

XII

"COME, cubby, cubby, cubby! Come on, you silly little chicken, there's nothing to be afraid of!" Pelle was enticing his favourite calf with a wisp of green corn; but it was not quite sure of him to-day, for it had had a beating for bad behaviour.

Pelle felt very much like a father whose child gives him sorrow and compels him to use severe measures. And now this misunderstanding—that the calf would have nothing to do with him, although it was for its own good that he had beaten it! But there was no help for it, and as long as Pelle had them to mind, he intended to be obeyed.

At last it let him come close up to it, so that he could stroke it. It stood still for a little and was sulky, but yielded at last, ate the green food and snuffed in his face by way of thanks.

"Will you be good, then?" said Pelle, shaking it by its stumps of horns. "Will you, eh?" It tossed its head mischievously. "Very well, then you shan't carry my coat to-day."

The strange thing about this calf was that the first day it was let out, it would not stir, and at last the boy left it behind for Lasse to take in again. But no sooner was it behind him than it followed of its own accord, with its forehead close to his back; and always after that it walked behind him when they went out and came home, and it

carried his overcoat on its back when it looked as if there would be rain.

Pelle's years were few in number, but to his animals he was a grown man. Formerly he had only been able to make them respect him sufficiently to obey him at close quarters; but this year he could hit a cow at a distance of a hundred paces with a stone, and that gave him power over the animals at a distance, especially when he thought of calling out the animal's name as he hit it. In this way they realised that the pain came from him, and learned to obey the mere call.

For punishment to be effectual, it must follow immediately upon the misdeed. There was therefore no longer any such thing as lying in wait for an animal that had offended, and coming up behind it when later on it was grazing peacefully. That only caused confusion. To run an animal until it was tired out, hanging on to its tail and beating it all round the meadow only to revenge one's self, was also stupid; it made the whole flock restless and difficult to manage for the rest of the day. Pelle weighed the end and the means against one another; he learned to quench his thirst for revenge with good practical reasons.

Pelle was a boy, and he was not an idle one. All day, from five in the morning until nine at night, he was busy with something or other, often most useless things. For hours he practised walking on his hands, turning a somersault, and jumping the stream; he was always in motion. Hour after hour he would run unflaggingly round in a circle on the grass, like a tethered foal, leaning towards the centre as he ran, so that his hand could pluck the grass, kicking up behind, and neighing and snorting. He was pouring forth energy from morning till night with open-handed profusion.

But minding the cattle was *work*, and here he husbanded

his energy. Every step that could be saved here was like capital acquired; and Pelle took careful notice of everything, and was always improving his methods. He learned that punishment worked best when it only hung as a threat; for much beating made an animal callous. He also learned to see when it was absolutely necessary to interfere. If this could not be done in the very act, he controlled himself and endeavoured upon the strength of his experience to bring about exactly the same situation once more, and then to be prepared. The little fellow, unknown to himself, was always engaged in adding cubits unto his stature.

He had obtained good results. The driving out and home again no longer gave him any difficulty; he had succeeded for a whole week in driving the flock along a narrow field road, with growing corn on both sides, without their having bitten off so much as a blade. And there was the still greater task of keeping them under control on a hot, close day—to hedge them in in full gallop, so that they stood in the middle of the meadow stamping on the ground with uplifted tails, in fear of the gad-flies. If he wanted to, he could make them tear home to the stable in wild flight, with their tails in the air, on the coldest October day, only by lying down in the grass and imitating the hum of gad-flies. But that was a tremendous secret, that even Father Lasse knew nothing about.

The amusing thing about the buzzing was that calves that were out for the first time, and had never made the acquaintance of a gad-fly, instantly set off running, with tail erect, when they heard its angry buzz.

Pelle had a remote ideal, which was to lie upon some elevated place and direct the whole flock by the sole means of his voice, and never need to resort to punishment. Father Lasse never beat either, no matter how wrong things went.

There were some days—well, what did become of them?

Before he had any idea of it, it was time to drive home. Other days were long enough, but seemed to sing themselves away, in the ring of scythes, the lowing of cattle, and people's voices far away. Then the day itself went singing over the ground, and Pelle had to stop every now and then to listen. Hark! there was music! And he would run up on to the sandbanks and gaze out over the sea; but it was not there, and inland there was no merrymaking that he knew of, and there were no birds of passage flying through the air at this time of year. But hark! there was music again! far away in the distance, just such a sound of music as reaches the ear from so far off that one cannot distinguish the melody, or say what instruments are playing. Could it be the sun itself?

The song of light and life streamed through him, as though he were a fountain; and he would go about in a dreamy half-consciousness of melody and happiness.

When the rain poured down, he hung his coat over a briar and lay sheltered beneath it, carving or drawing with a lead button on paper—horses, and bulls lying down, but more often ships, ships that sailed across the sea upon their own soft melody, far away to foreign lands, to Negroland and China, for rare things. And when he was quite in the mood, he would bring out a broken knife and a piece of shale from a secret hiding-place, and set to work. There was a picture scratched on the stone, and he was now busy carving it in relief. He had worked at it on and off all through the summer, and now it was beginning to stand out. It was a bark in full sail, sailing over rippling water to Spain—yes, it was going to Spain, for grapes and oranges, and all the other delightful things that Pelle had never tasted yet.

On rainy days it was a difficult matter to keep count of the time, and required the utmost exertion. On other

days it was easy enough, and Pelle could tell it best by the feeling. At certain times of the day there were signs at home on the farm that told him the time, and the cattle gave him other hours by their habits. At nine the first one lay down to chew the morning cud, and then all gradually lay down one by one; and there was always a moment at about ten when they all lay chewing. At eleven the last of them were upon their legs again. It was the same in the afternoon between three and five.

Midday was easy to determine when the sun was shining. Pelle could always feel it when it turned in its path. And there were a hundred other things in nature that gave him a connection with the times of day, such as the habits of the birds, and something about the fir-trees, and much besides that he could not lay his finger upon and say it was there, because it was only a feeling. The time to drive home was given by the cattle themselves. When it drew near, they grazed slowly round until their heads pointed in the direction of the farm; and there was a visible tension in their bodies, a homeward yearning.

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Rud had not shown himself all the week, and no sooner had he come to-day than Pelle had to give him a blowing-up for some deceitfulness. Then he ran home, and Pelle lay down at the edge of the fir-plantation, on his face with the soles of his feet in the air, and sang. All round him there were marks of his knife on the tree-stems. On the earliest ships you saw the keel, and the deck was perpendicular to the body. Those had been carved the first summer. There was also a collection of tiny fields here on the edge of the stream, properly ploughed, harrowed and sown, each field about two feet square.

Pelle was resting now after the exertion with Rud, by making the air rock with his jubilant bawling. Up at

the farm a man came out and went along the high-road with a bundle under his arm. It was Erik, who had to appear in court in answer to a summons for fighting. Then the farmer drove out at a good pace towards the town, so he was evidently off on the spree. Why couldn't the man have driven with him, as they were both going the same way? How quickly he drove, although she never followed him now. She consoled herself at home instead! Could it be true that he had spent five hundred kroners in drinking and amusement in one evening?

"The war is raging, the red blood streams,
Among the mountains ring shouts and screams!
The Turk advances with cruel rage,
And sparing neither youth nor age,
They go——"

"Ho!" Pelle sprang to his feet and gazed up over the clover-field. The dairy-cows up there for the last quarter of an hour had been looking up at the farm every other moment, and now Aspasia lowed, so his father must soon be coming out to move them. There he came, waddling round the corner of the farm. It was not far to the lowest of the cows, so when his father was there, Pelle could seize the opportunity just to run across and say good-day to him.

He brought his animals nearer together and drove them slowly over to the other fence and up the fields. Lasse had moved the upper half, and was now crossing over diagonally to the bull, which stood a little apart from the others. The bull was growling and kicking up the earth; its tongue hung out at one side of its mouth, and it tossed its head quickly: it was angry. Then it advanced with short steps and all kinds of antics; and how it stamped! Pelle felt a desire to kick it on the nose as he had often done before; it had no business to threaten Lasse, even if it meant nothing by it.

Father Lasse took no notice of it either. He stood hammering away at the big tether-peg, to loosen it. "Good-day!" shouted Pelle. Lasse turned his head and nodded, then bent down and hammered the peg into the ground. The bull was just behind him, stamping quickly, with open mouth and tongue hanging out; it looked as if it were vomiting, and the sound it made answered exactly to that. Pelle laughed as he slackened his pace. He was close by.

But suddenly Father Lasse turned a somersault, fell, and was in the air again, and then fell a little way off. Again the bull was about to toss him, but Pelle was at its head. He was not wearing wooden shoes, but he kicked it with his bare feet until he was giddy. The bull knew him and tried to go round him, but Pelle sprang at its head shouting and kicking, and, almost beside himself, seized it by the horns. But it put him gently on one side and went forward towards Lasse, blowing along the ground so that the grass waved.

It took hold of him by the blouse and shook him a little, and then tried to get both his horns under him to send him up into the air; but Pelle was on his feet again, and as quick as lightning had drawn his knife and plunged it in between the bull's hind legs. The bull uttered a short roar, turned Lasse over on one side, and dashed off over the fields at a gallop, tossing its head as it ran, and bellowing. Down by the stream it began to tear up the bank, filling the air with earth and grass.

Lasse lay groaning with his eyes closed, and Pelle stood pulling in vain at his arm to help him up, crying: "Father, little Father Lasse!" At last Lasse sat up.

"Who's that singing?" he asked. "Oh, it's you, is it, laddie? And you're crying! Has any one done anything to you? Ah yes, of course, it was the bull! It was

just going to play fandango with me. But what did you do to it, that the devil took it so quickly? You saved your father's life, little though you are. Oh, hang it! I think I'm going to be sick! Ah me!" he went on when the sickness was past, as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead. "If only I could have had a dram. Oh, yes, he knew me, the fellow, or I shouldn't have got off so easily. He only wanted to play with me a little, you know. He was a wee bit spiteful because I drove him away from a cow this morning; I'd noticed that. But who'd have thought he'd have turned on me. He wouldn't have done either if I hadn't been so silly as to wear somebody else's clothes. This is Mons's blouse; I borrowed it of him while I washed my own. And Mr. Bull didn't like the strange smell about me. Well, we'll see what Mons'll say to this here slit. I'm afraid he won't be best pleased."

Lasse talked on for a good while until he tried to rise, and stood up with Pelle's assistance. As he stood leaning on the boy's shoulder, he swayed backwards and forwards. "I should almost have said I was drunk, if it hadn't been for the pains!" he said, laughing feebly. "Well, well, I suppose I must thank God for you, laddie. You always gladden my heart, and now you've saved my life too."

Lasse then stumbled homewards, and Pelle moved the rest of the cows on the road down to join his own. He was both proud and affected, but most proud. He had saved Father Lasse's life, and from the big, angry bull that no one else on the farm dared have anything to do with. The next time Henry Bödker came out to see him, he should hear all about it.

He was a little vexed with himself for having drawn his knife. Every one here looked down upon that, and said it was Swedish. He wouldn't have needed to do it either

if there'd been time, or if only he had had on his wooden shoes to kick the bull in the eyes with. He had very often gone at it with the toes of his wooden shoes, when it had to be driven into its stall again after a covering; and it always took good care not to do anything to him. Perhaps he would put his finger in its eye and make it blind, or take it by the horns and twist its head round, like the man in the story, until its neck was wrung.

Pelle grew and swelled up until he overshadowed everything. There was no limit to his strength while he ran about bringing his animals together again. He passed like a storm over everything, tossed strong Erik and the bailiff about, and lifted—yes, lifted the whole of Stone Farm merely by putting his hand under the beam. It was quite a fit of berserker rage!

In the very middle of it all, it occurred to him how awkward it would be if the bailiff got to know that the bull was loose. It might mean a thrashing both for him and Lasse. He must go and look for it; and for safety's sake he took his long whip with him and put on his wooden shoes.

The bull had made a terrible mess down on the bank of the stream, and had ploughed up a good piece of the meadow. It had left bloody traces along the bed of the stream and across the fields. Pelle followed these out towards the headland, where he found the bull. The huge animal had gone right in under the bushes, and was standing licking its wound. When it heard Pelle's voice, it came out. "Turn round!" he cried, flicking its nose with the whip. It put its head to the ground, bellowed, and moved heavily backwards. Pelle continued flicking it on the nose while he advanced step by step, shouting determinedly: "Turn round! Will you turn round!" At last it turned and set off at a run, Pelle seizing the

tether-peg and running after. He kept it going with the whip, so that it should have no time for evil thoughts.

When this was accomplished, he was ready to drop with fatigue, and lay crouched up at the edge of the fir-plantation, thinking sadly of Father Lasse, who must be going about up there ill and with nobody to give him a helping hand with his work. At last the situation became unbearable: he had to go home!

Zzzz! Zzzz! Lying flat on the ground, Pelle crept over the grass, imitating the maddening buzz of the gad-fly. He forced the sound out between his teeth, rising and falling, as if it were flying hither and thither over the grass. The cattle stopped grazing and stood perfectly still with attentive ears. Then they began to grow nervous, kicking up their legs under their bodies, turning their heads to one side in little curves, and starting; and then up went their tails. He made the sound more persistently angry, and the whole flock, infecting one another, turned and began to stamp round in wild panic. Two calves broke out of the tumult, and made a bee-line for the farm, and the whole flock followed, over stock and stone. All Pelle had to do now was to run after them, making plenty of fuss, and craftily keep the buzzing going, so that the mood should last till they reached home.

The bailiff himself came running to open the gate into the enclosure, and helped to get the animals in. Pelle expected a box on the ears, and stood still; but the bailiff only looked at him with a peculiar smile, and said: "They're beginning to get the upper hand of you, I think. Well, well," he went on, "it's all right as long as you can manage the bull!" He was making fun of him, and Pelle blushed up to the roots of his hair.

Father Lasse had crept into bed. "What a good thing you came!" he said. "I was just lying here and

wondering how I was going to get the cows moved. I can scarcely move at all, much less get up."

It was a week before Lasse was on his feet again, and during that time the field-cattle remained in the enclosure, and Pelle stayed at home and did his father's work. He had his meals with the others, and slept his midday sleep in the barn as they did.

One day, in the middle of the day, the Sow came into the yard, drunk. She took her stand in the upper yard, where she was forbidden to go, and stood there calling for Kongstrup. The farmer was at home, but did not show himself, and not a soul was to be seen behind the high windows. "Kongstrup, Kongstrup! Come here for a little!" she called, with her eyes on the pavement, for she could not lift her head. The bailiff was not at home, and the men remained in hiding in the barn, hoping to see some fun. "I say, Kongstrup, come out a moment! I want to speak to you!" said the Sow, indistinctly—and then went up the steps and tried to open the door. She hammered upon it a few times, and stood talking with her face close to the door; and when nobody came, she reeled down the steps and went away talking to herself and not looking round.

A little while after the sound of weeping began up there, and just as the men were going out to the fields, the farmer came rushing out and gave orders that the horse should be harnessed to the chaise. While it was being done, he walked about nervously, and then set off at full speed. As he turned the corner of the house, a window opened and a voice called to him imploringly: "Kongstrup, Kongstrup!" But he drove quickly on, the window closed, and the weeping began afresh.

In the afternoon Pelle was busying himself about the lower yard when Karna came to him and told him to go

up to the mistress. Pelle went up hesitatingly. He was not sure of her, and all the men were out in the fields.

Fru Kongstrup lay upon the sofa in her husband's study, which she always occupied, day or night, when her husband was out. She had a wet towel over her forehead, and her whole face was red with weeping.

"Come here!" she said, in a low voice. "You aren't afraid of me, are you?"

Pelle had to go up to her and sit on the chair beside her. He did not know what to do with his eyes; and his nose began to run with the excitement, and he had no pocket-handkerchief.

"Are you afraid of me?" she asked again, and a bitter smile crossed her lips.

He had to look at her to show that he was not afraid, and to tell the truth, she was not like a witch at all, but only like a human being who cried and was unhappy.

"Come here!" she said, and she wiped his nose with her own fine handkerchief, and stroked his hair. "You haven't even a mother, poor little thing!" And she smoothed down his clumsily-mended blouse.

"It's three years now since Mother Bengta died, and she's lying in the west corner of the churchyard."

"Do you miss her very much?"

"Oh, well, Father Lasse mends my clothes!"

"I'm sure she can't have been very good to you."

"Oh, yes!" said Pelle, nodding earnestly. "But she was so fretful, she was always ailing; and it's better they should go when they get like that. But now we're soon going to get married again—when Father Lasse's found somebody that'll do."

"And then I suppose you'll go away from here? I'm sure you aren't comfortable here, are you?"

Pelle had found his tongue, but now feared a trap, and

became dumb. He only nodded. Nobody should come and accuse him afterwards of having complained.

"No, you aren't comfortable," she said in a plaintive tone. "No one is comfortable at Stone Farm. Everything turns to misfortune here."

"It's an old curse, that!" said Pelle.

"Do they say so? Yes, yes, I know they do! And they say of me that I'm a devil—only because I love a single man—and cannot put up with being trampled on." She wept and pressed his hand against her quivering face.

"I've got to go out and move the cows," said Pelle, wriggling about uneasily in an endeavour to get away.

"Now you're afraid of me again!" she said, and tried to smile. It was like a gleam of sunshine after rain.

"No—only I've got to go out and move the cows."

"There's still a whole hour before that. But why aren't you herding to-day? Is your father ill?"

Then Pelle had to tell her about the bull.

"You're a good boy!" said the mistress, patting his head. "If I had a son, I should like him to be like you. But now you shall have some jam, and then you must run to the shop for a bottle of black-currant rum, so that we can make a hot drink for your father. If you hurry, you can be back before moving-time."

Lasse had his hot drink, even before the boy returned; and every day while he kept his bed he had something strengthening—although there was no black-currant rum in it.

During this time Pelle went up to the mistress nearly every day. Kongstrup had gone on business to Copenhagen. She was kind to him and gave him nice things to eat; and while he ate, she talked without ceasing about Kongstrup, or asked him what people thought about her. Pelle had to tell her, and then she was upset and began to cry. There

was no end to her talk about the farmer, but she contradicted herself, and Pelle gave up trying to make anything of it. Besides the good things she gave him were quite enough for him to think about.

Down in their room he repeated everything word for word, and Lasse lay and listened, and wondered at this little fellow who had the run of high places, and was in the mistress's confidence. Still he did not quite like it.

". . . She could scarcely stand, and had to hold on to the table when she was going to fetch me the biscuits, she was so ill. It was only because he'd treated her badly, she said. Do you know she hates him, and would like to kill him, she says; and yet she says that he's the handsomest man in the world, and asked me if I've seen any one handsomer in all Sweden. And then she cries as if she was mad."

"Does she?" said Lasse, thoughtfully. "I don't suppose she knows what she's saying, or else she says it for reasons of her own. But all the same, it's not true that he beats her! She's telling a lie, I'm sure."

"And why should she lie?"

"Because she wants to do him harm, I suppose. But it's true he's a fine man—and cares for everybody except just her; and that's the misfortune. I don't like your being so much up there; I'm so afraid you may come to some harm."

"How could I? She's so good, so very good."

"How am I to know that? No, she isn't good—her eyes aren't good, at any rate. She's brought more than one person into misfortune by looking at them. But there's nothing to be done about it; the poor man has to risk things."

Lasse was silent, and stumbled about for a little while. Then he came up to Pelle. "Now, see here! Here's a

piece of steel I've found, and you must remember always to have it about you, especially when you go up *there*! And then—yes, then we must leave the rest in God's hand. He's the only one who perhaps looks after poor little boys."

Lasse was up for a short while that day. He was getting on quickly, thank God, and in two days they might be back in their old ways again. And next winter they must try to get away from it all!

On the last day that Pelle stayed at home, he went up to the mistress as usual, and ran her errand for her. And that day he saw something unpleasant that made him glad that this was over. She took her teeth, palate, and everything out of her mouth, and laid them on the table in front of her!

So she *was* a witch!

XIII

PELLE was coming home with his young cattle. As he came near the farm he issued his commands in a loud voice, so that his father might hear. "Hi! Spasianna! where are you going to? Dannebrog, you confounded old ram, will you turn round!" But Lasse did not come to open the gate of the enclosure.

When he had got the animals in, he ran into the cow-stable. His father was neither there nor in their room, and his Sunday wooden shoes and his woollen cap were gone. Then Pelle remembered that it was Saturday, and that probably the old man had gone to the shop to fetch spirits for the men.

Pelle went down into the servants' room to get his supper. The men had come home late, and were still sitting at the table, which was covered with spilt milk and potato-skins. They were engrossed in a wager; Erik undertook to eat twenty salt herrings with potatoes after he had finished his meal. The stakes were a bottle of spirits, and the others were to peel the potatoes for him.

Pelle got out his pocket-knife and peeled himself a pile of potatoes. He left the skin on the herring, but scraped it carefully and cut off the head and tail; then he cut it in pieces and ate it without taking out the bones, with the potatoes and the sauce. While he did so, he looked at Erik—the giant Erik, who was so strong and was not afraid of anything between heaven and earth. Erik had children