

## Handouts

### Scrambled Eggs A Story from Denmark

By Martha Hamilton and Mitch Weiss

A farmer once set off to market to sell his cattle. The way was long and tiresome, and the roads were bad, so one night he stopped at an inn to get a good night's sleep. In the morning, he ate a hearty breakfast of scrambled eggs. As he was about to pay, he realized he might run short of money before he got to market. He asked the innkeeper to trust him to pay for the eggs the next time he passed through. The innkeeper readily agreed, and the farmer went on his way.

After selling his cattle, he headed home. Not remembering the few small coins he owed the innkeeper, he took a different route. A few years later, when he finally passed by the inn once again, he remembered his debt. He apologized to the innkeeper and asked what he owed for the eggs. The innkeeper handed him a large sheet of paper covered with numbers. He said, "This is your bill. According to my calculations, you owe me four thousand kroner<sup>1</sup>." (That's approximately *four thousand dollars* in American money!)

<sup>3</sup>At first, the farmer thought it was a joke, but he soon realized the innkeeper was quite serious. "You ate ten eggs," said the innkeeper, "and if those had hatched, I would have had ten chickens. They, too, would have laid eggs, and so on. I have determined that, in the four years since you were here, I could have made four thousand kroner from those ten scrambled eggs."

The farmer protested, but it was no use. He was summoned to appear before the town judge the next day.

The farmer realized he would need a good, honest lawyer to defend him. He asked around town until he found one. The lawyer was outraged when he heard what the innkeeper had charged. He agreed to appear in court the next day to settle the matter.

All arrived in court the next afternoon at the appointed time—except the lawyer. Just as the judge was about to throw the farmer into jail, the lawyer rushed in.

The judge, who did not like to be kept waiting, asked sternly, "Are you this man's lawyer?"

<sup>8</sup>"Yes, I certainly am," replied the lawyer as he tried to catch his breath.

"Why are you late?" demanded the judge. "Do you think we have nothing better to do than wait for you?"

<sup>10</sup>"I'm very sorry, your honor," said the lawyer, still panting. "I lost track of time while I was boiling two bushels of corn and planting them in my field this morning."

<sup>11</sup>There was a roar of laughter in the courtroom. The judge asked, "Sir, have you lost your mind? You don't actually think that cooked corn will grow, do you?"

<sup>12</sup>"Well, if scrambled eggs can turn into chicks, then why not?" The judge understood the lawyer's point. He was outraged by the innkeeper's greed and deception. The judge fined him one hundred kroner, fifty to go to the clever lawyer, and fifty to the farmer.

The farmer thanked the lawyer for his cleverness and happily returned home. After that, he loved to tell the story of how he had once received *fifty kroner* for eating a plate of scrambled eggs.

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<sup>1</sup> **Kroner** is pronounced KRO-ner. This is the plural of krone, which is the Danish money unit, similar to an American dollar.