "but wait and see how far it goes. I can remember the first money I got—and how bad I felt when it all went without I knew how."

"Is it true that you put money in the savings-bank?" asked Ditte, shifting her bundle to the other arm. She had her washing in it besides the homespun cloth, the wool, the holland shift and the new wooden shoes.

Sine took the bundle from her. "Come here, you'll kill yourself dragging that, my girl," she said. "You might just as well have left the wooden shoes behind, you're going to wear them out at work anyhow. Or were you thinking of leaving them on the chest of drawers at home?"

"I only want to show them to my brothers and sister," said Ditte. "And Father!" she added solemnly.

"Oh well, you're a child, aren't you? Sometimes you seem quite a baby!"

Ditte returned to her question. Was she really fellow-servant with some one who had money in the savings-bank? It was very important to have this confirmed. "We had money in the savings-bank once," she said.

"Yes, that was the money your mother—" Sine stopped suddenly. And to make up for her slip she confided to Ditte that she already had five hundred crowns in the savings-bank; two hundred she had inherited, but the rest she had saved herself. And

when she had a thousand, she would start a little haberdasher's shop in one of the towns. "You ought to put a little by too," she said; "however little it may be, it grows into something. And it's a good thing to have something when you get old."

"Oh no, I'm going to get married," said Ditte. She didn't want to be an old maid.

"Yes, if he doesn't fool you," suggested Sine.

"Have you been deceived then?" Ditte preferred that expression.

"Yes, and shamefully too!" she said, suddenly breaking down. It was some years ago now, but whenever she was reminded of it, she could hardly keep back her tears.

"Did he leave you to bear the shame?" Ditte put a weight of experience into her voice; she was proud of being talked to like a grown-up.

"No, I didn't let it go so far as that—and that was why he threw me over," said Sine, half sobbing. They walked on, and she sniffled for a while, but then pulled herself together, blew her nose resolutely and put her handkerchief in her pocket. "Yes, you may well stare," she said, "you don't often see Sine crying. But every roof has its leaks that you have to run and fetch a bucket to."

"Why did he throw you over, though?" asked Ditte again, wondering.

"Yes, you may well ask that again," said Sine with a laugh. "But just you wait till they begin pulling your things about, first at one knot and then at another—and tell you they must know whether you're like this or like

that before they can marry you; then you'll understand better than you do now. No, men folks are best left alone. At first they're all cringing and humble as can be, but when they've got what they want, they turn round and put their foot on you."

Ditte considered this well and went over the little world of her acquaintance. "Father's not like that," she said decidedly; she thought of how long-suffering he had been with Sörine, and how he was only waiting for her to come out again.

"No, I don't think so either," said Sine readily; "but most of them are!" She was even redder in the cheeks than usual and her brown eyes sparkled quite angrily. "She's really pretty!" thought Ditte gladly.

"And you've only got to get used to it," Sine continued after a while. "'You'll never be able to do it,' Mother used to say—'your blood's too red; you may just as well give in first as last. What you save to-day you lose to-morrow'—and all the other sayings she could think of. But you've only got to get used to it—like everything else. When the feeling comes over you, you just cry a little and think of what happened before and take out your savings-bank book—and then it passes off."

When they got to the town the shops were open on account of the day. The street was full of farm-servants; some of them had already been celebrating the occasion. The only place that was not open was the savings-bank; Sine had to leave her money with

some people she knew and ask them to see to it for her. Then they went out to do their shopping; there was not much time, if they were to go down to Ditte's home and be back at the Hill Farm before night. "You must be quick about it," said Sine, "or else we shan't get there."

Yes, Ditte would be quick—for they must get home. "Father will be so glad to see you," she said. "He's terribly fond of you because you help me and are kind to me. He's so kind himself, he is!"

"Then I'll have to take him something too," said Sine, laughing, and bought a bottle of old rum.

Ditte had remembered her promise to little Povl and spent a whole crown on a toy for him; and as the others were not to be left out in the cold—Father least of all—the money all vanished. And she had plenty to carry, too! There was a pipe and tobacco for Lars Peter, a horse on wheels for Povl, a doll for Sister, and a carriage which could be wound up and would go by itself for Kristian to pull to pieces.

They got it all safely home, and then there was real joy. It was the first time in her life Ditte had been able to give presents, and the first time the children had had real toys from a shop; it was hard to say on which side the joy was greatest. Lars Peter at once filled his pipe and lit it. It was a grand smoke he puffed from it; he thought he had never seen such blue smoke before. And what a fine smell it had! "But you haven't saved much, have you?" he said teasingly. Oh well, she still had the best part of her wages, the cloth and the wool and the wooden shoes. Lars Jen-

sen's widow, who was clever with her fingers, had promised to make the dress for her; Ditte wanted to take her the stuff at once.

"Kristian can run round with that," said Lars Peter. "And you can make us a drop of coffee; real good coffee we can have to-day. When we have company like this!" He sent Sine a bright look.

Ditte came with the coffee and put a glass on the table. "You must have a taste of your present," she said.

"Not unless you two join me," said Lars Peter, and he brought two more glasses. He sat caressing the bottle before he uncorked it; let it rest in his hand a little and then held it up to the light. "There hasn't been such a thing in the house for many a year," he said, and his voice was full of warmth. "I'm blest if it isn't like meeting one's first love again."

"Was she like that?" asked Sine, laughing.

"She was pretty, you may be sure.—But all the same, such lovely rosy cheeks as yours I've never seen before!"

"But, Father!" said Ditte, admonishingly.

"Well, damn it—why should I sit here and tell lies? All I can say is, that if one was young again—" He was quite animated, though he had not yet tasted the rum.

Sine only chuckled; she took no offense to-day. But if it had been Rasmus Rytter or any one else—. Ditte looked proudly at her father. "Well, here's thanks for the drink, and thanks for being good to my girl," said Lars Peter and they touched glasses. Ditte joined

them, but she put down her glass with a shudder after just sipping it.

While she ran across to Lars Jensen's widow with the stuff for the dress, Lars Peter and Sine had time for a little serious talk about her; the children lay about the floor, taken up with their different toys.

"Is she getting on pretty well?" Lars Peter asked. They were both following Ditte with their eyes; she ran like a kid among the sandhills—full of excitement over the new dress.

"Oh yes, she's pretty smart at her work," said Sine. "I wish everybody was as willing and as conscientious."

No, there wasn't much shirking about her—so far as Lars Peter knew. But what about the treatment she got? She never complained—never a word; but the Hill Farm people hadn't a very good name.

Well, to be sure, they had their faults like everybody else, perhaps a bit worse than most. But it was a place you could put up with—not worse than that. And the food was good.

Yes, of course, that meant a good deal, and Sine herself was the best proof that the Hill Farm was not too bad, he remarked, fixing his eyes on her kindly round face. This made Sine laugh, and Lars Peter laughed too; they sat looking out of the window and got quite red about the eyes with the effort to overcome their laughter, and then they came to look at each other and laughed again. "Well, if it isn't—" Lars Peter began, but came to a stop.

It was the lovely rosy cheeks that made him so happy—and her not blaming her employers but shielding

them. She must be a good girl—and a real fine piece into the bargain! In the middle of her soft throat, where her dress was open, there was a little hollow which moved in and out as she talked. But when she laughed, it worked all the time in quick little throbs, as if she had some joker inside her throat playing pranks. How the devil could it be—“How is it that such a fine girl is allowed to go about without a husband?” he said.

“Yes, it’s hard to say,” she answered and laughed again.

Well, then Ditte came back and they had to go. Lars Peter stood for a moment gazing absently past them. “I’ll go a bit of the way with you,” he said then, with a shrug.

CHAPTER VII

WINTER DARKNESS

TO begin with, winter brought chiefly cold and darkness; Ditte thought she had never known such a dark and cold December at home. The snow came at the very beginning of the month; it came driving in from the sea and was caught by the three wings of the farm buildings, which lay open to take it in their embrace, and lay in deep drifts, blocking the way. Ditte felt the cold badly and had big chilblains on her hands and feet; the snow got into her wooden shoes and her feet were always wet. Sine found a chance of drying her stockings on the stove, but that did not help. She got sores on her heels and ankles and the backs of her hands from the cold and could not bear to wear shoes or put her hands in cold water. When she came to dress in the morning, her clothes were half covered by stiff snow that had drifted in through the ill-fitting door; and outside it might be so deep that she could only open the upper half door. Then she had to climb out and wade across to the scullery door; when she got inside, the snow melted on her and she was soaking wet from the waist down.

There was nothing amusing about the snow. At home the boys used to go quite wild when they woke up in the morning and found a fall of snow. They simply had to go out and stand on their heads in it—

in nothing out their shirts for choice; it was all one could do to keep them back till they had some clothes on. Ditte couldn't understand it; to her snow meant only cold, trouble and discomfort.

And the darkness didn't make things better. There was never any daylight to speak of till late in the forenoon, when most of the hard work was done; and early in the afternoon the darkness came tumbling in on them again. It came from out at sea, where it had been brooding in the meantime in the form of leaden fog and black dead-water. It was never really day.

One day passed like another, in cutting chaff, threshing and winnowing corn, and looking after the cattle. They were always hard at it and didn't get through very much; when at last one job was finished, two or three more had stacked themselves up waiting to be done.

At the Hill Farm nothing was ever in proper working order—and nothing had its proper place either, neither the hands nor the work they had to do. Ditte had to be here, there and everywhere; just as she was going to feed the cattle, they would call her off to help at the chaff-cutter.

She had to try her hand at everything, and generally at work that would be done by grown-up people anywhere else. She passed the corn to the feeder when they were threshing, or lay up in the loft, where there wasn't room for any of the others, and cleared the straw out of the way. And she had to take turns with Sine at working the winnowing-machine while

Karl fed it. It was hard work, but at any rate it was warm in the barn, and Karl would often change places with her, while she fed the machine. Then they were able to have a chat—she looked forward to these hours. Karl was shy and silent with the grown-up people—he couldn't stand being laughed at. But he felt at ease with Ditte and could talk freely with her. She had stopped her teasing and had gradually come to like him—she could see that he had a bad time and wanted somebody to be kind to him. But still she could not understand how he—a man—could put up with it all. When she told him so, he was helplessly dumb.

He was quite under the thumb of his mother—that must be it. Not that he was fond of her—he talked of her as a stranger and would often join in discussing her bad points; but he hadn't the strength to free himself.

One day he began to speak about his father, without anything having led up to it; he had never mentioned him before.

“Did you like him?” asked Ditte. “Because I know you can't stand your mother,” she went on, when there was no answer. “You needn't be ashamed to own up to it—we're not obliged to be fond of anything we *can't* be fond of. I don't like *my* mother either!”

“But that's sinful! God has told us that we are to love our parents,” Karl replied gloomily.

“Not if we *can't* be fond of them—for what will He do to us then? And what if they're not good?—You can see yourself, you're not fond of your mother—how will you get out of that, eh?”

Karl didn't know—but one ought to. The Scripture said so!

"But did your father love your mother? For he was such a God-fearing man, they say."

"No, he couldn't—but he was sorry for it. Mother smoked tobacco in the bedroom when he was ill. And it made him cough and spit blood, but still she didn't stop. Go on, she said, spit up your dirty blood and then you'll get some fresh. It was horrible to see Father's blood about the floor—his face was as white as chalk; but as for asking her to stop, he wouldn't do that. Then my brothers took away her pipe and tobacco and hid them, and she tempted me until I told her where they were—she gave me sweets."

"Didn't she thrash you into telling?—that would have been more like her."

"No, she never cared to strike the small and defenseless. But she thrashed my big brothers. And then they thrashed me again—for blabbing."

"And well you deserved it—even if you were a little one. Nobody would have got Povl or Else to do that, nor even Kristian either, thoughtless as he is. We stuck to Mother, all four of us, though Father thought it was wrong. But it was for his own sake—mostly."

"Was she unkind to him too, I wonder?"

"Oh, nobody can hurt Father; for he takes everything—you know—the same way as God does—he thinks the best of everybody."

"You mustn't compare a human being to God," said Karl reprovingly.

"I do it all the same," Ditte replied in irritation.

“With Father I do! You’re not a parson, are you?”

And so they fell out and didn’t talk any more while that job lasted.

The evenings were the best part of life. Luckily the days were short, and at dark all work in the yard and the barn came to an end; it was only the cattle that gave one something to do at intervals. The rest of the time Ditte sat in the warm living-room with its comfortable smell of peat-smoke, and helped at carding, spinning and winding yarn. Karl sat reading something pious, a missionary paper or whatever it might be; and when Rasmus Rytter was employed at the farm he sat asleep in the corner or told coarse stories about the people of the neighborhood. If the stories got really juicy, Karen struck up her scornful laugh and egged him on to tell some more. She had a grudge against everybody, without respect of persons, and wished them all bad luck; she never spoke up for any one or had any good to say of her neighbors.

“And why should I?” she answered when Sine once reproached her with this. “Do you think there’s anybody that has a good word to say of Karen Bakkegaards?” They didn’t spare her, so why should she spare them? And she didn’t lose a chance of telling a dirty story herself—especially if it gave her a hit at somebody. She was always going for her son about his piety; but that was such poor sport. He never answered back, but pretended he hadn’t heard.

Ditte too had to stand a good deal from her mistress

and Rasmus Rytter. Her transitional age constantly tickled something in them. The woman in her was beginning to peep out, and in her childish innocence she would ask questions that prompted them to laughter and ambiguous allusions. Sine snapped at them, and gave them, so to say, a rap over the knuckles; but nothing would stop them, they had to have their paws on this fresh young life that was feebly seeking its way out—and make fun of the experiences that were to come.

Otherwise Sine took no part in the conversation when those two were in it, but sat there with her round, rosy cheeks, attending to her work and living on her unhappy love. If anybody touched upon that or took any other liberties with her, she was quite ready to show her teeth.

Great preparations were made for Christmas in the way of slaughtering and baking. But no Christmas guests came of their own accord, and those who were invited, refused. "They won't run the risk of meeting the dealer and his cronies," Sine thought. "For there's no other reason why they should stay away this year more than any other—and they've never found fault with our Christmas dinners." She was almost offended on the farm's behalf. Their mistress was in a bad temper all this time; she scolded constantly, and said spiteful and disparaging things about everybody. She wanted to revenge herself. But Ditte was the one who felt least of her ill-temper; it was part of her powerful nature never to take the line which lay easiest. Karen

had a name for hitting those who were most likely to hit back.

One day between Christmas and New Year's the postman came round to the Hill Farm; they took no papers, so his visits were few and far between. There was a letter for the mistress. She went up to her bedroom with it, for it was always a serious business to get a letter. When she came back she was in a good humor.

"We're going to have some Christmas visitors to-day," she said to the two girls in the scullery; "so I think we'll have roast pigeon."

Karl had to go and catch the pigeons in the coops; Karen wrung their necks herself, as she stood and gave her orders. She took them slowly out of the bag, one by one; closed her big coarse hands round the fluttering bird, as though enjoying the agonized beating of its heart. "You're so nice and soft and warm, in a minute you'll be dead," she said, as she held its beak up to her mouth and wetted it with her spittle. Then she cautiously passed her thumb and middle finger over its body till she came right up under the wings—and gave a sudden squeeze, with a peculiar expression of enjoyment. She held the gasping bird at arm's length and watched it intently; the beak opened wider and wider, the eyes were extinguished under the milk-white rims, and all at once the bird's head fell to one side like a broken flower. It was an ugly sight. But Karen, with a laugh, flung the dead bird on the kitchen table to the girls. "There, that one's lost its breath; now you can take off its garment of innocence," she

said, reaching down into the bag for the next—she was in great good humor.

In the course of the afternoon they arrived, in two carriages! They were a noisy lot, hats on the backs of their heads and cigar in mouth, which they didn't even take out when they shouted or swore. Johannes was the most rakish of them all, and swaggered as if he owned the place. They were dealers and other riff-raff from the capital, where he was living now—the sort of people who scared every living thing across the ditch and into the fields when they came into the country. As soon as they were seen tearing along the road, people at the farms hurried indoors, as though they did not want even to be seen by such company. There they stood looking timidly out from behind windows and shutters and thinking all sorts of things.

Sine had enough to do in the kitchen, so Karl had to help with the evening milking. He was sulky and ill-humored; there wasn't a word to be got out of him. Ditte tried time after time, but in vain. She hated keeping silent, if there was anything on earth she needed, it was talk. She *would* make him answer.

"Is it true that you went to a dance the other night?" she said. "They say you did."

"Who says so?" he asked angrily. Now she had got him at last!

"Somebody—I shan't say who," she answered teasingly.

"Then you can just tell them it's a lie." Karl forgot himself, as a rule he never used such strong language.

"Why, there's no harm in it—Oh, of course, you think it's sinful to dance! If only I could go to a ball, a really swell ball!" Ditte began to hum a tune.

"You ought not to wish that; such places are full of sin."

"Oh, you and your sin—you say that about everything. You're a regular saint! I suppose you'll say it's sin to eat next?—Are you going to meeting again this evening?" Ditte regretted having teased him and turned the conversation to his affairs to make amends.

"Yes, if I can get off. Will you come?"

No, Ditte wouldn't. She had been once or twice, but had had enough. She didn't like being treated as a child of sin by all these self-righteous people, who were so pious that they couldn't hold their heads straight—even worse than the psalm-smiters at the inn-keeper's meetings at home. What did it concern her what her mother had done? But they treated her like a brand snatched from the burning.

"It isn't any good," she said.

Karl did not answer, he never pressed her. For a while nothing was heard but the milk streaming into the pails. Then came a noise from the farmhouse.

"Listen to them shouting and yelling," he said bitterly—"they take pride in their disgrace!" It was his mother he was thinking of—Ditte knew that well enough. "But at New Year's I'm going to leave; I won't stay and look on at all this!" He always said that, but he could never bring himself to it.

"Well, but they never touch one another," Ditte demurred—"they don't even kiss." She said it to con-

sole him, but not without a hope of getting him to tell her something.

“Oh, you don’t understand—you’re only a child!” he exclaimed in despair.

“You always say that, all of you!” Ditte answered, slightly offended. She could not understand what this mysterious something was that she was not allowed to know. “Was it that about her changing clothes with him the other day at the hotel at Frederiksværk?”

“Oh, there are so many things—and one is as nasty as the other.” He stopped suddenly and Ditte noticed a swelling in his throat. She left her work and went up to him, stood in the dusk of the cowshed and took him by the shoulders. She knew by experience the soothing influence of touch. But with him it had the opposite effect and he began to sob. “You ought to get your brothers to come home and speak to her,” she said quietly, laying her cheek against his hair.

“They will never come home any more,” he answered and pushed her away.

Ditte stood still for a moment. Then she heard Rasmus out in the yard and hurried back to her cow.

At half-past nine Karen Bakkegaards began to yawn and scratch her legs, which were covered with varicose veins; this was the sign for breaking-up. Ditte made haste to get across the yard before the lamp was put out in the living-room. She was not really afraid of the dark, but here at the Hill Farm the darkness was alive, something uncanny lurked in every corner. The

sea roared at the foot of the ravine and sent a biting chill up into the open farmyard; it was as if some one took hold of her under her clothes with icy fingers. She slipped in quickly and shut the door; one, two, three—she was out of her clothes and under the heavy old quilt.

The bed was ice-cold when she got into it; she drew up her knees under her shift right up to her chin, and her teeth chattered for a while until the worst of the cold had gone off. But it was some time before she got the quilts warmed through; until then she could not fall asleep, but lay thinking—about the folks at home and her mother in prison, about money and clothes, about what *had* happened—and what would happen in the future. For a brief moment her thoughts dwelt on Granny, but passed to something else; Granny was beginning to fade into the background of Ditte's mind. On the other hand, her mother came up oftener now; it was as though she appeared and claimed her thoughts; Ditte could see her clearly and had to occupy herself with her, whether she wanted to or not. She was very unwilling, and was glad when she found her thoughts slipping away somewhere else. But one had to be careful and pretend one didn't know anything about it. As soon as one thought: Ah, now my thoughts are going away from Mother!—then at once they dragged her back again. They came and went as they pleased, vaguer and vaguer by degrees as she got warm and sleep approached. For a moment they dwelt on Big Klaus, standing at home chewing comfortably in his stable at the Crow's Nest; the next, they were at the

new hotel that was to be built at the hamlet—and they just brushed past Karl on the way to sleep.

Karl was as far as possible from being Ditte's hero; the man she was to admire would have to be quite different. It was his being such an unfortunate wretch that stirred her feelings; he was always tormenting himself, and she was sorry for him. It was enough to make one weep to see him shambling about, homeless and an orphan in his own home; and to Ditte compassion was a summons to help. She was only too willing to bear others' burdens, but cudged her little brains in vain to find a remedy for his condition, and yet she could not give it up. He would have to go far away, to that pleasant brother of his, and help him to keep school. He would have hard work to make himself respected, but he had such a nice voice for singing hymns!

She herself would go into service in the capital and—lying half asleep—she imagined she was there already. It was the schoolmaster himself she was keeping house for, and she was just bringing him his coffee during the morning playtime. He gave her a cheerful smile, for she had made fresh cakes with the coffee as a surprise. "You're a good little housekeeper," he said, stroking her hair. Ditte was going to curtsy, but at that moment one of her legs gave a jerk and she woke up. That was what Granny used to call a sleep warning. "Then you ought to listen, because you're wanted for something," she had said. And Ditte lay still and listened, raising her head and holding her breath.

Outside the door she heard a miowing that sounded like a pitiful appeal. It's Puss, she thought; he's cold and wants to come in—or perhaps he can't find anything better to do. "Go into the barn and catch mice, Puss!" she called out towards the door. But the cat only miowed louder and scratched at the door. She jumped up and opened it, and the wind and snow blew in on her. But Puss was not inclined to hurry; it was always his way to dawdle when he ought not to; she had to take him by the scruff of his neck and haul him in. She hurried back to bed, and the cat jumped up on her pillow and stood arching its back close to her face. "Come down into bed, you silly!" she said, lifting up the quilt. But Puss plumped down on to the floor again and went back to the door, where she could see his eyes shining in the dark; he stood there miowing. She had to get up and let him out again—and then there was trouble outside.

Ditte could not make out what was the matter with the stupid thing to-night; and then all at once it occurred to her that he had not had his evening milk—she had forgotten it! It was a pretty bad blunder to forget that—she couldn't understand what she had been thinking of. And it was hard luck—fearfully hard luck on Puss, who had to go and catch mice all night. If mousers didn't get their fresh milk, they let you know it! To-morrow he should have a double quantity and she would be really good to him.

But Ditte was not to be let off so cheaply. Puss stayed outside miowing, and the noise grew more and more aggressive. She had neglected a creature en-

trusted to her care; there was no getting over that. The cat was out there crying pitiably over it—she had not been kind to it!

Ditte got out of bed and put on her wooden shoes; she took hold of the door-latch, but hesitated; she was trembling with cold and beginning to cry. Outside the wind howled and it was pitch-dark; she opened the door a little way at a time; the storm beat upon the old buildings and shook the doors and shutters—there was a moaning and giving way everywhere. Suddenly some one snatched the door from her and threw it open against the wall; she screamed and ran across the yard; she knew it must be the wind, but was frightened all the same.

She left her wooden shoes on the doorstep of the scullery and stole in; felt her way to the bowl and the milk-pail, while the cat rubbed itself against her bare leg—which gave her a feeling of security. She filled its bowl by dipping it in the pail; it was a dirty thing to do, but she couldn't help it. "Come along, Puss," she whispered, and went out again.

She stepped off the doorstep carefully so as not to spill the milk, and tried to get her bearings in the dark; she was smarting with the cold and fright sent shivers up and down her back—gave her a tickling feeling right up to the roots of her hair. And suddenly she stopped, stiff with terror; before her stood a dark form which she could just make out in the darkness. Ditte was going to scream and drop the bowl, but saw just in time that it was the pump. That made her quite courageous and she went in the direction of the barn-

door; the cat's milk bowl was placed in the barn at night—to make him stay there.

As she was going to open the barn-door, she remembered the suicide, and terror seized on her again, came over her like a gust of wind. She wanted to run away, but then Puss's milk would have been spilt; she stood for a moment quite still with the bowl in both her hands—paralyzed. Then she leaned firmly against the barn-door, so that nobody might come out and take her, while she put the bowl down in the snow.

When she stood up again, there was a light in the southern end of the farmhouse, where her mistress had her bedroom. Ditte became quite calm again on seeing it—and a little curious too; she had plenty of time now, though she was so cold that her teeth were chattering. Karen appeared in the pantry door with a flickering candle in her hand; she was in her shift and had her hair twisted up in a cloth. She went through all the front rooms, slow and listless in her movements, holding the candle in front of her, and in the other hand something or other—a knife, perhaps. So she must have felt hungry and come down to cut herself a bit of cold mutton!

In the living-room she stopped and lifted up what she had in her hand; Ditte saw that it was a rope and was again a prey to every kind of terror. She went backwards across the yard, with little sobs such as a frightened dog makes at night, for she could not turn her back on that vision. Karen came through the scullery and appeared in the scullery door; there she stood

feeling her way with her foot and staring out into the night. The candle flared up and went out.

How Ditte got to bed, she didn't know; she lay crouched together deep down under the quilt and shivered. She wished she could fall asleep and get away from all this terror, and then wake up in the morning and find that none of it had happened. Sometimes things turned out like that.

When she came out next morning, the bowl was lying in the snow by the barn-door and by the side of it was a rope; there were the prints of big bare feet in the snow. But Karen herself was in the scullery scolding—thank God.

CHAPTER VIII

WINTER RUNS ITS TEDIOUS COURSE

“**T**HERE’S no pleasure in life here at the Hill Farm—it’s enough to get on your nerves,” Sine would say at times. And yet she was the one who seemed to get on best, plump and even-tempered as she was.

It was just as if the darkness was heavier and the cold sharper here than anywhere else; all troublesome things became harder to deal with, more saturated with their own essence. At times the darkness might be so black that Ditte would scarcely venture out in it; at every instant it was trying to knock her feet from under her, with strange noises and one thing or another. Nowhere else had she been afraid of the dark, but here she would get into such a state that she dared not go into the barn without a lantern for fear of Karl’s father who had hanged himself in there. In the ordinary way she faced it boldly enough. But there were times when the foul air condensed—it had something to do with Karen Bakkegaards’ disorderly life—and when the whole place seemed haunted. Karl was the one who felt it most; there were some days when nothing would make him take a piece of rope in his hand. But it affected them all. The old bedclothes, that had been handed down perhaps for a hundred years, always had a strange smell; and when the weird fit was upon the

farm, this smell wove itself into Ditte's dreams and filled them with terror. The stench of tobacco and sickness given off by the old bed-ticking drew her with it into the bedroom where the consumptive man lay, hanging over the side of the bed, coughing and coughing with red foam on his lips. On the edge of the bed sat a stout woman puffing smoke in his face—and laughing when it really took effect; and down on the floor lay a little boy drawing pictures in the red stuff with his fingers. Then she woke with a shriek, struck a match, though it was strictly forbidden, and calmed down again.

That was how the feeling condensed at times. But she shook it off again; after all it was something that came from outside herself.

With Karl it was another matter; he lived under the curse itself and he never shook off anything. Sine thought he would have to be prepared to face all sorts of things. "He has his father's nature," she said.

At any rate there was nothing of his mother in him, anybody could scare him out of his life. All the more remarkable was it that in one particular way he asserted himself strongly enough—nobody could make him budge an inch. He would not touch tobacco and marked his disapproval of his mother's sinful ways by associating more and more with the goody-goody folks. And when she started boozing with Johannes and his cronies, he joined a total abstinence society. That was his protest—as though he would make amends for his mother's transgressions one by one.

But when it came to defending himself he was no

good; if she taunted him with his piety he said nothing. "Yes, you're just of an age to be running after petticoats," she said jeeringly, alluding to his going off to prayer meetings—and said it so that the others could hear. He took no notice and went on as before. It was just as little use forbidding him. She would set him to work at something or other to prevent his getting away; but when the time of the meeting arrived, he ran off just the same. In other things he trembled like a dog before his mother, but in this he only feared God.

Ditte would not have minded if he had shown a little courage in other ways as well; for instance, if he had acted as a buffer for her and Sine when their mistress was unreasonable. But then he always slunk away.

Karen got more and more unreasonable and was apt to bully them and find fault with everything; perhaps it was because she was full of the thought of marriage—pining for young flesh, thought Sine. At any rate it brought bitterness and ill-will into the work, and the sour atmosphere plagued Ditte most of all—it was everywhere and could not be shaken off.

As far as could be seen she had not suffered at all; no light-hearted carolings had been silenced; outwardly she had always been seriousness itself. But she had a spirit of her own deep down in her nature, a quiet, gentle spirit whose usual expression was the plucky way in which she tackled every kind of work. Through this she had saved her joy in life, the expression of which in games had been denied her by cir-

cumstances; and it was this that had made her so successful at home. The generosity of her nature had made it possible to preserve the sisterly relationship to the little ones and still to get them to obey. It had not always been easy; good intentions often had to take the form of harshness in order to obtain the desired effect. But she managed it, thanks to her indomitable spirit, which seldom rang out with its own note, but which gave the tone to all she did. And she succeeded in inspiring the others with her goodwill, and thus took off the edge of the harshness.

She had been obliged to smack them at first, in order to assert herself; but she succeeded in getting beyond that before the punishment had had time to lead to bitterness either in herself or in the others. When punishment was needed—usually for the children's own sake—she taught herself to give it in the same way as Granny used with her. If they got their clothes in a mess, they were made to feel it plainly enough—they were put to bed and there was no more play for them until their things were clean again. The punishment followed naturally from the fault; it was the dirtiness that took its revenge, not she. "Now you see, if you'd been careful, it wouldn't have happened," she would say innocently enough. She could even appear as the rescuing angel and win their gratitude for putting things right for them.

Thus she had had to find her way as best she could and had arrived at a belief in the essential justice of things—and this had helped her to govern her little world so well. Disorder was the result of a lack of

interest in one's work, or a sour temper; she hated it instinctively and was firmly convinced that it brought its own punishment. If you sneaked out of anything it was bound to come back on you; that had always been so as long as she could remember—in its earliest and simplest form when she wetted her clothes. Now of course existence was far more complicated, but it held good all the same—you simply had no peace. It might be when you had put on stockings with holes in them in the morning—and had a horrid feeling all day; or when you forgot to give Puss his evening milk and had to get up in the middle of the night and fetch it—because, if not, you couldn't fall asleep but thought you heard him miowing the whole time.

Ditte was a splendid little worker. If she hadn't many other pleasures, she knew the pleasure of work, and enjoyed it as the heart's reward for its goodness. Her hands were rough and scrubby, her voice was harsh and unlovely; she had no other way of showing the good in her than in her work. There she expanded, like a modest but useful flower. There was nothing gaudy about it all—a little good-natured diligent thing, that only wished to bloom for others.

But here no one gave her any credit for that. They were not fond of work, but looked on it as a nuisance, tackled it against their will and did no more than they could damned well help. That was why everything was all over the place. Ditte felt that it was all due to their not being fond of one another. There was no comradeship among the Hill Farm people. And Uncle Johannes was not going to make things better. He

only brought quarreling and ill-will—she knew that from the Crow's Nest.

She had seen enough of men and women this time and longed to get back to the pasture. She pined for the spring and watched intently for the signs of its coming, was glad when the first of the snow slipped off the roof facing south, and still gladder when the first tufts of grass showed up amidst the snow of the meadow like a shaggy back. It was the earth slowly heaving itself out of its winter sleep. The water bustled everywhere, first making ponds, then trickling on; the waters of spring sang their song day and night and came bubbling out of the wet earth. Signs of growth appeared; one day the ground was like rising dough to the feet. And above it sang the larks.

On a day like this she tramped over the meadows to the common. She was to go and ask Rasmus Rytter to come the next day: the spring plowing was to begin. He had not been at the farm since they had finished threshing a month before; there had been nothing for him to do. The water had not yet left the clayey parts and every moment the moist earth pulled off one of her wooden shoes; she had to stand on one leg while she drew it out. The ground held the shoe tight in its greedy lips, and when at last it let go, it did so with a deep sigh which made Ditte laugh.

She was in good spirits. It was jolly to get away from the farm for a while, and the finest thing of all was that there was light everywhere and no dark corners. For light was badly needed at home!

Rasmus Rytter's cabin lay at the far end of the common, a good way beyond the pasture. Water was lying in the marshland where she used to take the cattle; she had to go round along the edge of the fields. But it was fun to look down and recognize her nests, though the winter had pitilessly laid them bare; they gave her a curious homelike feeling and made her long still more for the summer.

Rasmus was not at home. His wife was messing about the fireplace when Ditte came in; she was unkempt and still in her under-bodice, though it was near noon. The place looked poor and dirty. "You mustn't look at me," she said, pulling her bodice across her bosom with her black hand. "There's such a lot to do to put the house straight that I haven't had time to see to myself yet." Well, Ditte saw how well the house had been put straight! Things were all over the place and the beds weren't even made yet.

In one of the beds lay a couple of children fighting; their ages might be about six and seven. "Are they ill?" asked Ditte.

"No, that they're not," answered the woman. "But we haven't enough to give them all, so they have to take turn and turn about in bed. It's been a downright cruel winter, it has."

Ditte had to stay and drink coffee. "If they hadn't gone and lost the grease-stick for me you'd have had a pancake to your coffee," said the woman, as she ran about searching. "I'd promised the youngsters pancakes for dinner to keep them quiet, and I'd got the dough all mixed ready, I had; but then there was

nothing to grease the pan with. It's a funny thing, though," she said, "I'm sure I saw the boys whacking each other with it this morning before they went to school." She ran to the back of the cabin and stayed there a while, bustling about. "Here, you hold your noise," she called to the youngsters in bed who were howling. "I can't do any more than I can, can I?" Then she appeared from the other side with something in her hand; it looked like a long dirty tallow candle of the home-made kind. "Here it was after all—I thought as much," she said, slamming the pan on to the fire. She took the thing and passed the end of it round the pan, which was slightly greased and began to sputter a little.

"What is it?" asked Ditte, wondering. "Is it a candle?"

"That?—it's a boar's pizzle, that's what it is. It always hangs here in the chimney, but this morning the old man took it to grease his boots with, and then the boys got hold of it."

"There isn't much grease in it," said Ditte, greatly interested in the result; she would have liked to see anybody that could stop those pancakes sticking to the pan.

"No, it's getting a bit dry, it's from an old boar, that's why. It's best for greasing backsides; the old man always takes it when the youngsters want a whacking. But sit you down now, the coffee's coming."

No, Ditte had to hurry off. "Or else I shall get a scolding," she said. She didn't want any of those pancakes.

“Oh, well. It was a good thing you came, for the old man’s getting so sour and don’t know where to turn. You can’t put anything decent before him when there’s no earnings—and then you can be sure there’s no peace in the house. If we hadn’t had a few herrings in the barrel and some potatoes in the pit, we should have been in a bad way. It’s been a dirty winter for us here. The weather’s been sour, they’re sour at the Hill Farm, and he’s sour himself—so how’s he to look for anything but sourness? It’ll do me real good to get rid of him for a bit.”

The days grew long and light. Ditte was not allowed to burn a candle in her little room, but now it was light enough if the upper half-door was left open. There was no window.

She had her little room in the oldest wing of the buildings, which once—perhaps a couple of hundred years ago—had been the dwelling-house. The stone floor still remained from the time when it had been used as a kitchen. The open chimney was still there too, but was closed at the height of the ceiling by straw laid on stakes; her bed stood in the chimney opening as in an alcove—there was just room for it. Above the bed there was still the toothed iron rod on which the pot had hung. When it rained, ancient soot used to pour down the wall by her pillow; the strong smell reminded her of Granny and brought melancholy dreams. It sometimes happened that mice gnawed their way through the blocked chimney and fell on to her quilt.

But Ditte was delighted with her den; it was the first time in her life she had had a room of her own. She had decorated it with an old wooden case, which she had put up on end and spread a white cloth on top. It served both for dressing-table and washing-stand. And along the top of the open chimney she had fastened a long blue valance with tassels which she had found in the loft; it had once belonged to a four-post bed and brightened up her alcove a great deal. On the dressing-table stood a scrap of looking-glass.

Here she spent her happiest hours; whenever she had any spare time she went off to her little room. It had been pretty cold in winter with the open half-door, but now it was all right. Then she would take out her various treasures and handle them, laying down one thing and taking up another, spreading it out and then folding it neatly. She could do this over and over again and it gave her heartfelt pleasure. There was a piece of embroidery for which she had been praised by the schoolmaster's wife while they were still living at the Crow's Nest; an album in which some of her confirmation class had written their names, and a photograph of the whole class. That was the only time she had been photographed, and she still looked with the same surprise and curiosity at the thin little girl who was supposed to represent herself—the smallest of the lot, and the ugliest, she thought. What she chiefly wondered was whether she would ever look as nice as the rest. She had no exaggerated opinion of her own appearance, and what could have given her one? Nobody had ever said, What a pretty little girl! about her.

And what was there to make her pretty? The blood that circulated through her body was not exactly sweetened in its passage through the heart; it found there a mass of troubles and carried all their bitterness into the rest of her frame, and on that she had to be nourished. Her color was still bluish from it, and it was hard to get rid of the thinness and boniness that resisted the growing roundness of her figure. And her crookedness stuck to her to the last; it had been well helped by the severe winter work. Altogether the result was a mixed one; she could not be called pretty yet!

But she was happy, she had never enjoyed the spring so much as this year. And the sunlight made up for a great deal. It just took her face and figure as they were and made short work of all the angularities. Sometimes she was quite a picture of sunshine and smiles as she crossed the farmyard with the deep blue sea of spring as a background. "Why, how happy you look, my girl!" Sine exclaimed, laughing herself. "Is it because you're going to take the cattle out?"

That is just how she looked on a day in the middle of May when she started out with the cattle again. And the beasts looked as she did. Their hair had grown long in the course of the winter and they were thin too, but the light and the wind played about them, and they were full of friskiness. They kicked up their hind legs in the maddest way as if they were trying to reach the sun, and started off in a wild gallop across the fields toward the Common. And Ditte followed them light at heart.

CHAPTER IX

A SUMMER DAY

THE first few days Ditte was out, she had taken her lunch over to Rasmus Rytter's cabin, but now the youngsters came to fetch it themselves morning and afternoon. They came in a body and were always there before she was; when they lay huddled together in one of her nests, waiting for her. They were as shy as young plovers and generally hid when they saw any one coming; as soon as they had got the food they darted off one after the other—as though they were running away with something stolen. When they had gone a little way they sat down, each by himself, and began to devour it. She had to be careful to divide it among them; it was no use trusting one of them with another's share, they were too hungry for that. They had not much on: a ragged pair of breeches and perhaps something that was meant to be a shirt as well; but they didn't want much either in the summer weather. And they were quick on their feet!

One day she set to work to scrub a little of the dirt off them, but it was not a success. On the following day they would not venture down to her, but lay up by the hedge and watched her; as soon as she approached they bolted. She held up the food for them to see, but it was no good. Then she left it where they had been

and went back to the marsh; and a little while after it was gone. They were like chickens hatched out of the way in some strawstack, half wild and full of suspicion; there was no way of making up to them. But when they were on their own ground they were quite different. At home in the cabin they made a row all day long that could be heard right across the Common—and their mother's scolding voice trying to make itself heard among them.

Their breeches hardly ever had any buttons, so that they had to hold them up when they ran. This irritated Ditte, and one day she caught one of them and held him fast. "You won't get anything to eat till I've sewed this on," she said, taking a button out of her pocket. Then he submitted to the operation, stamping his feet all the time, and as soon as she had wound the thread round and snapped it off, he tore away—still holding on to his breeches. "Let go, you stupid!" she called out with a laugh. Then he let go, and when he found they kept up of their own accord, he got quite wild and rushed round her at a frantic pace, round and round in the same narrow circle, leaning inwards like a tethered foal. Ditte saw quite well that it was done in her honor and followed him admiringly with her eyes. "That's very fine," she cried. "That's very nice of you. But you can't keep it up any longer, come and take your food." Oh, yes, he could do another round yet; and then came up to her puffing and received his share. This time he didn't run off with it, but lay down beside her and ate it.

That made the others stop and allow her to mend

their clothes. By degrees they gained confidence in her—and before she knew where she was she had another little family to take care of. It was no light job and it gave her a feeling of satisfaction; Ditte had a way of enjoying life when her hands were busy.

She got as far as making them let her wash them, and that gave her something to do. The worst part of it was their little heads; there was hardly anything to be done with them. She would have to steal a little paraffin and bring it out with her!—

One afternoon she soused their heads with paraffin; she had to tell them stories about Big Klaus while she did it, to make them stand still. When it was over they stood with blinking eyes, looking as if they had fallen into a strange world. "Does it smart?" she asked with a laugh.

"Yes. But they're not biting any more," they answered in surprise.

"Now you may go home," she said.

They took no notice and sat down by her. "Tell us some more," they asked.

"No, run away now. And then you shall hear some more to-morrow."

"About Big Klaus?"

"Yes, and about Pers the cat, who could open doors by himself." Then they shuffled off; but there wasn't much hurry about it.

Ditte got the cattle together, and then undressed and washed herself in a little pool that was hidden by bushes. She lay on her stomach in the shallow tepid water and played at swimming; when she raised herself

on her hands and lowered herself again, the water took hold of her stomach and her firm little breasts with a soft clucking sound. Her skin was not so grimy as last summer. She sat up on the grassy bottom and scrubbed herself to get the last of it off.

Then she sat on the dry bank, half dressed, and went over her clothes; she had sewing things in a paper beside her. The cattle were feeding quietly, there was time and leisure for her own occupations—clothes and the rest, and that was what Ditte wanted now. She was glad to be alone.

She sat humming to herself, half absorbed in her work, happy and free from care. Scraps of thoughts and impressions fluttered through her head and went again without her seizing them; the warmth of the earth rose from the thick carpet of moss and half-dry grass and embraced her. She was growing as she sat. There was a rumbling of wheels from the high road and she listened to the distant sound—it was somebody in a hurry. But she wouldn't trouble to get up and run into the meadow to see who it might be.

In the course of the afternoon Karl came down across the fields from the farm, so there was something the matter at home. "He's there again," he said, throwing himself down by her side—"they're half-drunk already." He turned his face away.

"Then you'll clear out, I suppose?" asked Ditte with a teasing smile. She couldn't understand how he could stay hanging about at home.

"I told Mother I should, but she only says, Go on then! She doesn't care about me or anything else, as

long as she gets her way. But now I mean it—I've packed up my things. I only wanted to say good-by to you." He waited a little while. "Don't *you* care either that I'm going away?" he asked, taking hold of her plaits.

Ditte shook her head decisively. "No, just you go and don't worry!" He had never made things any easier for her.

"Haven't I behaved well to you, then?—haven't I, Ditte?" he repeated, as she remained stubbornly silent.

"No," came her answer at last in a low voice. She had tears in her eyes as she thought of all the times when he ought to have taken her part against unjust treatment, but did not do so.

Perhaps he had the same thoughts. "No, I know that well enough," he said quietly—"for I was a coward. But now I'm not one any longer. From now on I shall try to be a good and brave man."

"Yes, for now you have a real sorrow," said Ditte, looking him in the face. She knew how hard it was to leave home.

He gazed helplessly before him: "The worst of it is that it's Mother—and then all that folks say about us. They stare at one, and then put their heads together and whisper. People are disgusting—wicked they are! But we mustn't think that—we ought to love our neighbors," he suddenly corrected himself.

"It's nothing to worry about, all that," said Ditte encouragingly; "let people talk. As long as you know you haven't done any wrong, what does it matter what people say? You said yourself the other day that if

only one was at peace with God, it was all the same what folks thought about one."

He leaned his head against her shoulder and sat with closed eyes. "It is so hard to be strong in God," he said quietly. "If only one had Him by one's side instead of within one—so that one could see Him." He was absently passing his hand over her back, then all at once he sat upright and looked at her searchingly. Her bodice had slipped down over one shoulder—she had not buttoned it properly; her shoulderblade stuck out a little.

"What's that you have there?" he asked, keeping his hand on the spot.

"Oh, that comes from carrying my little brothers and sister so much," she said, blushing and hastily covering herself. "It's almost gone now," she added in a low tone—with her face turned away from him.

"You need not be ashamed of it," he said, getting up. "I'm not like some of them!"

No, Ditte was not ashamed for him—or afraid of him either; he was only unhappy, nothing else. But she was sorry he had noticed that crookedness, now that it was almost gone. After that she always made an effort to hold herself upright; she wanted to be straight in the back and round in the breast like other girls.

The word *sin* always rang in her ears after her talks with Karl. Was it sin to wish to be pretty—and was it any use? Of course her father thought she was already. "You're getting quite a pretty girl," he said every time she came home. But he was an interested party; Ditte would not have minded hearing it from

other people as well. She wanted of course to be a good girl above all else, but it could never do any harm to be rather nice-looking too!

These were the thoughts she went about with—these and others: she no longer flew from one thing to another; Ditte had time to ponder. And that she had learnt at last. While she washed in the pools, she discovered herself inch by inch—without its giving her any great pleasure at present. There were many faults to be found!

But by many different paths her attention was diverted from the outward to the inward. One day she established the fact that she had round knees—so she would be kind to her husband! That was in itself a matter of course, nobody could ever say she had been unkind to any one; but it was a fine thing to have a tangible proof of it. One by one she became conscious of different sides of her nature, and sometimes this made her really glad. She did not suffer from false modesty; existence was poor enough without her making it any poorer. Here comparison of herself with others was not exactly to her disadvantage—she thought she could stand it on the whole. But then there was the unfortunate circumstance that people paid most attention to the outside.

But in looking into herself she found other things which did not fill her with joy, but only with strange wonder. And sometimes they made her anxious.

The sun and the wind played with her, with marked results. There was laughter in her now; it was, so to speak, stored up in her nature and constantly made it-

self felt as a tickling sensation, a tendency to burst out even at serious moments. But besides the laughter something else flitted within her like a ghost, disquieting thoughts, sensations she could not refer to anything she knew. Day by day she came across words and actions which caused some change within her. A hand had thoughtlessly taken hold of her plaits—from that day she was conscious of her hair; it felt like something separate, a being that demanded attention. She had to put her hand up to it, feel if it was tidy, lift it when it lay too close to her head, or plait it again. And out of gratitude for the attention she gave it, it began to grow and got thicker and softer.

A growth was going on in Ditte. She had strange sensations, now here, now there, as though sap was flowing rapidly to one part of her body or another. Sometimes she felt sore all over—and dizzy; it was growing pains, Sine thought. All day long she could sit quietly by herself, tracing these feelings; there was unrest in her budding breasts. She heard the talk of the grown-ups, their obscure allusions, and she listened in a peculiar way; she saw the behavior of the men and girls with each other in a new light. On Saturday evenings they assembled at one of the farms farther inland and danced out of doors to a concertina; and Ditte's heart throbbed when she stood in her little room and tidied herself to run over and look on. Once in a while some young fellow would catch hold of *her* too. She hit out at them, but did not get angry any more—only frightened.

Her mistress's affairs interested her greatly. She

was beginning to understand one thing and another, and guessed that within this strong peasant woman hidden forces were at work which would not bear the light of day and had been held down for years, but now broke loose irresistibly. Karen Bakkegaards was in the dangerous transition, said Sine—a mystic word which might mean a good deal. If she came in contact with her mistress's clothes, a queer cold thrill ran through her and there was a tingling at the roots of her hair. Everything and everybody was dominated by this singular possession of Karen's, Sine and the farm hands—and the son too, in his own way; a strange look came into their eyes, they spoke in undertones and behaved mysteriously with covert signs and glances. This weird, oppressive feeling haunted the whole neighborhood; people she had never seen before came up and began to question her—and then pulled themselves up and talked about ordinary things. It seemed to her that everybody was watching the Hill Farm.

It cast its shadow far and wide. When people came together and the Hill Farm was mentioned, the talk never left it and the theme was always the same—love in all its secret and fateful transformations. A curious brightness came into their eyes and all hidden things were dragged out. Every corner bred its mystery.

Ditte absorbed it all with eyes and ears till she got into a state of nervous tension; a purely physical terror would possess her and distract her mind so that she shuddered for no reason. One day when she sat outside the yard at her midday milking, she discovered her own blood on the milking-stool. She turned dizzy; no

one had ever talked to her about what was to come, she had had no mother to lead her gently into the mystery of Life. Now she was flung into it with brutal suddenness; its symbol, blood, was connected with so many other horrors in her scared imagination. She staggered indoors, white with terror.

In the doorway she met Karl. He asked her what was the matter and with some difficulty got so much out of her that he could guess the cause of her alarm. He smiled goodnatureedly, and that reassured her; it was pretty nearly the first time she had seen him smile. But then he turned serious. "You mustn't worry about that," he said, stroking her cheek; "it only means that you'll soon be a grown-up woman."

Ditte was honestly grateful for his consolation; she was not sorry that he should be in her confidence over this. To her he was not exactly a man, but a human being, a helpless one, who had often had need of her and now lent her a helping hand in return—it was so natural. It made no difference to their relations beyond this, that consolation was now mutual. She too had some one to whom she could trustfully turn when things went badly.

CHAPTER X

SORINE COMES HOME

DITTE had just finished feeding the four little chaps and it had gone off well. She had laid out the meal on a little tuft and placed them round it; they were to learn how to sit at table instead of tearing about with a piece of bread in their hand. And they were to learn to help themselves from a common dish without grudging each other—that was about the hardest thing. They liked each to have his own share which he could sit and gloat over greedily, or, better still, sneak off with it and devour it by himself like a stray dog. Ditte forced them to sit still and eat out of the same trough. If she gave one of them a piece, the other three followed it with greedy looks—their eyes were more on each other's food than on their own. Then she was down on them again; she could not bear envy. And their envy was still shown even when they had had their fill; Ditte remembered the truth of Granny's saying, that God satisfies the belly before the eyes. "You must behave nicely like Povl and Else and Kristian," she said. "They always share with one another, when they have anything." And by degrees they learned their lesson. The big ones didn't run away from the little ones any more, but held them nicely by the hand—at any rate as long as she could keep an eye on them!

She stood up on the slope looking after them as they trotted off home again. There were often quarrels among them, but then they turned their heads involuntarily and stole a glance behind them; and as soon as they saw that she was still standing there, they took hands again. She laughed. "Oh, yes, I can see you!" she nodded.

Ditte was lost in her thoughts of them when she heard a strangely familiar sound from the direction of the high road. A sight met her eyes coming over the top of the hill and moving down towards her—a cart jolting along with a big fantastic creature in the shafts, a bag of bones in the likeness of a horse. It staggered cautiously on with its huge shaggy feet, which looked like worn-out brooms sweeping up the dust of the road, and the vehicle came creaking behind. It went from one side of the road to the other, and in the cart sat a big figure huddled together, flicking automatically with a long, thin stick.

Ditte jumped with joy and ran across the stubble fields on her bare feet as if out of her senses. Lars Peter raised his head at her call, and Big Klaus imperceptibly came to a standstill.

"Is that you, my girl?" he said with a smile—strangely serious. "You see, I've got to go to town to fetch Mother."

"But then you're going the wrong way!" Ditte gave a ringing laugh. It was too comic that her father should mistake the direction, when he knew the roads better than any one else. "You're only going further and further away!"

"Yes, I know that well enough. But the thing is that Big Klaus can't possibly manage the drive—he's turned forty now." Lars Peter gave a melancholy smile. "And so I came out to try and borrow another horse, only I don't know where to turn to for it—we hardly know anybody. I suppose it's no use coming to you?"

Ditte thought not. Karen Bakkegaards was so spiteful to everybody.

"There's just the chance that this affair with Johannes might have made her a bit more friendly."

No, she didn't think so at all—quite the contrary. "You'd have done better to try at Sands Farm," she said, "I'm sure there's somebody there who'd be glad to lend you a horse."

"Yes, I dare say they've changed their minds about us now we're gone. I don't know—somehow I had the Hill Farm in my head; but I dare say you're right. Only it's a shame that Big Klaus has had the drive for nothing."

Yes, there was no mistake about it, he had changed since she last saw him. He fell asleep as he stood, with his head hanging down. Ditte plucked some grass from the ditch for him, but he wouldn't even smell it.

"It's harder and harder for him to feed," said Lars Peter. "The best thing for him would be to be knocked on the head."

He was so quiet himself to-day—there was something almost solemn in his manner; it must be because he was going to fetch Sörine. He seemed lost in a dream while Ditte was petting Big Klaus and trying to put a little life into him. "Well—it's time we turned

round and went inland," he said at last, picking up the reins. "You'll look in at home when you get a chance?"

Ditte nodded. She could do no more, in the state in which he was.

"It's a funny kind of war your mistress is carrying on," he said, when he had got the horse started again.

"How do you mean?" asked Ditte with interest. She was walking alongside, holding on to the body of the cart.

"Well, she's helping to spread scandals about herself. It's a strange form of amusement; one would think she had enough to keep her busy as it was. But she treats you all right, eh?"

Oh, yes, Ditte had nothing to complain of.

"But cut away now back to your beasts, before anybody sees you've left them. You know what farmers are like, they lend each other a hand at getting us into trouble." He gently took her hand off the cart.

Then Ditte let go, against her will, and ran back across the fields; she turned round every moment and waved; but her father was already plunged in his own thoughts again; he did not see.

No, to tell the truth Ditte was not inclined to go home and make a fuss over her mother's return. She had caused her and all of them many tears and much shame; Ditte thought she had got over it, but some of it was still left deep down in her, and now all the old thoughts came up to the surface again. It was her mother's fault that they were despised and treated as

outcasts—the criminal's family! No, she had no great desire to go home and see her again.

But that no longer settled the question. Before, yes—then it could simply be thrust aside by so many other things that were more important, but now it forced its own way into the foreground. She could not always stay away from home—that alone gave her something to think of. Her mother was no longer safely shut up in prison, but had come home and would take charge of things again. How would she set about it, and how would she behave to the children? These were serious questions which gave Ditte no peace.

And then an entirely new thought occurred to her—that she was wicked and unjust. This came upon her quite suddenly in connection with the word *sin*, which haunted her thoughts after her talks with Karl; she had never regarded her relations with her mother from that point of view before. She was forced to think of her father, of his solemn seriousness when she met him on the road, and his melancholy tenderness in all that concerned Sörine; and she could not help comparing him with herself. There was nothing in Lars Peter's example that taught her to hit one who was down. For the first time she understood the extent of her father's conciliatory spirit, and she was ashamed. How much he had suffered through Sörine! And yet he kept his home ready to receive her, had preserved it for years as a sanctuary where she could take refuge.—One day she fell to longing for home and the feeling was so strong that it made her cry.

“What's the matter with you?” asked Karl when she

came home in the middle of the day, red and tearful.

"I want so much to go home," she said.

"Then run off after dinner," he said—"I'll look after the cattle. *She's* not at home, she's gone to town." He didn't like saying "Mother" now.

Sörine was standing in the kitchen washing up when Ditte came. Her freckled arms were shockingly thin and her hands were strangely clumsy, as though she had never washed up before. Her cheeks were hollow, pale and patchy, and her face did not reflect the light. She glared at Ditte with the eyes of a stranger—like a frightened animal, Ditte thought—then dried herself on her apron and reached out a clammy hand. Ditte took it without looking at her.

They stood facing each other for a while, not knowing what to do. Ditte's heart softened and she was ready to cry; if her mother had made the slightest advance she could have thrown herself into her arms. But Sörine did not stir. "Father and the children are down at the harbor," she said at last, in a voice that had neither warmth nor tone in it. Ditte went down there, glad of the chance to get away.

Lars Peter was standing in the hold of the decked boat, cleaning up; the children sat on the wharf. He pulled himself up through the hatch and came ashore. "It was uncommon nice of you to come down home," he said with glad emotion, giving her his hand. "Thanks!"

"Oh, there's nothing to thank me for," said Ditte with a wry face; she was ready to burst

out crying, suddenly overwhelmed by the way he took it.

"Oh yes, it was good of you—for you had no call to do it," he said, putting his arm round her shoulder. "Anybody would have understood if you had kept away. Have you said how d'ye do to Mother?"

Ditte nodded. She was not yet quite sure of herself; if she had opened her mouth to answer, it might have been too much for her. And she was not going to howl any more—not at any price! It was only children who cried—and half-grown girls!

Lars Peter sat down on a bollard and pulled off his long wooden-soled boots; they reached up over the thighs and it wasn't done without some groaning. "We're beginning to get stiff," he said, wincing—"and then there's this pain in the joints. It's either old age coming on or else it means that one can't stand the trade."

"Well, what do you think about Mother?" he asked as they sauntered up. "She's a little strange to it all yet," he continued as Ditte did not answer—"but you can't wonder at that—after being shut up all those years. She must have been glad to see you.—Well, perhaps you couldn't notice it, she don't quite know how to find words for it yet. But one can see well enough that she has warm feelings for us all the same. Thank God we've got her home again! And now you'll be a little kind to her, won't you?—she wants it; folks here don't look at her very friendly. They'd rather she'd stayed where she was—so we've got to see and be a bit good to her."

Sörine had the coffee ready. Lars Peter took it as a kindness and looked at her gratefully, he was in a good humor. She went about silently looking after them, like a stranger, almost like a ghost; an impenetrable atmosphere separated her from the others. The children had not yet got accustomed to her; that could be seen in their eyes, which followed every one of her movements suspiciously. And she herself had a sort of look of having fallen unawares from a world where everybody was quite differently constructed. Ditte wondered whether she saw and heard anything at all of what went on around her; even her eyes did not disclose whether she followed their talk. It was not easy to guess what she thought about it all.

Towards evening Ditte had to leave again; Lars Peter went along the road with her. "Don't you think Mother's changed?" he asked when they had got beyond the sandhills.

"She looks poorly," Ditte answered, avoiding the question; she was not sure that Sörine had grown any more affection from being shut up.

"Yes, the air in there has pulled her down. But in her nature too she's different—she doesn't scold any more."

"What does she say to things in the hamlet here—the innkeeper and all that? And to our selling the Crow's Nest?"

"Well, what *does* she say? She really doesn't say anything, but goes about silently from morning till night. And she won't sleep in the room with the rest

of us—she's shy of company now. It's difficult to get her out of doors too, she'll only go out in the evening. All the same it seems to me that she's more contented—with me too."

"What about the neighbors?" asked Ditte.

"Ah, the neighbors, they give the house a wide berth. And the children come running up and stare in at the door—I don't know if it's the parents that send them. If they catch sight of Mother, they rush away squalling as if the devil was after them. That doesn't help her to get settled down again."

"They think she's got a mark branded on her forehead," Ditte explained. She had believed it herself and was surprised to find it was not so. "Has nobody asked you out?" she asked.

"No, not yet. But some day we shall see one or another of them come in to say good-day—when they've got used to the situation. There's more than one that would like to do it, but they daren't because of the others."

Lars Peter looked at Ditte in expectation of her confirming this hope, but she said nothing. And her silence was equal to many words; she didn't look at the prospect very brightly.

"I'm a little afraid myself that it won't work," he began again; "but then, we'll just have to find another place. The world's big enough, and after all there's nothing to boast of here. We shan't miss much by moving. Only it's a shame that one has had to put up with being fleeced of everything; it won't be easy to begin again from the beginning."

"But won't you get your money back when we go?"

"Oh no. The innkeeper's not the man to give up anything when once he's laid his dead hand on it. Especially now, when he's said to be in difficulties himself."

"The innkeeper? With all his money?"

"Yes, it staggers you—and plenty more too, I expect. No, the truth is, he owes money to the banks and such like; it's all borrowed, they say. That's why he's not building the hotel, the banks won't lend him the money. We thought he owned the whole place, but far from it. They say he's hard put to it to meet his bills; last quarter day they even expected him to go smash. And that explains why he's hard on others."

"Then what pleasure can he get out of it all? He might just as well have let us keep what was ours."

"No, I shouldn't think there was much pleasure to be got that way; but it must answer to something in his nature. Just now the brisling is pretty thick off the shore here; so thick that you can take them up by the bucketful. It's the mackerel that's driving them in; they're out there in shoals, eating their way through the crowd and pushing them on. And beyond them again there's the seal and the porpoise eating up the mackerel and driving them in. That's the way it does here too, I should think; he sweats us, and others sweat him and the likes of him again. I'd like to know whether there's anybody higher up that eats *them*."

"It's quite strange," said Ditte. She had never imagined any one above the innkeeper.

“Ah, strange it is! You might say it’s one devil ruling another. But it does one good to think that when all’s said and done, he’s no better off than the rest of us. It looks as if there was a scrap of justice in it, small though it may be.”

CHAPTER XI

DITTE CONSOLES A FELLOW-CREATURE

WHEN Ditte got home, the yard was full of strangers. Karl stood outside in the meadow, looking out as if he expected her. "It's a good thing you're back," he said feverishly. "Mother's come home—with a whole party. She's so mad about your running away without leave."

"But I did nothing of the sort," Ditte objected in surprise.

"No, but that's what she thinks. Hurry up now by the back way into the scullery and get to work, and then perhaps she won't notice. Or else she'll do nothing but scold." He was quite nervous.

"But why didn't you say you'd given me leave to run home?" asked Ditte.

"I didn't dare to, because—" he stood shifting his feet, foolish and miserable.

Ditte went in through the gate and across the yard, she didn't like back ways. If she was in for a rowing, she would just take it.—Sine was busy. "Thank goodness you've come and can lend a hand," she said; "I'm pretty near out of my wits. But you can thank your stars you weren't here an hour ago; the mistress was so wild that she promised to thrash you. And of course that skunk Karl must keep his mouth shut about giving you leave to go."

"Oh, he—" Ditte curled her upper lip in scorn. "But let her just try beating me, and I'll kick her shins with my wooden shoes."

"Goodness, child, are you crazy?—why her legs are full of varicose veins! Suppose you kicked a hole in them and she bled to death." Sine was quite alarmed.

"Well, what then? I shouldn't care," said Ditte.

Ditte was put to wash up. She was angry with her mistress for wanting to thrash her, with Karl for leaving her in the lurch, with the children at the village for not leaving her mother alone—with everything. She rattled the things unnecessarily as she washed them, and might easily smash something; Sine had to tell her to keep quiet. But the girl heard nothing; she had taken a regular fit, little bit of a thing as she was—it was quite funny! Sine had to take her firmly by the arm before she would behave. "Ugh, I'm so wild!" she said.

Sine laughed aloud. "Then somebody else has more reason to be wild! They come running out into the kitchen one after the other, giving orders—and they have some cheek. One would think the mistress had taken leave of her senses. She generally lets you know who gives the orders in this house."

All the same Karl was the one Ditte was angriest with. He wouldn't come indoors, but walked about the yard, calling out that he protested, found one job after another to do—and looked wretched. When he was quite sure nobody saw him, he shook his fist at the parlor windows. Yes, he was the right one to clench

his fists! Ditte felt inclined to go out and ask him if he'd like to borrow a petticoat.

No, there was something wrong with the mistress to-day. She came out into the kitchen, red in the face and with her skirts tucked up; her hair was in disorder and stuck up like a stallion's mane. Johannes came running after her, and this matronly woman, old enough to be a grandmother, romped with him like any giddy wench. It didn't suit her. She must have been drinking freely—she didn't see Ditte at all.

Directly afterwards Karl appeared at the scullery door—he had been just outside in the dusk and had seen it all. He made a sign to Ditte. "You mustn't laugh at it," he begged them—"I can't bear it!" He looked pitiable.—Ditte forgot her anger in an instant. "No, we won't," she said, touching his hand. "It isn't anything to laugh at either. But you go to bed now—then you'll forget it all."

He went outside again and began walking up and down under the lighted windows, like a sick dog. Ditte saw him there every time she ran to the pump for water—and threw him a word as she passed. Once she put her pail down and ran up to him. "Go to bed, do you hear?" she said, taking his arm and trying to prevail upon him.

"I can't," he answered, half crying. "Mother said I was to stay up and put the horses in."

"Pooh! let them do that themselves. You're not their slave."

"I daren't; Mother would be in such a rage.—Oh,

I'm such a wretched coward—I daren't do anything."

Ditte pressed his hand to let him know she bore him no ill will, and ran off.

At about eleven o'clock Sine sent her to bed. "You must be dead tired after your long walk," she said. "And you were up early this morning too—off with you now!" She made short work of Ditte's protests by pushing her out of the kitchen.

Yes, Ditte was tired, sure enough, so tired that she was on the point of collapsing. She stood hesitating for a moment in the dark scullery—out in the yard Karl was walking about in his wretchedness, he might be in need of a kind word. But what if he came in with her and sat on the edge of her bed and talked—that happened sometimes when he was in low spirits and wanted consolation. Ditte was too tired to talk; the thought of having to keep awake any longer positively made her feel sick. For once selfishness triumphed; she sacrificed another's need to her own and stole by the back way over to her little room.

Ditte sat for a while on the edge of the bed with her eyes shut. The powerful impressions of the day were working in her—and her tiredness; she was so dead beat that she reeled. Then she pulled herself together with a jerk, slipped out of her clothes in a second and jumped into bed. It was good to get into the cool bed-clothes and lose one's self, fairly sink in a luxury of tiredness. As soon as she had put her cheek on the pillow and turned her thoughts to something nice, she would be off.

As your thoughts are, so are your dreams, Granny used to say. And Ditte wanted to dream of something pretty—and wake with her mind full of vague sweetness after dreams that only lasted as long as the fleeting shreds of morning mist, vanishing before the light of day. At this time she used often to dream about the prince who was to come and take her away to his father's castle—as Granny had foretold in the spinning-song. In the daytime there were no princes—at any rate not for a poor girl like Ditte; but at night the prince really existed and came and asked her hand of Granny. That was just the splendid thing about dreams, that they took you and lifted you up into the light, so that you could see everything from above. But they were not free from troubles all the same, for he didn't think she was pretty. "No, because the most beautiful thing about her is inside," said Granny—"she has a heart of gold."

"Gold?" said the prince, opening his eyes wide. "Let me see!" Then Granny opened and showed him Ditte's heart. "But we don't like doing it," she said; "it might easily get dusty."

And the prince was pleased—for he knew all about gold. He took her by the hand and sang a verse of Granny's song:

"And if it's for a little child she's cried her poor eyes
out,
Spin, spin away; and spin, spin away!
Then she shall sit in state with servants all about,
Falderille, falderille, ray, ray, ray!"

"But that's about Granny herself," said Ditte in despair, letting go his hand—for she was annoyed about it.

"That doesn't matter," said Granny, joining their hands again—"just you take him. My turn will come all in good time. And the song was made for both of us."

Ditte opened her eyes in the dark and felt to her great joy that she really had a warm hand in hers. Somebody was sitting on the edge of her bed and feeling for her face. "Is that you, Karl?" she asked—not a bit afraid but a trifle disappointed.

"Now they've gone, that crew!" he said. "They were drunk and made a fearful noise. I don't understand how you could sleep with it going on. They wanted to give me two crowns for a tip because I put the horses in; but I'm not going to take their dirty money. I told them they could give it back to those they'd cheated out of it. And they very nearly hit me for that."

"That was the right thing to tell them," said Ditte laughing. "They well deserved it."

But Karl was not in a mood to join in her laughter. He sat in the dark holding her hand, but said nothing; Ditte could feel how his sad thoughts gnawed and gnawed within him. "Now you're not to think about it any more," she said—"it doesn't make things any better. It's only stupid to be sorry all the time."

"*She* wasn't out there when they went," he said absently, apparently not having heard what she had been saying. "Perhaps she simply couldn't come out."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Ditte, suddenly becoming anxious.

"Oh—she keeps pace with them when they're drinking, you see. It's likely enough she—" His head sank on her breast and he shook with heavy sobs.

Ditte threw her arms round his neck, stroked his hair and said comforting things to him, as if he were a little child. "There, there, be a man now," she said. And when her consolation failed, she made room for him by her side and took his head on her breast. "Now you're going to be sensible like a man," she said. "Why need you worry about anything? you can go away and leave it all behind." Her child's heart beat against his cheek, laden with sympathy.

By degrees she calmed him down; they lay talking together in undertones, quite happily—and suddenly began to laugh when they found they had their heads under the bedclothes and were whispering. That took away the last of Karl's melancholy; he began to tickle her and got quite lively. "You mustn't do that or I shall scream," she said seriously, trying to find his mouth.

Her kiss quieted him; and all at once he seized her in his arms and drew her violently to him. Ditte defended herself, but had to yield to the strength of his embrace; she felt so weak all over.

"Now you're hurting me," she said, and began to cry.

CHAPTER XII

SUMMER IS BRIEF

DITTE sat under the high bank at the edge of the field, and tried to shield herself from the Scotch mist. The cattle grazed down below. They were for the most part hidden by the thick fleecy mist, but she could hear them munching through the fog: they did not care to go far away from her in such weather.

The animals' coats were dripping, and the bramble bushes over her head were pearly gray with dewdrops. If she moved ever so little, they rained down on her. But she had no desire to move, only sat quite still, wishing herself quieter yet under the ground. Big drops hung on her eyelashes, as big as those swinging from the tip of every low-hanging leaf. Now and again one fell on her cheek, sometimes from a leaf, sometimes from her own lashes; it was not easy to tell which was which, and she did not even try. Only when one fell right into her mouth, then she knew well enough where it came from. She sat crouched up on the edge of the bank, cross-legged and with her bare, wet feet peeping out from under her skirt; blades of grass stuck out between her toes, and the soles were swollen and blistered with the wet. One hand she held over her mouth, and bit her knuckles, and she sat staring

straight in front of her without even blinking. She seemed as if turned to stone.

She felt a vibration, and heard steps down below in the field—Karl's! A little life awoke in her, and she looked around. To her tearful glance everything seemed broken, as if the whole world had smashed into a thousand pieces. She raised her face and looked up expectantly. "Now he will take me in his arms, and kiss me!" thought she, but did not change her position.

But Karl flung himself down beside her. They sat awhile, each looking out into the mist, then his hand sought hers among the grass. "Are you angry with me?" he asked.

She shook her head. "You could not help being so unhappy," said she. She looked away from him and her lip quivered.

Karl bent forward to try to meet her glance, but had to give it up. "I have prayed all night to the Lord to forgive my sin, and I believe He has done so," said he spiritlessly.

"Ah!" Ditte heard him speak, but the words did not reach her inner consciousness. It was a matter of such perfect indifference to her what he arranged with the Lord.

"But if you like I will stand forth and confess the whole to the Brethren," said he.

She turned hastily towards him; life and hope had come into her expression again. "Do you think the schoolmaster is coming here again?" She too could confide in *him*.

"No, I meant the Brethren," he answered.

Well, as to that, he could do as he liked. It did not concern her at all.

Shortly after he got up and went, and Ditte sat forlornly alone. He had not kissed her, and yet they belonged to each other, unhappily united in the common bonds of what is called sin. She had already begun to find qualities in him that she could not look up to, and she needed to find something to admire in him to excuse herself, needed to love him to account for what had happened between them. He was no longer exclusively the child needing her comfort. He had taken possession of her, so that she felt she could never get away from him. And yet he went away, as if nothing but disagreeable annoying things lay between them. Ditte stared uncomprehendingly after him.

The day became darker yet. She could go and have ever such a free, careless time, busy herself with different occupations, and sit and chatter with the day laborer's children; but all the time that would be there at the back of her mind, like a creature that had put the Evil Eye on one. If she as much as smiled it could reach out a black hand whenever it felt like it, and blot the smile out. And sometimes it overwhelmed her altogether. So there was no savor in life, all was black and gloomy, and she had only one wish,—that she could thrust away all that had happened and be as she had been before; throw herself at some one's feet and grovel there to beg forgiveness for her sin. It would be a long time before she could win back her peace of mind enough to creep back into her careless girlish world of dreams again.

Ah, but it was difficult to stop up the gap in the fence once broken down! Ditte knew that from experience out in the pastures, and could see that it was the same here. She had taken the care of another upon her shoulders, and in that there was nothing out of the way, for as long as she could remember demands had been made upon her mother instinct and fostering care. She had had to devote all her strength to smoothing the way for others, till helping them became a fixed habit.

Now, however, she would gladly have had a little free time. It was summer, and the sunshine had warmed Ditte's blood, and had hunted out all cares and worries, and kindled a secret desire for life and enjoyment. Every Saturday evening there was dancing, sometimes at Sea Hill and sometimes at some other farm, and Ditte was always there. It was the first time she had been to real dances, and enjoyed them thoroughly—just as happy to dance with one of her girl friends as with a fellow. The dance itself was her delight and she would shut her eyes and let herself be borne away into the whirling throng.

But it was not easy to avoid Karl: he used to lie concealed somewhere outside the farm, and watch for her, begging and praying her so earnestly not to go. Ditte did not care a pin what he said about sin and that kind of thing; but still it was hard to resist him now, so she would turn round and go home to the farm. If only he would have taken her for a walk. They might have gone along the beach to the fishing hamlet, a road where one never met any one. But he never thought of such a thing.

She would humbug him by pretending to go to bed, and steal out the other way. And when a dance happened to fall on one of the days he went to meeting she was delighted.

Karl was really troublesome, the most troublesome person she had yet had to do with. He had nothing better to do than hang about and keep a jealous eye on her, and always wanted to know where she was so as to be able to come to her with his troubles. He was just a spoilt child who would not be dictated to. He was sick at heart, tired of himself, of his mother and of the whole world. Ditte was the only one who could get him to smile and hold up his head once more. She was proud of this little success, and took no end of trouble with him, tried to manage him and make the best of things for both herself and him.

He never entered her little room again, not even by day; he was afraid. But sometimes he came by night and knocked softly at the door, and dead tired as she was, she had to get up and dress.

"It hurts me so here!" he would say, putting both hands to the back of his head. Then they would steal through the hollow lane down to the beach, and sit upon the big boulders, talking and listening to the monotonous splash of the waves. He was not loquacious, it was usually Ditte who chattered away. He would listen intently till now and then a pious fit came over him, and he would begin to reprove her. "You are still so worldly!" was his usual reproach.

"Then you can just let me alone!" Ditte would re-

tort indignantly. And then each would go their own way.

One Saturday evening there was the final dance of the season at an inn half an hour's walk inland. The long clear nights were over; it was the middle of August, dark and windy at night, and the summer dances were over for that year.

Ditte got leave to go and get ready as soon as the supper things were washed up; Sine was so good natured in sparing Ditte all she could and taking the evening work herself. Ditte put on her new homespun dress, never as yet worn, tied her plaits with a blue ribbon and wound them round her head. She wanted to be smart that evening—and grown-up! Luckily Karl was at a meeting, but to be quite sure of avoiding him, she took a field path which led behind the farm to the village. She was happy and hummed a tune as she walked along. It was true that a dark shadow still clouded her mind, but it was like a bad tooth, that had stopped aching. It did not hurt if only it was left alone.

The fun was at its height when she got there. The musicians had not turned up, so they were playing games with dancing in them, and singing their own accompaniment. There were both young and old from the farms, servants, and some lads from the workshops in the village: the farmers never came to these dances, they thought themselves above that. The dancers were circling round singing: "See who is in the midst of the ring!" Ditte sprang quickly into the ring, and took hold of two hands; she found that she was between two lads, but to-night she was neither timid nor bash-

ful—now she was grown up! She sang out loud, and waited anxiously to see if any of the fellows in the ring would come and choose her: it was exciting and her heart beat fast. Every one could judge from the number of times a girl was chosen, just how popular she was. There were girls who went on dancing the whole time, who scarcely got time to tie up their shoestrings!

It happened that Ditte was picked out immediately. Perhaps it was just a lucky chance, but she beamed with delight when she was brought back again to the ring. This beaming delight, the glow in her eyes, her enjoyment and sense of importance gave a new dignity to her bearing as she danced on the grass and made her seem beautiful. Every one could see it. Once again a half grown girl had cast off her childish ways, and entered the ranks of the maidens to compete for the apple of beauty, to try and win it; all clustered round her when the time came to take partners for the dance.

Was Ditte's head quite turned that evening? Perhaps there were not nearly so many after her as she herself imagined. But at all events she was among the young girls who were invited into the inn to drink coffee with the men.

When she came out again, it was quite dark. The innkeeper had hung a lamp from the gable window which lit up the grass and they danced in that light. There was a red-cheeked lad who had kept near her the whole evening, but had not danced; now under cover of the darkness he dared to come forward. Ditte liked him; he had firm, warm hands that took hold of hers without an afterthought, and his breath smelt of

youth, and of buttermilk, like a child's. But he was bashful, and indulged in foolish antics in the dance to carry off his embarrassment, so that the others stopped dancing to laugh. "Now we will stop!" said Ditte, laughing herself at his performance. He would not let her go, but went on twirling her round, and suddenly kissed her. Then he let go of her in alarm, and rushed out of the light, into the dark, amid the laughter of the others. They could hear him still running for a long time.

Ditte stole away from the dance before it was finished, to escape being taken home by one of her partners. She knew that the fellow who took a girl home expected something from her in return, and she wanted to be free and her own mistress. When she had gone a short way the red-cheeked lad sprang up, as if he had shot up from the ditch where he was lying, and came to meet her.

"May I take you home to-night?" he asked, a little uncertainly. "Yes, that you may," answered Ditte; she was not afraid of him. They walked along silently—it was his place to amuse her, but he only walked along with his head turned away. Ditte liked him well enough and would willingly have taken his hand.

"May I—may I go home with you another evening too?" he asked at last.

"I can't say now, but it's possible!" replied Ditte gravely.

"May I—may I tell any one else?"

No, Ditte did not like the idea of that. "They

would only talk nonsense and say we are sweethearts," she answered.

"Will—will you give me a kiss then?" He stopped and gazed intently at the ground.

Ditte kissed him quietly and thoughtfully. Then they continued their way, holding each other's hands now, but not speaking a word. At the farm Ditte stopped. "Good-night!" she said.

"Good-night, then!" he answered. They stood for a moment holding hands and then their lips met—they kissed like two loving children. But the kiss lasted too long and became too serious for them both, so they suddenly left off and began blowing each in the other's face, and laughing. Mogens turned round and began to run. She could hear his quick trot for a long time, and soon he broke out singing. Yes, Ditte liked him well.

Karl was sitting on the chopping block outside her door waiting. Ditte pretended not to hear or see him, and made straight for her door; she wanted to be free of his jeremiads for once. He came after her. "You have been to a dance," he said accusingly.

Ditte did not answer; it had nothing to do with him where she had been. She stood with her hand on the door-latch.

"I have been to a dance too. I have looked into heaven, and seen God's little winged angels before the Lamb at the foot of the throne. Will you come down to the beach with me, and I will tell you about it."

No, Ditte was tired and wanted to go to bed; it was too late.

"Will you answer me one thing?" he asked in deadly earnest. "Is it I who has led you into sin?"

"I am not in sin," said Ditte, stamping her foot and ready to cry. "Will you just let me alone, or I will call your mother and tell her everything." He stood staring uncomprehendingly for a moment, then turned on his heel and went down to the beach.

Ditte lay awake with a conscience that pricked her. But it was really no good, she would have to see about getting rid of him. It was too stupid if she could not even dance on account of Karl. Then she began to think of Mogens, his happy trot sounded still in her ears. It reminded her of Kristian, who could never walk quietly either, but always galloped along.

CHAPTER XIII

THE HEART

IT was said of the son and heir at Hill Farm that he was born with wrinkles in his forehead. "He has inherited a heavy burden; it's wonderful he's as good as he is!" they said. He was, in fact, a living witness to the curse. But the brothers out in the world had nothing the matter with them: they were quite all right. And the people who worked on the farm and stayed there any length of time came in for a share of the curse in one way or another. That was one of the curious ways of the inherited family curse—it skipped over the family and fell upon strangers. Sine was certainly a bit cracked too, red-cheeked and fresh and frightened of all men-folk as she was. Was it natural for a girl as pretty as she was to show her claws directly a man appeared on the scene and to take delight in nothing but her savings bank book? Every one knew what a dissolute beast Rasmus Rytter had become through being at the farm all his days, and now the little lass had caught the evil spirit too—in her own way! She had come running half crazy to the village one night, and hammered on a door like a wild hunted creature, and when cross-questioned as to what ailed her, could give no explanation. It was incomprehensible!

As to the Hill Farm, the trouble was that the same

race had lived in it too long, generation after generation. It was never properly cleared up and done up anew. New blood there was in as far as they married strangers and brought them home to the farm, and now and again another person was smuggled into the nest—the Hill Farm folk were never so very particular regarding the sanctity of the marriage bond. But it was never cleared up any the more for that; the farm lay just as it had always done, with all its old traditions, these and the old stories, the old customs, and the old habits were handed down from generation to generation both in dealing and in living by word of mouth, diluted occasionally by the new incomers. The walls were steeped in it, and the bedding that had been also handed down from immemorial times was heavy and noisome with it. A fire would have worked wonders there, and one or two had tried to give Providence a helping hand to get it cleaned up in that way in the course of centuries, but it was always in vain, the Hill Farm simply could not burn! The same atmosphere, the same smell, the same sickly closeness continued to steep and infect all the air round the farm, growing steadily worse as the decay went on. Sickness and penury and shifty and crooked dealings were good enough for them and carried on the tradition of the family.

Karen had silver beakers dated 1756, and the tuberculosis germs in the old feather beds were enough in themselves to turn the atmosphere in the farm house to that of a century-old midden. Folk went about their daily work amid the refuse of foregoing generations,

drew from it both their sustenance and their death. Life vegetated upon a churchyard, where sweat, and hard labor and crime formed the soil.

Ditte noticed the stupefying atmosphere. Her home had happily been free of all that oppressiveness of old things, they had their future ahead of them. In spite of all adversities it gave existence a certain freshness to feel that it was the future that lay before them, that they breathed in what one might call the new time, where there had been no life as yet. The rag and bone man's people had no inheritance to expect from either side, so they quickly set their forebears to one side. And it became a good habit among them in various ways to put a stroke through what had happened and only concern themselves with the future. Lars Peter always thought that it was stupid to keep up old prejudices and old sicknesses, and said as much when any one began to revive the past. They had to do as the gipsies did when they made a roast hare out of a stolen cat,—they first thrashed all the cat-poison out of the cat into its tail, and then cut it off.

Ditte had a stout little heart where everyday adversities were concerned. These she could contend with and get the best of. But here the darkness was the worst, everything had deep fixed roots and was haunted by the spirit of the past. She could understand Karl's distress at his mother's goings-on; that was something one could discuss, and it was possible to drive away this grief when one was lucky. But the continual gloom that hung over his mind,—his misery

over nothing at all, she could not grasp. And trying to bring comfort here was like making a hole in the sand to hold water,—it filled up just as quickly again from the bottom. It was a quite impossible task to keep up his spirits.

But she could not let him go either. She could not prevent herself from thinking of him and worrying over his conduct; that was her nature. Poor folks were like little birds: existence for them readily shaped itself to that of the cuckoo young in the sparrow's nest, whose whole daily business was to gape and gape and stuff its insatiable beak. Whether Ditte would or no, she had to bear the whole burden of a world she had no part nor lot in, there was no way out of it. If only he had been a little child! Then she could have taken him in her arms, played with him and talked nicely to him till he smiled and forgot it all.

So Ditte fought the fight for him whether she would or no, and fought it so long that the Darkness closed over her again. There was no love to bridge the gulf, no caresses to form a bond between them: he only sought her to find shelter against the darkness when he was gloomy and despairing himself. And she could think of no better way than to take him to her arms again and comfort him as best she could. This was not the time to think of herself and go on her guard when another human being was unhappy. It was late in the autumn when this happened again, and the same night she rushed out to the village and hammered on a door.

It was a terrible dilemma: they were not even sweet-

hearts in secret! She had only sacrificed herself—offered more than she possessed, and despoiled her breast of the feathery down to keep him warm. All day long she went about in a maze, her heart full of sorrow and wonder—remorse gnawed at her child's mind. When she spoke seriously to Karl about it, the same regret smote him also, and he began to weep and accuse himself, and behave like a madman. Then she had to try and calm him again. There was no way out of it!

It became impossible to bear alone, and she wished with all her heart that she had some one to confide in. She could not dream of Sörine as a confident: and Lars Peter had enough to trouble him—besides he was a man! Then there was the mistress. There were times when Ditte thought she would die if she could not tell some grown-up person about it; she could not bear the burden alone!

When she related this feeling to Karl in her serious, almost old-fashioned way, he became quite beside himself and behaved like a lunatic; his eyes started out of his head with fright.

“You ought not to be so much afraid of your mother,” said Ditte, “it is her fault! But we will go to her and tell her that she must be different, or she will make us unhappy.”

“Then I will go to the threshing floor and hang myself!” said he, threateningly.

For many days he kept away from her, neither did he speak when they met at their work, but went about with lips pressed firmly together as if he had sworn

a holy oath. But his glance met hers, beggin and imploring, and Ditte understood and was silent. She was sorry for him, he had no one to go to in his need.

So the autumn passed and the greater part of the winter too, a hard and difficult time for her. There were not many bright spots; just the visitors at the house, and also the fact that Karen of the Hill Farm, contrary to every one's expectations, had decided to marry Johannes. Karl took this desperately to heart, but Ditte was as pleased as a child. "You ought to be glad too," she said to Karl to justify her delight, "when they are sweethearting all the time!" Ditte had never been to a wedding before and the date was fixed for June.

Ditte was nearing her seventeenth birthday. These seventeen summers had shown her the tough side of existence. She had worked and slaved ever since she was little, first for her small sister and brothers, brought them up, and taken a mother's place towards them. When she left home, she had borne the burden of a grown-up person. That was over,—she could straighten her back now.

And she had scarcely let the little ones down from her lap, when she had to begin again on her own account. A new burden, heavier than anything she had borne before, began to stir under her little ill-used heart.

Other folks noticed it before she did herself, and looked at her with curious eyes; but she went about like a bewildered child and comprehended nothing of it. Sine said nothing, but gazed sadly at her and

sighed: she spared her as much as possible in the work, and Ditte guessed why. Many things only corroborated the same terrible fact—a human being had brought her nothing but pain to comfort himself and now she was to have a child as a punishment into the bargain.

One day when she went into the brewery she was overcome by violent sickness. Sine had to hold her forehead, her frail body seemed about to break in two. "Ah, poor little thing!" said Sine. "You had better not have danced so much last summer. I thought something like this would happen, you were so mad set on going!"

"It has nothing to do with the dancing!" said Ditte sobbing. Cold sweat stood on her forehead and upper lip.

"Well, well, that has nothing to do with me! But go and get on with your work now, so that the mistress doesn't find out anything about it."

Ah, dancing, dancing! If only she could have danced herself into having a child! She had heard a story of a girl who had danced herself into having one, and the expression had lingered in her memory like a beautiful verse. No, she had never been afraid to dance because of that! If she had to have children, and Granny had prophesied that she would get them easily, she would prefer to dance to get them.

She was a prey to despair and confusion: she thought that everybody stared at her and behaved strangely, almost rudely to her. Karl held himself aloof: however much she tried it was never possible to get a word

alone with him. A kind word would have been welcome indeed now, but nobody had one to spare for her. And when they got to know it at home! And her father!

One day Sine came running over to her in the stable. "You are to go in to the mistress!" said she, and stared at her with eyes bulging with fear. Ditte was not frightened herself, she felt that now she would soon be free.

Karen of the Hill Farm sat in the best parlor, at the table and looked as if she was about to hold a court of justice: she had bound a black handkerchief round her head and held a book in her hand. Behind her chair stood Karl; he looked imploringly at Ditte.

But she openly confessed the truth, so that was soon over. The mistress had always had the name for being just in spite of all her faults, and for doing the right thing by one when things were serious. She would surely appreciate the fact that Ditte had been good to Karl, and help her over it.

But Karen's sense of justice did not reach as far as that. Perhaps it was because she felt guilty towards her son and wanted to have him put in the wrong too. She took his part, never reproached him once, but vented all the vials of her wrath against Ditte.

"This is what people get for being good to you and giving you food and clothes," she began. "Shame for thanks, and misfortune into the bargain. Justice demands that you must be reported to the authorities and not merely sent away. See here, you can read the paragraph for yourself!"

Karen held the law concerning servants towards her and spoke in formal judicial language. "Thou has corrupted one of the children of the house and led him into evil deeds,—Paragraph six. Thou hast been guilty of an illicit connection with one of the household,—Paragraph twelve. And although an unmarried servant maid, thou hast become with child,—Paragraph thirteen. Thou hast forfeited thy right three times, and given me the right to deal with thee as I will. Get out of this house,—and at once." Ditte stood listening to the whole with a lifeless expression; she did not even cry. Her mistress sat there with the law in her hand and judged her according to the printed word—and yet twisted and juggled with the truth. The whole thing was so absurd, but she remembered Lars Peter's strange saying that those who served had no rights. When her mistress bade her pack up and go, she turned a pair of wondering, innocent childish eyes upon Karl. Would he say nothing at all? But he kept near his mother, and looked at her as if she was an abandoned criminal. So she staggered out to her room and packed her things.

Perhaps Karen of the Hill Farm was not altogether certain as to her son's attitude towards Ditte and would gladly get her out of the farm as quickly as possible. At any rate she followed her and made her hurry off. When Ditte had got her pack under her arm and was about to go, Karen suddenly snatched the down quilt up from the bed. "Is it there that you committed the sin?" asked she with a leer.

Ditte rushed blindly out. She knew not what she

did, her life seemed quenched within her and all around seemed bitterly cold and empty. There was only one idea in her mind—she would not go home—not for all the world.

It was early spring, the damp still lingered in the earth, and the fields were fearfully wet. But she plodded on, pushed her way through, sometimes stuck fast, and again pulled herself free. At last she got down to the water. There was now water all round the small "islands" where the nests had been, she had to wade out to them. Her nose ran and her shoes were sopping; she wept, but with a little whimpering cry, for her eyes were quite dry. The nests were empty and cold, and the bushes bare of leaves, and all about lay small relics of her playtime, which had been forgotten here. She waded back and sat at the edge of the marsh, where she had so often sat and sewed, her legs swinging over the bank just as she used to sit.

There she sat and looked down into the brown water, where the pike gave chase to water beetles, and thought of all the sad stories she had heard of desperate girls who had taken their own lives; thought too how cold it must be down there and shuddered. These stories had lain in her memory like some sad ditty, fantastic and remote, and yet so tragic. There were verses about such cases and she herself had sung them and wept in sympathy. But now she realized it better. They were found afterwards, poor creatures, and buried with the baby lying under their breasts. And when the dew time came! She could not help thinking about the innkeeper's wife, and most of all of the

poor little unborn child that had had to undergo all that, a miserable, shivering little creature without band or swaddling clothes, and her heart bled for it. She drew back from the water and wandered aimlessly about.

A voice called to her from the field above—she lifted her head—it was Karl. He came quickly towards her, waving as he ran. For one moment she stood there without noticing him, then turned and fled.

“I must speak to you!” he shouted imploringly—“I must speak to you!” She heard his steps coming behind her, and ran with her wet skirts flapping at her heels, shrieking wildly. She ran along the whole shore, past Rasmus Rytter’s hut, where the youngsters stood gaping after her, and ran on till she darted into the highway that led to the fishing village. There she hid among some rocks.

She did not venture into the village till darkness fell. She crept along behind the houses down to the harbor in order not to meet any one, feeling sure that whoever saw her would know what had happened. Lars Peter was in the boat with some of his mates, working; one of them was telling a funny story and she heard him laugh. The laugh rang deep and warm, and Ditte felt like screaming out when she heard it.

She hid behind a turned-up boat, wet and miserable, and waited till he was ready. It seemed centuries long; they had finished, but stood up on the pier talking. Ditte sat whimpering softly in the cold, it seemed to her impossible that any one could go on talking so heartlessly.

At last he said good-night and left them. Ditte raised herself. "Father!" she whispered.

"What the devil! Is it you?" exclaimed Lars Peter softly. "How did you get here?"

She said nothing, but stood there swaying to and fro in the dark.

"Are you ill, child?" he said, and caught hold of her. He felt how wet and cold she was and looked her closely in the face. "Has anything troubled you?" he asked. She turned her head away, and at this movement the truth dawned on him. "Come, let us go home," he said, and gently took her by the arm, "let us go home to Mother." His voice broke. It was the first time Ditte had heard her strong father break down, and it cut her to the heart. Then she understood all the gravity and hopelessness of the position.

CHAPTER XIV

THE END OF BIG KLAUS

THE innkeeper had sold the green!

If the inhabitants of the village had been told that he had sold the sea itself, they could not have been more taken aback. Here the fishermen had dried their nets as long as the hamlet had been in existence: here generation after generation through hundreds of years had hung up their means of livelihood to dry, shaken off the seaweed and mended the rifts the waves had torn. From pillar to pillar stretched long mounds made of all the dirt that had accumulated when the nets were shaken, and between these mounds were worn deep foot-tracks. The green was the common property of them all,—belonging to no one of them in particular. It lay as it had always lain, and like the beach itself served to remind them of those times when the earth belonged to all men alike. There the youngsters had played and the women gathered for their evening gossip—the green was the hub and center of their daily life. No one had dared to rig up tackle, build a boat there, or in any other way claim a share of it for their narrow personal affairs.

And now the innkeeper had been impudent enough to sell it. It was rumored that he had got several thousand kroner for a thing that had never been his!

For the first time the fishermen woke up from their

lethargy and began to rebel; this was the last straw. They took counsel together and decided to send a couple of men to the country town to consult a lawyer. But results proved that the innkeeper had done the thing so cleverly that they could not have him anywhere. He had legal papers not only about the green, but also about their own cottages that had been inherited from father to son. Properly speaking they were but tenants, and it was due to his generosity that they had not to pay rent into the bargain! He could turn them out, if he liked.

How had all this come to pass? Yes, who was clever enough to be even with the innkeeper? One of them had been obliged to give in at this point, another there, some of them had been boozing, others had signed away their right to get bread to eat. The innkeeper ran round so often with papers and asked for their signatures—"just for form's sake," he always said. They were not too clever at reading, and besides what was the good! Whoever had asked to examine the ogre's papers would have had a thin time of it!

However, it was strange to find things so; Ditte's sorrowful homecoming too soon did not attract the attention it would otherwise have merited. The women nudged one another and stared at the "poor house" as they went by, but there was no real heart in it. Even the nickname "poor house" had lost something of its sting, now that they all of them lived by his generosity!

As soon as the spring wet had disappeared and the

way to the hamlet was practicable, planks and barbed wire came in whole loads from the town, and the green was fenced in. The innkeeper himself ran about and paced it off with a little fat man, who was said to be a town merchant. The fishermen had to turn out of the green, and see about finding another place: it was strange enough to be hunted out of your own home in that way. And all along the shore where they had always walked, there was a piece cut off from them: they had to turn off, up into the village. It was not easy for the folk to get used to new paths; many a time the wire was trodden down and put up again, before it was left untouched.

It was annoying, but it had its exciting side. The man who had bought the green was so rich that he was said not to know what to do with his money. Now he was going to bury it in the sand down here, the maddest idea! He meant to put up a perfect palace, and lay out a garden,—here, in the middle of the sand! It came out that the soil was to be carted up from the innkeeper's fields. There was not too much of it up there either.

In the spring, stones and timber came from the town. The carters from there would not drive down through the loose sand. So the building material was unloaded up on the bank and Big Klaus had to draw it down through the hollow lane to the green. The merchant came every other day, sometimes with one man, sometimes with another. They ran about with long measures, put up a three-legged telescope and looked through it here and there, looked at some black

sticks and drove pegs into the ground. They had big rolls of paper in their hands, which every moment they spread out on the sea-grass and consulted. It looked most mysterious: the youngsters from the hamlet stood leaning over the wire fencing all day long in their shirt sleeves, gaping. The spring air and the excitement made the eyes and noses of the bigger ones run, the smaller ones had a worse experience; now and then one of them began to howl and make for home, but it was generally too late!

Little Povl was there too. He was seven and was to begin school in a few days, so it was important to waste no time. He hung about there the livelong day, but was not content to stand by the fence and stare; the very second day he was over the wire. It came about easily enough: a paper blew away from one of the men, and the boy, who was just considering how he could hit upon an excuse to get into the place, was over the wire in a trice and caught it up. Now that he was once there, no one thought of chasing him out. He made himself useful by carrying the tape-measure and running about with sticks to mark the distances. When Sörine came to the kitchen door and called, he could not hear. Even Ditte had her work cut out to make him listen. It would be meal-time, or some errand to run, and he would get scolded. "Now you shall be punished for the rest of the day," Ditte would say severely. Sörine kept silence. But before the two women had got hold of him, he was off again; there was nothing to be done with him.

The grown-ups held themselves aloof, and observed

the strangers from a distance, preferably from windows and door jambs! So they were Copenhagen folk! They made a great splash, although there were only two of them. It was said too that when first one had got a footing they multiplied like bugs, and could not be got out again. They brought no luck with them!

At any rate, Big Klaus had nothing to thank the new state of things for. The innkeeper had not exactly taken him over for his own good, but as a rule one was not obliged to see it. Here he was ill-treated before their eyes. They could not keep away from the window, when the load creaked and rattled down the hollow lane through the sand, and the driver cursed and shouted and thrashed. Sister Else simply howled and Ditte flung open the window and shrieked out. When Lars Peter was anywhere about, he came running and pushed behind. It sometimes happened too that he swore at the driver—a young yokel from the farm; but that only made bad worse.

Things must be in a pretty bad way with the innkeeper's finances when he began to sell the soil from the fields and hawk building materials about: it was more in his line to rake in all he could scrape together. But it was not a bit of use, he was always in need of money. Every second day he had to drive in to the town to get money, and he had to go down to the harbor and urge the fishermen to work harder and bring in bigger catches. They assented, but took things as easily as before. "It's just like throwing one's work into the sea," said Lars Peter, "so we might just as well let the fish stay there!"

The innkeeper had never yet got over the affair of his wife: perhaps it was that that made his legs give way under him. There was no blessing on his enterprises any more. He had lost a lot of boats in the Eastern storms, and the winter ice had crushed one boat. These were small misfortunes, but he seemed not to be able to rally from them,—he had not replaced them by any new boats. One of the old disused ones had to be put in the water again.

One day he came in from the beach with his two-barreled gun, he had been out shooting gulls. His big head suddenly popped round the kitchen door. Ditte screamed and involuntarily clutched her mother by the arm.

“Well, how nicely you two are helping each other with the work,” said he cheerfully, throwing a couple of sea-birds on the table. “And Ditte still screams for nothing at all: she has been out and got her bloom rubbed off, from what one can hear.” He said this with a cold satirical grin, showing all his teeth. “Well, well, otherwise I had thought that Ditte might have given a hand in unloading the bricks: they want a helper there, and she has grown big and strong out there.” Then he went off without waiting for an answer. They could hear his wheezing far away.

Ditte blushed crimson at the innkeeper’s innuendo. She stood for a moment hesitating, then took up an apron of sacking from the place under the stairs and went heavily towards the door. Her eyes looked frightened.

Sörine turned round: the girl’s slowness was no-

ticeable. She looked at her for a minute—and noted her absent manner, then took the apron from her. “Let me go instead!” said she.

“But it was me he wanted,” returned Ditte meekly.

The mother said no more, but took the apron and went out. Ditte watched her gratefully.

This time Ditte had made no triumphal procession round to all her friends and acquaintances in the hamlet; she had not been outside the door as yet. Lars Peter and Sörine were both agreed to save her from people’s remarks: she should not go out and run the gauntlet. She stayed at home, and did the hardest work for her mother, and it was a good thing, for Sörine had not much strength left. She could see everything from the window; the cottages from which the women came out, emptied something or other in the sand and disappeared again. She had also a view of the sea where the men were fishing, and the green where the children of the village were clustered. A lot of scaffolding had been set up, and the building materials were heaped about, a few masons were already there; they boarded over at the inn.

It was said that they were socialists; they had refused to lie on the straw in the barn, or to eat out of the dish with the farm servants at the inn,—and Ditte looked long after them. Through the open kitchen door she could see her mother taking stones from the man unloading and pile them up in rows, and hear her cough. It was hard work for her, if only she could stand it! Big Klaus was very hard worked,—he

was back and forwards the whole day. He never rested, not even when they loaded and unloaded, for they had to work with three carts.

Now he stuck fast again, up where the little stream rippled over the wheel ruts. The driver used the whip to him, so hard that the echo was heard over in Rasmus Olsen's hut: he was using the butt end, and Big Klaus was pulling so that he was almost even with the ground. But the load did not move, the wheels were buried in the sand. The driver ran round and beat him over the chest and forelegs, then ran back to the cart, and beat him over the back. Ditte forgot everything and rushed out screaming.

Lars Peter came running with long bounds from the harbor, his wooden shoes clattering. "Stop, you beast!" shouted he, and clenched his fist and shook it. Big Klaus had fallen, his forelegs sunk deep in the wet sand. "Catch hold of the cart again, curse you!" he yelled; but it was too late. The load fell on the horse's hindquarters: the forepart of the cart had broken. For a moment Lars Peter looked like a wild animal, he had the driver by the neck, and seemed likely to break it. "Father!" shouted Ditte in fear. Then he let go and went to the horse's side. It lay on its side panting, with both forelegs deep in the sand and half of the load over it. Men came up from the harbor and the building site and helped him to get the horse free from the load and the harness; he dug the sand away from his forelegs. "Come, old friend, now up again!" said he, and took hold of the bit. The horse lifted his head and gazed at him, then lay down

on his side and breathed heavily. His foreleg was broken.

"We must see about getting it shot," said Lars Peter, "there is nothing else to be done."

"Ah," said the village children. "Then we shall get horse-beef." But the children in the "poor house" wept.

The innkeeper himself came and shot Big Klaus in the forehead, and his body was put on a cart and driven up to the farm. Lars Peter helped to lift it up, and followed to the farm,—he wanted to skin it himself. "I have done a lot of knacker's work in my time, and would like to do the last service to Big Klaus," he said to Sörine to excuse himself. She was silent as was her custom, but did not seem to have any objection.

But the morning the horseflesh was to be divided, she showed a little more life than usual. She sent the children out with a big basket. "See that you bring home a good piece," said she—"it is more our property than any others'." That day Lars Peter got a beefsteak for dinner such as he had not had for a long time.

"It is curious enough," said he, as he ate, "that so old and worn-out a horse as Big Klaus should make such good steak. It is really sweet. Take a good helping of it, Mother, horseflesh is said to be so good for a weak chest. Eat plenty, children, it is not every day we have meat for dinner." He said all this with a touch of gallows humor.

Well, the boys were ravenous as usual. Ditte was

just as she was with all her food, so one could not count her. But Else, poor little thing, chewed and chewed, and could not swallow a bite. "It is so strange!" exclaimed she, and suddenly began to cry.

CHAPTER XV HOME AGAIN

SORINE went very quietly about her daily tasks. She certainly was not strong. She coughed a good deal and suffered from night sweats. Lars Peter and Ditte leagued together to get her to go to bed as soon as they had had supper. She was most reluctant, for she had been so long away that she loved her home and wanted to see so many things. But it was quite necessary.

“If only it isn’t consumption,” said Lars Peter one evening when they had got her into bed in the bedroom and they were sitting in the parlor talking. “It really seems as if one could see the germs making her more hollow-eyed every day. Don’t you think it would be a good idea to make her eat boiled linseed. They say that is so good for consumption.”

Ditte did not think it was worth while trying. “Mother eats so little,” said she, “and often throws it all up again. It must be the stomach she is suffering from.”

“One would think it was the chest after all that is wrong. What a cough! It sounds like a boat being drawn over the pebbles on the beach, when it rightly gets a hold of her. That comes from the wet walls in the prison; she says herself, the water was dripping from them.”

"I thought that Mother never mentioned that time," exclaimed Ditte, astonished.

"Well, not much, but now and again it happens that she lets fall a remark about it. But she generally goes about like a person without much interest in anything." Lars Peter sighed. "And how do you feel?" he said and laid his hand over hers, on the table.

Ditte did not directly answer the question.

"Are you still of the mind that I am not to go to Hill Farm? Really, for I should just glory in telling that rascally, rotten pack what I think of them. I can't get the law of them, but I should like to shake up their innards a bit. Peasant spawn!"

"Karl isn't rotten," said Ditte gently. "He is only weak—and unhappy."

"Not rotten? I should just say he is. Well, of all the— And that such a lousy swine should call himself religious and go to meeting,—I wonder that he hasn't made you as bad as himself." Lars Peter was furious, but it was only for a moment. "Well, well," said he good-humoredly, "it is your business after all. But it won't be nice for you to go about in that condition. It would have been only fitting if they had put up a little money for you, so that you could have gone away somewhere till it was all over."

"Money,—they've got no money! Not even so much as we have," said Ditte.

"Well, anyhow they're gorging up there now and making merry over the wedding day and night. They first started on Sunday, and it's Friday to-day. One

will scarcely be able to drive along the roads for all those drunken toffs." Lars Peter was rather hurt that he had not been invited too; it was his own brother's wedding after all.

No, it was not agreeable for Ditte, or for the others. Lars Peter might have added that it was not amusing for himself either. Both his own mates and the womenfolk in the hamlet began to question him as to whether Ditte had finished up at the Hill Farm, and what she was going to do now. It sounded innocent enough, but he understood very well what they meant by it. He was usually thin-skinned, but that made him low-spirited—he had always thought so much of and taken such delight in his children.

One day little Povl came rushing home,—with only one wooden shoe on. "Mother, is it true that the stork has bitten Sister Ditte in the leg, and she will have a little one after it?" He could scarcely breathe, poor little chap, he was so excited.

"Where is your other wooden shoe?" Sörine scowled at him to direct his thoughts to something else, but he was not to be intimidated.

"I lost it out there. Is it really true?"

"Who talks such rubbish?"

"All the children do, they are screaming after me: 'Yah, yah, Ditte is going to have a baby.'"

"Stay at home and play, then no one will be able to cry after you."

"But is it true?" He got a piece of sugared bread, which effectually stopped his mouth. Then he went

to sit on the lowest step of the stairs leading to the loft and gobbled it down.

Ditte was sitting in the parlor darning the children's things; she bent low over her work.

Shortly after Sister Else came in with Povel's lost shoe in her hand: a crowd of children stood down by the rocks booing. It was not hard to see that they had called after her, and her eyes were red-rimmed. She went silently into the parlor and stationed herself at the window. There she stood looking Ditte up and down. "What are you staring at, lass?" said Ditte at last, blushing furiously. Else looked away and went into the kitchen to help her mother, but Ditte felt her accusing eyes on her for long afterwards, and they worried her.

But Kristian was the worst of all, for he would not look at her. He kept away all day long, and only turned his little nose homewards when it was feeding-time, came in when the others had begun and slipped into his place with his hat on his knees, ready to be off again. He would not look at any of them, and kept his eyes cast down. If he was spoken to, and he could not avoid answering, he was rude and short in his reply. It made Ditte most unhappy; he had always been the most difficult of the children, and for that reason she loved him the best. He needed more love.

One day Ditte found him up in the loft. He was sitting right up under the roof with an old fishing line in his lap: frightfully busy with it. He had wet, dirty streaks on his cheeks.

"What are you sitting up here for?" said she and pretended to be surprised.

"What business is it of yours?" he retorted and kicked her in the shin.

She sank down on a wooden box, and rocked herself to and fro, with her hands folded over her leg, and her head bowed down. "Oh, Kristian, little Kristian!" she moaned.

Kristian saw that she had grown very white, and he crept out of his hiding place. "You can just let me alone," he said, "I haven't done you any harm." He stood glowering past her and knew not what to say.

"I have not done you any harm either," answered Ditte. Her voice sounded meek and appeasing.

"Ah—perhaps you think I'm stupid and can't see anything! I've got to go about fighting the other fellows, and giving them a smack in the eye, and it's true after all."

"What is true?" Ditte asked feebly. But she gave up the pretense and collapsed with her apron over her face.

Kristian pulled helplessly at her hands. "Don't go and cry!" he begged. "It is so silly. I didn't mean to kick you, really. I was only so sick of it all!"

"Oh, it doesn't matter," answered Ditte, sniffing. "You can kick me if you want to—I deserve it!" She tried to smile and be more cheerful, and Kristian took hold of her to help her up. But he only pulled at the sleeve of her dress; it seemed as if he was afraid to touch her. She had noticed that the other children

were the same, they never came and leaned against her now, and seemed too bashful to touch her. Something that was none of theirs lay within her now.

"Ah, Kristian, I could not help it! It was not my fault!" She took his face in her hands and looked into his eyes.

"I know that all right!" he answered, and twisted his face away from her. "And I don't say anything against you either. But they shall get paid out!" Then he sprang off down the stairs, and she saw him making off towards the northeast over the rocks.

"Where is Kristian?" asked Lars Peter as they sat at supper. "He has to help me bail out the boat." No one knew: Ditte had her doubts, but dared not say anything. At bedtime he had not come home. "So he's out on the loose!" said Lars Peter sadly. "I was so pleased to think that he had got over that: he hasn't gone for a year or more. Yes, not since he made off to see you at the Hill Farm, Ditte."

On the morning of the next day a strange man arrived with Kristian in tow. Sörine went into the kitchen. "Here is a boy who belongs to you," said the stranger, and pushed Kristian forwards inside the back door.

Lars Peter came to the stairhead in the loft: he had just come back from fishing and was going to bed. "What does all this mean?" he asked, looking from the one to the other.

"One of our ricks was burnt down last night, and this morning I found this fellow hidden outside the farm. It was only a chance that worse didn't happen,"

said the man in an even voice that expressed neither passion nor any other feeling.

Lars Peter stood staring stupidly in front of him. He could not understand any of it. "That's a bit too thick, what's your burnt rick to do with the lad? You know he's not one to burn a rick down!" Kristian looked at him with defiant eyes. "You may thrash me if you like!" they seemed to say.

"You can say what you like,—that's how it is!" said the stranger.

A light dawned on Lars Peter. "Are you the son up at the Hill Farm?" he asked. The man nodded.

"Well,—then you've got off cheap," and he laughed unpleasantly. "It would serve you just right if the whole damned place was burnt down about your ears. But the lad shall answer for it all the same. Go straight off to bed, you varmint!" Besides I should like a word in quiet with you." Lars Peter pulled on a sweater.

"I should be very glad to get a word with you too," answered the son at the Hill Farm. Lars Peter started—this was not just the answer he had expected.

They walked inland. "Well, what are you thinking of doing for the lass?" asked Lars Peter, when they had passed the cottages.

"You had better say what I should do!" said Karl.

"Does that mean that you will acknowledge the child before all the world?"

Karl nodded. "I had not thought of trying to get out of anything," he replied and looked Lars Peter squarely in the face.

"Well, that is always something!" Lars Peter seemed quite cheered. "Will you get married—if it happens."

"I am only nineteen," said Karl, "but we can get engaged."

"So that's how it stands! That seems a bit cal-low." Lars Peter had got quite cooled down again. He felt much inclined to give the son of the Hill Farm a proper dressing down, but the opportunity for that had gone by—they had talked too long over things. "I must say that you have behaved very shabbily," said he, and then stopped. "But that's just what we poor folks must expect of farmers."

"You ought not to say that," answered Karl. "I have no right to look down on any one. And I never dreamed of doing you any harm!"

"Well, it's possible!" Lars Peter stretched out his hand half reluctantly—he could not be angry long. He was a perfect booby—but what the deuce—"Well, good-by then. Perhaps you will write to us."

"I should like to have spoken to Ditte," said Karl hesitatingly.

"Would you indeed!" Lars Peter laughed. "And should another do it for you,—foolishly good as people are? No, no, we may be pigs, but we do not go about rooting!" Lars Peter went off a few steps, but came back again. "Do not misunderstand me! If the lass wants to continue the acquaintance, she may as far as I am concerned. But that she must decide for herself."

Then he went home to sleep.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SON FROM THE HILL FARM

WHEN Lars Peter came home for a talk with the little culprit, he had disappeared. He had got out through the window.

Lars Peter went up to the loft and lay down, but could not sleep. The meeting with the son from the Hill Farm had not exactly cheered him; it was certainly a comical scarecrow of a fellow the lass had got herself mixed up with,—an awfully silly ass! For a brief period he had fancied that perhaps Karl would prove to be the means of helping them up, so that they could look folks in the face again: but after all, he had turned out to be a mere hobbledohoy,—too young for marriage as yet. He could not even earn his own livelihood, and possessed no money at all. So that was a truly pleasant state of things! He could not help lying awake and worrying over it, and could hear the incessant wailing of old Doriom's twin down on the ground floor. "Granny is sleeping! Granny is sleeping!" wailed the babe unceasingly. It sounded like a cradle song.

He got up, went across the loft and down the steps into the next house. The twin was sitting on the down quilt that covered the old woman's bed, tear-stained, and piteous, and repeated his cry. Beside him lay his dead grandmother. She had been dead quite a time, for

she was cold, and the rats had already been at her. The twin looked as though he had been lying on her quilt crying all night long. It was a shame that no one had heard him. But they had got so accustomed to hearing the baby crying that they took no further notice of it. Lars Peter took the little one home with him.

"I have a little fellow here, who has no one to care for him any more," said he. "Mother has not shown up for a long time, and now the Grandmother is lying dead in there. Do you think we can find a bite of bread and a corner of the bed for him here?" Sörine did not reply. But she took the little one by the hand and led him into the room. Lars Peter looked gratefully after her. "We must send one of the boys up to the innkeeper to report the death," he said, and went to bed again. This time he was able to sleep.

When he woke up and came down to dinner, Kristian had returned home; he put himself in his father's way as if he wanted the business over and done with. Lars Peter noticed this all right, but did not see clearly how he was to tackle the situation. It would have been another matter in old days, then such an affair would have made him simply furious; but now he regarded it chiefly from the point of view of the risk the boy had run—and that was now over. Lars Peter had had many experiences in later years; what happened was like water on a duck's back no longer, but was retained in his memory and made him ponder over the puzzles of existence. He had been steadily going down the hill. But he himself had not been

to blame! His property had been taken from him,—then the money he had got for it,—then Big Klaus. And then Sörine,—though he had her back again now, in what a condition! In spite of all his struggles, his slaving and striving to live uprightly, what had he become? A poor lousy wretch, a harmless fool, stripped to the skin of all he possessed! An empty barrel,—that was the result of it all. And now Ditte's misfortune was the last straw! What was the use of being particular and guarding his property and life for those who simply wasted it all? Lars Peter had never known what it was to feel grateful to those placed over him in station—he had never had occasion to cultivate that feeling. But he had accustomed himself to the conditions, and tried to make the best out of it for all parties. Now he would often have liked to smite upwards with a hard hand. He would not have cared if Hill Farm had gone up in smoke and flames—not unless the boy and he had suffered for it afterwards.

After some time had elapsed the son from the Hill Farm turned up again; this time, it seemed, to settle down there. He had no shame at all about it. He came down to the inn with a bundle of working clothes under his arm, and a shovel and spade on his shoulder, and asked for work; an officious soul brought Lars Peter the news. "If he sets his foot here again, he goes out head first!" said Lars Peter threateningly.

One morning when Ditte went to the window to open it, Karl was wheeling earth in the new garden laid down round the villa. She nearly screamed when she

saw him; no one had told her he was there. At the sight of him all the horror and terrors of the Hill Farm woke anew in her. He was not guilty,—she regarded him more as a helpless victim like herself: but he reminded her of it all.

She stood gazing after him, in a strange mood, hiding behind the flowering geraniums, and gazing still. He was working better than he had done at home, but he did not look happy. "It is for my sake that he came down here," she thought; and a new feeling, one of pride, went through her while she swept the room. She was no longer only a poor, ill-used girl, whom people jeered at: she had won a victory! She enjoyed the feeling without trying to analyze it, or calculate what the results would be. She was inside the room and kept her eyes on him. "What shall I do if he comes and wants to speak to me?" she thought. She was not in love with him. She felt a certain satisfaction that he had come, but no wish to speak to him.

But he did not look towards the house, but stuck to his work; at dinner-time he turned his wheelbarrow upside down, opened his bundle and took out food, and began to eat. The bottom of the barrow formed his table. Ditte could see him from where she sat. It was odd to see him sitting there alone to feed, especially for her, when she had served in his home, laid his place at the table and made his bed. He had a stronger and nearer right to be master over her now! Ditte felt an instinctive desire to run out and say: "Please come in to dinner, Karl!"

He was working there the next day, and the following days. It was said that he had taken on the work of making all the garden to the villa, and lived in a straw thatched shed near the inn. He kept house for himself, washed for himself, and lived on scrap meals. It must be a lonely and sad life. He did not come in to visit them, he was always a curious fellow, and perhaps he was afraid of being turned out again! But one evening he prowled around the house. Ditte had not been out yet,—she was too much afraid of what folks would say; but she understood from the remarks of her brothers and sister. She saw that they knew him and the whole affair. Kristian must have told them.

Lars Peter was cross. "What the devil does he want here?" he said to Sörine. "He makes a laughing stock of us before the whole village, by this silly haunting the house in the dark!"

"It must be for a good reason he has come here," answered Sörine. Now whether it was because he was a farmer's son, or whether her mind was not strong enough to grasp anything more, it was easy to see that Sörine felt forgiving about it.

"For a good reason? I like that! Cheeky fool! If he was only half right in his noddle! But then no doubt we should see no more of him! The lass had better pray the Lord to look after him, and I can't see myself that she is crazy about him either, and the devil take me if I can understand how she came to get mixed up with such a silly stick!"

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They were sitting at supper, and they had fish and potato pie. It was difficult to get anything out of the innkeeper that summer, so they had to ring the changes on fish three times a day. But Sörine had been lucky enough to get hold of a little piece of smoked bacon:— one might say she had coughed it home, for when her cough was very bad, the innkeeper would give her something to get her out of the place. She had minced up the bacon and the small pieces gave a pleasant smoky flavor to the fish. There was great enthusiasm shown for the dinner on these occasions.

The twin, whose real name was Rasmus, but who was always called As, sat on Lars Peter's knee; he was the smallest. The mother had never turned up, and he was there! It was quite jolly to have a youngster on his knee again; Lars Peter had missed it lately; Povl fancied himself too big, and was shy over it. But As liked to be there. He was in his fourth year.

"There sits Mother!" said Lars Peter, pointing at Sörine. But the boy shook his head.

Sörine put more fish pie on their plates; that was her answer. She never overflowed with caresses or coaxing words, but she looked after the twin, just as she did for their own. "She is a good little mother," said Lars Peter when she went out into the kitchen for a moment, "only she finds it difficult to show her love in words." He wanted the children to be fond of her, and tried to point out her good qualities on every possible occasion, but there was still something to be counteracted. Up to a certain point they liked her, obeyed her, and distrusted her no longer. Ditte's

misfortune had helped Sörine to stand better with regard to them: Ditte was no longer their one and all. But she never possessed the children's confidence, and she did not lay herself out to obtain it either. She seemed happiest when she was able to wrap herself in her own thoughts, and appeared not to miss other people, not even Lars Peter. "She goes about like one who has said good-by to all things earthly," thought Lars Peter, often in depressed mood. But he never said so out loud.

When they had finished, Lars Peter sat looking at the sea, which was covered with white horses. "Where can Kristian be?" he said, and began to fill his pipe. This meant that he was going for a turn, for he never smoked in the room because of Sörine. Just then Kristian came in. He flung his hat down in a corner and pushed his way in to the bench. He was clearly in a rage.

"Why can't you come in in time?" asked Ditte reprovingly. The boy's whims and tempers were getting a bit too much!

Kristian did not answer but began devouring his food. When the first pangs of hunger were satisfied he raised his head. "There's some one standing behind the fire-engine house," he announced to the general public. "He asked me to say so at home,—but I was not to let any one hear it, he said." With the last words he looked spitefully at Ditte.

"What the devil! Is he going to begin night walks?" exclaimed Lars Peter angrily. "Has he not done us harm enough?"

"Father!" said a voice from the half-open bedroom door. Sörine was already undressing. There was a little hint of wonder in the cry.

"What the devil! You must admit—" he began, but broke off. The children stood listening, with open mouths and staring eyes.

Ditte went into the kitchen, and put on a scarf. "Else can clear away the things," she said. "I am going out a little." Her voice trembled. Lars Peter came out to her in the kitchen doorway.

"I did not mean to hurt you!" he said softly. "You know that right well. But if I were in your place, I should keep away from him. He means you no good." He laid his hand affectionately on Ditte's shoulder.

"I *will* speak to him," said Ditte, still with angry eyes. "So you can just think what you like about it! I believe he is only sorry about it all," she added more calmly.

"That's just the most deceitful kind. An old proverb says that sniveling lads are not healthy. Well, well, do as you think fit. I only wanted to warn you."

Ditte went out into the dusk. Ah, how grand it was to get a mouthful of fresh air again after being shut up so long. She wondered what Karl wanted to say to her. Yes, and what did she want with him, after all. She knew she did not want to marry, if it could only take place after the great event. Then she would go as a servant to Copenhagen, where there was a little life, and no one would know her past. She would not stay here and go about with a flabby fellow, with no backbone to him. But she did not mind going for

a walk through the village on his arm, just to show the folks that she had a father for her baby if she wanted one.

He was waiting behind the engine house; he stepped out when she left her home. "I knew your step!" said he happily, and took her hand.

"Why do you hide like this?" asked she, a little crossly.

"It is not for my own sake; every one may see my way of life, and know what I am after." His voice was even and calm; there was none of the thrill about him, that always gave her palpitation, and a feeling of misfortune. But he was still heavy-hearted and gloomy; it showed in his walk and bearing.

"You don't need to go and hide for my sake," said Ditte and laughed bitterly. "For every one knows it, and even the little children go and call out about it. If you want anything of me, you can come by day."

"I should like to," said Karl. "But your father can't bear the sight of me."

"Oh, you don't need to be afraid of Father,—not if you mean honestly by me."

They went on side by side, talking softly, and soon came clear of the cottages and out into the hollow lane leading up to the inn. It was Saturday evening, and several women came from the inn with provisions for Sunday. Ditte wished them good-evening in a loud voice; she was not sorry that they should see her in company of the one who had seduced her.

"May I come and fetch you for a walk to-morrow morning?" said Karl imploringly, squeezing her hand.

"We could go together to the house of God." He spoke forlornly, and his hand was cold—he needed human companionship. Ditte noticed it, she was sorry for him, and let him hold her hand.

No, she would not go to church with him! She did not feel like a sinner, and would not have people sitting and saying, "See those two penitents over there," and perhaps beginning to sniff from sympathy. "But will you go with me through the whole village, and past the inn?" she asked and listened breathlessly for the answer. "But I will take your arm, and say myself just how far we will walk. Perhaps right out to Fredericksværk." She wanted to be seen all over the place with him.

Karl smiled. "We will go as far as you like,—and can hold out," he replied. "But will you give me a really good kiss, not for sympathy, but for my own sake?"

"I'm not so crazy about you, but it might come to that yet," said Ditte, and kissed him. She noticed by the trembling of his lips how he needed warmth. "You too have a sad life," she cried involuntarily and thought as she said it of food and home comforts. How could he pass the time, without a soul by him?

"Oh, I think a lot," he answered quietly.

"What do you think about then, about me?" Ditte asked and laughed archly.

"Mostly about the child. It is so wonderful that a new human life is born from our desires. God has His own mysterious ways, my dear!"

Now he was beginning his old refrain, and Ditte be-

gan to think she had better go home. When they came near the cottage and stood to say good-night, he slipped something into her hand; it was a ten-kroner note.

"I won't have your money," said Ditte, pushing it away. He stood with it in his hand, crestfallen. "Then I have nothing to work for," said he.

"Yes, when that is for the child, then it is another thing. But you must not go and scrimp yourself, and give us all your week's wages; I won't have that!" She did not know what she was saying, she was so confused: her voice sounded angry.

Only when she was lying in bed with the note clasped tightly in her hand did she realize what had happened. She did not need to worry any more about taking the bread out of the others' mouths, or shudder to think where the money for the birth was to come from; she had found a protector. Karl was no longer a burden on her existence, she could rely on him. It relieved her so much that she curled up in bed and cried once more over him.

CHAPTER XVII

DITTE BASKS IN THE SUN

DITTE and her mother had been busy; they had taken advantage of a time when all the others were out to let out the band of her best home-spun dress. It was the second time the skirt had been let out, but it was a struggle to get it hooked all the same.

"You must hold your breath," said Sörine; she sat on a chair and exerted all her strength, while Ditte stood upright with her back to her, fiery red in the face. Her mother was not very strong, to be sure, but it was painful!

"You must be at least seven months gone," she said.

At last it was hooked; Ditte threw a shawl over her head, took a basket with a big plaice in it under her shawl and hurried out.

Just outside she met Kristian rushing up; he nearly knocked her down.

"There's going to be a feast!" he shouted as he burst in.

Ditte went along the wall of the house, treading carefully so as to avoid the rubbish heaps outside the doors of the other tenants. Fore-and-Aft Jakob stood at the corner with his head close against the wall, at which he was picking; he had picked off nearly all the facing and the laths were bare in many places.

"Can't you manage to find the *word* soon?" said Ditte; it was a standing joke.

Jakob raised his hand as a warning that she was not to disturb him—so he was on the point of finding it.

Ditte took the path to "Gingerbread House." The sun was shining and from the villa came the sounds of hammering and song. The little house looked freshly painted as usual; all about it was clean and tidy, and the elder over the well was in flower. It was like coming into quite another world. Ditte had not been there by daylight since she came home; in the evening she often went over to help the two old people.

The old woman was in bed—it was senile infirmity.

"So you've come in the sunshine?" she said. "I thought you only took moonlight walks. How's that?"

Ditte turned aside. "I've brought a plaice," she said in embarrassment.

"Thank you, my girl, it was good of your father to think of us old folks. But what has happened to you?" She caught hold of Ditte's hand, forced her to turn round and looked at her with a smile. Ditte had to sit on the corner of the blue alcove. "Well, tell me all about it."

"He is come," said Ditte in a whisper.

"What he?—there are so many he's," laughed the old woman.

"Karl, the son from the Hill Farm."

"So it's a son from the Hill Farm—you might have confessed that to me before, and then perhaps Father could have helped you to get your rights. And

now he's come of his own accord, you say, with his mother's approval?"

"No, his mother curses him. She is so wicked—a regular devil."

"She's not good, I know, but there must be reasons why she is what she is. We must beware of condemning anybody, for judged by the Lord's measure we should all fall short. But now you can be married, thank God!"

"He is not old enough yet, and I don't know whether I want to either," whispered Ditte.

"You don't like him?" The old woman looked at her in dismay. "Then indeed things have gone wrong with you, worse almost than one can imagine." She drew Ditte down to her. "You poor little thing," she said, stroking her head with both hands; "it must have been a terrible time for you." Her cheeks quivered—just as Granny's had done long, long ago; and they were just as soft. Ditte lay quite still and let the fumbling hands caress her; it was long since any hands had touched her so kindly.

The old woman pushed her gently away. "Can you take out the bottom drawer of the chest of drawers?" she said.

It was placed on a chair by the bed and she chose from it some old sheets and cloths and napkins that had become as soft as silk with washing and wear.

"They will do for the little one," she said, laying them in a pile; "they are worn, you know, but that makes them all the softer. And here is something coarser for yourself, and here's a pair of hemstitched

sheets and a nice pillow-case; we shall have to find you a nightdress too, so that you can be all in white when you're confined. You must receive your children in white, then they'll turn out well."

There was a great heap of things.

Ditte sat and looked at them with her eyes full of tears; inwardly she was laughing and crying at the same time. What was going to happen was suddenly and violently brought home to her; it had never been so actual before. She thought she could see herself in childbed, with the child in her arms already. But they were white, she and the child; her nightdress had lovely frills round the neck and the wrists, and the white border of the pillow lay round her and the little one.

"There now," said the old woman, waking her from her dream—"let it stay there and Kristian can fetch it; you needn't have the trouble of carrying it. And now will you give me the bottom drawer but one."

This was full of fine old things, neckerchiefs and embroidered linen; it was all in beautiful order and lavender was strewn among it.

"Look here, Ditte!" The old woman took up a cambric handkerchief bordered with lace. "This is my bridal kerchief. I have wept in it—but not from sorrow; you can see the rust-spots are red—those were tears of joy. It has only been used that once, and then it was put away—with the tears in it. You are to spread that over my face when I am put in my coffin. You will help Father to do that, won't you? That there is my bridal linen—I am to be dressed in

that. Ah! you don't do these things any more; but we that were young then, we wanted to follow the great events right up to the hour of death. And that's why we like young people who are rather serious. They say there's one of the Hill Farm sons that goes to the prayer meetings."

"Yes, that's Karl," said Ditte. "He is so solemn about it."

"And do you think it would be better if he took things lightly—with the sort of home he's got? He has not chosen the worst way; his mother tried other ways of getting out of her youthful troubles, she did."

"Did you know her when she was young?" asked Ditte.

"Yes, and she was a good girl. We had some property over in that direction and she was often at our house. She was engaged too, but her parents forced her to take another that they liked better, and that was what spoiled her. She burned her bridal kerchief as soon as she came home from church, and sat on her chest all night—she *would not* go to bed with him. But they broke her at last. And now you may go, my child; I must rest a little while Father's down at the beach. I suppose you've heard there's to be a feast this autumn?"

Yes, Ditte had heard, but she didn't believe it. "Why, he's nothing in the shop!" she said.

"He's in a poor way, sure enough, but that needn't stop him. He always acts the opposite way to other people."

Ditte did not go straight home, but walked round by the villa. The roof was on now; the workmen were hammering away inside, singing and whistling all the time; it sounded strange to Ditte—people didn't sing at their work either at the hamlet or at the Hill Farm. The heavy work in the garden was finished; Karl was now engaged in planting among the dunes.

Lars Jensen's widow gave her a nod from her doorway.

"It's quite nice to see you about again. Good luck!" she said.

Ditte knew what she was alluding to. "Thanks!" she answered. She didn't mind them regarding her as engaged.

"There's going to be a dance here soon—you know that, don't you?" said Lars Jensen's widow, involuntarily running her eyes over Ditte's figure.

"Yes, the innkeeper's going to have an autumn feast this year, and there'll be a floor for dancing too, so they say. Strange enough, when he's been so much against dancing! That was the excuse he gave eight years ago, that he wouldn't have a feast any more because the young people danced.—But now we shall have a chance of celebrating your engagement."

Ditte walked on round by the harbor. It was rather trying to walk alone, people's eyes were fixed on her figure; she would have liked to have Karl on her arm. She was big in proportion to her slight figure; she moved heavily and all the staring made her sway still more. Her face had got thin, especially about the nose! It looked longer and more pointed and the

freckles round it showed up. She parried people's stares with a resigned smile which was always on her face—a sort of apology in advance. One after another they came and congratulated her. She could see that they were taken up with her affairs and that they were beginning to take another view of her now.

As she went along, they stood looking after her and talking together. The thing that interested them was that the Hill Farm boy acknowledged his relations with her and was willing to marry her. They had begun a little too early, but after all, a girl engaged was half a wife! And he was a farmer's son, too. There must be something in the girl all the same, beyond what anybody could see, since he had taken such a liking to her after the first taste—it was generally the other way! He must see something in her, as they said, which nobody else had suspected—for he was clean daft about her. And she was a good girl for that matter.

Lars Peter was the last to be converted. He stuck out for a long time that Karl must be soft-headed. "How else should he come begging to be allowed to look after the girl and her child? The likes of those farmers' sons always clear out of it. No, he's not right in the nut, he isn't."

But anyhow he was devoted, he followed Ditte about like a dog. And he wasn't afraid of work either—he was a handy man. And even if he hadn't much sense—the girl had a head for two. When Lars Peter had admitted so much, it didn't take him long

to yield altogether. And having done that he soon began to feel for Karl.

"He roots about all by himself and never gets a warm meal," he said. "And it's a shame that he should have to sleep out there in the shed. Couldn't we manage it so that he had his meals with us and slept up in the loft? Then he'd get something for his week's wages, for he brings them here anyhow."

It wasn't so easy, though; Lars Peter had his bed up there, and there wasn't much room, as the place was full of tools and other lumber. But there was the loft over Doriom's den; that was still empty, nobody would move into it. Lars Peter had thought of getting a pig and keeping it in there, so that they might have some meat for the winter. There was plenty of offal to feed it on, and the innkeeper was not so particular now.

Thus it was that Karl became a member of the family.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FEAST

IT was the loveliest autumn morning one could wish, just the sort of morning to usher in a fine day. The fog hung over the sea, white and restless; it only needed a little sunshine and a breath of the morning breeze to sweep it away.

The hamlet was on its feet at the first sign of dawn; the youngsters could not sleep. They were too excited about the day; the first streak of light tickled their noses and they woke up. Then it was all over with the mothers' sleep; there was nothing to be done but to humor their offspring and get up. It was not much too early either; the boats came home unusually early that day. Here and there the hollow scraping of oars in the rowlocks could be heard in the fog; the boats might easily be in before the fire was lighted and the water boiling for the coffee. The worst disgrace that could befall any woman in the hamlet was that her husband should come home without her being ready to receive him with something warm.

Now the sun burst out over the dunes and swept away the fog. You could see it rolling up like a white blanket and exposing more and more of the world. First the fishermen's cabins appeared, with blue smoke pouring from every chimney; only that sloven they called the Masthead Light had not yet got a fire under

her kettle. She kept house for a fisherman in the last cabin to the north, but she was a bad one at getting out of the sheets. Then the harbor cleared, and one or two boats a little way out, and the sea lay there, fair and silvery blue, the loveliest shining surface an eye could see.

The innkeeper was already on his way to the harbor; no doubt he wanted to see how the autumn herring turned out, it was the first night they had been out drifting for them. He looked blue and shrunken in the cold of the morning and his big cheeks had fallen in as though they inclosed some monstrous affliction. They all knew of his struggles by day, so immense and incomprehensible that nobody tried to fathom them; and Rasmus Olsen's Martha was quite capable of making night hideous even for an Ogre!

But this was the Day, not an ordinary day like any other, but *The Day*, when nobody worked or quarreled over the food, or even did any cooking, but simply ate and drank and smoked and gossiped until swallowed up by the night and the sandhills. The grown-up people knew it and what was in store for them; as long as the oldest of them could remember the autumn feast had been the great compensation for the other three hundred and sixty-four bitter days of the year, a day in paradise when all want and privation was thoroughly well drowned in eating and drinking. Its success was measured quite simply by the number of men found lying among the sand-dunes and the number of women and children who had the stomach-ache next day. Originally it had been a thanksgiving festival

for a good autumn fishing, but, taught by experience of the uncertainty of all earthly things, they had transferred it to the opening of the fishing—so as to make sure of the spread whichever way it might go. Neither God nor the innkeeper could come and take back the food and drink that had once been swallowed, however arbitrarily they might act in other things.

The youngsters had never known what an autumn feast was like: the innkeeper had abolished it a couple of years before Lars Peter came to the hamlet. So their expectations were all the greater.

It was a long morning for the children of the hamlet; they could not get the time to pass; their excitement kept them always on the go, driving them first to one thing, then to another. By degrees they found their way to the feasting ground, where the workmen from the villa were laying the floor for dancing and knocking together long tables out of rough boards. The place was a flat, grass-grown depression among the dunes. On one side a little sort of pulpit was raised, fenced round with spruce boughs; that was where the innkeeper would preach and where the music would play for dancing.

The men were not much better off than the children. It would not do to put in an appearance before two o'clock, and that was a long way off. Rasmus Olsen was tramping up and down outside his cabin; he was in his shirt and knee-breeches with flaps. One of the flaps hung down; he buried his hand inside it as he walked chewing—and spitting out black jets against the wall. He was dreaming of the orgy to come and

wondering how he could give his old woman the slip when she tried to get him home. They were all loafing about among the huts, yawning at the sky and looking out of place. It was no use thinking of sleep; besides, they were not going to sea the following night so there would be lots of time for a long snooze.

The women were at the inn during the forenoon, most of them, helping to bake fancy bread, to draw beer and brandy, and to carve meat. An incredible mass of everything had been provided; nobody could understand how the innkeeper had managed to scrape it all together. Bread and butter and fat and all kinds of meat to put on it—one would have thought there was enough food for a whole year. The innkeeper himself was looking after it all—and Martha! She had taken charge since the wife died, and seemed like a wife to him altogether, or nearly so. At all events, they fought as only married folk have the right to do and snapped at each other viciously.

On the stroke of two all the inhabitants of the hamlet were collected. They stood in knots round about the feasting ground, stiff with excitement and bashfulness, waiting for the invitation. Their best clothes, which they seldom had occasion to wear, kept them in check and on their good behavior; when any of the children encroached on the ground, they were recalled with solemn gestures. Lars Peter and the children stood rather in the background: "We ought never to push ourselves forward," he said admonishingly, holding them back. Sörine had not come; she was not well and had gone to bed; and Ditte was to help with the

waiting. She stood among the other women at the serving-table and looked quite pleased with herself. Otherwise everybody was here, with the single exception of the old people from "Gingerbread House"; the wife was on her feet again, but they never took part in anything. Even children who had been confirmed and were out in service, had begged a holiday so as to be at the feast. Old Lau, the fisherman, who had been laid up with rheumatism the last year, had put in an appearance; they had carried him out and laid him in the grass to wait; he looked like a piece of potato-peel in the sun, all shriveled up with rheumatism. And Fore-and-Aft-Jakob was here with his blunderbuss.

The invitation was a long time coming; still the innkeeper did not appear. At last a boy came running up from the house and said something to Martha; she went up to the groups of men and said:

"Take your seats, please!"

It was quite funny to sit down like that in the open air—a whole population! From the end of the table where Lars Peter sat with the children you could see down the whole length of it, over stacks of cakes and buns, and watch the women on both sides working their way along with the coffee-pots.

"We shall be the last!" whispered Sister Else.

"It'll be our turn presently," said Lars Peter reassuringly. "Have a little patience!"

Then Ditte discovered that they had not been served yet and came up with the pot.

"Look at Jakob," she whispered with a laugh as she

poured out for her father. Fore-and-Aft Jakob had pulled a whole pile of coffee buns in front of himself; he was devouring them like a dog—with one side of his mouth—and he growled when any one else wanted to help himself; he had his gun between his knees. Old Lau they had also managed to prop up on a chair.

There were at least a hundred people and there was room for more yet. All the other end of the table was empty and beyond it could be seen the fire with the huge copper pot hanging from three poles. Rasmus Olsen's wife was in charge of the coffee. She stood watching the pot and would not let her attention be taken off by anything, with a big scoop of ground coffee in her hand—at least a pound. The moment the water came to the boil, she shot in the coffee with a sure hand. It sank to the bottom and took the water off the boil for an instant. Then it boiled up again—and now was the time! Quick as lightning Madam Olsen dashed three flounders' skins into the pot, snatched it off the fire and straightened her back, while the sweat poured down her face. "There!" she said—"that's done!" Nobody in the hamlet could make coffee like hers.

When the first three or four cups had been swallowed the men found another use for their mouths; they began to call out to each other.

"Well, how goes it, Lars Peter? Have you got room for any more aboard?" asked Rasmus Olsen.

"It's a bit easier now—as the old woman said when she lost her breeches," Lars Peter answered.

Then a laugh went round the table and talk was started—about the day's weather, and the weather they had for the feast eight years before. The men straddled over the benches one after another and collected in front of the place where Fore-and-Aft Jakob was eating as greedily as ever. He had long ago finished the whole pile, but those sitting near kept pushing more buns in front of him. There was nothing wrong with his feeding arrangements anyhow! There were cigars on the side table, five whole boxes of them; did the women intend to smoke them themselves? Ah, now Martha remembered and brought them round.

"Take two," she said to make up for her neglect to everybody. At any rate she wasn't stingy—for it would all be hers one day.

Something out of the ordinary had to be done in honor of the day, so the men sauntered slowly down to the harbor in a body; they looked upon it as a sort of excursion, while the women were clearing away and laying the table for supper. By the fire-engine house they met the innkeeper talking to some men who had a sort of legal look about them. Perhaps they had come to settle up his affairs; at any rate he didn't look very pleased. And he wouldn't have the fishermen down by the harbor.

"You ought to take a little turn inland and look at the new plantation," he said as he passed them; "it'll give you an appetite for supper."

They stopped for a while and thought it over; then wandered in among the dunes to take a nap. As to

tramping off anywhere but to the harbor, that would never enter their heads.

No use was made of the pulpit, thanks to the inn-keeper's unwelcome visitors. But for them he had intended to hold a meeting with hymns and preaching between the two meals. But now nothing was seen of him the whole afternoon; nor did he appear when the real feast was about to begin.

The workmen from the villa now joined the party and made things lively at once.

"Let us big boys sit at one end of the table," they said to the fishermen, "then the bottles won't have to run their legs off coming round to us."

That started a bustle of changing places, and it was not without its bits of fun. The Copenhageners insisted on having one of their men among the children; he hadn't yet lost his childish ways, they declared. And he went and sat there, but took a whole bottle of brandy with him, hugged it and caressed it to the great delight of the youngsters and the womenfolk. The end of it was that his comrades had to beg him to come back to them.

This time the women sat down with the rest—which made the whole thing more festive. They were kept laughing at the Copenhageners all the time; the fishermen, most of them, had no idea until to-day how much humor there was stored up in the womenfolk they sulked their way through life with—it fairly bubbled out of them when the right word started it. And they knew how to hit back too! The Copenhageners invented their own funny nicknames for everything: the

biggest dish of sandwiches they called Amager, the long roll of corned beef was the Roskilde Road, and to take a dram was translated as bending your elbow. The fishermen they called watermen. "Hullo, waterman, shall you and I send a silent thought to our great-grandmother?" they said when they wanted to clink glasses.

They were no good at finding answers, the fishermen; Lars Peter was the only one who could give them anything back—he was a bit of a lad himself! When the Copenhageners called him "waterman" he retorted with "beerman," and that joke rang the bell—for it could not be denied that they fetched a few bottles down from the inn in the course of the summer. He was in fine form and his boisterous laughter rolled down the whole table. Ah, it was a great time! The table was crowded with dishes all the way along and there was every kind of dainty with snaps and beer flowing like water. And the low sun shining on it all, making the glasses and bottles sparkle and lighting up bright eyes in flushed faces.

The innkeeper turned up just when things were at their liveliest. There was a sudden silence; even the Copenhageners stopped dead when they saw him. He appeared all at once in the pulpit, surveying them, without any one having seen him come; his broad shoulders just showed over the top of the rail; his big head lay sunk between them turning continually from side to side; he looked like some queer foreign bird.

"Well, you're getting on all right, I see," he said, showing his horse's teeth in a cold grin. "Now don't

disturb yourselves. You were done out of the sermon this afternoon, so I just wanted to say a word or two to you—now I've got you together. You don't come to meeting very often, and I don't blame you for it. I guess you think you sleep better at home. And when you're asleep you don't sin, the saying goes. But now we've got you pretty fast; if the food won't keep you here, the bottles'll manage it all right; you won't run away from God's word to-day.

“But I suppose you think God's word ought to be given you by a man of God, and your idea is that I'm a hell of a fellow. There's mad Jakob going about aiming at him with his loaded gun, you say to yourselves. But I'll let you into a secret; Jakob's gun won't go off—there isn't any lock to it. I sold him the gun myself when I heard he wanted to shoot me. You may just as well make the profit as any one else, I thought, and passed off an old gun on him. That's the whole secret! But I can tell you another story about a gun and a hell of a fellow. One evening I was out duck-shooting here to the south and I met Old Nick himself, he had horns on his forehead and snorted fire out of his nostrils—something very different from a poor misshapen Ogre. I suppose you think he'd come to fetch me? Not a bit of it—he only chatted about this, that and the other—when he could take one of you and when he'd come for another. ‘What's that you've got there?’ says he and takes hold of my double-barrelled gun. ‘That's a tobacco pipe,’ I say. He wanted to try how it smoked, so I let him take both barrels in his mouth and fired. But Old Nick sneezed and said, ‘That's strong tobacco

you smoke.' Well, that's what I call a hell of a fellow to stand fire. As for Jakob here, why, he paid for it with his last small savings. If anybody deserves to be called a hell of a fellow, it's me for not turning a hair when I sold it him.

"But have you ever seen the Ogre turn a hair? You've seen him take your daily bread with one hand and give it you back with the other; you remembered the one and forgot the other—and that's how it always is. He might have kept his fingers to himself, you think, what did he want with us?—Ah, what *did* I want with you?

"I wanted to exploit you, and I did it as well as I could—as is the duty of man to exploit what lies to his hand and make the earth subject to himself. You didn't like it, but do you think the horse likes drawing the cart or the sheep being sheared? They want their fodder, but they don't want to do anything for it.

"Ah, but we're men, you think—or perhaps you don't even think that? Scarcely, I should say—and then can you expect others to think so? Man is made in God's image, we are told. Do you think *I* was?—I should guess God would rather be excused. That makes you laugh—but if you are the ones that are made in God's image, I should almost think it was worse.

"Get angry if you like. If I didn't know it was the brandy that had put your bristles up, I could almost respect you.

"Let me tell you one thing before I go, and don't take offense at it—the Lord forgot something when he created you. If he breathed the breath of life into you,

he must have done it at the wrong end, or else I don't see how you could be so dull. You complained now and then when the harness chafed you, but you settled down to it; so you deserved nothing better. And don't you think you liked your slavery after all? It's easier to get your food chewed for you than to chew it yourself. I've chewed for all of you; that's what my teeth are for; but what have you done? There isn't one of you that's got a bite in him. I've thought time and again: how can they stand it—why don't they send you to blazes? But you're always ready to lick the hand that strikes you—there isn't a man among you—unless it's Lars Peter, but he's too soft, he is; you can turn him round if you get him by the heart.

“And now I'm going to thank you for what's past, for I reckon we've finished with one another now. You made it hard for me—by making it too easy. It takes a man to drive a pair of horses, and he has to look after the reins all the time, but with you—we've only got to give you a push and you go on all your lives—slow enough, to be sure. You're the tamest beasts of burden I've ever had to deal with, one could drive you with a broomstick. But what do you care? That's where you've been able to beat me, you've won by your sleepiness. Now I'm going to follow your example and see if a little sleep won't do me good. Good luck to you all!”

They were all pretty sheepish after the inn-keeper had gone.

“That was a bit over the top,” said Lars Peter suddenly—“he gave it us this time!”

That released the tension.

"Yes, he roughed you up a bit," said the Copenhageners. "But, my word, what a jaw that man's got!"

The sun was about to set; they were hanging about waiting for the music to start dancing. Karl had finished his work; he and Ditte were walking and chatting arm in arm near the scene of the feast. A lot of young people had come in from the farms round about to get a dance; Lars Peter ran into Sine from the Hill Farm.

"So you haven't lost your blessed red cheeks yet," he said gaily. "You're just the girl I want to hop round with."

The young people got impatient and sent some one up to the inn to fetch the fiddler. He did not come back and another one was sent. At last somebody came running down the hollow way, a young fellow from one of the farms.

"There won't be any dance," he shouted open-mouthed—"the inn-keeper's shot himself! He took both barrels in his mouth and pulled the trigger with his big toe. His brains are scattered all over the ceiling."

There was a shriek, a single short sharp scream; Lars Peter knew the sound and started to run. Ditte lay writhing in the grass—wailing; Karl was bending over her. Lars Peter took her up in his arms and carried her home.

CHAPTER XIX

DITTE lay on the top of the bed moaning with closed eyes. Round about her they were running in and out, in and out. Now and then she felt a cold sweaty trembling hand on her forehead—it was Karl's.

“Go in to Mother,” she whispered. “Oh—oh!” and then she sent a long piercing shriek out into the summer night. Why were they all running about and tramping so heavily—and why was she being tortured? Through her half-closed eyelids she could see all that was going on in the living-room. The women were running backwards and forwards in there, putting down one thing and taking up another—and tramping. Her mother would get no peace, poor woman. But Karl must be sitting in there with her: it was silly of him to keep coming in and out of the lying-in room, making a fool of himself before all the women. He ought to be sitting by her mother's bed, that's where he ought to be, holding her hand, and seeing that she didn't get snuffed out like a candle. Oh no! Ditte opened her mouth wide. She did not hear her own shrieks, but she heard every other sound: somebody running round the corner in wooden shoes, somebody else bringing a chair into the room. It was the midwife's chair of the hamlet, she knew it well from Lars Jensen's widow's cottage, where

it was kept. It was very broad and quite short in the seat; the children had taken it for a bench.

"The rack," was what Lars Jensen's widow had called it. She was present at every childbirth, though she had never had any children of her own; where the rack went, she went too. There was her voice, just over Ditte's head. "Come on, my girl," she said, "we'll get it over in a jiffy."

Then they dragged her on to the rack and propped her up. Her feet were put on the cross-bars and her knees stretched right out till they rested against the arms of the chair. They held her by the knees and Lars Jensen's widow stood behind pressing her hips.

"There," she said, "now for it."

And Ditte set up a piercing shriek.

"That's right," they said, laughing, "they could hear that right up at the Hill Farm."

Ditte couldn't understand; she had heard quite plainly the little clock strike two in the middle of her pangs—and why did they say the Hill Farm?

"Now, then—here it comes again!" exclaimed Lars Jensen's widow. And Ditte yielded as to a word of command. Oh, but why were they torturing her? What had she done? She cried to heaven in her woe, groaning and wailing, crushed and maltreated by frightful torments.

"This is the nasty part," the women said, laughing; "you've got to pay for your pleasure."

Oh, but no, no, no! The pleasure of sin, what was it? What had she done but her duty, always her duty? And now she was to be punished with the torments of

hell; they seized her with red-hot pincers and gave another turn to the rack, and when she gnashed her teeth and screamed like a wild beast they laughed and said, "More still!" A thousand devils had hold of her, there were flames before her eyes.

And suddenly it all vanishes and she hears Karl talking to her mother in his slow, drawling way, about life here and the life hereafter; and she thinks with gladness that it is a good thing he has come to live with them, for now her mother has somebody who understands her. She can talk to him; with him she seems to slip away, farther and farther away.

But now her eyes see something beautiful, a new light has come into them. And it is Karl who has brought it.

And suddenly it comes back again; everything falls upon her, she is crushed and mangled among fragments of a collapsing world.

"There now!" says a voice; "we got over that very nicely." A child's voice screams, and Ditte sinks quite softly into an abyss.

When she woke again, the sun was shining in on her and she lay in a white bed with hem-stitched sheets, and there were white frills on her wrists and neck. Her pale red hair lay over her night-dress; one of the women had been brushing it and stood by with the brush in her hand, saying:

"It's quite pretty after all, the girl's hair is; you never noticed that before, because it was plaited."

The pleated border of the pillow stood out round her head, and in her arm lay a little red object—a

human bundle. She looked at it with strange and indifferent eyes, while Karl stood by the bed weeping with joy about some meaningless thing or other.

“But you’re alive!” he said.

Yes, of course she was alive; what else should she be?

Then Lars Peter came rushing in; he had been at the inn to ask them to have a trap ready—a matter of life and death. He took the baby from her and held it up to the light.

“Oh, what a lovely little sprig of humanity!” he said with warmth and feeling in his voice. “You might let me have him.”

Then for the first time Ditte understood that it was a real living child she had got, and she reached out for the little one.

PURGATORY

CHAPTER XX

WHY DOESN'T THE LASS GET MARRIED?

DITTE came out of the door of the "poor house" with her baby in her arms. For a minute she stood sniffing at the fresh air as if considering things, then she ventured over the threshold, and took her away towards the old pensioners' house. The women came to their doors in all the cottages round about. So she was visible once again! Hussies who had their babies on the wrong side of the blanket had an easy time of it! Other women had to wait before they showed their faces abroad until they had been churched and cleansed from all defilement and the smirch of sin at the Lord's altar. But of course those low rag and bone folk were put above those who went to church—and possibly it was only the marriage bed that was defiled! People could almost believe it when they saw how obstinately the hussy strove against lying in it!

But it was interesting to see this child-mother, who, as far back as they could remember, had dragged a youngster about with her, now walking off with her own—still half a child herself! It seemed as if she had been obliged to get one of her own to keep her hand in, when her brothers and sisters grew big. She looked all right again too! Her hair stood out about the little round head, and caught the light; her warm

blood tingled under the lightly freckled skin, still soft and transparent after childbirth, and blossomed forth into roses at the least provocation. The hussy—a man's kisses and handling had in no way spoilt her looks. It well became her to be a young mother!

But an absurd figure she cut too—the stuck-up chit! Not only did she go and have a child, which was not such a difficult thing to do after all; but she was in the uncommon position of having a father for it! Then why on earth wouldn't she marry him? It was no doubt Rasmus Olsen's Martha that began the infection, she was in the habit of turning her claws on her beloved, like a cat! The boy was now nearly a couple of months; it was none too soon to hold him over the font—it never did to give the Evil One more of a hold on a child than necessary. And so convenient too, to have held the wedding and christening at the same time—a double event, as you might say. But counsel and advice were not wanted here! Inmates of "the poor house" were quite grand people—they didn't need to borrow a bag before they went a-begging.

It was really strange that the old couple continued to patronize Ditte—they who were otherwise too select to rub shoulders with other folks. You could almost call it encouraging vice! Yes, she had better cards in her hand than most people, but did she as much as say "Thank you" for that? The only one in the house who had liked Karl was the murderess Sörine; and no sooner was she dead than he packed up and disappeared. As was only natural, no one ever heard from him.

It was certainly a peculiar idea to drive away a person whom Fate had once for all marked out for one. She could never be really free of him, however much she might struggle and strive,—who had ever heard of folk here on earth running away from their own? And it had left proper traces on her too! He was a queer fish though, of course—neither played cards nor danced, and never went to a pub either. But then he had other good points. At any rate he was a man, right enough! And a farmer's son into the bargain! It looked pretty bad for a penniless rag and bone man's daughter,—a love-child at that,—to turn up her nose at a farmer's son,—especially when she had unloosened her girdle for him. Anybody else would have thanked their God if the man had condescended to them at all in such circumstances.

Ditte saw their heads clustered round about the doors, and knew to a "T" what they were gossiping about. But they could just talk! She knew her own mind, and she had both her father and the old couple in the "Gingerbread House" to back her up. The old wife had called Lars Peter to her sick-bed, and laid strict commands on him never to aggravate ill-luck into possible misery by letting Ditte marry Karl. However, there was no danger of it, for on that point Lars Peter was just as crazy as the girl. If she didn't want to go to the altar, he would be the very last to drag her there. What she really had against Karl as matters now stood, he did not quite understand; but perhaps it was something she had inherited from both Sö-rine and himself. Neither of the two families had been

especially noted for their eagerness to run to the church,—yet in spite of it, they had borne children with God's blessing, had got on well together, and had bided faithfully side by side until the last. He forgot—now as ever—that he was not really Ditte's father.

He did not feel any pride in her connection with a farmer's son either. Karl was too effeminate for him, and the farmer in him did not appeal to Lars Peter. He had never been able to understand Sörine here with her eternal ambition to rise to the farmer class. He and his had nothing to thank the farmer class for; like a strange sort of bird among the others his kin had always been hated and persecuted for their dark restless traits. They had got their own back when and where they could, through generations, as hangmen, witches and tramps. Folk hurled them forth into the night—and they returned—in league with the unholy Powers of Darkness. They always brought the spirit of unrest into the peaceful countryside; and with it lawlessness and passion. People never knew where to have them. They disturbed and robbed poultry-yards and sheep-folds, brought knives into peaceful dance gatherings, and now and then their raven locks made even the most virtuous spouse waver in her allegiance. For that alone they were cordially detested by the farmers.

That side of Lars Peter had burnt itself out long ago—the comparatively small share of it that he had inherited. It had passed with his youth and early manhood; since he had seen his wife and four children—all that he held dear here on earth, lying wet and cold in a

row by the well side, he ran amuck no more. Yet there had been a time later on—a senseless year or two as a sailor, but it had glided out of his memory leaving practically no trace. The only vestiges were the tendency to vagabondage—which came to the surface again in him. The farmers knew this characteristic of his and placed him accordingly.

That did not matter, Lars Peter had no ambitions in that quarter. In his eyes the farmer appeared a creature most deserving of pity—a blind mole feeling and knowing nothing outside of his own hole in the earth. Despised and outcast though he was, he more or less looked down on the whole farmer class. No, he did not feel at all honored by such a connection.

Kristian was now on a farm about three miles off and helped with the work; he went to school from there. And it was the same old story—they could never get enough out of him. He never got time to come home, and had to learn his lessons on the way to school, and to run all the way too. Farmers were all alike, at all times!

Ditte did not expect Lars Peter to force her inclinations;—he felt himself to be quite as much a grandfather to an illegitimate brat, as possible father-in-law to a farmer's son.

Ditte had got the old woman up while she made her bed and washed and tidied her. Now she sat in the cane chair by the bedside and gave her little one the breast. The old woman lay on her back and dozed, she was tired out after being got up. She had not much

strength left; only having her hair done or another nightdress put on made her absolutely collapse. She had not long to live, her life was ebbing day by day. But she was gentle and mild and full of thoughtfulness for others; what would become of the old man when he no longer had her?

Ditte was resting peacefully. Her mind was full of vague questions that needed no answer. She was tired and it was pleasant to sit thus half asleep and feel the milk flowing into her breast and up to the nipple. The boy was a perfect little glutton. . . . It was all she could do to keep him supplied with food. And the least thing made her tired and sleepy. He drank with long rhythmic gulps, and had a quaint meditative expression in his little eyes—rather like Karl when religiously inclined. So he himself lay and listened for sounds.

The old woman opened her eyes. "How hard he works," said she, smiling, "like a little pump!"

"He always takes it like that, when he really likes it. He would like to suck it in through his ears too!"

"I shall never know what that feels like. The Lord could not have thought us fitted to have children," said the old woman.

"Very likely you were too tidy," answered Ditte thoughtfully, "it wouldn't be amusing to be a child in a house where you can't do this, and mustn't do that either. But you wouldn't have had such a peaceful time all the same."

The sick woman laughed heartily.

"Do you think so? But perhaps we shouldn't have

been so tidy if we had had children to bring a little untidiness into our life. We would gladly have sacrificed a little of the peacefulness."

"But they bring a lot of sorrow," said Ditte seriously. "Look at father; how much trouble he has had through me."

"I think he has had much joy too," answered the old woman, and reached after her hand. "The sorrow you have given him till now, I would gladly have borne for the sake of a daughter, and I think father would say the same. We have never had anything but each other, and we must be thankful for that, even if we are a little selfish and study our own comfort, and find our happiness in having things nice."

Every minute the old man came slouching into the room and sat down by the bed. He said nothing, but held his wife's hand a moment. Then he suddenly let go; went away and gazed meditatively at the clock and slouched out again. Outside they could hear his steps going constantly to and fro; it was wonderful what he could find to be so busy about. "He's like that all the time," said the woman, "so busy, so busy. He has no time to sit with me, and yet he can't let me lie; so he runs to and fro continually. He calls it making things tidy, although everything has been in its place as long back as I can call to mind. He can be up in the loft all day long, messing about, and he has never finished; he has the feeling that we shall soon leave here."

Ditte sat meditating a little. "Why do you always say 'we'?" she asked at last.

The old lady looked uncomprehendingly at her.

"Yes, for people don't die both together, suddenly."

"Oh! Is that what you mean? You are surprised that I always count Father in everything. But you will come to understand it one day, for I hope that you too will find one for whom you can wear yourself right out, and come to dwell entirely in him. Perhaps our life has not been of much use; we haven't done much upon earth when looked at like that. If people really live to labor and till the earth, we shall go before our Maker with empty hands. We have brought forth nothing: on the contrary, we have consumed what others have left to us. But we have been good to each other and not thought of ourselves, but lived one for the other. And it has been a beautiful thing to know that you do not need to think about yourself, for another will take all that trouble from you. He who can confide his weal and woe to another is in good hands; thus each one grows into the other's being and they become inseparable. We have but little to say to each other, for we think the same thoughts, and at night we often dream the same dreams also."

"When I am asleep, I can feel if Povl or As have kicked off the clothes," said Ditte seriously. "Then I have no rest before I wake myself, and get up and cover him again."

"Yes, you are a good lass! We shall miss you, all of us, that you may be sure."

"Sister Else will come every day and lend you a hand; she is a clever girl for her age."

The old woman lay drumming her fingers on the quilt. "Karl is not quite so bad as he is made out, so

far as one can judge," said she suddenly. "He has sent money, you say?"

"But we don't know where it comes from. He had better stop writing. I have nothing against him—he is really good and kind. But I can't bear to think of his making love to me; it makes me feel quite sick!"

"Perhaps that's your punishment because he didn't misuse you from love. Sometimes when I look round the world I think that we women are there just for that, and that it is better to be misused, as it is called, than to live a barren life. We don't fall to pieces when a man takes hold of us as much as people cry out we do. There's a lot of hypocrisy about and we women like to make ourselves out more fragile than we are. I should think you could be well rewarded for it all by living your life at Karl's side; he is not an every-day person. He has only started badly, but happiness can be built up in so many ways. And now he cares for you, that you may be sure of."

"But I don't care for him—not a bit," replied Ditte hastily. "He is so silly."

The old woman patted her hand. "Yes, yes, now you have your boy, so there is no reason to waste any more tears on the matter. But when you come out into the world you will find that men are often silly, and that Karl is not just like them. Now let us see if you can look out for yourself when you meet them in their fine clothes. And now you had better go, for I want to rest a little."

"Shan't I get the supper ready first?"

"No, Father can do that all right. He must have a

little to be busy with. But let me kiss your boy properly, before you go away with him."

Ditte laid the child in the old woman's arms. "It is strange that such a little being seems to say more to us than one who has a long life behind him. And it has never thought a single thought yet, and smells all over of milk. Life comes to you clean and appetizing when you have a baby, and yet we hear that man is born in sin. It is difficult to understand. But go now before he begins to scream. And good luck and happiness be with you both."

"I will come back again and say a proper 'good-bye' before I start," said Ditte and bent over the bed to take the boy.

"No, let this rather be our 'good-bye'; it is so hard to part. And I will tell you now, child, that I thank God for having met you. You have made father and me richer; it is due to you that we have come to believe in the world again." She had taken Ditte by the cheek. "Father says you have a heart of gold. May you get on all right in the world with that! Think a little of yourself as well; one is obliged to in a world where most of us only think of ourselves." She kissed her once more and pushed her away. Ditte did not understand much of these words; but she grasped the gravity of the farewell, and cried a little on the homeward way. The old woman had been as a mother to her in that difficult time; the best and dearest of mothers! And now she was treading the same path that Granny had trod—there where neither tears nor appeals could reach her. Who would keep Ditte's spirits up now and

tell her, that in spite of everything that had happened, she was a good little woman?

Lars Peter had pulled up just outside the house and was busied in unharnessing. He had got hold of some old harness—just then for hire, and was driving about hawking herrings again. Old rubbish which he had gathered up in his rounds of the farms, lay at the back of the cart. He had stabled the horse and cart in Widow Doriom's deserted rooms, and grazed the horse in the hollows of the dunes. Now there was no inn-keeper to come spying and forbid him these poverty-stricken expedients.

"What is the matter?" he asked; alarmed at Ditte's tear-stained face; "there is nothing wrong with the baby, is there?"

"I have been over to the old people," said Ditte and hurried in to get out of further explanations. She could not bear to think of it, much less to speak of it. She gave the baby to Else and began to warm her father's supper. He was always very hungry when he came home from his rounds. It was not like the old days, when there was a good deal of food about on the farms. Now they had become stingy. Everything had to be sold and turned into money.

Ditte could not understand who bought all the food the farmers produced: anyhow not much of it came their way! She had put a little bit of pork into the fish pie which had been set aside for Father from dinner, and that bit of pork had its own strange history. Kristian had saved it from his own food up at the farm or how else had he come into possession of it? He had

passed it on to Else at school to take home with her; it was so long since Father had tasted pork. Yes, what a long time it was since they had had pork in the house! And how like Kristian to think of it! Ditte peered anxiously out while she was stirring the frying-pan. Now the two ravenous boys would naturally smell the pork, and come hurrying up, wolfishly hungry. Ah, well! Away, shadows! Let the sun shine!

"Well, I have found a home for the boy," said her father in a low voice when he had finished his meal and got his pipe filled. It was with a middle-aged childless couple; Lars Peter thought the little fellow would be well off there; the man was a crofter at Nöddebo. "Are you just as determined to go to the city?" he asked. "Couldn't you think of going to one of the smaller towns—Frederiksværk, for example,—or Hilleröd? Then you would be nearer the child,—and us too." No, Ditte wanted to go to Copenhagen. Out here every one said: "Oh, the rag and bone man's lass, the one with the illegitimate child!" But there there would be no one who knew anything about the matter, so she would be taken on her own merits, and Ditte promised herself that she would soon be looked up to. It had gone badly enough for a long time, but up there were many opportunities for those who really wanted work, and Ditte was very determined to give her fate a helping hand.

"Yes, if only I had a little money!" said Lars Peter with a sigh. "Then I could have gone into town with you, and begun a little ironmongery business, or else got hold of a little land." Lars Peter had quite for-

gotten the troubles he had endured in the "Crow's Nest." Now he would have had no objection to beginning the old life again,—half on the land, and half on the road.

It was not worth while staying in the hamlet. Things got still worse after the innkeeper's death. The inhabitants were unaccustomed to think or do business for themselves, and wandered aimlessly about. There was no method in anything. The boat and tackle could not be kept up like this, and food was hardly to be got. They had no connection for selling their catch to—the innkeeper had always seen to that. In order to make things a little better, Lars Peter took to the road again, and began to hawk herrings. He was not at all displeased at the change. It brought food to the house, and it made his blood run a little faster again. Truth to tell, he had had enough of the fishing, which brought in its train little food in the larder, but cold in the limbs and many night-watches. His fingers itched to begin something new, in a new place,—to try another way of making a living. But the money! "If he had to come to grief, what satisfaction had he in laying hands on my little all?" he asked, for certainly the twentieth time.

But Ditte did not encourage him in this vagabondage; it had become worse and worse for them, every time he had broken off with the old life: here at least they had a roof over their heads. "No, you try to work off a little of the debt," she said wisely, "think what Mother's illness and funeral have cost!" Yes, Lars Peter remembered it well enough; but what the

devil did that matter? Other people had cheated him out of all his!

No, Ditte did not think one could run away from one's debts. "We can't go away from the old couple either—they have no one but us. Sister must go there every day and give them a helping hand. And when I begin to get on in the capital, then I will help to get the whole cleared off, and we can leave here like respectable people. In town the wages are high."

"Yes, perhaps you are right. But it would have been splendid if only we could have gone into the town altogether. There one could begin all over again."

Yes, that was just it. Ditte wanted to go in quite alone—unhampered by past and origin and everything that could hold a girl down—be she ever so capable and clever,—and see if she could get on. There must be something good in store for her too. Granny had always maintained it, and in her own heart it lay buried deep like a glowing promise; often shrunk into the smallest compass, but never quite destroyed. Luck came in so many strange ways; but one must oneself hold out a hand. And Ditte did not intend to disappoint those at home, even if she got on well. It was not for her own sake that she was going.

CHAPTER XXI

OUT IN THE WIDE WORLD

THE last day before the uprooting was a busy time for Ditte. All the clothes in the house had to be gone through once more—and it was no light task. Although they had had nothing new since they came to the hamlet, but steadfastly wore out remnants of their better days in the “Crow’s Nest,” there was more and more to deal with. Heaps of old rags seemed to collect from year to year, one never quite got to the bottom of them. They were hard enough on their clothes, the lads, both Povl and the twin Rasmus, whom they could not find it in their hearts to get rid of. Kristian would wear out everything they put on him. It had been Ditte’s care to get everything turned and twisted so that it could be serviceable again. Most of the clothes had been made for them by Sörine in the “Crow’s Nest,” out of old, cast-off clothing which Lars Peter had brought home in the rag bags. Now they were literally falling to pieces, and Ditte had to take one patch to sew on another patch. Every evening when the children were in bed she could begin at once. How Else would get on with this was her greatest worry, and now she sat working at it, far into the night, so that the child should not be overwhelmed in rags. She sewed the remains of two pairs of breeches into one pair, patched and strengthened. Else was

capable enough for her ten years, quite clever at house-keeping, but she wasn't quite accustomed to darning and sewing yet,—she was too little.

And so the end of October was here,—it was dawn. Lars Peter stood at the door with a load of autumn herrings to be delivered to a big farmer at Nöddebo; from there he had undertaken to carry a load of charcoal to the capital. In this way he got the lass and her baby respectably moved and earned a modest penny, at the same time, which would come in useful. The parting was soon over. The two boys already lay out in the wet sand by the gable wall, and built castles, although it was hardly light enough to see yet. They rushed out to their play as soon as they came out of their beds, and it was nearly impossible to get them in in the evening, so engrossed were they in their task. They had scarcely time to give her a handshake, to say “good-bye,” and were deep in their sand-hole again; they never thought of turning their heads to see the cart drive off. Else waved, but smiled all the time,—now she was to be mistress of the house, and have no one over her. Ditte noticed both of these incidents—she had been as a mother to them and done everything for them in her power.

She sat quite still fretting over it. Lost in reflection, and totting it all up against them, she never heard Lars Peter's small talk about the countryside and the weather. She had seen that they did not care about her any more, it would be a good time before she let them hear from her and then perhaps they would begin to behave differently to her. Her eyelids hung heavy, and

now and then she loosened the shawl and felt the baby to see that he was well wrapped up against the morning cold.

"Is he warm and comfortable?" Lars Peter turned to her and discovered that tears hung on her eyelashes.

"You must remember that the boy will be well looked after," he said comfortingly, "and at Christmas you must get a holiday and come back and see him, and us as well."

"Oh! It's not that," said Ditte, beginning to sob, "it is the children. They didn't care a bit when I left them."

"Is that all?" Lars Peter smiled good-humoredly. "The other day I overheard Povl ask Else if she thought I should soon die, and then he could have my long boots. Children are all alike—out of sight, out of mind! But they care for you all the same, even if they have been a little less friendly lately, on account of this business here. They have had to hear many a bad word for your sake, you must remember."

Lars Peter was in his kindly mood of old. The vibrations of his droning voice seemed to fill her with a sense of comfort. Ditte had not seen him like this for a long time, not since she had gone out driving with him as a child. It was the country road that worked the magic, and that was his rightful place,—sitting on a cart. Naturally it was not Big Klaus he had between the shafts; but he had already got the horse into his own steady jog-trot. And Ditte could see that the horse was fond of its master.

"What the devil is that?" Lars Peter suddenly ex-

claimed. Kristian had suddenly popped out of a thorn-bush by the wayside just in front of them, with his cap over his eyes, like a highwayman. He stood in the middle of the road and aimed at the cart with a stick.

"Stop!" he cried, and laughed all over,—the rascal! He had his satchel over his arm. "May I drive with you?" he asked, dancing in front of the cart, "only a little way; I want so much to go part of the way with Ditte."

"But you have to go to school, you rascal!" Lars Peter tried to look angry.

Kristian stood there looking like a criminal with downcast eyes. He had forgotten all about that, although the school satchel hung over his arm as a reminder. But that was Kristian all over; there was only room for one idea at a time in his noddle. "Now it's too late," he said in an unhappy voice, "I should only get a flogging if I went now."

Lars Peter looked doubtfully at Ditte for support; she was always ready to pounce on him for playing truant. But this now was something she did not like to sit in judgment upon—she looked everywhere else.

Kristian took in the situation at a glance, and was up on the seat. Before many minutes had passed he had got the whip and reins from his father. He handled the tackle all right; the horse livened up under his hands and trotted quicker. It could not resist young blood either. Ditte sat and sunned herself contentedly. What did she care if Kristian played truant to-day? He was a good boy—the one she loved best of the whole family, and the one too who had caused her the

most trouble. He clung to her on that account, risked thrashings both in school and at the farm, only to say "good-bye." "I shall send you something from town, perhaps a driving whip," she said.

Kristian's eyes glistened. "And one day I will come in and visit you; I could run the whole way quite well," he promised her.

"You just dare to try!" cried Ditte, frightened. "You won't do it, promise me that." Kristian promised her readily, good boy that he was; but if he could keep to it, when the fit came over him was another matter. Now he had to get down; it could not go on like this. "You will have to run ten miles, you rascal!" said his father. Bah! Kristian did not count ten miles any distance—he had gone on longer trips—longer than it was wise to talk about. Lars Peter had to lift him forcibly over the side of the cart and let him drop into the road. He stood for a long time gazing after them, then at last he turned round and began to run. Ditte followed him with her eyes until he disappeared. "He is a good boy," she said half excusingly.

"Yes, but he is difficult. I am afraid that he will have trouble through life."

Ditte did not answer; perhaps she had not heard it at all. She was quite strange and unlike herself to-day. She avoided meeting his eyes, and gazed heavily before her, and yet it could be seen that she saw nothing. Lars Peter understood what it was, although she tried to show nothing. What was the good of making a fuss over what could not be altered. But it was unlucky all the same that she sat and shut herself up in these sad

thoughts. It would have been better to have given free vent to her sorrow and made an end of it. Lars Peter tried to help her several times by getting her to talk; he did not hold with that; it was like turning the knife in the wound to make a slaughtered beast bleed. But it had to be done. And every time she just smiled a pale weary smile. It was nasty rough weather, and several times on the way he drew up in a sheltered spot to let her nurse the baby a little. While she sat at the edge of the wood and gave the little one the breast, he walked to and fro, and tried to make them comfortable, or stood and amused himself by watching the baby's small fists groping over the mother's breast while it drank.

"It is hard after all for such a little kiddy never to be able to warm his nose on a pap any more," he ejaculated.

Ditte looked up quickly. For a moment it seemed as if all the floodgates would open and her grief gush forth, but she took herself in hand, and smiled her pale smile once more.

It was dinner time when they reached their destination and got the herrings delivered and the charcoal loaded up. When they came down to the crofter's place the wife stood in the road on the lookout; she was well up in the fifties, stout yet bustling. "I thought as how you'd soon be here," she said, and bade them welcome. "And you are just in time for dinner." The husband went a bit up into the rooffield, and fussed about there, he came limping towards them, bent and worn.

"So that is the lass," he said, and held out a clay-stained fist. "She has been early enough about the business—she is only a child herself." Ditte got red and turned her head away.

"Never you mind what that silly old fellow says," broke in the woman. "He has always been one of those to give plenty of tongue. But it has never gone beyond talk, or else we shouldn't have had to take a stranger's child to give us a little support in our old age."

"The pair of us must be at fault there," said the man coolly, beginning to scrape the clay from his hands with a stick. "And as far as that goes, folks get the children that the Lord meant them to have."

"Pooh!" The woman sniffed scornfully. "It is the man who begets children—if he is able to." She looked quite furious as she stood there with the baby in her arms. It was an old sore reopened.

"Down at the hamlet we often say that the hussies come running with the babies that the mothers won't have," said Lars Peter, trying pleasantly to stop the squabble.

"So I have something to look forward to," answered the woman, smiling. "I must look to the lass I haven't got! But seriously speaking, it is the same here as everywhere else. Some get none and others too much of the good things of life.—Well, well, come in and get something inside you. You must want it after your long ride." She was not so bad-tempered after all as she seemed at first.

In the corner by the cold stove sat a shriveled old

man staring vacantly in front of him. It was not easy to say if he understood anything at all; he did not move when they came in, but muttered and shuffled his wooden shoes to and fro on the floor. He shook all over as if he had the palsy.

"Here is something for you to do, Father," the woman screamed into his ear, and showed him the bundle. But he did not understand. "Just so, just so," he mumbled, clapped his withered thighs with the palms of his hands and shuffled. The woman gave up trying to make him take the baby and gave it to Ditte again. "He will soon have it," she said.

"I should think he's a little queer, isn't he?" said Lars Peter.

"Yes, it is time and eternity that worry him; he can't make the long years pass. He can't think, he's too silly for that, and can scarcely see or hear, so he sits and always treads with his feet to pass the time and jabbars nonsense. But now we think that this will be the saving of him, for it will probably be he who has to look after the baby. We others have our own work to see after."

"The Lord has forgotten him," the man put in; "He never remembers that the poor have to live and often He forgets to see to it that we can die." He tightened his mouth like a miser.

"Let him alone for that time that remains to him," said the woman sharply. "He does not eat much bread. And he doesn't have an amusing time—poor fellow."

"Amusing! Amusing!" The man made a grimace.

“Do others have an amusing time either? If you want an amusing time, you must be able to pay for it.”

There they were at the bone of contention again. Lars Peter was not pleased to think that perhaps he had put the baby in a house where there was quarrelling. “There has always been more to eat up than to bring forth,” he said soothingly,—and it would be easy to make a living if one had only old people and children to pay for. But it seems as if we poor folk have the devil at our backs, and therefore can’t get on, however much we try.”

The husband and wife exchanged glances. “If we have the devil at our backs, then the Lord has put him there for our good—and so we must bear him to the end of our lives,” said the wife after a pause.

“Perhaps so,” answered Lars Peter. “We can’t be quite sure of that, for the Lord gets the blame for so much that really ought to be laid on the devil’s shoulders. The innkeeper down in the fishing hamlet tried to get us to believe that it was on the Lord’s account that he bullied us; but dang me if the devil didn’t come and fetch him all the same. No, we poor folks must look to ourselves both for what harms, and what helps us up, and see that we hang together. And so I say ‘Thank you’ to you for taking the youngster. You won’t be rich out of the money you get, but at any rate I will see to it that it is paid at the right time. It will be four crowns on the first of each month, and six for the Christmas month. And two crans of her-

rings at harvest time. They are at their fattest then, and I will see that you are not cheated."

"No, we shan't get rich by what we get from it—dear as everything is now," said the wife, "but we had thought the boy would be a little support to us in our old age as a reward for taking him."

Ditte took no part in the conversation, but every time the talk fell on her baby, a shudder went through her.

"Yes, yes," said Lars Peter. "Let us see how things go for a bit. It is never wise for either of the parties to bind themselves too hard and fast."

"That was our idea. We meant to adopt the child, so that no one should know it was anything but our own."

Ditte began suddenly to cry outright—not only to weep, but to utter piercing screams which cut one to the heart. The crofter couple were so startled that they dropped their knives and forks, and even the old grandfather waked up for a moment. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself, lass?" cried Lars Peter, and took her in his arms. "You mustn't take my baby from me," she shouted. "You mustn't take my baby from me!" She was quite beside herself.

Well, they passed it off as well as they could, and began to talk of something else. And as soon as the meal was finished the men went out to harness the horse. Ditte laid her baby to the breast—for the last time. She was unhappy. "Let it take all it can get; drain your breasts quite empty," said the woman. "And here is some warm oil to smear them with to

ease the swelling a little when next the milk comes. Yes, you may stare, and think how can I know that; but another woman can have been young once too, and easily deceived and have had to give her child to strangers. Such is Life!"

Ditte began to cry again. "You mustn't take my child from me!" she wailed.

"But how you do take on! Who says any one is taking your child from you? There are children enough to be had, and you can come and fetch it yourself when you want to. Now you had better put on your things, for I hear the cart coming. We will bind up the breasts, so that they won't get flabby and hanging; but will be round and firm; so that you will look like a maid again. You have a fine skin, child," she continued, talking all the time she helped her. "You have the breast of a princess. The man who could lay his head here had no hard bed! Ah, yes, youth and beauty are tender plants. Another woman has also been young once and fitted to bring the wildest rascal to rest on her bosom, and where is all that now? Now I have only this crazy old fellow to come and nag at me,—a draggled hen with a mad cat at her heels! That is all that is left of the glory of youth. Yes, you can laugh at another poor creature, but you can't give up a little share of your wealth. And yet there are more left where that one came from, sweet and shapely as you are."

So she prattled on; but Ditte smiled no more. It was much against her will she had giggled—in the midst of her black despair, at the comic picture of the

hen and the cat. Against her will too she was helped into Lars Peter's big driving cape, to prevent her from taking cold in her breasts, which could very easily turn to cancer;—and resistingly she let herself be placed in the cart. "Come, kiss your baby for the last time," said the crofter's wife, and held the boy up to her, "and come soon again and see him." Ditte tried to take him, but was not allowed to. The woman went in with him, holding him tightly to her, as if she would show that now he was hers.

They went slowly forward in the autumn cold; the horse was old and tired and they had a heavy load. Lars Peter had his hands full to keep him going. Ditte sat still as a mouse—not a muscle moved—her eyes were fixed. She was exhausted, the wet wind blew cold through her garments, grief gnawed at her heart. The trees wept—the horse's coat dripped, Lars Peter's hat and Ditte's own eyelashes. At the side of the road loomed shadows in the fog, bushes, or cattle grazing. Some one was singing, perhaps a herdsman, or a laborer on the roots.

Why must we mortals weep
Through never-ending morrows?
Our eyes they are but twain,
And such a crowd of sorrows!

Ditte knew the song well, but she was not weeping, why did he sing it then? She only sat under the bluff and everything dripped and wept over her because she had sinned. It was senseless, this continual dripping,—why she had sinned only just to stop tears! The grasses by the roadside were trodden down, and

Karl stepped out of the fog. "It was I who sang," he said, "but we made a mistake, the Judge of all and I. You are no child of sin—comfort me again. You know our Lord said: 'Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these, ye did it unto me.'" So he went on imploring her, but Ditte tore herself free and fled in loathing.

She woke with a start, they had stopped at the edge of a wood. It was nearly dark. "The horse can do no more, we must see about finding a shelter for the night," said Lars Peter. It was close to Rudersdal Inn; but they could not afford to put up there for the night, so Lars Peter drove behind an old barn and unharnessed. The horse had its nosebag and Lars Peter's driving cape over it. They themselves crept into the barn through the hatch and settled down in the straw.

Lars Peter took out food and handed it to Ditte in the darkness; there was an apple for her too, and all the time he spoke comforting words to her. Ditte could not eat; she needed only rest and oblivion. But his quiet droning voice was pleasant to hear, if only she was not obliged to answer. She had slept little the last few nights with excitement and overwork, and now she only wanted to sleep and forget it all: while he chattered on, she fell asleep.

It was a restless night. Lars Peter did not get much sleep. The milk set up congestion in Ditte's breasts, and sorrow clutched at her heart: she lay dreaming and whimpered after her boy. When it got too much to bear, Lars Peter waked her up, and talked

kindly to her. "He is all right. Be sure he is asleep," said he.

"No, no, I know he is awake, and lies crying for me, for the milk is flowing to my breasts," sobbed Ditte.

That was a strange thing to hear. Lars Peter was quite at a loss to know what to say. "At any rate, see that you take things sensibly," he said. "It is of no use crying over spilt milk. And when you have got on a bit, you can always fetch the boy. In the town there is shelter for those who find it hard enough to get it out here on the open land. Perhaps it won't be long before we others come after you. And Karl is there anyhow, if you feel lonely."

Ditte was silent. She would not seek him out anyhow.

In the latter part of the night the moon shone forth. Ditte had pain all round her armpits, and could not bear to lie still. They got up and went on their way again. There were people on the road already, solitary wayfarers, half drunk with sleep, going in the same direction as themselves. "It is hiring day!" said Lars Peter. "They are walking to town to go into service or perhaps find casual work. I ought to have done the same in my youth, and then perhaps I should have looked very different to-day."

"But then you wouldn't have had us," exclaimed Ditte, horrified.

Lars Peter looked at her uncomprehendingly. "No?—Well, that's true too," he exclaimed, "but for all that, who knows?" No, that would have been too curious,—all those meetings! Then chance would

have had to bring Sörine to the capital, and they should have met each other naturally, and— But it is an impossible task to try to push about the pawns for Fate, and the man who would mix himself up in our Lord's matters must have a good head. For his part, he only knew that as far as Ditte and the others went, he would not wish his life otherwise.

Soon the big road became lively. Carts with chests of drawers and wardrobes perched up behind overtook them, and foot passengers came on to the highway from foot and field paths carrying knapsacks. It was just daylight. "You can see you are not the only one who wants to go in and try his luck," said Lars Peter gaily.

Ditte thought this had both a bad and good side. "If only I *can* find a place," said she.

Lars Peter smiled. "If you took the whole surface of Arre lake, Copenhagen could not be put down on it," he replied, "and people live over one another in many layers." One could see that he had no very clear idea of the capital.

"What do they do with the dirty water they have washed up in?" asked Ditte. "For then they can't throw it out of the kitchen door."

"No, are you crazy? Then people would get it on their heads. It goes down to the ground through pipes."

Ditte was quite livened up now. The congestion in the breasts was getting better, and all that lay behind had to give way to the present. The capital towered in front of them,—mystical in the morning fog, like an

endless forest of spires and cupolas, and factory chimneys, and from all the roads streamed in people going to their daily work,—carts and provisions: butchers' carts, milk carts, vegetable carts, and bakers' carts. "Yes, they get plenty to eat in there," said Lars Peter, and sighed. "A man has to live in there if he is to get a share in the good things he helps to produce himself."

Now they formed one link in the endless train of vehicles, and suddenly the road changed into paved streets, and there was a thunder of traffic. Ditte, quite frightened, seized Lars Peter's arm, and pressed closely to him. Clanging trams, shouting drivers, cyclists and people who rushed into the middle of a whirlpool, and came out safe on the other side, the whole whirled and whirled together in an earsplitting uproar. And the high houses bent over the crowds, as if they were giddy,—no, she had to shut her eyes and shuddered all over. She was not really afraid, only overwhelmed by all these terrible things; she was sure they could never come out safely. And suddenly they rumbled through a gateway, and were in the courtyard of an inn in Wester Street, which she knew quite well from Lars Peter's description of his adventurous city trip. Lars Peter got her put to bed, then drove on to Company Street where he was to deliver his charcoal.

And so his duty was accomplished, and he was in the capital! The horse stood in the stable before a full manger, and Lars Peter stood outside the inn door, and breathed in the air, with his head full of a strange, empty feeling. Outside lay cares and trou-

bles and hard labor; here stood Lars Peter full of expectations. There were in fact only too many things to choose among in here!

But first of all he had to feed the inner man; he was frightfully hungry. He found an underground eating-house and ordered a plate of hash, and a dram. It was absolutely necessary to get the cold and fatigue properly out of his limbs. And he was successful! When Lars Peter came up into the street again, he was a different being. It was true that all his surroundings had changed too. The sun shone, or was just going to—and the lass's prospects seemed quite brilliant, when rightly considered. She was young and clever with her hands, she had no further trouble with her child, and it was so lucky that it was hiring day into the bargain. Now, among all the vacant situations he must find one that just suited her,—where she would get good wages, and be well treated, and her personality develop. For, honestly speaking, Lars Peter could find no match to the girl. For a few moments he pondered as to whether he should look in at the Hauser Place cellar, where he had been helped once before. Perhaps the Bandmaster—? He had worked miracles that time. In Lars Peter's memory that trip had become both an adventure and something of an event. But when he came to Hauser Place and saw the steps leading down to the cellar, he stood still all the same. He had been robbed of both his watch and his pocketbook, however it had happened. He stood meditating a little, then turned and crossed the Coal Square into the old streets.

He liked walking here. Chandlers and ironmongers alternated in the basement shops, and on the ground floor on the pavement lay old lumber which spoke right to his heart. It would have been fine to have had some of that on his cart once upon a time! Opposite the chandler's brooms lay in bundles, and here and there stood a wheelbarrow with iron corners and all; and there hung shining new wooden shoes on the wall. Lars Peter would have loved to have a shop here.

In St. Peter's Street there was a big crowd before a flight of steps that led right down on to the pavement. These were folk of his own class, men with their trousers stuffed into their boots, and women, who one could see were accustomed to crawl about among roots and potatoes. They stood staring up at the high windows. "Servants' Agency," was painted on the panes. Now and then one of the flock made a hasty resolve and went up. One could almost think it had something to do with going before the magistrate, they all looked so faint-hearted.

Lars Peter went quickly up the stairs—he had been to an office before,—he had! In the entry they stood treading on one another's heels just like sheep. "What the devil! They can't eat one in there," he said, and pushed by them. The big room was full of wet, steaming people, who stood so close that they could scarcely move. At the further end of the hall was a railing, and behind it sat a girl clerk, and a man called the managing clerk,—one on each side of a big desk. They called them out one by one, by pointing at them with a penholder, listened to their requirements, and sorted

them out into divisions. Some were let through the railings and got in to see the chief himself, who stayed in the room inside again. His staff called him "the boss!" "He's a boss of human flesh and blood, that fellow!" said Lars Peter, half to himself, and looked round challengingly, but no one dared to laugh. Now and then the chief appeared at the door and gave an order. He was most horribly fat—so impossibly and grotesquely fat! And he was dark,—he looked like a proper black Satan, with the remains of a Roman nose in the middle of his enormous swollen face, and bristles coming out of a couple of nostrils that looked like the tunnels down to hell. Lars Peter glanced both timidly and angrily at him; although he had not the least quarrel with him; and every time he appeared discomfort went through the flock. And it was not so strange either, for he was a sort of God or half Satan, who presided over their interests. It was said that he had become a millionaire by dealing in human flesh. The pretty young girls among them were taken into his own office, especially if they were Poles. He persuaded them to go abroad, and they went to brothels in the big cities far away out in the wide world.

Lars Peter was not quite sure how to begin. He wanted something extra good for the lass, and for that he would have to exhibit her unusually fine qualities, but here among all this crowd he could not well sing the song of praise he had on his lips. Then he saw a paper notice fixed on the door of the agent's office. "Girls who have just been confined, please apply to Room B. Specially attractive offer." An idea came

to him, as he laboriously spelt it through, and went slowly away, afraid that some one would connect his departure with the placard. Then he took his life in his hands, as one might say, and knocked at the second door; he felt something of a criminal, he knew not why. A lady nearly as stout as the agent opened the door. She too had a crooked nose, and glared at him like a parrot. "It is about a young girl!" he said.

"Yes, have you brought her?" asked the woman sharply. "We don't take wet-nurses without seeing them!"

"Oh, ah! Is it a wet-nurse? Well, I might have guessed as much if I had used my wits a bit. What are you paying, if I may make so bold as to ask?"

"We shall agree all right about the wages, if she is healthy. But bring her here first," said the lady and banged the door in his face.

Humph! That was a real vixen! A cheeky one too! Lars Peter nearly got his nose jammed in the door. He was quite pleased at having answered her back so boldly, and trotted quickly down the street, his round hat a trifle on the back of his head. He had arranged things well—so far! Only he didn't quite like Ditte's going out as wet-nurse—as a milch cow as you might say. There was always something or other fishy about that. He had better go down in a cellar restaurant and puzzle it out—a schnaps cleared the brain so wonderfully, and made one see things in their proper perspective.

When he came up again he was quite clear that the lass would get an easy place with a proper wage for

giving a strange baby the milk which would otherwise be wasted,—so that she had not given birth in vain. And her own could drink from the bottle—it was only the real fine aristocrats that kept another woman to give their young ones the breast.

He walked firmly when he came in to Ditte's room, and lifted his feet unusually high. "Now you can get up, my girl, and see about getting dressed," said he, in high spirits. "For here is a splendid place for you. You will be a fine lady, and perhaps give the breast to a little Count, if you can pass the examination. For it is just as other folks buy a milch cow. But dang it all! The grand folks want to know what they are getting for their money!"

Yes, the lass could certainly pass the test. It was a perfect pleasure to see how round and white her shoulder and breast had become. She had her mother's fine skin; but was not nearly so freckled, and was better proportioned. Her hair was reddish-gold and shining, and when let down, reached far below her waist.

CHAPTER XXII

THE MATERNITY HOME

“**T**HERE’S a ring at the bell! There’s a ring at the bell!”

Ditte heard the call out in the little scullery off the kitchen, where she was tidying herself after her dirty work was done. “There’s a ring at the bell!” she repeated in a startled voice, addressing the nurse in the kitchen. Miss Petersen threw down what she had in hand, and ran down the long corridor. A few seconds later, she returned, breathless. “It was the Countess,” she ejaculated. “Do be quick. I have showed her into the matron’s office till you are ready.”

Ditte scurried into her “show uniform.” It was a white, loosely fitting frock, with short sleeves, and a low-cut neck, with a white cap,—and hurried in. When the visitor was shown in she was sitting in a white painted armchair, and the “Sister” stood over her, washing the nipple of her bared breast with a wad of sterilized cotton-wool dipped in boracic water from a white bowl. The lower part of the walls of the big ward was paneled with white painted wood, easy enough to wash over, for about five feet up, and the upper part of the walls and ceiling were lime-washed. The ward was divided into three parts,—the show-room—the girls called it among themselves! A few white baby cots with pale rose-colored hangings and a

couple of white washstands completed the furniture of the room. "Sister" spread a white napkin carefully over Ditte's breast. "There!" said she with a sugary smile. "Now I will fetch the baby!"

Not far from Ditte sat a young girl in deep mourning. Her eyelids were drooped pensively; but she gazed at the latter through the lashes. Ditte well knew that it was distinguished to look through your eyelashes in that way,—nearly as distinguished as using a lorgnette. But it looked a bit impertinent too,—to look at people and size them up in that way! She looked sweet too—and young,—scarcely older than Ditte herself. She had a long, black veil hanging down her back. That was to show that she was a widow, and had been obliged to send her baby away from her,—her milk had dried up from the vehemence of her grief when she lost her dear husband—or some such story. But she was not much of a widow—no more than Ditte was—because she had never been married! But she was a countess, and belonged to one of the most aristocratic families in the land—and had had a love affair with a groom. The other girls knew the whole story—as a matter of fact they knew the history of every baby in the home by heart, however complicated it might be, and however carefully hushed up—aha! they could always get on the track! Ditte could not understand this affair with a groom. If she herself had to have a baby of her own free will, she would choose a Count to be the father of it! Still, the young Countess was pretty. Her face had still the pallor that comes after childbirth, or was it perhaps her false step

that was the cause of it? The fine folks took such things rather more to heart than others did. At any rate, she showed some affection for her baby and visited it every week. So many others only came here to get rid of theirs, and never showed their faces in the place again.

It was longer than usual before the nurse came back with the baby; there had certainly been something the matter,—perhaps it was sore and had to be powdered. Ditte had nothing to do—the thing she disliked most of all—so she fell into a sad reverie. So many sad thoughts came knocking at the door of her heart when she had leisure. Suddenly she felt an arm round her neck. “And how is your own little one?” asked the young woman and laid her cheek against Ditte’s.

It was a terrible question to ask Ditte. Her face began to quiver and her lip to tremble. But fortunately the nurse came back just then. “Just look, madam, isn’t he a perfect little darling?” said she and laid the baby in the young mother’s arms. The mother gazed adoringly at her little one, and then laid it on Ditte’s breast with an enigmatic expression.

Ditte did not feel in the least shy of the Countess, she would have liked to have had a chat with her. In a way they were companions in misfortune, though it had smitten them in such different ways. But the nurse was always in the room, walking to and fro. Every minute she came up to them, and was all solicitude for the baby. “Slowly,” she would say; “do see that he drinks slowly.” But it was simply humbug; she was

really making secret signs to Ditte to take him from the breast.

Ditte tried to make it seem as if he had let go of the nipple himself. It went to her heart to do it; but she dared not disobey. "He can't possibly have had enough yet," interposed the girl mother, "he clings so tightly to it. Wouldn't it be best to give him the other breast too?"

"No. We really must not overfeed him," answered the Sister. "He would only throw it all up again, and would not thrive." She took him from the breast and gave him to his mother, who laid him in his little bed. The young Countess bent over the cot, and when she raised her face again her eyes were full of tears. Ditte felt a longing to throw her arms round her neck, and beg her not to worry so about it; for she would see that the boy had as much as he could drink. But just then the young girl stretched out her hand to say good-by and thanked them for being so good to her boy. She slipped a dollar note into Ditte's hand. The nurse showed her out, and Ditte went into the inner room and laid another child to the breast.

The nurse came back again. "Thank goodness that visit of inspection is over! Let's hope she didn't notice that we took the baby from the breast too soon."

"It does seem a pity; he could have taken a lot more!" said Ditte.

"Then he can finish off with pap!" declared the nurse. "The others must have their turn too—there's no such thing as rank and titles coming first in this house. But

it seems to me you are putting this baby to the other breast! Was the first one really emptied?"

Ditte nodded. She didn't like to have her breasts drained quite dry. It gave her a backache.

"Are you quite sure? Just let me see!" The nurse squeezed her breast. "We must be economical now. Milk is so dear.—But didn't the Countess give you a tip?"

Reluctantly enough Ditte took the note from her breast and gave it up. Miss Petersen went out of the room, coming back soon afterwards with a little small change. "Here you are! This is your share," said she. She was supposed to have gone to the matron with the tip, who divided it among the girls according to their capabilities and length of service. But it might very well be that she gave a little to the other girls and kept the rest herself! Ditte was disappointed, for when she was engaged golden visions of lavish tipping had been held out to her, and she could well do with a little. She was to get no pay until the nine months of her contract had elapsed. Now she understood the reasons only too well. It was to prevent her from going off without notice. But she made up her mind to tell the Countess what had become of her tip.

"Don't you dare to babble about things here in the clinic to any one,—not even among yourselves in the kitchen!" said the nurse suddenly and sharply. Ditte cowered away and whispered a timid "No!"

The bell rang, the nurse gave a little shriek and ran to open the door. She was the matron's right hand

and it was her duty to answer it. The little shriek was an imitation of the matron's manner; for she always gasped and pressed her hand to her heart when the alarm bell rang. She had a weak heart! The other women all had the same peculiarity. The fact was that the flat itself was so low in the basement story that the door-bell itself could not be heard, and was connected with an alarm bell at the end of the long corridor, and when *that* began to ring it made such a din that it jangled every nerve in one's body, and one simply *had* to scream, whether one would or no. And if there was a baby on one's lap, he began to roar in sympathy.

Except on these occasions there was not so much crying as might have been expected. The matron had some wonderful soothing syrup which was just the thing for babies.

But there was always a rush of visitors. One perpetual coming and going and ringing. What *did* all these people really come for? Most of them were closeted with the matron in her private room, which was just inside the front door; so nobody caught a glimpse of them. Sofia and Petra pretended they knew what all these people came about, but would not tell. "You're a greenhorn, my dear!" they said, and looked mysterious. But this time it was only the agent at the registry office. Ditte recognized his heavy step in the corridor, and heard the nurse's giggles. Whenever he saw an opportunity he was ready with a pinch—fat pig that he was!

Well, that meant that the matron was going out with

the agent for the evening, and would leave Miss Petersen in charge. And scarcely were they out of the house before the nurse called the girls and said: "I am just going out for a few minutes, so you will see after things while I am away. But be sure you stay down here the whole time. Remember it is a great responsibility to be left in charge."—"Yes, we will do that!" they answered glibly, and as soon as she was gone they flew up to their room and began to dress. So Ditte was obliged to go down and open the street door for them,—and then she was alone with the whole on her shoulders. Not only had she to look after the babies; but there was a big tub full of napkins to wash, and a patient to see to; the latter lay in the inner ward, and had come six months too soon! But that was always the way of things—everything was put upon her—Ditte—everything! She was now fed up with the whole business, and her chief wish was to pack up and get away as quietly as she could.

Ditte had already had many experiences without drawing the usual conclusions from them. She took the buffetings of Fate for what they were worth, and never thought of fathering them on any one else—not even on the people who had called them down on her devoted head. She was by nature exceedingly long-suffering; it was her chief virtue; things had to come to a pretty pass before she began to criticize and try to correct them.

But here her good-nature was too far imposed upon; she was neither stupid nor foolishly kind—when it came to the point. She had borne a child, and say what you

will, in her class that was nothing uncommon. She had also been obliged to part with it to strangers; but that was also in the usual run of things. All this was the common lot of the poor, and might be said to come under the law of Nature. But that dainty ladies should also make a slip, and bear children out of the marriage-bed—real ladies, not just farmers' daughters, for she knew of several cases among these,—well, that was something she had never as much as dreamed of! But they managed it quite all right; they came to the clinic and were operated on for some trumped-up malady,—just like the landowner's daughter that was here when Ditte came.—Her people related how she had fallen downstairs and fractured the coccyx; she lay there in bed and made a joke of the whole matter.

No, Ditte did not take things on trust any longer, and began to put two and two together. Her experience in the maternity home threw light on many a mysterious happening in her past. She had crept behind the scenes once for all, and seen many things in a totally new light. She perceived that the upper classes were no better than her own class; that was merely a delusion. While these fine ladies were lying here, screaming in the birthpangs, they were supposed to be either attending courses in Copenhagen or on a journey to Paris. Aha! The bitter pill followed the sweet taste in their case also; the midwife had used that expression to her; but it applied to them still better.

She was so much the wiser now. But something

still worried her. Her conception of *upper* and *lower* was distorted and her sense of justice shaken. She could reconcile it with the justice of things to give up her child as a punishment for her sin, and also that both she and it must suffer to help those who had not so sinned; but why her milk should be taken from her own child and given to those who were equally "children of sin": that was indeed an enigma to her.

One evening when they were all up in their room, she tried to talk to Sofia and Petra about it. But they only laughed at her and turned the whole thing into a farce. "Are you crazy?" asked Sofia. "Why should they be better than us? They have money; that's the most important thing! Do you think that any young girl, who was in the family way, would put up with the gibes of the street boys, and the old people's abuse, and all the rest of it, if she could find a way out of it? Many a time when I went down the street I only longed to bewitch some one to take what I was carrying off me. Men think nothing of leaving you in the lurch—but we have to stick it out, and must be glad to get even such a hole as this is. Justice is all humbug, and you can just say I said so!"

Whatever might be said about Justice, Ditte's duty was absolutely clear. But it was hard to nurse strange children and let them drain her life's strength from her, while thinking of her own that lay and wept among strangers and had to be content with a dummy teat and a bottle.

Ditte brooded over this and fretted after her baby;

every time she laid a child to her breast, her longing broke out anew. She was bitterly disappointed too; everything was so utterly different from what had been promised to Lars Peter and herself when she was engaged. They had understood that she was to be wet-nurse in an aristocratic household where the lady was too delicate and too refined to nurse her own baby. She was to have her uniform free, and always go about clad in white. And here she was! "A milch-cow on a baby farm!"

Sofia had nicknamed her thus. Ditte did not like it, but employed the expression herself when she felt most bitter; in order to revenge herself on everything and everybody. The white uniform was only worn when visitors were there; otherwise it was one round of dirty work, and nursing the babies in between times. There were no free evenings either, and they were all three engaged on the condition that they were to have no really free time during their period of service. The matron said it was to avoid the risk of bringing infection into the clinic; but Sofia and Petra declared it was to prevent them talking of the condition of things there outside. Every afternoon the nurse took two of them for a walk, while the third looked after the clinic under the watchful eye of the matron; so they all got fresh air at least.

Sofia and Petra went on their little jaunts the nights Ditte was in charge; and she had to be on the lookout, and downstairs, to let them in when they made a signal. Ditte thought them rather cheeky, and they often made fun of her country ways, but on the whole they were

good-natured and helpful to her, and she got on well with them. But neither of them ever thought of taking her out. They thought there was not enough go in her!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE ANGELS

“**L**ITTLE darlings! They *shall* have sunshine!” said the matron, and pushed the children’s cots over to the window, where a few weak rays fell on the floor. Yes, it *would* be called sunshine there, and when the window was opened, and the gas-works opposite wafted their perfumed clouds of smoke into the room, it was called fresh air.

Ditte and Mrs. Bram were at home alone. Petra and Sofia had gone for their walk with the nurse. Ditte went hither and thither, arranging things and giving an eye to the babies. Mrs. Bram leant back in an arm-chair, and babbled incessantly. There was not more work than Ditte could well do; the children were only four in number just then, and they were certainly not accustomed to being spoiled. One had just died, and a couple had disappeared for a time—to be boarded out somewhere or other. “Oh no, we have sometimes had as many as twenty here,” said Mrs. Bram, “things have been rather at a standstill lately—we have had one or two little accidents—and people are so suspicious.” She looked confidently at Ditte.

She had eyes just like a dog—nice faithful dog’s eyes, that never expressed either anger or any other feeling. Fear alone sometimes shone in them. Her figure was shapeless and flabby; the skin of her hands loose

and hanging. Ditte liked her well enough, and could never see what the other girls found so bad in her. She had asthma, and wheezed when she drew a deep breath—and was always dressed in a black silk dress, and looked so simple and worried, as if she understood nothing at all.

“Dear, sweet little angels!” she said. “My fiancé sometimes scolds me for not giving up my work here at the clinic. You know, don’t you, that the registry agent is my fiancé? We are only spending money, he says, and really one gets no thanks for all one’s trouble. But when the legal time of separation is up, we are going to the South of Europe to live—the air there is *so* good for asthma. Yes, we shall get married first. You know, don’t you, that one has to wait three years before one can get leave to marry again? Ah, yes! That is lest there should be something on the way from the first marriage.”

“Something on the way? Three years?” Ditte could scarcely restrain a smile.

“Oh, well! One knows well enough that people can’t always keep away from each other, because they are separated. Oh, yes! Dear little things!”

There was a ring at the door. Mrs. Bram had to clutch at her heart. It startled her so that she could scarcely rise.

Ditte tip-toed into the “showroom” and listened at the wall of the matron’s office. She heard young voices, a man’s voice a little hushed—talking for a long time, and a girl’s voice, which now and then broke into the discussion with sobs. But she could distin-

guish few or no words. "But can't you take it away?" said the manly voice out loud. "Oh, do, do! Only help me!" said the woman's voice, and broke into bitter weeping. Then there was silence and Ditte tiptoed back again.

Shortly after they came into the "showroom." Ditte could see them through the open door—a very young woman, so pale, so pale, whose eyes were red-rimmed with tears, and a man a little older in a frock-coat. He looked like a priest or a curate.

"Yes, you can't have this room," said the matron, "for the sweet little babies sleep here; but you shall have a quiet sunny room."

"Yes, yes," sniffed the young girl; "yes, yes!" Her friend held her hand, as if to protect her against all ill.

"And nothing will ever come out—is that certain?" asked he.

"You can make your mind easy about that," answered the matron. "We are still as the grave here. But you must let us know in good time when you are coming; we are always full up."

When the matron came in, Ditte was standing in the long dark corridor near the kitchen door. "May I go for a few minutes?" she asked. She rushed up the backstairs to her room, threw herself down on her bed, buried her face in the pillow and shuddered. The whole thing was so horrible—the poor tortured girl, and the man who had held her hand!—and herself!—she could not bear it! She lay there in tearless grief from sympathy for the unhappy girl who was going

through so much mental agony, and also from self-pity, that she had had no one to hold her hand. And a deep longing arose in her for all that she had left behind,—father and brothers and sister,—and her child, her own little child. Oh, how horrible life was! She could not weep one tear,—only shudder inwardly. “Take it away! Take it away!” reëchoed again and again, in her ears. And a new horror that had slumbered in her heart came suddenly to light. Her granny had often hinted to her when a child that it was a good thing that they had not succeeded in preventing little Ditte from coming into the world after all. “What would a poor devil like me have done, if I hadn’t had you to comfort me?” she would burst out suddenly, and begin to weep tears half of gratitude, half of fear. Ditte could distinctly remember how mysterious it all had sounded when they talked of preventing her from coming into the world.

She had fancied something like the kitchen door being shut on her so that she couldn’t get in to Granny; but would have to stand in the night outside and weep. But was it anything of this sort? Had they really tried to prevent her from coming into the world after all? Ditte felt cold all over at this thought. She was illegitimate too, and poor as well—for her and her like there were no maternity homes. They could only just take it away, or put up with the evil consequences.

The bell over the bed rang loud and long. Ditte jumped up and hurried down to her work.

It was not amusing, and yet after this discovery she could not but feel a secret delight that they had not

succeeded in keeping her out of existence. What would Lars Peter and the small sister and brothers have done without her? And only think if she had never seen the light of day! For Ditte was by no means tired of life.

But she wept a good deal in secret. Tears welled up in her every time she laid one of the strange children to her breast. She had to restrain them then; but they came back again and again when she was alone. It eased her to cry,—cleared some of the darkness from her soul.

Sometimes too she felt a sudden hate or rather rancor against the women who shook their own children from them, and yet took hers from her. But it would have needed a hard heart to nourish a spite when she had one of the little helpless things in her arms,—a harder heart than Ditte had ever possessed.

It was more difficult than Ditte had imagined to get accustomed to town life. She had never felt so lonely as here where there were people in plenty; and then there were no animals, not even a cat to come and rub her back against you and beg for a dainty morsel. The days were dark and gray in more senses than one; nearly all the winter they had to have a light in the kitchen, even in the middle of the day. From the windows were nothing but gray house-fronts, water-pipes, and an endless sea of roofs and chimneys. Yet there were streets like gardens of light with glowing shops, where all the glories of the world were exposed to view. Ditte had heard of them long before she

came here, and had herself seen them in dreams. But she would have liked to see them with her fleshly eyes too, and perhaps go in and buy in them. She would buy toys for her brothers and sister, and when her term of service was up and she got her wages, then— This was her chief solace in every need,—so many wonderful things would happen when she got her wages.

“You!” scoffed Sofia. “You will never get any wages. You are too stupidly good for that. Do you think we shall be allowed to go here and wear out our strength and lose our color, and get wages into the bargain? Now I will tell you what will happen. They will make it as hot as hell for me, hoping that I shall get so sick of it that I shan’t be able to stick it out, and go off before my time is up, and so lose my wages. Do you think I can’t see their little game? No, trust me! Here I have been and stuck it out for eight months, and so I can do the same for the ninth. And if they try me too far—” She shook her head threateningly.

“Yes, but what can you do? They have both might and right on their side.” Ditte was thinking of the Hill Farm.

“I shall just ask for my wages, and threaten to report them. Perhaps they wouldn’t be so delighted at that. Yes, I should ask for my full wages and perhaps board-wages as well. My sweetheart says I should. The very idea!”

It was not very long before Sofia came into conflict with her mistress for good and all. There was no doubt about her being put upon,—especially by the

nurse; every day she heaped reproaches on her for having no milk any longer. It came to a climax at last—Sofia flung the things on the floor and demanded to know what was the meaning of it all. If they wanted her to go, then she would do so at once.

The Sister called the others to witness such goings on, and refused to give her a penny. But an hour afterwards came a ring at the door, and there stood Sofia and her sweetheart; and the matron was obliged to put the best face on the matter and ask them into her office.

And shortly after Sofia came marching into the "showroom" with arms akimbo, exulting and triumphant. "I suppose I've a right to say a proper good-by to the other girls!" said she and waved a two-hundred-crown note. It was awfully thrilling! Ditte grew hot and cold: she could never have believed that a poor girl like that could ride the high horse over her mistress.

"It's because she knows a lot too much about the rotten goings-on here," said Petra phlegmatically.

As no other girl came in her place, Ditte and Petra had to look after the four children; Ditte being the last to give birth had the chief onus of it on her shoulders. Fortunately there were no new patients either. Petra suggested that they might be getting ready to close the clinic.

"They are awfully afraid of Sofia—she knew too much!" she said.

What could it be that Sofia and Petra both knew so much about; but of which she was still in ignorance? She could well see that a great deal—nay, most of what

went on, was not right. "The dear babies!" they would exclaim. "The sweet little darlings!" But in reality for all that concerned the children's welfare they were cold and calculating, and they did not care an atom for them. But there must be something else, some mysterious horror that Ditte lacked ability to grasp, all untutored as she was—she felt it must be so. She had dark intuitions of this terror, but missed their significance. No one felt well in the home; patients tried to get up and away as quickly as possible. A deep mysterious secrecy brooded over it, and shrouded the inmates in gloom. The Sister and Mrs. Bram were always irritable, and in a state of nervous excitement. And then this mysterious coming and going. Most of it took place in the evening—women bringing and fetching babies,—veiled ladies accompanied by gentlemen.

There was always some fresh surprise for Ditte. Babies disappeared as if caught up to Heaven—no doubt they were sent away to be boarded out; and others appeared to have rained down from Heaven into the very cradles! One baby would be lying there in the morning when Ditte came down—quite a different child from the one that had lain there the night before when she went up to bed.

Sometimes indeed they pretended it was the same one; but Ditte was not to be taken in,—each child had its own special little way of taking the breast. Sometimes, too, a baby died. Whenever that happened Ditte was genuinely grieved; it seemed so sad to see the little waxen baby figure lying there like a snuffed

out candle. She had a shuddering dread of death. Sofia and Petra were not so much in love with existence. "Perhaps it is better off than we after all!" they often said. "It has missed many a sorrow!"

Sometimes a baby disappeared for a day or two, and then as suddenly reappeared. It was always said to have been at the children's hospital for examination. But Ditte knew better now. It had been lent out for some lawsuit concerning paternity or inheritance, where there was something fishy. If all went well, the matron got half of what was going.

"She is really disgusting!" said Ditte. "To do such things for money!"

"She's an awful fool!" declared Petra, "for she doesn't ever get the money herself, the agent takes every penny of it. He owns the business and makes up to her only to get her completely under his thumb." Petra would jabber away, but at a certain point she always stopped and would say no more. She was a child of the slums, and had learnt to keep a quiet tongue in her head when it was to her advantage to do so.

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Ditte had resolved to make off on the first opportunity. She could bear it no longer. She sat up in her attic, and wrote to Lars Peter trying to excuse herself. It was regarded as a crime to run away from service in her family, and she knew it would upset him a lot. It was late at night and she was dead beat. Her pen would make blots, and she could not remember if "washing" was spelt with or without an "h."

Petra came up just then. "Oh, the little angels! Oh, the dear sweet little angels!" she mimicked as she crossed the room and flung herself on the bed.

"Have you just come up without leave? Aren't you in charge?" asked Ditte. "Have they gone out?"

"No, the matron said I might go up and sleep, and she would look after things."

"That's funny! What does it mean?"

"That I'm not wanted down below. Ugh, how beastly it all is!" She lay making grimaces.

"Why are you so odd, and why do you lie there pulling faces?"

"What business is it of yours? You attend to your love-letter," answered Petra, and turned her face to the wall. A second later she sprang up. "Now I am going to bed, and the devil take the whole lot of them!" said she and began to undress.

Ditte struggled on. She was never much of a scholar and the little she had learnt was forgotten. "How do you make a capital 'D'?" she asked.

"Do you think I know? Just make a flourish. He will understand it all right."

"I'm writing home," said Ditte. "And I *have* no sweetheart."

"A baby and no sweetheart! You're a nice one! The other way on is better fun." Then she fell asleep.

Ditte sealed up her envelope, and hid it under the tablecloth till there was an opportunity of posting it. She could not give it to the nurse, for then she knew it would never be posted. She lay awhile thinking of her new breast baby, a sweet little girl with golden

curls whom she had already begun to love. It was the proper time to feed her now; but she dared not go down uncalled. They would ring soon enough when they wanted her.

When she came down next morning there was a strange smell in the place. The nurse was decorating a little coffin. The matron came out, and walked to and fro, sniffing into her pocket-handkerchief. "Oh, the poor, poor little angel!" she moaned. The doctor, a friend of theirs, was already there writing out a death certificate. It was Ditte's new breast-baby that had died. She lay looking so lovely with a halo of golden curls round the baby face. Her eyes were only half shut, as if no one was to know she was peeping at Ditte. It was too heart-breaking for words.

Ditte laid a trembling hand on the baby's head, and bent down to kiss it farewell. No one was looking; she might quite well kiss it. The nurse was pouring out a glass of port for the doctor. "So early in the morning!" she heard him say in husky tones as he drank. His hand was shaky.

And Ditte's hand shook as well. Under the baby's curls, buried deep in the fontanelle, she had felt the head of a large pin. She gave one shriek and fell senseless to the ground.

That evening she fled from the place. Petra helped her down to the front door with her few goods and chattels and gave her the address of a family in Adel Street, a laborer called Jensen, where she could take refuge.

The following day Petra turned up herself—she had

also made off. "You can't imagine how glad they were when you hooked it," said she. "They've saved your wages. If I were you, I would go and ask for them, and threaten them with the police. I did!"

But Ditte would not hear of setting foot in that hell again—not for all the money in the world.

CHAPTER XXIV

DITTE MAKES ONE OF THE FAMILY

DITTE spent the night with Petra's friends, they were working people who lived in one of the oldest houses in Adel Street at the back of the courtyard, all crowded together into one room. She had seldom or never seen a smaller or more dilapidated dwelling place. The little room was divided into two compartments—one corner was partitioned off to serve as a kitchen, and was not larger than an ordinary sized table. On the other side of the room was a sort of recess where the husband and wife slept, with Petra's little baby, which she had put out to nurse there, between them. Their own two children had beds made up on chairs, and as a great favor Ditte was allowed to sleep on the high backed sofa, one of their most cherished possessions. It was covered with red plush, and smelt of moldy stuffing; they were paying for it on the instalment system. Everything else in the place smelt of mold and decay. It was a rotten old hole, and between the wainscoting and the sunken floor was a gap of several inches. Every evening the remains of the day's food had to be hidden between two plates to prevent the rats eating it in the night.

As Ditte was helping the two little girls to dress in the morning they could not find a garter; the rats had pulled it half under the wainscoting. "Yes, this is how

we poor must live!" said the young wife, who was dressing by the window. "This is the wonderful life we strive after in our youth—lice in the hair and rats under the floor! Yes, indeed, if I had the luck to be in your place, I would try and go back to the country before it was too late. At least one has room to move there. But naturally I am talking to deaf ears!"

She was indeed! Ditte had no thought of going home, and being laughed at for a failure.

The woman went with Ditte to one of the big newspaper offices where the advertisements were spread out in the window to see if she could get a place. "You won't get a really decent one now," she said. "But you had better take what you can get for the present. For when the gentry change out of the proper time, it is seldom a good place."

Ditte fixed on an offer from a young married couple—an officer's family. The wages were very low; but in compensation the girl was to be "treated as one of the family." That appealed to her.—"I'm so lonely up here," she said.

Mrs. Jensen was less enthusiastic. "I always preferred high wages to being well treated," she said. "The special consideration one has to sacrifice money for is not worth having. We know what being 'one of the family' means. Do pigs ever get into a palace except to be eaten?"

No, perhaps not; but Ditte was not in a position to pick and choose, and after all she was not to be fixed up for life. They went up to AA Boulevard to see

about the place, and Ditte was engaged and entered upon her duties on the spot.

So that trouble was over; she could begin afresh. There was a baby boy of five or six months in the house. There had been nothing about him in the advertisement, and the lady had not mentioned him either; perhaps she preferred Ditte to make the discovery unaided. Truth to tell, Ditte had had about enough of babies by now; she would not have objected to a little more freedom. But it was too late to change now. And the place seemed easy enough;—a small flat, and the lieutenant was out on his rounds of the forts a lot. And the lady helped in all the work herself.

The young wife was a great chatterbox, and Ditte soon learned that her father kept a shop in the provincial town where the lieutenant had been quartered, and that he often sent his daughter hampers to help towards the housekeeping. "But for goodness' sake don't ever let my husband know that; his honor as an officer forbids him to accept any such material help, and I am supposed to be able to keep house on what he gives me. Of course he thinks me much more wonderful than I am, and naturally I let him go on thinking so! Do you like soldiers? I think his uniform is one of the handsomest I ever saw; and you should just see how my husband sets it off!"

Truly Ditte's wages were not large: fifteen crowns a month. "We can't afford more," said the lady, "for officers are so badly paid. My husband says things have always been like that. They have to sacrifice

their very lifeblood for their country, and get small thanks for it in return. But then of course we have the honor of it!" In compensation for the smallness of the salary, Ditte was treated as one of the family; she slept on a couch in the dining-room and had the baby with her all night.

"We have absolutely no servant's room to the flat," said the lady, "and so my husband says if the girl has to sleep in the dining-room, then she really must be regarded as one of the family, and have the baby at night.—He can't bear having the baby in the bedroom! It prevents him from feeling newly married any more he thinks. But you don't mind a bit, do you?—And it shows our confidence in you! Besides you will learn a lot. That has always to be taken into consideration with regard to pay. In all the other trades one has to pay to be apprenticed; but a servant girl is paid while she is learning."

Thus she prattled on while they worked about the house. She was a plump little thing, with fat rosy cheeks, and was sweet and natural and friendly, but she was certainly not capable. Ditte really thought she was a terrible muddler. Just when Ditte was washing the floor she would have to leave her work to take the baby out. "He is to be a soldier, and so he must be a lot in the open air," the mistress would say, "I will finish your work for you." But when Ditte came back nothing was done all the same; the young wife only flitted about from one thing to another. She was no cook either. Every day they had either sausage or rissoles bought ready made. "My husband ought

really to have been here to-day" the lady used to say as they were having dinner. "He appreciates good food so much!"

Ditte became quite curious to see him; if he was like her mistress's descriptions he must be funny, thought she. Life was new to her, and she made mental pictures of everything beforehand. She had never seen a lieutenant in the flesh, and now that she had got a master who was a real live one, who offered his life-blood for his country, her childish imagination built up a wonderful picture of a warlike giant with imposing presence and a great sword grasped in both hands. And his nostrils would be dilated with warlike ardor. "My husband is so fiery!" her mistress had murmured in a burst of confidence one day.

It was indeed a disappointment, when a fortnight later he came back from the camp. Ditte's new master was a slim neat little man with a thin fair mustache of the kind that out in the country would be said to be in need of manuring. He had a parting back and front, which he could never get accurate enough, and wore a long parade sword which was always getting between his legs. He wore corsets—a thing which so tickled Ditte's sense of humor that she would wake up in the middle of the night and giggle over it—and he used to scream out quite hysterically if anything went wrong. He cursed and swore frightfully too if every little thing was not in apple-pie order for his toilet; and his little wife would burst into floods of tears and become utterly prostrated at such times. But as soon as he was out of the door, she would smile again. "The

lieutenant has such a hasty temper," she would say. "That is because he has always to go for those stupid recruits."

Of course it was something to belong to the family; but Ditte longed for a place, however small, that she could call her own,—a hole under the stairs even, where she could sit on her bed with folded hands, and indulge in a few moments reverie;—weep a few tears for her baby, her home, and be herself! A feeling of desire stirred within her, to live her own life, and mix with other young people of her own class. The other servant girls in the building had their free evenings, and their young men who fetched them at the street door, and with whom they went to dances and other places of amusement. Ditte wanted to go out too; but the lady was firm here. "We are responsible for you," said she. "You surely don't want to run about the streets of an evening?" Ditte could not see what was so very reprehensible in being out in the evening with other young folks: it was quite out of the question in the daytime for her. But in her mistress's eyes it was something degrading, "running about the streets" she called it. A decent respectable girl would not so lower herself; but would stay quietly at home of an evening. Quite scandalized she described how another family in the building had found their servant girls having visitors to coffee up in their room—men visitors too! And besides that the coffee had been filched from their employers. "You may be glad that *we* look after you!" said she.

But there was an end to that when the lieutenant

came home, for they were out nearly every evening. If by chance there came an evening when they were at home she never knew of it till the last minute, when it was too late to plan anything. So she either went to the Jensen's in Adel Street or wandered about the streets for a couple of hours bored to death.

"Get another place!" said Mrs. Jensen, "there are plenty of places vacant on the first."

"I haven't given notice!" answered Ditte.

"Just make off!"

No, she wouldn't do that. She was too sorry for her mistress. She was so helpless and quite nice and sweet!

"No, you are not one of those girls who just go off—that one can be sure of!" the lady said one day, while they were washing up. She must have scented some such idea in the air. "I am glad I got you! I always wanted a country girl. No, I don't like the Copenhagen girls who don't care for being in service except where everything is done in style. They must have their own room with a stove, and two courses at dinner with dessert, and a free evening every week. The lieutenant says they should just be under him for a week or two. He would teach them something!—How glad I am that you like children! Nearly all the girls we have had have made off before their time was up. Except the last!—My husband turned her out of doors. Now do you really think it could hurt any one to look after the baby in the evening? He just sleeps,—and he is company too! But do you know what she did? My husband and I are sometimes out

in the evening, and so she used to sit at home with the baby, or at least we thought so. But we couldn't understand why the baby was so pale. But one evening we came home from a ball before it was over, because I didn't feel well, and as we came along the street my husband said: 'Surely that is Clara just in front of us with a hussar and pushing a baby carriage!' 'What nonsense,' said I! Clara has no baby. Besides she is at home looking after the boy! But it *was* her all the same. With our little baby out in the street at twelve o'clock at night."

The lady's eyes filled with tears. "My husband gave her a tremendous talking to, and we found out that for nearly a fortnight she had taken the baby out secretly and put him in the cloak-room while she danced with her hussar. Isn't it frightful that any one can be so heartless to a poor little innocent child? And all for the sake of dancing!" She pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. Suddenly she flung down what she had in hand, rushed into the sitting-room and flung open the window: the clang of an alarm bell floated up from the Boulevard. She called out to Ditte: "That is the salvage corps! What can have happened? I always put on a pair of buttoned up knickers when I go out, and take a visiting card in my purse. Just in case anything should happen!"

One day Ditte had a great joy—she received a photo of her little boy. The farmer had taken him to church and taken the opportunity of getting him photographed as well. They wrote that he had been baptized Jens after the husband, and was healthy and lively; but

cried rather a lot. He wanted something to gnaw at all the time. Ditte laughed when she read this. Yes, he was a real, little greedy monkey. That one could see from the photo: he was so fat! She was a little surprised that they had chosen a name without consulting her, and named him after a stranger too; but he did look so nice sitting there in the middle of a landscape with pillars and palms, waving his fat little arms. And how nicely they dressed him!

Now how pleasant it would have been to have had her own room and a chest of drawers where she could put it up. Then every now and then she would glance at him and be cheered up. Ditte laid the photo in her bosom a couple of days; but fancied that it began to fade from the warmth of her body. So she put it on the sideboard in the dining-room. But one afternoon when she came home from her walk with the boy it had gone.

"Oh, the picture!" exclaimed her mistress,—
"That is a sad story! When my husband came and found it, he was awfully annoyed. In fact, he was just going to put it into the fire when I rescued it. Whatever made you think of putting it there?"

She fetched it from a drawer. It had got a little scraped, and Ditte's eyes filled with tears. "He looks so sweet," said the lady to comfort her. "Is it your little brother?"

"No, it is my own child," Ditte managed to say.

"Oh, I beg your pardon; it is a pity!" The young wife patted her cheek. "You mustn't mind. I will buy you a nice frame for it. Do you know, my baby came

too soon also," said she with tears in her eyes, "You can just fancy what a terrible time I had, being with child, and not knowing if Adolph would marry me or not. Poor little thing!" and she kissed Ditte and smiled in a friendly way through her tears.

This moved Ditte so that she could not find it in her heart to give notice. But she was so tired. It is true that there was not so much to be done, but what did that matter if one was always tired? At night she slept with one hand on the cradle to rock it if a whimper came from the little one. The lieutenant could not bear to be disturbed.

Ditte had had quite enough of children now. It had come quite naturally to this pass. She tended a child she did not care two pins about for the first time in her life—she could nearly have wished it ill luck. She looked after it, because it was her duty, turned it as if it were a package, got up at night to give it a bottle, and knew within herself that if it lay dead in the morning, like one of the little angels in the maternity home, she would not have cared two straws.

On the last day of the month Ditte sat and counted her wages over and over again. Her employers had gone out. She got up and took out the old knapsack in which she kept her things from under the couch, and began unpacking them and arranging them on the dining-room table, as she often did when she was bored. But suddenly she tossed them all back into the knapsack, warmed a bottle and gave it to the baby, put on her old shabby clothes and fled. She rushed down the stairs as if possessed. When she got into the

street she felt in despair over the little baby left in the lurch, and the whole business. She would not go back, and yet could not go away. So she sat on a bench in the Boulevard, and now and then went into the backyard to hear if the baby cried. Perhaps the lamp might be smoking,—perhaps fire might have broken out, or something else awful happened. But not until she saw her employers coming home did she hurry away to Adel Street and knock the Jensens up.

CHAPTER XXV

DITTE IS PROMOTED TO THE RANK OF PARLOR-MAID

THE alarm rang violently. Louise, the cook, tumbled out of bed and called Ditte. This not succeeding, she began to shake her again and again; but she could hardly bring her back to consciousness. Even when she had been got up to sitting on the edge of the bed, she was full of sleep, and swayed to and fro. "There she goes! Lying down again, 'pon my soul!" cried the cook, and seized the water-jug. The sound of the jug scraping on the edge of the basin, and the prospect of getting a cold douche down her back waked Ditte properly. "Oh, how tired, how tired I am!" she groaned and her face contracted. "Now that's right! Get your things on quickly," said the cook. "We will have a really good cup of coffee. Then you'll feel better."

"The coffee is locked up," Ditte answered dolefully.

"Pooh! Locked up! Do you think I'm an idiot?" Louise turned her broad back to her. "I took out enough for the whole week last night. It would have been crazy to do anything else. Ugh! stingy over a few grains of coffee! And flinging heaps of money away evening after evening over their grand parties! What do you think a party like last night costs? But thank God it doesn't matter what it costs. And shall I

go and scrimp and save to make it up again? Not much! We're bound to have what we need! The other day the Queen of the Fête—that's a new name they gave the mistress when they toasted her the other night—well, she came in to me and said, as she began picking the bones of a roast of beef out of the waste bucket. 'You must wash them well, Louise, and use them for soup. Bones make excellent soup!' Now I can't abide the mistresses in the kitchen; they only muddle up everything. 'Who is that soup for?' I asked. 'For all of us,' she answered sharp enough, 'but if you think you can't eat it, Louise, we must make something special for you.' 'Then I will see after the making of it myself, thank you,' says I, and so she got what for. She hasn't a bit of idea of cooking. Most of 'em haven't. They stir up something or other with a bit of pickled cucumber—some red and yellow mess,—and call it Italian salad. And then, if you please, they make out that they have cooked the whole supper themselves, and there they sit like pussycats, purring and praising one another. 'You are indeed a great artist in the culinary art, Mrs. Director!' 'Umph!' says I, 'if the guests had to eat what the mistress can toss up, they would soon stop coming here.' "

Louise gossiped on while she sat and bound up her legs which were swollen and full of varicose veins. Then she put on her dress and hurried down. Ditte followed at her heels. "Give me a hand to-day, only for a little," she begged.

Ditte had already several times experienced that "day after" which so often followed parties at the

director's. She was no longer quite so green, although she shuddered when she came into the room the morning after such a party. Ash-trays stood everywhere,—on what-nots, tables, and on the upholstered furniture,—each one a perfect midden of cigar and cigarette ends and burnt matches and ash. Bottles and glasses stood in sticky rings of wine, the hangings and furniture smelt of stale tobacco, and it seemed impossible to know where to begin the cleaning. The first time she gave it up, and fled sobbing to the cook, who had to come in and put her in the way of it. It had to be handled rightly, or else one only trampled in the dirt and made it more of a pig-sty than ever. No, indeed, a broom and wet sand could be of no use here. Then Louise scolded her, because she had taken the place without knowing anything about the work—and helped her afterwards. And Ditte, in her gratitude, bought something for her out of the tips she had got the evening before,—a silk handkerchief, or anything else she could think of.

It was only too true that she had “bettered herself” by means of a white lie. “If you are asked whether you can do this or that,” Mrs. Jensen had said, “just say ‘yes.’ When you are properly settled, you’ll learn it soon enough.” So when the lady had asked if she had been a parlor-maid before, she had answered “yes,”—not with much assurance certainly, yet it was a “yes” all the same. So it was important to learn it all very quickly, so that it might look only as if one was strange to the place at first, and Ditte made progress. But she had to puzzle it all out alone with the hints that Louise

gave her. The lady lay in bed till late in the morning and didn't put her in the way of things at all, only scolded when it was badly done. "You may be glad of that," said the cook, "if she had been a woman who looked after her things, you would have been turned out long ago."

This was not very comforting, but Ditte slaved on indefatigably, and tried to get into harmony with her new world. It was indeed a new world—from the thick carpets on the floors, which could neither stand water nor wet cloths, but must be cleaned with tea leaves,—to the chandelier of cut glass, which she was always in danger of pulling down, and the many expensive things which were set everywhere like so many traps for her.

She took her life in her hands as she moved among them, and the frequent parties with their consequent night vigils did not make things any easier. She and Louise had to be up and wait, often till the early morning, and sit yawning in the kitchen, listening to the noise from the rooms. Between one and two the master used certainly to come out and say they could go to bed if they liked, but for all that they stayed up until the guests were gone to help them with their things. Generally these former were in a good humor and lavish with their money. Ditte, who was young and looked smart, got the most tips, although Louise had had the most trouble; but so it always is in this world. And they divided the spoils afterwards.

"Just you take what they give you, and stop being stuck up," said Louise. "And if they ask you if you can

change; just say 'no.' A note is not at all too much when you have been slaving all night for it. But don't kick up a fuss if any one gives you a little pinch. Men are like that, when they have had a little drop. If they think they get more for their money that way, it's all the same to me—for a fiver or a tenner, I don't mind a blue finger mark on my hips. Sometimes one gets worse than that for nothing at all; and Mother always said: 'You have to get your food where you can find it.' "

The tips kept Ditte up. She hid them in her bosom, and could feel them rustling against her skin, while she slaved away to get things in order again. At half past seven the Director came down from the first floor, and by then the dining-room had to be aired and warm and tidy. However long the party had lasted he was up early and was fresh enough the day after. Nothing upset him. He had his own room upstairs and never went to that side of the house where his wife was; he had a mistress in the town. Ditte did not understand it at all. Here were people who had plenty of everything, and who never needed to take thought as to where the next was to come from. They had only to live their life of gaiety and splendor, and yet they were not happy!

Shortly after the lady rang. "Has the Director gone?" she would ask, and then Ditte brought her the remains of the evening's festivity on a big tray,—wine and whisky bottles with the leavings in them and half emptied glasses. She would have the whole lot put down by her bed, and lay and poured the leavings into

decanter. But the heel-taps in the glasses she drank; Louise declared it was the taste of tobacco and mustache she smacked her lips over; she was depraved in such things.

She had a big airy bedroom looking out on the garden with heavy gilded furniture, and hundreds of cut glass bottles and glass boxes and china jars. They were all beauty shop articles, and she had electric curling tongs and all the appliances for face massage. But she was none the handsomer for that! The reddish hair on the forehead bristled and looked like singed flax, and on the nape of the neck and in the scalp you could see the smears of auburn hair dye. The black pencilling round her eyes was smudged, and the red on her lips and cheeks as well. Ditte knew only too well what the "Queen of the Fête" looked like when she had got all her war-paint scraped off. When there was nothing left in the bottles Louise advised Ditte to put some in, as it meant being free of the mistress most of the morning, for which Ditte was not sorry.

She got a good deal of scolding, especially at first, and went about with beating heart, waiting for the entrance of the lady. There was enough to grumble at, that she knew well, even if she was long past the stage when she used a washleather and duster to the oil paintings. Ditte was not stupid. But there were hundreds of other things which were not so self-evident. She was plumped down into a world new and full of luxury and costly things, the existence of which she had never dreamed of, and which were often difficult to picture as valuable as they really were.

There were rooms and rooms full of them, and every single one of them had to be treated in its own particular way. Walking here was like dancing on rotten eggs, and Ditte was not at all happy. A plain glass bowl according to the lady's assertion, was worth many hundreds of crowns—God help Ditte if she broke it! She did not, but she poured water into a flower vase that on absolutely no account could stand water in it, and it was spoiled directly, although Ditte could never see any difference in it.

The lady took this sort of thing more calmly than Ditte herself. Ditte had lost her sense of proportion by going blundering about in the dark, never knowing when she had committed a crime or no, and could get quite hysterical over it. At such times she would rush up to her room and lie crying on the bed, and Louise would be obliged to fetch her down.

"You are a perfect silly in a gentleman's house!" said she comfortingly, "but certainly you do your best, and no one can say you don't. Now just you go downstairs. The mistress is quite sorry for you. And do see and give notice, and get a new place—in this house they kill a couple of girls every year. It's just like it was at home on the estate, where they wore out a pair of carriage horses every year, so that they had to be shot. But as for us, no one will be such a spendthrift as to waste powder and shot on us; we must go on till we drop." Her legs were all swollen from overwork, and quite dropsical. She was betrothed to a navvy, and was only waiting till she had saved enough to get married.

But Ditte did not want to give notice; she had fallen head over heels out of two places—that was enough! It was the first time in her life that she knew well enough that she did not give satisfaction. They had not been satisfied with her either in the other places where she had been in service; but that was different. Ditte began to suspect that it was just as impossible to give satisfaction as to creep up to the moon. But here she was discontented with herself; she felt that she was not capable of what she had undertaken, and it worried her. It had always been her pride to do her work properly.

Ditte had promised herself much from the capital—Not so much in the way of amusement, for in this way she was easy to satisfy. The early responsibility in her home had given her experience and developed her. She well knew that she was capable and set high aims before herself. But out there in the country it was scarcely proper housekeeping; one had porridge of one sort or another at nearly every meal. Table cloths were seldom used, and the beds were made as if there had been time for it. And of course it was quite different in town. There one didn't go out to stable and field work by day, and have to do all the housework when the men folk were eating or sleeping. Here one was in the house all day, polishing and making things nice, and cooking food according to a cookery book that was often very complicated. There was a demand for housewifely talent and carefulness and Ditte had both of these qualities. Already she had kept house for nearly ten years all by herself, and been

universally praised for her work. But oh! This leap from the hut,—from the hovel at the “Crow’s Nest,” and the “poor house”—to the rooms here. There was simply no comparison, and no half-way house. It was like leaping from the abyss of poverty to the glory of the highest heaven. In those old days, she had thought, especially on Sunday mornings, when she had washed the floor and tidied up, and strewed fresh sand on the ground, that they had a most comfortable home. But now she saw plainly that it was absolutely no dwelling place for a human being. The wine merchant’s horses had a much warmer and grander home. The house was ready to fall about their ears, ceiling and floors worm-eaten and moldy, not a bit of clothing that had not been “made over,” or a household possession that had not been, so to say, found on the dust heap. And she went straight from that, and moved among the costliest things, in large rooms with expensive carpets, furniture and pictures. She was overwhelmed and dazzled and bewildered. She lacked all sense of proportion, all power of valuation, and all instinct as to behaving in these new regions, where things that looked absolutely worthless would in reality be worth many thousands.

And it was the same with the people. Ditte took her mental nourishment direct from her surroundings—she was all eyes and ears, curiosity itself—nothing could escape her. But she could not understand the people either: could no more comprehend their essential being, than that of the objects. What did they want with all these costly things—they never looked at

them? They were certainly discontented, although they could get anything they wanted by just pointing to it. And they said one thing and meant another. The guests kissed the lady's hand just as in the most splendid novels; but they laughed and laid a finger to their noses when her back was turned. Ditte saw it quite plainly. Then the master and mistress lived under one roof, but slept each on their own storey.

Ditte had her evening out now—one every week, and every other Sunday. But she was like a caged bird; it was some time before she really believed that the cage door was open. "Go out, girl!" Louise said to her, "Go out and find a young man, and don't sit here in the room moping." So she let herself be driven out once or twice, and all at once she got a taste of freedom. She made girl friends and through them met young fellows, and did not need to be driven out any more; but gloated like a miser over her freedom. One evening late she was escorted home by some other young people; she had been to Dyrehavsbakken. They stood there on the road lined with villas and made a noise with whistling bladders.

"You are wearing your heels down, my girl!" said Louise next morning. "Take care you don't wear out other things into the bargain!" That day she got notice. At first she wept, and felt ashamed to change again so soon. Just as it had begun to go better too! But she thrust the feeling from her; the other girls she knew didn't take such things seriously; they changed for a mere nothing. One good thing came of it at any rate; three free afternoons—weekdays too

—could be demanded to go and look for a new place. Ditte enjoyed her afternoons to the full, although she got a new place on the first of them. One of her friends had taught her this trick. It was scarcely honest; but one had to reckon one thing with another. No one gave her anything! And it was jolly to go walking about the streets at a time when one would else be at work, and when the shops were open. Ditte had money in her pocket for the first time in her life, and made large purchases for her little boy and the folks at home.

And she promised herself a lot from the new place. There was nothing to regret—the best must still lie ahead. At any rate there was not much of it to be found in the places she had already traversed!

CHAPTER XXVI

HOMELESS!

DITTE sometimes thought Mrs. Jensen was right—it would have been better if she had stayed at home. The wages sounded well enough; but were not sufficient when one had to be decently dressed, and used up a lot of clothes in one's work; and any chance of really bettering herself seemed a long way off. She felt still more miserable and ignored here than out in the country. There people had taken some notice of such low folk as they, if not in the most friendly way; they had been human beings, though set at the lowest place at the table. Here, however, she and her like simply did not count!

Little by little she began to realize the position—through her own experiences and those of her friends. There were places good and places bad! Places where the lady of the house went about with the key of the larder in her pocket, and served out every morsel the girl ate herself, even the slices of bread; and other houses where one got as much as one could eat, and where the mistress helped the maid out of the pots before the food was taken in, so that there was no risk of finding nothing left over. There were places where the lady poked her nose into everything, and others where the servant reigned supreme, and the lady scarcely dared set her foot in the kitchen. There was

nothing to be said to all that. The only thing was to give notice as quickly as possible when one had been unlucky, and try to get a better place.

And very quickly one had had enough of that, and was again on the look-out. It was but an itching desire for change that left one no peace anywhere; one *had* to rush off whether one would do or no! Just as one had settled down, and expected to be comfortable this time, it would come over one like a cold shiver—one simply *had* to give notice!

This environment sucked Ditte down into the whirlpool, though she strove against it as long as she could. But having once begun, it all happened quite spontaneously. She gave and was given notice,—the one just as often as the other. And she watched her friends changing from place to place, from West to East and back again. They were like workmen at a rolling machine, fixed positions had they none; or like porters always on the way with the luggage, except that when they felt they had got it dragged up and down long enough, they slipped out of the running. They went into a factory or a dressmaking establishment.

Ditte knew nothing and cared less as to the reason of their perpetual change: it was all one to her, once the country feeling of shame at never stopping in one place was overcome. She only argued that the unknown was always to be preferred to the known—just as she had done in her childhood when she had run away from Granny. She had suffered much since that time, and bore the marks of it yet; but

nothing had ever quenched her hope and expectations. The same feeling of boredom that had urged her then to leave Granny's cottage and trot out on the highway after her own little snub nose, drove her on now. She hungered for something that had never come within her reach—neither in the good nor the bad places—food for her human soul. She did not object to hard work and her duties—these never deserted her; but sat and waited faithfully on the threshold of every new place. But she had dreams of something more—something harder to find, she knew not what precisely. It was something like being good to one another.

Ditte did not understand what it was to spare herself, where it was a question of bearing the brunt and doing all she could for others. She had a lot of good-fellowship in her. But there was no question of mutual help here,—she got board and wages in return for her work, and that settled her position. No one ever imagined that she went to her work with a desire to pour out her love upon other human beings, and in return craved a little of the same love. No one seemed to be concerned with the fact that she was also a human being with organs for gladness and grief, and needed a little laughter in the home in which she found herself, and perhaps to weep a little too! No one wanted to have anything to do with her soul, or her sympathy either; she had just to mind her own business and walk as discreetly as might be. Laughter was not for her—and still less sorrow; but the corner at the back of the stove was very dirty—would she kindly clean it!

At bottom it was the same everywhere—she did not belong to the household—she was a stranger, often an enemy, always in the way, whom the gentry only put up with because they could not do without her. In every home there was a life which she helped to frame and color; but where she made no part of the picture. From many things she could make out that the home rested on her—from the disturbance that ensued when she had to keep her bed for a day—from the despair when the day came for her to quit and they had not succeeded in getting any one else. And yet the world held no more homeless creature!

Ditte was so created that she must take her share in others' weal and woe, and do all in her power to make them happy. At home this had come back to her again, as the affection and well-being of the family was her greatest reward. Also at the farm where she had worked she had got a laborious share in the comfort she had created. But here she was just an outsider! It was not easy for Ditte to learn that she was no longer a human being; but a part of the household appliances. It gradually became bitter to her that her good qualities had to be limited to the purely useful. She had to be everywhere, but she had also to be invisible. She used up all her old stock of humanity while she was making these discoveries, but it was never renewed. Little by little it became more difficult for her to feel sympathy for her employers. In compensation she learned to act quite automatically.

Yes, that succeeded best of all. One had to be cold and unfeeling—a dummy who could clean and wait

at table; but neither see nor hear anything. One had to be correct and stylish and discreet. Ditte knew all these expressions by heart. One had to be able to hand the lady water and drops without a suspicion that she was ready to faint, talk indifferently with her about housekeeping, without seeing her swollen tear-stained face. Ditte felt a natural desire to lay something cool on her forehead, and whisper comforting words; but she wisely perfected herself in the other method—in what they called discretion!

She did not easily forget that word! Her first summer in service she passed with a broker who had a little summer place at Taarbeck. She went there with them, and was glad to be out of the town, only they had such a number of visitors, the larger number of whom spent the night there. One night there were so many that they had to put two married couples in the attic room under the gable with a screen between the two double beds. When Ditte came in with coffee next morning, the screen stood discreetly in its right place; but the ladies were lying in the wrong beds! She was so startled that she dropped the whole tray. So she got notice—she had been indiscreet!

She was not really a human being—it was that which galled her! There were employers who made her wear a special uniform, perhaps lest any one should make a mistake as to her position in the house. Ditte looked smart and walked well, and sometimes people had asked if she was the daughter of the house. She was glad her mistress had not heard it.

Her real home was the street; there she could seek

out humanity. And when she did, she was jeered at for it. She was always gadding about, they said. Ditte knew they said this; but remained indifferent. She took her amusement where she could find it. But she went among the other young folk, not entirely careless and glad. She was a trifle too heavy for them; too many serious things lay behind her in her life for her to acquire their light frivolous tone. But she did her best.

CHAPTER XXVII

KARL'S FACE

DITTE sat on a wooden chair at the kitchen table—in the corner by the sink, and munched her food. In front of her were the waste pipes from the sink and closet of the flat overhead: when she looked past this, she could only see a narrow yard with gray walls. She saw them with a dull, indifferent gaze, as she half listened to the chat from the dining-room where luncheon was in progress.

“Laura!” she heard, and the cry was repeated, louder this time! Ditte got up and took in the coffee. It was always difficult to hammer into her head that this strange name was for her; she always had to think twice before she answered to it.

In the dining-room the conversation had for some reason or other led to a quarrel. Ditte listened eagerly—what was the matter now? She was no longer upset by hearing others quarrel; in fact, it might be said that she felt a little malicious delight. There was a certain satisfaction in finding out that the gentry were also human—that they were not so much superior to her and her likes as they made out, but in reality used bad language, quarreled, yes, and sometimes beat one another too.

This was an experience which shook her inborn respect for them considerably.

All grew calm again, thank goodness! Possibly because there was a ring at the door. Ditte got up to go and open it, but was met in the passage by the half-grown daughter of the house, Miss Kirstine, with a letter in her hand. "A letter for Miss Man!" she said with a special emphasis on the word "Miss," and handed her the letter with a giggle. Ditte quite understood why she laughed. They did not approve of the "Miss" on the letter. She had already noticed it the first day when she was engaged. "What is your name?" the lady had asked.

"Kirstine Man," Ditte had answered.

"That's most annoying, for our youngest daughter is called Kirstine too, and it would easily lead to mistakes. Can't you take another name? Laura, for instance, would do!"

Ditte did not like it. "But you could call me Miss Man," she said ingenuously.

"No, we do not care to call our servant girl 'Miss,' " was the final, crushing reply.

So she was obliged to give up her good Christian name, and answer to the name "Laura," and at first it seemed to Ditte as if they had taken away her right to be a human being. People did the same to dogs when they changed owners—a new master, a new name! And they never spoke to her as "you," but always used the third person, which sounded as if she were not there at all, or at any rate did not belong to the household; while she herself had to say "Sir" or "Madam," and "Master" or "Miss" to the growing children. In spite of this, however, the children

often called her Miss Man in joke—they thought it very witty. But they got little amusement out of it, for Ditte took it quite seriously. Why shouldn't she be called Miss? They always called her so in the shops, and for all that she was poor and had to work for her daily bread, she thought she was just as good as any one else, and just as well brought up! So there was friction over the title, and she wrote home and told Sister Else to be sure and remember always to put "Miss Man" on her letters.

She got but few of these from home. Lars Peter had got unaccustomed to the use of pen and ink—if he ever had been good at it: Sister Else had to attend to all the correspondence. And it was difficult for her to find anything to say; as soon as she had begun, she always wrote: "Now I have no more to say, so will end my letter with love." All that Ditte longed to hear about the daily life was unanswered. Else could not understand that there could be anything interesting in that. She just stated who had died in the hamlet, and narrated which of the young people were walking out with each other—and Ditte was no longer so interested in that. Karl was nearly always mentioned; they were in constant communication with him, and now and then he paid them a visit. Ditte noticed that his star was at its zenith, and felt it a good deal; it was just as if he had slipped into the warm nest she had been pushed out of. Every time she wrote Else asked if she saw anything of Karl in town. Just as if they didn't know that she purposely kept away from him! But it was meant for a reproach!

And there was another reproach in to-day's letter. Lars Peter had lately been in town and tried to find Ditte; but she had moved again. "You *do* really move often!" wrote Else. Yes, naturally she often moved! What else should she do? But what did they know out there of the conditions of life in town? She didn't mind the rebuke from home, but felt all the more sorry that Lars Peter had been obliged to seek her in vain. It was a shame, and how gladly would she have seen him and heard a little real home news! It seemed as if she had never longed so before to hear his voice; she was so troubled inwardly, and in his presence one felt so good and in no doubt of the right way.

But Ditte neither heard nor saw anything of Karl. Yes, only once just after she had come up to town, she had got a line from him telling her he was living in Blaagaard Street and would be glad to come and take her out, if she cared to go. She had never answered—what use would it have been when she was never allowed out? It would have been pleasant that time to have had a male friend. But when she first began to feel her feet, she would not have liked him to control her movements, and look all the time as if he was weighing all her actions. But she knew that he was still in town and working at road making: Louise had let fall a hint, to wit, that her sweetheart was working with a fellow from Ditte's parish who knew her. This was significant enough, and Ditte did not fall into the trap!

Yet for all that she had not finished with Karl!

She could refrain from answering him, and keep away from him, but to shut him out of her thoughts was impossible. An impress of him remained on her mind, just as on her body; neither of them could ever quite disappear. His image came into her mind mostly when she was thinking of nothing at all. He looked at her with grave accusing eyes—especially if she was about to do something not quite right. It was all nonsense that he should play the rôle of her soul's judge. And it was most irritating that he always appeared with that accusing, lugubrious face just when she also was annoyed with herself—and masterfully push his way into her presence.

And she often dreamed of him. If she had not been able to get through her work in the day, or had had difficulties to contend with, she lived through all the trouble in dreams again. But it came out differently in the dream, so that it was Karl in person she was struggling with, his morbid inclination to suicide that, in spite of all sacrifice, she had not been able to overcome.

She would never be free of him!

And one evening she saw Karl himself—at least she thought so—it was in a tram on the way to a dance out in North Bridge at a hotel; at Blaagaard Street she saw his face among the crowd of people who stood at the stopping place: they were just starting again. He looked earnestly at her—not reproachfully, as she had expected, but with an entirely new expression—only inquiring. And what that inquiry meant Ditte

knew only too well. She would rather he had looked angry!

She did not enjoy the dance, and all the evening she saw his face up in the gallery among the onlookers. As often as she covertly glanced up, he was looking at her most intently. At length she could stand it no longer, and went up—she was determined to know what he meant—had she no right to dance? But when she got up, he was not there!

Ditte began to feel quite uncomfortable and went to no more dances. Her grandmother had taught her that when a face appeared in this way, it betokened something serious about to happen, either for oneself or for one of those nearest. She could not get rid of this feeling of fear, her child and her home held domineering sway in her soul, as they had not done for many a day. Perhaps something had happened to one or other of them—while she ran about and enjoyed herself—or even while she had been dancing! It had happened before, that horror of dancing and knowing nothing, while one both near and dear lay in the death struggle!

She begged her mistress for a couple of days to go home, saying that her father was ill. And as this request was refused, and it was too late to give notice for the first, she packed her things together one evening and made off. She *had* to get home! She got the porter to help her down with her luggage while the family were out. He took it to the Jensens'—out in Adel Street.

Ditte was not surprised to find her father in bed.

He had strained himself lifting the backboard of a wagon, and was lying with a mustard plaster on his loins; he could scarcely turn in bed. She was much more surprised to find Sine from the Hill Farm there. She nearly dropped her umbrella and muff, so startled was she when she opened the back door and Sine stood at the sink with her plump arms in the steaming water, clad in apron and washing dress and wooden shoes, with a calm industry as of one who feels thoroughly at home. She was still rosy-cheeked and became more so when she recognized Ditte. She greeted the latter with some embarrassment, and kept out in the kitchen. But Ditte did not feel called upon to ride the high horse.

Lars Peter's face shone with delight when he saw Ditte. She thought he looked bad, as well as pale and troubled: it must have been a difficult time for them. He did not seem to think it at all strange that she had come at the end of the month, but was joyfully surprised. "You have grown a fine lady," said he, and enveloped her whole form in a glance that warmed Ditte to the heart's core. Ah, that was what she stood in need of, to meet a glance that for once was not criticizing, but only contained goodness towards her!

"Yes, haven't you a fine daughter?" said Ditte, quite pleased. "But where are the youngsters?"

They were out somewhere. Else and the two boys were helping to pick herrings out of the meshes of the nets, Kristian was at the farm. "If he *is* there still!" added Lars Peter slowly.

Ditte had to look at everything, and take in the old familiar smell of it all. A nice clothes chest had been set between the windows—it was Sine's. The lamp with the blue glass shade that stood on the top, she also recognized. "Else did not write and tell me you were ill! Have you been so long?" she asked.

"Nearly a month! We did not want to frighten you for no good, as it is not dangerous. But it is horribly painful—I can't turn myself in bed. We are grateful to Sine."

"I had no idea she was here."

"No, for you see—" Lars Peter stopped. "I had just taken on some road-mending for the borough council, to earn a few pence, and it's danged heavy work to get the back piece lifted out when one is unloading. Now, I've done worse things than that, but one day I just doubled up, and fell on the side of the road and couldn't move a step. They carried me home, and when Sine heard how I lay here, she just thought—For poor little Else couldn't manage it alone. I must say she came like God's own angel, so if you would be a little friendly to her—" He spoke in a hushed voice. Sine came in with the coffee just then, but looked at neither of them.

"I was just telling Ditte how good you are to all of us," he said, and held out his hand. Sine glanced hastily from one to the other, then went and sat at the end of his settle-bed.

Ditte was not at all vexed about it, but felt that the others thought she was, and could not find anything to say. So she went up to Sine and kissed

her cheek. "I wished for that once!" she said simply.

"No? Well, that's all right then!" said Lars Peter, much relieved. "Let the others say and think what they like."

Ditte thought the same. "But why don't you two get married?" she asked, so suddenly that Sine burst out laughing.

"We might just as well ask you the same question," said Lars Peter, and laughed too. "You are the most likely one. I must get on my legs again first," he went on, more seriously, when he saw that Ditte did not like to be reminded of her past, "only grand folks are married in bed. We had been thinking of putting the wedding and Kristian's confirmation together—if he doesn't disappear first!"

"Has he gone wrong again?"

"Yes, he made off just lately. The parson had been rather strict with him at the confirmation classes, and so he started off to walk to Copenhagen. He meant to go and see you, and then to go to sea. It's not a bad walk, that—thirty to thirty-five miles! I had to go after him—that was the time I couldn't find you. I should never have got the boy either if I hadn't got the police to help me. A bad job that was!"

"You ought to let him go to sea when he is confirmed," said Ditte. "If I were a man, I should go to sea, it's not worth while staying on the land."

Yes, Lars Peter had noticed that she was not satisfied with her circumstances in town. But Ditte would

not pursue the subject, so he let it drop. She was used to bear her troubles alone, and that they let her do. She could get out of them all right. She had become a very pretty and determined lass for her twenty years, and wore her clothes well. No one who saw her could have thought that it was the rag and bone man's daughter, the little wizened, crooked kiddie from the "Crow's Nest" who stood there.

The next day Ditte had to go. She wanted to go to Nöddebo to see her child, and then into town to find a new place before the first of the month. They did not need her at home, and she did not want to be out of work at home in the hamlet either. And there were none of the inhabitants she cared for, now that the old pensioner couple were dead. The house was sold, and it was quite strange to see it and know that strangers lived there. Povl and Rasmus got the old nag out and drove her. She was refreshed by her visit home, short as it was, and enjoyed the drive with the two lads.

But the meeting with her child was a bitter disappointment. She had longed unreasonably for it, and yet she felt with torture in her soul that as each month went by she got further away from him. She had neglected to follow his growth, and did not recognize her little six-weeks-old baby in the dirty plump youngster that toddled about and said "Ga-ga!" and "Bo!" to everything, and stuck out his tongue. And the worst of all was that he was frightened of her. The crofter's wife had to force him to go to her. "Jens not afraid of the strange lady!" she said to him.

The words cut Ditte to the heart, she felt unwanted as never before and hastened away from the place. "He *is* my child for all that!" she repeated, as she hurried towards Hilleröd, where she was to take the train to Copenhagen. "He is my child!" But there was not much consolation in that. She had cut herself off from the boy. That Karl often went out and saw it did not make the case against her any better. She had been a bad mother, who left her child to strangers in order to have a good time herself, and now it was brought home to her.

It was with no special pleasure that she again stood in the capital. She was sick of it. She envied Sine, who had now settled into her new life at home—she had also belonged to just such a poor nest.

For a moment the thought of Karl crossed her mind, but she pushed it from her.

CHAPTER XXVIII

DITTE'S DAY

WHEN the alarm went off at six o'clock in the morning, Ditte sat up in bed with a start, still tired out from the fatigues of the day before, and the many preceding ones.. Half asleep she swung her legs over the edge of the bed, groped for her clothes and nearly fell back among the pillows again. But with a shiver she pulled herself together, threw off her nightdress, and began to wash in the hand-basin.

Ah! that brought the life back into her legs again. Her heart leaped up at the touch of the old sponge, seemed to turn round in the air, and began to beat furiously. It swung like a great bell, and from all sides her hidden powers came forth and took up their rightful stations. It was just as if she became possessed, and Ditte was absolutely convinced of the truth of what her grandmother had only hinted at, viz., that each of us is full of living beings, both good and ill. Her blood too surged through her veins in a living flood, and enveloped her in its warmth. Ditte took plenty of time to wash her body over with the big sponge; she stretched one arm up in the air, and with the other washed herself in the armpit,—where a little cluster of rust-red hair grew in secret, hidden in its own perfume,—then over her shoulders and back. The

white curved arm could reach over the whole body, so flexible had she become, she had not been so in her early 'teens, when her joints cracked and hurt her at every movement not strictly necessary. Ditte had certainly developed properly now, and she was glad of it.

She had sat her glass on the washstand, and glanced at her reflection in it, in all positions. There were no more sharp knobs down her back now when she bent forwards; it was all one soft curve. Whatever pose she struck gave soft delicate lines, the hips were finely modeled—likewise the shoulders,—the breasts round and firm. They did not hang at all, and the nipples had returned to their natural size again: Ditte was glad of that: they looked like two pink raspberries half buried in the dark halo round them, which melted into the creamy splendor of breast and shoulder. The brownish stains which had troubled Ditte greatly had disappeared; the blood had purified them. The abdomen was firm again too, and well rounded; it seemed to guard the untouched fruit—a pear with the calyx upwards. The small mother o' pearl like cleft in the layer of fat under the skin might easily have been overlooked. She glanced at it as she bent forward to wash her feet. And the birthmark on her thigh would never disappear either: it had always filled her with a mysterious wonder, family birthmark as it was! She stood balanced on one leg, leaning far over so that her luxuriant hair fell over her shoulders, veiling her face and dipping into the wash-basin. She spanned her ankle with her fingers—the small bone was too thick,

—that came from the endless running about. This, and a varicose vein beginning on one thigh, caused her serious disquietude.

Otherwise Ditte was satisfied with herself as far as the outward appearance went. She knew that she was well made and was glad of it. Why so? Was there any one in whose eyes she wanted to seem desirable? Or was there a lover about anywhere?

But no, Ditte was simply not awakened yet! She had had a child, and yet her breast was the abode of chastity, her senses still slept, untouched by any warm longings and dreams. She merely took the same pleasure in herself that an artist takes in a beautiful creation of his own. Ditte had no sweetheart, and desired none. All her feelings of that kind had had their vent—now she was practically cold. Like a miser she hid her treasures deep.

At a quarter to seven Ditte was downstairs. She put the kettle on the gas ring for tea, and called the children who had to go to school. While they dressed she did the dining-room and cut the sandwiches for their school lunch. They generally gathered round her and pulled on their coats while she buttered the bread, and then arose a struggle between duty and predilection. It was a Government official's family where Ditte was now in service, with a small income, who had a struggle to keep up appearances—one of the so-called "New Poor." It told upon the children; they were always hungry. Ditte willingly gave them all the food she could. It was so difficult to say "No"

to hungry youngsters; especially to the boys; they followed her every movement with greedy eyes.

"I shall catch it from your mother!" she said.

"Oh! Do let her scold!" they pleaded. "You are so good!" They really meant it, and were fond of her. So Ditte had to bear the brunt when the lady got up and came to see what there was for their own lunch.

At eight o'clock the master got his coffee and morning paper before he went to the office. At nine o'clock the mistress had hers in bed, and dozed for another quarter of an hour. She had given birth to so many children—four in all—and was not to tire herself by getting up too early. Half an hour later she rang again; she was ready to get up: Ditte laid out her clothes and waited on her. While she dressed, she made inquiries as to the progress of the morning's work, and gave her orders for the day.

"Just fancy, you are not through yet!" she generally exclaimed. "You certainly come down far too late."

The morning was the worst time of the day. Relay after relay of the family had to be waited on, and the rooms done at the same time. It was nothing but running to and fro between the rooms and the kitchen, and in to the lady every time she rang. When Ditte had cleaned the rooms from the dirt of the previous day, and made them warm and comfortable, the lady established herself there and she could get in to the bedroom. When she had finished there it was time to begin getting the lunch ready. But as a rule she

had to go into the rooms and do something or other over again.

Ditte's present employers were well-bred people; they never scolded at her or quarreled among themselves either. They merely corrected her in their own quiet passionless way, which often hurt more than angry words. Anyhow Ditte wished that they would now and then lose that quiet self-possession if in return they would occasionally express satisfaction and gladness with her. But they never thought of that.

She could not understand this continual dissatisfaction. When she had removed the dirt and discomfort of the previous day, and made the home comfortable again for the family, she slipped out of the room with the dirt, out into her kitchen, quite satisfied to think how nice she had made it for the others. Before she disappeared she would cast a last searching glance over the room, and felt that it was comfortable and fit to live in. And shortly after the lady would ring, and lead her from one object to another, dumbly pointing. Good gracious, a speck of dust! So much was to be done! She might just as well have rung to say: "Ah! how comfortable and warm it is here! Thanks very much, Kirstine."

What Ditte missed most of all was a little appreciation. In her world gratitude was a prominent characteristic: folks were, if anything, *too* grateful. Their very principle of existence lay in giving—and in being thankful that one had it to give. But here people only accepted everything, and that so ungraciously, as if it were a natural right. She had entered the house

overflowing with good-will, and was therefore well equipped to serve others. From her earliest childhood it had always been impressed upon her how she must conduct herself when the time came to go out into service. "Do so and so, and then you will be able to stay a long time in one place." Now all that was more or less effaced from her mind—the gentry no longer appeared to her as exalted human beings, almost superhuman in fact, for whose sake she really existed—beings to serve whom was a mere duty.

Now she was much wiser, without gaining any precise happiness from this wisdom. It was her nature to serve her fellow-beings; it was part and parcel of her inherent goodness, and yet she could not set limits to it without feeling poorer in herself. But it was necessary to be selfish if she was not to get worn out. Other people would not take care of her; but let her run till she dropped. These people had shown themselves to be just like her own class—neither worse nor better, and when it came to the point, not better brought up either. They had however one advantage—they took everything for granted and were ungrateful into the bargain. The poor folks said: "Now you must really not do any more and wear yourself out for my sake," and thanked those who did them a service. If one worked for a poor man he always came and said: "Now we will stop work for to-day!" But here she could never do enough. "Can't you get up a little earlier?" or "You can very well stay a little later this evening." All one's strength belonged to them as a

matter of course. The one free evening in the week was regarded almost as a theft.

And when the very best had been given, appreciation was but sparsely doled out. What Ditte had stolen from her sleep or her free time—a special effort, was also insufficient as a rule. They had expected still more, or demanded this drain on her strength as a daily event. Consideration for her health was not of course to be expected, but in order not to be completely worn out, it was necessary to draw in one's horns, and only do one's strict duty. It was good for her physically that she found this out in time.

But it was not so good for the soul and heart! She got rid of her swollen legs, but at the expense of something higher—she felt this herself and fretted over it. At one time she had felt that the inner being was better developed than the outer: now she knew that the reverse was the case. She knew that she was a handsome girl, and was glad of it—if only she had been as sure that she was a good one! But in order to stand up for herself, she had to fight against her own best qualities.

So she learnt the despicable virtue called self-preservation: she became slovenly, her mistresses said. Ditte, who in her own world had scarcely ever seen such a thing as laziness, got into slovenly ways. She stipulated just how much work she was to do when she took the place, and kept strictly to the agreement. She tried to avoid places where there were children, and if forced to take one, made the condition that she should have nothing to do with them. Otherwise she

would have her hands full both early and late. She often felt sorry, but hardened her heart, lest it should be used to her undoing.

The city had long since cured her of despondency or lack of spirit. It had gone further and had developed a certain readiness to do battle that often served to lay the storm when "bad weather" threatened. She learnt this trick from washerwomen, who were the bugbear of the ladies, but who well understood how to hold their own.

She often thought of imitating her friends, who one after the other slipped into factory work. From one point of view they had a much better time as servants,—were sure of food and shelter, and got a fixed wage; but in spite of this they preferred factory work. Ditte could quite understand it. The factory was cold and gloomy and dusty—the sun seldom appeared within its walls. But service was like being in the very heart of existence, and yet feeling none of its warmth. The more comfortable a home was, the more lonely one felt—when one was not a dog! The girl in service was like the virgin in the fairy-tale, who had to hold the candle for the lovers—an abominable destiny!

Ditte was not pleased at the direction her development was taking, and often asked herself if it might not be she who was unreasonable and took everything in the wrong spirit. At any rate one was happiest when one was able to submit to the conditions of a menial position. Lars Peter had said when she was going out to service after her confirmation, that a serv-

ant did best to have no opinions; and she would have been happier if she had been able to keep strictly to this all her days. The poor did best to be silent and submissive!

But if she could not, what then? There was a rebellious demon in her—she knew it only too well, and he grew and waxed lusty and fat. One evening on coming home she found that some one had been in her room. The things on the chest of drawers had been meddled with. This had happened before, but Ditte could not stand it any longer now; she must have her room to herself—the one place in the world where she reigned supreme. So a collision took place between the lady and herself and she gave notice.

One afternoon she was out looking for another place. She found one that rather appealed to her. It was with an old lady, the widow of a councilor. The old lady repeated time after time: "So you have no sweetheart!" "No!" answered Ditte, smiling, "I *am* so afraid of having a strange man shut up in the flat—I am all by myself, you see." They agreed as to the wages and the work, Ditte had seen the flat and could well undertake the work. "I should like to see your references," said the lady. And suddenly the little demon awoke in Ditte. "Yes, if I may see madam's references," she returned. The old lady started back as if a poisonous insect had stung her. "Girl! What are you saying?" she exclaimed. "Will you go straight out of my house?"

Ditte knew afterwards that she had been a fool. Naturally she and her like had to submit to cringing

proofs of good and honest behavior. The other class needed no proofs—they were as they were, and the others had to accommodate themselves to that state of things. She would not go and look for any more places—would not go into service again on any consideration. She would be off with the whole thing, take a room from the first of the month, and look for work.

One evening there were visitors. Every time Ditte went into the room she caught a little of the conversation. She was glad to find that as far as the ladies were concerned it was never deeper than she could well follow. And as to appearance—well, she had a better neck than any one of them. If she were to wear a low-cut dress she would certainly take the wind out of the sails of the whole lot. And without this advantage it sometimes happened that the gentlemen neglected their ladies so far as to send her an appreciative glance.

“They are all alike at bottom. They belong to quite a different world from ours,” she heard one of the ladies say once when she went in. Ditte recognized the tone: they had got on to the servant question. It would not be long now before her turn came. Right enough! when she next went in, the conversation stopped suddenly, and the ladies looked criticizingly at her. This was one of her most bitter experiences, when she really grasped the fact that while she was running to and fro doing her best, they were picking her to pieces, making merry over her common manners, and amusing the guests at her expense. Nothing had

made her feel so lonely and defenseless as this. She could not defend herself, but was debarred from giving her side of the question. She was an inarticulate being who had only to be dumb and do her work. They patted dogs and excused nearly everything they did: she was entirely unprotected. Gradually she came to nourish the feeling that at bottom they hated her. They accepted her work because that was unavoidable, but she herself was superfluous. If they could have dispensed with her person, and retained her useful qualities, they would have done so. It was the same to her! Nobody could make a laughing-stock of her any more now! But there were other things to say about her. Well, they could say what they liked. She no longer cared the least bit what they thought of her.

Yet she listened at the door, bitter of mood. She heard the hostess say something, and a couple of visitors laugh. Then a man's voice said: "Excuse me, but I never discuss servants, either our own or others. Our own is under the protection of my wife and myself, as long as she is with us, and I suppose the same holds good in other houses." A warm feeling glowed in Ditte's breast. She would gladly take service in that house! Soon after the party broke up. Ditte's eyes glistened her thanks when she helped him on with his coat. She was so grateful, she could have kissed him.

CHAPTER XXIX

SPRING

MRS. VANG and Ditte stood in the kitchen cooking; they had the window open, and the sun shone in and made long sunbeams of vapor and steam. "Oh, how fresh the air smells!" cried Mrs. Vang. "We are coming to the loveliest time of the year."

Out in the garden Mr. Vang and the children were making spring discoveries; they scraped manure and dead leaves aside and shrieked in chorus whenever a flower came in view. Now and then a little fellow came up to the window. "Is it nearly dinner-time? I'm as hungry as a hunter!" said he.

And suddenly the whole gang were there, kicking up a great commotion under the window.

"Something to eat, give us something to eat,
Or we'll knock the house down into the street."

They sang, and stamped and shook their fists at the window. It was a perfect conspiracy. "Throw water over them!" said the lady to Ditte. But at this the whole troop ran away, screaming as if the devil was at their heels. Down by the summer-house they stopped and sang:

"Oh! Miss Man, you just dare
To throw water over us here."

And quite unexpectedly a head filled the upper panes of the window. "A bodiless head!" shrieked both Ditte and her mistress. It was only Frederick, the eldest boy; he was hanging by the trellis work. "What is there for dinner?" he asked, in his funny deep voice.

"Potatoes and burnt fat, Mr. Ghost!—and fried masons' noses for dessert!" answered Mrs. Vang, with a curtsy.

The boy let himself drop from the trellis, and rushed through the garden. "I saw what we are going to have for dinner," he shouted.

Ditte laughed. "They are just like our boys at home," said she. "They were always desperately hungry when dinner-time came near."

Mrs. Vang nodded—she understood boys, and could imagine the whole scene from Ditte's description. "So they came rushing up from the beach," said she. "Oh, the glorious beach! It must have been splendid all the same, in spite of the poverty. Where there are children there is no real poverty, is there?"

"If only there is something to stuff them with!" said Ditte, wise beyond her years.

"Yes,—yes!" the lady roused herself. "Yes, it would be awful if one had not enough!" she shuddered.—"Now run up and tidy yourself a little while I warm the gravy, Miss Man. Then we will sit down to dinner," said she quietly.

This time Ditte did not drop what she had in her hand, as she did the first day. Then she had asked: "Am I to sit down with you to dinner?" in such an astonished tone that the lady burst out laughing.

"Yes, of course," Mrs. Vang had answered, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

Then she would rather have escaped; but now she too thought that it was quite natural, although only ten days had gone by. Mr. Vang had no appetite when he knew that some one was sitting alone in the kitchen munching her food, the lady said; and Ditte understood this feeling. As a child when she came to the "Crow's Nest" she had found it impossible to take anything herself until she had seen that they were all helped—the animals as well. No doubt she had taken after Lars Peter in that. It was just the same with him. At first, however, it was surprising to meet any one else who was the same.

It was a little difficult the first few days. Now she had got unaccustomed to sitting down with other people: for years she had chewed her food alone, in the corner by the sink. It was quite strange to sit and eat in human society, and that too with her own employers. How stupid and awkward she was!

But no one seemed to notice her blushes and embarrassment. She and the lady took turns in fetching the things from the kitchen during the meal, and the children at once made her join in the conversation. They put question after question relentlessly, till she answered. "Why was there only one twin? Why did she always speak North Sealand dialect?" etc.

"Now you must let Miss Man have a little peace," said the mother. "There will be plenty of time to get to know everything."

"Will she stay here always?" one of the small boys immediately asked. And Inge looked mischievously up from her plate. "Why are you called Miss Man? You are a woman!" She was five and full of mischief.

"That is because she would like to get married," said Frederick contemptuously. "Women always want to." Mrs. Vang smiled at her husband, who sat feeding the two-year-old kiddie; he always had him on his knee at meals.

"You must not make puns on the name 'Man,'" said Mr. Vang, "for it is the oldest and the most widespread family name here in this country. We should have fared badly without the Mans. Once they owned the whole land; but then a bad fairy came and bewitched them all. He was called Stomach, because he was nothing but stomach. But the Mans had a heart for their weapon and device."

"Oh!" said the children, with big eyes fixed on Ditte. "So it is a fairy story, and about you. You must be a fairy princess! What next? Did they never get away from the bad fairy?"

"No, not yet. But when he eats right in to their heart, then they will be free. For that will stick in his wicked throat."

Ditte really felt a little like a fairy princess. Not because there was less to do here—quite the contrary! The Vangs had not too much money—they washed at home, and made their own clothes, and every penny was turned over twice. The children's clothes made

a great deal of work, they had to be worn as long as possible, and yet look neat. The work basket was on the table every evening. But this was a life in which Ditte found herself at home. She knew the button bag, where all the old buttons were, and where everything one needed was to be found, and the bag for the clean linen and woolen rags. She had unraveled old stocking legs for darning wool before to-day, and once more tasted the joy of making something out of nothing, transformed by the help of some old cast-off thing. She had missed the love of things as she had missed the love of her fellow-beings. In this respect the one was like the other—something once used and cast aside when it was no longer worth keeping. People and things—into the dust-bin with them when they could be of no more use: when it did not pay to keep life in them, and patch them up. It was delightful to be a human being again—to be among human beings—glorious to be the object of attentions, and be allowed to bestow them.

There was enough to do from morning to night. In the evening when the children were in bed, they sat round the lamp with their darning and patching, both Ditte and her mistress. Mrs. Vang was incredibly clever with her fingers—Ditte could not hold a candle to her. They sat each with her own thoughts: Ditte was not much company in herself, and Mrs. Vang, who was so happy and lively all day, grew quiet in the evening like the birds. Ditte sat and drank in the wonderfully peaceful silence which reigned in the house, when the children slept and good hands worked

for them. And she forgot where she was, and dreamt that she was at home in the sitting-room—the little mother—with the little ones in bed, and the cares of the day behind her, weary and thoughtful. Did Ditte long for her troublesome childhood again? She laid her head on her arm and wept gently.

“What is the matter with you?” Mrs. Vang took her head upon her shoulder. “What troubles you, child?”

“Oh! you are too good to me,” answered Ditte, sobbing and yet trying to smile.

Mrs. Vang laughed. “That is not generally a reason for crying.”

“No, but I never played when I was a child—that is so strange!”

Mrs. Vang looked questioningly at her. She could not follow her train of thought now.

“I ought to have come here long ago!” said Ditte, and nestled up to her mistress.

And here she touched on precisely the thing that had harmed her: she had been out a little too long, and could have missed a good deal of it, without harm to herself. It had had time to corrode her soul too much. Just as she often said “Sir” and “Madam,” without meaning to, instinctively—the Vangs had distinctly forbidden her to use such forms of politeness—she would suddenly rouse herself up and be on her guard. “Might it not be that they are so kind in order to get more out of me?” some inner self would inquire, especially if she were tired. There was just as much to do here as elsewhere, one had really never

time to get through one's work. The lady took her full share in it all, and if one had to be up specially early, she came up and called Ditte, cheerful and fresh; as soon as her brisk step was heard on the stair, it gave a glad color to the day. Work here was not oppressive, however much there might be to do, it was not piled up, because one of the parties had sneaked out of her full share, neither was it despised, there was nothing of the yoke about it.

Ditte had no longer the feeling that she had to bear others' burdens. She had only reached bedrock in her unweariedness, through having abused it. She went about tired out, and had to be set going again. She often felt as if something inside her had broken and wanted winding up. A look of surprise from the lady was enough to ease her over the difficulty; but shame and regret in her soul would set her right again. And to excuse herself she accused others! That idea of having her to table and downstairs with them in the evening, was it not perhaps something they had thought of to have more control over her, and to save,—it was always wise to never reckon on anything unselfish on the others' part! Now and then she burned with shame that she could be so suspicious—most of all when she felt once more happy and contented with her existence—then came regret. It was bewilderingly difficult to find a solution—so long as it lasted, and sometimes Ditte in desperation began to attack both herself and others. Then Mrs. Vang had to speak seriously to her till she became quiet.

But this was only a hasty mood. Her mind had

developed under the weight of burdens too heavy for it, just as her body had done in her childhood. It would take time to right itself entirely. She had come out into the sunlight a little too hastily, and blundered about, butting hither and thither. It was not a graceful motion. But the new perfected nature was forming.

Ditte developed and blossomed day by day, and the spring drew nearer and nearer. Never before had she known that the spring was such an incomprehensibly lovely season. At home she had never noticed it properly, and only welcomed it for the lightening of her duties, when the youngsters could run out all day long, and they had no longer to wonder where they could get fuel from. Perhaps too the years of confinement within the barrack walls of the city had opened her eyes. The meadows and she ran races to see which should thaw first, hidden springs welled up within her, then burst suddenly forth, singing in silver-toned melody to the spring as they danced along. So many mysterious and elusive things moved within her, leaving in their train sweet melancholy or musical mirth. The evenings deepened the sadness, and then came the nights—the moonlit nights when sleep would not come for the strange white light that transfigured the whole room. Then one had to be careful that the moonlight did not shine on one's face while sleeping. Granny had told Ditte that this had cost many a young girl her life's happiness, and Ditte still firmly believed it.

And so the days glided on, each a little longer and lighter than the preceding one—and a shade warmer. In the garden something new happened every day, now one bush burst into bloom, now another. The children kept a sharp lookout, and came in with news, and then every one had to go out to welcome the new miracle, and Mr. Vang explained it. He knew the name of every single plant in the garden, how it fed and propagated, and nearly how it thought! Up in his study all the walls were covered with bookshelves. Ditte shuddered to think of all that he must have in his head.

But the sun mounted higher and higher. When it had roused up the flowers and bushes, it took hold of the great trees. And one day it reached the corner of the house, and shone in on Ditte through the gable window just as she was sitting at the table writing a letter, and it threw a kiss on her cheek that was warm and red before its coming, rested a moment in the hair round her smooth forehead, and then disappeared behind the forest.

The lady came up with a letter. It was from a young gardener who had a market garden near, and had been several times to the house with things for the garden: he wanted Ditte to go with him to a ball at Lundehus Inn. "We must soon seriously think about getting you away," said Mrs. Vang. "Things can't go on like this. You turn the heads of all the young men round about. Before you came we could hardly get the tradespeople to call, and now we have scarcely time to do anything but run out and say:

'No, thanks! We don't want anything to-day.' Do you know what people here have nicknamed you? Miss Touch-me-not!"

Ditte blushed, and Mrs. Vang's clear laughter rang out. Then Mr. Vang came over the drying loft from his study. He put his head in at the door with a comic expression of embarrassment. He had to stoop more than usual to get his head under the lintel.

"Come in, come in," said Mrs. Vang. He came warily in; Ditte gave him a chair, and sat down on the couch with the lady.

"It's really quite nice here," said he, looking round. "But there are no books! Wouldn't you like something to read?"

"Yes—es!" Ditte hesitated, she was ashamed to let him know that she never read. "Might I have 'Robinson Crusoe'?" she asked—she had dipped into it downstairs with the children. She did not know the names of any other books. But she was not happy about it. She thought he would ask her to say pieces of it by heart afterwards, and she had never been good at learning by heart.

"You shall have something that is just as amusing," promised Mr. Vang. "But shan't we go out for a walk, Marie?"

"I will stay with the children this evening, and Miss Man can go with you," said Mrs. Vang.

They walked westwards towards the evening sky, Vang, Frederick and Ditte. Vang was in the middle, and talked—about some disturbance in Copenhagen: Ditte thought he spoke wonderfully, she did not un-

derstand the half of it. But a higher world opened to her through his quiet voice, a world where one was far above questions of food and money and envious backbiting. This was the existence Ditte had imagined to belong to the upper classes, now she beheld her idea realized, a life lived in beautiful thoughts—in forbearance, and love to those in a lower station. God sat up above and watched over us all with loving forbearance, and on the way up to Him, he had placed the gentry—considerably nearer Himself than she and her life—and in a purer, sweeter atmosphere. That evening she felt that she was lifted up with them, and wandered fully awakened in the poor man's dream-land.

“The poor will be able to sing: ‘How beautiful is the earth, and how glorious is God’s Heaven!’ That is, in reality, what the struggle is about,” said Vang.

“Why do they drink, and make themselves still more miserable?” asked Frederick, in his deep voice.

“Because brandy is the only power that does them justice. So they sing their song of praise through that. It is not their fault if it sounds a little thick.”

“Yes, Father said once: ‘It must be splendid to think real thoughts,’ but then he had taken a drop,” interposed Ditte. “When he is sober, he does not dare to think about existence; it is too sad, he says.”

They both looked up into Vang’s face as they walked along on either side of him. The last rays of the setting sun were reflected in his glasses. Frederick had slipped his arm through his father’s.

"Take Father's other arm!" he said to Ditte. "One can walk better like that."

Ditte was completely happy. As they walked thus, all three in a group, she might have been taken for Frederick's elder sister, or Vang's wife. They hummed a tune together, as they came down the hill towards the house. "Through the fair kingdoms of earth!"

Mrs. Vang stood at the garden gate. "You have been a long time away!" said she, "and so many young men have gone by this evening!"

"Yes," said Vang. "We must really see about getting Miss Man engaged. She is a danger to all her acquaintances."

Ditte smiled—no, she would not marry.

But she was in love—only not with any man. It was the spring that welled up in her, and filled her with its vigor and luxuriance—without any definite object.

CHAPTER XXX

GOOD DAYS

MRS. VANG did things in her own way. They always dined at one o'clock in her house so as to make things a little easier in the afternoon, and often, when they stood in the kitchen cooking, she would say: "The afternoon is the best time. You can stay up in your room, and look after your own things a bit." It almost seemed as if she understood that Ditte too needed to be alone sometimes, and hold communion with her own little circle.

So she went upstairs and potted about, cleaned up, and moved things about to see how they would look in another position; and all this rested her thoroughly. She could hear Mr. Vang moving about in his study opposite, and went about very softly not to disturb him. When he was writing, they all, without exception, went about on tip-toes, although he did not wish them to—unexacting as he was. It came quite naturally, when Mrs. Vang said, "Father is working!" it was just as if she had put a spell on them. Only the toddlers paid no heed to it, but came storming unabashed up the stairs to show father something wonderful they had found—a stone or a rusty nail! The mother came rushing after. "Children, children!" she would cry in hushed tones, but Vang would come out and take them into his room for a minute. As

his door opened a cloud of tobacco smoke floated over the loft and penetrated to Ditte's room, just enough to have a fascinating influence. It was, however, impossible to sit in his study: he sat enveloped in a cloud of smoke.

"Then he thinks he is in Heaven! Otherwise he cannot write!" observed Mrs. Vang jestingly. She was always scolding him for smoking so much, but at the same time liked him to smell of tobacco.

How clean and tidy it was here. The old iron bedstead had white flounced hangings at the ends, so that the iron did not show, and the wooden washstand had white draperies; there were thick white curtains in front of the window to draw across at night. Ditte liked her room: one could see that from the shining cleanliness in every corner,—everything smelt newly starched and freshly scoured. Here she had let fall the first tears of joy shed since she came to town—in fact, since she had grown up. It was the day, now some months ago, when impoverished in soul, she had entered it for the first time. The little, poorly furnished room shone with friendliness, and in a vase by the bedside stood flowers. It was the first time in her life Ditte had been welcomed with flowers; they stood there like a promise of sweet rest and pleasant dreams. Since then she always saw to there being flowers there; she picked them in the evening when she went for a walk along the hedgerows, and they were placed on the little table by the bedside. There they should stand!

On the chest of drawers lay a big mussel shell Ditte

had once found on the beach down by the Hill Farm. Except for this there was nothing to remind her of the past. The photo of her little boy lay deep hidden in a drawer; there was no need to leave that lying about. It only led to questions, and when people knew the truth, they would look down on her. Ditte could not afford to have an upset here in this house, through unnecessary candor. She scarcely missed the child itself any longer: now and then she longed for it, but this longing no longer seemed like a tearing at her heart, an unbearable desire clutching at her hands. She had not been home for ages either, but Mrs. Vang had promised her a fortnight's summer holiday; then she really would go home and see them.

She had enough to do in developing. To the outward eye, no change could be seen, but she grew inwardly, she was sowing seeds! The town looked quite different from here, the boundary line between town and country, from what it had done when she was down among all those barracks. Here one could survey both them and their inmates. That was no doubt why Vang lived out here, to get a bird's-eye view! He called it the heart of the country. Ditte did not understand that—she thought of it rather as a big stomach.—What a quantity of food it devoured as time went on! Had not she herself nearly been swallowed up by it? But out here in Villa Vang she quite liked the town; they only went in for the day, looked at the shops and made purchases. Or they went in to the Zoölogical Gardens—the whole lot of them.

From her window she could see Frederiksborg Road,

which ran out into the country, and on either side of it fields, farms, hedges and houses. The farmers were plowing, the cattle grazing, and wayfarers tramped along the highroad, each intent on his own business. There were cornfields, and meadows and woods, and one enormous market garden. The birds sang, now rain fell, or the wind blew cold, and afterwards came the sun and warmed it again. It was beautiful—and wonderful, since God, the all-powerful, had created it. But on the table in Ditte's room lay a little square object—a book. Vang had written it, and it was not easy to understand how people could possibly produce such things; for when they were opened and one looked at the printed pages, the world stepped forth in glowing colors—a world one had never seen, and which had never existed; but which one seemed to know quite well—with towns and farms, fishing villages, and human beings with their joys and sorrows. Ditte thought it was wonderful, that merely by glancing from the window down upon the book she could call up an entirely different world. It was magic! The mistress said he had written a whole mass of books like that one, and in his study he had many more, hundreds of them, written by other people, and every one of them different! Now she would take great care not to make a noise when she went up to her room of an evening. The spirits should not have to take flight on her account. She knew now what was at stake. Vang often sat up there nearly all night, and when she woke she could see a ray of light stream over the ceiling through the half-open door—for he kept the

door open to let out the tobacco smoke. He *had* to smoke or he could do nothing! It was wonderful to think that her master sat there and saw visions in the blue smoke. And in the darkness the thought would cross Ditte's mind whether if the Lord had not created the world, Vang could not? She was not sure which would have been best! But at any rate love was more beautiful in Vang's created world than in our Lord's!

Ditte sat reading, with her hands pressed over her ears lest any unwarranted noise should intrude. It disturbed her when she heard the rumble of wheels from the road, at a place in the book where there should be no carriages. In spite of this she distinctly heard her mistress call out, in a most surprised voice: "Why, that is Lars Peter!" and slam a door, and run up the path in front of the house.

Ditte hurried downstairs. There they really were on the road—Lars Peter, Sine and all the youngsters—a good load! Mrs. Vang kissed Sine right on the lips. "You must excuse me!" she said, and smiled, but I have got to like you all so much—through Ditte." She looked at them all, one after the other, with glistening eyes.

"Well, she hasn't said bad things of us behind our backs, or put us to shame either!" said Lars Peter, in high spirits. He leaned on the horse's crupper, as he crawled out of the cart. "Good-day, my lass!" He pinched Ditte's cheek and shook her gently. "It is good to see you again!"

Then Frederick came rushing up, and little Inge, and the boys, they came from all sides. And Vang came hurrying from the back garden with the smallest in his arms. "Gee-gee!" cried the baby; "gee-gee!" and snorted till the foam stood on his chin.

They meant to go on into the town at once: the horse was tired and needed stabling. Lars Peter had hoped that Ditte could get the day free and go with them. But there was no question of that. Mrs. Vang declared they must go in and get something to eat—then they could always make other plans: and Vang said the same.

Lars Peter stood gazing at the ground, and dug his hands into his greatcoat pockets, while Ditte and Mrs. Vang pulled at him, one on each side. It looked as if he was searching for something; but he was merely embarrassed and wished to gain time.

"What do you say, Mother?" he asked thoughtfully. But Sine would do nothing but smile; there were deep dimples in her red cheeks. When Lars Peter let himself be carried off, Povl and Rasmus busied themselves with the harness and cart. They had grown into big boys since Ditte left home: they were two regular rascals!

Then Lars Peter had to go up to Vang's study to have a cigar. There was no smoking downstairs for the children's sake. He was quite stupefied at the sight of so many books. "Can you ever read them all through?" he asked doubtfully.

Vang had to admit that there were many of them he had not read, and probably never would. "I have

never been much of a scholar for reading," said Lars Peter, "it doesn't go well with out-of-doors work—I get so sleepy when I come in and sit me down. But I should just fancy that it might be the same with books as with folks—them that one knows one comes to like and to try to draw the best out of them. For all that it must be powerful tiresome work to sit there and write a fair hand. Dang me if any one should get me to do it, even if I could."

"No, you are quite right: it's not amusing," said Vang seriously. "I would gladly change with you, and drive along the highway. But I feel there is something in me that I *must* get written down—which perhaps no one else can write. And it is but seldom that people look at the matter so sensibly as you; the greater number envy one."

Then the women came up with the coffee; they drank it on the little balcony outside Vang's study. "This is a great honor for you, Lars Peter," said Mrs. Vang right out, "for no strangers are allowed up here. But we like you so much. You don't know how much we have talked about you and the children, and of the life down there in the village." She grew quite flushed.

"And I can darned well like you—next to my own little wife naturally," returned Lars Peter. "You are a real fine lady! But how the devil, I nearly said right out when I came, could you have known that it was me? The lass couldn't have photographed us all for you to see!"

"My wife has second-sight!" said Vang, looking

teasingly at her. "But you must have the same if you can see that she is a fine lady. For no one else has noticed that up to now. She doesn't do much either to show that she is a commander's daughter."

"You are quite annoyed about that!" said Mrs. Vang, stroking her husband's hair. "But you must excuse me if I disappear for a moment. Ditte can very well stay up here for a bit." She made a sign to her husband, who followed her to the study.

"I don't believe they have any money," whispered Ditte to her father, "and they are so worried about it: and don't know what to do."

"But we really haven't come to put them out: we only wished to have a look at you." Lars Peter was quite alarmed.

"They have talked so often about your coming here—I do think they will be so sorry if you go away now. Have you any money, Father?"

"You can be sure I have, my lass!" exclaimed Lars Peter, quite relieved. "That's jolly lucky. We've just drawn some of Sine's money, we wanted to see about something while we were in town." He took a hundred-crown note from his pocketbook and gave it to her,—the book was quite bulging with money, as Ditte noticed with pride. "Yes, isn't it a wealthy mother we have got?" Lars Peter glanced fondly at Sine. "But we are not going to waste it, you understand. That is to be the beginning of a business. Now how will you arrange it with your master and mistress here?"

"I'll run down myself to the grocer," said Ditte.

"May I spend it all? For then I can pay what we owe."

"She's grown into a splendid girl, don't you think so?" remarked Lars Peter when she had gone.

"That she always was!" said Sine. "She deserves a good husband."

"One like me, eh?" laughed Lars Peter. "Yes, but I was a little bit afraid she was beginning to be a fine lady."

Mrs. Vang came out to them. The girl must have told her about the money after all, for she came and stood behind his chair and took him by the shoulders. She did not say a word, but thoughtfully ruffled the hair on the nape of his neck; then suddenly she bent over, and kissed him on the big bald spot on the crown of his head.

"Good Lord, where have the kiddies got to?" cried Lars Peter to distract her thoughts. He was afraid she was going to begin to thank him.

"They are down in the back garden with ours," said Mrs. Vang. "You should just see what they can do together! Povl and Rasmus are teaching ours to dig holes. It is a pity that Kristian couldn't come too!"

"What, do you know about Kristian too? No—he's out in service properly now. But it could very well happen that he came running in one day all the same. He has a liking for a life on the road."

"He hasn't exactly caught it from strangers!" answered Mrs. Vang, laughing.

"No," said Lars Peter, scratching his head, "no,

that's possible enough!" And then it came out that they had not left home that day, but were out on a tour of several days, and had food with them in the cart, and a self-cooker. They halted at the edge of a wood, and cooked dinner. Last night they had slept at a crofter's place in Nöddebo.

"That must be glorious!" said the lady. "How I should like to go on such a trip with you!" Her eyes glistened.

"Oh, we can easily arrange that. You have only to go straight on along the road. But of course you must have a natural talent for it, and take things as you find them."

"We can! Both my husband and I! We are obliged to do that—in our present position," she added, smiling.

"Yes, I wondered to see that you were such a grand woman!" said Lars Peter, "but now I can hear it better still. It is always those who have too little for their own, who have their hearts in the right place. But where is the cart?" He sprang up quite startled.

Mrs. Vang laughed. "My husband and Frederick have driven it over to the inn. We think it better for you to stay here to-night than to go off looking for lodgings in the town. We can put you up very well, if only you will take us as we are."

Of course they could! Lars Peter for his part could very well hang on from a hatpeg and sleep anyhow; he thanked God he could always sleep like a top. "But there's no sense in putting you all out like this."

Then Ditte and Else came in with a big basket of things between them, and Vang came along the road. Lars Peter went out to meet him over the fields, he wanted to look round about him a little. Sine preferred to stay at home with the women. "I am wondering why the dickens it is that the land on this side of the road is so well farmed, and so bad on the other," said he to Vang as they met.

"That's because there has been a lot of speculating over the one on this side," answered Vang. "If any lawyer just glances at a field, it looks as if the devil himself had breathed^d on it, and nothing will grow there any more."

They walked over the fields together. Lars Peter had thought that Vang was a strange reserved fellow, not nearly so lively and talkative as his wife, and fancied that perhaps he felt himself to be above them. But it was rather that he let the others chatter on, while he was taking notes of it all, for when he was alone with one he was talkative enough, and there was sense in all he said. He seemed to have a knowledge of conditions in all classes, and did not spare any of them much—which sentiment Lars Peter fully agreed with. He had not much respect for the great. "It is we who do their thinking for them," he said, right out.

Lars Peter was quite sure that he and his worked for the great; it was a conception that was slowly coming to birth in his mind; but this was something quite new to him.

"Yes, when you supply the head, and we others bring

the hands, there is nothing much that they provide themselves," said he, laughing.

"Yes, there remains the *stomach*," replied Vang gravely. It was strange to hear such a distinguished man utter such a word; but it was true that in still deep waters grew the strangest plants.

Up on the balcony of the villa they could see people waving and calling to them. They must go back for dinner.

A festive table was spread in the dining-room, a long table with flowers and wine. Vang drew an old high-backed oaken chair with twisted legs to the end of the table—his own place. "You are to sit here, Lars Peter," said he, looking at him with filial admiration.

It was quite a high seat of honor. Lars Peter was quite overcome when he sat down. "No one has ever made such a fuss over me before," said he quietly.

It was a regular feast. The children were all jumbled up together; they were in riotous spirits, and gabbled and laughed at one another. But Vang liked it so. "Meal-times are the children's hours!" he said.

Lars Peter noticed that Vang ate his dinner with the youngest child on his knee. "Yes, the food tastes better to me when I have him," said Vang.

"Why, it's just the same with you, Father!" said Ditte, and looked lovingly from one to the other; roses blossomed in her cheeks for sheer gladness.

"Yes, it's the same with me!" answered Lars Peter, looking quite envious. "I should rather think so! But now there's no one at home to sit on my knee any

more. The youngsters say they are too big. But Mother has promised me one at Christmas—if I will give up chewing!”

Sine grew redder and redder.

“Good gracious, we are thirteen at table!” she exclaimed, with comic fright. Every one laughed, both grown-ups and children; it came so suddenly.

“Yes, Mother is superstitious,” said Lars Peter. “That, thank God, I have never been.”

“That’s the mark of the race.” Vang lifted his glass and nodded to him. “You have never been afraid of the Dark Powers, and therefore you have always been persecuted. A toast to those who are not superstitious—to the believers! We will have faith in our fellows,—not in ghosts and devils.” Mrs. Vang also took up her glass.

“It is because you live in the future that you are so crazy over children!” she said to her husband. “And therefore we will drink good luck to Sine.”

“This evening we’ll go to Tivoli,” said Vang. “All we grown-ups.”

“Ah!” said Frederick cheekily, “then I shall go with you!”

Mrs. Vang laughed: it seemed as if she was tickled the whole time, for all day she had laughed at nothing at all. “We must see about getting some one to look after the children,” she said, reflecting.

“I will see after them,” said Else. “I am really too tired to go in with you.”

“You, child!” exclaimed Mrs. Vang, astonished.

“She has looked after the home for a couple of

years, quite alone!" Lars Peter informed them, proudly.

"Now listen to my plan," said the lady. "This evening we grown-ups will go to Tivoli. To-morrow Ditte and her parents and all the children—ours as well—shall go to the Zoo, and see the town a little. Then you must come back here and have a late dinner, sleep the night here, and wait to drive home till the day after to-morrow. So you have a long day before you!"

"I'll be hanged if I don't go to the Zoo with them!" said Vang. "The very idea!" He looked quite injured.

"Then I won't be done out of it either," declared Mrs. Vang. "But it will be a very late dinner; you will have to put up with that!"

CHAPTER XXXI

DITTE PLUCKS ROSES

IT was really and truly summer at last. The heat was so great that you could see it moving in waves. They lay low along the ground, and shimmered before one's eyes. Only the children seemed unaffected by the warmth. They lay in groups on the lawn, munching gooseberries and currants, and chattering. It was so funny how they came one on the heels of the other—little steps and stairs—with just one year between each.

Frederick had cycled to the Sound to bathe. Mrs. Vang and Ditte sat on the veranda under Vang's study sewing. They could hear Vang walking about upstairs: he came out and knocked his pipe out on the balustrade of the balcony, and went in again. The two women sat silent, they were listening to his movements. He could go on like that the whole day, fiddling with first one thing, then another, and even talking to them, and yet be attending to his work all the time! It seemed to evolve within him, untouched by his surroundings; but they could see by his eyes that he was working: they resembled those of a sleep-walker. In this state his interest could not be aroused by anything. Mrs. Vang laughingly called it "hamram."

They were making a summer dress for Ditte of

flowered muslin, which the lady had picked up at a sale for a bargain. They wore low shoes and bare legs on account of the heat. "In this way we shall save our stockings," said Mrs. Vang. It was *her* idea.

"The tradespeople!" Ditte was not altogether comfortable about it.

"Fine lady!" said Mrs. Vang teasingly. "What do we care about them! Besides they will think we have flesh-colored stockings on. It is elegant nowadays to look as if we had bare legs!"

Vang came out on the balcony, and knocked out his briar again.

"Please, not on our work!" called his wife up to him.

"Oh! I beg pardon." He bent far over the balustrade to see them, and then came down. "Here you sit like two sisters," said he. "Two good and beautiful sisters! But neither of you is thinking of this tall man. Is there to be no tea to-day? It is so hot!"

Ditte threw down her sewing and sprang up.

"I must be getting dotty," cried she, and ran off to the kitchen.

"Or else you are in love," cried Mrs. Vang after her, archly.

"What a child!—But how prettily she goes dreaming about. One could almost fall head over ears in love with her!"

"I should, if I were a man!" declared Mrs. Vang gravely.

Ditte called from the kitchen door: "Children, children, tea or gooseberry fool?"

"Gooseberry fool!" they answered. "But it must have the skins in it."

"Then run to the summer house," her voice rang full and clear in the open air. Then she came in with the tea.

"How do you like our new stockings?" The lady stretched out one leg. "You might have noticed them yourself. See, they are silk."

"They are pretty enough!" said Vang, "but deucedly dear in the long run." The two women burst out laughing.

"You numskull! And yet people credit poets with—"

Vang bent her head backwards and looked down into her face. "What do they accuse poets of, and what has that to do with me?" asked he.

"Perhaps you are no poet then!"

"I am a live human being—just that. But it's enough. All really live human beings are poets too."

"I'm lively enough—but a poet!"

"You are a chatterbox—and talk frightful nonsense." He kissed both her eyes. Then he went away.

"He can't bear to be called a poet," said Mrs. Vang disconsolately. "He hates Art and artists, as perhaps you have noticed. He calls them hair-dressers. He tries to speak the unvarnished truth. Would you believe that could be so difficult? But he says we are

all of us entangled in shams: we must go and learn from the peasantry."

"From *us!*" exclaimed Ditte, horrified. "But we know nothing at all about poetry."

"Perhaps that is just the reason. I don't know exactly. Vang is so quiet about everything: one would never think he was an agitator, would you? But they are keeping an eye on him, believe me. They would like to catch him out, if only they could. At present he is keeping silent as much as he can—but one day—when an opportunity comes! Then they will take him from me, Ditte!"

"What, only because he stands up for the poor?" Ditte could not understand it: she gazed uncomprehendingly in front of her.

Mrs. Vang nodded. "That is the Future! Either they will throw their rags off themselves, or else the rich will have to wear the same. And if anything happens, he will join them—that I am sure of. Oh, Ditte! there is nothing in the world I could not give up for him!" She bowed her head and buried her face in her arms.

"What pretty arms she has!" thought Ditte, "and how pretty and good she is!" She stood over her, tenderly stroking the thick black hair, longing to comfort the grief which she could not understand. Then one of the children came running up to show something, and Mrs. Vang smiled and was herself again.

Every minute one or other of them came up. The little girl caught lady-birds, held them out on her finger-tip and sang to them, till they suddenly split like

a dried bean, unfolded hidden wings and flew away. The baby toddled up with a fat pink rainwater worm, which wriggled in his chubby, grimy fist. "Tastes good!" said he. But he was careful enough not to put it in his mouth. He was only trying it on to see if he could get his mother or Ditte to cry out in horror. "You rogue, will you be off with you, and not tease us!" said Mrs. Vang threateningly. Ditte sat and heard nothing. She had fallen into a reverie. She sat and thought about the poverty of her own childhood—how they had suffered and striven without getting much more forward. It had seemed as if a gnome came in the night and devoured all that they had gathered together during the day. That there should be any one willing to stand forth and speak the truth—they could not do it for themselves. Prison! She shuddered; filled with horror, and yet with an unforgettable admiration.

"Shall we go indoors and try it on?" she heard the lady say.

They went into the room where she and the children slept, and stood in front of the glass. Ditte slipped off her dress, her white arms gleamed in the afternoon sunlight; her cheeks glowed, in her eyes lingered traces of what she had heard. Ditte stood with her arms stretched out on either side while Mrs. Vang tacked something.

"You are for all the world like a fairy princess being dressed for the fairy tale," said Mrs. Vang, and turned her round like a top. "It hangs well, but you have a good figure for showing clothes off. Now run

upstairs and let my husband see you. You must see Ditte. She looks so nice!" she called up the stairs.

Vang had the door open for coolness. Ditte came in, glowing red with joy and bashfulness.

"Aha! How pretty and smart you look!" said he, looking admiringly at her youthful figure. "You must be lifted up!" He took her round the waist with both hands and lifted her up to the ceiling. "Now you must give us chocolate!" he said merrily.

Ditte gazed down into his face, intoxicated with his strength and it all. His glasses shone, and behind them, as behind window panes, deep in his eyes, Ditte herself beheld the loneliness of prison. She slipped down into his arms, pressed her mouth against his with closed eyes, and ran downstairs.

Ditte never knew if it were she who kissed Vang, or he who kissed her; but she knew all the more clearly that she did not wish it undone. She desired nothing in the world changed—everything around seemed steeped in the same warmth and sweetness, the gleaming love of everything. Day was a miracle, an intoxication and a dream, and night was no less. She opened her eyes in the happy certainty of a day filled with gladness, and shut them in the evening with her soul filled to overflowing with wondrous rich expectation. She embraced everything, and everything embraced her in return.

Ditte had had a child, but had never given herself to any man. Her mother-instinct and self-forgetfulness had often enough been in demand, but never her

passion; that had been allowed to slumber. Now the strong man had come and awakened it, sought for her heart, not to give her more burdens to bear, but to wake her to beautiful idle play. Her soul had long been softly humming to itself, now her blood too began to sing. She felt as if there were throngs of beings singing within her—one endless, festal, bridal train, and her heart frolicked about in sympathy. It was like a bewildered bird: she had often to press her hand over her breast before she could fall asleep.

She gave herself to Love's passionate might without scruple or reserve. There was no room for calculation in her feelings—she loved Vang, and he loved her in return—she cared for naught else. She became fonder than ever of the children, and nourished a boundless affection for Mrs. Vang. Sometimes the thought would cross her mind: did Mrs. Vang suspect anything? It would happen that Mrs. Vang would stroke her cheek with a glance as if to say: I know more than you think, when Ditte came home late in the evening, and Vang had fetched her from the last tram. And one day Ditte came in with a big nosegay of field flowers for Vang's room. Then Mrs. Vang laid her hands around his neck and said: "It's all right for you, having two people to make things comfortable for you!"

Mrs. Vang's warm hands were always patting and stroking those she loved, when she talked to them, emphasizing or mollifying her words. The problem crossed Ditte's mind and passed away again: Mrs.

Vang had never been kinder or more affectionate—they were on the most sisterly terms. Ditte was not jealous of Mrs. Vang.

Ditte was only afraid that Vang might change in his relations with his wife; but he remained exactly the same good and quiet husband. He was quiet, almost gentler than before; but a comforting strength radiated from his whole being that impressed them all. It was difficult to understand how he could be so contentious with regard to the world. Here at home there was never a dissonance.

This was a time full of happiness for Ditte, at first careless happiness, but after one morning seeing her mistress's tear-stained eyes—a despairing happiness. Perhaps it was only something in her own inner consciousness that had suggested the notion, her evil conscience which still half slumbered. At any rate it made her stop and think. But she went on just the same, though the happiness was not quite the same. It had lost something of its first freshness by being caught and examined; it left a bitter taste—the bitter-sweet of sin. She could be the most light-hearted creature on earth, and then suddenly clouds and shadows would come, who knows from where, and fill all life with pain and guilty sweetness. By turns she wept or rejoiced; was ashamed or felt pride—pride in being loved by a man who was so big and clever and who had so sweet a wife.

When she did not reflect, she went about in a blissful state, half dreaming, as if seeing the world through half-closed eyes. But, when she was forced to consider

whither she was wending, she shuddered and grew cold with horror. There was always something new which she had not considered before that raised its head. She was nourishing not alone love, but a guilty love! Not because she had freely given herself without the bond of wedlock; but because it was to a married man. Nothing was so shameful for a young girl as to have a connection with a married man, and this was just what she was doing. If they got to know it at home she could never show her face in the parish again; they would forgive her for the baby; but not for that. Lars Peter would not be able to go on living there, and the children, poor things, would have mud enough thrown at them.

Ditte kept these sufferings to herself—it was only her happiness that she shared with others. They grew none the lighter for that; but on the contrary had opportunity to grow and multiply in her loneliness. If the mistress was to discover anything—she who was so good and kind! If only she had been hard and unkind! Then it would not have been nearly so hard! Sometimes Ditte dared hardly face her, and if she had dared, could not; no word sounded so bad as the word “deceit.” She often fancied Mrs. Vang suspected something; she thought she could see it in her face, hear it in the tone of her voice. It was a terrible situation, and yet she was happy, lived her days in intoxication, a mist of warmth and dreams, and longings for the darkness.

“It must be strange, only to be able to make love in the dark!” said Mrs. Vang one day, as they stood

ironing, and she gazed dreamily far away. Ditte was glad that she had the dark. She could not go away—it never as much as occurred to her.

One day they were cooking the dinner. Ditte stood at the sink under the window cleaning fish. Outside it rained and blew: the cold weather had come. Vang was walking up and down in his study: he worked in that way. It was curious how everything transformed itself into work with him; he had never worked as he had this summer. "He had worked for two," as his wife innocently expressed it, with a smile and a faint emphasis on the word "two," that made Ditte pause and think a moment.

"Now the summer is over," said Mrs. Vang from the kitchen table, "a wonderful summer."

Ditte tried to answer; but the words stuck in her throat. Her eyes burnt. She dared not turn round, but bent busily over the sink: she felt certain that now the bolt would fall.

Mrs. Vang came up, put something down on the kitchen table and took up something else, but remained there. Ditte kept her face turned away, and bent over her work, so that Mrs. Vang should not see that she was crying.

She felt an arm laid kindly on her shoulder. "Ditte!" said Mrs. Vang slowly.

"Yes." Ditte dried her wet eyes with her bare arm, but did not look up.

"We cannot go on any longer. No, Ditte not one of us can hold out any longer. I cannot either!"

Ditte turned her wet face up with a helpless expression.

"No, I am not angry, Ditte!" said Mrs. Vang, and she laughed; but it was a laughter without mirth. "What should I be angry at? But here—in this house—we cannot be two. I cannot, and you cannot." She leaned her forehead on Ditte's shoulder.

"I wanted to give you notice—long ago," said Ditte weeping, "but—I am so sorry about it!"

"That is nothing—that!" said Mrs. Vang comfortingly, "what one has cannot be taken away after all. Only it is so strange. You and me! Upstairs, downstairs! So—so—complicated!" She laughed again, this time with her old clear laughter: "And how you have had to hush it all up, you poor girl!" She took Ditte's head, and kissed her. "Now we must show happy faces at dinner," said she. "We will have no scenes, you and I!"

Ditte wanted to rush away at once, just as she stood.

"But your clothes, child!" Mrs. Vang stood still, irresolute. Then she fetched Ditte's coat and hat. "Then go at once if you would rather," she said. "But you must say 'Good-bye' properly to Vang first."

"No, No!" Ditte defended herself with her hands. She was near a collapse.

"You can go to the little High School Home," said Mrs. Vang, and buttoned her coat. "I will pack your things and bring them over in the afternoon. And remember that we are always friends, always!" Mrs. Vang followed her out. "Stay!" she cried and plucked a big, red rose. "This is for you—the last in the gar-

den!" She stood by the high kitchen stairs and waved her white apron.

But Ditte did not look back. She went weeping down towards the town again. She had to run the last bit to the tram, and when she was standing on the back platform and the tram was already in motion, she discovered that she had dropped the rose.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE DOG

THE master came into the dining-room which Ditte was just cleaning, he was still only half-dressed.

“Has Scott done his little business?” he asked excitedly.

“I don’t know,” answered Ditte shortly.

“Hasn’t he asked to be let out into the yard?”

“No!”

The old Master of Hounds tripped into the bedroom again. There was still something of the discipline of old days to be marked in his walk and bearing. “That is really remarkable!” Ditte heard him say, “I have been downstairs twice in the night with him. There must be something wrong with him.” The lady made no reply.

Then he returned, in a green smoking jacket. He took a decanter of port from the sideboard. Ditte fetched a raw egg. “Now Scott shall have his morning pick-me-up,” said he, and dropped the yolk into a glass of port. The dog was dragged from under the dining-room table, where it lay on a fur rug every night. It looked as if it longed to bite them. Ditte had to force his jaws open, while the master poured the tonic down. The animal immediately threw it up again.

"I think he must have gastric catarrh!" he said, "his breath smells. Amelia, he has certainly gastric catarrh!" he cried through the open bedroom door.

"Is it anything but the sour smell of his hair? That always smells with long-haired dogs," said Ditte.

The old sportsman gave her an annihilating glance. Then quite offended he tripped into the bedroom again. "He must be dieted," she heard him say. "You must get hold of a cookery book for dogs, Amelia. But don't leave it to the servant again: the proletariat has no feeling for animals!" Ditte smiled bitterly. No, she had not much left over for Scott anyhow.

In the afternoons the old gentleman went out for a walk with the dog when his gout permitted it. But as it often did not, Ditte had to take him out on the boulevard. The half-hour fixed for the walk seemed endless. Scott was tiresome; he tugged at his lead, and barked, and pulled her from one object to another. "Just follow him," said the Master of Hounds, who went with her the first time to show her how dogs ought to be exercised. "He must do as he likes. You have only to hold tight, so that he doesn't get away from you."

There was nothing too loathsome for Scott to have his nose in and give it his approval, and Ditte felt much embarrassed. She was glad when the days grew shorter and darkness partially hid the dog and herself.

When she came home with it, the old gentleman's first question was "Has he done his business?" If not, he was beside himself. "It is catarrh of the

colon," he cried. "Poor Scott, you are crocking up, eh?"

The mistress smiled ironically.

"There's not much the matter with him," said she. "In the morning he rushed out and bit a man, who was here with a parcel, in the leg. I had to give him five crowns in compensation. Scott tore a hole in his trousers."

"Then he was a suspicious character, you will see! He had something or other on his conscience! Scott doesn't attack honest folk, eh, Scottie man? Five crowns! Why the devil didn't you send for a policeman, and then he might have confessed at once!"

The mistress could never be induced to give a hand, when the dog had to have an injection, castor oil or tonics. She simply said: "Thanks, not for me!" and went her way. So Ditte had to do it, whether she liked it or not. It was not amusing, but it was an easy place.

"If only it would run away, or something would happen to it!" said the lady to Ditte when they were alone. "Can't you let something happen to it? I should not be sorry!"

"Why don't you adopt a little child, Ma'am?" asked Ditte.

"The master can't bear children. And truly, it is a risky thing to take a child. There is bound to be so much that is bad in it, even if one adopts it when quite small. But all the same you can well let Scott run away—as far as I am concerned. I shan't snap your head off!"

It happened sometimes that the dog wrenched him-

self loose from Ditte and disappeared. She had to walk up and down and wait, till, often after hours of waiting, he turned his nose homewards. She dared not go home without the dog.

One evening she was walking down the boulevard calling him, half aloud and very shyly. A young artisan came out of one of the side streets. "Is it a Scotch sheepdog?" he asked.

"Yes!" said Ditte, flurried.

"He is running about in the side street. I will catch him for you, Miss," he answered.

"Take care! He bites strangers!" she called anxiously; but he had disappeared into the side street. She could hear him whistling and calling there. Shortly after he came back with Scott on the lead; he was springing about him and wagging his tail.

"Now see that, Miss! He won't touch me! Nothing ever bites me!" He had his hat in his hand, and laughed merrily. Ditte laughed too—from gratitude and because he was so handsome.

"No, it seems not!" said she.

He walked with her to the door. "Which is your evening out?" he asked and gave her his hand.

"Thursday," answered Ditte, and ran in. "Seven o'clock!" came breathlessly from the top of the stairs.

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Ditte looked forward to Thursday. She was lonely, and felt the need of a little gaiety, and of being taken out and amused by a young man,—only just a little.

She sang when washing up, so that her mistress had to come out and speak to her, and as soon as she had cleared away, she went up and made herself smart. She was rather saving with her clothes; but this evening she put on the best she had,—she wanted to look nice. And suddenly it occurred to her that he might not be there after all. He had possibly found some one else to walk with in the meantime—that would be just like an artisan's apprentice! And would she really know him again: she had so short a time to see him properly?

He stood at the gate down in the street waiting; took his hat off first, and then took her hand. "Thank you for coming!" said he, and then suddenly put his arms round her and kissed her. "My name is George Hansen, painter's apprentice," said he. "And what are you called, my girl?"

Ditte laughed and told him, and thus they became old friends; arm in arm they went off together to a dance hall.

Ditte was not disappointed. He was much nicer looking than she remembered him, slim and confident in bearing. His clothes were not fashionable, but fitted him well. He did not really look like a workman: his features were pale and well-cut, and he was a little sunken on the temples; his fine black hair waved slightly, and his eyes were unusually clever. He danced well; but Ditte would have liked to sit and watch him dancing with other girls nearly as well. He was a real fine gentleman to look at, there was no one who was not pleased to be asked to dance by him; one could see

where he was in the hall directly, for his partner smiled all over her face.

There were other men who danced better than he. When he was really eager in the dance his collar flew up on one side, and you could see the woolen shirt it was fastened to. And his cuffs slipped down every minute from having no linen shirt on. But all the same he was one of the first there!

And he had money in his pockets. Every second minute he took Ditte into the inner room and treated her. There was really no sense in doing it so often, but she was grateful all the same. After all it was the first evening they had been together; she would teach him to be more careful after a bit.

That was easier said than done! George was a capable workman and earned good money; but he worked in fits and starts, and as soon as he had money in his pockets his desire for work was quenched. The way he looked after himself was awful; his whole wardrobe consisted of what he had on. Ditte bought stuff and made him shirts, and tried to get hold of his money when he was flush, and entice him into a clothing store. But he turned the subject, kissed her and made hundreds of witty excuses, so that she could not keep to the serious matter in hand. When he could no longer answer her good reasons, he found an excuse for leaving her. Once she got as far as getting him right inside a shop, and while they stood and looked at some stuffs he disappeared. When they saw each other again a few days later he was penitent. But the money was gone, only he had bought her a bag with a

few crowns in it. "To make peace!" said he, and handed her the gift with the most contrite expression. So there was nothing for it but to take him by the head and kiss him—like the dear helpless child he was!

He must always have a present for her, or else he felt things were not as they should be. If Ditte were not pleased with the gift, but thought he ought to have saved the money, he was unhappy.

He was good—too good if possible. Any one could turn him round their little finger, and borrow money of him when he had any. Any one could get him to go off on a spree. He could not say "No!" That was his weakness. And he had a decadent tendency to spend as long as he had one cent in his pocket. He had no real craving for spirits; but they were included as a matter of course. He never got drunk, it really never told on him. But when he had been "on the bust" a couple of days, he became a ghastly white, and his hair stuck to his temples. Then he was quite unlike himself, and became bad-tempered and contrary.

"Let him go!" said his sister to Ditte one evening when they met each other in the street. "There's nothing to be done with him; he's a sot!"

But Ditte could not think of doing so. She liked him as he was in reality—lively and gifted, careless and good. The bad in him was due to merely accidental qualities, which she could combat. When she was out with him, everything went all right. And then there was no one like him! No one could work as he could; all his fellows agreed that he was the most capable

painter's apprentice in the town. It would come all right for them yet.

Without realizing it or desiring it, Ditte had again found some one to care for. She needed that, and while she went about her work thinking of him, she felt towards him nearly as towards an unutterably dear child. He could give occasion for trouble, perhaps, but what was more reasonable than that she should take his pale face framed in fine curly hair to her breast when he came to her full of remorse after having been on a spree? It happened that she went in vain to their trysts sometimes. Then he had met another! But one fine day he turned up again, so affectionate and gay, and natural, as if he had done nothing amiss. He could not do without her!

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One Sunday they were to go out together. Ditte was to fetch him at his room, and had buttered some sandwiches and bought a couple of eggs to give him something to take with him to work on Monday. He often ate as he best could. She had packed the whole in a neat packet with a little wooden holder, and wore a new hat she was anxious to show off to him. But it was raining, and the hat would not stand rain. But he simply had to see her in it.

Downstairs at the gate she took it off, and put it under her long coat. She held the coat carefully together with her left hand, and ran down the street bare-headed. It poured down, and she had to hurry. The packet swung to and fro in her right hand which

she held up her skirt with. The white underskirt flapped against her ankles, and her hair came down in wisps and stuck to her face. The Chandler at the corner stood at his street door and grinned and called after her. Opposite at the street door on the other side, stood George: he had come to meet her. He turned round with a jerk, and went down the street as if he had not seen her. He had his collar turned up over his ears. Ditte panting caught him up, and slipped her arm through his, but he freed himself with a shake.

"What the devil are you looking like that for?" he asked.

"It was raining so much,—and my new hat! Goodness, how I have hurried to-day!" She looked up at him with glowing eyes, her smile full of expectancy, love and forgiveness; but he avoided her glance. In his staring, shifty eyes she saw that he was not himself.

"You've been on a spree!" she said unhappily, "and I've been so looking forward to to-day!"

"What do I care? Go off home, and don't make us a laughing-stock!"

Ditte understood that the day was spoiled. "Very well. Good-by, then," she said, and gently shook his arm. "Then I'll go home again." She smiled with difficulty, and handed him the packet. "That is for your lunch to-morrow morning."

But he became mad with rage. "Will you give me food in the street as if I were a beggar?" He tore the paper off, and smacked a piece of food in her face. Ditte ran away crying and he ran after her and shied the whole lot at her,—sausages, cheese, potted meat—

they whizzed by on both sides of her. The soft-boiled eggs hit the door-posts, one on each side as she dashed in. She ran straight into the arms of her master and mistress.

Ditte got notice to leave on the first!

And so she was to begin the whole thing over again—fight to get the three free afternoons, run to the advertisement sheets, and from there to the vacant places in East and West—let herself be weighed and measured and cross-examined. And when one has really found something—to begin again in a new home, new rooms with new ways of arranging them, new habits to be instilled into one, new moods to learn to put up with, or—out again!

Ditte was tired of the endless wandering, tired of journeying through home after home, and of running the gauntlet. She wanted to try to be her own mistress, and take casual jobs at people's homes, washing, ironing and cooking and waiting. Then she could think of having her little boy with her; she had come to long for him.

She went out and took a room.

CHAPTER XXXIII

GEORGE AND DITTE

LARS Peter and Sine had moved into town with their entire worldly possessions: they were properly married now and had a little ironmongery business out in Isted Street. The boys went to school there, and Else, who had left school, was reading with the clergyman for her confirmation. As soon as she was confirmed she was to go into the shop. The boys had half-day places while they were still at school; but were to go to sea when they left. Kristian had written from South America; he was on his first voyage, and was well satisfied. He was quite a traveled man now!

It was comfortable enough at their place, but Ditte seldom went there all the same. Karl often called, and she could see that both Lars Peter and Sine were displeased with the way in which she lived. They had got to hear about George somehow or other. And then they were so happy and in love with each other; that got on Ditte's nerves.

She saw nothing of George; he had not shown up since the day he shied the food at her head and went for her. He was ashamed! And Ditte did not mean to seek him out. She was not angry with him and did not ask that he should make himself too cheap and come and plead for pardon either. But he must come voluntarily, so that she knew that he cared for her. In her heart she

did not doubt it; she only needed him to make a little poor amends. She still cared for him; but it was necessary that he should take the first step for the sake of their future relations. He was good and kind, when he had not been drinking, and she would be able to guide him, and keep him off the drink when once they were really living together. And he needed her—God knows what he was doing without her now!

Ditte was lonely. She had been in Nöddebo to fetch her little boy, who was a big fellow of five now; but the adoptive parents would not let him go. And she could not take him away by force, especially as the boy absolutely refused to go to her. She had taken a cheap little attic room in one of the dilapidated buildings in Queen's Cross Street: here she sat and brooded when she was not at work. She seldom went out, and often gave the other women in the house a helping hand, and kept an eye on the little ones when their mothers had to go out to work, or get the good man home.

She was no longer light-hearted and happy; even when she was quite comfortable and amused there was always a place in her heart where light and happiness could not penetrate, and where darkness always brooded. It was exactly the contrary of what had been there before; then there had always been a bright spot, however dark things looked for her.

Ditte could fix the date of this change precisely—it was after her stay at the Vangs'. She often thought of the happy months there, and wished that she had never gone to stay with them. Not on account of her

relations with Vang; if she lived to be a hundred she would never regret that! A man who was both strong and handsome had breathed upon her heart—and she had given herself to him, and bestowed her first love upon him. It was as it should be: it had only left sweetness, and the memory of it still remained as sweet.

But he had set her soul alight; that was the desperate part of the matter. After the life she had lived there—in pleasant work, mental interests, and human fellowship, it was difficult to feel herself at home in the cold darkness that again closed around her. She had caught a glimpse of the Promised Land—it had proved her undoing. She was unable to regard this experience as something undeserved—a bounteous gift; but took it as a natural right. The Vangs themselves had taught her to look on it in this light. And now she felt herself something of an outcast upon earth, with her very human demands upon life. The fixed idea took possession of her mind and was not to be driven out again, that her world—the one she was born into and belonged to—was now an under-world to her. She felt like one who paces up and down and labors in his damp prison cell, and suddenly hears some one calling that he is innocent and has been betrayed for a great inheritance. Insult added to injury! It would have been better not to have known it at all!

Life here in the old tumble-down Adel Street quarter was not exactly enlivening. She had need and misery at her elbow, just opposite was the gate of a refuge for the homeless—a shapeless, hideous mass, cold

and gloomy and squat of form. In the evenings the streets were full of prostitutes and foreign sailors, so she scarcely dared venture out. Round about her in the barrack-like buildings lay starving children: she could not help them, further than a hand-shake on the staircase. That was so much the worse! Now she was in the midst of all the misery Vang had sketched—and read aloud to them, when they sat round the lamp working. Then she had thought of it all as a poet's fancy; but it was stern reality enough here! She had herself been poor; but without knowing this poverty. Here there was nothing to make amends for being poor, and help one over it!

The names of the streets were fine enough—King's, Queen's, Crown Prince's, Noble and all the rest of it! But Ditte did not dream of happiness any more; she had given up expecting wonderful things to happen. She contented herself with dreaming of George. He lived a couple of streets away, in Prince's Street, but was no fairy prince himself, Ditte could see that now as clear as any one. He could make the money fly, and pawn his belongings, so that they were obliged to stop his wages to get the things home again, and the presents he gave were generally bought on credit. No, his word was not to be taken for more than it was worth, and all was not gold that he made out to be golden. Yet existence took on another color in his company.

One day she learned that he was ill. She went to him directly.

He utterly collapsed at the sight of her; threw him-

self half out of bed and sobbed. Ditte took his head in her lap, and sat holding it. He had grown thin and angular; his hair clammy and tangled. And his bed was dirty and had not been made for a long time. He had no night shirt on,—only a miserable old thin woolen vest—he lay in wretched discomfort. His back was emaciated with sickness and grief. She coaxed him back into bed.

“Now you must keep well under the bed clothes, while I fetch fuel and make a fire,” said she. He lay watching her as she lit the stove and cleaned the room. His brown eyes followed every one of her movements, like a child’s eyes they were—tender and full of trustfulness. She smiled at him and made a few remarks—then he smiled faintly again; but made no answer. And soon she discovered that he had fallen asleep: big tears still stood on his eyelashes.

She tip-toed to the bed and stood watching him, her soul full of mingled gladness and grief. The sunken, deathly white head rested quietly—almost too quietly,—the face was turned upwards. In spite of the stubbly beard, and the sickly sweat, it was still handsome, though pinched. The traces of a smile lay over it—the smile had been hers, but underneath it lay another expression, which was not a reflection of anything from without, but was there always. It must come from within, deeper than perhaps he knew himself. What was it which gnawed at, and tormented his lightsome, good-natured heart from within, and drove him out and on to his ruin? Ditte had not asked what ailed him: there was no need. There were the traces of a

terrible orgy still upon him, his right hand bore signs of having been badly bruised, and one eye was still surrounded by a green and yellow halo. This was gradually disappearing, so it must have taken place about a month ago! Yet he was still lying here! Had he received some internal injury? Was it Death itself that he was fighting? Ditte's blood grew cold. She stole quietly out, and asked a neighbor to listen and hear if all went well with him. Then she went home and packed her things and had them taken there.

A time of troubled happiness followed. Ditte arranging her work so that she could run home several times a day and see to George, warm a little food for him, and cheer him up a bit. She interested herself in any political news to tell him, and bought halfpenny papers for him. He loved reading, and had many fat books—novels he had borrowed from some library or other, and never managed to take back again. Ditte did not like this carelessness; she was very exact about always taking things back, if she had been obliged to borrow at all. But it was too late, and the books came in useful anyhow. Every time he had read them through to the end, he began again at the beginning—just as interested the next time—like a child!

Thus he passed the time, and was grateful for every kindness shown him. He liked lying there, and expressed no wish to get up or go out. Ditte was not elated at this; but took it as a proof of how ill he was; when one cherished no illusions, one was not disappointed. All the same a quiet hope lived within her that all would yet be well.

She got up at three or four o'clock in the morning and went round with papers for some hours, to have time to be with him later in the day, and besides this she took what she could get in the way of chance jobs. It was pretty difficult to scrape together enough to live on; but George was delighted with everything as it came. Ditte was quite struck to see how modest his wants were at bottom, even the least little triviality would always put him in a good temper.

"That is splendid," he said about everything. "And only wait till I am up again!" he would add cheerfully. "Then things will go well. Then we shall both of us be earning!"

In the evenings and on Sundays Ditte had more time. Then she sat on the edge of his bed and they learned to know each other better. She told him about her little boy; she could not bear to have secrets from him now that they lived together as man and wife. "I shall get him back for you," he said confidently. "If the foster parents refuse to give him up, I shall go to the police."

Ditte had not much faith in that being of any use. "The police—they are not there to help us!" she said.

"Yes, when poor folks are against poor folks, then the police can be of use!" declared George.

His strength came slowly back, and he began to be able to digest solid food, but Ditte had to be careful. He threw it all up at the least provocation. "I have always been like that, as long as I can remember!" he said, and smiled at her fright. "I am squeamish, you see!"

One day when she came home, he had got up: he was sitting at the window looking at the new-fallen snow. He looked pale and weak, still it was a step in advance. "Do you know what I was sitting and thinking of?" he asked. "I was thinking of life. There is no real sense in it—for an outsider to watch. Good and evil now—as regards the one or the other! One can be sorry that one injures or grieves another person; but one can't avoid doing it. Perhaps one suffers when something *has* to be—one's self most of all; but one has to bear the blame for it! What sense is there in that? or in the whole thing?"

Ditte laughed. "You are sitting up properly and thinking!" she said, glad and proud to find how clever he was. "But here is something different for you to see. A roast chicken! I got it from my old employers—the Master of Hounds. They are so good: the old gentleman says that no one has ever looked after Scott as I did."

George cast a fleeting glance at the chicken. "I don't know how it is, but food has never interested me," said he thoughtfully. "Not in solid form!" he added with a flash of dry humor.

"You have never cared over much for spirits either," answered Ditte eagerly, "it was only something that went with all the rest. Do you know what I think it was? Excitement! You longed for adventures!"

Now, however, he expressed no desire for change; he liked the room best. In one way Ditte was glad that he recovered so slowly. She knew where he was.

But one day she came home to find him vanished—

leaving no explanations. She stood forlornly gazing at the deserted room. She held her arm pressed against her breast. The whole night she sat up and kept a light burning, and the next day she did not go out to work—she could not. She sat pale and haggard at the window, and stared down into the street, hoping to see him turn up. If he should be lying helpless somewhere or other! In any case he would have over-drawn his scanty stock of strength, and her whole work would be wasted.

And towards evening he suddenly appeared at the door holding her little Jens by the hand. "Just look what I have for you—a fine boy, and delivered in a perfectly finished condition. I bought him at the big store," he said, and laughed with delight. "Look a little pleased, can't you, my girl?" Ditte hardly could. The tension and fear were over; but she could scarcely be herself.

The boy was not at all pleased to see her—he was rather frightened. On the other hand he clung to George—naturally—every one went mad over him. It was lucky, however, especially as he was the one who would have the most to do with him. George had been too venturesome, and had to keep his bed for some days. So the boy sat in bed with him most of the time, and George read one of the novels aloud to him. It was a French love drama, about a married man and his mistress, and the terror that possessed them lest their intimacy should have consequences.

"Do you read that kind of thing to the boy?" asked Ditte, "he doesn't understand a word of it."

"Yes—Jens understands it himself!" said the boy quite offended; "afraid they should have a baby!"

"There! Hear him yourself!" George burst out triumphantly, "He is a clever little chap: he has a good head-piece." They were as like as two peas: and both perfect children. It was a pleasure to Ditte to listen to them.

Thus a couple of weeks went by, and then a country policeman came and fetched the boy home again.

"Of course I could go and pinch him once more," said George, "but the father stands behind him, and the Old One himself couldn't get the better of the police when they show that side. You had better adopt a child yourself!"

"It's not at all the same thing," answered Ditte bitterly.

"One loves children because they are children, and not because one has been so unlucky that one's own number has come up with a baby. Adopt one, and then you get money with it into the bargain."

That would come in very useful! George had begun to go out and get a little casual work, but it did not amount to much in the week. And there were no good jobs going,—the winter was a dead time for painters. "But then we should have to do the inspectors," said Ditte. "We shouldn't get leave to have adopted children here!"

"Inspectors!" George laughed. "Have you ever heard of inspectors bothering about that? We naturally cannot give the little one anything we haven't got ourselves," he said seriously, "but it would be

devilishly amusing to have a chick in the nest. They twitter so prettily."

So they took an adopted child, and pushed on through the dark and cold season. It was poor fare anyhow, but they were happy together, and the end of the winter was in sight. George got on well, with one small exception there was never anything the matter with him. He went out one day: Ditte discovered that her best tablecloth had disappeared. But he came home early and went to bed. When he had fallen asleep, she went through his pockets, and found the pawn ticket, and put it away to redeem the cloth when she had the money. She said nothing about it: it was so little to make a fuss over. A day or two afterwards he came of his own accord, and confessed. "I was out on a spree!" he said, "it shan't happen again!"

Ditte was ready to believe him, the little one took up most of his attention: he had no desire to go out in the evening. "As far as I'm concerned, you may take another," he said, while sitting and playing with the child.

"It won't be necessary," said Ditte calmly, "for by the summer we shall have one of our own."

"Then we will have a proper flat, in a good quarter," he answered. "This is a perfect hole. And as soon as I get work I want you to stay home. It's pretty rotten when the wife has to go out and work!"

Ditte had nothing to say against this, there was enough to do at home. There was a possibility of his being taken on to decorate a big building that was

being converted into a bank; the foreman on the job had promised to see about getting him in. Ditte was thankful at the prospect of better days; she was tired and overstrained from having to rush from place to place in her work.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE RECKONING

IT was winter in the streets, and where the men were working, and right inside the homes too; Ditte could scarcely keep the window panes from freezing over. When she wanted to see down into the street, she had to breathe on them to thaw a hole. She had put the baby to bed to keep him warm; for the fuel had come to an end two days too soon—the cold was so biting. What good was it that the sun was mounting higher in the sky all the time if it could not be seen. Snowflakes danced over the roofs—the air was thick with them, they lay piled high in the streets. All the windows in the quarter were frozen over—others were as badly off as she—their fuel was finished. And there were little breathing holes on their panes too; they peeped out as she did. It was pay day for them too. Thank God the week had only seven days!

In their home it was not only pay day, but also the day for paying the big bill. For a whole month they had existed on board wages; to-day the balance was to be made up and the profit divided. She knew it would be a decent one, for George had worked hard. On the table lay a long list of things they absolutely *had* to have, and those they would like to have as well. They had made it out together the evening before, and it had grown long indeed. All the time George kept

thinking of something absolutely necessary—a set of furs for Ditte, toys for the baby—always something else for them; he never thought of himself. To-day she had gone through the list once more, and crossed out most of the last part: there was quite enough to be done with the money, and if there were a few cents over, it would be all the better.

She stood there huddled in her shawl and kept a sharp eye on the street. Directly she saw him coming she would run down and meet him at the street door. He should see how fond she was of him. She heard a glad childish voice from the next door call: “Now I can see Father!” Then they lit up; she could see the thin shafts of light which fell into her room through the chinks in the wall. One by one the dwellings around her were all lit up. That meant that the husband had come home, and they sat round the table and portioned out the week’s wage—for firing, food and lottery ticket. Ditte suddenly felt sick at heart; she had forgotten to renew George’s lottery ticket!

The street lay in darkness; but she remained standing there. When she really came to herself, it was too late to look for George at the place where he worked. All the same she put a shawl over her head, and went down to the street. For two hours she went backwards and forwards from one end of the short street to the other, keeping an eye on every living thing. She dared not turn the corner; he might be coming from the other side. Figures loomed up out of the falling snow, and disappeared into it again. They had a coating of snow all down one side from top to toe. Any one of

them might be him; he must be on the way now! Every time she gave it up and thought of going in, a new snow-clad figure came within the circle of light from a street lamp, and she ran towards it. "Is it George?" asked a half-grown hussy who came over from Helsingör Street, one of the night-hawks of the quarter. "You needn't wait for him! I met him in there at New Harbour—he's up to no good!" So she went in and got into bed.

Next day she begged a basket of coke on credit from the dealer and lit a fire. If he did come home, she must be able to keep him—now that he was on the loose. She made the place look comfortable and put on a pretty dress: it was important to look nice when he came; a sour face might drive him from the door again. She sat and waited into the afternoon, then she gave the child to a neighbor, while she ran down to Castle Street where his sister lived, perhaps the brother-in-law would know something, they were fellow-workmen. When she came back, the neighbor told her that he had been home—with a comrade. They had eaten everything Ditte had in the larder.

So she rushed out again, at haphazard! She went down to the New Harbour—absurd! It was yesterday he had been there! She searched through dance halls and workmen's clubs, he might be in one place as well as another. The cold was frightful: it seemed absolutely to freeze the marrow of one's bones, if one stood still. If he should be lying out in it now! Perhaps he was lying behind some shed or paling, freezing to death! There were so many possibilities, so over-

whelmingly many—it was hopeless to go on searching! And perhaps he was sitting at home now, waiting for her and wondering what had become of her. So she rushed homeward in mad haste!

Then out once more! There were all these public houses and bars to search through—places she knew he frequented, and all those others where it was possible that he had dropped in. And his comrades, fellow-workmen—and the suspicious looking individuals she knew he kept company with when he was in this state! And his old sweethearts! Ditte went to them too; she wept as she went from place to place in the old buildings, knocking at door after door; but it never occurred to her to spare herself. He *must* be somewhere or other, and it was all the same to her where, if only she could find him. Despair and hope urged her on; when she was near collapse, one or the other spurred her on again. He had been to many of the places where she called—she was on his track—only too far behind! All the inhabitants of the quarter knew of her search; when she turned homewards, they came up to her and gave her information which drove her out again.

On the morning of the third day she came staggering through Helsingör Street, completely exhausted and ready to drop. She was still searching, and was on her way home to see if he had come back; but it was purely mechanical; she had lost the power of feeling, everything had come to a dead stop within her. In one of the bad houses, a woman opened the window and called out to her. She wore a flowered dressing

gown, and her abundant breasts hung over the window-sill.

“Hey, you there! They have just fished a fellow up an hour ago in New Harbour—like enough he stumbled into the water in the dark. You should go and see if it is him! They towed him into the Morgue.” Then the window was slammed to.

Ditte went no further: she returned quietly home. Now she had found him. She undressed and crept into bed, dazed and half dead. And as she lay gazing vacantly at the ceiling, numbed and utterly unable to feel or think, there was a sudden movement within her. It was a soft mysterious movement which slowly stroked the inner skin of her stomach, and glided back again, like a finger writing, and it was followed by two dull, warning thuds. Ditte lifted her head from the pillow and stared bewildered around her; then she grasped the meaning of the secret signal from the hidden being. It was as if a light had been lit, deep, deep down in the darkness; it streamed suddenly in on her with overwhelming might.

She burst into violent weeping.

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