

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

all over the place! Erik could put his finger into the barrel of a gun, and hold the gun straight out at arm's length! Erik could drink as much as three others!

And now Erik was sitting and eating twenty salt herrings after his hunger was satisfied. He took the herring by the head, drew it once between his legs, and then ate it as it was; and he ate potatoes to them, quite as quickly as the others could peel them. In between whiles he swore because the bailiff had refused him permission to go out that evening; there was going to be the devil to pay about that: he'd teach them to keep Erik at home when he wanted to go out!

Pelle quickly swallowed his herring and porridge, and set off again to run to meet his father; he was longing immensely to see him. Out at the pump the girls were busy scouring the milk-pails and kitchen pans; and Gustav was standing in the lower yard with his arms on the fence, talking to them. He was really watching Bodil, whose eyes were always following the new pupil, who was strutting up and down and showing off his long boots with patent-leather tops.

Pelle was stopped as he ran past, and set to pump water. The men now came up and went across to the barn, perhaps to try their strength. Since Erik had come, they always tried their strength in their free time. There was nothing Pelle found so exciting as trials of strength, and he worked hard so as to get done and go over there.

Gustav, who was generally the most eager, continued to stand and vent his ill-nature upon the pupil.

"There must be money there!" said Bodil, thoughtfully.

"Yes, you should try him; perhaps you might become a farmer's wife. The bailiff won't anyhow; and the farmer—well, you saw the Sow the other day; it must be nice to have that in prospect."

"Who told you that the bailiff won't?" answered Bodil, sharply. "Don't imagine that we need you to hold the candle for us! Little children aren't allowed to see everything."

Gustav turned red. "Oh, hold your jaw, you hussy!" he muttered, and sauntered down to the barn.

"Oh, goodness gracious, my poor old mother,
Who's up on deck and can't stand!"

sang Mons over at the stable door, where he was standing hammering at a cracked wooden shoe. Pelle and the girls were quarrelling, and up in the attic the bailiff could be heard going about; he was busy putting pipes in order. Now and then a long-drawn sound came from the high house, like the distant howling of some animal, making the people shudder with dreariness.

A man dressed in his best clothes, and with a bundle under his arm, slipped out of the door from the men's rooms, and crept along by the building in the lower yard. It was Erik.

"Hi, there! Where the devil are you going?" thundered a voice from the bailiff's window. The man ducked his head a little, and pretended not to hear. "Do you hear, you confounded Kabyle! *Erik!*" This time Erik turned and darted in at a barn-door.

Directly after the bailiff came down and went across the yard. In the chaff-cutting barn the men were standing laughing at Erik's bad luck. "He's a devil for keeping watch!" said Gustav. "You must be up early to get the better of *him*."

"Oh, I'll manage to dish him!" said Erik. "I wasn't born yesterday. And if he doesn't mind his own business, we shall come to blows."

There was a sudden silence as the bailiff's well-known

step was heard upon the stone paving. Erik stole away.

The form of the bailiff filled the doorway. "Who sent Lasse for gin?" he asked sternly.

They looked at one another as if not understanding. "Is Lasse out?" asked Mons then, with the most innocent look in the world. "Ay, the old man's fond of spirits," said Anders, in explanation.

"Oh, yes; you're good comrades!" said the bailiff. "First you make the old man go, and then you leave him in the lurch. You deserve a thrashing, all of you."

"No, we don't deserve a thrashing, and don't mean to submit to one either," said the head man, going a step forward. "Let me tell you——"

"Hold your tongue, man!" cried the bailiff, going close up to him, and Karl Johan drew back.

"Where's Erik?"

"He must be in his room."

The bailiff went in through the horse-stable, something in his carriage showing that he was not altogether unprepared for an attack from behind. Erik was in bed, with the quilt drawn up to his eyes.

"What's the meaning of this? Are you ill?" asked the bailiff.

"Yes, I think I've caught cold, I'm shivering so." He tried to make his teeth chatter.

"It isn't the rot, I hope?" said the bailiff sympathetically. "Let's look at you a little, poor fellow." He whipped off the quilt. "Oho, so you're in bed with your best things on—and top-boots! It's your grave-clothes, perhaps? And I suppose you were going out to order a pauper's grave for yourself, weren't you? It's time we got you put underground, too; seems to me

you're beginning to smell already!" He sniffed at him once or twice.

But Erik sprang out of bed as if shot by a spring, and stood erect close to him. "I'm not dead yet, and perhaps I don't smell any more than some other people!" he said, his eyes flashing and looking about for a weapon.

The bailiff felt his hot breath upon his face, and knew it would not do to draw back. He planted his fist in the man's stomach, so that he fell back upon the bed and gasped for breath; and then held him down with a hand upon his chest. He was burning with a desire to do more, to drive his fist into the face of this rascal, who grumbled whenever one's back was turned, and had to be driven to every little task. Here was all the servant-worry that embittered his existence—dissatisfaction with the fare, cantankerousness in work, threats of leaving when things were at their busiest—difficulties without end. Here was the slave of many years of worry and ignominy, and all he wanted was one little pretext—a blow from this big fellow who never used his strength for work, but only to take the lead in all disturbances.

But Erik lay quite still and looked at his enemy with watchful eye. "You may hit me, if you like. There is such a thing as a magistrate in the country," he said, with irritating calm. The bailiff's muscles burned, but he was obliged to let the man go for fear of being summoned. "Then remember another time not to be fractious!" he said, letting go his hold, "or I'll show you that there is a magistrate."

"When Lasse comes, send him up to me with the gin!" he said to the men as he passed through the barn.

"The devil we will!" said Mons, in an undertone.

Pelle had gone to meet his father. The old man had tasted the purchase, and was in good spirits. "There were

seven men in the boat, and they were all called Ole except one, and he was called Ole Olsen!" he said solemnly, when he saw the boy. "Yes, wasn't it a strange thing, Pelle, boy, that they should every one of them be called Ole—except the one, of course; for his name was Ole Olsen." Then he laughed, and nudged the boy mysteriously; and Pelle laughed too, for he liked to see his father in good spirits.

The men came up to them, and took the bottles from the herdsman. "He's been tasting it!" said Anders, holding the bottle up to the light. "Oh, the old drunkard! He's had a taste at the bottles."

"No, the bottles must leak at the bottom!" said Lasse, whom the dram had made quite bold. "For I've done nothing but just smell. You've got to make sure, you know, that you get the genuine thing and not just water."

They moved on down the enclosure, Gustav going in front and playing on his concertina. A kind of excited merriment reigned over the party. First one and then another would leap into the air as they went; they uttered short, shrill cries and disconnected oaths at random. The consciousness of the full bottles, Saturday evening with the day of rest in prospect, and above all the row with the bailiff, had roused their tempers.

They settled down below the cow-stable, in the grass close to the pond. The sun had long since gone down, but the evening sky was bright, and cast a flaming light upon their faces turned westward; while the white farms inland looked dazzling in the twilight.

Now the girls came sauntering over the grass, with their hands under their aprons, looking like silhouettes against the brilliant sky. They were humming a soft folk-song, and one by one sank on to the grass beside the men; the evening twilight was in their hearts, and made their figures

and voices as soft as a caress. But the men's mood was not a gentle one, and they preferred the bottle.

Gustav walked about extemporising on his concertina. He was looking for a place to sit down, and at last threw himself into Karna's lap, and began to play a dance. Erik was the first upon his feet. He led on account of his difference with the bailiff, and pulled Bengta up from the grass with a jerk. They danced a Swedish polka, and always at a certain place in the melody, he tossed her up into the air with a shout. She shrieked every time, and her heavy skirts stood out round her like the tail of a turkey-cock, so that every one could see how long it was till Sunday.

In the middle of a whirl he let go of her, so that she stumbled over the grass and fell. The bailiff's window was visible from where they sat, and a light patch had appeared at it. "He's staring! Lord, how he's staring! I say, can you see this?" Erik called out, holding up a gin-bottle. Then, as he drank: "Your health! Old Nick's health! He smells, the pig! Bah!" The others laughed, and the face at the window disappeared.

In between the dances they played, drank, and wrestled. Their actions became more and more wild, they uttered sudden yells that made the girls scream, threw themselves flat upon the ground in the middle of a dance, groaned as if they were dying, and sprang up again suddenly with wild gestures and kicked the legs of those nearest to them. Once or twice the bailiff sent the pupil to tell them to be quiet, but that only made the noise worse. "Tell him to go his own dog's errands!" Erik shouted after the pupil.

Lasse nudged Pelle and they gradually drew farther and farther away. "We'd better go to bed now," Lasse said, when they had slipped away unnoticed. "One never knows what this may lead to. They all of them see red; I should think they'll soon begin to dance the dance

of blood. Ah me, if I'd been young I wouldn't have stolen away like a thief; I'd have stayed and taken whatever might have come. There was a time when Lasse could put both hands on the ground and kick his man in the face with the heels of his boots so that he went down like a blade of grass; but that time's gone, and it's wisest to take care of one's self. This may end in the police and much more, not to mention the bailiff. They've been irritating him all the summer with that Erik at their head; but if once he gets downright angry, Erik may go home to his mother."

Pelle wanted to stay up for a little and look at them. "If I creep along behind the fence and lie down—oh, do let me, father!" he begged.

"Eh, what a silly idea! They might treat you badly if they got hold of you. They're in the very worst of moods. Well, you must take the consequences, and for goodness' sake take care they don't see you!"

So Lasse went to bed, but Pelle crawled along on the ground behind the fence until he came close up to them and could see everything.

Gustav was still sitting on Karna's open lap and playing, and she was holding him fast in her arms. But Anders had put his arm round Bodil's waist. Gustav discovered it, and with an oath flung away his concertina, sending it rolling over the grass, and sprang up. The others threw themselves down in a circle on the grass, breathing hard. They expected something.

Gustav was like a savage dancing a war-dance. His mouth was open and his eyes bright and staring. He was the only man on the grass, and jumped up and down like a ball, hopped upon his heels, and kicked up his legs alternately to the height of his head, uttering a shrill cry with each kick. Then he shot up into the air, turning

round as he did so, and came down on one heel and went on turning round like a top, making himself smaller and smaller as he turned, and then exploded in a leap and landed in the lap of Bodil, who threw her arms about him in delight.

In an instant Anders had both hands on his shoulders from behind, set his feet against his back, and sent him rolling over the grass. It all happened without a pause, and Gustav himself gave impetus to his course, rolling along in jolts like an uneven ball. But suddenly he stopped and rose to his feet with a bound, stared straight in front of him, turned round with a jerk, and moved slowly towards Anders. Anders rose quickly, pushed his cap on one side, clicked with his tongue, and advanced. Bodil spread herself out more comfortably on the ground, and looked proudly round the circle, eagerly noting the envy of the others.

The two antagonists stood face to face, feeling their way to a good grasp. They stroked one another affectionately, pinched one another in the side, and made little jesting remarks.

"My goodness me, how fat you are, brother!" This was Anders.

"And what breasts you've got! You might quite well be a woman," answered Gustav, feeling Anders' chest. "Eeh, how soft you are!" Scorn gleamed in their faces, but their eyes followed every movement of their opponent. Each of them expected a sudden attack from the other.

The others lay stretched around them on the grass, and called out impatiently: "Have done with that and look sharp about it!"

The two men continued to stand and play as if they were afraid to really set to, or were spinning the thing out for its still greater enjoyment. But suddenly Gustav had

seized Anders by the collar, thrown himself backwards, and flung Anders over his head. It was done so quickly that Anders got no hold of Gustav; but in swinging round he got a firm grasp of Gustav's hair, and they both fell on their backs with their heads together and their bodies stretched in opposite directions.

Anders had fallen heavily, and lay half unconscious, but without loosening his hold on Gustav's hair. Gustav twisted round and tried to get upon his feet, but could not free his head. Then he wriggled back into this position again as quickly as a cat, turned a backwards somersault over his antagonist, and fell down upon him with his face towards the other's. Anders tried to raise his feet to receive him, but was too late.

Anders threw himself about in violent jerks, lay still and strained again with sudden strength to turn Gustav off, but Gustav held on. He let himself fall heavily upon his adversary, and sticking out his legs and arms to support him on the ground, raised himself suddenly and sat down again, catching Anders in the wind. All the time the thoughts of both were directed towards getting out their knives, and Anders, who had now fully recovered his senses, remembered distinctly that he had not got his. "Ah!" he said aloud. "What a fool I am!"

"You're whining, are you?" said Gustav, bending his face over him. "Do you want to ask for mercy?"

At that moment Anders felt Gustav's knife pressing against his thigh, and in an instant had his hand down there and wrenched it free. Gustav tried to take it from him, but gave up the attempt for fear of being thrown off. He then confined himself to taking possession of one of Anders' hands, so that he could not open the knife, and began sitting upon him in the region of his stomach.

Anders lay in half surrender, and bore the blows without

trying to defend himself, only gasping at each one. With his left hand he was working eagerly to get the knife opened against the ground, and suddenly plunged it into Gustav just as the latter had risen to let himself fall heavily upon his opponent's body.

Gustav seized Anders by the wrist, his face distorted. "What the devil are you up to now, you swine?" he said, spitting down into Anders' face. "He's trying to sneak out by the back-door!" he said, looking round the circle with a face wrinkled like that of a young bull.

They fought desperately for the knife, using hands and teeth and head; and when Gustav found that he could not get possession of the weapon, he set to work so to guide Anders' hand that he should plunge it into his own body. He succeeded, but the blow was not straight, and the blade closed upon Anders' fingers, making him throw the knife from him with an oath.

Meanwhile Erik was growing angry at no longer being the hero of the evening. "Will you soon be finished, you two cockerels, or must I have a bite too?" he said, trying to separate them. They took firm hold of one another, but then Erik grew angry, and did something for which he was ever after renowned. He took hold of them and set them both upon their feet.

Gustav looked as if he were going to throw himself into the battle again, and a sullen expression overspread his face; but then he began to sway like a tree chopped at the roots, and sank to the ground. Bodil was the first to come to his assistance. With a cry she ran to him and threw her arms about him.

He was carried in and laid upon his bed, Karl Johan poured spirit into the deep cut to clean it, and held it together while Bodil basted it with needle and thread from one of the men's lockers. Then they dispersed, in pairs,

as friendship permitted, Bodil, however, remaining with Gustav. She was true to him after all.

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Thus the summer passed, in continued war and friction with the bailiff, to whom, however, they dared do nothing when it came to the point. Then the disease struck inwards, and they set upon one another. "It must come out somewhere," said Lasse, who did not like this state of things, and vowed he would leave as soon as anything else offered, even if they had to run away from wages and clothes and everything.

"They're discontented with their wages, their working-hours are too long, and the food isn't good enough; they pitch it about and waste it until it makes one ill to see them, for anyhow it's God's gift, even if it might be better. And Erik's at the bottom of it all! He's for ever boasting and bragging and stirring up the others the whole day long. But as soon as the bailiff is over him, he daren't do anything any more than the others; so they all creep into their holes. Father Lasse is not such a cowardly wind-bag as any of them, old though he is.

"I suppose a good conscience is the best support. If you have it and have done your duty, you can look both the bailiff and the farmer—and God the Father, too—in the face. For you must always remember, laddie, not to set yourself up against those that are placed over you. Some of us have to be servants and others masters; how would everything go on if we who work didn't do our duty? You can't expect the gentlefolk to scrape up the dung in the cow-stable."

All this Lasse expounded after they had gone to bed, but Pelle had something better to do than to listen to it. He was sound asleep and dreaming that he was Erik himself, and was thrashing the bailiff with a big stick.

XIV

IN Pelle's time, pickled herring was the Bornholmer's most important article of food. It was the regular breakfast dish in all classes of society, and in the lower classes it predominated at the supper-table too—and sometimes appeared at dinner in a slightly altered form. "It's a bad place for food," people would say derisively of such-and-such a farm. "You only get herring there twenty-one times a week."

When the elder was in flower, well-regulated people brought out their salt-boxes, according to old custom, and began to look out to sea; the herring is fattest then. From the sloping land, which nearly everywhere has a glimpse of the sea, people gazed out in the early summer mornings for the homeward-coming boats. The weather and the way the boats lay in the water were omens regarding the winter food. Then the report would come wandering up over the island, of large hauls and good bargains. The farmers drove to the town or the fishing-village with their largest waggons, and the herring-man worked his way up through the country from cottage to cottage with his horse, which was such a wretched animal that any one would have been legally justified in putting a bullet through its head.

In the morning, when Pelle opened the stable doors to the field, the mist lay in every hollow like a pale grey lake, and on the high land, where the smoke rose briskly