III

THERE was something exhilarating in the wealth of sunshine that filled all space without the accompaniment of corresponding heat. The spring moisture was gone from the air, and the warm haze of summer had not yet come. There was only light—light over the green fields and the sea beyond, light that drew the landscape in clear lines against the blue atmosphere, and breathed a gentle, pleasant warmth.

It was a day in the beginning of June—the first real summer day; and it was Sunday.

Stone Farm lay bathed in sunshine. The clear golden light penetrated everywhere; and where it could not reach, dark colours trembled like a hot, secret breath out into the light. Open windows and doors looked like veiled eyes in the midst of the light, and where the roof lay in shadow, it had the appearance of velvet.

It was quiet up in the big house to-day; it was a day of rest from wrangling too.

The large yard was divided into two by a fence, the lower part consisting in the main of a large, steaming midden, crossed by planks in various directions, and at the top a few inverted wheelbarrows. A couple of pigs lay half buried in the manure, asleep, and a busy flock of hens were eagerly scattering the pile of horse-dung from the last morning clearance. A large cock stood in the middle of the flock, directing the work like a bailiff.

In the upper yard a flock of white pigeons were pecking corn off the clean stone paving. Outside the open coach-house door, a groom was examining the dog-cart, while inside stood another groom, polishing the best harness.

The man at the dog-cart was in shirt-sleeves and newly-polished top-boots; he had a youthful, elastic frame, which assumed graceful attitudes as he worked. He wore his cap on the back of his head, and whistled softly while he cleaned the wheels outside and in, and sent stolen glances down to the wash-house, where, below the window, one of the maids was going through her Sunday ablutions, with shoulders and arms bare, and her chemise pushed down below her bosom.

The big dairymaid, Karna, went past him to the pump with two large buckets. As she returned, she splashed some water on to one of his boots, and he looked up with an oath. She took this as an invitation to stop, and put down her pails with a cautious glance up at the windows of the big house.

"You've not had all the sleep you ought to have had, Gustav," she said teasingly, and laughed.

"Then it isn't your fault, at any rate," he answered roughly. "Can you patch my everyday trousers for me to-day?"

"No, thank you! I don't mend for another to get all the pleasant words!"

"Then you can leave it alone! There are plenty who'll mend for me without you!" And he bent again to his work.

"I'll see if I can get time," said the big woman meekly. "But I've got all the work in the place to do by myself this afternoon; the others are all going out."

"Yes, I see Bodil's washing herself," said Gustav, sending a squirt of tobacco-juice out of his mouth in the

direction of the wash-house window. "I suppose she's going to meeting, as she's doing it so thoroughly."

Karna looked cunning. "She asked to be free because she wanted to go to church. She go to church! I should just like to see her! No, she's going down to the tailor's in the village, and there I suppose she'll meet Malmberg, a townsman of hers. I wonder she isn't above having anything to do with a married man."

"She can go on the spree with any one she likes, for all I care," answered Gustav, kicking the last wheel into place with his foot, while Karna stood looking at him kindly. But the next moment she spied a face behind the curtains up in one of the windows, and hurried off with her pails. Gustav spat contemptuously between his teeth after her. She was really too old for his seventeen years; she must be at least forty; and casting another long look at Bodil, he went across to the coach-house with oil-can and keys.

The high white house that closed the yard at its upper end, had not been built right among the other buildings, but stood proudly aloof, unconnected with them except by two strips of wooden paling. It had gables on both sides, and a high basement, in which were the servants' hall, the maids' bedrooms, the wash-house, the mangling-room, and the large storerooms. On the gable looking on to the yard was a clock that did not go. Pelle called the building the Palace, and was not a little proud of being allowed to enter the basement. The other people on the farm did not give it such a nice name.

He was the only one whose awe of the House had nothing sinister about it; others regarded it in the light of a hostile fortress. Every one who crossed the paved upper yard, glanced involuntarily up at the high veiled windows, behind which an eye might secretly be kept upon all that went on below. It was a little like passing a row of

cannons' mouths—it made one a little unsteady on one's feet; and no one crossed the clean pavement unless he was obliged. On the other hand they went freely about the other half of the yard, which was just as much overlooked by the House.

Down there two of the lads were playing. One of them had seized the other's cap and run off with it, and a wild chase ensued, in at one barn-door and out at another all round the yard, to the accompaniment of mischievous laughter and breathless exclamations. The yard-dog barked with delight and tumbled madly about on its chain in its desire to join in the game. Up by the fence the robber was overtaken and thrown to the ground; but he managed to toss the cap up into the air, and it descended right in front of the high stone steps of the House.

"Oh, you mean beast!" exclaimed the owner of the cap in a voice of despairing reproach, belabouring the other with the toes of his boots. "Oh, you wretched bailiff's sneak!" He suddenly stopped and measured the distance with an appraising eye. "Will you stand me half a pint if I dare go up and fetch the cap?" he asked in a whisper. The other nodded and sat up quickly to see what would come of it. "Swear? You won't try and back out of it?" he said, lifting his hand adjuringly. His companion solemnly drew his finger across his throat, as if cutting it, and the oath was taken. The one who had lost the cap hitched up his trousers and pulled himself together, his whole figure stiffening with determination; then he put his hands upon the fence, vaulted it, and walked with bent head and firm step across the yard, looking like one who had staked his all upon one card. When he had secured the cap, and turned his back upon the House, he sent a horrible grimace down the yard.

Bodil now came up from the basement in her best

Sunday clothes, with a black silk handkerchief on her head and a hymn-book in her hand. How pretty she was! And brave! She went along the whole length of the House and out! But then she could get a kiss from the farmer any day she liked.

Outside the farm proper lay a number of large and small outbuildings—the calves' stable, the pigsties, the tool-shed, the cart-shed and a smithy that was no longer used. They were all like so many mysteries, with trap-doors that led down to pitch-dark, underground beet and potato cellars, from which, of course, you could get by secret passages to the strangest places underground, and other trap-doors that led up to dark lofts, where the most wonderful treasures were preserved in the form of old lumber.

But Pelle unfortunately had little time to go into all this. Every day he had to help his father to look after the cattle, and with so large a herd, the work was almost beyond their power. If he had a moment's breathing-space, some one was sure to be after him. He had to fetch water for the laundry girls, to grease the pupil's boots and run to the village shop for spirits or chewing-tobacco for the men. There was plenty to play with, but no one could bear to see him playing; they were always whistling for him as if he were a dog.

He tried to make up for it by turning his work into a game, and in many cases this was possible. Watering the cattle, for instance, was more fun than any real game, when his father stood out in the yard and pumped, and the boy only had to guide the water from manger to manger. When thus occupied, he always felt something like a great engineer. But on the other hand, much of the other work was too hard to be amusing.

At this moment the boy was wandering about among the outbuildings, where there was no one to hunt him about.

The door to the cow-stable stood open, and he could hear the continual munching of the cows, now and then interrupted by a snuff of contentment or the regular rattle of a chain up and down when a cow rubbed its neck upon the post. There was a sense of security in the sound of his father's wooden shoes up and down the foddering-passage.

Out of the open half-doors of the smaller outbuildings there came a steamy warmth that smelt pleasantly of calves and pigs. The pigs were hard at work. All through the long sty there was munching and smacking. One old sow supped up the liquid through the corners of her mouth, another snuffed and bubbled with her snout along the bottom of the trough to find the rotten potatoes under the liquid. Here and there two pigs were fighting over the trough, and emitting piercing squeals. The calves put their slobbering noses out at the doors, gazing into the sunny air and lowing feelingly. One little fellow, after snuffing up air from the cow-stable in a peculiarly thorough way, turned up his lip in a foolish grin: it was a bull-calf. He laid his chin upon the half-door, and tried to jump over, but Pelle drove him down again. Then he kicked up his hind legs, looked at Pelle out of the corner of his eye, and stood with arched back, lifting his fore and hind-quarters alternately with the action of a rocking-horse. He was light-headed with the sun.

Down on the pond, ducks and geese stood upon their heads in the water, flourishing their red legs in the air. And all at once the whole flock would have an attack of giddy delight in the sunshine, and splash screaming from bank to bank, the last part of the way sliding along the top of the water with a comical wagging of the tail.

Pelle had promised himself much from this couple of hours that were to be entirely his own, as his father had

given him a holiday until the time came for the midday work. But now he stood in bewilderment, overwhelmed by the wealth of possibilities. Would it be the best fun to sail upon the pond on two tail-boards laid one across the other? There was a manure-cart lying there now to be washed. Or should he go in and have a game with the tiny calves? Or shoot with the old bellows in the smithy? If he filled the nozzle with wet earth, and blew hard, quite a nice shot could come out of it.

Pelle started and tried to make himself invisible. The farmer himself had come round the corner, and was now standing shading his eyes with his hand and looking down over the sloping land and the sea. When he caught sight of Pelle, he nodded without changing his expression, and said: "Good day, my boy! How are you getting on?" He gazed on, and probably hardly knew that he had said it and patted the boy on the shoulder with the end of his stick; the farmer often went about half asleep.

But Pelle felt it as a caress of a divine nature, and immediately ran across to the stable to tell his father what had happened to him. He had an elevating sensation in his shoulder as if he had been knighted; and he still felt the stick there. An intoxicating warmth flowed from the place through his little body, sent the adventure mounting to his head and made him swell with pride. His imagination rose and soared into the air with some vague, dizzy idea about the farmer adopting him as his son.

He soon came down again, for in the stable he ran straight into the arms of the Sunday scrubbing. The Sunday wash was the only great objection he had to make to life; everything else came and was forgotten again, but it was always coming again. He detested it, especially that part of it which had to do with the interior of his ears. But there was no kind mother to help; Lasse stood

ready with a bucket of cold water, and some soft soap on a piece of broken pot, and the boy had to divest himself of his clothes. And as if the scrubbing were not enough, he afterwards had to put on a clean shirt—though, fortunately, only every other Sunday. The whole thing was nice enough to look back upon afterwards—like something gone through with, and not to happen again for a little while.

Pelle stood at the stable door into the yard with a consequential air, with bristling hair and clean shirt-sleeves, his hands buried in his trouser pockets. Over his forehead his hair waved in what is called a "cow's-lick," said to betoken good fortune; and his face, all screwed up as it turned towards the bright light, looked the oddest piece of topsy-turvydom, with not a single feature in its proper place. Pelle bent the calves of his legs out backwards, and stood gently rocking himself to and fro as he saw Gustav doing, up on the front-door steps, where he stood holding the reins, waiting for his master and mistress.

The mistress now appeared, with the farmer, and a maid ran down in front to the carriage with a little step-ladder, and helped her in. The farmer stood at the top of the steps until she was seated: she had difficulty in walking. But what a pair of eyes she had! Pelle hastily looked away when she turned her face down towards the yard. It was whispered among the men that she could bring misfortune upon any one by looking at him if she liked. Now Gustav unchained the dog, which bounded about, barking, in front of the horses as they drove out of the courtyard.

Anyhow the sun did not shine like this on a week-day. It was quite dazzling when the white pigeons flew in one flock over the yard, turning as regularly as if they were a large white sheet flapping in the sunshine; the reflection

from their wings flashed over the dung-heap and made the pigs lift their heads with an inquiring grunt. Above, in their rooms the men sat playing "Sixty-six," or tipping wooden shoes, and Gustav began to play "Old Noah" on his concertina.

Pelle picked his way across the upper part of the yard to the big dog-kennel, which could be turned on a pivot according to the direction of the wind. He seated himself upon the angle of the roof, and made a merry-go-round of it by pushing off with his foot every time he passed the fence. Suddenly it occurred to him that he himself was everybody's dog, and had better hide himself; so he dropped down, crept into the kennel, and curled himself up on the straw with his head between his fore-paws. There he lay for a little while, staring at the fence and panting with his tongue hanging out of his mouth. Then an idea came into his head so suddenly as to make him forget all caution; and the next moment he was sliding full tilt down the railing of the front-door steps.

He had done this seventeen times and was deeply engrossed in the thought of reaching fifty, when he heard a sharp whistle from the big coach-house door. The farm-pupil stood there beckoning him. Pelle, crestfallen, obeyed the call, bitterly regretting his thoughtlessness. He was most likely wanted now to grease boots again, perhaps for them all!

The pupil drew him inside the door, which he shut. It was dark, and the boy, coming in out of the bright daylight, could distinguish nothing; what he made out little by little assumed shapeless outlines to his frightened imagination. Voices laughed and growled confusedly in his ears, and hands that seemed to him enormous pulled him about. Terror seized him, and with it came crazy, disconnected recollections of stories of robbery and murder,

and he began to scream with fright. A big hand covered the whole of his face, and in the silence that followed his stifled scream, he heard a voice out in the yard, calling to the maids to come and see something funny.

He was too paralysed with terror to know what was being done with him, and only wondered faintly what there was funny out there in the sunshine. Would he ever see the sun again, he wondered?

As if in answer to his thought, the door was at that moment thrown open. The light poured in and he recognised the faces about him, and found himself standing half naked in the full daylight, his trousers down about his heels and his shirt tucked up under his waistcoat. The pupil stood at one side with a carriage-whip, with which he flicked at the boy's naked body, crying in a tone of command: "Run!" Pelle, wild with terror and confusion, dashed into the yard, but there stood the maids, and at sight of him they screamed with laughter, and he turned to fly back into the coach-house. But he was met by the whip, and forced to return into the daylight, leaping like a kangaroo and calling forth renewed shouts of laughter. Then he stood still, crying helplessly, under a shower of coarse remarks, especially from the maids. He no longer noticed the whip, but only crouched down, trying to hide himself, until at last he sank in a heap upon the stone paving, sobbing convulsively.

Karna, large of limb, came rushing up from the basement and forced her way through the crowd, crimson with rage and scolding as she went. On her freckled neck and arms were brown marks left by the cows' tails at the last milking, looking like a sort of clumsy tattooing. She flung her slipper in the pupil's face, and going up to Pelle, wrapped him in her coarse apron and carried him down to the basement.

When Lasse heard what had happened to the boy, he took a hammer and went round to kill the farm pupil; and the look in the old man's eyes was such that no one desired to get in his way. The pupil had thought his wisest course was to disappear; and when Lasse found no vent for his wrath, he fell into a fit of trembling and weeping, and became so really ill that the men had to administer a good mouthful of spirits to revive him. This took instant effect, and Lasse was himself again and able to nod consolingly to the frightened, sobbing Pelle.

"Never mind, laddie!" he said comfortingly. "Never mind! No one has ever yet got off without being punished, and Lasse'll break that long limb of Satan's head and make his brains spurt out of his nose; you take my word for it!"

Pelle's face brightened at the prospect of this forcible redress, and he crept up into the loft to throw down the hay for the cattle's midday meal. Lasse, who was not so fond of climbing, went down the long passage between the stalls distributing the hay. He was cogitating over something, and Pelle could hear him talking to himself all the time. When they had finished, Lasse went to the green chest and brought out a black silk handkerchief that had been Bengta's Sunday best. His expression was solemn as he called Pelle.

"Run over to Karna with this and ask her to accept it. We're not so poor that we should let kindness itself go from us empty-handed. But you mustn't let any one see it, in case they didn't like it. Mother Bengta in her grave won't be offended; she'd have proposed it herself, if she could have spoken; but her mouth's full of earth, poor thing!" Lasse sighed deeply.

Even then he stood for a little while with the handkerchief in his hand before giving it to Pelle to run with. He

was by no means as sure of Bengta as his words made out; but the old man liked to beautify her memory, both in his own and in the boy's mind. It could not be denied that she had generally been a little difficult in a case of this kind, having been particularly jealous; and she might take it into her head to haunt them because of that handkerchief. Still she had had a heart for both him and the boy, and it was generally in the right place—they must say that of her! And for the rest, the Lord must judge her as kindly as He could.

During the afternoon it was quiet on the farm. Most of the men were out somewhere, either at the inn or with the quarrymen at the stone-quarry. The master and mistress were out too; the farmer had ordered the carriage directly after dinner and had driven to the town, and half an hour later his wife set off in the pony-carriage—to keep an eye on him, people said.

Old Lasse was sitting in an empty cow-stall, mending Pelle's clothes, while the boy played up and down the foddering passage. He had found in the herdsman's room an old boot-jack, which he placed under his knee, pretending it was a wooden leg, and all the time he was chattering happily, but not quite so loudly as usual, to his father. The morning's experience was still fresh in his mind, and had a subduing effect; it was as if he had performed some great deed, and was now nervous about it. There was another circumstance too, that helped to make him serious. The bailiff had been over to say that the animals were to go out the next day. Pelle was to mind the young cattle, so this would be his last free day, perhaps for the whole summer.

He paused outside the stall where his father sat. "What are you going to kill him with, father?"

"With the hammer, I suppose."

"Will you kill him quite dead, as dead as a dog?"

Lasse's nod boded ill to the pupil. "Yes, indeed I shall!"

"But who'll read the names for us then?"

The old man shook his head pensively. "That's true enough!" he exclaimed, scratching himself first in one place and then in another. The name of each cow was written in chalk above its stall, but neither Lasse nor Pelle could read. The bailiff had, indeed, gone through the names with them once, but it was impossible to remember half a hundred names after hearing them once—even for the boy, who had such an uncommon good memory. If Lasse now killed the pupil, then who *would* help them to make out the names? The bailiff would never stand their going to him and asking him a second time.

"I suppose we shall have to content ourselves with thrashing him," said Lasse, meditatively.

The boy went on playing for a little while, and then once more came up to Lasse.

"Don't you think the Swedes can thrash all the people in the world, father?"

The old man looked thoughtful. "Ye-es—yes, I should think so."

"Yes, because Sweden's much bigger than the whole world, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's big," said Lasse, trying to imagine its extent. There were twenty-four provinces, of which Malmöhus was only one, and Ystad district a small part of that again; and then in one corner of Ystad district lay Tommelilla, and his holding that he had once thought so big with its five acres of land, was a tiny little piece of Tommelilla! Ah yes, Sweden was big—not bigger than the whole

world, of course, for that was only childish nonsense—but still bigger than all the rest of the world put together. "Yes, it's big! But what are you doing, laddie?"

"Why, can't you see I'm a soldier that's had one leg shot off?"

"Oh, you're an old crippled pensioner, are you? But you shouldn't do that, for God doesn't like things like that. You might become a real cripple, and that would be dreadful."

"Oh, He doesn't see, because He's in the churches today!" answered the boy; but for safety's sake he thought it better to leave off. He stationed himself at the stable-door, whistling, but suddenly came running in with great eagerness: "Father, there's the Agricultural! Shall I run and fetch the whip?"

"No, I expect we'd better leave him alone. It might be the death of him; fine gentlemen scamps like that can't stand a licking. The fright alone might kill him." Lasse glanced doubtfully at the boy.

Pelle looked very much disappointed. "But suppose he does it again?"

"Oh no, we won't let him off without a good fright. I shall pick him up and hold him out at arm's length dangling in the air until he begs for mercy; and then I shall put him down again just as quietly. For Lasse doesn't like being angry. Lasse's a decent fellow."

"Then you must pretend to let him go while you're holding him high up in the air; and then he'll scream and think he's going to die, and the others'll come and laugh at him."

"No, no; you mustn't tempt your father! It might come into my mind to throw him down, and that would be murder and penal servitude for life, that would! No,