

A Story from the Sand Dunes

Hans Christian Andersen

This is a story of the sand dunes of Jutland, but it doesn't begin there; no, it begins far away to the south, in Spain. The ocean is the highway between the two countries. So now let your thoughts journey to Spain!

It is warm there, and it is beautiful. The fiery red pomegranate blossoms grow among the dark laurels; a refreshing wind from the mountains breathes over the orange gardens and the graceful Moorish palaces with golden cupolas and colored walls. Children walk in procession through the streets, carrying torches and waving banners, while high above them stars sparkle in the clear arching vault of heaven. Song and castanets can be heard; young men and girls dance under the blossoming acacias, while the beggar lies on a carved marble block, quenches his thirst with a juicy watermelon, and dozes his life away. It is all like a beautiful dream; give yourself up to it. Yes, as did the young married couple, to whom had been granted all the choicest of earthly blessings - health, beauty, good nature, riches, and honor.

"We are as happy as anyone could ever be!" they said, with full conviction in their hearts. Yet they had one step higher to go to attain complete happiness, and that would be reached when God would give them a child, a son in their own image, body and soul. That blessed child would be welcomed with jubilation, cared for with the utmost love and tenderness, and be surrounded by all the luxuries that riches and an influential family can provide.

Meanwhile the days glided past, each like a holiday.

"Life is a precious gift of love, almost too great to understand," said the wife. "And just to think that this fullness of bliss shall still increase and grow, in another life, throughout eternity. I can hardly conceive of it!"

"And it certainly also shows the arrogance of people," said her husband. "It really shows a terrible conceit when people persuade themselves to think they'll live forever - become as God! Were these not the words of the serpent, the master of lies?"

"You surely don't doubt that there is a life after this, do you?" asked his young wife, and it was as if a shadow passed through their sunlit thoughts for the first time.

"Faith promises it, I know, and the priests tell us it is so," said the young man. "But, happy as I am now, I feel and know that it is only pride, an arrogant thought that demands another life after this - an extension of this happiness. Haven't we been granted enough in this life, so that we could and should be satisfied?"

"Yes, that has been given us," said the young wife, "but how many thousands find this life a heavy trail! How many have been thrown into this world only to find poverty, shame, sickness, and misfortune! No, if there were no afterlife, the blessings on this earth would be too unequally divided - our God would not be a God of justice!"

"The beggar down on the street has pleasures just as dear to him as the king enjoys in his splendid palace," said the young man. "And what about the poor beast of burden that is beaten and starved and works itself to death? Doesn't it sense the bitterness of its miserable life? Why shouldn't it too demand an afterlife, and call it unfair that it wasn't granted the advantages of a higher creation?"

"Christ told us, 'In my Father's house are many mansions,' " answered the young wife. "The Kingdom of Heaven is as infinite as God's love. The animal is His creation too, and I don't believe that any single life will be lost, but that each will be granted the greatest

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share of happiness it is capable of receiving."

"But this world is good enough for me now," said the young man, as he slipped his arm around his lovely, amiable wife and smoked a cigarette on the open balcony, where the cool air was heavy with the fragrance of orange blossoms and carnations. Songs and the clicking of castanets came from the street, while the stars glittered high above, and two eyes full of love - his wife's eyes - gazed on him with the expression of eternal love. "A moment like this," he said, "makes being born well worth while - just to experience such a moment - and then vanish," he said smiling, while his wife shook her finger reprovingly. And the cloud soon passed; they were much too happy.

Everything that happened seemed only to add to their happiness and well-being. A change came, but it was only a change of place, not a change that diminished their happiness and enjoyment of life. The young man was appointed by the King to be ambassador to the court of imperial Russia, a post of great honor, such as his birth and ability well fitted him to occupy. He had a great fortune of his own, and his young wife's wealth was equal to his, for she was the daughter of the richest and most respected merchant. And since one of her father's largest and finest ships would sail this year to Stockholm, it was arranged that the dear children, the daughter and the son-in-law, would travel on it to St. Petersburg. Everything was royally fitted out for the voyage, with soft carpets underfoot and silken splendor everywhere.

There is an old heroic ballad familiar to all Danes, called "The King of England's Son." He also goes to sea in a splendid ship, with its anchor inlaid with pure gold and every rope woven of silk. The ship of the Spanish merchant might have reminded one of this vessel, for the magnificence was similar, and the farewell thoughts were very much the same:

God grant that we meet with joy again!

The parting was brief, for a fair wind blew briskly off the Spanish coast. They hoped to reach their destination in a few weeks. But as soon as they were well out at sea the wind died down to rest. The ocean grew smooth, and the waters reflected the glittering light of the stars of heaven. There were festive evenings in their richly appointed cabin.

At last they wished the wind would rise again, to speed them on their voyage. But every wind that arose came from the wrong direction. Weeks went by; two whole months passed, in fact, before the wind blew in their favor, from the southwest.

They were somewhere between Scotland and Jutland, when the west wind burst forth, just as in the old ballad, "The King of England's Son":

*While the sky was dark and the wind blew,
And there was neither port nor land in view,
They cast their anchor, but to no avail;
They were blown to Denmark by a west wind gale.*

This occurred a long time ago. King Christian VII, still a young man, then sat on the throne of Denmark. Much has happened since then; there have been many changes and innovations. Lakes and swamps have become green meadows, while heaths have been plowed into useful land. And in the shelter of the West Jutlander's house there now grow apple trees and roses, but you must seek these out, for they hide from the sharp west wind.

Still, it is easy to imagine yourself back in times more remote than even the reign of Christian VII, for now, as then, the brown heath of Jutland stretches for miles with its barrows, its mirages, its winding, rough, sandy roads. To the west, where broad streams of water flow into the fiords, there are marshes and meadows, encircled by the high sand hills which rise up toward the sea like an Alpine chain with jagged summits, broken only by

high banks of clay. From these the waves eat off giant mouthfuls year after year, so that the edges and summits topple down as though shaken by an earthquake. That's how it looks today, and that's how it looked many years ago, when the happy couple sailed past it in their splendid ship.

It was a bright, sunshiny Sunday in late September; the peals of the church bells extended to one another all along the Nissum Fiord. The churches there are like immense stones, each like a piece of rock mountain; the North Sea itself might wash over them, and they would still stand firm. Most of them have no towers, their bells hanging out in the open air between two wooden beams.

The services had ended, and the congregation emerged from the House of God into the churchyard where then, as now, there grew neither tree nor shrub. No plants, flowers, or wreaths adorned the graves; only rough hillocks showed where the dead had been buried, while sharp grass, beaten flat by the wind, covered the whole cemetery. Here and there a single grave still has a tombstone, perhaps a moldering log, cut in the shape of a coffin. These are pieces of driftwood from the forests of West Jutland. The wild sea provides the shore dwellers with many hewn planks, cast upon the coast. But the wind and salt sea spray soon wear away these monuments.

One of these blocks had been placed on the grave of child, to which a young woman came from the church. She stopped and gazed down at the rotted wood; shortly her husband joined her. They spoke no word; presently he took her hand, and together they walked away from the grave, on over the brown heath and over the moor toward the sand dunes. For a long time they walked in silence.

"That was a good sermon today," said the man. "If we didn't have our Lord we would have nothing."

"Yes," replied his wife, "He sends us happiness and sorrow. He has a right to. Our little boy would have been five years old tomorrow if we had been allowed to keep him."

"It does no good to grieve," said the man. "He is much better off there than here; he is where we pray to go."

They said no more, but passed on silently toward their home among the sand dunes. Suddenly, from one of these, where there was no grass to hold the sand down, it looked as if a column of heavy smoke were rising; it was really a gust of wind boring into the bank and whirling the fine particles of sand into the air. A second gust followed, so strong that the strings of fish hung on the line rattled against the walls of the house; but it lasted for only a moment; then all was quiet again, and the sun shone warmly.

The man and his wife went into their house, quickly changed from their Sunday clothes, and then hurried across the dunes, which looked like enormous waves of sand suddenly frozen in motion. The sea reed and the bluish green of the sharp dune grass alone relieved the monotony of the white sand. A couple of neighbors appeared, and all helped in pulling the boats higher up on the sandy shore, while the wind steadily strengthened and blew biting cold. When they returned across the dunes the waves were lifting their whitecaps; sand and sharp pebbles were beating into their faces, and the wind cut off the top ridges of some of the dunes, breaking them into sand showers.

Evening came, and a swelling sound filled the air; there was a howling and wailing like a host of despairing spirits, and even though the fisherman's hut lay near the shore, the noise of the wind drowned the roar of the sea. The sand drifted against the windowpanes, and every now and then there came a violent gust of wind that seemed to shake the house to its very foundation. It was a dark evening; the moon would not rise until nearly midnight.

The air cleared a little, but the storm was now raging with all its fury over the deep, black

ocean. The fisherman and his wife had long since gone to bed, but in such weather it was impossible to close an eye.

Suddenly there was a tap at the window; the door was pushed open, and someone said, "A large ship is stranded on the outer reef!" In a moment the man and his wife were out of bed and dressing themselves hurriedly.

The moon was up now, and it would have been light enough to see had it not been for the flying sand which forced eyes to squint. Only with great difficulty, waiting for each lull and creeping a little farther between gusts, could they make their way across the sand dunes. And now, like swan's-down in the air, salty white foam flew in from the sea, as it hurled its waves against the coast in boiling fury.

Only a long-experienced eye could have distinguished the ship way out there; it was a splendid two-master. At that very instant it was lifted over the reef, three or four cable's lengths off the usual channel; it drove on toward land, struck against the second reef, and there stuck fast.

It was impossible to send any help, for the sea was far too tumultuous; waves broke over the entire vessel. They imagined hearing screams of terror, the cries of death agony; they could see the aimless rushing to and fro on board; it was all hopeless, helpless. Now a wave like a thundering avalanche crashed down on the bowsprit, and then it disappeared. The stern rose high above the water, and two people could be seen leaping from it into the sea; they disappeared - a moment more - and a tremendous wave thundering toward the dunes flung a body on the shore. It was a woman, and surely she was dead! A couple of women who quickly gathered around her believed she showed signs of life, and carried her over the dunes to the fisherman's cottage. How beautiful and dainty she was! - no doubt a lady of rank.

They laid her in the fisherman's humble bed; there was no linen to wrap her in, only a woolen blanket; but at least this was warm and comfortable. She breathed, but she was in a high fever. She had no idea where she was or what had happened; perhaps this was just as well, for all that was dear to her now lay at the bottom of the ocean; they had met the same fate as those sung of in the ballad about "The King of England's Son":

*A sorrowful sight it was to all;
The ship was broken into pieces small!*

Many bits of the wreck were driven ashore, but the lady alone survived of all the voyagers. Still the wind howled and wailed along the coast.

For a few minutes she seemed to rest, but then came screams of pain and fear. Her beautiful eyes opened, and she spoke a few words, but no one could understand her. At last, after hours of suffering and struggles, there nestled in her arms a tiny, newborn child.

That child was to have rested under silken curtains in a beautiful home, was to have been welcomed to a life full of this world's riches; but our Lord had willed that he should be born in this humble hut; and not so much as one kiss was he to receive from the lips of his mother!

The fisherman's wife placed the baby against its mother's heart, a heart that beat no longer - she was dead. And the child who was to have been brought up in luxury and pleasure had been hurled headlong into life, tossed by the sea among the sand dunes, there to experience the lot of a poor man, and weary and dark days.

And always the old song comes to our mind:

*On the King's son's cheek there was a tear
"Pray, Christ, I reach Bovbjerg; then I shan't fear!
If only I had come to Herr Bugge's Strand;*

*Then no knight nor squire of any band
Would have dared against me lift a hand."*

The ship had been wrecked a little to the south of the Nisum Fiord, on the very shore that Herr Bugge had once called his own. The hard, cruel times of the ballad, when the dwellers on the western coast treated castaways so inhumanly, had long passed. The shipwrecked were now treated with love and kindness, as they are in our own time. The dying mother and the unfortunate child would have been treated with the utmost care and tenderness, wherever the storm had driven them; but nowhere could they have received more sincere kindness than in the hut of that poor fisherwoman who, only yesterday, had stood with a sorrowful heart beside the grave of her child who, if God had allowed him to live, would today have completed his fifth year.

No one knew the identity of the dead woman or from where she had come. The broken fragments of the wrecked ship brought no explanation.

No letter or news of the daughter and son-in-law was ever received at the rich merchant's house in Spain. They could not have reached their destination, considering the violent storms that had raged for the last few weeks. For months they waited, before admitting to themselves the sad truth: "All lost! All perished!"

But in the hut of the fisherman near the sand dunes of Hunsby there was now a tiny infant.

Where God provides food for two there is sure to be enough for a third; and near the sea there is always at least a plate of fish for hungry mouths. They christened the little one Jörgen.

"Surely he must be a Jewish child," people said; "his skin is so dark." "He may just as easily be Italian or Spanish," said the clergyman. To the fisherman's wife all three races seemed very much the same, but it was a great comfort to her to know that at least the child was really a baptized Christian.

The boy thrived, his noble blood sustaining warmth and gaining strength from the poor fare, as he grew in that humble hut; the Danish language, as spoken in West Jutland, became his own language. The pomegranate seed from Spain had become a sea-grass plant on Jutland's western coast, and in this home, so foreign to his inheritance, he took root for the rest of his life. He was to experience hunger and cold, a poor man's wants and troubles, but also he was to know a poor man's pleasures.

For everyone childhood has its high lights, and the memories of these sparkle throughout one's whole life. What a full share of play and pleasure he had! All the miles of shore were strewn with playthings for him; it was a mosaic of pebbles, red as coral, yellow as amber, or white and round as birds' eggs, all bright with colors, and smooth and polished by the sea. Even the dried-out skeleton of a fish, the water plants, dried by the wind, or the shiny, white seaweed, long and narrow like strings fluttering among the rocks, were a delight to eye and heart. The boy was a wide-awake child, full of ability. How he could remember all the old stories or songs he had ever heard! And how clever he was with his fingers! He could make sailing ships out of stones and shells or draw pictures that were quite an ornament to the room. He could "carve his thoughts out of a stick," as his foster mother said, when he was still only a little boy, and his voice was so sweet and caught the strain of a melody so quickly! That little heart was attuned to many fine harmonies which might have rung throughout the world if he had been placed in a less narrow home than the fisherman's hut near the North Sea.

One day a box of rare flower bulbs drifted ashore after a shipwreck. Some were taken out and made into soup, with the idea that they might be good to eat; others were just left to rot in the sand and never fulfilled their destiny, never unfolded the glorious beauty of form and color that lay hidden within them. Would such be the case with Jörgen? Life was soon

over for the flower bulbs, but he still had many years to live and struggle.

It never occurred either to him or his foster parents that their lives were lonely and monotonous; days went by, and there was plenty to do and hear and see. The ocean itself was a great book of lessons; every day it seemed to turn over a new page, storm or calm. A shipwreck was an exciting event. The visit to the church was a festive event. Twice a year the fisherman's hut had a visitor, and a very welcome one. This was the eel seller from Fjaltring, up near Bovbjerg, who was the brother of Jörgen's foster mother. He came with a red wagon full of eels; it was shut up like a box, and had blue and white tulips painted on it. It was drawn by two black oxen, and Jörgen was permitted to drive them.

The eel man had a good head on him. He was a jolly guest; he always brought a little keg of schnapps, and everyone had a drink of it, sometimes from a coffee cup, if there were not enough glasses. Even Jörgen, little as he was, had a thimbleful; that was so he could digest the fat eels, said the eel man. Then he would tell them his old story, and whenever he heard people laugh at it, he always repeated it at once, to the very same people, as all talkative folks do. And as Jörgen used phrases from this story throughout his youth and later in life, we had better listen to it.

"The eels played out in the river, and Mother Eel said to her daughters, when they had begged for permission to explore a little way up the stream, 'Don't go too far! The wicked man with his spear will come and catch you all!' But they did go too far, and of the eight of them only three returned to their mother and wailed out their story, 'We had only gone a little distance beyond the door when the ugly man with the spear came and stabbed our five sisters to death!'

" 'They'll come back,' said the eel mother.

" 'No,' said the daughters. 'For he skinned them and cut them into bits and fried them.'

" 'They'll surely come back,' said the eel mother.

" 'Yes, but he ate them!'

" 'Still they'll come back,' said the eel mother.

" 'But he drank schnapps afterwards!' said the daughters.

" 'Oh, my! Oh my!' howled the eel mother. 'Then they'll never return! For schnapps drowns eels!'

"And for that very reason people should always take a little schnapps after eating them," finished the eel spearer.

And this story ran like a thread of gold tinsel - his most humorous recollection - through the web of Jörgen's life. He too wanted to go past the threshold, "a little way up the river," or rather out into the wide world in a ship; but his foster mother objected, just as Mother Eel had objected, "There are so many wicked men with spears." He longed to go a little past the sand dunes into the heath. And at last he did for four pleasant days, the brightest of his whole childhood; and he saw all of Jutland's happy, homelike beauty and sunshine. He went to a party; it was a funeral party.

A wealthy relative of the fisherman had died; his farm was far inland, "to the east, a bit northerly," as the saying goes. Jörgen's foster parents had to go, and they took him with them. They passed from the dunes over heath and swamp to the green pastures where the Skjaerum River hollows out its bed - that brook full of eels, where lived Mother Eel and her daughters whom the wicked people speared and cut in pieces. And hadn't men often acted just as cruelly toward their fellow men? The good knight, Sir Bugge, whose name lives in the old song, was murdered by wicked men; and, though he himself was called "good," he is said to have come very close to slaying the architect who built his castle, with its tower and thick walls, on the slope where the brook Skjaerum falls into the Nisum

Fiord, just where Jörgen now stood with his foster parents. The ramparts and the red crumbling fragments of the walls could still be seen.

It was here that Sir Bugge, after the architect had left, ordered one of his men to follow him. "Say to him, 'Master, the tower leans to one side.' And if he turns and looks to find out, you must slay him and take from him the money I have paid him; but if he turns not, let him depart in peace." The man obeyed, but the architect did not turn; rather did he answer clearly and boldly. "The tower does not lean, for I have built it well; but one day a man shall come from the West in a blue cloak, and he shall make it lean." And a hundred years later this came to pass, for the North Sea broke in and the tower collapsed; but Predbjörn Gyldenstjerne, who owned the castle at that time, built a new mansion on the slope higher up; this is still standing, and is called Nörre Vosborg.

Jörgen and his foster parents had to pass this place, so now he saw this and other spots that he had heard stories about in the long winter evenings. He saw the castle, with its double moats choked with trees and bushes, and its rampart overhung with bracken. But the loveliest sight to him were the tall lime trees that reached right up to the roof and filled the air with fragrance. In the northwest corner of the garden stood a large bush bearing flowers as white as snow - they seemed strange to him among the green leaves of summer. It was an elderbush, the first he had seen blooming; that bush and the lime trees were stored safely away throughout the years in a corner of his mind, a bit of the fragrance and beauty of Denmark, "kept to delight the old man."

The journey continued and became still more pleasant; for outside Nörre Vosborg, where they had found the flowering elderbush, they met other people who were also going to the funeral, and drove on with them. Of course, all three of them had to sit on a little wooden chest with iron trimmings at the rear of the carriage, but they decided even that was better than walking. The carriage rolled away over the rough hillocks of the heath, and the oxen that drew it stopped to graze whenever a patch of fresh grass appeared among the heather. The sun shone warmly, and they saw the strange sight of rising smoke in the distance, as transparent as though beams of light were rolling and dancing over the heath. "That is Loki driving his flock," people said, and that was enough explanation for Jörgen. He felt as though he were driving right into fairyland - and yet everything was real! And how still it all was about them!

The heath spread out before them, a wide, rich carpet, with the heather in blossom. Mingled with the dark green juniper and fresh oak shoots, it studded the ground as if with bouquets. This was an inviting place to throw oneself down, if it were not for the many poisonous snakes people said were there. And people spoke too of the wolves that used to be found there so often that the district was known as Ulvborg Herred. The old man who was driving the wagon told them how, in his father's day, the horses often had fierce battles with wild beasts since exterminated, and how one morning he found a horse trampling on a wolf he had slain, while his own legs were quite bare of flesh which had been gnawed off in the struggle.

The wagon rolled too quickly over the rough heath and through the deep sand. They reached the house of mourning, where they found many strangers inside and outside; many wagons stood side by side, with their horses or oxen turned out to seek meager pasture; from the back of the house great sand dunes, like those at home near the sea, extended far and wide. How could they be here? It was twelve miles into the country, yet they were as tall and large as those by the shore. The wind had lifted them up and blown them here; they too had a history.

Psalms were sung, and a few of the older people wept, but aside from this, everything was very pleasant, Jörgen thought. There was plenty to eat and drink; the finest fat eels, with schnapps afterwards "to settle the eels," as the eel seller had said. And his words were certainly carried out at this gathering.

Jörgen went in and out of the house, and by the third day he was as thoroughly at home there as in the fisherman's hut among his own sand dunes, where he had spent all his life. But the heath here was far more beautiful, with its myriads of brilliant blossoms and luscious sweet bilberries, growing so thickly that if one stepped on them, the ground became stained with their red juice. Here lay an old viking grave, and near it lay another. When the mysterious columns of mist curled upward through the calm air, they said, "The heath is on fire." It shone brightest toward evening.

But the fourth day came at last and brought the end of the wake; it was time to return from the inland sand dunes to the coastal sand dunes.

"Ours are the real ones after all," said the father. "These have no strength."

Then they talked about the sand dunes, and how they came to be here, and this was very interesting. The peasants found a corpse on the shore and buried it in the churchyard; then the sand began to fly about, and the sea broke in with violence. A wise man of the parish advised that the grave be opened, for if the stranger were found sucking his thumb, they could then be sure that he whom they had buried was a merman, and that the sea would not rest till it had fetched him back. So they opened the grave, and sure enough, the dead man lay with his thumb between his lips. He was quickly laid on a cart drawn by two oxen, and as though stung by hornets they rushed with him over heath and moor to the sea. That stopped the shower of flying sand, but the dunes that it formed are still there.

That was what Jörgen learned and carried away with him from the happiest days of his childhood - those four days at the funeral party.

How wonderful it was, he thought, to go out into the world and see new places and new people! And he was to go still farther away. Before he had finished his fourteenth year - he was still a child - he did actually go out to look at the world, through the eyes of a cabin boy. Now he had to endure bad weather, rough seas, and evil men; scanty fare, cold nights, the rope's end, and blows from a hard fist - yes, such were his experiences. There was something in his noble Spanish blood that continually boiled over and brought hot words to his lips. He soon learned it was wisest to restrain them, but in doing so, he felt somewhat as the eel must feel when it is skinned, cut up, and tossed into the frying pan. "I shall return again!" said a voice within him.

Now the ship touched at the Spanish coast, the home of Jörgen's parents, in fact at the very town where they used to live in splendor and happiness. But he knew nothing of his homeland or his relatives, and even less did his family know of him. The shabby cabin boy was not even permitted to go ashore while the others went; but on the last day it happened that some provisions had been bought, and Jörgen was told to carry them on board.

There stood Jörgen in his wretched clothes that looked as if they had been washed in a ditch and dried in a chimney; this was the first time that he, the dweller of the sand dunes, had ever seen a great city. How tall the houses were, how narrow the streets, swarming with human beings constantly rushing to and fro, a regular whirlpool of townspeople and farmers, monks and soldiers - a clamor, a screaming, a jangling of bells from asses and mules, a clanging of bigger bells from the churches - song and musical instruments - knocking and hammering, for every tradesman seemed to have his shop either on his threshold or on the sidewalk. And all the while the hot sun burned down, and the air was heavy. It was as if one had entered a bake oven full of beetles, cockchafers, bees, and flies, all humming and buzzing with all their might; Jörgen hardly knew if he were walking or standing still.

Suddenly he saw before him the mighty portals of a cathedral, with lights streaming out through the twilight of the colonnades, and the fragrance of incense saluting him. Even the

poorest beggar in rags could venture to climb those stairs and enter. The sailor who had taken Jörgen ashore went into the church; Jörgen followed, and soon he stood in the sanctuary. Colored pictures glowed out from golden backgrounds; amid flowers and candles at the altar he beheld the Blessed Virgin holding the Holy Child; priests in their vestments were chanting, while pretty choirboys swung silver censers. What magnificence he saw there! All this glory and beauty, streaming into Jörgen's soul, nearly overpowered him. The church and the faith of his fathers surrounded him and awakened a chord in his soul, causing tears to come to his eyes.

From the cathedral they proceeded to the market. A heavy load of provisions was piled upon him. It was a long way back, and when he grew tired he wanted to rest in front of a large and splendid palace decorated with statues and marble pillars, with broad steps. But as he rested his burden against the wall a porter dressed in gold lace bustled out, waving a silver-headed cane, and drove him away - him, the grandson of that house! But no one knew it, himself least of all.

And so he returned to the ship and accepted, as before, his share of cuffs, broken slumbers, and hard work. Such was his first experience in life! "It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth," they say: "Yes, if he makes up for it in old age."

When the term of his signing on was ended, and the ship was anchored in the Ringkjöbing Fiord, he went home to the Hunsby sand dunes. But his foster mother was dead - she had died during his voyage.

A hard winter followed, with snowstorms raging over sea and land. It was difficult to get from one place to another. How differently are things divided in this life. Here were icy cold and driving snowstorms, while in Spain the sun burned too fiercely. And yet one clear frosty day, while Jörgen watched the swans flying from the ocean across the Nissum Fiord toward Nørre Vosborg, he felt that here, in the northern land, he could breathe more freely. And Denmark had its beauty of summer too; he imagined he could see the heath with its flowers and ripe, juicy berries, while the lime trees and elderbush of Nørre Vosborg stood blooming before him. He must go back there again.

It was toward spring, and the fishing began. Jörgen helped, for he had grown during the last year; he was quick and alert at his work, and there was no lack of spirit in him. He could swim and tread water, turn over and tumble in the water. The often warned him to beware of the mackerel shoals, which, it is said, seize the best swimmer, drag him down into the water, and eat him - that would be the end of him. But that never happened to Jörgen.

Among his neighbors on the sand dunes was boy named Morten. He and Jörgen had become good friends, and now they shipped out together on a vessel bound for Norway. Afterwards, they went to Holland together. They had never quarreled, but when one is hot-blooded by nature, one can easily start something; and that Jörgen did one day, over nothing. They were sitting together, behind the cabin door, eating off the same clay dish, when Jörgen, who held his pocket knife in his hand, raised it toward Morten with a threatening gesture, his cheeks deadly pale and his eyes blazing with fury. But Morten only said, "So you're the sort who uses a knife!" At those words Jörgen's hand was lowered; he said no word, but finished his dinner and went off to work. Morten and said, "Hit me in the face! I deserve it. There's something in me that's always boiling over."

"Oh, forget it," said Morten, and they became better friends than ever.

When they had returned home to the sand dunes, and people heard the story of this quarrel, they said that Jörgen was like a pot that easily boiled over, but that he was an honest pot, anyway.

"But he's no Jutlander. No one can call him a Jutland pot," was Morten's witty answer.

They were both young and healthy, well built, and with strong limbs. Jörgen was the more active.

Up in Norway the peasants go into the mountains and take their cattle there to find pasture. On the western coast of Jutland, the fisherman build huts among the sand dunes. They build them with planks from shipwrecks, and cover them over with heath and turf; here the fishermen live and sleep during the early spring. Each fisherman has a girl as a servant - she is called his *aesepige*; she supplies the bait for the hooks, must be ready on the wharf with warm ale to refresh him, and cooks his food when he returns to his hut, tired and hungry. The girls carry the fish up from the boat, cut it up, and, in short, have plenty to do.

Jörgen, his foster father, a few other fishermen, and their girls had a hut together; Morten lived in the next hut.

One of the girls, named Elsa, had known Jörgen ever since they were both little children; they were quite fond of each other and always happy to be together. They were much alike in disposition, but quite different in appearance, for Jörgen was very dark-complexioned, while her skin was white, her hair as yellow as flax, and her eyes as blue as the sea on a sunny day.

One day Elsa and Jörgen were walking together, and Jörgen was holding her hand in a warm, fervent grasp, when she said to him, "Jörgen, I want to unburden my heart to you. Let me be your *aesepige*, instead of Morten's. I know he has hired me, but you're like a brother to me, and Morten - he and I are sweethearts. But now, don't go and tell everybody else about it!"

Jörgen felt as if the sand dunes were whirling beneath him. He didn't say a word; he only nodded - and that was the same as saying, "Yes." This was all that was necessary to make him feel a bitter hatred in his heart for Morten. The more he thought about it, the clearer he realized that Morten had robbed him of the only creature he loved. Never before had he understood his own feelings toward Elsa, and now all hope of winning her for himself was gone.

When the fishermen are returning home over a fairly rough sea, it is interesting to see how the boats pass over the sand reefs. One man stands upright while the rest watch him, sitting with their oars ready to use the moment he signals that a great wave is coming which will lift the boat over the reef. It comes, and the vessel is tossed up so that its very keel can be seen from the shore; in another moment the entire boat vanishes from sight and neither boat, men, nor mast can be seen - you might imagine the ocean has swallowed everything up; another moment, and the boat reappears, crawling up the wave like a mighty sea monster, its oars moving like the creature's legs. The second and third reefs are crossed in the same way, and then the fishermen spring into shallow water and drag their boat ashore. Every wave helps them, until finally they have it beyond the reach of the breakers. But the slightest mistake in the signal when passing those reefs, the delay of a moment, and they would be shipwrecked.

"It would soon be all over with me and Morten too, if that happened," came into Jörgen's mind out at sea. They were approaching the outer reef when his foster father suddenly became seriously ill; the fever had seized him. Jörgen jumped up and stood in the bow. "Father, let me take your place!" he said; and his eyes moved from Morten to the sea, and from the sea back to Morten, as the oars swung on with the steady strokes, and the great wave rolled toward them. Then suddenly his look fell on the pale face of his foster father, and he could not obey his wicked impulse. The boat crossed the reefs in safety, and in safety they came ashore. But that evil thought still lurked in Jörgen's heart and roused every little fiber of bitterness that he remembered from his childhood days; but he could not weave the fibers together, so he dismissed it all from his mind.

He felt that Morten had robbed him, and that was reason enough to hate him. Some of the fishermen noticed the change in Jörgen, but Morten himself saw nothing; he was just the same as ever, ready to help and eager to talk - in fact, a little too much of the latter.

Jörgen's foster father took to his bed; it became his death bed, for a week later he was dead. Jörgen was his heir, now master of the cottage behind the sand dunes. It was a poor enough hut, but still it was something; and Morten didn't have so much.

"I suppose you won't go to sea again, Jörgen," said one of the old fishermen. "You'll always stay with us now."

But that was by no means Jörgen's thought; on the contrary, he thought about seeing some more of the world. The eel seller up at Fjaltring had a cousin up at Old Skagen, also a fisherman, but wealthy, and a shipowner too; they said he was a kindly old man with whom it would be very pleasant to take service. Old Skagen lies way up at the northern part of Jutland, as far away from the Hunsby sand dunes as one can go; that part of the idea pleased Jörgen best; he had no intention of attending the wedding of Elsa and Morten, which was to take place in a couple of weeks.

It was foolish for Jörgen to go away, said the old fisherman; now that he had a house of his own Elsa would very likely prefer him to Morten. Jörgen's reply was so abrupt that it wasn't easy to make out his meaning. The old man brought Elsa to him; she didn't say much, but she did say: "You have a house; that must be considered."

And Jörgen did consider many things. The ocean has its heavy waves, but the waves of the human heart are even heavier; many thoughts, strong and weak, passed through Jörgen's heart and head before he asked Elsa, "Suppose Morten had a house as good as mine; which of us would you rather have?"

"But Morten doesn't have one, and never will have one."

"But suppose he did have one."

"Why then I'd take Morten, of course; for that's the way I feel about him! But one must have something to live on."

All night Jörgen thought over this answer. There was something within him, he found, something he himself couldn't figure out; it was stronger even than his love for Elsa.

He went to Morten, and what he said and did had been well considered; he offered to sell his house to him on the lowest possible terms, explaining that it would please him better to go to sea again. When Elsa heard about it, she thanked him with a kiss, for she really did love Morten better.

Jörgen was going to leave early next morning. Late the evening before, he had a sudden desire to go to see Morten once more. On his way among the sand dunes he met the old fisherman, who greatly disapproved of his leaving, and who declared Morten must carry a charm sewn up in his pocket to make the young girls fall in love with him. Jörgen brushed aside such talk and bade him farewell. Then he proceeded to Morten's hut where he heard loud voices; evidently Morten was not alone. For a moment Jörgen stood irresolute; least of all did he want to meet Elsa there, and now that he thought it over, he would prefer not having Morten thank him all over again. So he turned back without entering.

Next morning, before daylight, he tied up his bundle, gathered his provisions, and started through the sand dunes to the shore. It was easier walking by the sea than along the heavy, sandy road, and besides it was shorter, for he was going first to Fjaltring, near Bovbjerg, where lived the eel seller, whom he had promised to visit.

The ocean was smooth and blue, and as he walked he crushed under his feet the shells and pebbles, the playthings of his childhood. As he was walking his nose began to bleed, and a couple of large drops fell on his sleeve; it seemed a trivial enough matter, but a

trivial matter can sometimes be of importance. He soon stopped the bleeding, wiped his sleeve, and walked on. It seemed as if this had cleared both his heart and head. When he found sea kale growing in the sand, he broke off a branch and stuck it in his hat, determined to be joyful and happy; wasn't he going out into the world "a little way up the river," as the young eels had so longed to do? "But beware of wicked people, who will spear you, skin you, cut you in pieces, and lay you in dishes!" he repeated to himself. "I'll slip through the world whole-skinned. Courage is a strong weapon."

The sun was already high when he reached the narrow inlet between the North Sea and the Nissum Fiord; then he looked back and made out in the distance two men on horseback with others following them, all riding at great speed. This did not concern him.

The ferry boat was on the opposite side of the bay, but Jörgen shouted till it came across for him. He sprang on board, but before the ferry was halfway across, the men who had followed him on horseback arrived on the shore, and with threatening gestures called for him to return in the name of the law. Jörgen couldn't imagine what it meant, but thought it would be best to return; so he took the oar himself, and rowed back. In an instant the men had leaped into the boat and before he was aware of it, they had bound his hands together with a rope. "It's well you're caught!" they said. "Your crime will cost you your life!"

He was accused of nothing less than murder! Morten had been found stabbed in the neck with a knife; late, the evening before, one of the fishermen had met Jörgen on his way to Morten's house, and it was remembered that it wasn't the first time Jörgen had threatened Morten with a knife; there seemed no doubt that he was the murderer.

Now the question was where to confine him. Ringkjöbing was the proper place, but it was a long way off, and the wind was against them. In less than half an hour they had crossed Skjaerum Fiord, and now they were only a quarter of a mile from Nørre Vosborg, which was a strong mansion with moats and ramparts. One of the men in the boat was the brother of the keeper of this mansion; he suggested that they might get permission to confine Jörgen, for the time being, in the dungeon where Long Margrethe, the gypsy, had been imprisoned until her execution.

No one listened to Jörgen's denials, and those few drops of blood on his shirt were silent witnesses against him. Conscious of his innocence and of the fact that there was no chance of his being cleared, he calmly resigned himself to his fate.

They landed near the old rampart, where the castle of Sir Bugge had stood - it was the very same spot that Jörgen's feet had trodden years before when he had gone with his foster parents to the funeral party, where he had spent those four happy days on the heath. By the very same path they now led him up to Nørre Vosborg; and here, as then, the elderbush was in full bloom, and the tall lime trees wafted their fragrance to him - he might have imagined it was only yesterday that he had been here last.

Under the grand staircase in the western wing of the building a passage leads into a low-roofed vaulted cell; it was from here that Long Margrethe was led to her execution. She had confessed to having devoured the hearts of five children and believed that, could she have eaten two more, she would have been able to make herself invisible and fly away. In the cell was a tiny, narrow airhole in the wall; but the lime trees outside sent none of their refreshing fragrance within; all was cold, damp, and moldy. There was only a rough bench in the cell; but a good conscience makes an easy pillow, so Jörgen could really lie comfortably.

The thick wooden door was closed and the iron bolts were shot, but superstition can creep through the keyhole of a mansion as well as a fisherman's hut; and as Jörgen lay in the silence and darkness he could not help thinking of Long Margrethe and her horrible crimes. Her last thoughts had filled that narrow dungeon the night before her execution. Nor could he help remembering the black arts that had been practiced by the owner of this

mansion, Herr Swanwedel, when he lived there many years ago, and how the watchdog that guarded the bridge had every morning been found hung in his chains across the railing. Such thoughts came to Jörgen's mind and made him shiver; but a sunbeam, a refreshing thought from without, also came to his mind, the remembrance of the blossoming elder and lime trees.

He was not left here long, but was removed to Ringkjöbing; but there his imprisonment was none the less rigorous. For Jörgen's times were not like ours; they were hard times for poor men; peasant farms and peasant settlements were still being converted into new knights' estates. The coachman or valet of a nobleman was often appointed village judge, with power to condemn the peasant to a severe flogging or the loss of all his property, for some trifling offense. And thus, in Jutland, far from "The King's Copenhagen," and the wise and just rulers of state, the law took its course with little regard for justice. Jörgen could expect that his case would be delayed.

His wretched cell was bitterly cold; when would this misery end? Innocent, he had been thrown into misfortune and sorrow; that was his lot! He had plenty of time to think over the hard dealing that this world had given him, and to wonder why this fate had been allotted him. Still, all would correct itself in that "second life" which assuredly awaits us. In the poor fisherman's cottage that faith had taken firm root in his soul; the light that, even amid the sunshine and plenty of Spain, could not pierce the darkness of his father's mind was sent to him to comfort him in poverty and distress, a sign of the mercy of God, which never disappoints.

Now the spring storms settled in. The roaring of the North Sea can be heard for miles inland, and when the tempests abate there is a thundering as of hundreds of heavy wagons rolling over a hard tunneled road. In his dungeon Jörgen heard this sound, and it was a relief to him; no old melodies could so move him as the music of the rolling ocean - the boundless ocean that had carried him throughout the world with the speed of winds - the ocean over which men pass, carrying their own house with them like the snails carry theirs, always standing on their own native ground, even in foreign lands. How he listened to that deep thunder! How his thoughts surged into a turmoil within him! Free, free! How wonderful to be free - even if with a patched shirt and shoes without soles! Sometimes his soul burned with indignant anger, and he pounded the wall with his clenched fist.

Weeks, months, a whole year passed, and then the gypsy Niels Tyv, the horse dealer, as he was called, was picked up, and then better times came; it was established that Jörgen was innocent.

The evening before Jörgen's departure - the night of the murder - Morten and Niels Tyv had met at a little tavern north of Ringkjöbing Fiord. A couple of glasses were emptied, not enough to get drunk on, but enough to loosen Morten's tongue; he began to boast of having bought a house and of getting married, and when Niels asked from where he was getting the money, Morten proudly slapped his hand to his pocket.

"The money's here, right where it ought to be," he said. This boast cost him his life, for when he rose to go Niels followed him, and stabbed him in the back with a knife - all for the sake of money that was not in his pocket at all.

There was a great deal of talk about the affair, but for us it is enough to know that Jörgen was released. But what compensation did he receive for the long, weary days he spent in the cold and loneliness, and for being despised by his fellowman? Why, he was told it was lucky for him he was innocent; now he could go. To be sure, the mayor gave him ten marks for traveling expenses, and several citizens of Ringkjöbing offered him beer and good food, for there are a few kind hearts in the world; not all men "spear, skin, and devour" their fellows.

But the best thing of all was that a merchant from Skagen named Brønne - the same man

with whom Jörgen had intended to take service before his imprisonment - had come to Ringkjöbing on business at just that time and heard the whole story. He was kindhearted and sympathized with Jörgen's sufferings; now he would do him a little kindness and prove to him that there are some good people in the world.

Out of prison, not only to freedom, but to a paradise of love and kindness! But it is no man's fate to drain a cup of unmixed bitterness. If even man could not endure to offer such to his fellow man, how could the all-loving God?

"Let the past be dead and buried," said Merchant Brönne. "We'll draw a heavy black line over the last year and burn the calendar, and in two days we'll be off together for Skagen - happy, friendly, peaceful Skagen! People call it the out-of-the-way corner of the country; it's a blessed chimney corner, with windows opening out to the whole wide world!"

What a journey! To breathe the fresh air again; to emerge from the cold damp prison air into the warm sunshine! The heath was gay with blooming heather; the shepherd boy perched on a warrior's grave mound, shrilling his flute made from sheep bones; Fata Morgana, the beautiful mirage of the desert, flaunted her hanging gardens and floating woods, and the wonderful transparent phenomenon called "Loki driving his flock" could be seen.

They traveled up toward the Lime Fiord, toward Skagen, through the land of the Vends, whence the men with the long beards - which had earned them the name of Lombards - had emigrated when, in the days of the famine under King Snio, it was decreed that all the children and old people should be put to death. But Gambaruk, a noble woman of great wealth, had proposed instead that all the young should leave the country.

Jörgen was learned enough to know all this, and although he had never seen the land of the Lombards beyond the Alps, he could easily picture it to himself, for had he not in his boyhood seen the south, Spain? He could remember clearly the piled heaps of fruit, the scarlet pomegranate blossoms, the noise and din and ringing of bells in that great beehive of a city. But he still loved best the land of his home, and Jörgen's home was Denmark.

At last they reached "Vendilskaga," as Skagen is called in the old Norse and Icelandic sagas. Even then old Skagen, with its Easter and Westertown, stretched for miles with sand dunes and farmland as far as the lighthouse near Grenen. Houses and farms were strewn among the shifting sand dunes - it is a wild land where the wind plays constantly in the loose sand, and where the screams of sea gulls, sea swallows, and wild swans cut sharply through the eardrum.

A few miles southwest of Grenen is High or Old Skagen; here Merchant Brönne lived, and here Jörgen would now live. The house was tarred; each of the little outhouses had an inverted boat for a roof, and driftwood joined together formed the pigsty. There was no inclosure, for there was nothing to inclose; but on ropes, strung in long rows one above another, hung countless fishes drying in the wind. The whole shore was strewn with dead herring; in fact, the nets could hardly be thrown into the sea before they would be filled with them. Great loads of herring were caught and taken inland. They were so plentiful that many were often thrown back into the sea or left to rot on the sand.

The merchant's wife and daughter, and even the servants, rushed out in delight to greet the father when they arrived home. There was such handshaking, so much noise, so much to talk about! And the daughter had such a sweet face and lovely eyes!

The house was cozy and roomy inside; the table was set with plates of fish, flounder fit for a king, and wine from Skagen's own vineyard, the great ocean, from which the grapes drifted ashore already pressed, both in barrels and bottles.

When mother and daughter had heard who Jörgen was, and learned how cruelly he, an innocent man, had been treated, they looked upon him with kindness, and the beautiful

Miss Clara's bright eyes sparkled more warmly than before.

Jörgen found a blessed home in Old Skagen; it did his heart good; it had suffered so much cruelty, even the bitterness of love, which either softens or hardens the heart. But Jörgen was still young, his heart still soft, and there was a vacant place in it. For that reason it was perhaps just as well that in three weeks Clara was to sail for Christiansand, in Norway, to spend the winter with an aunt.

The Sunday before her departure, all were to go together to Holy Communion. The church was large and stately, built by the Dutch and Scotch many centuries before, and quite a distance from where the town is now situated. The church was somewhat dilapidated now, and the way through the deep sand made hard walking, but people did not mind these difficulties to get to the house of God, to sing psalms, and to hear the sermon. The sand was piled up outside the wall around the cemetery, but the graves had still been kept free of it.

It was the largest church north of the Lime Fiord. The Virgin Mary, with a golden crown on her head and the infant Saviour in her arms, was painted in bright colors above the altar; the holy Apostles were ranged around the choir, and high on the wall there hung portraits of Skagen's old burgomasters and councilmen, with their insignia of office. The pulpit was carved. The sun shone brightly into the church, lighting up the polished brass chandelier and the little vessel that hung down from the roof. Jörgen was overwhelmed by the same pure, childlike feeling of devotion that had thrilled his soul when, a boy, he had stood in the rich Spanish cathedral. But here the feeling was different, for in this place he felt that he was one of the congregation.

After the sermon came the Communion, and when Jörgen knelt with the others to receive the consecrated bread and wine, he found that he was kneeling next to Miss Clara. But his thoughts were so raised to God and the Holy Sacrament that not until they rose did he realize that she had been his neighbor. Then he saw the salt tears rolling down her cheeks.

Two days later she sailed for Norway, and Jörgen went out to help on the farm and with the fishing; there were more fish to be caught there in those days than there are now. Shoals of mackerel shone brightly in the darkness of the night, thus betraying the course they were following. The sea robins snarled, and the crabs gave pitiful cries when they were caught; fish are not as voiceless as people say. Jörgen was more quiet than they; he kept his secret - and yet some day it would perhaps burst forth.

Every Sunday when he sat in church and his eyes rested on the picture of the Virgin Mother, they also paused a moment on the spot where Miss Clara had knelt beside him, and he thought of her and her kindness to him.

The autumn brought its rain and sleet. The water rose up in the town of Skagen, for the sand could not absorb it all; people had to wade through it, and sometimes even sail through the streets in boats. Snowstorms and sandstorms followed; ship after ship was wrecked on those fatal reefs; the sand whirled about and buried the houses until the occupants had to creep out through the chimneys. But that was not an unusual occurrence there. Indoors were comfort and warmth; the blazing and crackling fires were fed with peat or with dried wood from the wrecks, and Merchant Brønne read aloud from an old chronicle. He read about Prince Hamlet of Denmark and of how he landed from England and fought a great battle near Bovbjerg; his grave was at Ramme, only a few miles from the eel seller's home, where the heath was like an immense cemetery, studded with hundreds of viking grave mounds. Merchant Brønne had visited Hamlet's grave. There was more talk of the olden days and of their English and Scottish neighbors, and then Jörgen sang the old ballad about "The King of England's Son," about the stately ship, and how it was decked out:

*The blessed words of our dear Lord
Were written in gold on panels aboard.
On the prow, in colors rare,
The King's son clasped his maiden fair.*

Jörgen sang this verse with especial sincerity, while his eyes, luminous and black from his birth, sparkled with more fire than ever.

Thus the evenings passed pleasantly, with song and reading; all were happy in that house, even the very animals. The tin shelves gleamed with clean plates; hams and sausages hung under the ceiling, and they had winter supplies in abundance. Many rich farmhouses like this are still to be found in West Jutland, abundant as this one in good comfort, good cheer, good sense, and good humor, and like the tent of an Arab for hospitality.

Jörgen had never spent so happy a time, at least since the four days of the funeral, when he was a child. And still Miss Clara was absent; but she was never absent from their thoughts or conversation. In April a vessel was to be sent out to Norway to bring her home, and Jörgen was to go with it.

He had become so joyous and hearty, Mother Brønne said that it was a pleasure to look at him.

"And so it is to look at you!" said the old merchant. "Jörgen has put new life in our winter evenings, and in Mother too. Why, you have grown younger this year! You were once the prettiest girl in Viborg, and that's saying a lot, for I've always considered the girls of Viborg to be the prettiest."

Jörgen said nothing in reply, but he couldn't help thinking of one Skagen girl, the one he was to bring home.

One morning Merchant Brønne went out to the lighthouse, which stands quite some distance from old Skagen, but not far from Grenen. The signal lights had been extinguished for quite some time, for the sun was already high when he climbed the tower. Four miles from the extreme point of land the sand reefs stretched under water. Many ships could be seen that day, and among them, with the help of his telescope, he believed he could distinguish the Karen Brønne; that was the name of his vessel. Yes, there she was, sailing home with Clara and Jörgen on board! Clara sat on the deck and saw the sand dunes slowly appear in the distance. If the wind held, they would be home in an hour. So near were they to home and its happiness, so near to death and its terrors.

Suddenly a plank gave way in the ship, and the water poured in! They tried to plug the leak; the pumps worked furiously; the sails came down, and the distress flag was hoisted. They were still four miles out at sea, and the fishing boats that they could see were too far off. The wind carried them landward; the tide was in their favor; but they were not strong enough. When the ship began to sink, Jörgen threw his right arm about Clara.

What a look she gave him as, crying on the holy name of our Lord, he leaped with her into the ocean! She shrieked in terror, but she knew he would never let go his hold.

*On the prow, in colors rare,
The King's son clasped his maiden fair.*

Jörgen acted out the old words in this moment of terror and peril; how fortunate that he was an excellent swimmer! He made his way with his feet and one free hand, the other clasped tightly around the girl. Now he floated; now he trod water with his feet, using every trick he knew to husband his strength so that it might last till he reached shore. When he heard the girl sigh, and felt a shuddering thrill pass through her body, he only held her

closer. Now a wave rolled over them, but the current still carried them on; the water was so deep and clear that for a moment he fancied he saw shoals of mackerel flashing beneath them - or was it Leviathan, waiting to devour them? Shadows of the clouds swept over the water, to be followed by dazzling sunshine; flocks of birds flew screaming overhead while wild ducks, heavily and sleepily drifting on the surface of the water, started into the air in panic at the sight of the swimmer. Jörgen felt his strength going fast when he was only a few cables' lengths from shore. But help was coming - a boat was drawing near! Just then he distinctly saw a white figure in the water. A wave lifted him up; the figure came nearer; he felt a stunning shock, and everything became dark around him.

There on the sand reef lay the wreck of a ship with the sea partly covering it; the white figurehead leaned against an anchor, and only the sharp iron edge projected above the water. Driven on by the fatal force of the current, Jörgen had struck against this figurehead; in a daze he sank with his burden, but the next wave lifted him and the young girl.

The fisherman got them both into his boat; blood was streaming over Jörgen's face, and he looked as if he were dead; but he still held the girl so tightly they had to tear her from his arm. They placed Clara, pale and lifeless, in the boat and rowed toward Grenen. All methods of restoring her were tried, but in vain - she was dead. For some time Jörgen must have been carrying a corpse, struggling and wrestling for the life of one who was already dead.

"Jörgen still breathed, and they carried him to the nearest cottage in the sand dunes. A sort of army surgeon - he was also a smith and a trader - who happened to be on the spot bound up his wound, and the next day a physician was sent for from Hjörning.

But his brain was affected; he lay raving and uttering wild cries until the third day, when he fell into a sort of trance. It seemed his life hung by a thread, and for this thread to give way, the doctor said, was the best wish they could have for him. "Let us pray for our Lord to take him; he will never be a man again."

But life did not leave him; the thread did not break, though memory and all other faculties of the mind were injured. It was horrible! Only a living body was left, a body that soon regained health and strength.

Jörgen remained in Merchant Brönne's home. "He lost his mind trying to save our child," said the old man. "He is now our son!"

"Crazy": that was what they called Jörgen now, but it was hardly the right word; he was like a musical instrument with loosened strings that have lost the power of sound. Very rarely, and only for a few moments, would the old power seem to return; then they would give old melodies, or a few chords would be played. Sometimes pictures of the past would seem to rise before his mind, but then they would fade away into the mist, and once more he would sit with a blank, motionless, thoughtless face. We can only hope that he did not suffer. His dark eyes had lost their brightness and looked like black clouded glass.

"Poor crazy Jörgen," people said. And this was he who before he was born, was destined to have such a rich, earthly fortune and such happiness that it would be arrogance, terrible vanity, even to wish for or believe in an afterlife. Were all the fine qualities of his soul wasted? Only cruel days, anguish, and broken hopes had been his lot. He was like a precious root which is torn from its rich soil and flung out to rot in the sand. Could this really be the destiny of a soul created in the image of God - a mere game, battered by the chances of this world? No! The God of love will compensate him in another life for all that he lost and suffered in this. "The Lord is loving unto every man, and his mercy is over all His works." The pious old wife of Merchant Brönne repeated these words from the Psalms of David in faith and comfort, and she prayed that our Lord would soon end Jörgen's life of sorrow and take him to enjoy "God's gift of grace," the life everlasting.

Clara lay buried in the churchyard, where the sand drifted over the walls, but Jörgen did not seem to know this. It never penetrated the narrow world of his thoughts, which lived only in fragments from the past. Every Sunday he accompanied the family to church, and sat quietly with a blank face. Once, during the psalm singing, he sighed deeply, and his eyes took on life. He was gazing at the altar, at the very spot where, over a year ago, he had knelt beside his dead friend; his face turned white, his lips murmured her name, and the tears rolled down his cheeks.

They gently led him from the church, but he told them that he was well, and that he had no recollection of what had happened. Poor soul, tried indeed, but not rejected by our Lord! For who dares doubt that God, our Creator, is all-wise and all-loving? Our heart and our mind give us this truth, and the Bible confirms it. "His mercy is over all His works."

In Spain, where gilded Moorish cupolas are fanned by the warm breezes amid laurels and orange trees, and where song and castanets are heard, a childless old man, the rich merchant, sat in his beautiful palace, sadly watching a procession of pretty children passing through the street with torches and waving banners. How much of his wealth would he not give to have such children himself! He thought of his daughter and her child who perhaps had never seen the light of this world, hence would never attain the glory of paradise. "Poor child!"

Yes, "Poor child!" indeed- a child still, though past thirty years old; for Jörgen had lived thus for many years in Old Skagen.

The flying sand had drifted over the graves in the churchyard up to the very walls of the church; here among those who had gone before them, among relatives and friends, the dead were still being buried. Merchant Brønne and his wife now rested here under the white sand, among their children.

It was early in the year, the time of storms; the sand curled up like smoke from the sand dunes; the ocean tossed huge waves; large flocks of birds, like storm clouds, flew screaming overhead, and ship after ship was wrecked on those fatal reefs that stretched along the coast from Skagen to the Hunsby sand dunes.

One afternoon, as Jörgen sat alone in his room. A sudden light broke in his mind; it was the same restless feeling that had often in his younger years driven him out over the sand dunes or the heath.

"Home! Home!" he said. No one heard him. He left the house, and sand and pebbles whirled around him and beat into his face. He went toward the church, where the sand lay drifted up against the wall and half covered the windows. The church door was unlocked and easy to open; Jörgen went in.

The wind raged and howled over the town of Skagen; such a hurricane had not been known within the memory of man. It was awful weather! But Jörgen was sheltered within the house of God, and while black night reigned outside, within him everything grew bright - bright with the light of the immortal soul. He felt as if the heavy stone in his head had burst with a clang! He imagined that the organ was playing, but it was only the storm and the roaring of the ocean that he heard. As he sat down in one of the pews he thought the candles were being lighted, one by one, until there was a blaze of light such as he had only seen in the land of the Spaniards. Then all the portraits of the old councilors and burgomasters came to life; they stepped down from the walls where they had hung for so many years, and seated themselves in the choir. Then the gates and doors of the church swung open, and all the dead entered, festively dressed, as was customary in the olden days; sweet music was played as they walked in and seated themselves in the pews. The psalm singing swelled like the rolling of the ocean. Jörgen's old foster parents from the Hunsby sand dunes were there, and the good Merchant Brønne and his wife, and beside them, next to Jörgen, sat their gentle, loving daughter. She gave her hand to Jörgen, and

together they went up to the altar where they had knelt once before, and the pastor joined their hands and consecrated them to a life of love. Then the sound of the trumpet burst forth, marvelously like the voice of child, full of longing and expectation; it swelled into the sound of an organ, full of rich, glorious tones, blessed to hear and yet mighty enough to burst the tombstones on the graves.

The ship hanging in the choir sank downward, in front of them, and grew vast and splendid with silken sails and golden masts, with anchors of red gold and ropes of silken twine, like the ship in the old ballad. The bridal couple stepped on board, and all the congregation followed; there were room and enjoyment for all. Then the arches and walls of the church blossomed like the elder and the fragrant lime trees; joyfully they waved their green branches, and bowed, and parted. The ship was lifted up and sailed with them through the ocean, through the air. Every candle in the church became a tiny star; the winds sang a hymn, and all joined in:

"In love, to glory! No life shall be lost! Supreme happiness forever! Hallelujah!"

And these were Jörgen's last words in this mortal world, for the thread that held the immortal spirit snapped; only a lifeless corpse lay in the dark church, while the storm howled and covered it with drifting sand.

The next morning was Sunday, and the pastor and congregation set out for church. The road, buried in sand, was almost impassable. When they reached the church they found an enormous sand heap completely covering the door. Then the pastor prayed briefly and said that as God had now closed the door to this His house, they must go forth and raise Him a new one elsewhere. So they sang a psalm and returned home.

In vain Jörgen was sought throughout the town of Skagen and the sand dunes; it was supposed that the rolling waves of sand had buried him beneath them.

But his body was entombed in a vast sarcophagus, in the very church itself. During the storm our Lord cast earth over his coffin; the great heaps of sand lay above and around it, and they cover it to this day. The drifting sand lies piled above those mighty arches; thorns and wild roses now twine over the church, where the visitor struggles on toward its tower still showing above the sand. His tombstone may be seen for miles; no king ever had a more magnificent one. And no one will ever disturb the repose of the dead, for none until now has ever known his resting place; for this story was sung to me by the storm among the sand dunes.

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