

Children's Talk

At the merchant's a big children's party was being held, with well-to-do people's children and illustrious people's children; the merchant cut a fine figure, was a man of learning; he had taken his final school exams, closely watched over by his good-natured father, who had initially only been a cattle dealer, although honest and enterprising! that had been a profitable business, and the merchant had made that money grow; he had a clever mind and a good heart too, but people spoke less about that than all his money.

Illustrious people were frequent visitors at his home, both blue-blooded, as they are referred to, and noble-minded, as they are referred to, as well as those who were both and those who were neither. There was now this children's party with children's talk, and children don't mince words. There was this lovely little girl, but so awfully arrogant, she had been kissed and spoilt by the servants, not the parents, they were much too sensible for that; her father was a Groom of the Chamber and that's terribly important, she knew that.

'I'm a Child of the Chamber!' she said. She could just as well have been a child of the cellar, one has no say in such matters oneself; and then she told the other children that she was '*born to it!*' and said that if one wasn't born to it one could never become it; it didn't help to read, to be ever so diligent if one wasn't born to it, for one could never become it.

'And those whose name ends in *-sen*,' she said, 'nothing can ever become of them in the world! you must hold one's hands on your hips and keep them at a distance, these "*-sen! -sen!*"' And she held her lovely, small arms akimbo with the elbows sticking out, to show how this could be done; and her small arms were so lovely. She was charming.

But the merchant's little daughter got so angry; her father's name was *Madsen* and she knew that this name ended in "*-sen!*" and so she said as proudly as she could:

'But my father can buy a hundred thalers' worth of sweets and scatter them for children to scramble after! can your father do that?'

'Yes, but my father,' a writer's little daughter said, 'can put both your father and your father and any 'father' in the newspaper! Everyone's afraid of him, mother says, for my father runs the newspaper!'

And the little girl held her head up high when she said this, as if she was a real princess who must always hold her head up high.

But outside there stood a poor boy looking in through the half-open door. He wasn't even able to join those inside, he was that poor; he had turned the spit for the cook and now been allowed to get a glimpse behind the door of the party-dressed children amusing themselves – and that meant a great deal for him.

'If only I was one of them!' he thought, and then he heard what was being said – that was really something to make him feel downhearted. His parents back home didn't have a penny to put by, and they couldn't afford to take a newspaper, let alone write it, and worst of all his father's name, which was also his name, definitely ended with "*-sen*", nothing in the world could ever become of him. It was all so pitiful! though he *had* been born, he felt, truly born, nothing else was possible.

Well, that was that evening.

Many years now passed and during which time children grow into adults.

An imposing house stood in the town, it was full of splendid things, everybody wanted to see it, even people from outside the town came to see it, who, I wonder, of the children we have told of could possibly own such a house? Well, that's easy to work out! no, it's not so easy, actually. The house belonged to the poor boy; something did become of him, even though his name ended in "*-sen*" – – *Thorvaldsen*.

And the three other children – the children of *blood*, *money* and *arrogance*? well, none of them threw anything in each other's teeth, they were all equal – they turned into pleasant, nice people, they were basically good; what they had thought and said back then was just – *children's talk*.