

On the Dunes

The tale will speak of the Jutland dunes, yet it begins not there, but far, far away in the south, in Spain: for the sea connects all lands; let your thought fly to Spain! How warm it is there, how wonderful! Amidst dark laurel trees flash purple pomegranate blossoms; a cool breeze wafts from the mountains over orange groves and magnificent Moorish galleries with gilded domes and painted walls. Processions of children move through the streets, holding candles and waving banners, while above the city streets stretches a clear, pure sky, sprinkled with shining stars! Songs flow forth, castanets click, youths and maidens whirl in dance beneath the shade of flowering acacias; a beggar sits on the steps of a marble staircase, quenches his thirst with juicy watermelon, and then sinks once more into his accustomed slumber, sweet sleep! Indeed, everything here resembles some wondrous dream! Everything invites to sweet idleness, to marvelous reveries! Such waking dreams were indulged in by a young newlywed couple, showered with every earthly blessing; everything had been granted them: health, happiness, wealth, and an honorable position in society.

"Not a soul could be happier than we!" they said sincerely; and yet one more step remained for them to climb upon the ladder of human felicity, should God grant them the expected child, a son, a living physical and spiritual image of themselves.

A happy child! He would be greeted with universal rejoicing, the tenderest care and love, all the prosperity that wealth and noble kinship can bestow upon a person.

Life was an eternal festival for them.

"Life is a merciful gift of love, almost too great, boundless!" said the wife. "And to think that this fullness of bliss must yet increase there, beyond earthly life, grow to infinity!... Truly, I am even unable to cope with this thought, so boundless is it!"

"But is it not overly presumptuous?" replied the husband. "Is it not, in essence, presumptuous to imagine that eternal life awaits us... like gods? To become like gods—why, this thought was instilled in mankind by the serpent, the father of lies!"

"But surely you do not doubt the future life?" asked the young wife, and as though a dark cloudlet slid for the first time across the cloudless horizon of their thoughts.

"Religion promises it to us, priests confirm this promise!" said the young husband.

"But precisely now, feeling ourselves at the summit of bliss, I realize how arrogant,

how presumptuous it is on our part to demand another life after this one, to demand the continuation of our bliss! Has not so much already been given to us here, in this life, that we not only can but must be fully content with it?"

"Yes, much has been given to us," objected the wife, "but for how many thousands of people is earthly life nothing but trial; how many from birth itself are doomed to poverty, humiliation, sickness, and misfortune! No, if no other life awaited people beyond this one, earthly blessings would be distributed too unevenly, and God would not be the All-Just Judge!"

"Even the wandering beggar has his joys, which in their own way rival those of a king, owner of a splendid palace!" answered the young man. "And does not the draft animal, beaten, starved, and overworked, feel, in your opinion, the burden of its earthly lot? Then even an animal might demand for itself an afterlife, deem its lowly place among other creatures an injustice."

"In my Father's house are many mansions," said Christ!" countered the young woman. "The kingdom of heaven is boundless, just as God's love! Animals too are His creations, and, in my opinion, no living being shall perish, but each shall attain that degree of bliss to which it is capable of rising!"

"Well, for me, this life alone suffices!" said the husband, embracing his beautiful wife. The smoke of his cigarette drifted from the open balcony into the cool air, steeped with the fragrance of orange blossoms and carnations; from the street came sounds of songs and the clicking of castanets; above their heads shone the stars, while into the husband's eyes gazed the tender eyes of his spouse, glowing with the fire of infinite love.

"Why, one such moment is worth a man being born, living through it, and—vanishing!" he continued, smiling; the young woman gently wagged her finger at him, and the dark cloudlet passed—they were too happy!

Circumstances unfolded for them so favorably that life promised even greater blessings ahead. True, a change awaited them, but only of place, not of their happy manner of living. The King appointed the young man as envoy to the Imperial Russian Court—his lineage and education made him fully worthy of such an honorable appointment.

The young man himself possessed fortune, and the young wife brought him no less; she was the daughter of a wealthy, respected merchant. One of the largest and finest ships belonging to the latter was precisely scheduled to sail to Stockholm that year; upon it they decided to send their dear children, daughter and

son-in-law, to St. Petersburg. The ship was adorned with royal luxury; everywhere soft carpets, silk, and velvet...

In an old song familiar to all us Danes, "about the English prince," it tells how this prince sails away on a richly decorated ship, with anchors of pure gold and silken rigging. It was precisely this ship that came to mind when looking upon the Spanish vessel: the same luxury, the same thoughts at departure:

Oh, grant us, God, a safe return!

A strong tailwind blew; the moment of farewell was brief. Within a few weeks the ship ought to have reached its journey's end. But when it was already far from land, the wind subsided; the shining, smooth surface of the sea seemed frozen; the water glittered, the stars sparkled, and within the rich cabin a festival seemed underway.

Eventually, however, everyone began longing for a good tailwind, yet it showed no sign of appearing; and if at times a wind did blow, it was not favorable but contrary. Weeks followed weeks; a full two months passed before a favorable wind arose from the southwest. At that time the ship found itself between Scotland and Jutland; the wind swelled the sails and carried the ship—just as in the old song about "the English prince":

And the wind blew, the heavens darkened;
Where could they take shelter? Where shore, where port?
They lowered their golden anchor to the depths,
Yet the malicious wind drives them toward Denmark.

Many years have passed since then. In those times a young King Christian VII sat upon the throne of Denmark; many events occurred during this period, much changed, much transformed. Lakes and marshes became lush meadows, steppes turned into cultivated fields, and on the western coast of Jutland, sheltered behind the walls of peasant cottages, apples and roses grew. Yet one must search for them with one's eyes: so cleverly do they hide from the fierce western wind. And still, here on this coast, it is easy to let one's thought travel even to times more remote than the reign of Christian VII: in Jutland even now, as in ancient days, stretches an immeasurable brown steppe, homeland of mirages, dotted with burial mounds, crisscrossed by humpy, sandy paths. To the west, where great rivers flow into fjords, meadows and marshes still spread out, protected from the sea by high dunes. The jagged peaks of the dunes stretch along the shore like a mountain chain, interrupted in places by clayey slopes; year after year the sea gnaws away piece by piece from them, until finally the promontories and hills collapse as

though from an earthquake. Such was Jutland in those times when the happy couple sailed upon their rich ship.

September was drawing to a close; the weather stood sunny; it was Sunday; the sounds of church bells chased one another, spreading along the shore of Nisum Fjord. The churches themselves resembled hewn stone blocks—each was carved from a fragment of rock. The sea rolled its waves over them, yet they simply stood and stood. Most lacked bell towers; the bells, fixed between two pillars, hung beneath the open sky.

The church service ended, and the people poured out onto the graveyard, which even then, as now, displayed neither tree nor bush, nor flower, nor even a wreath upon the graves. Only small mounds indicated the places where the departed rested; the entire graveyard was overgrown with sharp, stiff grass; the wind tossed it about relentlessly. Here and there on

Among the graves there were also monuments, that is, half-rotten fragments of logs hewn in the shape of a coffin. These fragments were brought by the coastal forest—the wild sea. For the shore dweller, the sea grows ready beams, planks, and trees; the surf delivers them to the shore. But wind and sea mist soon cause them to rot.

Such a fragment lay also on the child's grave, toward which one of the women who had come out of the church was heading.

She stood silently, her gaze fixed on the half-decayed wooden fragment. After a little while her husband joined her. They exchanged not a word; he took her by the hand, and they walked across the brown steppe and marsh toward the dunes. Long they walked in silence; at last the husband said:

"A good sermon today! Had we not our Lord, we should have nothing!"

"Yes," answered the wife, "He sends us joys, He sends us sorrows too! And He is always right... Today our little boy would have been five years old, had he lived."

"Truly, you grieve in vain!" said the husband. "He has departed happily and is now where we too must ask God to let us go."

They spoke no more and turned toward home. Suddenly above one of the dunes, on which the sand was not secured by any vegetation, there rose as it were a pillar of smoke: a strong whirlwind tore up and whirled the fine sand. Then a new gust of wind swept by, and the fish hung out on lines to dry drummed against the walls of the house; then all grew still again; the sun baked fiercely.

Husband and wife entered their cottage and, quickly taking off their holiday clothes, hastened back to the dunes, which rose on the shore like monstrous sandy waves suddenly halted in their course. Some variety of color was provided by the bluish-green sharp stalks of beach grass and sandwort growing on the white sand. Several more neighbors gathered on the shore, and the men, with united efforts, dragged the boats higher onto the sand. The wind kept strengthening, becoming ever sharper and colder, and when husband and wife turned back home, sand and sharp pebbles flew straight into their faces. Strong gusts of wind sheared off the white crests of the waves and scattered them as fine dust.

Evening fell; in the air there seemed to howl, whistle, and moan an entire legion of accursed spirits; husband and wife did not even hear the roar of the sea, though their cottage stood almost on the very shore. Sand flew against the windowpanes; gusts of wind threatened at times to overturn the cottage itself. It grew dark, but around midnight the moon was due to appear.

The sky cleared, but the storm raged on the sea with undiminished force. Husband and wife had long since gone to bed, but there was no thought of sleep in such weather; suddenly someone knocked at their window, the door opened a little, and someone said:

"A large ship is standing on the outer reef!"

In an instant husband and wife leaped up and dressed.

The moon shone fairly brightly, but the raging sandy whirlwind blinded the eyes. The wind blew so hard that one might as well lie down upon it; only with great difficulty, almost crawling, making use of the pauses between the hurricane's gusts, could one cross the dunes. From the sea, like swan's down, salt foam flew onto the shore; the sea rolled its boiling waves with noise and roaring. One needed an experienced eye to distinguish a vessel at once in the sea. It was a magnificent two-masted ship; it was being driven toward the shore across the reefs, but on the last one it ran aground.

To offer help to the ship or its crew was out of the question—the sea was too enraged, the waves mercilessly lashed the hull of the vessel and broke over it... To the fishermen there seemed cries and wails of despair; people on the ship could be seen bustling about helplessly, in confusion... Then an enormous wave rose and crashed onto the bowsprit. In an instant—the bowsprit was gone; the stern rose high above the water, and at that moment two human figures, embracing each other, jumped from it, jumped and vanished in the waves... Another instant, and—a huge wave cast onto the dunes a body... that of a young woman, apparently lifeless. Several fisherwomen gathered around her, and it seemed to them that she

still showed signs of life. They immediately carried her into the nearest cottage. How beautiful and tender the poor creature was! Surely a lady of rank!

They laid her on a miserable bed, without any linen, covered only with a woollen blanket, but it was precisely into this that the stranger ought to be wrapped—what could be warmer!

They managed to bring her back to life, but she was in a fever and conscious of nothing: neither of what had happened nor of where she had arrived. And thank God: all that had been dear to her in life now lay at the bottom of the sea. Everything happened as in the song "about the English prince":

No sight could be more terrible:
The ship broke on the reef like glass.

The sea cast ashore fragments of the ship; of the people, only one young woman survived. The wind still howled, but for a few moments silence reigned in the cottage: the young woman fell into unconsciousness; then pains and cries began, she opened her wonderful eyes and said something, but no one understood a single word.

And now, as reward for all the sufferings she had endured, a newborn child found itself in her arms. A magnificent cradle with a silk canopy awaited it, a luxurious dwelling, rejoicing, raptures, and a life rich in all earthly blessings, but God judged otherwise: it was destined to be born in a poor cottage, and not even to receive its mother's kiss.

The fisherman's wife pressed the child to the mother's breast, and it found itself beside a heart that had already ceased to beat—the mother was dead. The child, which ought to have met in life nothing but wealth, nothing but happiness, was cast by the sea onto the dunes to experience want and the lot of a pauper.

The Spanish ship had broken up a little south of Nissum Fjord. The cruel, inhuman times when shore dwellers made their living by plundering shipwrecks had long passed. Now the unfortunate met here loving, heartfelt treatment, a broad readiness to help. Our time may pride itself on truly noble traits of character! The dying mother and the unhappy child would have found shelter and care in any house on the shore, but nowhere would they have been treated with more sympathy, more warmth, than in the very one into which they had fallen: that of the poor fisherwoman who had stood so sadly yesterday beside the grave of her child, who on that day would have turned five.

No one knew who the dead woman was or whence she came. The ship's fragments were mute.

In Spain, in the house of a wealthy merchant, they never received either a letter or news of their daughter or son-in-law. They learned only that they had not reached their destination and that in recent weeks terrible storms had raged at sea. They waited months; at last news came: "Complete wreck; all perished."

And in the fisherman's cottage on the dunes a new inhabitant appeared.

Where God sends food for two, there is enough for a third: on the seashore there is enough fish for a hungry stomach. The boy was named Jørgen.

"This must be a Jewish child!" people said of him. "Look how dark-skinned he is!"

"Or perhaps he is a Spaniard or an Italian!" said the priest. But all these three nationalities were, in the fisherman's wife's eyes, one and the same, and she consoled herself that the child had been baptized. The child grew; noble blood was nourished by poor food; the scion of a noble family grew up in a poor cottage. The Danish language, the West Jutland dialect, became his native tongue. A pomegranate seed from Spanish soil grew on the western coast of Jutland into a grain of sand. Thus can man adapt! He became fused with his new homeland by all his vital roots. He was destined to know hunger and cold and other hardships, but also the joys that fall to the lot of the poor.

Every person's childhood has its own joys, which cast a bright reflection over his whole life. In games and amusements Jørgen lacked nothing. On the seashore there was pure freedom for play: the entire shore was strewn with toys, laid out like a mosaic of multicolored pebbles. There were red ones, like coral, and yellow ones, like amber, and white, round ones, like bird's eggs—in short, all sorts of small stones smoothed and polished by the sea. Dried skeletons of fish, dry seaweed and other marine plants, whitening on the shore and entangling the stones like ribbons, also served as toys, as delight for the eyes, as food for the mind. Jørgen was a capable boy, richly gifted. How well he remembered various stories and songs! And what hands he had—simply golden! From stones and

From shells he crafted little ships and pictures to decorate the walls. According to his adoptive mother, the boy could express his thoughts by carving them into a piece of wood, though he was still very small. How wonderfully his voice rang out; melodies flowed spontaneously from his throat. Yes, many strings were stretched within his soul: they might have resonated across the entire world had his fate been different, had it not cast him into this remote fishing village.

Once, a ship wrecked nearby, and waves washed ashore a box containing rare flower bulbs. Some of them were chopped into stew—the fishermen mistook them for edible roots—while others were left to rot on the sand. They were never

destined to fulfill their purpose: to unfold before all eyes the hidden splendor of their colors. Would Jørgen be happier? The bulbs soon perished, whereas he faced long years of trial ahead.

Neither he nor anyone else around him ever imagined that days here dragged on boringly and monotonously: there was plenty of work for hands, eyes, and ears alike. The sea served as an enormous textbook, unfolding a new page each day, acquainting the coastal inhabitants with calm, then gentle waves, then wind and storm. Shipwrecks were major events, while church visits constituted true holidays. Among visits from relatives and acquaintances, the arrival of the fisherman's family's uncle, an eel seller from Fjältring near Bovbjerg, brought particular joy. He came twice a year in a painted cart loaded with eels; the cart resembled a box with a lid, decorated against a red background with blue and white tulips; a pair of dappled oxen pulled it. Jørgen was allowed to ride upon them.

The eel merchant was a wit, a jolly fellow, and always brought along a small keg of vodka. Everyone received a full shot glass or even a coffee cup if glasses ran short; even Jørgen, small as he was, got a portion about the size of a thimble. One must drink something to keep the fatty eel down in the stomach, the merchant would say, and each time he told the same story; if listeners laughed, he would begin again from the start. Such is the weakness of talkative people! And since Jørgen himself often guided his actions by this story both in adolescence and even in maturity, we too must become acquainted with it.

Eels swam in the river; all the daughters begged their mother to let them go out freely, to swim upriver, but the mother told them: "Do not go far! Otherwise, the nasty fisherman will come and spear you all!" Nevertheless, they ventured too far, and of eight daughters, only three returned to their mother. They began complaining: "We had barely stepped outside our home when the nasty fisherman appeared and stabbed our sisters to death with his trident!" "Well, they will still return to us!" said the mother. "No!" replied the daughters, "he skinned them, cut them into pieces, and fried them!" "They will return!" repeated the mother. "But he ate them!" "They will return!" "He washed them down with vodka!" said the daughters. "Oh! Oh! Then they will never return!" wailed the mother. "Vodka buries eels!"

"Therefore, one should always wash down this dish with vodka!" added the merchant.

This story ran like a red thread throughout Jørgen's entire life, providing ample material for witty remarks, proverbs, and comparisons. And sometimes Jørgen felt

an intense desire to peek out from home, to wander across the wide world, but his mother, like the mother eel, said: "There are many evil fisher-people in the world!" Still, one could visit the heath not far from the dunes, and he did so. Four joyful days illuminated his entire childhood; in them reflected for him all the beauty of Jutland, all the joy and happiness of his native land. Jørgen's parents were invited to a feast—indeed, a funeral feast.

One of their wealthy relatives had died. He lived on the heath, northeast of the fishing hamlet. The parents took Jørgen with them. Passing beyond the dunes, across the heath and marsh, the road led through a green meadow where the River Skærum carved its path, teeming with eels. There lived the mother eel with her daughters, whom evil people killed, skinned, and cut into pieces. But often people treated their own kind no better. Thus Knight Bugge, mentioned in an old ballad, was killed by evil men, although he himself, good as he was, had intended to kill the builder who erected for him a thick-walled castle with towers. This castle stood precisely where Jørgen now halted with his parents, at the confluence of the River Skærum with Nisum Fjord. Ramparts were still visible, along with remnants of brick walls. Sending his servant after the departing builder, Knight Bugge said: "Catch up with him and tell him: 'Master, the tower is falling!' If he turns around, chop off his head and take the money he received from me; but if he does not turn, let him go in peace."

The servant caught up with the builder and delivered the message, but without turning around, the builder replied: "The tower is not yet falling, but someday a man in a blue cloak will come from the west and make it fall." And so it happened a hundred years later: the sea flooded the land, and the tower collapsed; however, the castle owner Predbjørn Gyldenstjerne built himself a new one, even higher than the previous; it still stands today in Northern Vosborg.

They also had to pass by this last place. All these locations had long been familiar to Jørgen from tales that sweetened his long winter evenings, and now he saw with his own eyes both the courtyard surrounded by double moats, trees, and bushes, and the rampart overgrown with ferns. But best of all were the tall lime trees there, whose tops reached the roof and filled the air with sweet fragrance. In the northwest corner of the garden grew a large bush covered in flowers like snow. This was elderberry, the first blooming elder Jørgen had ever seen. Both it and the flowering lime trees imprinted themselves upon his memory for life; the child stored away memories of his homeland's beauty and aroma for old age.

They completed the rest of the journey much faster and more comfortably: right near Northern Vosborg, where the elder bloomed, other guests invited to the feast overtook Jørgen and his parents traveling in a cart and offered them a ride.

Naturally, all three had to sit at the back, on an iron-bound wooden chest, but for them this was still better than walking. The road crossed the hummocky heath; the oxen pulling the cart occasionally stopped upon finding amidst the heather a patch of land covered with fresh grass; the sun beat down warmly, and above the heath rose a strange haze. It curled in billows yet remained more transparent than the air itself; it seemed as though sunbeams were swirling and dancing over the heath.

"This is 'Lokeman' driving his flock of sheep!" they told Jørgen, and that was enough for him: instantly he transported himself into a fairy-tale land, yet never lost sight of surrounding reality. What silence reigned upon the heath!

On all sides stretched the boundless heath, resembling a precious carpet; the heather bloomed; cypress-green juniper and fresh oak saplings peeked out from it like bouquets. One felt like throwing oneself onto this carpet to roll about—if only there weren't so many poisonous vipers here!... Speaking of them and wolves led to conversation; the latter once abounded here so greatly that the entire region was called Wolf Land. The elderly driver recounted that in ancient times, when his late father was still alive, horses often had to fight fiercely against bloodthirsty beasts, and once, early one morning, he himself stumbled upon a horse trampling a wolf it had killed, yet its legs were entirely gnawed away.

Too quickly for the boy, they crossed the hummocky heath and deep sands, arriving at the house, which was crowded with guests. Wagons pressed close together; horses and oxen nibbled the sparse grass. Behind the yard rose sandy dunes, just as high and immense as those in Jørgen's native hamlet. How did they reach here from the shore, being three miles away? The wind lifted and carried them; they have their own history.

Psalms were sung; two or three elderly men and women shed tears, yet according to Jørgen, it was very cheerful: eat and drink to your heart's content. They were served fatty eels, which naturally had to be washed down with vodka. "It keeps the eels down!" the old merchant used to say, and here his words were firmly upheld. Jørgen scurried everywhere and by the third day felt completely at home. Yet here, on the heath, everything differed greatly from their fishing hamlet among the dunes: the heath simply teemed with little flowers and wood pigeons;

Large, sweet berries were trampled underfoot, and the heather was drenched in red juice.

Here and there burial mounds rose up; in the still air, smoke curled upward; somewhere the steppe is burning—they told Jürgen. In the evening, a glow rose over the steppe—how beautiful it was!

On the fourth day the memorial feast ended; it was time to go home, to the coastal dunes.

"Ours are the real ones," said the father, "but these have no power at all."

Conversation turned to how they had come here, into the interior of the country. Very simply. On the shore they found a dead body; the peasants buried it in the cemetery, and immediately afterward a terrible storm began, sand was driven inland, the sea wildly surged onto the shore. Then one wise man advised digging up the grave and seeing whether the deceased was sucking his thumb. If so, then it was a water spirit, and the sea demanded him back. They dug up the grave: the dead man was sucking his thumb; immediately they loaded him onto a cart, harnessed two oxen to it, and those oxen, as if stung, raced it across the steppe and marsh straight into the sea. The sandy blizzard ceased, but the dunes, just as they had been piled up, remained standing inland. Jürgen listened and kept all these stories in his memory together with recollections of the happiest days of childhood, of the memorial feast.

Yes, how much better to break away from home, to see new places and new people! And Jürgen was indeed destined to break away again. He had not yet turned fourteen when he hired himself onto a ship and set off out into the wide world. He came to know weather and sea, and wicked, cruel people! No wonder he was a cabin boy! Meager food, cold nights, the whip and fists—he had to taste it all. There was enough to make his noble Spanish blood sometimes boil over; hot words begged to leap from his tongue, but it was wiser to bite it back, and for Jürgen this was the same as for an eel to allow itself to be skinned and laid upon a frying pan.

"Well, I shall claim what is mine!" he said to himself.

He happened to see the Spanish coast, the homeland of his parents, even that very city where they had lived in happiness and plenty, but he knew nothing either of his homeland or of his family, and the family knew even less about him.

The lad was not even allowed to go ashore, and he stepped onto it for the first time only on the last day of their stay: some provisions had to be purchased, and they took him along to help.

And so Jürgen, dressed in wretched little clothes, as if washed in a ditch and dried in a chimney pipe, found himself in the city. He, a native of the dunes, saw a large city for the first time. What towering houses, narrow streets, how many people! Crowds scurried to and fro; along the streets flowed as it were a living river: townsfolk, peasants, monks, soldiers... Shouting, noise, clamor, jingling of bells on

donkeys and mules, ringing of church bells, singing and clacking, banging and rumbling: craftsmen worked on the thresholds of houses, or even right on the sidewalks. The sun baked fiercely, the air was heavy and stifling; Jürgen felt as though he were in a red-hot oven, packed full of buzzing and droning dung beetles and May bugs, bees and flies; his head spun. Suddenly he saw before him the majestic portal of the cathedral; in the half-darkness beneath the vaults candles flickered, incense smoked. Even the most ragged beggar had the right to enter the church; the sailor with whom Jürgen had been sent headed straight there; Jürgen followed him. Bright icons gleamed against a golden background. Upon the altar, amidst flowers and lit candles, stood the Mother of God with the Infant Jesus. Priests in sumptuous vestments sang, and pretty, well-dressed boys swung censers. All this beauty and splendor made a deep impression on Jürgen; the faith and religion of his parents touched the most hidden strings of his soul; tears welled up in his eyes.

From the church they went to the market, purchased the necessary provisions, and Jürgen had to carry part of them. It was a long way; he grew tired and stopped to rest before a large, magnificent house with marble columns, statues, and broad staircases. Jürgen leaned his burden against the wall, but there appeared a gorgeously gilded porter in livery who, raising a cane with a silver knob at him, drove him away—him, the grandson of the master! But no one knew this; Jürgen himself least of all.

The ship sailed; again stretched out the same life: jolts, curses, sleeplessness, hard labor... Well, it does no harm to taste everything! After all, they say it is good to undergo a harsh schooling in youth. Good indeed, good—if a happy old age awaits you afterward!

The voyage ended, the ship again dropped anchor in Ringkøbing Fjord, and Jürgen returned home, to the fishing hamlet, but while he wandered the world, his adoptive mother had died.

A harsh winter set in. Snowstorms raged over sea and land; it was simply a misery to make one's way across the steppe. How, indeed, different countries differ from one another: here freezing cold and blizzards, while in Spain terrible heat! And yet, seeing on a clear, frosty day a great flock of swans flying from the sea toward North Vosborg, Jürgen felt that here, after all, it was easier to breathe, that here, at least, one could enjoy the delights of summer. And in his mind he pictured the steppe, all in flowers, strewn with ripe, juicy berries, and the blooming lime trees at North Vosborg... Ah, he must go there again!

Spring approached, the fishing season began, and Jürgen helped his father. He had grown considerably over the past year, and work progressed well with him. Life bubbled within him like a spring; he could swim both sitting and standing, even somersault in the water, and he was often advised to beware of mackerel—they swim in schools and attack the best swimmers, drag them underwater and devour them. That would be the end! But fate prepared something else for Jürgen.

The neighbors had a son named Morten; Jürgen became friends with him, and together they hired themselves onto a vessel sailing to Norway, then to Holland. There was generally no serious reason for them to quarrel with each other, but anything can happen! With hot-tempered natures, hands itch so readily; this once happened to Jürgen too, when he fell out with Morten over some trifles. They sat in a corner behind the captain's cabin eating from one earthenware bowl; Jürgen had a knife in his hand, and he raised it against his companion, turning pale and glaring wildly. But Morten merely said:

"So you are one of those ready to use a knife?"

At that instant Jürgen's hand dropped; silently he finished his meal and returned to his work. After finishing their tasks he approached Morten and said, "Strike me in the face—I deserve it! Truly, within me something forever boils over, just like in a pot of boiling water!"

"Well, all right, let us forget it!" answered Morten, and from that time onward their friendship became almost twice as strong. Returning home, to Jutland, to the dunes, they told about life at sea, and recounted this incident too. Yes, the blood in Jürgen boiled over, yet he was still a fine, reliable "pot."

"Just not a 'Jutlandish' one—you cannot call him a Jutlander!" joked Morten. (The so-called "Jutland pottery" is made from dark clay and distinguished by its fire-resistance and durability.—Translator's note.)

Both were young and healthy; both were tall, sturdy lads, but Jürgen was distinguished by greater agility.

In the north, in Norway, peasants pasture their herds on the mountains, where there are special shepherds' huts, while on the western coast of Jutland, on the dunes, cabins are built for fishermen; they are knocked together from shipwreck debris and roofed with peat and heather; inside, along the walls, run sleeping bunks. Every fisherman has his own girl-helper; her duties are to bait the hooks, greet the master returning from the catch with warm beer, prepare his food, pull the caught fish from the boats, gut it, and so forth.

Jürgen, his father, and several other fishermen with their helpers lodged in one cabin. Morten lived in the nearest one.

Among the girls was one named Elsa, whom Jürgen had known since childhood. They were very friendly with each other; their temperaments had much in common, but in appearance they differed sharply: he was a dark-haired brunette, while she was fair; her hair was yellow as flax, and her eyes light blue like the sunlit sea.

Once they walked side by side; Jürgen held her hand in his and pressed it firmly. Suddenly Elsa said to him:

"Jürgen, I have something on my heart! I would rather work for you—you are like a brother to me, but Morten, for whom I hired myself, is my fiancé. Only do not chatter about this to others!"

The sand seemed to sway beneath Jürgen's feet,

but he did not utter a word, only nodded his head: agreed, so to speak. Nothing more was required of him. Yet at that very moment he felt that with all his heart he hated Morten. The more he thought about what had happened—and earlier he had never thought so much about Elsa—the clearer it became to him that Morten had stolen from him the love of the only girl who had ever pleased him, namely Elsa; that was how it now turned out!

One should see how fishermen are carried across the reefs by waves in fresh weather. One of the fishermen stands at the bow, while the rowers keep their eyes fixed on him, awaiting the signal to lay down their oars and surrender to the approaching wave that must carry the boat over the reef. At first the wave lifts the boat so high that from the shore its keel is visible; a minute later it disappears among the waves; neither the boat itself, nor the people, nor the mast can be seen; the sea seems to have swallowed everything... But another minute passes, and the boat reappears on the surface on the other side of the reef, like a sea monster emerging from the water; the oars move quickly—just like the legs of an animal. The same thing repeats before the second, before the third reef; then the fishermen jump into the water and guide the boat to the shore; the blows of the waves help them, pushing it from behind.

Fail to give the signal in time, miss by a minute, and—the boat will smash against the reef.

"Then it would be the end for both me and Morten!" This thought flashed through Jørgen's mind when they were out at sea. His father had suddenly fallen seriously ill; fever racked him; meanwhile the boat approached the last reef;

Jørgen leaped up and shouted:

"Father, let me take your place!"—and his glance slid from Morten's face to the waves.

Here comes a huge wave... Jørgen looked at his father's pale face—and could not carry out his evil intention. The boat happily passed the reef and reached the shore, but the wicked thought took firm hold in Jørgen's head; his blood boiled; various bits of debris and fibers rose from the depths of his soul, things that had settled there during his friendship with Morten, yet he could not spin from them a single thread by which he might grasp, and so for now he did not proceed to action. Yes, Morten had ruined his life, he felt it!

How then could he not hate him? Some of the fishermen noticed this hatred, but Morten himself noticed nothing and remained the same good comrade and talkative fellow—perhaps even too talkative.

As for Jørgen's father, he was forced to take to his bed; the illness proved fatal, and he died within a week. Jørgen inherited the house on the dunes, true, it was small, but even that was something; Morten did not have even this.

"Well, now you won't be hiring yourself out as a sailor anymore! You'll stay with us forever!" one of the old fishermen said to Jørgen.

But Jørgen had quite different thoughts in mind—he precisely wished to wander about the wide world. The eel merchant had an uncle who lived in Old Skagen; he too engaged in fishing, but was already a prosperous merchant and owned his own vessel. He was known as a kind old man; it was worth serving under such a one. Old Skagen lies at the extreme north of Jutland, far from the fishing hamlet and the dunes, but this circumstance especially appealed to Jørgen: he did not wish to feast at the wedding of Elsa and Morten, which was being prepared to take place in about two weeks.

The old fisherman did not approve of Jørgen's intention—now he had his own house, and Elsa would surely incline rather toward his side.

Jørgen answered this so abruptly that it was not easy to grasp the meaning of his speech, but the old man went and brought Elsa to him. She said little, yet still she said something:

"You have a house... Yes, that gives one pause!.."

And Jørgen pondered deeply.

Angry waves roll across the sea, but the human heart sometimes surges even more strongly; passions overwhelm it. Many thoughts rushed through Jørgen's head; finally he asked Elsa:

"If Morten had such a house as mine, which of us two would you choose?"

"But Morten has no house and never will!"

"Well, suppose he did have one."

"Well, then I suppose I would choose Morten—he is dear to me! But one cannot live on love alone!"

Jørgen reflected upon this all night long. What exactly drove him, he himself could not explain, yet this unconscious impulse proved stronger than his love for Elsa, and he obeyed it—he went in the morning to Morten. What Jørgen said to Morten during their meeting had been carefully considered by him throughout the night: He yielded his house to his comrade on terms most favorable to him, saying that he himself preferred to hire onto a ship and depart. When Elsa learned of everything, she kissed Jørgen right on the lips—for Morten was dear to her.

Jørgen intended to set off on his journey early the very next morning. But in the evening, although it was already late, he felt inclined to visit Morten once more. He went, and on the way, upon the dunes, met the old fisherman who disapproved of his intention to leave. "Morten must have a duck's bill sewn into his trousers, that girls cling to him so!" said the old man. But Jørgen interrupted the conversation, took his leave, and proceeded to Morten's. Drawing nearer, he heard loud voices inside the house: someone was with Morten. Jørgen halted in hesitation—he had no desire whatsoever to meet Elsa. After thinking it over well, he did not wish to hear expressions of gratitude from Morten yet again, and turned back.

In the morning, before sunrise, he tied up his bundle, took with him a basket of provisions, and descended from the dunes straight to the shore; walking there was easier than through the deep sand, and also closer: he wished first to go to Fjältring to the eel merchant, since he had promised to visit him.

The shining surface of the sea blazed brightly blue; the shore was strewn with shells and little cockles; toys that had amused him in childhood crunched beneath his feet. Suddenly blood spurted from his nose—a trivial occurrence, yet even such a thing sometimes acquires important significance. Two or three large drops fell upon the sleeve of his shirt. He wiped them away, stopped the bleeding, and felt that from the nosebleed he became somehow lighter both in head and in heart. In the sand grew a little bush of seaweed; he broke off a twig and stuck it into his hat.

"Boldly, cheerfully forward! To see the wide world, to peek out from home, as the eels used to say. Beware of people! They are wicked, they will kill you, cut you up, and fry you in a pan!"—he repeated to himself and laughed: "Well, I certainly know how to save my own skin! Fortune favors the bold!"

The sun already stood high when he approached the narrow strait connecting the western sea with Nissum Fjord. Looking back, he saw in the distance two horsemen, and at some distance behind them several more people on foot; all of them evidently hurried. Well, what did that matter to him? The boat was at the other shore; Jørgen called to the ferryman; they pushed off, but had not yet reached the middle of the strait when the horsemen, galloping at full speed, dashed up to the shore and began shouting, ordering Jørgen in the name of the law to return immediately. Jørgen could not comprehend what they wanted from him, but reasoned that it would be best to return; he himself took hold of one oar and began rowing back toward the shore. Hardly had the boat touched land when the people crowding on the bank jumped into it and bound Jørgen's hands with rope; he had no time to recover his senses.

"Wait! You shall pay with your head for your villainy!" they said. "It is well that we have caught you!"

They accused him of nothing less than murder: Morten had been found with his throat cut. One of the fishermen had met Jørgen late the previous evening on the way to Morten's dwelling; Jørgen had more than once threatened the latter with a knife—therefore he was the murderer! He ought to be closely guarded; Ringkøbing was the surest place, though it would not be reached soon. Just then a west wind was blowing; within half an hour, or even less, one could cross the bay and reach the Skærum River, and from there only a quarter of a mile to North Vosborg, where there was also a strong castle with ramparts and moats. In the boat was, along with others, the bailiff's brother, and he supposed they would be permitted to lock Jørgen in the pit where Long Margaret had sat until her execution.

No heed was paid to Jørgen's justifications: the drops of blood on his shirt convicted him. He himself knew he was innocent, but others did not believe it, and he resolved to submit to fate.

The boat landed precisely at that rampart where once stood the castle of Knight Bugge, and where Jørgen and his parents had stopped to rest on their way to the feast, to the memorial banquet. Ah, those four happy, bright

days of childhood!.. Now he was being led along that same road, across those same meadows, toward Northern Vosborg, where the elder bushes still stood covered in

blossoms and the flowering, fragrant linden trees remained. It was as though he had walked here only yesterday.

In the left courtyard wing of the castle, beneath one of the high staircases, a descent opened into a low vaulted cellar. From there Tall Margaret had been led out to execution. She had eaten five children's hearts and believed that if she ate two more, she would gain the ability to fly and become invisible. A tiny air vent had been pierced through the wall, yet the refreshing aroma of the fragrant lindens could not penetrate through it. Dampness, mold, bare boards instead of a bed—this is what Jørgen found in the cellar. But a clear conscience, they say, is a soft pillow; thus, Jørgen slept well.

The thick door was secured with a heavy iron bolt, yet phantoms of superstition penetrate even through keyholes; they enter both manor halls and fishermen's huts, and here, to Jørgen, they came all the more readily. He sat thinking about Tall Margaret, about her crimes... Her final thoughts seemed still to hover in the air, the thoughts she entertained on the night before her execution. Tales also came to Jørgen's mind concerning miracles performed here during the lifetime of the landowner Svanvedel: every morning the dog guarding the bridge was found hanging by its chain upon the bridge railing. All these gloomy thoughts besieged and frightened Jørgen, and only one memory illuminated the cellar with a sunbeam—the memory of the flowering elder bushes and lindens.

However, he did not sit there long; he was transferred to Ringkøbing, into equally harsh confinement.

In those times things were not as in ours; poor people fared badly. Everyone still remembered how peasant farms and entire villages were turned into new noble estates, how any coachman or footman became a judge and sentenced a poor peasant for the slightest offense to loss of his holding or to whipping. Something similar still continued to occur in Jutland: far from the royal residence and enlightened guardians of order and law, justice was administered quite arbitrarily. Thus it was somewhat fortunate that Jørgen had only to suffer imprisonment.

What cold stood in the quarters where they locked him! When would all this end? He was innocent, yet delivered to shame and calamity—such was his fate! Yes, here he could ponder it at leisure. Why did it persecute him so?... Everything would become clear there, in the future life that awaits us all! Jørgen had grown up with this faith. What the father, surrounded by Spain's luxurious, sun-drenched nature, could not comprehend, shone upon the son with a comforting ray amidst the darkness and cold surrounding him. Jørgen firmly relied upon God's mercy, and such reliance is never deceived.

Spring storms made themselves felt again. The roar of the sea could be heard for many miles around, even deep inland, but only after the storm had subsided. The sea thundered as though hundreds of heavy carts were rolling over hard, plowed ground. Jørgen listened keenly to this rumbling, which brought some variety into his life. No ancient song reached his heart so deeply as the music of rolling waves, the voice of the turbulent sea. Ah, sea, wild, free sea! You and the wind carry a person from country to country, and everywhere he wanders together with his home, like a snail, everywhere carrying with him a piece of his homeland, a fragment of native soil!

How Jørgen listened to the dull murmur of the waves, and how thoughts and memories stirred within him himself! "Freedom! Freedom!" In freedom lies paradise, bliss, even if you wear shoes without soles and coarse patched clothing! His blood boiled with anger, and he struck his fist against the wall.

Thus passed weeks, months, an entire year went by. Suddenly the thief Niels, nicknamed "the Horse Dealer," was caught, and better times arrived for Jørgen: it became clear how unjustly he had been treated.

North of Ringkøbing Fjord stood an inn; there, on the evening before Jørgen's departure from the hamlet, Niels and Morten met.

They drank a glass, then another, and Morten did not exactly become drunk, but rather... grew overly lively, gave free rein to his tongue—he recounted that he had bought a house and intended to marry. Niels asked where he had obtained the money, and Morten boastfully tapped his pocket:

"There, where it ought to be!"

His boasting cost him his life. He went home; Niels crept after him and plunged a knife into his neck to seize money that did not exist.

All these circumstances were detailed extensively in the case file, but it suffices for us to know that Jørgen was released into freedom. Well, and how was he compensated for all he had endured: a year of imprisonment, cold and hunger, separation from people? Why, they told him that, thank God, he was innocent and could depart. The burgomaster gave him ten marks for the journey, and several townspeople treated him to beer and good refreshments. Yes, there were kind people there too, not everyone was the sort ready to stab, flay, and throw someone onto a frying pan! Best of all, however, was that at that very time the merchant Brenne from Skagen, whom Jørgen had wished to enter service with a year earlier, happened to be in town on business.

The merchant learned the whole story and wished to compensate Jørgen for all he had suffered; the old man had a kind heart, he understood what the poor fellow must have endured, and intended to show him that there are indeed good people in the world.

From dungeon to freedom, into God's light, where love and heartfelt sympathy awaited him! Yes, it was time for him to experience this too. The cup of life is never filled solely with wormwood—no kind person would offer such to their neighbor, and certainly not Almighty God Himself—All-Encompassing Love.

"Well, put a cross over all this!" the merchant said to Jørgen. "Let us erase this year as though it never existed, burn the calendar, and in two days—on our way, to our peaceful, God-blessed Skagen! They call it 'the bear's corner,' but it is a cozy, blessed nook, with windows open to the white light!"

What a journey that was! Jørgen breathed deeply. From the cold dungeon, from the stifling, stuffy air, to find oneself once again in bright sunshine!

The heather bloomed, the entire steppe was covered in flowers; atop a burial mound sat a shepherd boy playing a homemade flute made from a sheep bone. Fata Morgana, wondrous aerial visions of the steppe: hanging gardens and forests floating in the air, the strange undulation of air waves—a phenomenon peasants describe as "Lokeman driving his herd"—all this he saw anew.

Their path led toward Limfjord, toward Skagen, whence came the "long-bearded people," the Lombards. During the reign of King Snio there was famine here, and it was decided to kill all the elderly and children, but the noble woman Gambarruk, owner of one of the northern estates, proposed instead to exile the youth beyond the country's borders. Jørgen knew this legend—to that extent he was educated—and if he did not additionally know the actual land of the Lombards lying beyond the high Alps, he at least knew roughly what it resembled. After all, as a little boy he had traveled south to Spain and remembered fruits piled in heaps, red pomegranates, the noise, clamor, and bell ringing in the enormous city resembling a beehive. Yet the best country remains nevertheless one's homeland, and Jørgen's homeland was Denmark.

Finally, they reached Vendil-Skaga, as Skagen is called in ancient Norwegian and Icelandic manuscripts. Even in those times an endless chain of dunes stretched here along the sandbar, right up to the lighthouse, interrupted by cultivated fields, and towns existed: Old Skagen, Vesterby, and Østerby. Houses and homesteads were then scattered among the drifting, mobile sandy hills, then the fierce wind tossed unsecured sand, and then seagulls, terns, and wild swans cried deafeningly here. Old Skagen, where the merchant Brenne lived and where Jørgen was to

settle, lies one mile southwest of Cape Skagen. In the merchant's courtyard smelled of tar; roofs on all outbuildings consisted of boats turned upside down; pigsties were nailed together from shipwreck fragments; the yard was not fenced—there was no one and nothing to fence against, although on long ropes hung one above another, flattened fish were drying. The entire seashore was covered with rotting herrings: no sooner was the seine cast into the sea than it returned packed full with herrings; there was nowhere to put them—they had to be thrown back into the sea or

leave to rot on the shore.

The merchant's wife and daughter, along with all the household members, joyfully welcomed the father and master; there was handshaking, shouting, and chatter. And what a lovely little face and eyes the merchant's daughter had!

Inside the house it was spacious and cozy. Fish dishes appeared on the table—such flounders as even a king would relish! And the wines came from the Skagen vineyards of the great sea: grape juice flows into Skagen directly in barrels and bottles.

When the mother and daughter learned who Jørgen was, hearing how cruelly and innocently he had suffered, they began to look at him even more tenderly; especially tenderly looked the daughter, dear Clara. Jørgen found in Old Skagen a cozy, splendid family hearth; now his heart could find peace, though this poor heart had indeed endured much, even the bitterness of unhappy love, which either hardens it or makes it still softer, more sensitive. Jørgen's heart did not harden; it was still young, and now there remained within it an unoccupied little space. Incidentally, just then came Clara's journey to visit her aunt in Christiansand, in Norway. She intended to depart there by ship in about three weeks and stay there all winter.

On the last Sunday before Clara's departure, everyone went to church to receive communion. The church was large and rich; several centuries ago Scots and Dutchmen had built it; not far from it the town itself had grown up. The church had already somewhat decayed, and the road leading to it was very difficult, from hill to hill, now upward, now downward, through deep sand, yet the inhabitants still willingly went to God's temple to sing psalms and listen to the sermon. Sand drifts had already reached the top of the cemetery fence, but the graves were constantly cleared.

This was the largest church north of Limfjord. On the altar stood the Mother of God with the Child in her arms, as if alive; in the gallery were carved wooden images of the apostles, and above, on the walls, hung portraits of old Skagen

burgomasters and judges; beneath each portrait appeared the conventional inscription of that person. The pulpit too was entirely carved. The sun played merrily upon the brass chandelier and upon the little ship suspended from the ceiling.

Jørgen was seized by that same feeling of childlike reverence which he had experienced as a boy in the rich cathedral in Spain, but here to this feeling was added the consciousness that he too belonged to the flock.

After the sermon began the communion. Jørgen also partook of the bread and wine, and it happened that he knelt down precisely beside Clara. But his thoughts were turned toward God; he was wholly absorbed in the sacrament being performed and noticed who his neighbor was only after he had risen from his knees. Glancing at her, he saw that tears were streaming down her cheeks.

Two days later she departed for Norway, while Jørgen continued performing various tasks around the house and participated in fishing; in those times there was indeed plenty to catch—more than now. Schools of mackerel left behind them at night a luminous trail revealing their movements underwater; sculpins (the fish *cottus scorpius*) croaked, and crabs emitted plaintive wails when caught by the fishermen; fish are not nearly as mute as people say about them. As for Jørgen, he was even quieter than they, keeping his secret deep in his heart, but someday it was destined to surface.

Sitting in church on Sundays, he devoutly fixed his gaze upon the image of the Mother of God adorned on the altar, but sometimes briefly shifted it to the place where Clara had knelt beside him. She never left his thoughts... How kind she had been to him!

Then autumn arrived: dampness, gloom, slush... Water pooled in the town's streets; the sand could not absorb it fast enough, and residents had to wade through the streets, if not swim. Storms smashed ship after ship against the deadly reefs. Snow and sand blizzards began; sand buried the houses, and inhabitants often had to crawl out of them through the chimneys, but this was no novelty to them. Yet inside the merchant's house it was warm and cozy; peat and shipwreck debris crackled merrily in the hearth, while the merchant himself read aloud from an ancient chronicle the tale of the Danish prince Amlet, who returned from England and fought a battle at Bovbjerg. His grave lies near Rammé, only about two miles from where the old eel trader lived; in the boundless steppe rose hundreds of burial mounds; the steppe itself was an enormous cemetery. Merchant Brenne himself had visited Amlet's grave. When reading grew tedious, they turned to conversation; they discussed antiquity, their English and Scottish neighbors,

and Jørgen sang an old song "about the English prince," describing how the ship was adorned:

The gilded sides shine brightly,
God's word is written upon them;
And the ship's bow a galleon adorns:
The prince holds the maiden in his embrace.

Jørgen sang this song with particular feeling; his eyes positively sparkled; they had been so black and shining since his very birth.

Thus they sang and read; in the house reigned peace, tranquility, and God's grace; everyone felt as within their own family, even the domestic animals. And what order there was in the house, what cleanliness! On the shelves gleamed brightly polished tinware; sausages and hams hung from the ceiling—abundant winter stores. In our times all this can be seen on the western coast of Jutland among many peasants: the same abundance of provisions, the same decoration in the rooms, cheerfulness and sound sense; generally their affairs have improved. And here reigns the same hospitality as in the tents of the Arabs.

Never before had Jørgen lived so well, so cheerfully, except for those four merry days of childhood spent as a guest at a funeral feast. And yet Clara was not here; that is, she was not at home, but in thoughts and conversations she was constantly present.

In April the merchant decided to send his vessel to Norway; Jørgen would go aboard it too. How cheerful he became! Indeed, during this time he had grown stronger in body, as Mother Brenne herself said; it was pleasant to look at him.

"And you too!" her husband told her. "Jørgen has enlivened our winter evenings, and you as well, old woman! You have even grown younger this year. Look what you've become—a delight to behold! After all, you were once the foremost beauty in Viborg, and that means much: nowhere have I seen such beautiful girls as there."

Jørgen did not utter a word—and indeed he should not have—but thought only of one girl from Skagen. It was to her that he was now traveling. The vessel, driven by a fresh wind, spent only half a day on the voyage.

Early in the morning Merchant Brenne set out for the lighthouse that rises far out at sea, near the very tip of the Skagen cape. When he climbed onto the lookout platform, the light had long been extinguished; the sun stood high. For a whole mile from shore stretched sandbanks into the sea. On the horizon many ships appeared that day, and the merchant hoped with the help of a telescope to find

among them his own "Karen Brenne." Indeed, she was approaching; aboard her were both Clara and Jørgen. Now they already saw in the distance the Skagen lighthouse and the church bell tower, appearing from afar like a heron and a swan upon the blue water. Clara sat at the railing watching how, one after another, the familiar dunes emerged on the horizon. If the favorable wind continued blowing, they would be home in less than an hour. So close was the joy of reunion—so close too was the terrible hour of death.

A hole opened in one side of the vessel, and water rushed into the hold. They hurried to pump out the water, plug the breach, raised all sails, and hoisted the flag indicating the ship was in distress. Only about a mile remained to reach the shore; fishing boats were already visible in the distance, hastening to help; the wind drove the vessel toward land, the current aided it, but the ship sank into the water with terrifying speed. Jørgen wrapped his right arm around Clara's waist.

How she looked into his eyes just before he, invoking God's name, plunged with her into the waves! She cried out, but she had nothing to fear—he would not let her go.

The prince holds the maiden in his embrace!

Jørgen too resolved upon this in the hour of terrible danger. His ability to swim proved useful now; he worked with both legs and his free hand—with the other he held the girl firmly against himself—then yielded to the current, moving his legs only slightly; in short, he employed every technique he knew to conserve strength and reach the shore.

Suddenly he felt that Clara took a deep breath and convulsively trembled... He pressed her to himself even tighter. Waves rolled over their heads; the current lifted them; the water was so clean and transparent. For one moment it seemed to him that he saw in the depths a school of shining mackerel, or perhaps it was the sea monster itself, preparing to devour them... Clouds, drifting across the sky, cast a light shadow upon the water, then again the rays of sun played upon it. Flocks of birds flew screaming above Jørgen's head; wild ducks, drowsily rocking on the waves, startled at his approach, flew up into the air. But the swimmer's strength kept failing... He felt this; there was still quite a distance to swim to shore, yet help was near, the boat was approaching. Suddenly he clearly saw beneath the water a white figure looking straight at him... A wave caught him, the figure drew nearer... He felt a blow... everything went dark before his eyes!..

On the reef underwater lay lodged a fragment of a ship with a galleon figurehead depicting a woman leaning upon an anchor. It was against its point, jutting

upward, that Jørgen struck, driven by the current. Unconscious, he sank into the water together with his burden, but the next wave again tossed them upward.

The fishermen pulled both of them into the boat; Jørgen's face was all covered in blood; he lay as if dead, yet he held the girl so tightly that they could scarcely loosen her from his hands. Lifeless and pale, they laid her on the bottom of the boat, which was heading toward Skagen.

Every means was employed, but it proved impossible to bring Clara back to life. For a long time now had Jørgen swum with a corpse in his embrace, struggling and exhausting himself, saving the dead.

But Jørgen himself still breathed, and they carried him to the nearest house, behind the dunes. Some barber-surgeon, who was at the same time a blacksmith and a petty trader, bandaged his wound while awaiting the physician, for whom they had sent to Hjørring.

The patient's brain had been affected; he lay in delirium, uttering wild cries, but on the third day he fell into a stupor. Life seemed to hang in him by a thread, and, according to the physician, it would have been better if that thread had snapped.

"God grant that he may die! He will never be a man again!" But he did not die, the thread did not break; instead, the thread of memory broke, all mental faculties were cut off at the root—that is what is terrible! Only the body remained, which prepared to recover and live in its own way. The merchant Brenne took Jørgen into his home.

"He suffered while saving our child!" said the old man. "Now he is our son."

People began to call Jørgen half-witted. But this was not entirely true; he resembled an instrument with weakened strings that had ceased to sound. Only for some brief moment, in rare minutes, did they regain their former elasticity and sound, and even then only a few separate chords of old melodies rang out. Pictures of the past surfaced and disappeared again, and Jørgen sat once more, staring fixedly into space with a meaningless gaze. One must suppose that he, at least, did not suffer. His black eyes had lost their brilliance, looking lifeless and dull.

"Poor, feeble-minded Jørgen!" people said of him.

So this is what became of the child whom his mother had carried in her womb for a life so rich in happiness that it would have been unforgivable pride merely to desire it, let alone expect another beyond it! Thus, all the rich capacities of the soul went to ruin? Need, sorrow, and disaster were his lot; he, like a luxurious flower bulb, was torn from rich soil and thrown upon the sand—to rot! Was not a creature

made "in the image and likeness" of God Himself worthy of a better fate? Is everything in the world merely a play of empty chances? No! The merciful Lord undoubtedly prepared for him in another life a reward for all that he had endured in this one. "The mercy of the Lord is above all His works!"—these words of the psalmist the pious wife of the merchant repeated with faith, and her heartfelt prayer was a prayer for Jørgen's speedy departure into the kingdom of God's mercy, where eternal life reigns.

Clara was buried in the cemetery, which was being increasingly covered by sand. But Jørgen seemed not even aware of this; it did not enter the narrow sphere of his thoughts; they caught only fragments of the past. Every Sunday he accompanied the merchant's family to church and sat quietly, staring ahead with a meaningless gaze. But once, while listening to the singing of psalms, he sighed, his eyes sparkled and fixed upon that place near the altar where, a year before, he had knelt beside his deceased beloved. He spoke her name, turned pale as a sheet, and wept.

They helped him out of the church, and he said that he felt quite well. He no longer remembered what had happened to him, he remembered nothing. Yes, the Lord had tested him severely! But can anyone doubt the wisdom and mercy of our Creator? Our heart, our reason tell us of His wisdom and mercy, and the Bible confirms: "His mercy is above all His works!"

Meanwhile, in Spain, where the warm breeze caresses orange and laurel trees, blows upon Moorish gilded domes, where songs flow, castanets click, and processions of children move through the streets with candles and fluttering banners, there sat in a luxurious house a childless old man, the wealthiest of merchants. What would he not have given from his riches just to regain his children, his daughter, or her child, who perhaps was not destined even to see the light, and consequently, eternal life? "Poor child!"

Yes, a poor child! Indeed a child, though he had already reached his thirtieth year; such was the age to which Jørgen had lived in Skagen.

The sand drifts had already covered the cemetery right up to the church wall, yet the dying still wished to be buried beside those who had earlier departed into eternity, relatives and dear ones to their hearts. Merchant Brenne and his wife also lay beneath the white sand beside their daughter.

Spring came, the season of storms; the dunes smoked, the sea raised its waves high, birds flew in clouds above the dunes, uttering cries. Ship after ship broke upon the reefs.

One evening Jørgen sat alone in the room, and suddenly some restless longing, a striving toward distant places, flared up within his breast, such as had often drawn him even in childhood from home out onto the dunes and into the steppe.

"Home, home!" he repeated; no one heard him; he left the house and headed toward the dunes; sand and small stones flew into his face, swirling around him in pillars. Thus he reached the church. Sand had covered the entire wall and even the windows halfway up, but the passage to the doors had been cleared. The doors were not locked and opened easily; Jørgen entered.

The wind howled over the town; a terrible hurricane broke loose, such as the inhabitants did not remember, but Jørgen was already in the house of God. Around stood the dark night, yet in his soul there was light, within it kindled a spiritual fire that never completely goes out. He felt that the heavy mass pressing upon his head suddenly fell away with a crash. Sounds of an organ seemed to reach him, but it was the storm howling and the sea moaning. Jørgen sat down in his place; the church was illuminated with lights; one candle flared up after another; such brilliance he had seen only once in his life, in a Spanish cathedral. The old portraits of burgomasters and judges came to life, descended from the walls where they had hung for years, and took their places in the gallery. The church gates and doors swung open, and all the deceased parishioners entered in festive garments such as they had worn in their time. They proceeded to the sounds of wonderful music and seated themselves in their places. The choir began to sing psalms; powerful waves of sound poured forth. The elders, Jørgen's adoptive parents, merchant Brenne with his wife, were also there, and beside Jørgen sat their dear, loving daughter Clara. She extended her hand to Jørgen, and they went together to the altar, knelt down, and the priest joined their hands, blessing them to live in peace and love!.. The sounds of trumpets rang out; full tones sobbed blissfully, as if hundreds of children's voices, swelling into powerful, soul-elevating, stormy chords of the organ, and again passing into tender, enchanting notes, yet at the same time capable of shaking grave vaults!

The little ship that hung from the ceiling descended, suddenly became so large, magnificently adorned, with silken sails, gilded yards, golden anchors, and silken ropes, like that ship sung of in an ancient song. The newlyweds boarded the ship, all the other parishioners followed them; there was room for everyone, everyone was well. The church walls and vaults blossomed like elderberry and fragrant lime trees, and gently stretched their branches and leaves toward the ship, intertwining above him like a green arbor. The ship rose and sailed through the air. All the candles in the church turned into little stars, the wind sang psalms, and the very heavens sang:

"Love! Bliss! Not one life shall perish, but all shall be saved! Bliss! Hallelujah!..." These words were the last words of Jurgen: the thread that held his immortal soul snapped... In the dark church lay only his lifeless body, while around it the storm still raged, the sand swirling in a whirlwind.

The next day was Sunday; in the morning the parishioners and the priest set out for the church. It was difficult to make their way there: the road had become almost impassable. At last they arrived, but... the church doors were buried under sand; before them rose an entire hill. The priest read a short prayer and said that the Lord had closed for them the door of this His house, and that they must build Him a new one in another place.

They sang a psalm and dispersed to their homes.

Jurgen was found neither in the town nor on the dunes, wherever they searched, and they decided that he had been washed away by the waves.

Yet his body rests in a magnificent tomb—within the very temple. The Lord commanded the storm to cover his grave with earth, and it remains beneath the heavy sandy shroud even to this day.

The sands have covered the majestic vaults of the temple, and now thorns and wild roses grow above it. From the sands peeks out only one bell tower—a majestic monument over Jurgen's grave, visible from afar for several miles. No king has ever been granted a more splendid monument! No one shall disturb the peace of the departed; no one knows, or at least until now no one has known, where he is buried. As for me, the wind roaming over the dunes told me all this.