

Jukka's small hut stood in the exact spot where the jungle gave way to the beach and where big palm leaves threw their shade onto the sand. On the verge between the dark green forest and the long white beach, protected from the wind and the waves. Jukka had built the hut himself, from knobby branches, big palm leaves and fruit boxes that had washed up in the bay. There was only one room, where Jukka slept. When he woke up during the night he could see the stars glitter through the cracks in the roof.

In the morning, the sun pushed up from the horizon, stroking the beach with its warm beams until it reached the bead curtain across the hut's entrance, lit up the room and tickled the soles of Jukka's feet.

Then he would sit up, stretch his arms and legs, crawl outside and throw himself head first into the waves of that blue, blue sea. It was so blue that you could hardly distinguish it from the sky.

And that's how Jukka's day started.

That's how Jukka's day started, most of the time. Except that, on that one morning in spring when our story begins, he suddenly didn't feel like jumping into the sea.

As he was stretching out on his bamboo mat, the tips of his fingers touched the back wall of the hut and his toes almost reached all the way to the entrance.

This small hut is *too* small, Jukka thought. It's time to build a new one.

But he didn't feel like doing that either. He didn't feel like washing the sleep from his face, and he didn't feel like watching the small colourful fish that scattered, startled, whenever anyone dived into the water.

Instead, after crawling out of his hut, he just sat on the beach and let the sand run through his fingers. A little further away, a stately ship lay in the shallow surf. Its heavy

anchor was buried deep in the sand. A rolled up sail hung from its mast and its lookout was overgrown by a climbing plant. Above it, a black flag was flying, bleached and frayed by the constant tugging of the wind. That ship hadn't sailed the sea for many years. A wobbly rope ladder hung down from its side. And right now, the red door leading into the belly of that ship opened and a large man with a beard came out. He rubbed his broad chest and let his sharp seaman's gaze wander across the sea. Then he stopped for a moment, taken aback because he couldn't see a dark-haired head bobbing on the waves, and lifted his arm to discover Jukka standing on the beach instead.

“Good morning, my boy!” he roared into the wind. “Good morning, Captain Bittermoon”, Jukka mumbled back. He didn't care if the captain couldn't hear him.

Captain Bittermoon had given up life at sea a long time ago, almost as long as Jukka had been alive. But he didn't want to leave his ship.

“I wouldn't be able to sleep in a house”, he liked to claim. “Nothing rocks me into sleep as nicely as the waves gently lapping the bow in the evening.”

And so the ship lay on the beach, surrounded by shallow water at high tide. Captain Bittermoon lived on it, and Jukka had also lived on it until it got too cramped for him there and he moved into his hut underneath the palm trees.

Now Bittermoon disappeared into the galley that used to be the wheelhouse to make breakfast. He stuck his head through the door. “Get us some eggs!” he called out to Jukka. “Then we'll have banana pancakes.”

“Pfft”, Jukka sighed as he stretched out in the sand.

There was a nest in one of the high palm trees behind his hut, and Jukka happened to know there were four blue speckled eggs in it. He could have taken two of them and let the bird parents keep the other two so that chicks could hatch from them. But Jukka didn't feel like climbing up the smooth trunk. He didn't feel like doing *anything*.

And maybe he would just have continued to lie in the sand and eventually died from boredom if his stomach hadn't rebelled. Because, as soon as the scent of fresh flatbread wafted over from the ship, his stomach started to growl loudly. So loudly that Jukka finally picked himself up, stomped over to the ship and climbed up the rope ladder.

"No eggs?" Bittermoon asked, putting his arm around Jukka as a greeting.

"Nope", Jukka muttered.

The captain thoughtfully stroked his face. First he stroked the cheek that was raw and stubbly, and then the other one with a fiery red scar stretched taut over his cheek bones.

"Does your scar hurt?" Jukka had asked him several times before.

"No", Bittermoon always answered and gave a deep sigh.

Now he sighed again but for a different reason. "Well, then we'll just have the bananas without the pancake", Bittermoon said. "Are you going to set the table?"

Jukka climbed the narrow stairs to the flat roof on top of the former wheel house, but only because he was starving and because he almost regretted that he hadn't brought the eggs with him. He laid the table with plates, mugs and cutlery. The table was up here because there was no proper kitchen inside the ship and certainly no dining room.

Bittermoon and Jukka ate their breakfast on the roof where the wind tore at their hair and the sun had bleached the colour from the planks.

There was also a cosy rocking chair up here, Captain Bittermoon's favourite spot. It offered a splendid view over the entire bay, over the rocks and the sand and the sea where now and then another ship sailed past, many many miles away. And over the crowns of the palm forest where monkeys vaulted through the canopy and parrots scattered, screaming loudly, when Jukka strolled through the undergrowth. And over the big wide desert beyond the forest. Beyond it, a long distance away, on a clear day, Jukka could sometimes even see the White Mountains. Every day, Captain Bittermoon did an inspection round, walking from one end of the bay to the other to make sure everything was in order. And every evening he jogged from the rocks at the Northern end to the patch of reeds at the Southern end to stay fit. For the rest of the day he liked to sit on the roof, letting the wind rock his chair, crack sun flower seeds and just watch the world go by. He always wore a cap with a wide brim because the burned skin on his right cheek hurt when the sun shone too brightly onto his scar.

Right now, Bittermoon was lumbering up the stairs, a fresh loaf of bread under one arm and a basket with hibiscus jam, a jug of water, vanilla honey, bananas and a few small chocolate tarts under the other.

Bittermoon put the basket on the table and lifted his hand to test the air. "Stiff breeze today", he remarked "Don't want you to be blown off the roof!" He pinched Jukka's cheek, laughing. "That would be my worst misfortune! What use would the most beautiful beach and the best boat be to me if you were blown away?" Jukka flopped onto his chair. "I'm too heavy to be blown away", he growled, sulking.

Bittermoon eyed him carefully. "What's going on with you?" He put a hand on Jukka's forehead. "Are you feeling unwell? Do you have a fever?"

“No”, Jukka mumbled. “I feel perfectly well.” But something restless and jittery was rumbling around inside him, something he couldn’t explain to himself.

During breakfast, the captain tried to engage Jukka in conversation. “What are your plans for today? Are you going to dive for seashells between the cliffs?” “That’s what I did yesterday.”

“Then what about swimming out to the sandbank?”

“I’ve been there a thousand times.”

“Or looking for crabs among the rocks.”

“Don’t feel like it.” Jukka pushed his plate away although there was still half a banana on it.

“I could pack a picnic lunch for you”, Bittermoon suggested. “The sea air gives you an appetite, as we know.” Jukka only groaned and said nothing.

“Well, that’s quite something”, the captain mumbled. “So what’s wrong with you?” Jukka remained silent. Something was indeed wrong, something was missing, but he couldn’t say what. Today was really just a day like any other. As long as he could remember, it had always been like this. Bittermoon’s Bay with Jukka, the captain, and various animals. Jukka didn’t even know that other kids had a mother and brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles and friends.

After breakfast, Jukka fed the two goats already waiting for him in their enclosure at the end of the bay, in the shade of the palm trees.

On the way there, he counted his steps – four hundred and three exactly. And one thousand three hundred and twenty-one steps to the other end of the bay. Fifteen less than the year before, exactly. Because his legs were getting longer. Or the beach was getting smaller.

Jukka kicked a grey pebble in the sand. Probably the same one he'd kicked across the beach yesterday. He sat down on a piece of driftwood, cupping his chin in his hand.

Bittermoon was sitting on the boat in his rocking chair, watching out.

But what for, Jukka asked himself. There wasn't much that could happen to you in the bay, unless you got hit on the head by a coconut or stung by a poison jelly fish.

“I just like to keep an eye on everything”, the captain would say. He watched Jukka climb up high trees, disappear into deep grottoes, and, from the sandbank, observe the shark fins that occasionally glided through the waves. He had his eye on everything, but he never worried.

As long as, well, as long as Jukka didn't mention that one thing. Jukka sat up straight. But *that* one thing was what he was interested in. And today, when he didn't feel like doing anything at all, he was suddenly particularly interested in it.

He trudged back to the ship, feeling determined. He climbed up the rope ladder and then walked up the stairs, making so much noise that he jolted Bittermoon out of his nap. “Is it time for lunch already?”

„No“, Jukka said. He narrowed his eyes and peered over the tops of the big palm trees. To the place where lush green turned into barren yellow. “The desert...” he mused out loud.

Bittermoon coughed. “Oh look, Jukka! Dolphins!” he shouted hoarsely and pointed to the sea.

Jukka had seen many dolphins. Instead of turning around, he crossed his arms over his chest. “I’ve got an idea for what I could do today.”

Captain Bittermoon jumped up so quickly that his rocking chair nearly fell off the roof. “Under no circumstances!”

Jukka inclined his head. “I’d like to know what’s in the desert.”

“I can tell you what’s in the desert”, the captain snorted. “Scorpions and sand fleas.”

“Well then there’s no reason why I shouldn’t go and look at them.”

“Oh oh!” Bittermoon said, swinging his index finger through the air. “You’re only saying that because you’ve never seen a scorpion. One sting, and you’re dead as a doornail.”

Jukka frowned angrily. He pulled the small forked branch from his belt that he’d carved into a sling shot a few days ago and equipped with a rubber band. “I can defend myself.”

Captain Bittermoon’s eyes grew dark and his voice started to tremble a little. “Don’t you like our beautiful beach any more?”

„Of course I do“, Jukka growled. “But a little trip into the desert...”

„What’s the point of having the most beautiful bay and the best boat if you’re stung to death by a scorpion?“ the captain interrupted. A damp veil descended across his blue eyes. Jukka pondered this. He probably was supposed to comfort Bittermoon now but he didn’t really feel like it.

The captain wiped his eyes. “But quite apart from that I need you here today. You’ll have to guard the ship. Good thing you’re armed.”

Jukka felt his stomach drop. “Is it that time again, already?” he asked. Suddenly, he didn’t want to go into the desert any more. He just wanted Bittermoon to sit in his rocking chair and watch out for him.

The captain nodded. “Yes, our sugar and flour are almost finished. And your shirts are getting too small again. It’s time, I’ve got to go.”

Jukka’s throat contracted. „Can I come with you?” Bittermoon sighed and pulled Jukka into his arms. “And who’s going to guard the bay? Who’s going to get the goats into the stable if there’s a storm? Who’s going to clear the roof if it rains? Who’s going to make sure that the monkeys don’t steal anything?” Captain Bittermoon asked. “I’m sure you understand that, don’t you? I need you here. And I’m going to be back really soon.”

In the evening, Captain Bittermoon packed his bag and threw on his travelling coat. “You’re sleeping on the ship tonight?” he said, reassuring himself. “You’re going to guard the ship and the ship is going to watch out for you.” Jukka was sitting on Bittermoon’s big bed that nearly filled his entire cabin, silent. He nodded.

“Be glad you can stay here”, Bittermoon said, lifting the thick soft blanket to let Jukka crawl in. “Out there, you’re bound to encounter crooks and thugs. Thugs who laugh at you and point their fingers at you. Crooks who steal the socks off your feet. You don’t want to do that to yourself, do you?”



Maybe Jukka *did* want to do that to himself, and he couldn't imagine why anyone would laugh or point at him. However he could imagine how dark and sad Bittermoon's eyes would become if he said so. So he continued to say nothing and nodded again.

Bittermoon tugged Jukka into the blanket.

Apart from the bed, the cramped cabin contained only a wooden chest and a shelf with spare clothes and a few tattered books. A bedside table stood next to the bed. On that bedside table, there was a velvet cushion and sitting on that velvet cushion was the Heart of Glass.

Jukka steadied himself on his elbow to get a better look at the fist-sized crystal of smoothly polished glass. In the light of the oil lamp, the Heart of Glass shimmered in a thousand colours that suffused the whole cabin into a rainbow of light. The captain shouldered his bag, wiping off the cool glass just one more time. "I'm leaving my heart with you", he said solemnly. "Watch out for it on my behalf!"

And then the door snapped closed and the planks were creaking as Bittermoon climbed down onto the beach and disappeared into the palm tree forest. Jukka couldn't sleep. The wind was blowing more strongly than usual, shaking the door, so that, again and again, Jukka woke with a start, trying to listen out into the darkness. He could hear the surf lapping the beach. It sounded utterly alien tonight.

"What if I went and Bittermoon had stayed here instead?" he asked aloud into the silence. Would the loneliness creep into his bones like this, too? Jukka clenched his fists underneath the blanket. Only one way to find out.

For a long time, Jukka lay awake, listening out for Captain Bittermoon's footsteps. They would have to come out of the forest again at some point in order to return to the boat across the beach.

As the pale light of morning penetrated into the cabin, Jukka's eyes fell shut after all. He was woken up by clattering noises from the deck and the door swinging open. Bittermoon did try to be quiet but he never really quite managed.

Still half-asleep, Jukka noticed the captain throwing a searching look at the Heart of Glass. Then he felt the bed wobble and the captain rolling in beside him.

"I'm back", Bittermoon grumbled quietly, starting to snore before Jukka could even respond.

Jukka pulled the blanket up to his chin. I'm going to look at the desert soon, he thought. But not today. Today he was glad that Bittermoon had returned safely, completely without any signs of scorpion stings or crook attacks.

Both of them slept in until late morning.

After they got up, Captain Bittermoon was in a decidedly good mood. "Flour and sugar", he declared cheerfully, unpacking his heavy bag "And two shirts for you that you hopefully won't grow out of again within the next three weeks. And also, this!" He let a small net with seven colourful marbles glide into Jukka's hand. "I'm going to show you later how we'll shoot these marbles on deck. Because there's absolutely no reason to be bored on our beautiful beach."

The captain always brought something interesting or useful with him from his nightly forays. Sometimes it was a fish hook for Jukka, sometimes a pair of new shoes, fresh fruit that didn't grow on their beach or in their forest, or tools they didn't own yet. And finally, Captain Bittermoon would take something out of his big backpack that brought a special sparkle to his eyes. "A little present for good old Bittermoon", he would mutter, pleased with himself. The captain then polished his souvenirs, humming quietly. Gold, or jewels, or maybe a valuable

necklace. He would inspect them from every angle and then carefully place them in the heavy chest next to the door.

This time, Captain Bittermoon took a big, shiny black egg from his backpack. Jukka kneeled down next to him and peered into the darkness inside the oaken box. It sparkled and glittered inside. The captain blew carefully on the egg, wrapped it in a soft cloth for protection and bedded it in with the other objects in the chest. He sat there for a moment, as if frozen, looking at his collected treasures in delight.

“Bittermoon“, Jukka burst out, “From where...?” Bang! The lid came crashing down onto the chest.

“Aargh!” the captain scolded. “You nearly squashed my fingers!” He got up, breathing heavily. “Come, I’m famished.” When Jukka managed to squeeze himself outside past him, the captain started to complain. “I’m so glad to be back here again. If you only knew what kind of wretched creatures are running around out there!” He shook himself. “If I could only stay on our beach forever! But we need flour and sugar, don’t we?” The captain tried to catch Jukka’s eye and his approval. Jukka just winced. But Bittermoon was probably right. They did need flour and sugar. He walked up onto the deck in front of the captain. “The main thing is that you’re back again.”

The captain beamed all over his face, saying: “The main thing is that I’m back again!”

The main thing was that they were both doing well. They had their wonderful beach and the sun was shining every day. They had the warm breeze that moved through the palm trees and the splashing of the waves lapping lazily onto the cliff. They had the colourful fish in the water and the screeching parrots in the forest. They had their delicious coconut pancakes and their sweet honey tea.

Jukka had caves to explore and trees to climb, and Captain Bittermoon had his Heart of Glass that glittered inside his cabin and that he sometimes stared at for hours

„How beautiful it is here”, Captain Bittermoon said with a blissful sigh.

Jukka sighed, too, throwing his marbles into the air and catching them again.

“Somehow I’m totally fed up with all that beautiful stuff”, he muttered, so quietly that Bittermoon couldn’t hear it. “It’s time for a little trip.”

[...]

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And the captain was humming.

So Jukka was thinking about the desert again and that it might be well worth a visit. He contemplated talking to Bittermoon about it. But he was sitting in his rocking chair, so deeply lost in his own thoughts, that Jukka preferred to give it a miss. Instead, he climbed down to the beach and drifted in the shallow water for a while.

Now and then he squinted over to the boat where the captain was spitting sun flower seeds over the railing. Should he wait until Bittermoon fell asleep before he dared to embark on a new trip to the desert? He would just roam around in the forest for a bit, looking for Miko. And if he couldn’t find him, he might just walk a little bit further...

Jukka yawned and stretched luxuriously. Maybe it really was too hot today for an excursion. Maybe tomorrow would be better...

Jukka looked over to the boat again. Captain Bittermoon had disappeared!

The chair was still gently rocking back and forth, but the captain was no longer on the roof of the boat. Jukka sat up. He couldn't see Bittermoon, neither in the bow nor at the rear of the boat. And the galley was empty, too.

Had they really run out of provisions again? Jukka wondered. But even if that was the case, Bittermoon wouldn't disappear in the middle of the day without saying goodbye. And certainly not in the midday heat. And when it was time for his nap!

Jukka got up and went over to the boat. The captain would never have left his cosy rocking chair without good reason!

Just as Jukka started to worry, the red door on the ship clattered open and Bittermoon's broad back appeared on deck. He was dragging a big clunky object behind him. Now Jukka trotted down the beach a bit faster. The object that Captain Bittermoon was hauling out of the belly of the ship was the huge old telescope that had been standing around for years, in the junk room of the ship, dusty and untouched.

When Jukka reached the boat and was climbing up the rope ladder, Bittermoon had already heaved the heavy telescope up onto the roof and positioned it on its three long metal legs. Now he was rotating the tiny wheels and adjusting the resolution of the image while peering anxiously through the thick tube. "Can that be possible?" he whispered hoarsely.

Jukka looked across the palm tree forest and the desert. What was the captain looking for? "What are you doing?" Jukka asked.

Captain Bittermoon looked up, startled, and inadvertently pushed the telescope with his hand so that it lurched around and hit Jukka on the head.

„I, I...“ the captain stuttered. "I didn't notice you." He stared at Jukka as if seeing him for the first time.

“Are you hurt?”

Jukka rubbed his scalp. “Not too badly. Can I have a look, too?”

“No!” the captain burst out. He turned the telescope to the other side, so swiftly that Jukka nearly got hit a second time.

Jukka jumped back. “Is this a telescope or a murder weapon? What’s going on?”

Bittermoon grew pale and didn’t say a word. He just nodded and released the telescope.

Jukka craned his neck in order to look through it. As he was trying to hold the telescope still and focus onto a particular spot, Bittermoon whispered, almost inaudibly: “People are coming!”

Jukka looked up from the telescope and asked, incredulous: “People are coming?”

He looked in the direction Bittermoon was pointing his trembling finger. And, indeed, even with his naked eye he could now see a distant blob moving steadily towards the beach. People were coming!

Jukka pointed the telescope towards the blob. His heartbeat hammered in his ears. There, behind the forest where the desert began and where only dry bushes and meagre little trees grew, he could make out a rocky road.

And on that road rode a colourful box wagon with blue streamers. The wagon was pulled by a sturdy white horse. A figure with flaming red hair escaping from underneath a big sun hat was sitting on the coach box. Next to this figure there were two more creatures, and one of them was smaller.

Captain Bittermoon pushed Jukka aside now, so that he could look through the telescope again. “That can’t be real”, he mumbled. “It doesn’t make sense!”

Even without the telescope Jukka could now see the horse trundling along a narrow path that led directly into the palm tree forest. “They’re coming here”, he stated. He clutched at his chest. Was that fierce thumping in there normal, these sounds like a bear waking from hibernation?

“Who is this?” Jukka whispered.

Bittermoon growled so that he could have been mistaken for a bear himself. “Who knows? A witch!”

“A witch?”

The Captain looked at Jukka. “I didn’t say she was an evil witch”, he grumbled. “A *little bit* evil, perhaps.”

Jukka and Bittermoon stood on the roof of the ship, never moving. They stood there while the wagon disappeared behind the palm trees so that they could only glimpse it now and then between the leaves. They stood there without saying a single word, as birds scattered into the air and a bright neighing resounded across the bay. It still took a good long while until the strangers arrived at the beach. Soon, Jukka could see that the red haired person on the coach box was a woman. A woman, similar to the figures in the picture on the wall of captain Bittermoon’s cabin. A few slim creatures were depicted there, with big hats and long hair, with flowing dresses all the way down to the ground and with smooth faces that looked somehow very different from Bittermoon.

“Who is this?” Jukka once asked about the figures in the picture, and Bittermoon snorted: “They’re women.” He said it as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

And now such a tall woman with a wide rimmed straw hat and a flowing blue dress was sitting on the coach box of the wagon moving towards the beach. Next to the woman sat a huge black and white dog. And in the corner, leaning against the wall of the wagon, squatted a child.

Finally, the horse and wagon drove the last few metres through the palm forest, disappeared once more and, a short while afterwards, rolled onto the firm sand.

The woman clicked her tongue. The horse, a stocky giant, trotted towards the boat, warm steam ascending from its nostrils.

“They’re coming to see us”, Jukka said.

“Yes“, Captain Bittermoon answered in a raw voice.

“Should we climb down?“ Jukka asked.

The captain paused briefly, then suddenly threw his arms up in the air and shouted: “Do we have a choice?”

“Are these the crooks and thugs?“ Jukka whispered to Bittermoon as they slowly climbed down the rope ladder to the beach. “We’ll see“, the captain grumbled, nervously pushing his cap around on his head.

The wagon stopped in front of the ship, its wheels crunching the sand.

Captain Bittermoon stepped behind Jukka and put his warm hand onto his shoulder.

Jukka tensed his muscles. If these creatures had come to make trouble then they’d soon see who they were dealing with!



In that moment, the woman raised her hand, with a brilliant smile. “Winnie Bittermoon! Its been such a long time!” Jukka looked from one of them to the other.

“You know her?” he murmured, astonished.

But the Captain didn't react. He didn't do anything at all, just stood there, not moving, until the woman laughed and shouted: “Are you going to help me down over here?”

Jukka blinked, irritated, as Bittermoon's face grew red. The scar on his cheek glowed, even more noticeable than usual.

“Yes, yes, of course“, he said and took a step towards the wagon. He reached out to the woman who leaned on his arm and, with two elegant steps, descended onto the sand.

The big dog immediately jumped after her. And the child also got up. It looked at captain Bittermoon for a moment, checking him out. Then it quickly looked away again. Ignoring Bittermoon's helpful hand, it climbed down the ladder on its own.

Jukka looked at the child, astonished. It had thick hair, plaited into braids, and wore a purple dress that reached just below its bony knees, above laced boots.

The child looked at him briefly but when Jukka tried a smile, it made a noise like “Pfft!” and turned away. The woman dusted her clothes off, then she reached out towards the child and pushed it in front of the captain. “This is my daughter Liliana Lasara.” “Oh” said the captain.

Turning to Jukka, the woman continued: “And I'm Kandidel Wind.“

“Ah!” said Jukka.

Captain Bittermoon finally found his voice. He pulled Jukka closer to himself. “This is, this is my... err... Jukka.”

Kandidel Wind broke into heartfelt laughter. “I’m very pleased to meet you, Jukka!” she shouted, grasped Jukka’s hand and shook it thoroughly.

The captain cleared his throat. “Well, since you’re here anyway, do come in and have some chocolate cake with us.”

“Bittermoon’s chocolate cake!” Kandidel clapped her hands and laughed again. “There’s very few better things in life than that!” She linked arms with Bittermoon and let him lead her towards the ship.

“What are you doing here?” Jukka could hear the captain whisper to her.

He stared after both of them. What on earth did Bittermoon have to whisper about to this witch? Jukka waited for the captain to turn and shout: *Are you coming?* But nothing. The captain was fully occupied with holding the rope ladder so that Kandidel could climb it. It looked as if Bittermoon had forgotten Jukka altogether.

Jukka turned towards the strange child who was unhitching the huge horse. It gave the horse a smack on its rear so that it flew over the sand, tail swishing and mane fluttering. Jukka’s tongue was so heavy in his mouth that he couldn’t utter a single word. The child strolled along the beach with its dog and turned back, looking bored.

“Pleased to meet you!” Jukka shouted eventually. Well, he intended to shout that but it came out all muddled: “Pleasameeya!”

The child stopped and checked him out from head to toe.

Jukka coughed.

“Can’t you speak properly?” the child asked.

Jukka blushed. “Of course I can.” The frog in this throat finally jumped out. “It’s just.. it’s... we’ve never had another boy here on our beach and... I’m pleased to meet you.”

The child fixated Jukka with a penetrating glare. Its eyes became narrow slits. “I’m not a boy.”

Jukka was quickly running out of patience now. “Really? So what are you then? A penguin?”

The child crossed its arms in front of its chest. “I’m a *girl*, you dried-up earth worm.”

Jukka said nothing. *Girl!* He remembered dimly that Bittermoon had once said something about boys and girls. Girls became women, and boys became men.

The *girl* turned her chin up.

Jukka briefly considered pushing her into the sand. But then he thought better of it. “Boy, girl – what difference does it make?”

The girl looked at him, surprised, struggling to find an answer. “It does”, she said. Then she shrugged and admitted: “Not really.” She gave a big sigh and suddenly Jukka felt a bit sorry for her. After all, she was a total stranger here. And maybe she was like Miko, fighting to defend herself with claws and paws because she didn’t know what was happening to her.

So Jukka said kindly: “It’s very nice here in Bittermoon’s Bay. Would you like me to show you where you can find seashells?” The girl blew him a raspberry. “Yikes, seashells are so ugly!”

Jukka clenched his fists in inside his pockets. No, he didn’t feel sorry for this stupid thing at all.

And what now? The girl seemed suddenly ready for a conversation. She put her arms together behind her back and rocked back and forth on her feet. Then she said: “So you’re Jukka?”

“Yes.”

“Jukka – and?”

“And what??”

The girl rolled her eyes impatiently. “I mean, what’s your surname?” “My surname?”

“Are you a parrot?”

Parrot? Jukka was on the point of saying but he bit his tongue.

“Everyone has a surname”, the girl declared. “My name is Liliana Lasara Wind. My mother’s name is Kandidel Wind. You captain’s name is Bittermoon. And *your* name is just Jukka?”

Jukka raised his eyebrows. “Yes, just Jukka.”

The girl snorted. “Even my dog has a surname!”

Jukka looked over at the dog lying in the shade of the box wagon.

“Bo Knorre!” the girl shouted.

The dog cocked his ear, got up and came towards them, wagging his tail.

“This is Bo Knorre”, the girl said by way of introduction.

Bo Knorre looked at Jukka, sniffed at him a bit and pushed his damp nose against Jukka’s belly in a friendly manner. Jukka scratched him behind the ear.

“Just be careful”, the girl warned. “He doesn’t like strangers.” She pulled the dog back by his collar. Jukka lowered his hand.

“So the captain isn’t your father then?” the girl asked innocently.

“He found me... between these cliffs over there”, Jukka said, with barely suppressed anger. “He’s kind of... how can I explain it... a kind of substitute mother.”

Liliana Lasara hesitated and inclined her head. Then she burst out laughing. “I’ve never seen a mother with such a big beard! Everyone has parents, you know.” Her eyes sparkled.

“Oh do they?” Jukka asked. “And where’s your father then?” That stopped the girl in her tracks, just for a tiny moment. “My father lives in a wonderful house close to the White Mountains. And I could visit him any time I wanted. Except when he doesn’t have time. Because he really has a lot to do sometimes and he often needs to travel.”

Jukka shrugged. “I have the captain and the beach. Most people don’t have that.”

“But your parents...” Liliana Lasara started up again.

But Jukka had had it with her. He took a step towards her and stretched out his arms as if he needed to scatter a swarm of demented sparrows away. “My mother is a parrot and my father is a dried-up earth worm, you know? Any other questions?”

The girl retreated, looking frightened. Then she giggled and pressed her lips together until they formed a small smile.

“And why do you even need such long name?” Jukka asked. “I’m going to call you Lila.”

With these words he turned around triumphantly and stomped off over the sand. He took big steps, waiting for Lila to call him back. Like Captain Bittermoon did when Jukka was offended and marched off. For example when he was supposed to clean his ears again although he’d only done it last week. The captain would then call him back after a few

metres, in a conciliatory voice, and say that the ear cleaning could be postponed after all. But now Jukka had almost reached the sea and Lila still wasn't calling him.

Maybe she was wondering how to apologize. That was probably why the dog was barking at her so reproachfully. She likely felt embarrassed at how she had acted, Jukka thought. She was almost certainly wondering how to make it up to him. Maybe a little present? There had to be a lot of space for a lot of stuff in that box wagon, and she surely would...

But Lila didn't call him.

Jukka was now up to his ankles in water and didn't know what he was doing there. He turned back towards Lila – but Lila had disappeared.

Jukka looked at the ship. He looked at the box wagon. No one to be seen. No one calling him. No one looking for him. The beach was empty and the sea rippled lazily around him. Jukka didn't have the faintest idea what to do with himself now. He sulked, squatting on a rock in the shallow water, throwing pebbles into the waves. The horse was nibbling on a few bushes at the edge of the forest, Bo Knorre was asleep. And there was no sign of Lila.

She was probably sitting inside the dark cramped wagon, fretting about it all. He was sure she was waiting for him to come and get her out of there.