



**Jeppe of the Hill**  
Or, The Transformed Peasant

A five-act comedy by  
Ludvig Holberg

Acting Edition adapted by  
Jerry Argetsinger



Salt Lake City

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**JEPPE OF THE HILL**

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## **Characters in the Comedy (13 M 2W)**

*Jeppe of the Hill*, a Peasant

*Nille*, his Wife

*Jacob Shoemaker*, an Innkeeper

*Baron Nilus*

*Secretary* to the Baron

*Valet* to the Baron

*Erik*, a lackey

*Arv*, a lackey

*Two Doctors*

*Overseer's Wife*

*Three Armed Men*

*Magnus*, a Traveler

**Setting** – On and around Jeppe's peasant farm outside the village of Bierget on Zealand, the largest island of Denmark; also inside his Baron's Manor House, 1723

**Jeppe of the Hill** received its American premiere at Nebraska Wesleyan University, Lincoln, under the direction of Kenneth Robbins, April 22, 1992.

## **Pronunciation Guide**

Erich	ěr-ĭk
Hans	Hāns (never the German "Hahnz")
Jacob	Yā-kōb
Jeppe	Jěp-pǎ
Marthe	Mǎr-tǎ
Nille	Nĭl-lǎ
Peder	Pē-thěr
rix-dollar	rēks-dollar

**Ludvig Holberg** (1684-1754) Baron of Holberg, was a writer, essayist, philosopher, historian and playwright born in Bergen, Norway, during the time of the Dano-Norwegian double monarchy, who spent most of his adult life in Denmark.

**Gerald Argetsinger**, Ph.D. (Bowling Green State University), is an Associate Professor, Department of Cultural and Creative Studies, National Technical Institute for the Deaf, a college of the Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, NY. Argetsinger has had a distinguished career in theater and film as a scholar, playwright, director and producer. He has published extensively on Ludvig Holberg, "The Father of Danish Literature and Theatre" and has translated several of his comedies. Over a dozen of his scripts have been produced and published, including *Trail of the Lonesome Pine*, the Virginia State Outdoor Drama. He is a nationally recognized director of outdoor drama, including *The Hill Cumorah Pageant* (Palmyra, NY), *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (Big Stone Gap, VA), *Utah!* (Tuacahn, St. George, UT), *Equality of Rights: the First Women's Rights Convention* (Seneca Falls, NY) and two historic dramas, *Sword of Peace* and *Pathway to Freedom* (Snow Camp, NC). Off Broadway and regional directing credits include Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (Quintero Theatre, Theatre Row, NYC), Shaffer's *Equus*, van Zandt's *Silent Laughter*, Wright's *Mistakes Were Made*, and Carol Lynn Pearson's *Facing East* with an African American cast. He is married to award winning costume designer Gail (Bishop) Argetsinger and they have raised two sons.

**JEPPE OF THE HILL, or The Transformed Peasant** A comedy in five acts by **Ludvig Holberg**. Adapted and Translated by **Jerry Argetsinger** and **Sven Rossel**. 13 Men 2 Women. 1 Exterior / 2 Interiors. About 90 minutes. (*For production by Professional, Amateur and Educational theatres.*) **Jeppe of the Hill** is Holberg's most successful comedy, having remained active in the repertoires of virtually all national Scandinavian and several Northern European theatres since 1722. It is also the most likely to be produced around the world. The character Jeppe Berg is considered the first fully developed Danish literary character and is considered one of the great comic character roles of all time. The supporting roles also offer great opportunity for comic genius. Jeppe is a Zealand peasant, a drunk, a ne'er-do-well who is beaten by his wife, oppressed by his Baron and cuckolded by the deacon. On his way to the village to buy soap for his wife, he finds his way into Jacob's pub where he squanders all of his money on drink and falls into a ditch in a drunken stupor. The Baron passes him by and decides to play a joke. They will carry him into the manor house, dress him in silks, and when he awakens convince him that his peasant life was a terrible dream and that he is the rightful Lord of the Manor. When he is finally convinced, he tries unsuccessfully to act the part, eating like a slob, berating his servants, and bedding the overseer's wife. Finally drunk on Canary wine, he is cast out onto a dung heap where his wife finds him and beats him all the way home as he tries to convince her he was in paradise. He is next confronted by a local magistrate who tries and finds him guilty of breaking into the manor house. Sentenced to death, he again sinks into a drunken coma and awakes hanging on a gallows. As his wife beats him, the Baron appears and has him cut down from the gallows, explaining the prank that has been played on him and what they should have learned. The play ends with Jeppe and Nille returning home while the Baron moralizes about the dangers inherent in practical jokes. **ORDER #3108**

## Act I

*(A spring morning outside Jeppe's half-timber, thatched farmhouse.)*

**NILLE:** *(Enters from the house. NILLE is a hard-working, determined woman. She addresses the audience.)* I don't think there's a lazier scoundrel in the whole county than my husband! I can hardly wake him up when I pull him out of bed by his hair. That man knows today is market day, and still he sleeps! Just the other day, Parson Poul said to me, "Nille, you are too hard on your husband. After all, he is and should be master of the house." But I answered, "No, my good Mr. Poul, if I let my husband rule this house for just one year, neither the baron would get his rent nor the parson his offerings, for in that time he'd drink up everything in the village! Should I let a man be master when he's ready to sell his furniture, wife, children and even himself for brandy?" At that Parson Poul became very quiet and wiped his hand across his mouth. The baron's overseer agrees with me and says, "My dear woman, ignore what the parson says. It does say in the marriage ritual that you should honor and obey your husband; but on the other hand, it's written in your lease that you must keep up your farm and pay your rent." I just pulled Jeppe out of bed and went out to the barn to check on things; when I got back he was sitting on the chair, sound asleep, with his pants around his ankles. Well, I grabbed my switch down from the hook and whipped that man until he was wide awake again. The only thing he's afraid of is Master Erich. That's what I call my switch.

*(To JEPPE.)*

Hey, Jeppe! Is your rear covered yet? Do you want to talk to Master Erich again? Hey, Jeppe, get out here!

**JEPPE:** *(Stumbles out of the house trying to pull on his light coat.)* I've got to have time to dress, Nille. I can't very well walk to town like a pig without pants and coat.

**NILLE:** Scoundrel! You could have put on ten pair of pants since I woke you up this morning.

**JEPPE:** Have you put away Master Erich, Nille?

**NILLE:** Yes I have, but I know right where to find him if you're not quick enough. Come here!

*(Aside.)*

See how he cringes.

*(To JEPPE.)*

Come here! You're going to town to buy two pounds of soft soap. Here's the money for it. But listen, if you're not back here in four hours, Master Erich will dance a polka on your back.

**JEPPE:** How can I walk eighteen miles in four hours, Nille?

**NILLE:** Who says you have to walk, cuckold? Run! I've pronounced the sentence once and for all, now do what you want.

*(NILLE exits into the house. As JEPPE moves down to address the audience, his house moves off-stage and he is on the road to the village.)*

**JEPPE:** *(Aside.)* Now that sow's going in to stuff herself with breakfast, while I, poor wretch, have to walk eighteen miles without anything to eat or drink. Can any man have such a damnable wife as mine? I think she's actually the devil's cousin. It's true that people in the county are quick to say Jeppe drinks, but they never ask why Jeppe drinks. I never got as many thrashings in my ten years in the militia as I get in one day from that awful woman. She beats me, the overseer drives me to work like a beast, and the deacon has his way with her! So can't I drink? Can't I use the means nature gives us to drive away our sorrows? If I was a

**Jeppie of the Hill** by Jerry Argetsinger

fool I wouldn't take such things so much to heart and I wouldn't drink. But there's one sure thing, I am a bright man; therefore I feel this more than others. And so I have to drink. My good friend, Moons Christoffersen, often says to me, "The devil take your fat belly, Jeppie. You must hit back. Then the old hag will behave." But I can't hit back for three reasons: First, I don't have the nerve. Second, that damned Master Erich hanging behind the bed, which my back can't even think about without crying. Third, because I am, and I don't mean to boast, a sweet-tempered soul and a Christian who never seeks revenge, not even against the deacon, who is always sneaking off with her. I even pay that man his offerings and he never invites me in for a glass of beer. He even had the nerve to mock me when I was telling how a wild bull that feared no man was once frightened by me. He cracked, "Don't you get it Jeppie? The bull saw that your horns were bigger than his!" Good people, such words can pierce an honorable man who never once wished revenge on his cheating wife. On the contrary, last year when she was lying sick with jaundice I wished that she might live. After all, hell is already so full of evil women that Lucifer might send her back and then she'd be even worse than before! But I would be happy if the deacon died. He only insults me and I overheard Nille complain that he can't even dip a decent candle. Once I decided to settle things with the deacon when Nille overheard him call me a cuckold. I said, "The devil be your cuckold." And what happened? Master Erich jumped off the wall to settle things. My wife thrashed me until I begged the deacon for forgiveness and had to thank him for his service. So go ahead! You have no Master Erich hiding behind your beds. If I had one wish in the world, I'd pray that my wife had no arms. She can use her mouth as much as she likes, but with no arms she couldn't grab either Master Erich or the deacon! But I'm almost to Jacob Shoemaker's inn. He'll surely give me a skilling's worth of brandy on credit. I have to have something to hold me over.

*(He calls off-stage to JACOB.)*

Hey, Jacob Shoemaker! Are you up? Open up, Jacob!

*(JACOB enters wearing only his shirt.)*

**JACOB:** Who the hell wants in so early?

**JEPPE:** Good morning, Jacob.

**JACOB:** Thanks, Jeppie. You're up and about very early today.

**JEPPE:** Let me have a skilling worth of brandy, Jacob.

**JACOB:** Sure thing. First give me the skilling.

**JEPPE:** You'll get it tomorrow when I come back.

**JACOB:** Jacob Shoemaker doesn't serve on credit. I'm sure you have a skilling or two.

**JEPPE:** Like hell I do, Jacob, excepting for the money my wife gave me to buy something in town.

**JACOB:** I'm sure you can shave a couple pennies off the things you buy. What is your business?

**JEPPE:** I'm getting two pounds of soft soap.

**JACOB:** Couldn't you just say that you paid a penny or two more per pound than you really pay?

**JEPPE:** I'm so afraid that my wife would find out, then I'd be in for it.

**JACOB:** Nonsense! How's she going to find out? Can't you swear that you spent all the money? You're as dumb as an ass.

**JEPPE:** Well, Jacob, I guess I could do that.

**JACOB:** Give me a skilling.

**Jeppie of the Hill** by Jerry Argetsinger

**JEPPE:** Here. But you must give me a penny change.

**JACOB:** (*Brings out a glass of brandy and toasts JEPPE by taking a drink from it. Then he hands the glass to him.*) Cheers, Jeppie!

**JEPPE:** You drank that like a thief.

**JACOB:** You know it's the custom for the innkeeper to drink to his guests.

**JEPPE:** I know it's the custom, but damn the one who started it. Here's to you, Jacob.

**JACOB:** Thanks, Jeppie. You'll have to drink up that other penny. After all you can't take it back home. But I could owe you a glass of brandy when you come back. Believe me, I don't have a single penny change.

**JEPPE:** The hell you say. If it must be consumed, then it must be at once, so I can feel I've got something in my belly. But if you drink any of it, I'll pay you nothing.

**JACOB:** (*Fills up his brandy glass.*) Cheers, Jeppie.

**JEPPE:** God protect our friends and disgrace our enemies.  
(*He drinks.*)

Ah! That feels good in the belly.

**JACOB:** Good luck on your way, Jeppie.

**JEPPE:** Thanks, Jacob Shoemaker.

(*JACOB exits and JEPPE is back on the road.*)

**JEPPE:** (*Alone and in a merry mood, he begins to sing.*)

A white hen and a speckled hen

Turned against a rooster . . .

I wish I had the nerve to drink up another skilling. Oh! I wish I had the nerve to drink up another skilling! I think I'll do it. No, I'll get in trouble. If I could only get the inn out of my sight I wouldn't feel the need; but it's like somebody's holding me back. I have to go in again. But what are you doing, Jeppie? I see Nille, as though she's blocking the way with Master Erich in hand. I'll have to turn back. Oh! I wish I had the nerve to drink up another skilling! My belly says, "Do it." My back says, "Don't do it!" Which one should I cross? Isn't my belly bigger than my back? I think so. Should I knock? Hey, Jacob Shoemaker, get out here! But that damned woman blocks my way again. If she'd only slap me so it didn't hurt, I'd say to hell with it. But she hits like . . . Oh, God, strengthen this poor man. What shall I do? Control your nature, Jeppie! It's disgraceful that you'd get in trouble for a measly glass of brandy. No! It won't happen this time. I must go on. Oh, I wish I had the nerve to drink up another skilling. It's my bad luck that I got that first taste of it; now I can't leave. Move legs! The devil will tear you to pieces if you don't go. No! The bastards won't budge at all. They want to go to the inn again. My limbs are at war with each other; my belly and legs want the inn and my back wants the market. Will you walk, you dogs! You beasts! You rogues! No, damn them, they will go back to the inn. I have more trouble getting my legs to walk away from the inn than I have getting my piebald horse out of the stable. Oh! I wish I had the nerve to drink up one more single skilling. Who knows, maybe Jacob Shoemaker will advance me a penny or two if I beg for it. Hey, Jacob! A glass of brandy for a full skilling!

**JACOB:** (*Appears carrying a full large glass of brandy already poured.*) Jeppie! Back so soon? I didn't think you got enough. What good is two pennies worth of brandy? It barely wets your throat.

**JEPPE:** That's true, Jacob.

**Jeppe of the Hill** by Jerry Argetsinger

*(He drinks.)*

Bring me another brandy for a full skilling while I finish this one.

*(Aside.)*

After I drink it he'll have to give me credit whether he wants to or not.

**JACOB:** Here's two pennies worth of brandy, Jeppe. But the money first.

**JEPPE:** You can certainly give me credit while I drink.

**JACOB:** If you won't pay in advance, Jeppe, you won't get a drop. I've sworn off giving credit to anyone; not even to the overseer himself.

**JEPPE:** *(Crying.)* Can't you just give me a little credit? I'm an honest man.

**JACOB:** No credit.

**JEPPE:** Here's your money, then, skinflint! Now it's done. Drink up, Jeppe.

*(He continues drinking.)*

Ah, that feels good.

**JACOB:** Yeah. It can bake a snake's insides.

**JEPPE:** The very best thing with brandy is, it gives you such courage afterwards. I was so changed by that last glass, I don't think any more about either my wife or Master Erich. Have you heard this song, Jacob?

LITTLE KIRSTEN AND SIR PEDER SAT AT A TABLE, PETEHEIA!

THEY SANG ALL THE DIRTY WORDS THEY WERE ABLE, POLEMEIA!

IN THE SUMMER SINGS THE LUSTY FINCH, PETEHEIA!

THE DEVIL TAKE NILLE, THE UGLY WENCH, POLEMEIA!

I wrote that song myself.

**JACOB:** The hell you say.

**JEPPE:** Jeppe isn't as dumb as you think. I've also done a song about shoemakers . . .

**JACOB:** I think you're ready for another brandy.

**JEPPE:** Yeah, that's true. Give me another brandy for a skilling.

**JACOB:** Now I can see you're a generous man—who doesn't grudge my house a penny.

**JEPPE:** That's right, Jacob. Just bring me four penny's worth.

**JACOB:** Right away!

**JEPPE:** *(Singing again.)*

THE EARTH DRINKS WATER,

THE SEA DRINKS SUN,

THE SUN DRINKS SEA,

THE WHOLE WORLD DRINKS

AS YOU CAN SEE,

SO WHY NOT ME?

**JACOB:** *(Brings out two large brandy glasses.)* To your health, Jeppe!

**JEPPE:** *(Takes them, then gives one back to Jacob.)* *Mir zu!* [German: Drink with me!]

**JACOB:** *(Takes a drink, then returns the glass.)* Your health for the half of it is good enough for me.

**JEPPE:** *(Attempting to speak Low German.)* *Ich tank* you, Jacob! *Drik dat de* devil takes *du*.

*(Slurring his speech.)*

**Jeppie of the Hill** by Jerry Argetsinger

Y'er *vilkommen* to it.

**JACOB:** I hear you speak German, Jeppe.

**JEPPE:** True, it goes way back; but I don't usually speak it unless I'm drunk.

**JACOB:** Then you must speak it at least once a day.

**JEPPE:** I served in the militia for ten years. Shouldn't I understand a soldier's language?

**JACOB:** Jeppe, I know. We served in the campaign together for two years.

**JEPPE:** That's true. Now I remember. You were hanged once for running off to Wismar.

**JACOB:** I was going to be hanged, but I was pardoned. I escaped by the skin of my teeth.

**JEPPE:** It's a shame you weren't hanged, Jacob. But weren't you in on that auction on the moors, you know what I mean?

**JACOB:** What action wasn't I in?

**JEPPE:** I'll never forget the first barge the Swedes fired. I think 3,000 men fell at the same time. It was hell.

**JACOB:** Yeah, yeah. Death is hard to face; you get so god-fearing when you're up against the enemy.

**JEPPE:** That's true, but I don't know why. All night before the auction I laid and read David's Box of Salt. [He means "David's psalter."]

**JACOB:** It surprises me that you, who've been a soldier, can let your wife bully you.

**JEPPE:** Me! I only wish I had her here, then you'd see how I'd clobber her! Another glass, Jacob! I still have two skillings and when they're drunk up, I'll drink on credit. Give me a tankard of beer, too.

**JACOB:** Your health, Jeppe!

**JEPPE:** Hey! He—y! Here's to you and here's to me and here's to all good friends, hey-y-y-y.

**JACOB:** Won't you drink to the overseer?

**JEPPE:** Sure thing! Fetch me for another penny. The overseer's an all right man. When we slip him a little on the side, he swears a solemn oath to the baron that we can't pay our rent. Oh hell, I'm out of money. You'll advance me a large one or two on credit?

**JACOB:** No, Jeppe. You can't take drinking anymore now. I'm not the kind of man who'll let his guests overdo it and drink more than they can handle. I'd rather lose the business, for it would be a sin . . .

**JEPPE:** Just another two pennies worth.

**JACOB:** No, Jeppe. I won't pour anymore. Remember, you've got a long way to walk.

**JEPPE:** You ass. Beast! Sonuvabitch! Bastard! Ai-i-i—i!

**JACOB:** (*Clearing the glasses and flasks.*) Goodbye, Jeppe! Good luck on your trip!

(*JACOB exits.*)

**JEPPE:** (*Alone on the road.*) Whoa, Jeppe! You're as drunk as a beast! My legs won't hold me. Will you stand or not, you rascals? Hey! What time is it? Hey, Jacob Sonuvabitch! Just one more big one!

(*He almost falls.*)

Will you stand, you dogs? The devil take me if you'll stand. Just freshen me up, Jacob! Listen comrade, where is the road to town?

(*He looks at the trees.*)

Stand still, I tell you! See, the beast is drunk. You drank like a fish, Jeppe.

(*He falls down.*)

Was this from a brandy for two pennies?

**Jeppe of the Hill** by Jerry Argetsinger

*(He is trying to stand, but fails.)*

Jacob! You pour drinks like a thief!

*(JEPPE melts into a stupor and passes out. The BARON and his entourage consisting of his SECRETARY, VALET, and his lackeys ARV and ERIK enter on the road.)*

**BARON:** it looks as though this will be a fruitful year; just see how thick the barley grows.

**SECRETARY:** That's true, Your Grace. But that means a barrel of barley won't go higher this year than five marks.

**BARON:** That doesn't matter. The peasants are always better off in the good times.

**SECRETARY:** I don't know why it is, Your Grace, the peasants always complain and demand seed grain whether it's a fruitful year or not. When they have something, they drink all the more. There's an innkeeper in this region named Jacob Shoemaker who is a great help in making the peasants poor. They claim he puts salt in his beer so they get thirstier the more they drink.

**BARON:** Perhaps we should get rid of that fellow. But what's that lying in the road? Surely it's a dead man. We hear of nothing other than misfortune. One of you run over and see what it is.

*(ARV crosses to JEPPE.)*

**ARV:** It's Jeppe of the Hill, who has the shrewish wife. Wake up, Jeppe. No. He wouldn't wake up if we beat him and pulled his hair.

**BARON:** Let him be. Wait. I should like to play a joke on him. You're usually full of ideas, can't you hit on something now that will amuse me?

**SECRETARY:** I think it would be fun to tie a paper collar around his neck, like a priest, or cut off his hair.

**VALET:** I think it would be funnier to smear ink on his face and then send someone to see what his wife does to him when he goes home like that.

**BARON:** That's good enough, but what do you bet that Erik comes up with something even better. What do you say, Erik?

**ERIK:** I think we should undress him completely and lay him in m 'Lords best bed. Then in the morning, when he awakes, we'll all behave toward him as though he is the lord of the manor, so he doesn't know how he's been twisted or turned around! Then, after we have him believing he's a baron, we'll get him just as drunk as he is now and put him in his old clothes out on a dung heap. If we execute it cleverly it should produce some extraordinary results, and he'll convince himself that he had either dreamt of his good fortune or that he really was in paradise.

**BARON:** Erik! You are a great man and therefore have only great ideas. But what if he wakes up all of a sudden?

**ERIK:** *(Kicks at JEPPE sleeping soundly on the heap.)* I'm sure he won't, Your Grace. This same Jeppe is the one of the soundest sleepers in the entire county. Last year someone tried to slip a firecracker behind his neck, but when the firecracker went off he still didn't wake up.

**BARON:** Then let's do it. Drag him away at once! Dress him in an exquisite shirt and lay him in my finest bed.

**End of ACT I**

## ACT II

*(The next morning. The scene opens with JEPPE lying in the Baron's bed. A gold-brocade robe is draped over a chair. JEPPE awakes and rubs his eyes. He looks around, becoming terrified and rubs his eyes again. He grabs at his head and finds a gold-embroidered nightcap in his hand. He smears spit on his eyes and rubs again. He examines the cap, turning it in his hands and notices the fine shirt he is wearing. He grimaces grotesquely. In the meantime, soft music is playing. JEPPE wrings his hands and cries.)*

**JEPPE:** Ai! What is this? What is all this splendor and how did I get here? Am I dreaming? Or am I awake? Where's my wife, where is my house, and where is Jeppe? Everything is changed including me. Ai! What place is this?

*(He calls quietly, afraid.)*

Nille? Nille. Nille! I think I've died and gone to heaven, Nille, but I'm so unworthy. Is it really me? When I feel my back still sore from the beatings, when I hear myself speak, when I feel the hole in my tooth, I think it's me. But when I look at my hat, my shirt, at all this splendor and I hear the beautiful music . . . May the devil split me in two if I can't get it into my head that it's me. No, it's not me. I'll be a scoundrel a thousand times over if it is. But aren't I just dreaming? I don't think so. I'll try pinching my arm. Ow! I'm awake because if I wasn't awake then I couldn't . . . But now that I think about it, how can I be awake? There is no mistaking that I am Jeppe of the Hill. I know I'm a poor peasant, a serf, a scoundrel, a cuckold, a hungry louse, a maggot; how can I, at the same time, be a baron and lord of a castle? Therefore it's best that I be patient until I wake up.

*(He sits not knowing what to do. Beautiful music begins to play causing him to cry again.)*

Oh! Can a man hear that in his sleep? It's not possible! But if it is a dream I hope I never wake up; and if I'm mad I hope I'm never sane again! But I'm neither dreaming nor crazy because I can remember everything that's happened to me. I can remember that my late father was Niels of the Hill, my wife is called Nille and her switch is Master Erich and she is cheating on me with the deacon. Ah-hah! Maybe I drank myself to death yesterday at Jacob Shoemaker's. Died and went straight to heaven. Death must be a lot easier than we imagine. I didn't feel a thing. It can be debated about whether I died on land or on sea, because I left the world awfully wet! Oh, Jeppe! Your troubles and sour days are transformed into such bliss! But there is one thing on my mind, and that is, I'm so thirsty my lips are sticking together. Should I wish to be alive again it would only be to get a tankard of beer to quench my thirst! I'm ready to wither away of thirst and I'm all alone; I don't see anyone. At the very least I should see my grandfather who was such an honest man he died without owing the baron so much as a penny. I know that many people have lived just as good a life as me; so why should I be the only one who found a place in heaven? Oh! What place is this? I'm not asleep, I'm not awake, I'm not dead, I'm not alive, I'm not mad, I'm not wise, I'm Jeppe of the Hill, I'm not Jeppe of the Hill, I'm Jeppe under the Hill, I'm poor, I'm rich, I'm a wretched peasant, I'm a baron . . . Ah-h-h! Help! Help! Help!

*(With that great scream the VALET and ERIK rush into the room. Occasionally through the scene the BARON and other members of his household are seen spying on JEPPE to see how the charade is progressing and to mock his bad manners.)*

**Jepppe of the Hill** by Jerry Argetsinger

**VALET:** I wish Your Grace a blissful good morning. Here is your robe, if Your Grace wishes to get up. Erik, run and fetch a towel and washbasin.

**JEPPE:** Ah! Your Honor, Mr. Valet, I'll gladly get up. But I beg you not to hurt me.

**VALET:** God forbid that we should hurt m'Lord.

**JEPPE:** Before you kill me, won't you please do me the favor of telling me who I am?

**VALET:** Doesn't m'Lord know who he is?

**JEPPE:** Yesterday I was Jeppe of the Hill, but today . . . Oh, I don't know what to say.

**VALET:** We are delighted that m'Lord is in such excellent humor today that he feels like jesting. But, God help us, why is Your Grace crying?

**JEPPE:** I'm not Your Grace. I'll swear a holy oath that I'm not, for as far as I can remember, I'm Jeppe Nielsen of the Hill, one of the baron's peasants. If you send for my wife, she'll tell you; but don't let her bring Master Erich with her.

**ERIK:** This is peculiar. What's going on? M'Lord must not be awake, for he has never before joked like this.

**JEPPE:** Whether I'm awake or not I can't say, but I know this and can say, that I am one of the baron's peasants and my name is Jeppe of the Hill, and I've never been a Baron or a Count in my life.

**VALET:** Erik, What can this be? I'm afraid that m'Lord has become ill.

**ERIK:** Perhaps he is walking in his sleep; for it often happens that people get out of bed, dress, talk, eat and drink in their sleep.

**VALET:** No, Erik, I believe that m'Lord is hallucinating from some illness. Run quickly and get a couple of doctors.

*(ERIK exits as JEPPE reacts in terror.)*

Oh! Your Grace, drive such thoughts from your head. Otherwise Your Grace will strike fear into the entire household. Does m'Lord not recognize me?

**JEPPE:** I don't even recognize myself! How should I know you?

**VALET:** It is possible that I should hear such words coming from my noble Lord's mouth and see him in such a state? Oh! Our unfortunate house, to be plagued by some enchantment! Can't m'Lord remember what he did yesterday when he rode on the hunt?

**JEPPE:** I've never been either a hunter or a poacher. I know that would result in hard work at the Navy Yard. No living soul can prove that I've ever hunted a hare on my master's property.

**VALET:** My noble Lord! I rode with you myself on the hunt yesterday.

**JEPPE:** Yesterday I was at Jacob Shoemaker's and drank up brandy for seven skillings. How could I go hunting?

**VALET:** On my knees, I beg m'Lord to stop this nonsense. Erik!

*(ERIK enters.)*

Did you send for the doctors?

**ERIK:** Yes. They'll be here shortly.

**VALET:** Then let's get m'Lord into his robe; maybe he'll feel better when he gets out into the air. Will m'Lord please put on his robe?

**JEPPE:** *(Getting out of bed, he is dressed in a fine gold-embroidered nightshirt.)* With pleasure.

*(The VALET helps him on with the robe.)*

**Jeppe of the Hill** by Jerry Argetsinger

You can do anything you want with me, as long as you don't kill me. I'm as innocent as a baby in its mother's womb.

*(The door is opened as ARV leads in two DOCTORS.)*

**FIRST DOCTOR:** With the greatest pain we hear that the master is not well.

**VALET:** True, Doctor, he is in miserable condition.

**SECOND DOCTOR:** How are things, Your Grace?

**JEPPE:** Just fine, except I'm a little thirsty from all that brandy I had at Jacob Shoemaker's yesterday. Will you just give me a tankard of beer and let me go? Then they can hang you and all doctors because I don't need any medicine!

**FIRST DOCTOR:** I call that a clear hallucination, my dear colleague.

**SECOND DOCTOR:** The stronger it is, the quicker it will pass. Let's feel the master's pulse. What is your recommendation, Doctor?

**FIRST DOCTOR:** I suggest we bleed him immediately.

**SECOND DOCTOR:** I do not agree. Such unusual infirmities must be cured by other means. The master has had a weird and hideous dream that has stirred up his blood and confused his brain to the point that he believes he is a peasant. We must attempt to amuse the master with those things that usually give him the greatest pleasure. Give him his favorite wine and food and play the music he most likes to hear.

*(ARV goes to the door and, on his order, music begins.)*

**VALET:** Isn't this m'Lord's favorite piece?

**JEPPE:** Could be. Do you always have so much fun here in the manor?

**VALET:** Whenever m'Lord wishes, for you pay everyone's board and wages.

**JEPPE:** But it's odd that I can't remember what I did before.

**FIRST DOCTOR:** It's a symptom of this illness, Your Grace, that you forget everything you've done before. I remember a few years ago that one of my neighbors became so confused by strong drink that for two days he convinced himself that he had no head.

**JEPPE:** I'd be satisfied if our District Judge did the same! But his delusion is the exact opposite, for he's convinced that he has a large head, though in fact he has none at all, which anyone can see by his sentencing.

*(Everyone laughs.)*

**SECOND DOCTOR:** It is delightful to hear m'Lord jest. But to finish the story, this same man ran all over town asking people if anyone had found his head. But he got well again and to this day is a bell ringer in Jutland.

**JEPPE:** He could do that even if he didn't find his head!

*(Everyone laughs again.)*

**FIRST DOCTOR:** Perhaps my dear colleague can remember the story from around ten years ago about the man who thought his head was full of flies? He wouldn't give up the notion no matter how much people pleaded with him, until a clever doctor cured him in this way: he sprinkled dead flies on a mustard plaster and laid it over the man's head. After a while, the doctor pulled it off, showed the sick man the flies, convinced him that they came out of his head, and he was well again. I also heard of another man who, after a long fever, got the idea that if he passed his water he would flood the country! No one could change his

## **Jeppe of the Hill** by Jerry Argetsinger

thinking, for he said he'd rather die for the public good. But he was cured in this manner: a message was sent to him from the commander of the city that he feared a siege and there was no water in the moat. He was asked to prevent the enemy's entry into the city by filling the moat. The sick man was overjoyed because he could serve both his fatherland and himself; and so was relieved of both his water and his sickness.

**SECOND DOCTOR:** I can give you another example from Germany. A nobleman stopped for the night at an inn. After eating, he retired to his room, removed his gold chain from around his neck, and hung it on the wall. When the innkeeper thought that the nobleman was asleep, he sneaked back into his room, removed sixty links from the chain, and hung it back on the wall. The guest got up the next morning and ordered his horse to be saddled. Then he put on his clothes and went to fasten the chain around his neck. When he discovered half of it was missing he began to scream that he was robbed. The innkeeper ran in and pretending to be terrified, screamed "Oh! What a terrible transformation! My Lord! Your head has become twice as large as it was yesterday!" He then brought out a trick mirror that magnified everything two times. When the nobleman saw his head looking so large in the mirror he began to weep, "Now I understand why my chain seemed so short!" At that he mounted his horse and wrapped a cloak around his head so no one could see it along the way. They say that he remained at home, hidden for several days because he couldn't get over the idea that his head had become too large.

**FIRST DOCTOR:** There are countless examples of such delusions. I remember hearing about a man who thought his nose was ten feet long and warned everyone he met not to come too close.

**SECOND DOCTOR:** My colleague has surely heard the story about the man who thought he was dead? A young man got it into his head that he was dead, so he lay down in a coffin and refused to eat or drink. His friends tried to convince him of his foolishness, but to no avail, for the young man only laughed, maintaining that it was against all the rules for the dead to eat and drink. Finally an experienced man of medicine got a servant to pretend also to be dead and brought him in procession to where the sick man lay. At first, the two lay there for a long time looking at each other. Finally, the sick man asked the other why he was there, to which he answered because he was dead. About that time some people came who were hired, bringing the latter man his supper—at which he got up out of his coffin and ate a good meal, saying to the other, "Aren't you going to eat soon?" The sick man wondered about it and asked if it was fitting for a dead man to eat, but got the answer that if he did not eat he would not be able to stay dead for very long. He was persuaded first to eat and later to sleep, get up and dress himself. He aped the other in everything until he became alive again and came to his senses. I could give you countless more examples of such strange delusions. This is exactly what has happened to the Noble Lord; he has got it into his head that he is a poor peasant. But m'Lord must cast those thoughts from his mind; then he will immediately be well again.

**JEPPE:** Is it really possible that this is a delusion?

**FIRST DOCTOR:** Of course. M'Lord has heard from these stories what delusions can do.

**JEPPE:** Then I'm not Jeppe of the Hill?

**SECOND DOCTOR:** Absolutely not.

**JEPPE:** Isn't the wicked Nille my wife?

**FIRST DOCTOR:** By no means, for m'Lord is a bachelor.

**JEPPE:** Is it a complete delusion that she has a switch named Master Erik?

**Jeppé of the Hill** by Jerry Argetsinger

**SECOND DOCTOR:** A complete delusion.

**JEPPE:** Then it's also not true that I was supposed to go to town yesterday to buy soap?

**FIRST DOCTOR:** No.

**JEPPE:** And I didn't drink up my money at Jacob Shoemaker's?

**VALET:** M'Lord was hunting with us all day yesterday.

**JEPPE:** Then I'm not a cuckold?

**VALET:** Her ladyship died many years ago.

**JEPPE:** I'm already beginning to understand my foolishness. I won't think of that peasant again; for I can see that a nightmare has caused these delusions. It's amazing how a man can get such ideas into his head.

**VALET:** Would it please m'Lord to walk in the garden while we prepare some lunch?

**JEPPE:** Very well. But you'd better hurry, for I'm both hungry and thirsty!

**END of ACT II**

### ACT III

*(The BARON's room. The doors are open to the gardens. A small table with chair has been prepared for a formal lunch. JEPPE enters dressed as a baron. He is followed by his retinue, including the VALET and the BARON disguised as a Secretary.)*

**JEPPE:** Wonderful! I see that the table is all set.

**VALET:** Yes. Everything is prepared; if Your Grace would please be seated.

*(JEPPE sits at the table. The others stand behind his chair; laughing at his ill manners when he grabs into the dishes with all five fingers instead of proper utensils, belches over the table, and cleans his nose with his fingers and wipes it off on his clothes.)*

**VALET:** Would m'Lord care to select his wine?

**JEPPE:** You know what wine I usually drink in the morning.

**VALET:** M'Lord usually prefers Rhine wine. If that is not to m'Lord's taste, he may quickly get another.

**JEPPE:** *(Grimaces and shakes his head.)* Um-m-m. That's too sour. You must pour a little mead in it, then it will be all right. I really like sweet things.

**VALET:** Here's some Canary wine, if m'Lord would like to taste it.

**JEPPE:** That's a good wine.

*(He toasts them.)*

Everybody, cheers!

*(Every time he drinks, trumpets blast.)*

Hey fellows, on your toes! Yet another glass of Canary wine, don't you know?

*(To the BARON/Secretary.)*

Where did you get that ring on your finger?

**BARON:** M'Lord himself gave it to me.

**JEPPE:** I don't remember that. Give it back to me, I must have been drunk when I did that. People don't give

**Jeppe of the Hill** by Jerry Argetsinger

away rings like that.

*(The BARON removes his ring and JEPPE puts it on his own finger.)*

Later I want to check out what other things you got. Servants should get no more than meals and wages. I swear I can't remember giving you anything special. Why should I? That ring is worth more than ten rix-dollars.

*(Wagging his finger.)*

No, no, no! My dear fellows, not so, not so. You must not take advantage of your Lord's weakness and drunkenness. When I'm drunk I'm ready to give away my pants; but after I sleep it off I take back my handouts. Otherwise my wife, Nille, will beat me with that damned Master Erich. But what am I saying? Now I'm falling into those crazy thoughts again and don't remember who I am. Give me another glass of Canary wine. Cheers, again!

*(The trumpets blast again, startling JEPPE.)*

Pay attention to what I say, fellows. Be it known that from now on, when I give something away in the evening when I'm drunk, you must give it back the next morning. When servants get more than they can eat, they get arrogant and try to pull down their masters. How much do you get paid?

**BARON:** M'Lord has always paid me two hundred rix-dollars a year.

**JEPPE:** You sure as hell won't get two hundred rix-dollars from now on. What do you do that's worth two hundred rix-dollars? I, myself, have to work like a beast and be out in the barn from dawn to dusk and can barely . . . Here come those damned peasant-thoughts again. Give me another glass of wine!

*(He drinks again and the trumpets blast.)*

Two hundred rix-dollars! That's fleecing your master. Do you know what, my dear fellows? After I've eaten I have in mind to hang every second man on the estate. That'll show you that you can't screw around with me in money matters!

**VALET:** We'll return everything we've received from Your Grace.

**JEPPE:** Yeah, yeah. Your Grace, Your Grace. Compliments and flattery are cheap to come by these days. Your mouths butter me up until you spirit away all my money. To be sure, your mouth says, "Your Grace," but your heart means, "Your Fool." You don't say what you mean! You servants are like the man when he greeted his brother with, "Hail to you!" while he plunged a knife into his heart. Believe me, Jeppe is no man's fool!

*(They all kneel and beg for mercy.)*

Stand up again, fellows, until I've eaten. Later I'll see where things hang together and just who deserves to hang or not. Right now I'm going to have some fun.

*(He calls out.)*

Where is my overseer?

**VALET:** Right outside.

**JEPPE:** Send him in immediately!

**ERIK:** *(Enters disguised as an overseer wearing a silver-buttoned coat and sword-belt around his waist.)* Your Grace, what is your command?

**JEPPE:** Nothing. Excepting that you're going to hang.

**ERIK:** I've done nothing wrong, Your Grace, why should I be hanged?

**Jeppe of the Hill** by Jerry Argetsinger

**JEPPE:** Aren't you an overseer?

**ERIK:** Yes, I am, Your Grace.

**JEPPE:** And you have to ask why you should be hanged?

**ERIK:** I have always served Your Grace faithfully and honestly and worked so hard in my duties that Your Grace has always praised me far and above his other servants.

**JEPPE:** I know you've worked hard at your job. That can be seen by your silver buttons. What's your yearly salary?

**ERIK:** Half a hundred rix-dollars a year.

**JEPPE:** (*Pacing back and forth.*) Fifty rix-dollars? Hm-m-m. Yes. You'll hang at once.

**ERIK:** But it can't be less, Worthy Lord! Not for a whole year's diligent service.

**JEPPE:** That's just the reason why you shall hang; because you earn only fifty rix-dollars. But you have enough money for a silver buttoned coat, for ruffled cuffs around your wrists, for a fine sword and belt, and you earn only fifty rix-dollars a year! You must be stealing from poor little me. Where else could it come from?

**ERIK:** (*Kneeling.*) Oh, Worthy Lord! Spare me for the sake of my poor wife and little children.

**JEPPE:** How many children?

**ERIK:** I have seven living children, Your Grace.

**JEPPE:** Ha! Seven living children? Sekketeer, hang him immediately.

**BARON:** But Your Grace, I am no henchman.

**JEPPE:** What you are not, you can become. You already look the part. When you're through hanging him, I shall hang you.

**ERIK:** Oh Worthy Lord! Is there no pardon?

**JEPPE:** (*Sits and drinks, then stands again.*) Fifty rix-dollars, a wife and seven children. If no one else will do it, I'll hang you myself. I know what kind of men you are, you overseers! I know how you treat me—Oh! Those damned peasant thoughts again! I'll just say that I have your ways and means so well at my fingertips that I could be an overseer myself if needs be. You get the cream off the milk while the lord of the manor gets the shit! When some peasant greases your palm you come back to your lord and say, "The poor man is willing and hardworking enough, but such bad luck has hit him that he can't pay up; he has poor land, his cattle are infected" and other such nonsense that the lord of the manner is supposed to swallow. Believe me, good man, I won't allow myself to be led around by the nose, for I'm a peasant myself, and a peasant's son—There's that madness again!

**BARON:** (*Falls to his knees.*) Oh, Nobel Lord! Have mercy on him for his poor wife's sake! How then would she live and feed her children?

**JEPPE:** Who says they will live? They can hang alongside of him.

**BARON:** But m'Lord, she is such a delightful, beautiful woman.

**JEPPE:** So? By the way you speak of her maybe you're in love with her. Let her come in!

(*VALET opens the door for the OVERSEER'S WIFE, who enters and kisses JEPPE's hands.*)

**JEPPE:** Are you the overseer's wife?

**WIFE:** Yes, I am, Worthy Lord.

**JEPPE:** You are pretty. Will you lay with me tonight?

**Jepppe of the Hill** by Jerry Argetsinger

**WIFE:** M'Lord may command what he will, I am in his service.

**JEPPE:** (To ERIK.) Is it all right with you if I sleep with your wife tonight?

**ERIK:** I thank m'Lord that he would show my poor house that honor.

**JEPPE:** See here! Bring a chair for her, she's eating with me!

*(She sits at the table and eats and drinks with him. JEPPE notices the SECRETARY/BARON looking at her and becomes jealous.)*

I'll beat you if you so much as look at her!

*(JEPPE continues to drink wine as the OVERSEER'S WIFE eats with him with much more refined manners. Every time JEPPE looks at the SECRETARY takes his eyes off of her and looks at the ground. JEPPE calls for polka music and dances with her, but his drunkenness causes him to stumble and fall again and again. Finally, he is unable to stand and passes out.)*

**BARON:** He's sound asleep. Now we've won the game. But we were almost the greater fools because of his determination to tyrannize us to the point where we would either have had to ruin the charade or allow ourselves to be mistreated by that coarse peasant. We can learn from his behavior how tyrannical and arrogant such people become who are suddenly thrust from the gutter into positions of honor and nobility. I masqueraded as a secretary at a rather unfortunate time, for if he had thrashed me the joke would have misfired, subjecting me to ridicule from no less a person than a peasant. It's best if we let him sleep awhile before we put his filthy peasant clothes back on him.

**ERIK:** No, m'Lord! He's already sleeping like a rock. See, I can kick him and he doesn't feel it.

*(He gives JEPPE a hard swift kick.)*

**BARON:** Then get him out of here and finish the charade.

**END of ACT III**

**13 more pages in Acts IV and V.**