

MAN OF THE SEA

Thomas Mann and the Love of His Life

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Holding his hand

Introduction

She is already feeling slightly fearful; she knows this is a big moment.

Especially for him, for Herrpapale as she calls her father. She knows very well how much he loves the sea. He's told her about it so many times, this great blue expanse, the holidays he spent in Travemünde when he was little and happy. And now the moment has finally come when he can really show it to her. His sea. The Baltic Sea.

Elisabeth shivers. It's early evening, already a little cool. But it is mainly the joy, the excitement that's making her shiver, and a touch of fear that she might not appear enthusiastic enough. That she might not find it quite as vast, as overwhelming, as wonderful as the man whose hand she is holding as they walk. Elisabeth Mann is six years old. She is wearing a dark bathing suit, her hair is bobbed, and her little brother Michael is holding their father's other hand. But their father barely notices him.

He is here, on the beach at Kloster on Hiddensee, to show his sea to his favourite girl. He, too, is a little agitated. But he knows his girl won't disappoint him. She never has. Whenever he's showed her the things that are sacred to him – the old clock, the Spanish pictures, the books in the book room, treating them with great reverence – that reverence has always been

hers, too. In silence and awe, she has let him show her his world. And so it has become her world, too.

Water always was her element, in any case. He shared that with the world in the paean he wrote to her soon after her birth: “For the water / that serves and caresses your little body, and which you / trust so fearlessly, it is your element”. All the same, to be on the safe side he has also told her the story of an early disappointment. He himself was still very little when it happened, though he already loved the sea like nothing else in the world. And, as they did every summer, he and all his family – well, nearly all; his father only came at weekends – had travelled north to the beach at Travemünde. And with all the proud ownership of a lad who had been coming here for years, he presented his sea to his nanny, a woman from Saxony who had never seen the coast before. And she stood there, feet planted wide apart, and said, “It’s pretty enough, but I thought it’d be prettier.” Prettier? How, if you please, could the world’s most perfect place be prettier? It was a shock and an insult and an impertinence. And so, just to make quite sure that such a thing wouldn’t happen to him again – not with his favourite girl – he told Elisabeth about this early disappointment in advance. She knew, then, how she had to marvel at it.

The whole journey up here from Munich was a dream. They took the sleeper to Berlin, Elisabeth sharing a bed with Michael, one at each end, their mother in the bunk above, watching over their sleep, and their father

next door with a compartment to himself. And when she lifted the blind a little, she could see the starry sky rushing past as she lay quietly in her bunk, looking out of the window.

In Berlin, they visited their Uncle Peter, the physicist, in his laboratory. And he conjured up a sea for them too, out of air. At least, that's how Elisabeth saw it when her uncle showed them liquid air, so cold it had turned into a blue liquid. And when her uncle dipped a soft rubber hose into it, it was transformed into a hard rod, so cold was this small sea.

But then they finally set off again for the little island. They were staying in a small hotel called the Haus am Meer, the house by the sea, and her father was slightly ill at ease because another writer was staying at the same hotel, a gigantic old man with long, sparse white hair and a high forehead. We will hear more of him later.

First, then, the father took his two little ones to the beach. Luckily, Elisabeth didn't have to force herself to admire it. The sense of wonder came from her entirely of its own accord. The smell, the colours, the little waves, the sweeping view. She understood at once why her father loved it all so much. But at the same time, she immediately wanted to know what was out there, right at the end, where you couldn't see any further. "That's the horizon," her father said. "And behind that? What comes after the horizon?" – "The horizon, and beyond that, more horizon. The further out you row, the further

the horizon recedes, so that all you ever see is a horizon; until at last land comes into view, and then the horizon vanishes. But then you can see it again if you turn around.”

She never forgot that, as long as she lived.

But that summer, the sea served other purposes: silliness. Bathing, diving, throwing herself into the waves, dunking her brother, being dunked by her older siblings, collecting shells, building castles and marble runs, being buried, swimming with her mother. Oh yes, her mother, who had a practical love of the sea that her father lacked. Running in and swimming like a fish wasn't something her father did. Sitting in his wicker *strandkorb*, he looked, wrote, looked again, as if lost to the world in his chair, isolated, protected, secure beneath the striped canopy. He was fashionable, and fantastically decked out. He had a particular penchant for maritime caps: captain's hats, white sailor hats, Prince Heinrich caps. Sometimes he wore a dressing gown and smoked. He would swim in the morning, briefly, staying in the shallows. He called it his “morning devotions in the sea”. Afterwards he was fresh for the day, and for his writing.

At the start of this summer holiday, Thomas Mann had been hoping he could finally finish the *Magic Mountain* here. He had begun writing it twelve years earlier, and he kept believing it was almost finished. Copies of

the first volume had been printed in December of the previous year. But the ending dragged on and on.

Perhaps in part it was that the author found it difficult to bid a final farewell to “life’s problem child”, his Hans Castorp, the son of a Hamburg merchant family whom Thomas Mann’s pen had dispatched into the mountains of Davos, those snow-bound mountains that had such an uncanny similarity to the sea at home. Worried about losing sight of him forever in the tumultuous battles of the First World War. Yes, perhaps that was partly the reason why here, on the Kloster beach, he would once again prove unable to write the “finis”.

Just a few months earlier he had written the beach into the mountain book once more, written of the sea’s magic drawing his unremarkable hero Hans into the depths, into decay, into death. “A stroll by the shore” is the title of the chapter that tells us:

You walk and walk, and you never get back home on time,
because you are lost to time and it to you. O sea – we sit here
telling our story far from you, but our eyes and heart turn
towards you now, and we explicitly invoke you, speak your
name aloud, making you as present as you constantly have been,
are, always will be, in our silent thoughts... Blustering
wasteland, spanned by pale, bright gray, drenched with a dry,

salty tang that clings to our lips. We walk and walk along the light springy beach strewn with seaweed and tiny shells, our ears swathed by the wind, by the great, ample, mild wind that passes freely through space, unencumbered and without malice, filling our heads with a gentle numbness – we wander, wander and watch the roiling sea send tongues of onrushing foam to lick our feet and fall back again. The surf seethes, wave upon silken wave crashes with a bright thud against the level beach – here, there, on sandbars further out. And the universal turmoil, the tenderly booming din closes our ears against every other voice in the world. Profound contentment, knowing forgetfulness. Sheltered in eternity, let us close our eyes.

The sea is the silent hero of all his books. “The sea,” as Thomas Mann once said himself, “its rhythm, its musical transcendence is in some way present everywhere in my books, even when – as is often enough the case – the talk is not expressly of the sea.”

Unfortunately, that summer in Kloster, a very different, larger than life hero of his current book was present in the “Haus am Meer”. It was the man with the shock of white hair; Thomas Mann had met him the previous year in Bolzano and made a snap decision to turn him into a character in his novel.

Gerhart Hauptmann, Nobel laureate, naturalistic revolutionary of the German stage, and an immense, intimidating personality. Thomas Mann had made him into the equally immense and entirely ridiculous personality of Mynheer Peeperkorn in *The Magic Mountain*. Thomas Mann didn't simply invent anything; he *found* his characters, and he had found Gerhart Hauptmann at just the right moment. A man who spoke with maximal gestures and minimal words. A loveable Dionysus who lived life to the full rather than talking about it. A colossus among men who, unlike Hans Castorp, would not let the magic of the snow-covered landscape or the roar of the sea enchant him into placing his life in danger. A giant. Unfortunately, a dim-witted one.

The Manns now found themselves in the rather narrow confines of this house with this most straightforward giant. In the evening, Hauptmann read aloud from his work in progress, his *Eulenspiegel* – and in return he now desired to hear a sample of the *Magic Mountain*, on which, as he knew, Thomas Mann was working. But the latter, who under normal circumstances read willingly and constantly from his works in progress, bristled at the suggestion. Made vague excuses: he didn't want to shine his own light here, it wasn't appropriate, and so on. But the real-life Peeperkorn wouldn't accept that. Mann describes the giant's reaction as follows: "The objection was forming in Hauptmann. It was one of the tense moments typical of him, in which his facial expression, his hands prepared some significant

utterance, which then, when it appeared, might initially surprise one with its simplicity... A second later, I saw that my hesitation had been mistaken and fearful. He said: 'You are wrong. In my father's house there are many rooms.'"

That was nicely put, but the air here was somewhat thin. Later, after the novel was published, Thomas Mann would apologise to the model for his character at length and in writing, but now of course it was too early for that; the novel was not yet finished, Peeperkorn was still wholly unknown to the world, and it was quite impossible. The Manns departed, though they stayed on the Baltic coast, travelling to Usedom, to Bansin, and then on to Ahlbeck, where Thomas Mann had gone alone two years previously to work on his great lecture "On the German Republic".

In that lecture, he had to some extent bidden farewell to the sea. To the draw of the sea. To all that the sea stood for in his mind: irresponsibility, sympathy with death, the pull towards decay, forbidden love, apolitical and anti-democratic tendencies, intoxication, romanticism, the bliss of forgetting, happiness without duty, beauty, holidays without end.

He had come down on the side of the republic, of democracy, of the upstanding battle against the forces of darkness and irrationality. Against the sea. This battle, the victory in this battle, was not something he was born to. He called it an effort to "overcome the self".

This is the substance of the story we want to tell here, when we talk about the “man of the sea”. It’s about this seductive magic. About Thomas Mann’s love of the sea and how he kept that love all his life, but also about how, in the middle of his life, he invented a hero who would have been lost in the depths of the snow, in the depths of the sea, had a democratic educator from Italy not been standing on the beach with a fog horn, to warn him of those deadly, infinite depths and to call him back, to the safe place on land.

In real life, the birth of a little girl had also helped Hans Castorp’s inventor to resist the pull. Thomas Mann wrote about it this way himself: towards the end of the First World War, the outbreak of which he had once celebrated as both a personal and national liberation, he had inwardly pledged himself to love. To love Elisabeth, whom he called his real firstborn. It can’t have been much fun for his four older children to have read this – though ultimately, they all knew it anyway. Their father celebrated his unfair love. Not least in the summer of 1924, on the beach.

Elisabeth never forgot that moment. She devoted her later life to the sea, to the protection of the world’s oceans and the utopia of a community acting in solidarity. She saw the origin of her globe-spanning dedication to what she would call “oceanic politics” in this summer, in the love of the sea her father passed down to her. Because while, for him, the love of the sea was always a rather threatening love, which he had to counter with a critical consciousness, for her the sea was a mission and a utopia. The place she

needed to spend a lifetime fighting for. “It was a magical world,” Elisabeth said at eighty, recalling this summer. “Even today, when I empty the espresso grounds down the sink from a small, nicely-shaped container, it makes me think of the damp sandcastles we shook from our brightly coloured little buckets and lined up along the beach.”

And – despite her pre-eminence in her father’s eyes – she was not alone in being infected by a love of the sea that summer. At the end of the holidays, Thomas Mann wrote to his friend Ernst Bertram: “The children feel true pain at parting with the sea, both the younger and the older ones, just as I once did...”

And to understand where this “once” began, let us briefly travel halfway around the world, to a different beach at the edge of the rainforest, to a different century. To the beach at Paraty in Brazil, where a little girl with dark eyes spent her childhood.

The First Beach

The sea is glowing. A host of little flames fly out of the air into the water and are extinguished there. It is early evening, the sun has just set, and a crowd of children are standing on the beach looking out to sea. The old man shoots little fires into the dark air, one after another. They are long, thin rolls of paper that he has set alight in quick succession and then set free, like glow worms.

Dodo beams. She is proud of her grandfather, whom she calls Großpai, the man who is creating this glowing wonder for all the watching children of the sun – Dodo's brothers and sisters, and the children of the plantation workers and plantation slaves.

Dodo feels blessed when she is allowed to be here, on the Ilha Grande, the large, verdant island not far from her home beach. This is where her grandparents live – plantation owners, powerful, wealthy, people who inspire fear. Though Dodo is only a little afraid of her grandmother, Großmai. Großmai is strict, and always wants her granddaughter to watch her make bobbin lace when she could be outside with the slaves eating carne seca, the dried meat with black beans that Dodo loves.

Her real home is on another beach on the mainland, 250 kilometres south of Rio de Janeiro. It's a large property, a hacienda with a red shingled roof and

a balcony around the large main house. Around it are ten smaller houses, where the slaves are accommodated. Dodo's parents are also plantation and slave owners, and wealthy people. When her father was nineteen years old, he came from right at the top of the map all the way down here to the coast. He came here to find happiness and make money. Both worked out for him. He started his own plantations, and bought up others, and married the divinely beautiful daughter of a Brazilian-born plantation owner. And for a while now they have been living in this fantastic house right by the sea, with a small beach and a view of green hills, bays, little sailing boats. The rainforest begins just behind the house, and the cries of howler monkeys and parrots reach the ears of the people who live there.

The family moved in 1851. A little caravan made its way from their previous home in the August of that year: the slaves, the first three young children, the entire household, the father on his horse, the mother in a kind of sedan chair, because she was pregnant again. And on the journey, in the middle of the rainforest, her contractions began. The slaves and the children were sent on ahead, to their new home; the mother, Maria Luiza, was bedded down under the palm trees, where "among monkeys and parrots" as her husband always liked to say afterwards, she gave birth to her baby: Julia, known to everyone as Dodo.

Her childhood on the beach at Paraty is like something from a dream. She is always surrounded by other children, her older siblings, the children of the

slaves, children from the beautiful little town nearby with the low, colourful houses and the narrow lanes. When it rains hard, for a long time, people paddle canoes down the flooded streets.

But when does it rain? Julia spends her childhood barefoot and in white shirts; she has blonde hair, which she regularly curls. She gathers fallen bananas and coconuts, prises small oysters from the rocks at the water's edge. Azaleas and orange trees bloom in the garden. Hummingbirds fly like golden sparks from one flower to the next. She chews sticks of sugar cane, which grow like reeds on the shore. On her fingers she wears little rings made from the shell of an armadillo. Sometimes, using a small washtub as a boat, she rides down the little stream that flows out of the rainforest behind the house, towards the sea.

Everything here is tender and green, and even at the sea's edge, the shore slopes very gently into the depths. The beach is small, with palm trees along its fringes. There is nothing more to wish for here. A childhood paradise. How long will it last?

Once, on one of her solitary expeditions into the forest, a giant boa constrictor crosses her path. She dashes screaming back towards the house and the sea, and finally some men appear and tackle the snake. After that, she is filled with horror whenever she sees a snake, however small it may be.

Another time, as she is coming back inside from the sea, she hears a heart-rending wail from the depths of the house. Beneath the rooms that the family occupies is a mill, where sugar is pressed from sugar cane. Day after day, slaves turn the millwheel in the basement of the house. Normally, the plantation owner's family barely notice. But today a man who was sitting on the turning beam has been crushed between the beam and the wheel. His cries cut you to the quick. Julia won't forget them as long as she lives. Her mother has the seriously injured man brought upstairs, where she bandages his wounds and prepares mingao, a porridge of maize or oats. From that day on, Dodo finds the constant, quiet grinding of the millwheel beneath the floor of the family rooms a sinister sound.

The brightest days are the church feast days. Then the children walk, holding their father's hand, to the little church in the town. Their father inspires respect; he is an imposing, serious gentleman with side whiskers and a light crown of hair. Everyone greets him reverently. How proud the girl is, walking through the streets with her hand in his. Aren't all the people greeting her, too?

Pentecost, for instance, when the children kneel with their rose garlands, and suddenly white doves are flying around the church and a choir bursts into song – a beautiful, bright women's choir. The singers are hidden from view, and Dodo thinks they sound like angels. Only for a moment does she

catch a glimpse of a bright dress above her, when a hatch opens and the doves fly free. What a bright day that is.

But there is horror here, too. For Good Friday, the faithful have constructed a large cloth puppet of Judas Iscariot. With his terrible grimace and lolling head, he is dragged through the streets of Paraty accompanied by the angry noise of the crowd. People beat the puppet with a fanatical zeal, until it's completely shredded.

All of this makes a deep impression on her soul. One night in particular. She has been to stay with her grandparents again for a few days on the Ilha Grande. Now it's time to return to Paraty. Her grandparents don't accompany her; her parents don't pick her up; some Black men will row her home on this late evening, across the sea. It is already quite dark, and one of the slaves carries her in his arms as he places his bare feet carefully on one rock and then the next. The surf is fierce, and the small boulders on which he is treading are flooded again and again by the waves. They are slippery. He feels his way very carefully onwards, carrying his precious cargo with her blonde curls. Then they finally reach the canoe, which is tossing about in the crashing surf. The waves smack against the sides of the boat.

Otherwise, nothing happens. The sea, where her grandfather lit those little flames a few days before, lies in great darkness. The men row the girl safely back to land, to her beach, her home.

Dodo has just turned six, and her mother is pregnant again. She isn't well; she spends most of her time lying in the hammock with a view of the sea. Dodo stays close by, bringing her the things she wants. Then at some point she is playing on the beach or elsewhere when her father – her Pai – comes to her, looking even more serious than usual. He takes her by the hand, she and her brother Nené. Dodo resists. Serious Pai shouldn't be making her go with him, nothing good can come of this. She wants to stay on the beach or in her room, in her world, not go where her father is now leading her, gently but firmly.

They enter her mother's room. And then suddenly, everything stops. Her mother is lying there with closed eyes, pale and stiff and cold, "surrounded by tall, flaming candles; hair and body dressed with flowers, and in her arms a very small dead child."

Horrified, Dodo tears herself free from her father's hand and rushes weeping from the room, not turning round, not looking back at her father. Later she wonders whether he, too, wept at the dead woman's bed. She doesn't know.

Into another world

The world is still the same: the bay, the palms, the sugar cane, the calls and cries from the forest, the stream behind the house, the sun, the oysters, the islands, the sea. But it's over. Her mother is dead, her little sibling not even properly in the world and already cold and pale on the belly of her dead mother. Everything has frozen. At first, her dignified, strict father doesn't know what to do. But then he makes a decision. His daughter has no inkling of what it is. But she does know that her life until this point, her carefree life, is irrevocably over.

Her father can't go on like this. Alone, with no wife and all these children, far from his real homeland – he can't, and he has no desire to. He is in shock, and then he is resolute. Life here is over, for a start; an era of life has come to an end. He intends to sell everything. The land, the house, the slaves, gold, silver, tools, the ten slave huts – he puts it all up for sale. A year after his wife's death, the deal is done. The beach, the bay and the splendid house no longer belong to him. He is free to start a new, different life. The children are his sole remaining tie.

In April 1858, he and his children and the Black slave Anna board a French sailing ship. It will take them to his old homeland, that much the children

know. But what that means, and how long they will stay – that, they don't know.

The voyage is an adventure, above all. Later, Julia recalls the flying fish she sees from the deck, the sperm whale, the sharks that circle the ship, the swordfish that the sailors kill and haul on board. In rough seas, their Anna lays them on the deck and covers them with their father's travelling coat. "Then," Julia writes, "the mighty breakers could come and crash down on the children!"

The crossing-the-line ceremony at the equator is a splendid thing: the sailors dress up as monkeys and wild men and spray everyone with little water-filled hoses until they are sodden to their last thread of clothing. No hiding, pleading or screeching does any good. Everyone is baptised. Her little brother Nené is even plunged into an old flour barrel filled with water, and afterwards runs around wet and white.

Once, during an especially fierce storm, Nené almost falls out of a hatch into the sea, and at the last moment a tillerman drags him back onto the deck by his little smock.

When there are no storms and the sea is quiet and unthreatening, it's time to protect yourself against the stormy times to come. Julia calls it a superstition, but it's also a reminder of her mother's Catholicism when the sailors urge her to seek and find the shadow of the Madre de Deus, the

mother of God, on the sea. Because only those who see the silhouette of the Virgin on the surface of the water are protected from the sea's elemental power on this crossing. Julia looks and looks. "There!" the sailors cry, pointing into the blue, until she finally manages to discern a torn dark blue robe in the skipping waves, and perhaps something like a torso. Is she safe now? Probably. Well-protected, they arrive at the port of Le Havre two months after their departure from Brazil.

Then their journey takes them on to Hamburg, where Julia's father buys the children toys and new clothes to welcome them to his fatherland, so that when they reach Lübeck they will not stand out any more than is to be expected. They take a stagecoach to their final destination, to Lübeck.

The attempt not to stand out doesn't work, of course. The children are wearing Panama hats, they have their Black slave Anna with them, and the dignified Pai. No, the city has never seen such an odd family. The children of Lübeck run jeering and laughing behind the exotic group. In an attempt to somehow calm them down and get rid of them, the Brazilian family throw sweets into the cheering crowd.

What a strange new world, this Lübeck: the gabled houses, the pale-skinned people, the incomprehensible language. Julia and her siblings meet their grandmother, their father's brother Eduard and his wife Emma. A great aunt is said to have enquired impatiently before their arrival, in her Low German

dialect: “So when are Ludwig and his wee black bairns coming?” They had no idea, of course, what the Brazilian children of the sun would look like.

For Julia, there is above all so much to marvel at. At first, they live with their eternally funny, friendly, good-humoured grandmother, their German Großmai. Then their father takes them to the house of a hunchbacked woman named Therese who, as he has told them, is now to be their foster mother. This is where the girls are to live. Julia immediately feels safe and cared for with her. She doesn’t understand a word in this new country and she misses her old world, but she’ll get used to it. As long as her siblings are with her, and her father and Anna, whom she’s known since she was born.

But then comes that morning. Anna wakes her, in floods of tears. The children are startled – what’s wrong? She says they have to be quiet, she isn’t supposed to tell them, their father strictly forbade it, but she has to, she has to say goodbye to them, perhaps forever. Very soon, this very morning, she and Pai will be sailing back home, to Brazil.

The children can’t believe it. They scream, they wail, they cling to Anna; this is completely impossible, their Pai would never leave them alone here like this, and certainly not without a word to them. But that is precisely what he’s doing. Their father comes in, even colder and more severe than usual; he remonstrates with Anna for disobeying his clear instructions. Now he has

all this bother with the crying children. This is exactly what he was hoping to avoid at all costs.

But it doesn't change anything. He and Anna set off that morning, leaving the children behind. "So far away, on the other side of the great ocean, lay the land from which they had come – and now Pai meant to return there without them?" Julia writes later.

Her mother dead, paradise lost, her father gone, and the trusted Anna with him. She is alone with her siblings in this wholly new, strange world, with no one who speaks her language, no rainforest, no hummingbirds. Julia Bruhns is seven years old. A traumatised little girl.

"What contrasts now cut into Mana's and Dodo's life! The sunny homeland where they spent their earliest childhood, living without constraints, mostly in magnificent nature; the love of their Mai, their Anna, their grandparents on the Ilha and everyone they had known and played with as young children over there – that now lay far away forever; and now, as if transported to another world, they were surrounded by a strange land, climate, people, language and customs."

She will make her way in Lübeck; she has no choice.

Deny yourself

She is fond of the hunchbacked Therese Bousset, in whose boarding house she grows up. Her grandmother is magical. She likes her aunt and uncle as well, even if one day, when she has screamed “Diabo! Diabo!” out of fear of the devil, Uncle Eduard does beat her until that fear, which he says has got into her from her “negro upbringing” is driven out once and for all. This uncle became “her favourite uncle”, as she writes.

The loveliest thing in these years is the sea. When the other children from the boarding house go away for the summer to spend the school holidays with their parents, Julia, her brother Manuel, their other siblings and Therese go to the Baltic coast, to Travemünde. She looks forward to it all year. There are no palm trees, and no toucans, either, or black vultures, and the woodland up here is strangely silent. But the sea is the sea. The sea is home and in some remote, magical way the water here is connected to the water on the other side of the globe in her home bay. In all weathers, and at six in the morning, Julia sets off for the beach, so that she and Manuel will be the first there, to bag a bathing machine. The machines have already been pulled out into deeper water, and a boat rows swimmers out to them from the jetty. Then, what delight: swimming, jumping, dunking, spraying, diving. When they're ready, they ring a bell and a boatman collects them

and takes them safely ashore. Even storms and waves don't put them off; the machines are a little closer to the shore when the water is rough, but there is always bathing, always the sea, always fun. And the waves are never all that high.

Then comes breakfast, and afterwards Therese takes them to the pleasure grounds behind the Kurhaus to listen to the early concert, which always begins with a chorale. They read, do homework and crafts – and then it's back into the sea. Sometimes they ride along the beach, past the Kurhaus, like Sancho Panza on a recalcitrant donkey. In the evening they sit with Therese in the large conservatory that looks out onto the woods and read aloud. It is the story of Undine that makes the greatest impression on her: the foundling from the sea, the soulless water sprite whose father, the Mediterranean water prince, sends her away to find love and gain an immortal soul. Julia loves this story and it makes her shudder, too, at the revenge Undine takes on her beloved Huldbrand, who dies in her arms amid kisses and tears. And she is frightened of the water spirit Kühleborn, Undine's uncle who is both man and water; he can make the waves rise up and is one of the elemental spirits who dwell in the forest. Undine seeks to drive him from her happy world forever, when she rolls a stone onto the fountain that is the only entrance to her world. Kühleborn – how terrible and frightening Julia always finds him. “When he entered the tale, she looked out shyly at the dark trees, lost in sinister thoughts, and imagined she saw in

one of those trees the gigantic figure of the water spirit.” Many years later, in another house here in Travemünde situated opposite the little wood, she will read the fairy tale of Undine aloud to her own children. And they, too, will remember it for a long time.

Little Julia often dreams herself out of the world. In the fairy tales she hears and reads, and above all in theatre and music. She plays the piano, plays it very well, plays for hours, quite of her own accord. Soon she is composing her own little pieces; she starts going to the opera and the theatre at a young age, and is adamant – this is her first wish – that she wants to become a “theatre lady”, as she calls it, an actress, slipping into other lives, other worlds. She often stands in the arbour out in the garden and sings the operas she has heard. No matter whether she has an audience or not. The arbour is her stage.

But the otherwise friendly and affectionate Therese Bousset is uncompromising on the “theatre lady” issue, clear and cold: “But Therese gave that idea short shrift, saying that she must not desire such a thing, or Pai and Großmai, Therese, and her uncles and aunts would be very sad.” Her whole world, then – everyone who meant something to her. Not only was it forbidden to take up that career; even the desire to do so was forbidden. Julia writes: “From then on, Dodo regarded the matter as settled and an impossible thing for her.”

Julia is obedient. She has no choice in that. She is all wrong here, in this world. It bothers her that people can't see that at first glance. All her siblings have Brazilian-dark hair and she is the only blonde one, the only one who looks like she belongs here. She soaks her hair "in a terrible way, in oils" to make it darker, like her mother's, like her siblings'. Over the years, her hair darkens by itself and turns a deep brown.

She becomes increasingly lonely. When she is fourteen her Großmai dies, the woman she loved above all else. Another person to whom she has to bid farewell. In an awful way, the body here in Lübeck reminds her of her mother and that horrific moment, never to be forgotten, when her father dragged her to the death bed. This sudden seriousness, the sunken chest, the thin hands, the pale face, and a snowy silken robe. None of this, nothing about this cold figure, bears any relation to the person she loves. And she is always afraid that this cold, white person might suddenly open her eyes or move a limb. Another dead woman's room that the girl leaves as if fleeing.

In the meantime, her beloved big brother Manuel is summoned to Brazil by her father. She is becoming increasingly solitary. She has only one friend, Josefa, who like Julia was torn away from her homeland at an early age.

Josefa comes from Mexico and speaks Spanish. The girls are united by their foreignness.

But in any case, she has the sense that friendships won't help to combat the feeling of loneliness and abandonment. The friends and the friendships won't stay, either. And what then? How great will the abandonment be then? "But principally, she felt that a thousand friends could not replace the love that had been ripped from her so early with her mother and grandmother and her grandparents 'over there'; she felt that friendships were as fleeting as soap bubbles. She let all girls come to her more or less without interest, and they came." But there is a coldness about her. The other girls call her "domineering", "conceited", and "independent". But it is fear and sadness that make her shy away from these friendships.

Soon, she begins to pin her hopes on leaving childhood behind, as quickly as possible. Much as she likes Therese and her maternal nature, her older sister is already confirmed and has moved out, her father has now sent for her second eldest brother as well, and she is exposed, powerless, alone. The early decision to be confirmed is her decision to become an adult. It was her big brother who decided she should leave her mother's religion and convert to Protestantism. In converting, he has brought all the siblings with him into a new denomination. Then finally, Palm Sunday arrives, the day of her confirmation. She receives her confirmation verse. And she is shocked. She loves Jesus, and is resolved to follow his commandments and of course above all her personal blessing. But it instructs her: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

What is this supposed to mean? Why has this verse been chosen for her?

Everyone knows her story, everyone knows that all she has done here is try desperately to adapt to a life that is not her own, a world that is not her own. She has been denying herself for a long time already, as far as she can. She can't comprehend it: "Why was it given to *her*?" And she adds: "*Now* she took it seriously; she didn't believe she could promise that she would have the strength to follow the Lord in suffering and deny herself."

But she will have the strength. It is her blessing for life. Or perhaps her curse: deny yourself.

Then both her younger brothers are back in Brazil, too, sent for by their father. The girls are not sent for. They have to stay. Her sister Mana marries a son of the Stolterfoth family, who have a large estate and whom the sisters like to visit. It's a free life out in the country; there are seven siblings. It always reminds Julia a little of her carefree childhood at home. At Mana's wedding, Julia falls madly in love with the groom's brother, Paul. And he loves her, too. Now everything might turn out well. Who could object? After all, his parents and even the strict Pai have already agreed to their siblings' wedding. The Stolterfoths have no great wealth and aren't respected merchants, it's true – but who would be troubled by that? Him. The strict Pai. Evidently he has no intention of losing both daughters to have-nots from the house of Stolterfoth. And in any case, we might suspect,

Julia's father has already received another proposal. Or is hoping for one.

Julia has no idea of this. Julia is in love and filled with joyful anticipation.

With all her might she wants to escape from childhood and into marriage.

She believes there is nothing worse in the world than remaining single.

Later she learns that she was wrong about that, as she writes (referring to herself in the third person once again): "But over time she learned to see that there are indeed worse things."

Before this worse thing makes its entrance, her father – alerted to the situation – arrives from Brazil. He has bought magnificent gifts and outfits for his daughter, the finest travelling clothes, and "from Paris he had brought her a beautiful wooden chest with a dozen Jouvin gloves and a lot of belts in bright stripes or plain colours, to go with her gold buckle and the white muslin dresses."

It seems a little like this beautiful young woman is to be auctioned off to the highest bidder. But first and foremost, the bond that she has made with this Paul from the country must be forcibly broken. Therese Bousset has already spoken to the suitor in no uncertain terms: "Dear Paul, you are nothing, you can do nothing, you have nothing, and in any case Julia is promised to Herr Consul Mann, so keep your hands off the girl." Or so Julia's cousin Ella recalls later in her memoirs. This is also the first mention of the future husband's name. Julia herself will not mention it in her own memoirs.

She writes that her father took her walking to “make her forget her firmly-held ‘inclination’”. The pair go away for three weeks, to Switzerland, to France, into the mountains; on dangerous routes she climbs high and then higher still, her father calls her back, but Julia loves danger. They ride horses up to the Gemmi peak in the Bernese Oberland. In Leukerbad she observes the invalids in their warm, steaming communal baths. “Dodo had the impression that they were prisoners, sentenced to live out their lives here.”

She herself is sentenced to forget her previous life here, to forget her love. They go on to Lucerne, to Lake Zurich, and visit relatives who are staying in a sanatorium for a lung complaint. But father and daughter only stay a short time.

When they finally return to Lübeck, Julia’s love for Paul has certainly not vanished. But Paul himself has. He has meanwhile been dispatched to Genoa, and later to Riga, where he remains. Julia doesn’t see him again, as she writes, “until she was a wife and mother”. She adds, “And then they passed each other by.”

On her time away, she writes, “And she thanked Pai very much for the lovely trip.” Deny yourself...

Her memoirs, written many years later, end shortly thereafter. In the final pages she describes being approached at balls by one ugly, unprepossessing,

unloved suitor after another. She ends with the words: “And at one of these balls, an eve-of-the-wedding and wedding party, she saw her future husband. She was sixteen and a half years old, and her fate was sealed.”

This sounds like an appropriately grim conclusion to a dreadful youth. Like the logical consequence of growing up in a world that was not hers, into which, using all her powers of self-denial, she had to fit herself. She is forbidden from marrying Paul. His place is taken by this other man, who has chosen her. An imposing man with a waxed, perfumed moustache and fine English suits, who smokes Russian cigarettes and is one of the most respected and wealthiest men in the city: Consul Thomas Johann Heinrich Mann, more than ten years his bride’s senior. An excellent match, as they say.

Things take their course

At the age of just twenty-three, following his father's premature death, the consul had taken over the company. His two half-brothers from his father's first marriage were overlooked. There was conflict within the family. His sister Elisabeth had married a conman and lost a lot of money. But the company flourished, and the consul was regarded as a capable man.

Lübeck's high society had begun to wonder why he was hesitating so long to get married. Perhaps he'd been waiting for Julia. Everyone in the city knew her – Julia da Silva-Bruhns, the girl from Brazil. She was known as the most beautiful woman in the city. And her father was wealthy, too, a respected citizen of Lübeck who had made his fortune on the other side of the world.

It almost seemed as though these two people practically *had* to marry, if everything was to take its proper course in Lübeck at that time. There was only one small doubt in people's minds: wasn't she somehow a little too exotic? Too foreign? Not quite from here? And did this rather exotic choice of wife not count against the consul in some small way? If he were really so entirely healthy and stable, Lübeck to his marrow, with a lust for life and a Hanseatic, commercial coolness, would he not have chosen a wife who was

fully and completely from here? Perhaps, perhaps... At least the people of Lübeck now had something to talk about, to doubt, to marvel at, to observe.

It was this woman in particular, this foreign woman they were talking about; all you had to do was look at her eyes, for instance: "These eyes were not trusted. They had a strange look to them, and the people were unable to decipher what was written there. This woman, whose demeanour was so cold, so withdrawn, closed off, reserved and hostile, and who seemed to expend a little warmth only on her music, aroused vague suspicions. People dusted off their little scrap of human knowledge to use it against Senator Buddenbrooks's wife. Still waters often ran deep."

Julia was seventeen when she married the consul; he was twenty-nine. For Julia, their wedding meant liberation, a kind of happiness, even if it wasn't her beloved Paul she was permitted to marry. But she was now free, in a way. She could go to the theatre whenever she liked, attend concerts, play the piano, take charge of the servants. She and her husband moved into a magnificent apartment; soon, of course, they would buy a house. She gave parties, displayed herself to polite society in splendid gowns, and her husband the consul – who in a wonderful way took care that he, too, was perfectly costumed – admired her for it.

But this kind of freedom was quickly ended. "After Dodo's confirmation, her girlhood lasted only one year and a half – then things took their course,

and the duties of housewife and mother began,” she writes. “Things took their course”, that’s what she calls it.

What took its course was the birth of her first child Heinrich, named after his father and, as the firstborn son, a potential successor to the firm. It was 27 March 1871. The fact that the birth of this son didn’t suit her was something that Heinrich himself later surmised in his novel *Eugénie*, where he introduces young Jürgen, the son of a consul of the same name, Jürgen West and his wife Gabriele. The boy’s mother doesn’t love him, didn’t want him. He has anxiety dreams about her simply leaving him. Once, she really does leave him alone in an inn, to go for a coach ride with a man. And then, on her return, she scolds the child: “She called out his name reluctantly, without leaving the coach. He was startled, and his first instinct was to hide, then he recognised the impossibility of that and ran to her like the good boy he did not feel himself to be. His mother said threateningly, ‘Shall I tell Papa of this?’ – after which Jürgen didn’t dare breathe.” Heinrich Mann later described Jürgen as an autobiographical character.

Many years later, Heinrich Mann also painted a picture of himself and his mother. An amorous scene with added children. She is sitting in the garden, in a rocking chair, heavily made-up and holding a fan. Her eyes turned to one side, she is reclining so far in the chair she is almost lying down.

Opposite her sits a straight-backed officer, giving her a questioning, wondering, admiring look. Heinrich painted himself lying in a flower bed in

the foreground; the year is 1875, and he is four years old. Inside the house in the background, a baby is visible through the window, disregarded by the world around him.

The prince

This is the new baby, the second-born, the little brother: this is Paul Thomas Mann, born on 6 June 1875. Why was he christened Paul? After Paolo, one of his mother's brothers? Or after the forbidden Paul up in Riga? We don't know; the name soon vanished from everyone's consciousness, and they called the boy Tommy, or Thomas when they needed to be strict with him.

The planets were in a lucky constellation at the time of his birth, as he later wrote proudly: "The alignment of the planets was propitious, as adepts of astrology often assured me later; based on my horoscope, they promised me a long and happy life and an easy death." And he was an easy, quiet child, too – a dreamer, who loved nothing more than sleeping. As far as he could remember later on, he had probably always been that way inclined, had loved to sleep. But it became a true passion on that evening when his mother told him the fairy tale of the man who didn't sleep. A strange tale, no one else knew it, and perhaps she had made it up herself. It was about a man who worked so eagerly and diligently and doggedly that one day he cursed sleep, and an angel came and granted his wish: "He breathed on the man's eyes, so that they became like grey stones in their sockets and never closed again. Oh, how this man regretted his wish; how he stood out as the only sleepless member of the human race. A sad, cursed man, he struggled

through life until death finally released him.” That made a deep impression on little Tommy as he lay in his cot with the green curtains. “I know that that evening, I could hardly wait to be left alone in my little bed, to throw myself on the breast of sleep; that I have never slept so soundly as on the night I listened to that story.”

It must have been clear to everyone quite early on that this refugee from daytime and friend of the twilight would not turn into a good, hardworking pupil. It was only when he started school, as Thomas Mann recalled later, that he came to know the true ardour of sleep. He hated school, hated the daytime demands that the institution made on him, and the more he suffered at school, the better he slept. The best, the deepest sleep came on Sunday nights. And later in life, he also slept most soundly when he was unhappy or in despair, when “disgust at humankind frightens me away into the darkness”.

Sleep, bed – to him, this is his mother’s world, and has been from the beginning. It’s the world in which “warm, unconscious and with knees drawn up like they once were in the dark of the mother’s body, attached once more as it were to the umbilical cord of nature, nourishment and renewal draw us along mysterious paths...”

And his love of the landscape that we want to describe here, the foremost love of his life, is here, too, in the love of sleep and forgetting and the

dreamy return to the womb. More than that: it is one with that love. And a bed is a place of perfect happiness: “Is it not like a magic boat, which sits in its corner by day, concealed and inconspicuous, and in which every evening we bob out onto the sea of unconsciousness and infinity?”

The sea! Infinity! My love of the sea, whose immense simplicity I have always preferred to the challenging multifariousness of the mountains, is as old as my love of sleep.”

Little Paul Thomas Mann was a dreamer, a prince of sleep in a world of his own. In an early picture, we see him with large, dreamy eyes, draped by the photographer over a hay bale and wearing a pale checked shirt, looking into the distance. He is four years old. There is a picture of his brother Heinrich at the same age, standing between the legs of his pensive, proudly smiling father, who has a half tender, half possessive hand on his shoulder. The boy’s little coat is buttoned all the way up. He looks at the world with sadness and suffering in his eyes. Heinrich was the first. The future heir, the future consul. At this point, his future is still a small burden, laid gently and vaguely on his shoulders. But it will grow larger.

Tommy, the dreamer, was a little freer than his big brother from the start. Naturally, his father tried to instil a degree of manliness in him. Though of course, bringing up children in an upper middle-class merchant family in Lübeck in the century before last was not a matter for the head of the

household. But setting an example, providing suitable toys, suitable dressing-up clothes, to reflect the roles his sons were expected to play in later life – those were the consul’s opportunities to exert an influence on his offspring. And the Mann children certainly didn’t lack for toys. Their young visitors marvelled at the nursery that Heinrich and Thomas shared, which was stuffed with all kinds of marvellous things.

But the gifts that may have been to the consul’s taste, the “manly” presents, held little appeal for Tommy. A suit of armour complete with visored helmet, lance and shield was all well and good. He played with the small army of lead soldiers without any real passion, and was bothered by “the thick peg” between their bowed legs. And he was reluctant to wear the hussar’s uniform that had been specially cut to fit the sleepy prince. “Military masquerade” – it wasn’t for him.

The real marvel was Achilles the rocking horse: “When it was given to me as a present, it seemed like a beautiful dream to me with its lifelike stature. Elegantly saddled and bridled, it had the natural childish-rough coat of a chestnut pony – it *was* a chestnut pony in stuffed form – and the most faithful glass eyes in the world. It wasn’t a sense of chivalry that made me love it, I do remember that, but sympathy with its coat, its hooves and nostrils.”

A horse like a dream. Ideal for the sleep-loving boy's favourite occupation: lengthening the night into the day. He found it easy even as a young child. Waking up and simply continuing to live out the dream beyond the magic boat. Ideally as a prince or an emperor, as His Majesty, as some kind of chosen one. The best thing about the game was that no one could interrupt it. No one could destroy the dreamworld with ignorant questions or despicable reality checks. Because either he didn't inform the world that today he was a prince. And then "I robed myself in a certain lovable majesty and went about proud and happy in the secret of my magnificence."

Or he would inform "his servant", the nanny who was responsible for him, about his high status that day. The nanny would then have to ensure the proper deference was shown to him by the public, the Lübeck passers-by they encountered when they went out. He transferred this experience of his to his conman-hero Felix Krull, who is so moved at the majesty of his imagined role as ruler that he sheds real tears. He plays it so well that he believes it himself: "Overwhelmed by a sense of my age and dignity, I would sit silent in my little wagon, while my nurse was instructed to inform all we met who I was, since I should have taken any disregard of my fancy much amiss. 'I am taking the emperor for a walk,' she announced, putting the flat of her hand to her temple in a clumsy salute, and everyone paid me their respects."

No wonder that the best gift for the brothers was a puppet theatre. It was given to Heinrich for Christmas as a young boy and he loved it for a while, but not as long or as fervently as his little brother did. Playing with it together wasn't the easiest thing, either, since each wanted to be the king and the director as well. Luckily, the boys were soon joined by two sisters. When they were small, the girls willingly accepted instructions from one side and then the other. And when Heinrich took over as director, Thomas either watched and learned, or sulked. But ultimately, the best time Thomas had with this puppet theatre was once Heinrich had finally lost interest and the sisters found other things to do as well, and he was able to put on plays all by himself behind closed doors, directing, playing the king and enjoying the thunderous applause. The invisible audience was always fantastic, cheering the king and the director, the whole dreamlike theatre world. And no one interrupted. No one doubted the king's majesty. That was the dream of life. That was life itself.

He found the evening hours spent with his mother as lovely as his solitary plays, when his head was in her lap and she would tell him fairy tales that no one else knew, or when she played the piano and Thomas would sit silent in a dark corner; he could never get enough of her playing. She was dreamy and gentle and often strangely absent, too. The literary likenesses of their mother that her sons later included in their books often paint her as beautiful, exotic, cool and seductive, on the fringes of what was socially

acceptable at the time. “She was,” Thomas Mann wrote many years after her death, “transplanted to Lübeck at a very tender age and, as long as she was managing that large household, she behaved entirely as an assimilated child of the city and the upper echelons of its society should.” Yes, a thoroughly assimilated child. But the children sensed early on that this assimilation, this role she was playing, didn’t come easily to her.

But then, thinking about their father, the powerful man, the patriarch, who was greeted with such respect by the whole of polite society and his little lads along with him, when they were out on the street together – wasn’t he too secretly acting out a role?

Thomas Mann described his father often in his books, in various guises and with varying degrees of literary transformation. The theatrical quality of his demeanour is painted most powerfully in the early story “The Clown”: “But my father was a tall, broad gentleman in a fine black cloth jacket and white waistcoat, on which there hung a golden binocle. Between his short, ice-grey mutton chops, his chin, clean-shaven like his upper lip, protruded round and strong, and between his brows there were always two deep vertical lines. He was a powerful man with great influence in public affairs; I saw people leave him with fluttering sighs and eyes aglow, and others who were broken and in utter despair. For it happened from time to time that I and often also my mother and my two older sisters were present at such scenes; perhaps because my father wanted to instil in me the ambition to rise

to the heights he had; perhaps also, I suspect, because he needed an audience. He had a way, leaning on his chair with one hand tucked into the front of his jacket, of watching the departure of the person he had delighted or destroyed that gave me this suspicion even as a child.”

It was an act with two different messages: first, of course, a message to his soft little son with this disastrous love of sleep, of music, fairy tales and royal hubris: Boy, look what I can do! Shatter people! Destroy lives! Just look what my power can achieve! But the other message was: Woe to you, and woe to us, if we should one day be shattered ourselves. Let the sight of these ruined people be a lesson to you.

The son took note. But did it have the desired effect? The first-person narrator of “The Clown” concludes: “I sat in a corner and considered my father and mother, as if I were choosing between them and deciding whether my life would be better spent in dreams or in deeds and power. And my eyes lingered in the end on the silent face of my mother.”

Well, where else? In truth, there is really no choice to make for this clown, or for the young Thomas Mann. That choice was made deep within him, and it was made long ago, when he lay in the cot with the green curtains, loving sleep so much and his mother’s stories.

The most remarkable story amid all the fairy tales, the poems and little novels that his mother read or told, however, was the one that was really

true. The story of Paraty, of the jungle, where his once-tiny Mama had been born, the magnificent house beneath the palm trees, the black vultures and howler monkeys and life on the beach. Where was it again? How far away was it? Each telling was a sensation, and the boys would rush to the globe to assure themselves once more of this monstrous distance. What? That far? Separated from us by so much blue? Please, she had to tell them the whole thing again in great detail. And she told the story – how she loved to tell it. More so the older she got, and the further back her childhood lay. She herself wrote later, about the Dodo of the past: “The older Dodo gets, the more often and more fondly she thinks of her childhood and the more longingly she seeks to draw aside the veil that lies ever more thickly before it; Dodo’s childhood appears to her increasingly like a fairy tale, an unreachable shadow from a sunken world, irrevocable, like all loves, long since passed away.”

How lovely, though, and a kind of small consolation, to be able to implant this longing in the souls of your own children, where it will then lead a life of its own. Freer perhaps, more vague, a dark longing for a place they themselves have never been to. The dream of this distant bay can grow infinitely large, when it is not kept small by any kind of lived reality.

The sea. Happiness.

Thomas Mann was probably seven years old when he saw the sea for the first time, his sea, the Lübeck bay where the family holidayed for four weeks every summer, beginning in 1882.

He will recall that day, that sea afresh again and again for the rest of his life. When he returns to his old hometown at the age of fifty-one, now a celebrated man of the world, he explains to the gathering assembled in his honour: “There is the sea, the Baltic, which the boy sighted for the first time in Travemünde, the Travemünde of forty years ago with the old Biedermeier-style Kurhaus, the Swiss chalets and the concert hall”. Where he heard orchestral music for the first time in his life, where the sea and the music formed an ideal emotional conjunction for him, which would shape the rest of his life. “In this place, in Travemünde, the holiday paradise where I spent what were undoubtedly the happiest days of my life, days and weeks of profound contentment and satisfaction that nothing in my later life, which today I can certainly no longer call poor, would surpass or cause me to forget them.”

His work, the origin of his work that would one day conquer the world, lies up here, in these dreamy childhood days on the Baltic coast: “I hope that I have given it some thanks, the sea of my childhood, the Lübeck bay. In the

end it was its palette on which I drew, and if my colours have been found to be subdued, lacking in fire, austere – well, it may be the fault of certain views between the silvery trunks of beech trees into the pale pastels of sea and sky, on which my eye fell when I was a child and happy.”

Thomas Mann transferred his experience of the sea to many of the characters in his novels. But most directly, and in most detail, to his early prince of decline Hanno Buddenbrook, the last of his kind, who draws a simple line under the story of a family in the book of his ancestors, ending with the apologetic words: “I believed... I believed... nothing more was coming.”

Observers of the young Hanno there by the sea might already have had some inkling that nothing more would come after him, and that he would not keep going for very long, either. He was simply a little too in love with the silence up there, the sleep up there, with idleness and watching and the sea. “Summer holidays by the sea! Did anyone, anywhere grasp what happiness that signified?” No, almost no one in the Buddenbrooks world grasped that complete, utter, all-encompassing happiness as he did. Or did they? There were two others: Tony, his aunt, who once found the love of her life up on this northern coast and, for the sake of the family honour, lost it again. And in the end, his strict father, who suppressed this love of the sea until it could no longer be suppressed. But we will come to that later.

First, let us look at this Hanno, this pale, music-loving boy who likes to sleep so much and whose father is determined to make him staunch and manly. The doctor has advised the parents to spend the holidays with their young son by the sea. The sea air is supposed to fortify and refresh him, turn him into a man of the sea. But the delicate little body simply rests here, simply enjoys the silence and the soft sand and his father's absence. When the father comes on Sundays, his son closets himself away. That's all he needs: to be educated even here, by his sea. And to forbid himself tears and indolence in the service of a higher cause, in the service of business-like manliness.

Up here is another world: "The way one could let one's eyes roam effortlessly, painlessly, off into that infinite green and blue, from which there came, free and without obstacle, the gentle swish of a strong, fresh, wild and splendid-smelling breeze, enveloping one's ears and bringing about a pleasant dizziness, a dull torpor in which the consciousness of time and space and everything bounded was blissfully swallowed up..."

A dull torpor, a pleasant dizziness – no, this was somehow not the effect that father and doctor had expected the sea to have on the sleep-addicted little boy. And it could have been even worse, had the boy's nanny not protected him from the draw of the sea. Not that the current would have drawn him out into the waves – no, he simply couldn't stop looking. Looking for longer and longer, when "all around, the whole expanse was

filled with this mild and marvellous swishing, benevolently encouraging the little Johann and coaxing him into closing his eyes in immense contentment.” Simply stay here. Simply never open your eyes again. Simply be. The emissary from his father’s world, the nanny Ida Jungmann, prevents this: “Come along, Hanno; we must go; supper time; you’ll catch your death sleeping out here...”

This time, Ida Jungmann is able to save him from death and take him home, to one of the “Swiss houses” where they spend their holidays. But the desired fortifying effect of the seaside never materialises, as the disappointed Doctor Langhals confirms on their return to Lübeck. The muscles still so meagre, the whole boy so thin, and: “We are still making an altogether too melancholy face,” he remarks. “He’s homesick for the sea,” his mother tells the doctor. And the latter replies: “Well, well... so you like it there, then!” Hanno’s face is suddenly flushed with colour. What does this mean? Might this Langhals fellow be on his side? Is this white-coated earthly power going to make his greatest dream come true? The sea, forever? “A lunatic and fantastical hope” rises through Hanno. But it dissipates again just as quickly. This medical barbarian didn’t really mean anything by the question. Hanno and the sea remain separated – with the exception of four blissful weeks a year.

But Thomas Mann, who saw Hanno in himself and turned him into a character in his novel, was able to take something of this sea home with

him, to Lübeck. Almost as great as his love of the sea and of fairy tales was his love of music. Listening to his mother was wonderful, but more wonderful still were the daily concerts in the Travemünde Music Temple. He could sit there, listening and watching. He was particularly delighted by the conductor and the leader of the orchestra. And one day in the hotel, with the aid of two sticks, he simulated playing the violin himself, dramatic, engrossed, very authentic. This was another of his own experiences that he later passed on to a character – the conman Felix Krull. There, a father who is in an unusually good mood “under the soothing influence of the bathers,” is so pleased with the boy’s game that he convinces the conductor to let his son perform to an audience. The conductor agrees, and the son is decked out as a perfect child prodigy. They buy him a small violin, a sailor suit, long silk socks and patent leather shoes, and they coat the bowstrings with Vaseline so that no one will be able to hear the phony little artist’s doubtless terrible playing. He is put on the stage, the real musicians play, and the little charlatan bows his violin with tremendous devotion. And he testifies to his own success, which “I may say was complete. The audience, both genteel and lowly, crowded in front of the pavilion, streaming in from every side. They saw a child prodigy. My passion, the pallor of my working face, a wave of hair falling over my eye, my childish hands with their wrists becomingly framed by the blue sleeves, which puffed around the upper arms

and tapered towards the wrists – in short, my whole very touching and wonderful performance tugged at their heartstrings.”

The business with the sticks, at least, was something the young Thomas Mann had really experienced. On that seaside holiday, when he gave his stick performance, his mother discerned a gift and passion for music in him, and so, when they returned home, he was given violin lessons. He kept playing for many years, and often accompanied his piano-playing mother on the violin. And since, as he says, “the sea and music formed an ideal emotional conjunction for ever,” from then on, Thomas Mann always had a kind of inner sea with him.

[END OF SAMPLE]

The extended quotation on p. 6 is taken from: Thomas Mann: *The Magic Mountain*, tr. John E. Woods, Vintage 1996. All other quotes translated by Ruth Martin.