

laid the little pink, new-born mice out on the grass. They looked like half-hatched birds.

"They *are* ugly," said Pelle, who did not quite like taking hold of them, but was ashamed not to do so. "They're much nastier to touch than toads. I believe they're poisonous."

Rud lay pinching them between his fingers.

"Poisonous! Don't be a silly! Why they haven't any teeth! There are no bones in them at all; I'm sure you could eat them quite well."

"Pah! Beastly!" Pelle spat on the ground.

"I shouldn't be at all afraid of biting one; would you?" Rud lifted a little mouse up towards his mouth.

"Afraid? Of course I'm not afraid—but—" Pelle hesitated.

"No, you're afraid, because you're a blue-bag!"

Now this nickname really only applied to boys who were afraid of water, but Pelle quickly seized one of the little mice, and held it up to his mouth, at exactly the same distance from his lips that Rud was from his. "You can see for yourself!" he cried in an offended tone.

Rud went on talking, with many gestures.

"You're afraid," he said, "and it's because you're Swedish. But when you're afraid, you should just shut your eyes—so—and open your mouth. Then you pretend to put the mouse right into your mouth, and then—" Rud had his mouth wide open, and held his hand close to his mouth; Pelle was under his influence, and imitated his movements—"and then—" Pelle received a blow that sent the little mouse half-way down his throat. He retched and spat; and then his hands fumbled in the grass and got hold of a stone. But by the time he was on his feet, and was going to throw it, Rud was far away up the fields.

"I must go home now," he shouted innocently. "There's something I've got to help mother with."

Pelle did not love solitude, and the prospect of a blockade determined him at once for negotiations. He dropped the stone to show his serious wish for a reconciliation, and had to swear solemnly that he would not bear malice. Then at last Rud came back, tittering.

"I was going to show you something funny with the mouse," he said by way of diversion; "but you held on to it like an idiot." He did not venture to come quite close up to Pelle, but stood watching his movements.

Pelle was acquainted with the little white lie when the danger of a thrashing was imminent, but the lie as an attack was still unknown to him. If Rud, now that the whole thing was over, said that he only wanted to have shown him something funny, it must be true. But then why was he mistrustful? Pelle tried, as he had so often done before, to bend his little brain round the possible tricks of his playmate, but failed.

"You may just as well come up close," he said stoutly. "For if I wanted to, I could easily catch you up."

Rud came. "Now we'll catch big mice," he said. "That's better fun."

They emptied Pelle's milk-bottle, and hunted up a mouse's nest that appeared to have only two exits, one up in the meadow, the other half-way down the bank of the stream. Here they pushed in the mouth of the bottle, and widened the hole in the meadow into a funnel; and they took it in turns to keep an eye on the bottle, and to carry water up to the other hole in their caps. It was not long before a mouse popped out into the bottle, which they then corked.

What should they do with it? Pelle proposed that they should tame it and train it to draw their little

agricultural implements; but Rud, as usual, got his way—it was to go out sailing.

Where the stream turned, and had hollowed out its bed into a hole as big as a cauldron, they made an inclined plane and let the bottle slide down into the water head foremost, like a ship being launched. They could follow it as it curved under the water until it came up slantingly, and stood bobbing up and down on the water like a buoy, with its neck up. The mouse made the funniest leaps up towards the cork to get out; and the boys jumped up and down on the grass with delight.

"It knows the way it got in quite well!" They imitated its unsuccessful leaps, lay down again and rolled about in exuberant mirth. At last, however, the joke became stale.

"Let's take out the cork!" suggested Rud.

"Yes—oh yes!" Pelle waded quickly in, and was going to set the mouse at liberty.

"Wait a minute, you donkey!" Rud snatched the bottle from him, and holding his hand over the mouth, put it back into the water. "Now we'll see some fun!" he cried, hastening up the bank.

It was a little while before the mouse discovered that the way was open, but then it leaped. The leap was unsuccessful, and made the bottle rock, so that the second leap was slanting and rebounded sideways. But then followed with lightning rapidity a number of leaps—a perfect bombardment; and suddenly the mouse flew right out of the bottle, head foremost into the water.

"That was a leap and a half!" cried Pelle, jumping straight up and down in the grass, with his arms at his sides. "It could just squeeze its body through, just exactly!" And he jumped again, squeezing himself together.

The mouse swam to land, but Rud was there, and

pushed it out again with his foot. "It swam well," he said, laughing. It made for the opposite bank. "Look out for the fellow!" Rud roared, and Pelle sprang forward and turned it away from the shore with a good kick. It swam helplessly backwards and forwards in the middle of the pool, seeing one of the two dancing figures every time it approached a bank, and turning and turning endlessly. It sank deeper and deeper, its fur becoming wet and dragging it down, until at last it swam right under water. Suddenly it stretched out its body convulsively, and sank to the bottom, with all four legs outspread like a wide embrace.

Pelle had all at once comprehended the perplexity and helplessness—perhaps was familiar with it. At the animal's final struggle, he burst into tears with a little scream, and ran, crying loudly, up the meadow towards the fir-plantation. In a little while he came back again. "I really thought Cupid had run away," he said repeatedly, and carefully avoided looking Rud in the face. Quietly he waded into the water, and fished up the dead mouse with his foot.

They laid it upon a stone in the sun, so that it might come to life again. When that failed, Pelle remembered a story about some people who were drowned in a lake at home, and who came to themselves again when cannons were fired off over them. They clapped their hollowed hands over the mouse, and when that too brought about no result, they decided to bury it.

Rud happened to remember that his grandmother in Sweden was being buried just now, and this made them go about the matter with a certain amount of solemnity. They made a coffin out of a matchbox, and ornamented it with moss; and then they lay on their faces and lowered the coffin into the grave with twine, taking every possible care that it should not land upon its head. A rope might

give way; such things did sometimes happen, and the illusion did not permit of their correcting the position of the coffin afterwards with their hands. When this was done, Pelle looked down into his cap, while Rud prayed over the deceased and cast earth upon the coffin; and then they made up the grave.

"I only hope it's not in a trance and going to wake up again!" exclaimed Pelle, suddenly. They had both heard many unpleasant stories of such cases, and went over all the possibilities—how they woke up and couldn't get any air, and knocked upon the lid, and began to eat their own hands—until Pelle could distinctly hear a knocking on the lid below. They had the coffin up in a trice, and examined the mouse. It had not eaten its fore-paws at any rate, but it had most decidedly turned over on its side. They buried it again, putting a dead beetle beside it in the coffin for safety's sake, and sticking a straw down into the grave to supply it with air. Then they ornamented the mound, and set up a memorial stone.

"It's dead now!" said Pelle, gravely and with conviction.

"Yes, I should just think so—dead as a herring." Rud had put his ear to the straw and listened.

"And now it must be up with God in all His glory—right high, high up."

Rud sniffed contemptuously. "Oh, you silly! Do you think it can crawl up there?"

"Well, can't mice crawl, I should like to know?" Pelle was cross.

"Yes, but not through the air. Only birds can do that."

Pelle felt himself beaten off the field and wanted to be revenged.

"Then your grandmother isn't in heaven either!" he

declared emphatically. There was still a little rancour in his heart from the young mouse episode.

But this was more than Rud could stand. It had touched his family pride, and he gave Pelle a dig in the side with his elbow. The next moment they were rolling in the grass, holding one another by the hair, and making awkward attempts to hit one another on the nose with their clenched fists. They turned over and over like one lump, now one uppermost, now the other; they hissed hoarsely, groaned and made tremendous exertions. "I'll make you sneeze red," said Pelle angrily, as he rose above his adversary; but the next moment he was down again, with Rud hanging over him and uttering the most fearful threats about black eyes and seeing stars. Their voices were thick with passion.

And suddenly they were sitting opposite one another on the grass wondering whether they should set up a howl. Rud put out his tongue, Pelle went a step further and began to laugh, and they were once more the best of friends. They set up the memorial stone, which had been overturned in the heat of battle, and then sat down hand in hand, to rest after the storm, a little quieter than usual.

It was not because there was more evil in Pelle, but because the question had acquired for him an importance of its own, and he must understand it, that a meditative expression came into his eyes, and he said thoughtfully:

"Well, but you've told me yourself that she was paralysed in her legs!"

"Well, what if she was?"

"Why, then she couldn't crawl up into heaven."

"Oh, you booby! It's her spirit, of course!"

"Then the mouse's spirit can very well be up there too."

"No, it can't, for mice haven't got any spirit."

"Haven't they? Then how is it they can breathe*?"

That was one for Rud! And the tiresome part of it was that he attended Sunday-school. His fists would have come in handy again now, but his instinct told him that sooner or later Pelle would get the better of him in fighting. And anyhow his grandmother was saved.

"Yes," he said, yielding; "and it certainly could breathe. Well, then, it was its spirit flying up that overturned the stone—that's what it was!"

A distant sound reached them, and far off near the cottage they could see the figure of a fat woman, beckoning threateningly.

"The Sow's calling you," said Pelle. The two boys never called her anything but "the Sow" between themselves.

So Rud had to go. He was allowed to take the greater part of the contents of the dinner-basket with him, and ate as he ran. They had been too busy to eat.

Pelle sat down among the dunes and ate his dinner. As usual when Rud had been with him, he could not imagine what had become of the day. The birds had ceased singing, and not one of the cattle was still lying down, so it must be at least five o'clock.

Up at the farm they were busy driving in. It went at full gallop—out and in, out and in. The men stood up in the carts and thrashed away at the horses with the end of the reins, and the swaying loads were hurried along the field-roads, looking like little bristling, crawling things, that have been startled and are darting to their holes.

A one-horsed vehicle drove out from the farm, and took the high-road to the town at a quick trot. It was the farmer; he was driving so fast that he was evidently off

* In Danish, spirit = aand, and to breathe = aande.

to the town on the spree. So there was something gone wrong at home, and there would be crying at the farm that night.

Yes, there was Father Lasse driving out with the water-cart, so it was half-past five. He could tell that too by the birds beginning their pleasant evening twittering, that was soft and sparkling like the rays of the sun.

Far inland above the stone-quarry, where the cranes stood out against the sky, a cloud of smoke rose every now and then into the air, and burst in a fountain of pieces of rock. Long after came the explosion, bit by bit in a series of rattling reverberations. It sounded as if some one were running along and slapping his thigh with fingerless gloves.

The last few hours were always long—the sun was so slow about it. And there was nothing to fill up the time either. Pelle himself was tired, and the tranquillity of evening had the effect of subduing his voice. But now they were driving out for milking up there, and the cattle were beginning to graze along the edge of the meadow that turned towards the farm; so the time was drawing near.

At last the herd-boys began to jodel over at the neighbouring farms, first one, and then several joining in:

"Oh, drive home, o-ho, o-o-ho!

O-ho, o-ho!

O-ho, o-ho!

Oh, drive home, o-o-ho!

O-ho!"

From all sides the soft tones vibrated over the sloping land, running out, like the sound of happy weeping, into the first glow of evening; and Pelle's animals began to move farther after each pause to graze. But he did not dare to drive them home yet, for it only meant a thrashing from the bailiff or the pupil if he arrived too early.

He stood at the upper end of the meadow, and called his homeward-drifting flock together; and when the last tones of the call had died away, he began it himself, and stepped on one side. The animals ran with a peculiar little trot and heads extended. The shadow of the grass lay in long thin stripes across the ground, and the shadows of the animals were endless. Now and then a calf lowed slowly and broke into a gallop. They were yearning for home, and Pelle was yearning too.

From behind a hollow the sun darted long rays out into space, as if it had called all its powers home for the night, and now poured them forth in one great longing, from west to east. Everything pointed in long thin lines, and the eager longing of the cattle seemed visible in the air.

To the mind of the child there was nothing left out of doors now; everything was being taken in, and he longed for his father with a longing that was almost a pain. And when at last he turned the corner with the herd, and saw old Lasse standing there, smiling happily with his red-rimmed eyes, and opening the gate to the fold, the boy gave way and threw himself weeping into his father's arms.

"What's the matter, laddie? What's the matter?" asked the old man with concern in his voice, stroking the child's face with a trembling hand. "Has any one been unkind to you? No? Well, that's a good thing! They'd better take care, for happy children are in God's own keeping. And Lasse would be an awkward customer if it came to that. So you were longing for me, were you? Then it's good to be in your little heart, and it only makes Lasse happy. But go in now and get your supper, and don't cry any more." And he wiped the boy's nose with his hard, crooked fingers, and pushed him gently away.

V

PELLE was not long in finding out all about the man who had been sent by God, and had the grave, reproachful eyes. He proved to be nothing but a little shoemaker down in the village, who spoke at the meeting-house on Sundays; and it was also said that his wife drank. Rud went to his Sunday-school, and he was poor; so he was nothing out of the ordinary.

Moreover Gustav had got a cap which could turn out three different crowns—one of blue duffle, one of water-proof American cloth, and one of white canvas for use in sunny weather. It was an absorbingly interesting study that threw everything else into the background, and exercised Pelle's mind for many days; and he used this miraculous cap as a standard by which to measure everything great and desirable. But one day he gave Gustav a beautifully-carved stick for permission to perform the trick of turning the crown inside out himself; and that set his mind at rest at last, and the cap had to take its place in his every-day world like everything else.

But what did it look like in Farmer Kongstrup's big rooms? Money lay upon the floor there, of course, the gold in one place and the silver in another; and in the middle of each heap stood a half-bushel measure. What did the word "*practical*" mean, which the bailiff used when he talked to the farmer? And why did the men call one another "*Swede*" as a term of abuse? Why, they were all Swedes! What was there away beyond the