‘I was exuberant when I got the order to take the helm. Only a few sails were set, but with a favourable breeze from the stern we sailed proudly past thousands of islands on this beautiful, sunny day. I felt as if the world belonged to me.’

Chapter II
Seafaring, 1893–1895

ON 1 MAY 1893 I began as a trainee on the *Abraham Rydberg*. It was a lovely, small, full-rigged ship under the command of Captain Claes Silfversparre, a very fine man who had previously been a member of the Swedish Royal Navy. The first and second mates were also men from the navy. Every mast was under the command of a navy boatswain. The rest of the crew consisted of 63 trainees. As a rule they were promoted to petty officer after proving themselves worthy, but sometimes simply according to their age. Silfversparre ended this practice, which did not always produce good results.

The ship had been loaded, and all the brass was shining like new coffeepots. We were ready for service at sea. Before I left home, my mother put a parcel in my knapsack containing two books on Mathematics and asked me to study every day, even if only a little. These two books – one of them quite advanced – changed my whole life without a doubt. Father and Gustaf came to say farewell, and I felt a lump in my throat when they left.

We sailed from the dock at Djurgården on 5 June 1893, and I was exuberant when I got the order to take the helm. Only a few sails were set, but with a favourable breeze from the stern we sailed proudly past thousands of islands on this beautiful, sunny day. I felt as if the world belonged to me.

To try to describe this time with the *Abraham Rydberg* would be foolish, almost sacrilegious, but the memories and experience have never left me. Therefore I skip it, except to mention that we stopped at Sandhamn, Karlshamn, Helsingör, Göteborg, and Karlskrona.

We were back in Stockholm on 22 August 1893.

While I was working on the usual offloading of the *Abraham Rydberg* in August 1893, a beautiful ship came to Stockholm and moored at Djurgården, an unusual place for a ship of its kind. It was the full-rigged ship the *Hawkesbury*, built in Sunderland, England, in 1868 for cargo and passenger traffic to Australia, but bought by a Swedish company in 1888. She was 1 164 gross tons, 60m long, and 7.5m wide, with a draught of 7.3m. It was the largest ship I had ever seen. The

captain was NP Nordfeldt, a robust man of forty five years. The first mate was Andersson, a gruff but kind man. The second mate was Carl Wink, a lively young man, only twenty years old. The ship had a crew of twenty. My first voyage on the *Abraham Rydberg* had left me with a liking for the sea, and I fell in love with the *Hawkesbury* at once. I asked Father about signing on, but Mother thought I should return to school. She gave in when Father suggested that it would do me good and calm my wild Viking tendencies.

Eric Halmborg, a neighbour and peer, joined me. We were paid 20 crowns a month, which included payment for loading and unloading the ship.

The second day on board, I saw two large rats going ashore along the thick ropes that moored the ship. I told Erik, who was the son of a sea captain and seemed knowledgeable. He suggested I tell the first mate. When I did so the first mate asked me not to say a word to the crew, for they were superstitious when it came to rats that abandoned ship just before it sailed. It was indeed a sign of bad luck, but not for us: The first mate paid the price!

After loading some timber in Stockholm, we sailed on 17 October 1893 to Västervik. There we loaded more planks, and on 4 November we set sail with a heavy load of timber, a lot of it on deck, bound for South Africa. The ship was renowned for her speed, and we overtook everything that was ahead of us.

We arrived in the North Sea under full sail. Powerful winds pushed us along at 12 knots. I helped with the logbook so I knew. For some hours the wind increased steadily. The captain was a good seaman and liked to see his ship sailing fast. But the wind increased in intensity to a full storm, at which stage the captain had waited too long to reduce sail. The heavy deck load was causing the ship to roll violently. By the time he gave the order to take down the fore- and main-topgallant sails it was too late. When the sheets were released the storm blew the loose sails to rags with a sound like gunfire.

As young as I was, I could not help comparing Captain Nordfeldt with Silversparrre. When we encountered very bad weather on the outer side of Gotland on the *Abraham Rydberg* Silversparrre advised: 'It is cheaper to take in the topsails than to allow them to blow away.' I was convinced that Silversparre would have taken the sails in a lot earlier. This was etched in my memory by grumbling among older crew members about the *Hawkesbury* having too much sail in a storm.

It was blowing like hell: The fore-topsail had gone and the main-topsail was in rags. It was a miracle that none of us was hurt. Large chunks of sailcloth, tangled with rope, beat against the masts and yardarms like whiplashes. An old sailor took his knife, went out on the mainsail yardarm and cut away some cordage; a few seconds later all of the wreckage blew overboard. By this time heavy green waves were washing over the starboard gunwale. It was only with huge effort that we managed to take in the remaining sails and leave only the lower foresail to steady the ship and hold it on course. If my memory serves me correctly, by then all the remaining sails were torn in any case. The storm was now a hurricane. During this work my right hand got jammed between loose planks and I could not use it. I told the first mate and he put me in the rigging as a lookout to warn about large

oncoming waves. He saw I was not holding on with my right hand and called out to me, 'Use both hands.' After I had nearly been swept away twice by waves, he called me down and took a look at my hand. He was a kindly sort of man and ordered me forward to the forecastle so that Erik could help me bandage my hand. Then he jumped up into the rigging and took my place as a lookout. That was the last time I saw him.

While Erik tried to bandage my hand, which had two fingers crushed and the flesh on its back scraped off to the bone, a huge wave rolled the ship on its beam ends. She came up again, but slowly and with a strong starboard list. I'm convinced that if the deck cargo frapping had not been cut away at this stage, we would all have ended up in Davy Jones' Locker. As the ship straightened, Erik and I ran out. My hand was still not bandaged, so I wrapped a handkerchief around my fingers. We found only destruction. All the lifeboats had gone overboard, and the crew's quarters and galley were shattered. A large mass of loose lumber had accumulated on the starboard deck.

Carl Wink was swept overboard like a cork. Another huge wave flung the ship upright, and lo, there stood Carl Wink.

The first shipmate, Andersson, had been washed overboard and was never seen again. One man lay with his head badly crushed by a plank; another could not move his right arm after lumber had fallen on his shoulder; a third man was badly hurt when a block of wood fell and crushed his skull; and then there was me with my useless hand.

The ship staggered to and fro in the heavy sea – not waves but mountains of water surging over our windward gunwale. Erik and I had barely taken in the devastation when a huge green breaker caught Carl Wink, now first mate, and swept him overboard like a cork. The captain ordered the whole crew astern towards the officers' quarters, but while we were looking for a rope to span from stem to stern to hang on to, another huge wave hammered the ship and flung her back upright. And lo and behold, there stood Wink, dripping wet, on deck amid the wreckage! The capsizing hull had apparently scooped Wink up as she returned to an upright position.

(Note: I have met Wink many times since then, the last time this year, 1962. He was healthy and strong, though he was eighty eight years old.)

As the only remaining sail, the foresail, had by now also been shredded by the wind, it was impossible to sail in the hurricane, so we drifted and rolled in the high sea, totally at the mercy of the elements. Before we could reach the stern as the captain had ordered, another man was badly hurt by the loose lumber on the cargo deck.

When we reached the officers' quarters, warm coffee and grog awaited us, and I have to say that since then I have always liked to have grog when I am wet and frozen. There was even a little food, and as we had not eaten anything but biscuits for two days, it tasted particularly good. The captain was a tough sea dog, but his heart was as kind as a kitten's. I could feel his hand shaking as he bandaged my hand. I suppose it looked awful – it was certainly very painful. When he had assessed the damage, the captain ordered Erik to nurse all the injured in the cabin. Then he decided that we needed a lookout. He could not spare any man, and I

could do nothing else, so he ordered me to do the job. Wink followed me and secured me firmly to the ship's wheel, which for some time had been lashed in place to secure it against the violent shaking of the rudder by the churning sea.

Wink checked the holds and found that the ship was half filled with water. The pumps were manned immediately, which was not an easy task. The men were exhausted and the waves washed over us constantly. The shift at the pumps was kept short to save the men's strength. When they rested they still had to fight their way back to the shelter of the poop and the welcoming coffee that Erik made for them. Every now and then Erik gave us awful tasting soup, but at least it was warm. Who cared about the taste!

Not a man on board really believed we would ever walk on terra firma again. Yet throughout this terrible ordeal only one man – the one with the bad head injury – broke down and talked incoherently, probably because he was in such severe pain. During this time we must have drifted a long way, for Wink told me we were on the Dogger Bank.

The sea was more violent here where the water was shallow.

We had been helplessly adrift for several days when something terrifying happened. I was still tied to the helm as a lookout and it was rather dark. Suddenly I heard two men shouting: before I could communicate with those below deck, there was a terrible crash and the *Hawkesbury* shook from stem to stern. I saw a bearded man looking toward the stern from the forecastle. He looked like the first mate Andersson who had drowned days earlier. My hair stood on end.

All those who could walk came up on deck after the crash. They too were scared when they saw the bearded man, struggling to get on board.

Eventually the man arrived at the stern and introduced himself. He was a Dutchman and he was furious, but he calmed down when he realised our precarious situation. We had rammed his large fishing boat with its seven-man crew. He could not tell if anyone else but he had survived. This fisherman did the work of two as he helped us man our stricken ship. The storm abated at suppertime on the day our bearded guest arrived. A steamer saw our distress signal but could not tow us. The following day, 23 November 1893, at 6 pm, a tugboat came from Antwerp and took us to that port.

The captain was very considerate and sent all the injured men to hospital for treatment. I was sent to Gashuis Stuivenberg Hospital and enjoyed my thirteen days there, as there was a lot to see and learn. I was operated on several times to save my hand and arm. Gangrene had set in and I noticed that some nasty looking flesh had been cut away from my middle finger. They told me that the salt water from the North Sea had kept the wound fairly clean, otherwise the arm would most likely have had to be amputated.

When I left the hospital, the wounds were still open in several places but much better. The crew stayed on in Antwerp for several weeks, and I had the pleasure of being introduced to the rather gaudily-dressed ladies in The Black Cat and The English Crown, both very notorious in those days. Then we received orders to return to Sweden. All the wounded travelled by steamer, which we thought was

fun. The *Hawkesbury* sailed back and underwent thorough inspection and repairs in Sweden before her next voyage. I arrived in Stockholm on 27 January 1894. Because of my hand, I was not keen on going to sea for some time afterwards.

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My return home was pleasant. My adventures had made me into some kind of hero, not only in my class but in the whole school. But this did not alter my lowly status as a mathematician. I studied diligently when it was possible and made some progress, but the journeys on the *Abraham Rydberg* and the *Hawkesbury* and my hospitalisation in Antwerp had done nothing to undo my mental block when it came to Mathematics. I felt very frustrated. My parents thought that my troubles were temporary and that I needed to concentrate more on my studies. What they and the teacher could not understand was how I could add two and even three long columns of figures at the same time without difficulty, and yet still struggle with other aspects of Mathematics.

For my part, my love of the sea was somewhat subdued when I started to understand that Mathematics was a necessary evil for everyone who wanted to become a ship's captain.

My sea voyages had developed my strength and physique, with the result that the boys in my class now seemed immature and I mingled with boys older than me. One of these boys was a keen swordsman and asked me if I could fence. I could not, but the thought fascinated me. As my hand had healed totally, I joined KFUM in Stockholm, where I had my first lessons. Fencing took me by storm. The instructor liked my enthusiasm and my strong wrist. He let me come twice a day for instruction in sabre and foil. My enthusiasm for things military was stirred once again. One day after taking my usual fencing lessons, I saw some boys having boxing lessons in the gymnasium. I joined the group and learned to fight with my fists. It was the most useful thing I ever did, as it saved me in desperate situations later on in life.

I joined the rowing club of some friends at their request. We were only five, so it was a select group. We had a quick four-oared boat in Årstaviken. We used to row into Mälaren, passing the old bathhouse (Mälarbadet) located at the head of Norrström close to Riddarholmen, then speed with the currents under Norrbro, close to the palace, to Saltsjön and then further on to Fjäderholmarna. Here we bathed and ate sandwiches. Sometimes we would play skittles before making the return trip.

I continued with my studies and other activities but I was still not satisfied. One day I read an advertisement placed by an architect who needed a draughtsman, preferably a young man. I immediately went to the Technical Institute at the address given for applications. The man, a Professor Clason, clearly had not expected any applicant to turn up there, but he was friendly. He gave me paper and pen and asked me to copy an architectural drawing on the wall. He was satisfied with the end result and asked me about school. I told him the bare truth about my mathematical difficulties. He did not find that a problem. We agreed upon

a salary, working hours and so on, and I went home to tell my parents. Mother wanted me to continue with school, but both of them agreed that my position there was difficult.

The next day, 2 May 1894, I started in the office of Professor Clason, who was working at this time on the construction of the Nordic Museum at Djurgården and the Hallwylska Palace on Hamngatan. I liked the work very much. His chief assistant was architect R Östberg, who later designed the New City Hall.

One day after we had been working for some time on the Hallwylska Palace project, he asked Östberg to make drawings, face as well as profile, of his head and mine. I would not find out the use of these drawings for another sixty-five years, when I learned to my astonishment that his head and mine were sculpted in stone and placed on either side of the Hallwylska Palace gateway. They can still be seen there today.

'Professor Clason's head and mine were sculpted in stone and placed on either side of the Hallwylska Palace gateway. They can still be seen there today.'

Clason also took an interest in my education: He encouraged me to take the baccalaureate (the examination which qualified candidates for higher education). This worried me and made me restless – it was not the future I envisaged for myself. I decided to tell him so. He was very understanding: 'You have something inside you – but it is not the sea,' he said when we parted. I felt pangs of conscience when I left him, as he had always been very decent toward me.

During my time with Clason, I continued my fencing and target shooting in Stockholm and the horse riding when I was on Grofstanäs. A few years later I was in service with the Cape Mounted Riflemen and was, of course, training in swordsmanship, as every man in this cavalry unit carried a sabre. One day the regimental aide, Captain Cantwell, usually an abrupt person, took me aside and said: 'You told us you were a sailor, but here you are, nineteen years old, and you can fence with both sabre and foil, you ride well, and you are an expert shot, a member of the Bisley team!' He grinned as he posed this parting question: 'What kind of ship did you serve on?'

After I had left Professor Clason I went straight to Captain Silfversparre, who received me with open arms and promised, if possible, to find employment for me on a ship destined for Cape Town. So on 1 May 1895 I was once again on board the *Abraham Rydberg*. In recognition of my experience on the *Hawkesbury* and service under his command in 1893, Captain Silfversparre promoted me to starboard crew's quarters corporal, starboard foresail corporal, ship's chaplain, and also stroke oar on his gig, which made me the foremost among the cadets.

Sailing from Stockholm on 17 June 1895, we passed Kodjupet and, as the wind was favourable, we went through the Sandhamshålet and arrived in Sandhamn on 19 June. We almost lost one of the boys near Sandhamn.

Some rough cadets threw one of their fellows overboard just for fun while we were anchoring. Unbeknown to me, the lad could not swim. The officer on deck brought it to my attention. I was not too worried, as the boy was known for playing tricks, but then I saw him sinking for the third time. Sven Ridderborg and I jumped into the sea in the nick of time and grabbed him by his woolly hair.

Instead of appreciating it, this boy and two others gave me a lot of trouble later on, because they hated every form of discipline.

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The rest of the voyage was pleasant and educational. We arrived in Helsingborg on 21 July 1895 after exercising several days at sea: taking down and setting up the yards and the skysails and then tying them back again, in addition to difficult cruising manoeuvres in the tight straits between Sweden and Denmark.

Captain Silfversparre could be a terror when things did not go well, but he was also quick to forgive.

I was glad to arrive in Helsingborg, because Captain Silfversparre had given me the task of disciplining certain youths who were too wild. I did not relish the task, but I had to follow his instructions and do the job. They were not really that bad, but they were cunning devils. They played tricks on the younger boys, which would have entertained me if they had picked on boys their own size. The Captain made allowances for these tricks, but when they started on one of the officers, he gave me the order to intervene. He did not want officers to be involved in minor breeches of discipline during training

It was not easy to follow his instructions, because these fellows sensed that I was out to get them. One evening, however, when I was on duty as ship's chaplain, two of them started a fight while I was reciting the 'Our Father', as I usually did every evening when we were gathered for prayer. I stopped the prayer and ordered the assembled trainees to stay put while I went over to the culprits with my eighteen-by half-inch Manila rope, which I always carried as a sign of my authority. I gave them both a good thrashing. One of them tried to hit me, but a left hook to the chin curbed him. Then I finished the prayer.

Captain Silfversparre and all the officers were present during this harsh interlude. The captain's face was very serious, but his eyes were shining with amusement, as if he was remembering something from days gone by. He took me aside later on and told me not to use the 'cat o' nine tails' again but that he approved of the deed. The punishment worked. We had no further trouble with these youngsters. One of them came over to me the next day and we became good friends.

A few days later the captain told me that he had found employment for me on a ship destined for Cape Town.

I accepted this offer without even taking a look at the ship.

Among the sixty ill-matched cadets were Sven Ridderborg and Erik von Otter. We became close friends. Like me, Ridderborg journeyed on to South Africa and, after a period of military training in Thembuland, eventually ended up serving in the same brigade as me. Later on, after we both took leave of the British army, we met up again in Sweden. I never saw Erik von Otter again after the journey. He became a captain in the King's African Rifles in Nairobi, although I never encountered him when I too was there from 1906 to 1907.

The day after our arrival in Helsingborg, 3 August 1895, I was hired to serve on the Swedish barque *Fredrik av Nyhamn* for 25 crowns per month. Captain

Silfversparre, the dear old soul, had informed me I would receive navigation training during the voyage. Therefore I was more like a British midshipman than a normal seaman. He said I might even be allowed to live and eat with the officers. As the ship had docked in Stettin in Germany, I had to take passage in the small steamer Malmö to Copenhagen and from there in the steamer Titania, which reached Stettin on 7 August.

Of the eight-man crew, two were Dutch and the rest Swedes, but in reality only seven were quartered in the forecastle, as the captain's son Henrik, a spoiled red-haired brat, lived with the officers aft. I slept with the crew. Captain Lars Petter Cronberg was a rough-looking man – huge, muscular, and very inconsiderate and harsh. His daughter Olga was a sweet and sympathetic fourteen-year-old, who was loved by everyone.

We weighed anchor the next morning, destined for Sundsvall. We had a favourable stiff breeze and did twelve knots all morning. At suppertime the breeze intensified into a half-gale. When it reached storm strength all sails were taken down except the fore-topsail, yet still we ran fast ahead of the wind. We arrived and anchored in Svartvik, a few kilometres outside Sundsvall, after a little more than three days, which was not bad.

The next day we were towed to the large sawmill in Skönvik and without delay started to load timber for Cape Town.

While we were in Skönvik I took an unpaid day off and went deep into the countryside to visit Father's old friends in Medelpad. Many of them had died, but Peter Erik was very happy to meet August's son. He had known my father well when he was a young man.

We left Skönvik and arrived just outside Helsingborg on 8 September 1895. The captain needed to get something from shore and we anchored. We were struck by a full storm that night and started dragging anchor. The other anchor with its heavy 75-fathom chain was dropped, but we continued to drag. The weather was looking bad and the situation was almost hopeless when the storm suddenly abated, as if by a stroke of magic. After taking supplies on board we set off for Cape Town on 9 September.

We had mild weather throughout the English Channel. We fished a lot and caught much more than we needed.

A day or so later we harpooned a large porpoise and it took the whole watch to land it on deck. The dark red meat around the neck was good, but the other parts were black and unpleasant.

We passed Madeira and caught a good northeasterly breeze. After a while I noticed that we had changed course to a more southwesterly direction.

On 30 October we sighted an island and I was told it was Fernando de Noronha, which belonged to Brazil. Later on we seemed to sail between two islands which were quite close to each other. Someone said they were Trinidad and Martin Vaz, but I was not sure. We pushed on southwards doing 10 knots in a good southeasterly breeze.

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We slaughtered one of our two big pigs on 12 November, which was a great day. The pork brought a welcome change to our otherwise boring diet of salt fish and toasted bread rolls, filled with tasty whitish worms – no doubt very good for us. But any word of complaint was immediately brought to the captain's attention by one of the men, although we never knew who he was.

We passed the Tropic of Capricorn on 14 November. The sun was on its way down, but heavy black storm clouds swept like giant monsters across the sky and gathered like a big wall in the west. The sky was a pale yellowish-grey, and the sea seemed to be forbiddingly calm. The sails banged the yards against the masts when the ship rolled in the long, regular swell.

I stood near the wheel, a strong and healthy 17-year-old boy who knew how to handle the helm and sail a ship as well as anyone on board – of that Captain Silfversparre had made sure. I longed for adventure and new horizons, the same feeling that had driven my ancestors to sail the seas more than a thousand years before. A short distance away at the starboard gunwale sat Olga, the skipper's pleasant young daughter. My eye often strayed in her direction and she seemed to return my admiration by throwing back friendly, understanding glances. Olga was liked by all for her kindly and sympathetic nature. Often she intervened between her father's wild temper and the crew, especially when it came to me.

Her father seemed to have conceived a violent grudge against me personally, probably on account of his daughter, since she often spoke to me against his wishes. He had caught her throwing affectionate glances towards me, which I always returned.

My reflection on her beauty was suddenly interrupted by a head sticking up through the open skylight of the companionway leading down to the officers' quarters. A big coarse nose the colour of a tomato appeared threateningly, and the dark eyes looked quickly around and discovered Olga. Then the cruel giant jumped up on deck and peered at the compass. It was Cronberg, the personification of my fears and horror. Owing to the complete absence of wind, the ship was not responding to the helm and had been pushed a few degrees off course by swell and current. In an eruption of rage, he blamed me for not holding course.

He lunged forward with a sweeping roundhouse punch aimed at my face, but when I ducked, his massive fist crashed into the upper spoke of the ship's wheel with a sickening thud. Raging mad, he was just about to throw himself on me when Olga intervened. Evidently he had been drinking heavily, for he pushed her aside with a curse and prepared himself for a new frenzied attack.

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Johnson, the first mate, arrived just at that time and warned him about the proximity of the approaching storm. Sobered by the thought of duty and danger, the skipper looked around and gave orders: 'All hands on deck to reduce sail! Tend to your halyards! Let go! Sternward, you morons, and bring in the spanker! There

was not a moment to spare. Olga, who was a good sailor, took the rudder, while I started towards the bow to call out the watch.

Eager to get away from the lurking danger, I rushed to the forecastle but received a powerful kick from the skipper as I passed him. The deck swarmed with men hurrying to clamber up the masts to take down the sails. Soon only the captain and the first mate were left on deck.

It started to rain as I went to take in the main-topgallant sail and the captain's son Henrik went to take in the fore-topgallant sail. Everybody worked like madmen, as the approaching cyclone was already stirring up the sea not far from us, although not a breath of wind could be felt. As suddenly as it started, the rain stopped. Then came a strange sound, almost as if the sky had drawn a deep sigh, and the ship seemed to creak in all its joints.

Then again came the ominous calm, which was short-lived. A moment later a powerful wind came whistling through the rigging, followed by a cold breeze, and then the screaming hurricane in all its fury caught the ship as it dipped from the crest of a high wave. Only the fore-topsail remained set but the ship rolled over, staggering under the terrible pressure from the wind on its beam, which pushed the aft leeward gunwale underwater.

We came close to capsizing but in the end the skipper eased her away from the wind. When the ship finally turned around, the furled fore-topgallant sail came loose and tore. The captain had not seen the men climb up and was angry because the sail had broken loose. He asked his son who was standing beside him: 'Who furled that sail?'

The son, a wretched specimen of a boy, was afraid to tell the truth and pointed to me, and with kicks and blows the father ordered, 'Climb up and fasten it, you bastard!' It was crazy to send a man, especially a mere boy, on such a mission. The sail, torn in several places, beat its attached cordage against the mast with blows that could kill an ox. With a racing heart I climbed up, not as scared of the raging weather as I was embittered by the evident injustice.

This sail had been fastened by Henrik, the captain's own son.

The wind was terrible and I had not experienced anything like it, not even in the North Sea a year earlier. As I climbed over the masthead at the top of the foremast, I almost got blown away. When I reached the yardarm on the upper part of the fore-topmast I was fighting for my life. The only way to climb the topgallant mast was inch by inch. Here I did not have anything to hold on to except the oily mast and the protruding backstays.

God only knows how I managed to bring the torn sail in, but without a doubt I got some help when half of it blew away in the screaming wind with a sound like gunfire. My fingers were skinned and bleeding after digging into the wet sailcloth, but what was left of it was recovered. I had already done more than anyone could ask. I climbed down to the fore-top masthead in the lee of the mast and looked down out at the stormy sea. The cyclone whistled and howled through the rigging like a thousand demons and it took all my strength to hold on, but I was unwilling to hurry down. I was only a boy – curled up and desperately holding on to the

mast like a monkey. Inside me raged a maelstrom of emotions caused by the recent chain of events. My faith in man had never before been so shaken. This was a new combination of feelings: Doubt and bitterness towards authority.

Luckily, my thoughts strayed homewards to my parents and their wonderful guidance. All my life filed past me like a revue and I was hunting through my childhood fields and forests. Suddenly I woke from my daydreaming and got down quickly.

I had barely set foot on deck when I was grabbed from behind by four strong arms and dragged to the pump close by the large mast. I could not believe my senses and did not struggle until they started tying me, but by then it was too late, which was just as well.

'I had barely set foot on deck when I was grabbed from behind by four strong arms and dragged to the pump close by the large mast.'

It was dark, but I saw the captain not too far away, staring at me with a mad, spiteful expression. Alongside him stood the officers. The forecastle men were crowding together in the shelter of the starboard foredeck.

The officers seemed to be in a violent discussion and did not react to the captain's order: 'Pull off his shirt!' The skipper lost his temper and rushed towards the second mate, shouting at him to obey the order. When the second mate tried to persuade him not to go any further, he was knocked to the deck with something the captain had in his hand. The third mate apparently knew this crazy captain, and he quickly pulled off my clothes without saying a word.

The captain – may he rot in hell for all eternity – used a three-quarter-inch rope to give me ten lashes with all the strength of his fury. He was not satisfied, because he screamed at me: 'Take this because you did not hold the course and injured my hand, you bloody upstart, and take this because you are a lousy seaman and you made me lose my sail!' Then he lashed me with ten more terrible blows and then another ten. I was now bleeding badly. He rested a second, but his rage had not been calmed by his exertions. 'Now I shall get you to crawl for pardon, you obstinate son of a bitch – beg or otherwise I will kill you,' he roared.

My body was a helpless mass of aching, bleeding flesh. I could not lift my head, which was hanging down over my chest. I was conscious but too weak to answer. I remember the contempt I felt for the captain's son who was standing close by the officers and did not say a word. Nor did the first mate, the one who had sent Henrik to the foremast. My eyes wandered in the direction of the men standing like helpless spectators, and I felt a silent sympathy for them, even though I wondered why they allowed such injustice. In the welter of feelings I felt a bitter and desperate hatred towards the captain, which I could not control.

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My keeping silent instead of begging for pardon, only made him worse. The lashings started again. At the sixth lash from that rope my body finally fell into blessed unconsciousness. This condition could only have lasted a few seconds, and when I awoke the giant was standing there, waiting. It would give him no satisfaction to whip an unconscious man.

When he lifted his arm, a strong crescendo of objections rose from the crew, who moved threateningly forward, no longer willing to be spectators to this abysmal show of authority.

Fearing the worst, the first mate rushed forward to the captain and pulled him away. When the captain realised that he had gone too far, he withdrew towards the stern with the officers and his son. As soon as the officers moved to the stern, the crew rushed forward and freed me. This sign of sympathy infuriated the captain. He fetched a rifle and threatened to shoot the first one who got close to me. It was pitch black. The waves had increased in size and continued to sweep tons of water over the deck. It was when one of these washed over me that my senses returned. Even though I was only semi-conscious, I realised that I was tied up half-naked and covered with blood. I was about to call out for help when a hand touched my head and another brought a mug with warm soup to my lips. It tasted like a drink for the gods. I was revived but unable to move. The next thing I knew I was untied and being carried by two men to my bunk in the forecastle. There I recognised my saviours. One was the ever-friendly Bill Royston, the other Carlson, a pure old Swedish sea dog of the genuine kind. After making me as comfortable as he possibly could, Bill turned to the rest of the crew and asked: 'For how long shall we continue to accept these things? Our lives are not worth a damn if we submit any longer. You know that this lad has been accused and almost whipped to death for something he has not done. If there are more persecutions, we shall report the matter to the British authorities in Cape Town.'

After further statements the men agreed to stick together and appointed Bill as their spokesman. I do not remember anything of the four days and nights after the whipping, but afterwards I was told that I had been running a high fever and fighting for my life. But evidently my day had not yet come. Youth, strength, and a will to live, aided by Olga's wonderful care as a nurse, helped me to win through. On the ninth day I was back at work.

The last part of the voyage passed without many problems. An air of forced jocularity hung over the aft deck, but there were moments that showed how empty and shallow these officers' efforts were to create an illusion of normality.

Catching an albatross was the most exciting of the few things that happened. The ship's carpenter cut out a V-shaped copper plate. Each side was about eight inches long, one inch wide, and one-sixteenth of an inch thick. The edges on the inside of the V were filed very sharp and a steel trace was attached at the two ends of the V and fastened to a log line. Salty meat was tied as bait in the fork of the V and totally covered it. It was then thrown overboard at the stern and dragged in the ship's wake as far out as the line allowed. The albatross that I wanted was a beauty but was suspicious of the bait. After many meat pieces had been thrown out, he finally dived, took the V-shaped hook, and was hauled in.

The captain came up on deck when the bird was brought in and took charge. When somebody (deliberately, I think) let go of the sail cloth which had been thrown out over the bird's head, it promptly bit the captain's hand and nearly tore off one of his fingers, which gave us all much pleasure, because he was a rotten

son-of-a-sea-cook (as we used to say in those days, with all apologies to sea-cooks and their loved ones).

When we got close to the Cape of Good Hope, we saw parts of Africa's southwestern coast in the distance. It seemed grim and ominous, from the mountainous ridge all the way down to the seashore, but it looked far worse than it really was.

On 26 November 1895 we anchored in Table Bay after having been at sea for seventy eight days. The ship remained in Cape Town for three weeks off-loading cargo and stocking up with provisions. During that time I went ashore several times, although the captain and his son constantly supervised my activities.

I never tired of looking at Table Mountain rising up behind the city. It was as venerable and artistic as anything could be. The steep forest-dressed slopes were crowned with long stretches of sandstone and deep crevasses here and there. Oaks, magnificent pines, and many other trees and leafy plants grew abundantly on its lower slopes, including the silver tree with its silver leaves, smooth and soft as velvet. Large numbers of these trees were clustered in some places, giving the impression of plantations.

There was an abundance of fish in the harbour. Some of them had strange names like Stumpnose, Red Roman, and Seventy-Four. All were delicious. Snoek (snake mackerel) were present in large quantities, as were crayfish (rock lobster). The marketplace was filled with delicious fruits: oranges, bananas, loquats, peaches, nectarines, watermelons, and several kinds of wonderful grapes, which made excellent wine.

A potent but awful alcoholic drink called 'Cape Smoke' was produced, I think, from peaches. This white spirit was very popular among the Hottentots and caused a high rate of alcoholism with all its associated social problems.

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The city itself was a disappointment, but only the parts close to the beach. Many streets were narrow and dirty, and flanked by badly built, unkempt one- and two-storey houses.

Further up towards the mountain, the city was delightful. Many houses were built in the Dutch style. The suburbs were attractive, with semi-wild hedges of trees and bushes. Along the street close to the beach one could not avoid noticing a large number of Malayan and other dark-skinned people.

The Malayan fishermen with their red hats fascinated me. These people constituted an unusual and artistic part of the seashore. They were successful people, far superior to the Hottentots in all ways. They dressed well. Nevertheless they too had some social problems. Their religion forbade them to imbibe strong drinks, but that did not stop them from using narcotics, especially cannabis, and throwing the occasional wild party or getting involved in knife fights.

Bill Royston had spent more than two years in South Africa and he told me about the place. While we were anchoring I could quietly take in the local geography from deck. South Africa had me in its grip within twenty-four hours

of arriving in Cape Town. It drew me irresistibly to its interior and later claimed more than twelve of the best and happiest years of my life.

I had changed a lot since the day I was flogged. The bruises had practically all disappeared, but where the flesh had been torn, it hurt when the scabs were split open by my movements.

The captain had deliberately beaten me on the kidneys, which troubled me for years – eventually years later I had to have one kidney surgically removed. But this could also have been due to a fragment from a grenade that hit me in the back. The scars on my back made me look like a brown-striped zebra. They were a constant reminder of the outrages Cronberg had committed and a spur to escape from him and his ship. Wild schemes for revenge ran through my head, but Bill advised me against it. Somehow I was glad that he did, and instead I began to make plans of a different sort. Nobody knew my intentions except him, and he was captivated by my spirit of adventure and agreed to help me. The cargo had been unloaded by the crew and the week had comprised long, hard hours. Bill warned me one day that somebody had eyes on me all the time and that I had to be careful. This spurred me to increased exertion and introversion.

'I gave the captain's son Henrik the "dusting" of his life.'

My plans were in place: when the ship was once again ready to go to sea, the time was ripe to implement my secret plan to jump ship. I had signed on for twenty-five crowns (about five dollars) a month for the voyage, but no money had been paid out for three months.

On Christmas Day 1895 I went to the captain and asked for the usual advance on my wages. Instead of paying me he kicked me out of the cabin and said, 'Do you think I don't know you intend to run away? Go to hell! Get out of here! You won't get any money from me.'

This was a terrible blow to my plan, as I had only a shilling and sixpence from something that I had sold to one of the men. Bill had taken the entire advance he was entitled to and used it for liquor. The captain knew that I did not have any money and thought that I could not get far, but in this he was mistaken. Bill decided to stay on board when I did not get paid. This was truly a blessing, for otherwise he would have drunk all the money we had in the first bar.

I kept my eyes on the captain and the next time he went ashore, on Boxing Day 1895, I made my move. I looked for his creep of a son Henrik; but he was nowhere in sight. As I left the ship, I saw Henrik coming down the seemingly endless pier towards me. I could not avoid him, and he saw my bundle of belongings. He made some stupid comment that enraged me, so I gave him the 'dusting' of his life. This gave me some grim satisfaction, but I had very little time for revenge. I was wondering what I should do with the semi-conscious simpleton. It would have been stupid to leave him on the pier in open view, so I helped him on board, placed him in the lantern repairer's little room on the starboard side of the forecastle, and closed the door.

Nobody had seen me except Bill, who was totally broke and had taken the watch on deck to help me. I waved to him and hurried ashore on my way to the

interior of Southern Africa with only a shilling and sixpence in my pocket and a small bundle containing all my earthly belongings.

But I felt happy as a lark.

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