

## A STORY FROM THE SAND DUNES

This is a story from the Jutland sand dunes, but it does not start over there, no, far off, to the South, in Spain; the sea is the path of travel between the countries; just imagine yourself there, in Spain! there it is warm and delightful; there the bright scarlet pomegranate flowers grow among the dark laurel trees; from the mountains a refreshing breeze wafts down over the gardens of orange trees and the magnificent Moorish halls with their golden cupolas and their coloured walls; through the streets children go in processions with candles and fluttering banners, and above them, high and clear, is the great vault of the heavens with twinkling stars; there is the sound of songs and castanets, young men and women dance vigorously beneath the flowering acacia trees while the beggar sits on the hewn marble and quenches his thirst on a juicy water melon, whiling away the time; all of it is just like a lovely dream, and to abandon oneself to it, well, that is what two young newly weds were doing unrestrainedly – and they had also been given all the blessings of earthly life: health, good spirits, riches and glory.

‘We are as happy as anyone could possibly be!’ they say, with the full conviction of their hearts; although they could be raised yet one step higher in happiness, as they would be when God granted them a child, a son who resembled them in body and soul.

The happy child would be welcomed with rejoicing, be given the greatest care and love, all the well-being that riches and a wealthy family can provide.

Their days glided past like one long celebration.

‘Life is a gift of love’s grace, almost unfathomably great!’ the wife said, ‘and this fullness of bliss will be able to grow in the afterlife and on into an eternity! – my kind cannot contain this thought!’

‘And this surely is also presumption on the part of humanity!’ the man said. ‘It is basically a dreadful pride to believe that one will live for ever – become like God! That was also what the serpent said, and it was the Master of Lies.’

‘But surely you do not doubt that there is a life after this one?’ the young wife asked, and it was as if for the first time a shadow passed through the sun-lit realm of their thoughts.

‘Faith promises it, the priests say claim it!’ the young man said, ‘but in the midst of all my happiness I feel and acknowledge that it is a form of pride, a presumptuous thought to demand a afterlife after this one, a continued bliss – surely so much is given us in this existence that we can and ought to be satisfied!’

‘Yes, this we have been given!’ the young wife said, ‘but for how many thousands hasn’t this life been a heavy trial; how many have not, as it were, been cast into a world of poverty, disgrace, illness and misfortune; no, if there was no life after this, then everything on this earth would have been too unequally apportioned; then God would not have been the Righteous One!’

‘The beggar down there has joys that to him are just as great as those the king has in his rich palace!’ said the young man, ‘and don’t you think that the beast of burden that is beaten, starved and toils itself to death is aware of the weight of its existence? It could also demand a afterlife, call it an injustice that it was not placed on a higher rung of creation!’

‘In the Kingdom of Heaven are many mansions, Christ has said!’ his young wife replied, ‘the Kingdom of Heaven is the eternity that God’s love is! – the beast too is one of his creatures, and I do not believe that a single life will be lost, but gain all the bliss which it can receive and which it finds sufficient!’

‘But this world is enough for me!’ the man said, and threw his arms around his lovely, adorable wife, smoked his cigarillo out on the open balcony, where the cool air was full of the scent of oranges and carnations; there was the sound of music and castanets from down in the street, the

stars twinkled from above, and two eyes full of love, those of his wife, gazed at him with the eternal life of love.

‘For such a minute,’ he said, it is well worth being born, to sense it and – to disappear!’ he smiled, his wife lifted her hand slightly reproachfully – and the cloud was gone once more, they were far too happy.

And everything seemed to comply with them and move on in glory, happiness and well-being, there was a change now and then but only one of place, not one that affected their enjoyment and right to win happiness and pleasure in life. The young man was sent by his king as an emissary to the imperial court in Russia, it was a post of honour, his birth and knowledge entitled him to it; he had a considerable fortune, his wife had brought him one that was no less than his, she was the daughter of the richest, most respected merchant. One of his largest and best ships was precisely that year just about to depart for Stockholm, it was to take his dear children, daughter and son-in-law to St. Petersburg, and the ship was furnished in royal style, with soft carpets for their feet, silks and magnificence everywhere.

There is an old ballad that all Danes know: it is called ‘The King’s Son of England’, he too sails on so costly a ship, its anchor is inlaid with red gold and every rope with a silken twine, that ship one cannot help thinking of while gazing at the one from Spain – here was the same splendour, the same thought of farewell:

‘God grant we all meet with joy once more!’

And an offshore wind blew keenly from the Spanish coast, the farewell was brief; within a few weeks they would be able to reach their desired destination; but when they were well out at sea the wind died down, the sea turned still and glittering, the water shone, the stars in the sky shone, it was like festive evenings in the rich cabin.

Finally, everyone wished the wind to get up once more, that a fair wind would bear them forwards, but no wind came, if the wind got up, it was always against them, and in this fashion weeks passed, indeed, no less than two months, only then did they get a favourable wind, it blew from the south-west, they were halfway between Scotland and Jutland, and the wind grew stronger, just as in the old song about ‘The King’s Son of England’:

‘Then dark clouds came and the gale winds blew,  
No land or shelter those on board knew,  
So they dropped anchor as best they could,  
But the westerly wind blows them in towards Denmark.’

Many ages have past since then. King Christian VII sat on the Danish throne and was then a young man; much has happened since that time, much has altered and changed; lake and bog have become fertile meadow, the heath cultivated land, and in the shelter of the West Jutlander’s house grow apple trees and roses, but they must be sought out, for they hide from the keen westerly winds.

There are those over there who can think far farther back in time than to the reign of Christian VII, when Jutland had – and in some places still has – mile after mile of brown heathland with its barrows, its *fata morganas*, its criss-crossing uneven and sand-swept roads; and to the West, where large rivers enter the fjords, there are expanses of meadow and bog hemmed in by high land, dunes, which, like a range of Alps with jagged peaks, rise up towards the sea, only punctuated by high slopes of clay out of which the sea devours huge mouthfuls year by year, so that cliffs and hills crash down as if shaken by earthquakes. That is how it still looks to this day, and how it used to look many years ago, when the happy married couple were sailing off the coast in the costly ship.

It was in late September, it was Sunday and the weather was sunny, the sound of the church bells reached each other along Nissumfjord, the churches there stand like hewn boulders, each of them a piece of rock face; the North Sea could roll over them and they would still stand; most of them are without a tower, the bells then hang freely outdoor between two beams. The church service was over, the congregation on its way out of the House of God into the churchyard, where then as now there were and are not a single tree or bush, not a single planted flower or a wreath laid on any grave, uneven mounds indicate where the dead lie buried, a sharp-edged grass, whipped by the wind, grows over the entire graveyard; a few graves perhaps have a tombstone, or rather a mouldering piece of wood trimmed into the form of a coffin; the wood fetched from the 'forest' of the western region: the wild sea where, for those living on the coast, there grow the trimmed beams, planks and trees that the breakers bring ashore. The wind and sea mist soon cause the flotsam to crumble, and such a piece lay here on a child's grave, and one of the women who came out of the church went over to it, she stood still, gazed at the half-disintegrated piece of wood, soon her husband joined her; they did not exchange a single word, he took her by the hand and they walked from the grave out onto the brown heath, over boggy land towards the sand dunes; for a long while they walked in silence.

'That was a good sermon, today!' the man said, 'if we didn't have the Lord God, we would have nothing!'

'Yes,' his wife answered, 'he gladdens and saddens! that is his right! – Tomorrow our little boy would have been five years old, if we had been allowed to keep him.'

'Nothing will come of your grieving!' the man said. 'He is in a better place! he is where we can only pray we one day will come!'

And then they spoke no more and walked on to their humble dwelling among the dunes; suddenly, from one of these, where the lyme grass could not bind the sand, there rose what was like a great cloud of smoke, it was a gust of wind that had bored its way into the dune and whirled up the fine grains of sand; another gust came, dashing all the fish stretched out on a line against the wall of the house, and then everything was still once more; the sun beat down fiercely.

The man and wife entered their home and were soon out of their Sunday clothes, they then hurried over the dunes, which stood there like huge waves of sand that had suddenly been stopped in their tracks; the blue-green sharp-edged marram grass and lyme grass offered some variation in colour against the white sand. A couple of neighbours arrived, they helped each other to get the boats higher up on the beach, the wind grew stronger, it was bitterly cold, and as they returned across the dunes, the sand whirled sand and sharp small pebbles into their faces; the waves were topped with white crests, and the force of the wind snipped over the tips so that they became a trail of spray.

Evening came, there was a growing swishing in the air, a howling and complaining, like a host of desperate spirits, it blotted out the rolling of the sea, despite the fact that the fisherman's cottage lay so close to it. The sand swirled against the window-panes and there was the occasional gust that shook the house to its foundations. It was dark, though towards midnight a wild moon came out.

The air cleared, but the storm rushed at full strength out across the deep, dark-rolling sea, The fishing folk had long since gone to bed, but there was not a chance in such frightful weather of getting a wink's sleep; then there was a knock at the window, the door opened and the call came: 'There is a large vessel stranded on the outermost sandbar!' – at one leap the fishing folk were out of bed and in their clothes.

The moon had come out, there was enough light to see in, had one been able to keep one's eyes open in the swirling sand, there was a gale blowing that one could lean into, and only with great difficulty, crawling forwards between the gusts, were they able to get over the dunes, and here flying through the air like swan's down came the salt froth and foam from the sea, which like a heaving,

seething cascade hurled itself against the shore. One had indeed to have a practised eye to immediately make out the vessel out there; it was a magnificent two-master; precisely now it was being lifted over the sandbar, three, four cable-lengths off the usual channel, it drove towards the land, hit the second sandbar and was held fast. It was impossible to come to its aid, the sea was too rough, it battered against the vessel and crashed over it. They thought they could hear cries of distress, screams of mortal fear, they could see all the frantic, helpless activity. There now came a wave which, like a crushing boulder of rock, fell onto the bowsprit and it was gone, the stern towered high up above the water. Two persons leapt together into the sea, they vanished – for an instant – and one of the largest waves that surged up towards the dunes flung a body up onto the shore – it was a woman, a dead body they assumed; a couple of the women caught hold of her and thought they could notice signs of life, she was borne over the dunes to the fisherman's cottage. How beautiful and fine she looked, it must surely be a lady of distinction.

They laid her in the humble bed; there was not a thread of linen in it, there was a woollen blanket to wrap oneself in, and that gave plenty of warmth.

She came to, but was in a fever, she knew nothing of what had happened or where she was, and that was also a good thing, for everything that was dear to her lay on the ocean floor, out there what had befallen them was what was sung of in 'The King's Son of England':

'It was a sorrowful sight to see,  
The fine ship reduced to mere debris.'

Wreckage and flotsam were washed ashore, she was the only one of all on board to survive. The wind continued to howl in over the coast, for a short while she was quiet, but soon came cries and agony – she opened her lovely eyes wide, said some words, but no one here could understand them.

And then, after all she had suffered and been through, she was holding a new-born child in her arms; it ought to have been resting in a fine bed, with silken curtains, in the rich house! it ought to have been welcomed with rejoicing to a life full of all earthly riches, and now the Lord God had let it be born in this poverty-stricken hole! without even a kiss from its mother.

The fisherwoman laid the baby to its mother's breast, and it lay against a heart that was no longer beating – she was dead. The child, who ought to have been brought up in wealth and happiness, had been flung into the world, flung into the sand dunes by the sea, in order to experience the lot of the pauper and burdensome days.

And as always the old ballad comes to mind:

'Then the tears coursed down the king's son cheek,  
Alas, my fate here at Bovbjerg's bleak!  
With me things have gone from bad to worse!  
Had I but come to Sir Bugge's fief,  
No knight or squire would have been my thief!'

The ship had stranded just south of Nissumfjord, on the shore Sir Bugge had once called his own; the hard, inhuman times when the inhabitants of the west coast were 'of evil intent' towards anyone shipwrecked were long since past; love and kind-heartedness, self-sacrifice for the victims existed there as one of the noblest characteristics of our age; the dying mother and the wretched child would have been met with care and attention wherever 'the wind had blown', but nowhere more sincerely than at the home of the poor fisherman's wife, she who only the previous day had stood with a heavy heart by the grave that held her child, a child who this very day would have been five years old if God had vouchsafed it to live.

Nobody knew who the stranger, the dead woman, was, or where she came from. The pieces of wreckage offered no explanation.

In Spain, in the rich house, no letter or message about the daughter or son-in-law ever arrived; they had not reached their destination, violent gales had been raging for the past weeks; people waited for months. 'Lost with all on board!' they knew that for sure.

But in the Huusby sand dunes, in the fisherman's cottage, they now had a little lad.

Where God provides food for two, the third one will always find a morsel to eat; and down by the sea there is always fish for a hungry mouth. The child was given the name Jørgen.

'He must surely be a Jewish child!' people said, 'his skin is so dark!' 'He can also be an Italian or a Spaniard!' the vicar said. The fisherman's wife felt it made no difference which of the three, and consoled herself with the fact that the child had been baptised a Christian. The boy thrived, his noble blood retained warmth and gained strength from the humble fare, he started to grow in the lowly dwelling; the Danish language became his language, as spoken by the West Jutlander. The pomegranate seed from Spanish soil became the lyme grass plant on the west coast of Jutland, all this it is possible for a human being to attain! he held on tight to his home with the roots of his young life. He was to taste the adversities and straitened circumstances of the poor man, but also his joys.

For everyone, childhood has highlights that continue to shine throughout one's life. What rich opportunity there was there for play and pleasure – the entire beach, mile upon mile, lay there with playthings: a mosaic of pebbles, red as coral, yellow as amber, and white, worn round as if bird's eggs; of every imaginable hue, and all of them smoothed and polished by the sea. Even the dried-out skeleton of a fish, the water-plants dried by the wind, the gleaming white seaweed, long and narrow as ribbon, fluttered among the stones; everything was a source of play and pleasure to the eye and also to the mind; and the boy was a bright child, many great talents lay hidden in him. How he could recall stories and songs he had heard, and he was so adroit with his fingers! out of stones and shells he could construct entire vessels and pictures that the living room could be decorated with; he could carve his thoughts out of sticks, his foster-mother said, and the boy was still so young! he had a lovely voice, melodies tripped off his tongue. Many strings were strung in this chest, they could have sounded out in the world had his situation been elsewhere than in a fisherman's cottage on the West Jutland coast.

One day a crate from a shipwreck drifted ashore with rare flower bulbs in it, some of these people took and put in the pot, thinking that they were edible, others lay there rotting in the sand, they did not fulfil their destiny and unfold their magnificent colours, all the glory that lay within them – would Jørgen fare any better? It was soon over with the bulbs, he still had years of trials and testing ahead of him

It never occurred to him or any of the others over there just how lonely and monotonous the passing days were, there was plenty to do, to hear and to see. The sea itself was one great textbook, every day it offered a new page, dead calm, ground swell, gales and storms; the shipwrecks were the highlights; church services were like festive occasions, although one visit in particular was especially welcome in the fisherman's cottage, it was repeated twice a year, it was that of the the uncle who was an eel-man from Fjaltring up near Bovbjerg; he came with a red-painted cart full of eels, the cart was covered over like a coffin and painted with blue and white tulips; it was drawn by two dun oxen – and Jørgen was allowed to drive them.

The eel-man was a quick-witted fellow, a cheerful guest, he carried a keg with him that was full of spirits, everyone got a dram of snaps from it, or a coffee-cup full if there was a shortage of glasses, even Jørgen, in spite of his young age, was given a generous thimbleful, it was so one could keep hold of the slippery eel, the eel-man said and he always told the same story and when people laughed at it he immediately always repeated the same story to the same people; that is what all

talkative people do, and since Jørgen referred to that story throughout his boyhood and into adulthood as well, we might as well hear it as well.

‘The eels lived out in the river and the eel-mother said to her daughters whenever they asked to go a little way up the river on their own: “Don’t go too far! the horrible eel-catcher can come and take every one of you!” – but they did go too far and of the eight daughters only three returned to the eel-mother; and they wailed: “we had only gone just a little outside the door when the horrible eel-catcher came and speared our sisters to death!” “They will come back again!” the eel-mother said. “No!” the daughters said, “for he flayed them, cut them in little pieces and put them in the pan.” But they will come back again!” the eel-mother said. “But he then drank spirits after eating them!” the daughters said. “Oh, oh! then they will never come back again!” the eel-mother wailed. “The snaps will bury the eel!”

‘And that is why one must always drink one’s snaps with that dish!’ the eel-man said.

And this story became a golden thread that ran through Jørgen’s life. He too wanted to be outdoors, ‘a little way up the river’, out travelling in the world, and his mother said the same as the eel-mother, ‘there are many wicked people, eel-catchers!’ but beyond the dunes, just a little way out onto the heath, that must be alright; and his mind was set on it. Four delightful days, the brightest of his entire childhood, unfolded; all the loveliness of Jutland, the joys of the home and sunshine lay in them, he was to go to a festive gathering – a funeral party, admittedly.

A wealthy relative of the fisherman had died; the manor lay inland, ‘eastward and a point to the north’ as it is called. Father and mother were to attend, and Jørgen too. They travelled over heath and bog and came to the green meadows where the river of Skærumaa wound its way, the river with the many eels where the eel-mother lived with her daughters, those the wicked people speared and cut into little pieces; and people often didn’t treat their fellow humans any better; Sir Bugge, the knight mentioned in the old ballad, was also murdered by wicked people, and despite being called good, he could easily have almost had the builder killed who built a castle with towers and thick walls for him, precisely where Jørgen now stood with his foster-parents, where Skærumaa runs into Nissumfjord. The ruins were still visible, with red rubble scattered around them. Here, once the builder had left, Sit Bugge had said to his squire ‘Go after them and say: Master, the tower has a lean! if he turns back or look, kill him and take the money he got from me, but if he does not, then allow him to travel on unharmed,’ and the squire obeyed, and the builder answered: ‘the tower does not lean, but one day a man will come from the west in a blue cloak, he will cause it to lean!’ and that took place a hundred years later, then the North Sea broke in and the tower fell, but the owner of the manor Prebjørn Gyldenstjerne, built a new manor higher up, where the meadowland ends and it is still standing – the manor of Nørre-Vosborg.

Jørgen had to pass by there with his foster-parents – every location here he had been told of during the long winter evenings, and now he saw the manor with its double moats, trees and bushes, the ramparts overgrown with bracken rose up inside! but loveliest of all were the tall linden trees, they reached all the way up to the ridge of the roof and filled the air with the sweetest fragrance. To the north-west, in the corner of the garden, stood a large bush with flowers as if there was winter snow in the greenness of summer; it was an elder bush, the first that Jørgen had seen blossom in such a way; it and the linden trees remained stored in his memory for the rest of his life – Denmark’s scent and loveliness, like the soul of the child ‘kept safe for the old man!’

The journey now proceeded and grew more comfortable, for just outside Nørre-Vosborg, where the elder stood in flower, they met up with other guests who were going to the funeral party and travelled with them in a carriage, admittedly all three of them had to sit at the back on a small wooden chest with iron mountings, but they felt that this was better than walking even so. The ride took them over the uneven heath; the oxen that pulled them stopped from time to time whenever they came across a fresh patch of grass among the heather, the sun shone warmly, and it was

strange to see far out a cloud of dust that swayed back and forth, despite the fact it was clearer than the air, one could look through it, it was as if rays of light were rolling and dancing over the heath.

‘That’s Loki driving his flock,’ they said, and that was sufficient explanation for Jørgen, it seemed to him he was riding straight into a fairytale land, and yet it was reality. How still everything was here!

In front of him lay the vast expanse of heathland, as if a huge, precious carpet; the heather was in bloom, the cypress-green juniper bushes and fresh shoots of oak appeared in the heather in clusters like bouquets, it was so inviting to romp around here, had it not been for the many poisonous adders! of which people spoke, as of the many wolves there had been here, which was why the shire bore the name Ulvborg Herred. The old man who was driving, told of life here in his father’s time, how the horses out here often had to fight a hard fight with the beasts that had now been exterminated, and that one morning he had come out here and found one of the horses holding down a wolf it had killed, but the flesh had all been torn from the horse’s leg.

All too quickly they crossed the uneven heathland and passed through the deep sand. They stopped at the house of mourning, which was full of strangers, inside and out; one carriage after the other stood there, horses and oxen were grazing on the meagre pasture; large sand dunes, like those back home on the west coast, rose up behind the manor, stretching out far and wide! How had they arrived up here, a dozen miles inland and just as high and mighty as those down by the beach? The wind had lifted and moved them, they too had their own history.

Hymns were sung, a couple of old people also wept, but apart from that everything was so enjoyable, Jørgen felt, here there was plenty to eat and drink; the loveliest plump eels and after them one had to drink snaps, ‘that keeps the eel in its place!’ the eel-man had said, that those words were well and truly put into practice here.

Jørgen was indoors and Jørgen was outdoors; by the third day he felt just as much at home here as in the fisherman’s cottage and the sand dunes where he has spent all his days up to this point. Here on the heath it was admittedly rich in a different way, here among the flowering heather they were crowberries and blueberries, they grew in profusion, so large and so sweet that one could really come to squash them with one’s feet so that the heather dripped with their crimson juice.

Over there lay a barrow, here was another; columns of smoke rose in the calm air, it was a heath fire, people said, it lit up the evening so delightfully.

Now the fourth day came and then it then the funeral party was over – they were to travel from the inland dunes to the coastal dunes.

‘Ours are the real ones, aren’t they!’ father said, ‘these ones have no power!’

And they spoke of how they had come into existence, and all of it was very easy to understand. Down on the beach a body had been found, the farmers had laid it in the graveyard, then the sand-drifting began, the sea broke in violently, a wise man in the parish advised them to open the grave and see if the buried man lay there sucking his thumb, for in that case they had buried a merman, and the sea wanted to break in to fetch him; the grave was opened, he lay there sucking his thumb, and so they immediately loaded him on a cart, two oxen were hitched to it, and if stung by botflies, they raced with him across heath and bog out into the sea, then the sand-drifting stopped, but the dunes are still standing. All of this Jørgen heard and kept in his mind, from the happiest days of his childhood: the days at the funeral party.

It was nice to get out, to see new areas and new people, and he was to get out more. He was not yet fourteen years old, still a child; he went to see, got out and learnt what the world has to offer; tried foul weather, high seas, wicked minds and hard people – he became a cabin boy! bad food, cold nights, knotted rope and fisticuffs lay in store, and there was something in his aristocratic Spanish blood that came to the boil, so that he foamed at the mouth with angry words, although it

was wisest to choke them back, and that was a feeling as for the eel to be flayed cut into little pieces and put in the pan.

'I'll be back!' something inside him said. He also got to see the Spanish coast, his parents' fatherland, the town itself where he had lived in prosperity and good fortune, but he knew nothing of native soil and ancestry, and his family knew even less about him.

The poor ship's boy was not allowed to leave the boat either, though on the very last day the vessel was anchored there, he was allowed ashore; purchases had to be made, and he was to haul them on board.

There stood Jørgen in miserable clothes that looked as if they had been washed in the ditch and dried in the chimney; the first time he – a dune-dweller – saw a great city. Oh, how tall the houses were, the streets narrow, with teeming crowds of people, some pushing forward here, others there, it was a whole maelstrom of city folk and peasants, monks and soldiers; there was a bawling, a screaming, a ringing of bells on donkeys and mules – with church bells ringing too! there was chatter and clatter, beating and hammering, for every occupation had its workshop in the doorway or on the pavement, and the sun beat down so mercilessly, the air was heavy, it was as if one had come into a baker's oven full of dung beetles, cockchafers, bees and flies, they hummed and it buzzed; Jørgen didn't know whether he was coming or going. Then right in front of him he saw the mighty portal of the cathedral, the candles gleamed from the semi-dark vaults and there was a smell of incense. Even the poorest beggar in rags dared climb the flight of steps and enter. The sailor, who Jørgen followed, made his way through the church, and Jørgen stood in the sanctuary. Many-coloured images glowed from a golden background. The Virgin Mary with the Infant Jesus stood on the altar among flowers and candles; priests in their ceremonial robes sang, and lovely choirboys in surplices swung silver thuribles; it was a wonderful, magnificent sight to see, it pervaded Jørgen's soul, overwhelmed him; the church and belief of his parents enveloped him and struck a chord in his soul, so that his eyes filled with tears.

From the church he moved on to the market square, he was given a great many provisions to haul around; their route was not a short one, he grew tired and rested outside a large, splendid house that had marble columns, statues and wide flights of stairs; he leant his burden against the wall there; and then a finely braided porter rushed out, waving a silver-mounted stick at him and chased him away – the grandchild of the house, but nobody there knew that, least of all Jørgen himself.

And then he came back on board, was shoved around and given hard words, had little sleep and much work – and so he had been put through all that! and it is said to be a good thing to put up with trials and tribulations in one's youth, people say – yes, if it means a good old age.

The time he had signed on for was over, the vessel lay once more in Ringkøbing fjord, he came ashore and returned to the Huusby sand dunes, but his mother had died while he had been away on his journey.

A harsh winter followed; snowstorms swept over sea and land, one could hardly toil one's way forwards. How differently things are apportioned in this world! such freezing cold and driving snow here, while in Spain the sun was scorching hot, much too hot, and yet, when a day came here that was utterly frosty clear and Jørgen saw large flights of swans fly in from the sea, over Nisumfjord and up towards Nørre-Vosborg, he felt that here the very best weather was to be found, and here it was also delightful in summer! in his thoughts he then saw the heath flowering and teeming with mature, juicy berries; the linden trees and elder bush at Nørre-Vosborg were in bloom, he simply had to go there once more.

Spring was on the way, the fishing began, Jørgen helped, he had grown during the previous year; and he was an eager worker; there was plenty of life in him, he could swim, tread water, twist and turn out there, he was often warned to steer clear of the shoals of mackerel; they take the best



swimmer, pull him deep down beneath the surface, devour him and then he is gone – but this fate did not befall Jørgen.

At the neighbour's house in the dunes a boy lived by the name of Morten, he and Jørgen got on well with each other and both of them shipped out to Norway, and also went to Holland, there never anything outstanding between the two of them, but something can easily arise when one is somewhat quick-blooded by nature, for then one easily makes great gestures, and Jørgen once did this when they started to quarrel on board about nothing at all; they were just sitting behind the cabin door eating from a clay dish they were sharing, Jørgen was holding his clasp knife in his hand. he raised it towards Morten, but at the same instant went white as a sheet and had an ugly look in his eye. And Morten just said:

‘So you're the type of person who would use a knife!’

No sooner had he said this than Jørgen's hand was down again, he didn't say a word, ate his food and went off to do his chores; when they had finished their work, he went over to Morten and said: ‘just strike me in the face! I have deserved it! I seem inside me to have a pot that comes to the boil!’

‘Let's forget about the whole thing!’ Morten said, and after that they were almost twice as good friends; indeed, after they had returned home to Jutland and the dunes and had spoken of what had taken place, it was also mentioned that Jørgen could boil over, but he was an honest cooking pot even so!

‘He's not a Jutlander! You can hardly call him a Jutland pot!’ and that was wittily said by Morten. They were young and healthy, the two of them, well-grown with strong limbs, but Jørgen was the more lithe.

Up in Norway farming folk take their livestock up to mountain pasture in the summer; on the west coast of Jutland huts have been raised deep in the dunes, made out of shipwrecks and roofed with peat and layers of heather. Places to sleep line the walls of the room, and here in early spring the fishing folk sleep, build and dwell, every one has its ‘baiting girl’ as she is called, and her job is to bait the hooks, and greet the returning fishermen with warm beer and a meal when they come home exhausted. The baiting girls also haul the fish up from the boat, clean them and have much more to do besides.

Jørgen, his father, a couple of the other fishermen and their baiting girls shared the same hut; Morten lived in the one next door.

One of the girls, Else, Jørgen had known ever since she was small, the two of them got on extremely well with each other, their natures were similar in many respects, although they were the complete opposite in appearance, he had a darkish skin and she was white, with flaxen hair; her eyes were as blue as the sea in sunshine.

One day, as they were out walking together and Jørgen held her firmly and intimately by the hand, she said to him: ‘Jørgen, I have something on my mind! let me be your baiting girl, for you are like a brother to me, but Morten, who has hired me, he and I are sweethearts – but that is not worth mentioning to others!’

It seemed to Jørgen as if the sand of the dunes quaked beneath his feet, he said not a word, just nodded, and that means the same as yes; nothing more than that was necessary,; but all of a sudden he felt in his heart that he could not stand Morten, and the more he thought about it – he had never thought about Else before – the clearer it seemed to him that Morten had stolen from him the only thing he was truly fond of, and that something was Else, this he now had realised.

If the sea is rather rough when the fishermen are returning home with their boat, just watch them crossing the sand bars: one of them stands upright in the bow, the others give him all their full attention, they sit there with their oars which, in front of the sand bar, they keep at the ready until he gives them the signal that a large wave is on the way that will lift the boat over, and it is lifted, so

that from the shore one can see its keel, and the next instant the entire boat is hidden by the waves in front of it, there is no boat, no people or mast to be seen, one would almost believe the sea had swallowed them; a moment later they come into view again like some huge sea creature crawling up the wave, the oars like its moving legs; the same process is repeated at the second and third sand bars, and now the fishermen leap ashore, pull the boat up onto the sand, each fresh wave helping them and giving them a good start until they have got it well up the beach. One wrong command off the sand bar, one moment's hesitation, and they will be shipwrecked.

'And the same fate would befall me and Morten!' That thought came to Jørgen while out at sea, just when his father had fallen seriously ill. He was racked by a fever; it was just outside the outermost sand bar, Jørgen leapt to the bow of the boat:

'Father, let me!' he said and his gaze slid over Morten and over the waves, but as each oar made ready for the strong pull and the largest wave came, he saw his father's pale face and – was unable to obey the evil impulse. The boat managed to get past the sand bars and reach the shore, but the evil thought lay in his blood, it seethed and boiled up every strand of bitterness that frayed in his memory from their time as comrades, but he was unable to plait them into twine and so he did nothing. Morten had ruined him, that was what he felt, and sufficiently to make him hateful. A couple of the fishermen noticed this, but Morten did not, he was just as before, helpful and talkative – a bit too much of late.

Jørgen's foster-father had to keep to his bed, it became his death-bed, he died the following week – and then Jørgen inherited the small house behind the dunes, nothing but a shack, but it was more than nothing – Morten had even less.

'Now you won't sign on any more, Jørgen! but always stay here with us!' one of the old fishermen said.

Jørgen did not entertain such a thought, he was more than ready to see a little more of the world once more. The eel-man from Faltring had an uncle up in 'Gammel Skagen', he was a fisherman, but also a wealthy merchant who was a shipowner; he was said to be such a kind-natured old man – it was probably well worth being in his service. Gammel-Skagen lies at the northernmost tip of Jutland, as far away from the dunes of Huusby as one can get, and that was what appealed to Jørgen most, he did not even wish to attend Else and Morten's wedding, which was going to be held in a couple of weeks' time.

It would be unwise to leave, the old fisherman felt, for now Jørgen had a house – Else would probably prefer to take him.

Jørgen answered so curtly that it was hard to make out what he said, but the old man brought Else to him: she did not say much, but this she did:

'You have a house! one must take that into consideration!' And Jørgen had much he was taking into consideration.

The seas can run high, even higher run those of the human heart – many thoughts, both strong and weak at times, passed through Jørgen's head and heart, and he asked Else:

'If, though, Morten had a house as I have, which of us would you rather take?'

'But Morten hasn't got a house and won't get one either!'

'But imagine if he did!'

'Well, then I would probably take Morten, for that's how things are with me now! But you can't live off that!'

And Jørgen thought about this all night long. There was something inside him, he couldn't quite put his finger on it, but he had a thought that was stronger than his love for Else; – and so he went to Morten, and what he said and did there was well thought-out in advance: he handed over the house to him as cheaply as possible, he wanted to go to sea again, that so appealed to him. And Else kissed him right on the lips when she heard this, for she was after all most fond of Morten.

Jørgen intended to leave early in the morning. The evening before, it was already late, he felt the urge to visit Morten once more, he walked over, and among the dunes he met the old fisherman who was not so keen on him leaving, Morten must surely have a duck's beak sewn into his trousers, he said, since the girls all fell so in love with him. Jørgen dismissed the comment, said goodbye and continued over to the house where Morten lived, he could hear raised voices inside, Morten was not alone; Jørgen hesitated, Else was the last person he wanted to meet, and when he really thought about it, he didn't want Morten to feel he had to thank him yet again, so he turned back.

The next morning, before dawn, he tied up his bundle, took his provisions and went down the dunes towards the beach, which was easier to walk along than the heavy, sand-strewn road, and also shorter, for he first wanted to get to Fjaltring, near Bovbjerg, where the eel-man lived, since he had promised to visit him.

The sea was smooth and blue, shells and conches lay there, his childhood playthings crunched under his feet. – as he walked, his nose suddenly started to bleed, it was only a small thing, but such things can turn out to be of significance; a couple of large drops fell on his sleeve; he washed them out, staunching the blood and really felt that the loss of it had made him feel lighter in head and mind. There was some sea-kale flowering in the sand, he broke off a sprig and stuck it in his hat; he wanted to be cheerful and happy; he was off into the great, wide world 'outdoors, a little way up the river!' as the eel-children wanted to! 'Beware of the wicked people who spear you, cut you into little pieces and put you in the pan!' he repeated to himself with a smile, he would probably get through the world in one piece; to be of good cheer is a powerful weapon!

The sun was already high in the sky when he drew near to the narrow entrance from the North Sea to Nisumfjord; he looked back, and quite a way off made out two people on horseback, others were following, in great haste – it had nothing to do with him.

The ferry lay on the far side of the entrance; Jørgen shouted out to it to come, went on board, but before he and the man rowing were half-way across the men who had been hurrying so arrived, they call out, they threatened and called out in the name of the law. Jørgen had no idea what this meant, but thought it best to turn around; even took one of the oars and they rowed back; at the same instant, the people leapt into the boat, and before he knew it, they had bound his hands.

'Your evil deed will cost you your life!' they said; 'a good thing we managed to catch you!'

It was no less a thing than murder that he was being accused of. Morten had been found stabbed with a knife in his neck; one of the fishermen had late the previous evening met Jørgen on his way over to Morten; it was not the first time that Jørgen had raised a knife against him, people knew that; he must be the murderer, it was now a question of getting him in safe custody; Ringkøbing was the right place, but the journey was a long one, the wind due west, it took them less than half an hour to get across the fjord towards Skærumaa and from there it was only a mile or so to Nørre-Vosborg, which was a stronghold with ramparts and moats. In the boat was the brother of the steward over there, he thought they would be allowed for the time being to put Jørgen in the gaol where the gypsy woman Langemargrethe had sat prior to being executed.

No one listened to Jørgen's defence, a couple of drops of blood on his shirt spoke eloquently against him, he was well aware of his innocence, and since he could not clear his name here, he abandoned himself to his fate.

They landed right next to the old castle mounds where Sir Bugge's manor had stood, here where Jørgen had walked with his foster-parents to the celebrations, the funeral party, the four blissful, brightest days of his childhood. He was taken the same way over the meadow up to Nørre-Vosborg, and there the elder tree stood in full bloom, the tall linden trees filled the air with their fragrance – it seemed only the day before he had last been there.

In the west wing of the major, beneath the main staircase, there is a way down to a low, vaulted cellar, and it was from there that Langemargrethe had been led to the place of execution; she had

eaten five children's hearts and she believed that if she had procured two more, she would have been able to fly and make herself invisible. In the wall there was a small, paneless, narrow air-hole; the fragrant linden trees outside were unable to penetrate with just a little refreshment, everything was chill and mouldy in there; there was nothing but a plank bed, but a clear conscience is a good pillow, so Jørgen was able to lie softly.

The thick wooden door was shut, an iron bar shot across to bolt it, but the nightmare of superstition is well able to crawl through a keyhole, at both manor and fisherman's hut, to where Jørgen now sat and thought of Langemargrethe and her wicked deeds; her last thoughts had filled this room the night before the execution; he recalled all the black arts that had been practised here in the old days, when Swanwedel was lord of the manor here, and it was still well known how the watch-dog that stood on the bridge was found every morning hanged on its chain over the railings. All of this filled and chilled Jørgen, although a sun's ray from outside sent a shaft of light in from outside, and this was the memory of the elder in bloom and the linden trees.

He did not sit here long, he was taken to Ringkøbing, where the prison was just as severe.

Those times are not ours; the poor man had a hard time of it; back then farmsteads and farming communities were still being assimilated by new manor houses, and under such a regime coachman and valet became district court judges who for a minor offence could sentence a poor man to lose all his family fortune except his land and to be put in a pillory and whipped; there were still a few of these around, and in the Jutland countryside, far removed from the Royal City of Copenhagen and enlightened, fair-minded rulers, justice was meted out as best it could be, and that time weighed heavy for Jørgen was the least of his worries.

It was bitterly cold where he was imprisoned, but would it come to an end? Through no fault of his own he had been subjected to hardship and misery, that was his lot! how things had been apportioned him in this world he now had time to think about; why had he been brought into this situation? Yes, things would be better 'in the afterlife', that which assuredly await us! that belief he had embraced while living in the humble fisherman's hut; that which, in the abundance and sunshine of Spain, had not lit up his father's thoughts became for him, here in the cold and darkness, a light of consolation, God's gift of mercy – and that can never bring disappointment.

Now the springtime storms could be felt. The rolling waves of the North Sea could be heard far inland, but only when the storm had abated; it sounded like hundreds of heavy carriages being driven over a hard, sunken road; Jørgen could hear it in his cell, and that made a change; no old melodies could reach the heart more profoundly than these notes, the rolling sea, the free sea where one was borne through the world, flew with the winds, and wherever one ended up, one had one's own house with one, just as the snail has; one was always one's own master, always at home, even in a foreign land.

How he listened to the deep rolling sound, how his thoughts caused memories to start rolling: free, free, what bliss to be free, even without soles to one's shoes and with a patched shirt of tow yarn! Occasionally something flared up inside him when he thought of this, and he pounded the wall with his clenched fist.

Weeks, months, a whole year had passed, when a gypsy, Niels the Thief, 'The Horsedealer' as he also was called, was caught, and then, then better times came, it became abundantly clear what an injustice Jørgen had suffered.

North of Ringkøbing Fjord, at a smallholder's who also kept an inn, in the afternoon the day before Jørgen had set and the murder took place, Niels the Thief and Morten had met, drunk a few glasses together, and they ought not to have gone to a man's head, but they had set Morten's tongue wagging a bit too much, he started boasting and said that he had got himself a house and was to be married, and when asked about the money for this, Morten proudly patted his pocket:

'It's where it should be! he replied.

This boasting was to cost him his life; when he had left, Niels followed him and stabbed him in the neck with his knife, to take money that did not exist.

It was a long-drawn-out affair, suffice it to say that Jørgen was set free, but what did he get in the way of compensation for all that he had suffered for days and years, in gaol, the cold, rejected by people; well, he was told that it was a good thing that he was innocent, now he was free to go. The mayor gave him ten marks for travelling expenses and several of the citizens gave him beer and good food, for there were also good people there! not everyone 'spears, flays and puts in the pan!' but the best thing about all of it was that Brønne, the merchant from Skagen, who Jørgen had intended to sign on with a year earlier, happened to be in Ringkøbing on an errand just then; he heard about the whole business, he had a heart, he understood and felt what Jørgen had suffered, now he wanted to enable him to have a better life, to let him experience that there are also good people in the world.

From prison to freedom, to the Kingdom of Heaven, to love and kind hearts he now moved, well, that too had to be tried out; no cup of life is solely wormwood and gall, no good human being could ever pour such a cup to another mortal – should then God, the Fount of all Love be able to?

'Let all of that be buried and forgotten!' Merchant Brønne said: 'let's blot out the past year! We'll burn the calendar year! and in two days' time we'll travel to peaceful, delightful and pleasurable Skagen! people say that it's a distant corner of the land; but a delightfully cosy stove corner it is, with windows that open out onto the wide world.'

What a journey it was! it was like drawing breath once again! to come out of the old prison air into warm sunshine. The heath was full of heather in bloom, a teeming profusion, and the shepherd boy sat on the ancient barrow and played on his flute, carved out of a sheep's bone. *Fata morganas*, the beautiful mirages of the desert, with hanging gardens and swimming forests, were visible as well as the strange light shimmering of the air, known as Loki driving his flock.

Their journey took them up to the Limfjord, across the land of the inhabitants of Vendsyssel, up towards Skagen, from where centuries before men with long beards, the Lombards, had emigrated when during the famine during King Snio's reign, all children and old people were to have been killed, but the noble lady Gamaruk, who owned the land up here, proposed that the young people should rather be allowed to leave the land; Jørgen knew about this, he was that knowledgeable, and even though he did not know the land of the Lombards south of the high Alps, he did know what the scenery looked like there, he had himself been south as a boy, in the land of Spain, he remembered the piles of fruit heaped up there, the red pomegranate flowers, the humming, the buzzing and the sound of bells in the city's great cathedral, but it is loveliest in one's homeland, and Jørgen's home was Denmark.

Finally they reached 'Vendilskaga', as Skagen used to be called in the old Norse and Icelandic sagas. Mile upon mile, interspersed with dunes and farmland, Gammel Skagen stretches out – and already did back then – Vesterby and Østerby, out to the lighthouse near 'The Prong'; houses and farms lay as they do today, scattered between driven and drifting sand dunes, a desert where the wind revels in the loose sand and where gulls, terns and wild swans can be heard screeching so loud that it almost bursts one's eardrums. Gammel Skagen lies about five miles southwest of 'The Prong', and it was here that Brønne lived and Jørgen was now to stay. The farm was tarred, each of the small outhouses had an upturned boat as its roof, small pieces of wreckage had been hammered together to form a pigsty, there was no fencing, there was nothing to put one round, but strung up in long rows, the one above the other, hung cut-up fish for the wind to dry. The whole beach was covered with heaps of rotten herring, the seine nets were hardly dipped in the water before great loads of herring were hauled ashore, there were too many of them, they were either thrown back into the sea or allowed to lie there and rot.

The merchant's wife and daughter, the servants too, came out rejoicing when the master of the house returned home, there was much shaking of hands, shouting and talking – and what a lovely face the daughter had – and two kind eyes!

Inside, the house was cosy and large; dishes of fish were placed on the table, plaice fit for a king; wine from Skagen's vineyards, the mighty ocean, the grapes brought ashore already pressed, both in barrels and in bottles.

When the mother and daughter then heard who Jørgen was and how he terribly he had suffered despite his innocence, their eyes fell even more mildly on him, and most mild gleamed those of the daughter, the fair maiden Clara. He found a wonderful home in Gammel Skagen, it did his heart good, and Jørgen's heart had tried a great many things, including the bitter sea of love that either hardens or softens; Jørgen's heart was still so soft, it was still so young, and there was fortunately room for him there, since in precisely three weeks' time Miss Clara was to travel by boat to Christiansand in Norway to visit an aunt and to stay there the entire winter.

The Sunday prior to their departure they were all in church for Holy Communion; the church was large and fine, centuries earlier it had been built by Scots and Dutchmen some way from where the town now lay; it had become somewhat dilapidated, and the path up and down in the deep sand was extremely laborious, but people willingly put up with that to come to the House of God, sing hymns and hear a sermon. The sand lay right up against the ring wall around the church, but the graves inside were still kept free of the shifting sands.

It was the largest church north of the Limfjord. The Virgin Mary, with a golden crown on her head and the Infant Jesus on her arm, stood as if large as life on the altarpiece; the sculptures of holy apostles stood in the chancel and high up on the wall one could see portraits of the former mayors and councillors of Skagen with their insignia of office; the pulpit was decoratively carved. The sun shone so cheerily into the church onto the gleaming brass chandelier and the small votive ship hanging from the ceiling.

Jørgen was as if overwhelmed by a feeling of holy, childlike purity, as when young he had stood in the rich church in Spain, but here there was a strong awareness that he belonged to the congregation.

After the sermon there was Holy Communion, he gladly partook with the others of the bread and wine, and it so happened that he came to kneel right next to Miss Clara; although his thoughts were so fixed on God and the holy sacrament that he only noticed who had been his neighbour when he got up; he saw the salt tears coursing down her cheeks.

Two days later she travelled up to Norway, and Jørgen made himself useful on the farm, went out fishing, and there was plenty of fish to be caught, far more than nowadays. The shoals of mackerel glittered in the dark nights indicating where they were bound, the gurnard grumbled and the squid squealed pitifully when it was hunted; the fish are not as dumb as people say, Jørgen was far more so with what he was concealing, but that too would be said at some point.

Every Sunday when he sat in church and his eyes latched onto the image of the Virgin Mary on the altarpiece, they also rested on the spot where Miss Clara had knelt at his side, and he thought of how kind-hearted she had been towards him.

The autumn came with sleet and wet snow, the water stood splashing over the ground in Skagen, the sand could not absorb all that water, one had to wade, almost sail by boat; the storms flung one vessel after the other onto the deadly sand bars, there were snowstorms and sandstorms, the sand whipped round the houses so that people had to creep out through the chimneys, but that was nothing unusual up here; it was cosy and warm inside, heather peat and pieces of shipwrecks crackled and sparkled, and Merchant Brønne read aloud from an old chronicle, read about Prince Hamlet of Denmark, who came ashore from England over here near Bovbjerg and gave battle; his grave lay not far from Ramme, only a dozen or so miles away from where the eel-man lived;

barrows by the hundreds rose up out there on the heath, a whole graveyard, Merchant Brønne had himself stood beside Hamlet's grave; they talked of the old times, of their neighbours, the English and the Scots, and Jørgen sang for them of 'The King's Son of England', and of the magnificent ship and how it was appointed:

'Twixt port and starboard, painted in gold  
God's word stood writ for all to behold.

From stern to prow it was gilded there,  
The king's son embraced his maiden fair!

Jørgen sang these lines with great intensity, his eyes glistened as he sang – they had been jet-black and gleaming from birth.

There was singing, there was reading, all was well provided for, family life right down to the domestic animals and suchlike were well kept; the shelves gleamed with polished tin plates, and from the ceiling hung sausages and hams, there was a full stock of winter provisions; yes, we can still see such a thing over on the many rich farms on the west coast, so brimful of provisions, so neat and tidy in all the rooms, shrewdness and good humour, and nowadays they have come recovered their strength; hospitality can match that of the Arab's tent.

Jørgen had never before experienced a time so enjoyable since he was a child, those four days when he was at the funeral party, even though Miss Clara was absent, except in thoughts and words.

In April they were to sail to Norway, Jørgen was to be on board. Now he had also in good spirits and had a bit more flesh on him! mistress Brønne said, he was a joy to behold.

'And you too!' the old merchant said, 'Jørgen has livened up the winter evenings, and our mother as well! You have grown younger this year, you look quite delightful! You were also the loveliest girl in Viborg, and that is saying something, for there I have always thought that the girls there were prettiest!'

Jørgen didn't remark on this, it would not have been suitable to do so, but he was thinking of someone from Skagen, and he was sailed up to her, the ship put in at Christiansand, a favourable wind took him up there in half a day.

One early morning, Merchant Brønne walked out to the lighthouse that lies a long way from Gammel Skagen, up near 'The Prong', the coals on the tilting pan up there had already been extinguished for quite some time, the sun was already high in the sky when he reached the tower; for several miles from the northernmost tip of land the sand bars stretch under the surface; off them he could see many ships today, and among them, looking through his telescope, he thought he could make out 'Karen Brønne', that was the name of the vessel, and he was correct, it was approaching, Clara and Jørgen were on board. The lighthouse and church tower of Skagen they could see like a heron and a swan on the blue water. Clara was sitting by the railing watching the dunes gradually come into views; yes, if the wind kept as it was, they could be home within the hour; they were so close to it, and to happiness – so close were they to death and the dread of it.

A plank gave way on board, the water surged in, they tried to seal it and bale the ship, struck all the sails, hoisted a distress flag as well; they were still some distance offshore, the fishing boats could be seen, but far out, there was an onshore wind, the swell was in their favour and also helped, but not enough, the vessel was sinking. Jørgen clasped Clara firmly with his right arm.

What a glance she gave him when, invoking the name of the Lord God, he leapt with her into the sea; she let out a scream, but she could rest assured that he would not let go of her. What was said in the old ballad:

‘From stern to prow it was painted there,  
The king’s son embraced his maiden fair!’

Jørgen now put into practice in the hour of danger and fear, now it really came in useful that he was a proficient swimmer, he forced his way through the waves with his legs and one arm, with the other he held the young girl tight, he rested on the water, trod water, carried out all the movements he knew and was familiar with, so as to have sufficient strength to reach land.

He sensed that she let out a sigh, he felt a shuddering convulsion pass through her, and he held on tighter; a single wave washed over them, a current lifted them, the water was so deep, so clear, for an instant he seemed to see the glittering shoal of mackerel down there, or was it the leviathan itself that wanted to swallow them; the clouds cast shadows over the water, and once again the sun’s rays gleamed; screeching birds in great flocks flew over him, and the wild ducks that, heavy and sleepy, let themselves drift on the water, flew up in fright at the swimmer; but his strength was waning, he could feel that – the land was still a couple of cable lengths away, but help was at hand, a boat was approaching – but under the water, he saw it clearly, there stood a white, staring figure – a wave lifted him, the figure approached – he felt a sharp thrust, everything went black, he lost consciousness.

There on the sand back stood the wreck of a ship, the waves lay over it, the white figurehead was held up against an anchor, the sharp iron point just stuck up to the surface of the water; Jørgen had been thrust against it, the current had driven him forwards with increased force; unconscious, he sank with his burden, but the next wave lifted him and the young girl once more.

The fishermen caught hold of them and hauled them into the boat, blood was streaming down Jørgen’s face, he was as if dead, but he still held the girl so tightly clasped that they had to prise his arm and hand from her, deathly pale, lifeless and outstretched she lay there in the boat that made for ‘The Prong’.

Everything was done to try and bring Clara back to life, she was dead; for some time out there he had been swimming with a corpse, had toiled and exhausted himself for someone who was dead.

Jørgen was still breathing, they bore him to the nearest house inside the dunes; a barber-surgeon who was there – also incidentally a smith and small shopkeeper – dressed his wounds, until the following day the doctor from Hjørring had been fetched.

The sick man’s mind was affected, he lay there delirious, let out wild screams, but on the third day he sank into what seemed a doze, his life seemed to be hanging by a thread, and that this thread broke was, according to the doctor, the best thing that one could wish for Jørgen.

‘Let us pray to the Lord God that he may be released! he will never be a whole person again!’

But life did not let him so, the thread refused to break, all the bands of his mental powers were severed, that was the horrible thing, all that was left was a living body, a body that had to regain health, function again.

Jørgen remained in Merchant Brønne’s house.

‘After all, he has gained his deathly infirmity trying to save our child!’ the old man said; ‘Now he is our son!’

Crazy is what people called Jørgen, but that was not the right expression; he was like an instrument where the strings have loosened and that can no longer sound right – only for a moment or two, for a few minutes, did they recover their tautness and played – old melodies sang out, for a few bars; images unfurled and died away in the mist once more – he sat there once more staring, thoughtless; we must hope that he did not suffer; his dark eyes lost their gleam, they seemed to be made of black glass that had been breathed on.

‘Poor crazy Jørgen!’ people said.



He was the one who had been borne under his mother's heart to a life rich and happy, one that meant it would be 'presumption, a dreadful pride' to wish for, yet alone believe in a life after this! Were all the great talents of his soul then wasted? Nothing but hard days, pain and disappointment were his lot; he was a magnificent bulb that had been wrenched from his rich soil and thrown into the sand to rot! Did that creature created in God's image have no greater worth? Was and is everything a mere random play of circumstances? No! The God of All Love would and wished to give him compensation in another life for what he suffered and lacked in this one. 'The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.' This words from one of David's psalms spoken in faith by the devout, old wife of the merchant brought her consolation, and her heartfelt prayer was that Our Lord would soon loosen Jørgen's bonds and he would be allowed to enter 'God's gift of mercy', eternal life.

Clara was buried in the churchyard where the sand swirls over the wall; it seemed as if Jørgen did not think of this at all, it was not included in his sum of thoughts, it only housed shipwrecked pieces from the past. Every Sunday he went with the family to church and sat there silently with an empty look; one day, during the singing of a hymn, he let out a sigh, his eyes lit up, they were turned towards the altar, towards the spot where more than a year and a day previously he had knelt with his dead friend, he uttered her name, and went white as a sheet, the tears coursed down his cheeks.

He was helped out the church, and he told them he felt all right, did not feel that anything had been wrong with him, that he had no memory of it – this man so sorely tried and cast on one side. – And God, our Creator, is wise and all-loving, who can doubt this? our head and heart both recognise this, the Bible confirms it: 'His tender mercies are over all his works!'

In Spain, where among orange and laurel trees the Moorish golden cupolas are swathed in warm breezes, where singing and castanets sound, there sat in the magnificent house a childless old man, the richest merchant; through the street the children go in procession with candles and fluttering banners. How much of his wealth would he not have given to have such a child, his daughter or her child, that which perhaps never saw the light of this world and how then that of eternity, of paradise? 'Poor child!'

Yes, indeed, poor child! only a child and yet thirty years old – so old Jørgen there in Gammel Skagen had now become.

The shifting sand had now laid itself over the graves in the churchyard, right up around the church's walls, but here with those who had gone before, with family and dear ones the dead wished and had to be buried. Merchant Brønne and his wife rested there with their child beneath the white sand.

It was early in the year, the season of spring storms; the dunes smoked, the seas were heavy, the birds in large flocks, like scudding clouds in a storm, flew screeching above the dunes; shipwreck followed shipwreck out on the sand bars from 'The Prong' in Skagen to the dunes of Huusby.

One afternoon when Jørgen was sitting alone in the living room, his mind cleared, a sense of unrest, as he had often felt when younger, drove him out among the dunes and on the heath:

'Home! home!' he said. No one heard him: he left the house, went in among the dunes, the sand and tiny stones beat into his face, formed whorls around him. He walked towards the church; the sand lay against its walls and half-way up the windows, but in the passage-way in front the sand had been blown away, the church door was not locked, and easy to open; Jørgen went in.

The wind swept howling over the town of Skagen; it was a hurricane worse than any living person could recall, terrible weather, but Jørgen was in the House of God, and while it turned as black as night outside, it grew light within him, it was the light of his soul which will never be extinguished; the heavy stone that lay in his head he felt shatter with a sharp crash. He seemed to hear the organ playing, but it was the storm and the rolling ocean; he sat down in the pew, and the

candles were lit, one by one, in such a profusion as he had only seen in the land of Spain, and all the pictures of the former councillors and mayors came to life, they stepped out from the wall where they had stood for many years, they sat down in the chancel; all the doors of the church opened, and in came all the dead in festive attire, as in their own age, they came in to the accompaniment of lovely music and sat down in the pews; then the hymn-singing was like a rolling ocean, and his old foster-parents from the dunes of Huusby were there too, and old Merchant Brønne and his wife, and next to them, close to Jørgen, sat their mild and adorable daughter, she stretched out her hand to Jørgen and they went together up to the altar where they once had knelt, and the vicar joined their hands, joined them in matrimony to a life in love. – Then the trumpets rang out, strangely like the voice of a child for of longing and pleasure, it swelled into the sound of the organ, a hurricane of rich-uplifting notes, sheer bliss to listen to yet powerful enough to cause the gravestones to shatter.

And the votive ship hanging in the chancel descended in front of the two of them, it became so large, so magnificent, with silken sails and gilded yard, the anchors were of red gold and every rope with a silken twine, as in the old ballad. And the bridal couple went on board, and the whole congregation followed them, and there was space and splendour for all of them. And the walls and arches of the church blossomed like the elder and the fragrant linden trees, the branches and leaves swayed gently; the bent down, parted, and the ship was lifted and sailed with them through the sea, through the air, every church candle was a tiny star, and the winds began to sing hymns and everyone joined in:

‘In love, to glory!’ ‘Not one life shall be lost!’ ‘Blissfully happy! Hallelujah!’

And these words were also his last in this world. The bond broke that held his immortal soul, – there only lay a dead body in the dark church, over which the storm raged and whirled the swirling sand.

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The next day it was Sunday, the congregation and the vicar came to divine service. Their path across the sand had been arduous, it was almost impassable, and now that they were here, they found a large dune had been swept up high in front of the church door. And the vicar read a short prayer and said that God had close the door to his house, so now they must go elsewhere and build a new one to Him.

Then they sang a hymn and returned to their homes.

Jørgen was nowhere to be found in the town of Skagen or among the dunes, where they looked for him; the rolling sea up the beach had taken him with it, people said.

His body lay buried in the largest sarcophagus – the church itself; in the storm God had thrown earth onto the coffin, the heavy layer of sand lay there and still lies there.

The shifting sand has covered the great vaults. Sea hawthorn and wild roses grow over the church where the wanderer now comes up to its town that sticks up out of the sand, a huge tombstone on the grave, visible for miles around; no king ever had one more magnificent! No one disturbs the dead man’s rest, no one knew about it or knows about it, until now – the storm sang this to me among the sand dunes!