

parlour, and had much of its easy movement. They were quicker than Pelle, but not so enduring; and they had a freer manner, and made less of the spot to which they belonged. They spoke of England in the most ordinary way, and brought things to school that their fathers and brothers had brought home with them from the other side of the world, from Africa and China. They spent nights on the sea in an open boat, and when they played truant it was always to go fishing. The cleverest of them had their own fishing-tackle and little flat-bottomed prams, that they had built themselves and caulked with oakum. They fished on their own account and caught pike, eels, and tench, which they sold to the wealthier people in the district.

Pelle thought he knew the stream thoroughly, but now he was brought to see it from a new side. Here were boys who in March and April—in the holidays—were up at three in the morning, wading barefoot at the mouth of the stream to catch the pike and perch that went up into the fresh water to spawn. And nobody told the boys to do it; they did it because they liked it!

They had strange pleasures! Now they were standing "before the sea"—in a long, jubilant row. They ran out with the receding wave to the larger stones out in the water, and then stood on the stones and jumped when the water came up again, like a flock of sea-birds. The art consisted in keeping yourself dryshod, and yet it was the quickest boys who got wettest. There was of course a limit to the time you could keep yourself hovering. When wave followed wave in quick succession, you had to come down in the middle of it, and then sometimes it went over your head. Or an unusually large wave would come and catch all the legs as they were drawn up in the middle of the jump, when the whole row turned

beautifully, and fell splash into the water. Then with a deafening noise they went up to the schoolroom to turn the "bulls" away from the stove.

Farther along the shore, there were generally some boys sitting with a hammer and a large nail, boring holes in the stones there. They were sons of stone-masons from beyond the quarries. Pelle's cousin Anton was among them. When the holes were deep enough, powder was pressed into them, and the whole school was present at the explosion.

In the morning, when they were waiting for the master, the big boys would stand up by the school wall with their hands in their pockets, discussing the amount of canvas and the home ports of vessels passing far out at sea. Pelle listened to them open-mouthed. It was always the sea and what belonged to the sea that they talked about, and most of it he did not understand. All these boys wanted the same thing when they were confirmed—to go to sea. But Pelle had had enough of it when he crossed from Sweden; he could not understand them.

How carefully he had always shut his eyes and put his fingers in his ears, so that his head should not get filled with water when he dived in the stream! But these boys swam down under the water like proper fish, and from what they said he understood that they could dive down in deep water and pick up stones from the bottom.

"Can you see down there, then?" he asked in wonder.

"Yes, of course! How else would the fish be able to keep away from the nets? If it's only moonlight, they keep far outside, the whole shoal!"

"And the water doesn't run into your head when you take your fingers out of your ears?"

"Take your fingers out of your ears?"

"Yes, to pick up the stone."

A burst of scornful laughter greeted this remark, and they began to question him craftily; he was splendid—a regular country bumpkin! He had the funniest ideas about everything, and it very soon came out that he had never bathed in the sea. He was afraid of the water—a “blue-bag”; the stream could not do away with that.

After that he was called Blue-bag, notwithstanding that he one day took the cattle-whip to school with him and showed them how he could cut three-cornered holes in a pair of trousers with the long lash, hit a small stone so that it disappeared into the air, and make those loud reports. It was all excellent, but the name stuck to him all the same; and all his little personality smarted under it.

In the course of the winter, some strong young men came home to the village in blue clothes and white neck-cloths. They had laid up, as it was called, and some of them drew wages all through the winter without doing anything. They always came over to the school to see the master; they came in the middle of lessons, but it did not matter; Fris was joy personified. They generally brought something or other for him—a cigar of such fine quality that it was enclosed in glass, or some other remarkable thing. And they talked to Fris as they would to a comrade, told him what they had gone through, so that the listening youngsters hugged themselves with delight, and quite unconcernedly smoked their clay pipes in the class—with the bowl turned nonchalantly downwards without losing its tobacco. They had been engaged as cook’s boys and ordinary seamen, on the Spanish main and the Mediterranean and many other wonderful places. One of them had ridden up a fire-spouting mountain on a donkey. And they brought home with them lucifer matches that were

as big, almost, as Pomeranian logs, and were to be struck on the teeth.

The boys worshipped them and talked of nothing else; it was a great honour to be seen in the company of such a man. For Pelle it was not to be thought of.

And then it came about that the village was awaiting the return of one such lad as this, and he did not come. And one day word came that bark so-and-so had gone to the bottom with all on board. It was the winter storms, said the boys, spitting like grown men. The brothers and sisters were kept away from school for a week, and when they came back, Pelle eyed them curiously: it must be strange to have a brother lying at the bottom of the sea, quite young! “Then you won’t want to go to sea?” he asked them. Oh yes, they wanted to go to sea too!

Another time Fris came back after an unusually long playtime in low spirits. He kept on blowing his nose hard, and now and then dried his eyes behind his spectacles. The boys nudged one another. He cleared his throat loudly, but could not make himself heard, and then beat a few strokes on his desk with the cane.

“Have you heard, children?” he asked, when they had become more or less quiet.

“No! Yes! What?” they cried in chorus; and one boy said: “That the sun’s fallen into the sea and set it on fire!”

The master quietly took up his hymn-book. “Shall we sing ‘How blessed are they’?” he said; and they knew that something must have happened, and sang the hymn seriously with him.

But at the fifth verse Fris stopped; he could not go on any longer. “Peter Funck is drowned!” he said in a voice that broke on the last word. A horrified whisper passed through the class, and they looked at one another

with uncomprehending eyes. Peter Funck was the most active boy in the village, the best swimmer, and the greatest scamp the school had ever had—and he was drowned!

Fris walked up and down, struggling to control himself. The children dropped into softly whispered conversation about Peter Funck, and all their faces had grown old with gravity. "Where did it happen?" asked a big boy.

Fris awoke with a sigh. He had been thinking about this boy, who had shirked everything, and had then become the best sailor in the village; about all the thrashings he had given him, and the pleasant hours they had spent together on winter evenings when the lad was home from a voyage and had looked in to see his old master. There had been much to correct, and things of grave importance that Fris had had to patch up for the lad in all secrecy, so that they should not affect his whole life, and—

"It was in the North Sea," he said. "I think they'd been in England."

"To Spain with dried fish," said a boy. "And from there they went to England with oranges, and were bringing a cargo of coal home."

"Yes, I think that was it," said Fris. "They were in the North Sea, and were surprised by a storm; and Peter had to go aloft."

"Yes, for the *Trokkadej* is such a crazy old hulk. As soon as there's a little wind, they have to go aloft and take in sail," said another boy.

"And he fell down," Fris went on, "and struck the rail and fell into the sea. There were the marks of his sea-boots on the rail. They braced—or whatever it's called—and managed to turn; but it took them half-an-hour to get up to the place. And just as they got there, he sank before their eyes. He had been struggling in the

icy water for half-an-hour—with sea-boots and oilskins on—and yet—"

A long sigh passed through the class. "He was the best swimmer on the whole shore!" said Henry. "He dived backwards off the gunwale of a bark that was lying in the roads here taking in water, and came up on the other side of the vessel. He got ten rye rusks from the captain himself for it."

"He must have suffered terribly," said Fris. "It would almost have been better for him if he hadn't been able to swim."

"That's what my father says!" said a little boy. "He can't swim, for he says it's better for a sailor not to be able to; it only keeps you in torture."

"My father can't swim either!" exclaimed another. "Nor mine either!" said a third. "He could easily learn, but he won't." And they went on in this way, holding up their hands. They could all swim themselves, but it appeared that hardly any of their fathers could; they had a superstitious feeling against it. "Father says you oughtn't to tempt Providence if you're wrecked," one boy added.

"Why, but then you'd not be doing your best!" objected a little faltering voice. Fris turned quickly towards the corner where Pelle sat blushing to the tips of his ears.

"Look at that little man!" said Fris, impressed. "And I declare if he isn't right and all the rest of us wrong! God helps those that help themselves!"

"Perhaps," said a voice. It was Henry Bödker's.

"Well, well, I know He didn't help here, but still we ought always to do what we can in all the circumstances of life. Peter did his best—and he was the cleverest boy I ever had."

The children smiled at one another, remembering various things. Peter Funck had once gone so far as to wrestle with the master himself, but they had not the heart to bring this up. One of the bigger boys, however, said, half for the purpose of teasing: "He never got any farther than the twenty-seventh hymn!"

"Didn't he indeed?" snarled Fris. "Didn't he indeed? And you think perhaps you're clever, do you? Let's see how far you've got, then!" And he took up the hymn-book with a trembling hand. He could not stand anything being said against boys that had left.

The name Blue-bag continued to stick to Pelle, and nothing had ever stung him so much; and there was no chance of his getting rid of it before the summer came, and that was a long way off.

One day the fisher-boys ran out on to the breakwater in playtime. A boat had just come in through the pack-ice with a gruesome cargo—five frozen men, one of whom was dead and lay in the fire-engine house, while the four others had been taken into various cottages, where they were being rubbed with ice to draw the frost out of them. The farmer-boys were allowed no share in all this excitement, for the fisher-boys, who went in and out and saw everything, drove them away if they approached—and sold meagre information at extortionate prices.

The boat had met a Finnish schooner drifting in the sea, covered with ice, and with frozen rudder. She was too heavily laden, so that the waves went right over her and froze; and the ice had made her sink still deeper. When she was found, her deck was just on a level with the water, ropes of the thickness of a finger had become as thick as an arm with ice, and the men who were lashed to the rigging were shapeless masses of ice. They were like

knights in armour with closed visor when they were taken down, and their clothes had to be hacked off their bodies. Three boats had gone out now to try and save the vessel; there would be a large sum of money to divide if they were successful.

Pelle was determined not to be left out of all this, even if he got his shins kicked in, and so kept near and listened. The boys were talking gravely and looked gloomy. What those men had put up with! And perhaps their hands or feet would mortify and have to be cut off. Each boy behaved as if he were bearing his share of their sufferings, and they talked in a manly way and in gruff voices. "Be off with you, bull!" they called to Pelle. They were not fond of Blue-bags for the moment.

The tears came to Pelle's eyes, but he would not give in, and wandered away along the wharf.

"Be off with you!" they shouted again, picking up stones in a menacing way. "Be off to the other bumpkins, will you!" They came up and hit at him. "What are you standing there and staring into the water for? You might turn giddy and fall in head first! Be off to the other yokels, will you! Blue-bag!"

Pelle turned literally giddy, with the strength of the determination that seized upon his little brain. "I'm no more a blue-bag than you are!" he said. "Why, you wouldn't even dare to jump into the water!"

"Just listen to him! He thinks you jump into the water for fun in the middle of winter, and get cramp!"

Pelle just heard their exultant laughter as he sprang off the breakwater, and the water, thick with ground-up ice, closed above his head. The top of his head appeared again, he made two or three strokes with his arms like a dog, and sank.

The boys ran in confusion up and down and shouted,

and one of them got hold of a boat-hook. Then Henry Bödker came running up, sprang in head first without stopping and disappeared, while a piece of ice that he had struck with his forehead made ducks and drakes over the water. Twice his head appeared above the ice-filled water, to snatch a breath of air, and then he came up with Pelle. They got him hoisted up on to the breakwater, and Henry set to work to give him a good thrashing.

Pelle had lost consciousness, but the thrashing had the effect of bringing him to. He suddenly opened his eyes, was on his legs in a trice, and darted away like a sand-piper.

"Run home!" the boys roared after him. "Run as hard as ever you can, or you'll be ill! Only tell your father you fell in!" And Pelle ran. He needed no persuasion. When he reached Stone Farm, his clothes were frozen quite stiff, and his trousers could stand alone when he got out of them; but he himself was as warm as a toast.

He would not lie to his father, but told him just what had happened. Lasse was angry, angrier than the boy had ever seen him before.

Lasse knew how to treat a horse to keep it from catching cold, and began to rub Pelle's naked body with a wisp of straw, while the boy lay on the bed, tossing about under the rough handling. His father took no notice of his groans, but scolded him. "You mad little devil, to jump straight into the sea in the middle of winter like a lovesick woman! You ought to have a whipping, that's what you ought to have—a good sound whipping! But I'll let you off this time if you'll go to sleep and try to sweat so that we can get that nasty salt water out of your body. I wonder if it wouldn't be a good thing to bleed you."

Pelle did not want to be bled; he was very comfortable lying there, now that he had been sick. But his thoughts were very serious. "Supposing I'd been drowned!" he said solemnly.

"If you had, I'd have thrashed you to within an inch of your life," said Lasse, angrily.

Pelle laughed.

"Oh, you may laugh, you word-catcher!" snapped Lasse. "But it's no joke being father to a little ne'er-do-weel of a cub like you!" Saying which he went angrily out into the stable. He kept on listening, however, and coming up to peep in and see whether fever or any other devilry had come of it.

But Pelle slept quietly with his head under the quilt, and dreamed that he was no less a person than Henry Bödker.

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Pelle did not learn to read much that winter, but he learned twenty and odd hymns by heart only by using his ears, and he got the name Blue-bag, as applied to himself, completely banished. He had gained ground, and strengthened his position by several bold strokes; and the school began to take account of him as a brave boy. And Henry, who as a rule took no notice of anybody, took him several times under his wing.

Now and then he had a bad conscience, especially when his father in his newly-awakened thirst for knowledge, came to him for the solution of some problem or other, and he was at a loss for an answer.

"But it's you who ought to have the learning," Lasse would then say reproachfully.

As the winter drew to an end, and the examination approached, Pelle became nervous. Many uncomfortable

reports were current of the severity of the examination among the boys—of putting into lower classes and complete dismissal from the school.

Pelle had the misfortune not to be heard independently in a single hymn. He had to give an account of the Fall. The theft of the apple was easy to get through, but the curse—! “And God said unto the serpent: Upon thy belly shalt thou go, upon thy belly shalt thou go, upon thy belly shalt thou go!” He could get no further.

“Does it still do that, then?” asked the clergyman kindly.

“Yes—for it has no limbs.”

“And can you explain to me what a limb is?” The priest was known to be the best examiner on the island; he could begin in a gutter and end in heaven, people said.

“A limb is—is a hand.”

“Yes, that is one. But can't you tell me something that distinguishes all limbs from other parts of the body? A limb is—well?—a?—a part of the body that can move by itself, for instance? Well!”

“The ears!” said Pelle, perhaps because his own were burning.

“O-oh? Can you move your ears, then?”

“Yes.” By dint of great perseverance, Pelle had acquired that art in the course of the previous summer, so as not to be outdone by Rud.

“Then, upon my word, I should like to see it!” exclaimed the clergyman.

So Pelle worked his ears industriously backwards and forwards, and the priest and the school committee and the parents all laughed. Pelle got “excellent” in religion.

“So it was your ears after all that saved you,” said

Lasse, delighted. “Didn't I tell you to use your ears well? Highest marks in religion only for moving your ears! Why, I should think you might become a parson if you liked!”

And he went on for a long time. But wasn't he the devil of a laddie to be able to answer like that!