



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
Elementary-school teacher
August Reinhold Hallström
and two of his three sons:
Gustaf and Thord.

CHAPTER I

Boyhood, 1878–1893

MY BROTHERS Gunnar and Gustaf, nephews, and nieces have been asking me for years to write my life story. I have been busy with other things, but now that both my brothers are in Valhalla and I am sitting on my own here in Florida, memories sneak up on me. That is why I think it good to write, if only a little.

To delve the strange treasure of the soul that we call memory is a fascinating experience: It shapes our attitude to the good and the bad in life. Most fascinating, maybe because they are so elusive, are the lost details of childhood. These memories often seem so alive and clear, at other times obscure, less real even than dreams. These indistinct glimpses into the past are often frustrating cloud shadows, constantly changing.

We know that we remember something – but what?

I have often plunged into the well of memories. At times during field service I would lie on my back on the ground and try to look beyond the stars in the night sky. I would wonder what life is all about. In particular I would wonder about impressions of childhood that emerged from this pious state of wakeful dreams. The mind wants to dwell on them, turn them over, examine, and recall them with greater clarity. Sometimes a few words in an old letter or diary – or innocent remarks by a stranger – serve as trigger. Sometimes a triviality, against one's wishes, forces thought back to another epoch. A small boat, just a tuft of grass, or a wild gooseberry bush can do that.

Some memories have importance only to the person in question, so I will simply mention a few of those that might be of interest to later generations or have a place in the family archives.

Family chronicles show that I was born in Stockholm at one in the morning on 17 April 1878 and weighed nine pounds. My earliest memories revolve around our home at the tip of Mariaberget in Southern Stockholm. Lake Mälaren lay below us and beyond it were the city's northern parts. To the east could be seen the oldest parts of Stockholm, with some round towers that remained from the eleventh century or earlier. Best of all were the trees, bushes and tall grass that grew

wild in front of our house, all the way down to the water. This semi-wild mountain refuge was of course for us boys filled with Red Indians and Vikings, with and against whom we waged all kinds of imaginable wars. When I was not a Viking, I was always an Indian chief. These roles were sometimes contested, particularly by my older brother Gunnar, especially the role of Viking chief.

I remember, far back, as in a haze, a large fire burning on the other side of Mälaren, approximately where the present City Hall now stands. Years later, even my father could not tell me when it was. I reminded him of it when I returned home after some years abroad in 1912. He said, ‘It could have been the big mill that burned to the ground in 1879, but you were only a year old then.’ Around the same time there was another event that was just as mysterious. I remember enormous fireworks around Mälaren. Because my memory was very clear about this, I asked Father about it, also in 1912. He answered, ‘There were large fireworks when Nordenskjöld, (the Polar explorer), returned with the SS Vega in 1879 after completing the Northeast Passage, but you were far too young to remember that.’

As these events are totally clear in my memory, they must have amazed me. Is it possible that at the age of one I had been lying in my cradle, close to the window and really saw these things?

A rather unusual phenomenon occurred around the year 1883. At dusk, meteors started to fall – not just one but thousands – a meteor shower. It was a frightening sight for a five-year-old boy, and when the people around us started to pray and sing hymns, my brother Gustaf and I were more practical. We crept under a bed.

In February 1884, before I turned six, I stood by a window and looked beyond Mälaren. The matchbox I was playing with exploded and the curtains caught fire. The house would have burned to the ground if Mother had not acted as swiftly and resolutely as she did.

The memory of this terrible fire is incredible; flames, heat and the clamour – everybody screaming except Mother. Calmly, as always, she rescued me and did whatever else needed to be done.

Apart from our home in the city, my earliest memories are centred on two islands, Björkö and Adelsö. Our summer house was situated on Adelsö for some time but we often went to nearby Björkö.

This island was about two miles long and half a mile wide, situated on Lake Mälaren about twelve miles west of Stockholm. Both these islands had wonderful forests and fields, which teemed with game and wild berries. The lake itself was full of fish. What more could a boy or a man wish for?

Björkö was our favourite of these two islands because we had learned that once the Viking settlement Birka stood there with its majestic fortress controlling the surrounding countryside far and wide. When I was a boy the northern part of Björkö was marked by decaying remainders of this once-proud fortress. Thousands of Viking graves could be seen all over the island. Björkö and Birka are two names for one and the same island. During the Viking era the name Birka referred to the town and the fortress, but today it refers to the whole island. When it actually

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became a Viking stronghold is lost in legend and the uncertain mists of ancient Swedish history.

It is believed that Birka was founded around AD 500 at the time of King Ottar, who died in 528.

That Birka flourished during the eighth century as a trade centre for the Swedish Vikings is a known fact, affirmed in the Hamburg-Bremen chronicles of the Catholic Church.

The fortress was built on the highest point of the mountain on the north side of the island. It was about 180m long and 150m wide on the inside and consisted mainly of two large ramparts that surrounded the highest point on three sides. One of them is hard to map out today. The other varies from 7.5m to 40m in width at the base but is only 2m high on the inner side.

The ramparts were built with large stones, gravel, and soil and have three gates. The place has decayed over hundreds of years and erosion has taken its toll. The rampart is now covered with grass and moss, but as thousands of visitors walk monthly across this national monument, more of it will erode with time. On the western side of the stronghold there was no need for a rampart as the cliff dropped almost vertically around 30m into Mälaren's waters. At the tip of this precipitous slope large stones were strategically placed to be rolled down onto the enemy below.

Of the town Birka there was no trace. It has been flattened to the ground. But the black soil that it stood on was filled with archeological treasures, as were the Viking graves.

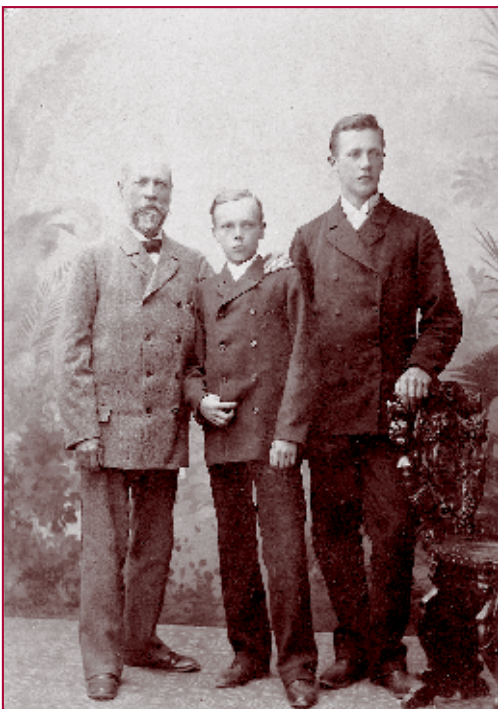
The fortress was erected as a retreat for the Vikings' families and for the merchants of Birka. The city also had a protective rampart, at least on the eastern side.

Other than that there are outlines of ramparts at the entrance to at least one of the small bays on the island's northern coast, where it is believed that the large dragon ships moored for protection against storms as well as enemies.

To the north, east, and south of the fortress the ground was covered by 3 000 Viking graves lying side by side as far as the eye could see.

This abundance of burial mounds all the way into the woods fascinated us boys. We believed we heard strange whispering among the sleeping warriors when the wind sighed through the birches, pines, and junipers. We were susceptible to impressions, but I must admit that I have the same feeling now as I did then when I walk (as I do every year) through this sacred place.

An observant person wandering around Björkö might wonder how seafaring Viking ships could find shelter from the elements and enemies in the small shallow bays around the island. The explanation is that the land has risen several feet above sea level. Today's shallow bays were more than adequate anchorage for the eighth and ninth century Viking ships. The phenomenon is best spotted at the 550-yard long meadow in the middle of the kidney-shaped island. This lowland, now about



five feet above water, was originally the seabed of the strait that divided Birka into two islands about a thousand years ago. When the fortress was built, the waves of Mälaren washed the foot of the mountain. Today, however, the ground is dry and firm and covered by trees and bushes.

The Frankish monk Ansgar reached the Vikings in Birka in the year 828 to preach Christianity, with some success. But the new religion made no difference to the constant warfare in the region. War followed upon war, until one day seemingly impregnable Birka was taken by surprise and fell – while most of its warriors were away at sea. It was ravaged by fire after a battle, but no one seems to know against whom.

It is possible that a strong fleet of pirating Varangians sought revenge and booty when they attacked and set fire to Birka around AD 1 000.

Volumes have been written and will continue to be written about Birka. It is not my intention to dig deep into its history because you boys know the place so well. However, generations to come may not remember this Viking stronghold; hence these notes. Enough has been said, but I can hardly end my words about Birka without mentioning Rurik, my favourite Viking.

No one knows for sure when and where Rurik was born, but it could very well have been in or near Birka, which he later used as a base for his operations. In Russian history, Rurik's name is mentioned by the Chudes, one of the tribes living in western Russia. The Chudes' chronicles from the year 6 370 (AD 859) tell how they invited the Varangian Rurik and his two brothers to help Novgorod against an enemy. Other Vikings or Tartars could have put pressure on the rich city of Novgorod from the east. It is not clear if Rurik accepted this invitation. We know that he and his brothers sailed off and captured Novgorod and its surroundings in AD 862 and that thereafter he ruled as chief.

Rurik was not satisfied to rule only over Novgorod, so he made expeditions southward. When he moved inland, he did not burn his ships or leave them behind – he took them with him. When a river's current was unsuitable, the ships were placed on logs and pulled overland by manpower until they could be launched on water again.

This was not a novelty: All Vikings living by Lake Mälaren had to move their ships in this fashion over the tight lowlands at the southern end of the lake. The same method was used by Rurik's descendants to get to Constantinople and by other Vikings who invaded France.

Rurik went on conquering in true Viking style. Cities and large areas were taken in all directions, including Smolensk on the Dnieper River and then Kiev, which became the new capital of the Viking dynasty. While Rurik pushed inland into western and southern Russia, his Vikings also contested control of the coastal areas of the Baltic with Danish and Norwegian Vikings. The Varangians were mainly Suiones mixed with a small number of Danish and Norwegian Vikings. Their raids and conquests towards the end of the first millennium extended to the Orkney Islands, Ireland, England, France, and even further south. The name Varangian comes from the Icelandic Vaeringar (meaning united). The Varangians

were also named Rus or Ros. Some think that the name originates from Roden, today's Roslagen, the name of the archipelago east of Stockholm facing Russia, where many Vikings lived. Others believe the word derives from the name of Rurik himself.

Whatever the derivation, the important point is that Rus or Ros was the origin of the name Russia, which came to be used for the area of Viking settlements around Kiev and the Dnieper. It is interesting to note that a Swede in today's Finland is still called Ruotsi and in Estonia, Rots.

The Vikings made extensive plundering raids south of Kiev. They reached the Black Sea and raided along its entire coast. Still not satisfied, they turned their eyes to the Greek Empire's rich capital, Constantinople. The Vikings called the city Miklagård (a large fortress or city). Chief Oleg, a relative of Rurik, set sail for Constantinople with a large fleet in 866 and forced the Greeks to pay a huge ransom in gold, silver, wine, fruits, and expensive cloth.

The Viking Rurik founded the Rurik Dynasty. All the Russian Tsars that followed him for approximately 700 years originated from this remarkable man. He died in 879 but the Rurik Dynasty did not come to an end until Tsar Feodor died in 1598. The Swedish Vikings that did not return to Sweden married Russians. Being a minority, they were absorbed into the population.

They were an important part of the early Russian population, but their descendants became part of the Slavic people.

Final comments on Björkö: in 1834 Swedish Protestants raised a monument on Björkö to honour the memory of the fanatical Catholic monk Ansgar. They may have been right to do so, but the large Anglo-Irish cross should not have been raised in the middle of the Viking stronghold.

The act testifies to short-sightedness, bad taste, and a deliberate attempt to desecrate the memory of our ancestors. Not another word about Björkö and the Vikings: I want my thoughts to circle for a while, around you – the third and fourth generations. It is uncertain if future generations will be inspired by the same things as us. Therefore it would be good if some of your ancestral spirit could connect to future generations.

Our descendants ought to know how we have been affected by our love for Björkö, Mälaren, and Roslagen with its ten thousand islands.

My father, a cross-country ski champion in 1881, took us on long hikes as often as he could. We played among the graves of Viking chiefs, and hunted in the forests with homemade bows and arrows. We often had to fish for our dinner and pick wild berries for dessert, but we got all the coarse, hard Swedish bread we could eat and water to drink. This was not satisfactory to us, but it was the old man's way of keeping us in shape, giving us good health and strong teeth.

Many and fascinating were the myths and legends Father told of the Vikings. He was a master at this art. He had a fine voice, and he recited and sang the legends in a captivating way. He instilled the feeling of the past in his sons and created a deep-rooted pride in our land and people. He could somehow make the

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stones, the ground, the trees, and even the air itself vibrate in harmony with the memory of these ancient warriors.

Our beings became imbued with the essentials of their greatness, and we longed to replicate the example of their bravery. Father's stories built a romantic background to my life. Every burial mound became sacred to me – in every way a holy place. It is not strange that I was to take refuge on this island during my first adventure. I did so as naturally as a carrier pigeon returning home.

No childish planning preceded my first daring venture: Only dread and fear of the future pushed me forward. I was eight years old but fairly strong and active and maybe a bit reckless.

A lovely girl called Mary was in my class. All the boys liked her. I thought myself the favourite and was vexed by the attention another boy showed her. On 29 May 1886 he insisted on carrying her books and so the fight was on.

We were evenly matched in strength and I fought hard but not really skilfully. I rushed blindly at him, like someone berserk, to force him to the ground. My violent attack made him stumble backwards and he stepped through a cellar window. To my horror, he disappeared into the darkness below. A shiver went up my spine when I looked down into this terrible abyss. I could not even catch a glimpse of what I assumed was his lifeless body. I called out but got no answer. Very scared, I ran to the female caretaker and told her that the boy had fallen. Then I ran down the street, putting as much distance as I could between myself and the scene of the tragedy.

I ran non-stop to the waterfront, where some ships were anchored. Here I lost my cap but could not stop to pick it up. A thought occurred to me. I should go to Björkö and hide among the burial mounds and in the forest. With this idea in mind I went to the steamer destined for Björkö. I was lucky: I arrived just as they were pulling in the gangway.

Without thinking about the consequences I jumped aboard. Nobody paid attention to me, but my conscience was heavy with the terrible thing I had done. Full of remorse and despair I hid among the barrels in the deck cargo. My thoughts circled around my situation.

Even now that I am eighty-four years old, I feel sorry for that lonely little boy. I mourned my friend, whom I had really liked and whose death I had caused. I wondered about my mother, about what she would think and how much she would worry when she found me gone. I struggled with the wish to return home but I remained in hiding. As far as I can remember, my objective was clear but my heart was heavy.

When my confusion dissipated I focused on my problem and formed a childish but decisive plan. Yes, I would hide in the forest for some time and then go to sea and become a great captain. Then I would return home to Stockholm and make up for the pain I had caused. (A week earlier I had read about Hernán Cortés in Mexico.) I awakened from my daydreams as the boat edged towards the jetty at Björkö. I had to get ashore quickly, as the boat only docked for a minute or two. My hiding place among the barrels was close to the starboard gunwale, next to the

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wooden jetty. I looked around and saw two passengers standing close to the jetty, each with a ticket in hand to give to the mate at the gangway.

I awaited my moment, then sneaked away from the barrels and climbed the gunwale onto the jetty without anyone noticing. I lost no time getting into the nearby trees and thereafter to the old fortress. From a suitable lookout I saw the boat leave and watched the two passengers make their way to a farm about a kilometre from the jetty.



When they were out of sight, a feeling of security washed over me. The burden of fear and guilt eased, but the need for a hideout was still my priority. I felt free and happy on this romantic island and headed northeast from the fortress to a small bay where the Vikings had anchored their ships for protection against north-westerly storms and enemies.

It was now late in the afternoon. Suddenly I experienced an unpleasant emptiness and feeling of loneliness. I fought a growing feeling of abandonment and compelled my dreams of bravery and honour to return. But my imagination let me down. I threw myself onto the damp sea grass on the beach, extremely unhappy and very hungry.

The severity of my situation terrified me, but I forced myself to stop thinking of my needs, of the cold and my tiredness. I fell asleep. I awoke about midnight, frozen and stiff. I stood up and anxiously looked around. It was a dark night and there was a powerful northerly wind. Heavy clouds brushed the treetops in the black, ghostly forest ahead.

I have often tried to analyse my thoughts standing on that beach. I remember staring out towards the lake but seeing only the waves pounding the beach at my feet and feeling as if every incoming wave would pull me down into the cold, black depths. With a shiver I turned toward the forest but found it to be even less hospitable than the lake. In my excited state I saw a ghost behind every bush and a troll behind every tree. Since then I have spent many nights in the earth's densest tropical jungles, but none has ever seemed so dark and terrifying as the forest did that night. I suppose an instinctive act of self-preservation forced me into the forest. At first reluctant and timid, I approached it slowly, but once inside, I began to run. The small village was only a kilometre away and I knew the road, but a storm was raging. The night was terribly dark and the thickets very dense. I ran wildly, my mind a playground for fear of unspeakable dangers. In a while I understood that I had lost my way in the confusion. This made me nervous and I increased my speed, but my strength was giving way. I tripped and fell (it seemed) a thousand times. The trolls were after me, my knees were giving way, and then a ghost caught me from behind. I felt myself turning in the air and then I fell again. I do not remember anything else.

It was clear daylight when I regained consciousness. I looked around to find that my clothes had caught in the branch of a tree and caused me to fall. I was frozen and almost sick with hunger. This must have encouraged me to walk towards the

farm. The farmer and his wife were very kind. Their daughter Elvira, about five years old, was happy to get a playmate.

I told them I had permission from my parents to stay on the island, which was a white lie of course. They gave me food and took care of me. About a week later, Elvira and I went to meet the SS Ekholmen. While I was on the jetty a man came down from the steamer and asked me, ‘Aren’t you Mr Hallström’s boy Thord?’ I answered yes, but as the steamer was about to leave the man rushed back onboard. I think he was a Captain Lindberg.

The following day, 4 June 1886, the farmer took hold of me sternly, led me to the jetty, and put me on the steamer destined for Stockholm. Now I started to worry, because Father, although a fair kind of a man, was also a disciplinarian. When we got home, Mother was in bed with a newborn baby girl. Father was so happy to see me alive that he did not give me a beating. When the commotion of my return had died down and my sister Lydia’s birthday had passed, Father told me how they had grieved for days, thinking that I had drowned.

A prominent Stockholm newspaper carried the following article on the first or second day of June 1886 under the headline ‘Child Lost’:

‘An 8-year-old boy, Thord Hallström, son of elementary school teacher Hallström, who lives in house number 41 at Öfre Badstugatan, has not returned home since 29 May, when he went on an errand in the city after school. He has not been found in spite of the efforts of his disconsolate father, who searched [for him] both day and night. It is feared that the boy has met with an accident and been killed.’

The year 1887 brought a big change into our young lives: We moved our summer home from Adelsö, on the freshwater lake Mälaren, to Grofstanäs in Roslagen northeast of Stockholm, which has salt water from the Baltic sea. Grofstanäs was divided into three thriving farms – Södergården, Norrgården and Mellangården. We rented Södergården. The farmer had a nice family, a boy, Gustaf, and three girls, Emily, Amanda, and Selma, approximately our age. We had a boat and discovered all the fishing spots in the vicinity. As soon as we settled in, Father built what we called the ‘Vilan’, a kind of temple or pavilion. It was situated on some firm rocks on an isthmus opposite our jetty and had a wonderful view over many islands. We boys helped to clear the bushes behind the Vilan and discovered several burial mounds of stone. According to authorities at the Museum of History, these dated from the Viking era. If ever we wanted to go fishing after this discovery, Father would ask, ‘Have you tended to your ancestors’ graves?’ If not, no fishing. So these six burial mounds became the best cared for in the country. We were not allowed to dig for treasures in these graves, which was of course annoying.

One of my favourite activities at Grofstanäs was riding the farmyard horses to their pasture in the evening and returning them the following morning. Father and especially Mother were pleased at this, and I became really good at bareback riding. When I was out of sight, I used to trot and gallop, and then I began jumping over small hurdles. This went on for several years and I became quite a competent horseman.

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One day Father discovered a boat lying deep in the soft clay near the jetty. He examined it thoroughly and started to dig it out. It took two summers to do this work. The hull was 21m long and made of oak, which had been blackened by years in the salty clay. It was like black velvet and soft to the touch. He had a table made from some of the planks. It was given to me after his death, but Gustaf used it as a writing table in his home for many years. Now that Gustaf has died I ought to give it to one of the boys.

We all thought that it was a Viking ship, and maybe it was, though my father judged it not to be older than the thirteenth or fourteenth century.

In 1889 another very difficult change occurred. We seemed to have been uprooted. We moved from our home on the mountain to Hornsgatan 94 because somebody started building a large block of flats in front of our house. This would spoil our view and take away part of our playground.

The house which we moved to was owned by Uncle Erik Lindström, a friend of Father's. We liked him, not only because he was kind to us: He had a lovely yacht and was a member of the Royal Swedish Sailing Society. The name on his cutter-rigged yacht was *Hebe*.

After my notorious Björkö adventure, Father and I were brought closer together. This probably began when I surprised him while he was target shooting with a small-bore rifle. It was a .22 calibre and had a simple back-loading mechanism. I have to say that he was a wonderful shot.

Many years earlier he had been a hunter with a great reputation when he was working in the forests in Norrland. Then he had carried a long-barreled musket, probably something similar to the reputable Kentucky Longrifle so popular in America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

I asked my father for permission to shoot. He issued a lot of instructions and handed me the rifle. I took to it like a duck to water and my father was very pleased. From that day he allowed me to practice twice a week. Father was an excellent instructor. It was not long before I was the best marksman in my class. Owing to this interest in rifle shooting and a growing wish for promotion in the school battalion, I neglected my other studies. I failed miserably in my academic subjects but was usually the leader in all outdoor games and physical activities.

One day the inspector of military exercises came to the parade ground, which he did only on rare occasions. He gave the order for a manoeuvre in close order. Something went wrong in our platoon and the whole company was a total shambles. The inspector was probably a former army officer and knew what to do. He removed the leader of the platoon from the formation and ordered the commander of the company (my favourite teacher) to take charge. The teacher was surprised, but his eyes quickly scanned over the platoon and caught mine. He was unafraid but needed help. Without a word passing between us, I stepped forward and calmly took over the command of the platoon. The whole incident passed so quickly that the inspector did not notice anything unusual. When everything

proceeded well, I continued as leader of the platoon, which was the highest rank a student could attain.

Father wished me well in my promotion but I know that he grieved over my bad examination results.

In 1891 something occurred to hurt my pride and make me very angry. My school selected a team for an inter-schools shooting competition. I was considered by some to be unsuitable for selection because I was too young and my grades too poor. But I had the top results in marksmanship so I was included in the team. There were objections from parents who wanted to see their sons on the team. When my father challenged them to shoot against me to settle the question, no-one took up the challenge.

The competition took place on 10 March 1891 on the army rifle range at Ladugårdsgårde. My school did not win, but I took first prize as an individual shot. My name was called to collect the prize, a beautiful hunting knife.

What appealed to me most was the man on horseback who handed it to me. He was a magnificent looking man with a Napoleonic beard named General Rappe. He looked sternly at me and asked, ‘How old are you?’ I answered that I was thirteen. ‘You seem older than that and you shoot like a man,’ he responded. ‘You will become a good soldier one day.’ He gave me the knife with a friendly smile. I turned to leave, convinced that one day I would become a cavalryman and be a general like him. Twenty six years later I fulfilled my wish.

I must also mention that my father’s shooting instructions served me well in South Africa six years later. I had just enlisted with the renowned Cape Mounted Riflemen (CMR) in 1897 when the rifle team was selected to shoot in the Queen’s Cup at Bisley. We nine new recruits were asked if we could shoot. Two of us were sent to the shooting range to be tested. Two weeks later I was a member of the CMR team sent to Bisley to compete against all the regiments in the Commonwealth. It was Queen Victoria’s Jubilee year. To be a member of this team was seen as a great honour. We did not win, but we probably could have.

A tribal uprising in Pondoland interrupted it all and we were rushed off to quell the rebellion.

When we returned from Ladugårdsgården, my father praised me for my shooting but asked me at the same time to concentrate as much on my studies.

‘If you manage in Mathematics, you shall have your own gun for Christmas,’ he promised, I studied day and night and made some progress, but not enough to satisfy me. Mathematics appealed to me but I had to work hard to force it into my wooden head. It was annoying to see my brother Gustaf walking along the street reading his homework on the way to and from school, and yet he still did so well at his studies.



I can only guess what my father’s thoughts were, but long before Christmas he asked me to go with him to look at some rifles that were for sale. We came to an old house behind Birger Jarls statue on Riddarholmen and there in a grand room were a large number of old army rifles. In a corner stood four double-barreled

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shotguns that interested my father. I noticed a long rifle with a bayonet, which I proudly handed to my father. He told me to return it, as he wanted a shotgun for bird hunting. Apparently he was not satisfied with the shotguns and we left, but on the way out I grabbed hold of the rifle again. In the end it was bought for ten crowns. I was the happiest boy in the city, even though I had to pay for it myself. It was an old muzzle-loading matchlock musket. When we arrived at the tram station my father insisted on taking a private compartment because of the long gun with bayonet. That was something I could not understand.

Owing to some misunderstanding concerning the rental agreement, we did not go to Grofstanäs one summer but went instead to Gäddö, a few kilometres from Norrtälje. The village was situated on an inlet with some rocks at its mouth.

While I was fishing early one morning, I saw four seals lying on the rocks and ran home for my gun with the idea of securing my mother a sealskin fur coat. I loaded it carefully at home with a full charge of black powder and my homemade lead ball, which was a bit too big and difficult to push down the barrel. The calibre was large, probably similar to that of a 12-bore shotgun. As it was early morning no one had disturbed the animals. I did my best but I could not get closer than about 180m. I was afraid somebody might alert the animals, so I took careful aim and fired. The report sounded like cannonfire and the recoil almost threw me over. People came out of their cottages to see what had caused the explosion. The seals had disappeared from the rocks, so Mother had to do without her fur coat.

This precious rifle is now in my nephew Sten Hallström's custody, as he took care of it after my father's death, while I was in Malaya. I am afraid I left the gun in Sweden still loaded and have often wondered if anyone knew that.

(Author's Note: We did not know. We used to put touch-powder on the touchhole when we played war games with the musket. On one such occasion, in about 1918, a spark ignited the old ammunition and discharged a hail of pellets, only just missing me. AG Hallström.)

The following summer, Father rented Norrgården in Grofstanäs. The owner's wife had an old uncle whose name was Kasper – a very important person from my point of view, as he owned a double-barreled breechloading shotgun. Kasper must have been a lonely man as he often came to talk to me, a 13-year-old boy. I liked to listen to his stories about the sea, and I learned a lot.

One day I was allowed to go with him to Lustigräsket, a beautiful lake in the forest, and he let me carry his shotgun. As we were walking, he instructed me on how to climb a fence with the gun and how to carry it while walking. On the lake there was a small house with a combined living room and kitchen on the ground floor and another room in the attic upstairs. Kasper rejected the house as it was too damp for him and we made our bed in a small barn filled with fresh hay, which I liked a lot.

When we rose around 3 o'clock the following morning we heard several shots and duck flying over the house. This drove the old man crazy and he said, 'Let's go back home.' On the way he told me about a lake in Sikaskogen about two to three kilometres away, which was always full of wild duck and where the forest was

full of deer and elk. The following day Uncle Kasper was taken ill and remained sick for several days, which almost thwarted my plans to get a duck. I decided to go alone with my own gun. With this intention I went to Kasper so that he could describe the route to Sikaskogen and the lake.

I did not think that he was suspicious as he described in detail the shortcut to get there. As it turned out, he was suspicious and it was in my best interest. He told my father that I was intending to hunt ducks and elk with a musket in Sikaskogen. Father, who was a keen hunter, must have liked the idea, but said nothing as I wandered away with my gun to get ‘squirrel’. Without my knowledge, he was stalking me like a deer.

Kasper’s directions were good and, half running in my eagerness, I was in the forest before I realised it. The distance was further than I had expected, the gun was heavy and my cache of home-made lead bullets weighed me down. Then I noticed large animal footprints in soft ground. All tiredness was gone and I prepared myself for the elk hunt. I knew that these were elk tracks because Uncle Kasper had shown me what they looked like.

I turned around to look for the animals and noticed water and plentiful duck swimming around. It had to be Kasper’s lake. I had loaded the gun with a bullet large enough to kill an elephant. Kasper had told me many times not to aim at swimming ducks. You have to shoot them when they are on the wing. I had done a lot of target practicing but now I wondered if I could hit a flying duck with just one bullet. As I was unsure and could not return empty handed, I lured the ducks as Uncle Kasper had taught me. Sure enough, two of them came swimming to my hideout behind some bushes. When one was about 50 metres away, I fired and blew its head off. Now I was faced with another problem. How could I get the bird onto the beach? I could not leave it out in the water, so I undressed and went into the water after it. Holding it in my hand was a bit awkward, so I took the neck between my teeth and that’s how I brought it to land, like a retrieving dog.

When I had dressed I felt very hungry and decided to go home to get supper. On my way back I got a bit lost, which made me rather late but still in time for supper. I showed off my beautiful bird, which I had carried several kilometres, and received a horrible shock. The farmer’s wife looked at it, laughed, and said, ‘This is an eider, famous for its soft down but unfit for eating.’ Dad, no doubt seeing my embarrassment, came to my rescue by suggesting that we should hang the bird in a tree for two or three days before we ate it. When the time came to eat it he gave me a large portion, which I haughtily accepted. But I have not enjoyed duck since!

Time went by, another summer and winter passed and I seemed to be at a standstill academically, even though I had studied properly during the winter. A dangerous thought came into my head: Maybe I was stupid! So I decided to go to sea lest I bring shame to my father. After a few days of persuasion he agreed, but decided that I had to have a decent start and got me to sign on the training ship, the *Abraham Rydberg*.



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