Mogens Klitgaard

God Tempers the Wind to the Shorn Lamb

Translated and with an Introduction and Notes by Marc Linder

With the Assistance of Gitte Gaarsvig Sørensen

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The cover image is one of the friezes adorning the lobby of the Danish Parliament, which were painted by Rasmus Larsen between 1918 and 1921. Courtesy of Folketinget.

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Second Chapter

1

I ran through the garden and didn't stop till I got to the wroughtiron gate. I mean, I might run into someone and it would look strange if I came dashing down through the tree-lined walk as if the devil were on my heels. I was certain that by fleeing I'd been saved from something terrible without actually making clear to myself what this terrible thing consisted of. It was certainly my good moral upbringing that had warned me at the last moment.

When I got down to the barracks, I began to feel that I'd behaved childishly and ridiculously. Maybe it was just Miss Klara's practical joke and I'd made a fool of myself. If I hadn't been so disheartened and well-mannered, the situation never would've arisen. And if I hadn't been brought up on such a horror of everything that couldn't be regarded as normal and decent, I wouldn't have behaved so foolishly. On a small scale I've never been afraid of doing what was forbidden; I've always been able, so to speak, to give vent to everything that was in me by pilfering and fibbing, but as soon as things took on a larger scale, I was gripped by panic and couldn't go through with anything.

I wouldn't have needed to be sitting here this evening and begging you for a cup of coffee and a night's lodging if I'd had the ability to take those chances life's given me. I'm going to tell you about my life lock, stock, and barrel. You'll get to hear some strange things. Maybe not what's romantic in the usual sense, but in any case the pure, sheer truth about a person who had a good upbringing and didn't amount to anything.

When I went into Siska's room, I suddenly felt like confiding the whole thing to her. I wanted to go up to the inn. True, I didn't have any money, but Siska had said that if I felt like going up there after I'd been at the farmhouse, I could just take a seat in the tap-room and order a beer—she'd pay all right.

The inn was jam packed with people. Both outdoors and indoors. Drunken and stark-raving mad people. Incessant traffic in and out the door. And as background for the whole din the



dance music from the dance hall, which led out to the garden. I couldn't see Siska anywhere and that's why I went into the taproom where I was so lucky as to find a place to sit, because there was just then a brawl and the two people who'd gotten into an altercation agreed to settle matters outside, where there was more room. After I'd been sitting for a bit waiting for my beer, one of the day laborers came along, a little tubercular Swede, and said that the manager had been there and asked if anyone'd seen me—he'd looked very worked up.

I became nervous about what the whole thing might turn into and didn't dare keep sitting there. I couldn't find Siska; I was in the dance hall, through the whole tap-room, and all around the whole building. Finally I went out into the garden it was a very trampled garden with some shrubbery and homemade benches. In all corners where there was a little bit of darkness you could hear voices whispering or see the vague outline of couples making love. Behind the inn garden there was a little grove of birch trees and alders. If that's the way things looked in the inn garden, what must they have looked like in the grove? And besides, it was so dark I wouldn't be able to see her; it was better if I went back to the tap-room. On the way in I ran into her. She was together with one of the hands from up at the farm house. I felt very relieved and was glad to see that she didn't look so heated up and that her dress wasn't wrinkled like many of the other girls'. I said to her that I wanted to talk to her and we went outside a little piece away from the road and sat down at the edge of a ditch. It was very mild and the mosquitoes almost wouldn't leave us alone; the noise from up at the inn sounded as if it came from a lunatic asylum where the patients had revolted; out here it was tranquil—you could hear the little sounds of the roadside. There was a scent of the newly mowed hay from the field behind us.

I told Siska the whole story, even the business about the manager who was going around looking for me and looked so crazy. She sat for a bit and thought it over and then said that you never knew what might come of it; it was probably better that I go away this very evening—there was a bus that went to town at



11:30. She wanted to give me ten crowns; maybe I could get some work in town, maybe there was a ship in the harbor where I could sign on—in Halmstad* there were many ships. Otherwise I could go to Falkenberg* and try there.

We sat for some time without saying anything. I was sorry about having to leave her and said that we'd write to each other. She thought that was a bunch of nonsense. But maybe we'll never see each other again, I said. She looked at me surprised—of course we wouldn't. That'd certainly be a strange coincidence. I was pained by the fact that she could take it so coolly and I took her hand. But now she became impatient and wanted to go back to the dance; she gave me a hurried kiss and got up, laughed a bit at my sadness and said that I was a silly boy and that she'd surely think about me sometimes.

2

In Halmstad I found out that the town was hot right then. That is, that the police were conducting round-ups of vagabonds. There was a big dispute over the cause: some said that it was because we'd now gotten to that time of year when the officers went around being bored—it'd become too warm to sit indoors playing cards and it wasn't warm enough yet to go spy on lovers in the park down by the river. Some said that it was because the chief of police was seeking a transfer to a town known for its aversion to tramps and that he now wanted to document that he was capable of keeping the riff-raff away.

I of course couldn't have cared less what the cause was—I didn't feel like being sent home to the saying of grace and potted plants and that's why I immediately left this inhospitable town to go to Falkenberg. On the way I joined company with an old beachcomber* who was so fat that he had a hard time begging clothes that fit him. On the other hand, he always got first-class clothes whenever he finally got some. He took only the same size clothes as clergymen and bank presidents and didn't know what it meant to go around in ready-made clothes. The size

alone meant that it had to be tailored.

In Falkenberg I lived at Mother Britta's. She's an old woman who lives from housing traveling journeymen, or lived, because she's probably dead now. The thing was that her house was located just outside the city limits so Falkenberg's police had no business there, and the *luffer* were freed from reporting their arrival and departure* and all that stuff that people who take to the road hate, not always because they don't have a clear conscience, but because they're anarchists. That doesn't mean that they're adherents of a definite political idea—they don't give a damn about all that; it's their temperament that's anarchistic. And at Mother Britta's they could be left alone by the Falkenberg police,* who carried sabers and only got a chance to show their stuff when there was a fair in town. Mother Britta never asked for identification or anything like that; she asked if you had lice, and when you'd said no and paid fifty øre, you were assured of lodging for the night. Actually it was odd that she asked about that—I can hardly imagine that there was ever anyone who said yes. And all of them had lice—they called them spikes *—and joked about hating to have their blood mixed. There's a story that there was supposed to be a race in Norrland* that consisted of some big fellas with a cross on their backs. But that was doubtless a lie; at least I've never seen any such guys.

Mother Britta had about ten house guests divided between two rooms. Apart from an itinerant girl, who slept in Mother Britta's room. She was a tall, thin beanpole, who made some sort of thigamajigs out of bits of rope to put combs in; she unraveled the piece of rope so it resembled hair that had been let down, and tied a red silk ribbon around one end. It looked really attractive. The farm girls were delighted with them and I'm pretty sure the girl earned good money. The ten guests represented just as many kinds of vagabonds. There were broadgaugers—they were the ones who calmly and level-headedly tramped along the highways and took life's goods in the order in which they came without trying to interfere with their fate by making drastic decisions; then there were the tap dancers, who didn't give a damn about the open country and only cared about

the towns—they travelled by train as stowaways or stopped cars on the highways and were allowed to hitch a ride, or they quite simply paid for their railway ticket: it could be worth it—they polished off a town in the course of a couple of days and didn't feel like hanging around and wasting time on the highway.

Then there were the *hawkers*.* They dealt in one thing or another, shoelaces, shoe polish, soap, postcards, safety pins, and all that kind of stuff. They were business people and they seldom mixed with a broad-gauger; in a pinch they might permit themselves to discuss the cities' heat with a tap-dancer.

I was brought up well and have honest social ambitions.* Or rather had. In the course of two weeks I'd run through the various stages and become a hawker. I'd come to town as a broadgauger, but quickly discovered that it paid to take the bus out to the small communities* in the vicinity and beg there instead of in Falkenberg, where you could run around all day to scrape together a dollar.* The communities weren't so overrun—you could easily take home several crowns without having overexerted yourself especially. One evening one of the hawkers asked me whether I'd buy a bunch of safety pins from him since he'd gotten a job as an agent for selling lace to private customers. I bought them and began doing business. It was in all respects progress: I earned more and more easily, it was less risky and more pleasant. I had to laugh when I thought about what a beet worker had to do to earn a day wage that was less than mine.

3

The beggars' hotel's bourgeoisie consisted of two hawkers, the tall thin girl, a nationally known vagabond named Värmlands-Kalle,* and me. I was included because I was so young and because I was a Dane. The exotic and the uncommon are highly valued. Meanwhile it was Easter and the bourgeoisie had decided to celebrate Easter on Sunday. We chipped in and went shopping. The main components of the feast were macaroni,

boiled eggs, and liquor. Lots of liquor. The beanpole arranged the meal. Mother Britta was the guest of honor and handed out cigars for this occasion. It started off in an unusually nice and bourgeois way. There was a white cloth on the table and three daffodils in a glass. We enjoyed behaving nicely and feeling like burghers. We ate in a cultivated way. Even Värmlands-Kalle ate in a cultivated way.

We'd bought three times as many eggs as we could eat. On the other hand, the liquor ran out before we got to the coffee. We chipped in again and bought a new supply from Mother Britta. Before I got drunk for real, I remember that Kalle was sitting and telling funny stories. He was a specialist, dealt in French pictures and condoms, and supplemented his business with small-time swindling. He used two boxes of snuff a day and was missing two fingers on his left hand. The beanpole had become sentimental, she was sitting and blathering on about a walk in the woods where she'd gone with her betrothed holding hands, and saying something about nightingales, the wonders of love, and all that kind of stuff. One of the hawkers was infected by her sentimentality and together they left the party to devote themselves to these subjects in peace.

After I'd thrown up down in the garden, I was put to bed. Mother Britta took my clothes off with her own hands; she was an ugly old hag all right, but she was a good person. In the evening she brought in a glass of milk, and after I'd drunk it, I wasn't so ill that I couldn't go for a walk.

When I walked down across the market place, I saw that a circus had come to town; a lot of people were standing and watching the tents being raised. Damn it, they had to do a bunch of work, those circus people. When you see someone like a jockey in the ring, you don't think about the fact that at one and the same time he's a laborer and has to pitch in with the heavy drudge work, that he's a laborer, groom, and transport worker.

I joined the spectators—it's always nice to see people doing some work. In spite of the liquor-breakfast I felt fit, but felt like smoking a cigarette. There was a farm boy standing next to me who'd just lit one, revealing that he had a whole pack. But it



was *Bridge*, and I didn't much care to smoke Bridge, which isn't a good cigarette. A well-dressed youth was standing a little farther on who looked as though he might well smoke a decent brand. I ingratiated myself with him* and when I saw that he was smoking *SSS*, I asked if I might take one along for my buddy too. Later I saw all right that he noticed that I was alone and that that business with the buddy was a scam, but of course he could hardly come over and demand the other one back.

When I'd seen my fill of the circus crew, I took a walk down to the river. My stomach felt a bit empty and I went into a villa and asked for a sandwich. The maid was home alone and I was seated in the kitchen and I got both coffee and a cigar after the meal. Before I was done, the master and mistress came home, and the maid let me into her room so as not to have any trouble with the wife.

I sat for an hour and a half on the maid's bed and couldn't get out. One of the beanpole's comb-holders, an amateur picture of a marine with a beard, and a picture of Christ were hanging on the wall. A wall rug hung over the couch with an embroidered inscription: Your own home is worth its weight in gold.

In addition, a couple of darned stockings were hanging over the back of a chair. Spilled powder was on the table. And an English textbook was lying there.

When the maid finally came back, she gave me fifty øre, a pair of her master's socks, and a scriptural passage. I said that I'd wait to change socks till I got home. She asked where I was living, and when I told her, she looked very worried. A little later she asked whether I was saved. I didn't really know what to answer, but I said that my father was a parish deacon. That seemed to do, but appeared to disappoint her a bit, since she'd doubtless been dreaming of eventually saving someone or other. She let me out through the garden.

4

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A Thurø-schooner is a schooner that's native to Thurø.* But



it's not just the ship's construction and its place of origin that differentiates it from other sailing ships. In a way, there'd be no need for bearing a designation of its domicile; everybody who's had a little to do with ships would be able to say right away what kind of craft it was. For that matter, the craft could disguise itself and the skipper assume a Dutch name—that wouldn't help a bit: it'd inevitably be brought to light that it was a Thurøschooner. The ship's atmosphere would betray it; the thickest paint wouldn't be able to cover the vapor of Funen petty-bourgeoisdom. And if you didn't have a sense of smell for that kind of thing, the food and discipline would tell you that, all right.

When I left the maid, who'd given me a pair of her master's socks and a scriptural passage, I didn't know anything about Thurø-schooners. Didn't know anything about ships at all. Before twelve hours had passed, I knew what a Thurø-schooner was, but by then it was too late—the "Constantia" was out on the Kattegat's wild waves, and I wouldn't have been able to slip back onto land anyway.

Of course, I ought to have become suspicious right away when the man I got to chatting with down at the harbor told me that there was a Danish ship there the crew had deserted. Crews really don't desert just like that for the fun of it. They desert because there's something wrong with the conditions on board. In reality, it's totally idiotic for the police to arrest sailors who've deserted and haul them before a judge who imposes harsh sentences on them. Of course, it was the skipper who should be brought before the court and account for the abuses and promise the judge to mend his ways. But if that still hasn't dawned on the courts, maybe I can be excused for not having realized it either and not having figured out right away that, if the crew of the "Constantia" deserted, it was because it wasn't a pleasant ship to sail on.

The way things now stood, I was inclined to believe that the skipper was right when he said that they were a bunch of damned dirty swine who hadn't earned their keep and that in reality he was ecstatic over having gotten rid of them. Could I be the cook? I certainly thought I could. That suited him fine—then

he'd get off with just telegraphing for two ordinary seamen.* So that matter was settled; he was an open-minded man, the skipper—I had neither papers nor a discharge book.* I could stay on board right away; the two ordinary seamen were supposed to come the next morning from Copenhagen, and as soon as they came, we'd sail. He was so nice, the skipper, he gave me a crown and said that I could go up and have myself a drink at the cafe on the corner. The future looked bright and friendly for me: I'd get to see foreign countries and life on board would probably be enjoyable and romantic. The skipper was probably like a father to his people. Incomprehensible that those people had deserted. But if they were that stupid, they also didn't deserve anything better than to be arrested.

While sitting at the cafe, I already felt like an old seaman, and in relation to the landlubbers sitting in there, I felt a certain pride: I mean, now I was a son of the sea, actually I'd always been, I was born for the sea, had always loved life at sea, in school they'd called me seaman because I'd read a seaman's novel and taught myself to walk with the same rolling movements as sailors and use technical maritime terms the other students didn't understand. Besides, undoubtedly I had an innate aptitude for seamanship: it surely wasn't every fifteen-year-old boy who could sail a stolen one-masted skiff from Humlebæk to Sweden, was it? And when I thought back to that night, it actually seemed that there was a pretty good wind. It'd probably been what you call a strong breeze. Even old sailors would certainly have been astounded by the feat.

In any case, now I'd signed on as cook on the Thurøschooner the "Constantia" and was sitting with my beer longing for a few breakers and a little whistling in the rigging. Damn it, that was something else than rooting around in a beet field, selling safety pins, or begging for a sandwich from some farmers who didn't know anything about the world except the ground they went clumping around on their whole lives. I bought myself one more beer and looked weather-beaten.

When the ordinary seamen came the next morning, we were towed out of the harbor and left to our fates. We had deck cargo. Mine timber. There was enough wind to fill the sails, the sky was blue, and a small archipelago of skerries* and a couple of gulls made the departure a perfect idyll. We calmly glided off and the skipper was standing astern looking congenial. Kind of a real Funen grandfather with a pointy beard and blue eyes. The ordinary seamen went around putting things straight on deck and the mate had turned in to sleep. I was sitting in the galley making preparations for lunch. Fruit soup* and hash.

Toward noon the skipper brought prunes and raisins for the soup. One prune and five raisins for each one. By now the coast had become a narrow strip and there weren't so many gulls. Here beyond the archipelago of skerries the boat was bobbing up and down a little; I could see that in the galley by the fact that the frying pan and pots that were hanging on the wall first slid slowly to one side, stopped there for a bit, and then slid slowly to the other side. I couldn't stand it. Especially not in connection with the smell of the food. A bucket of water was standing on the floor. It was only three-fourths full, but one second the water was about to run over the brim, then it stopped, sank slowly, and began to rise on the other side till it was about to run over there; a raisin that was lying on the table rolled back and forth at the same speed. From one end of the table to the other end of the table. I couldn't stand it. It was unpleasant. And all these movements were backed up by sounds that accentuated the rhythm. I dashed out to the railing and threw up. Naturally to the windward, where the wind struck the ship's side and sprayed the gall in my face.

It could've been worse. I went back to the galley, drank a little water, and ate a raisin. It was the one that had been lying on the table rolling back and forth.

The skipper had said that when they called *ready about*, I had to rush forward like a wild animal and loosen the foresail sheet, hold on tight, and let go only when the craft had turned so

far that the wind no longer caught the sail. Then I had to jump over to the other side, haul taut and fasten it. Just as I'd finished eating the raisin, they shouted *ready about*. I immediately forgot my bad stomach and darted off. As I stood at my place by the foresail, I was proud of my job. For the first time in my life I felt the joy of being a real man. I stood with my legs far apart and held on to the sheet with both hands.

6

When I came back to the galley, it was full of soot and smoke. Everything was covered with greasy black specks. The food too. And new blasts of black clouds were coming out of the stove through hundreds of cracks.

Of course, I could figure out the cause, all right. The galley's chimney was an angular pipe made of tin; when the craft turned, the wind blew down into the pipe. In other words, it had to be turned in the direction of the wind every time we turned. I don't know whether I'd considered it, or maybe thought that it turned on its own. I mean, you could easily think that. Just like a weather vane, right? When I went out of the galley to crawl up on the roof and turn the chimney, I was black with soot all over. The mate was standing close by. He looked at me as if he were going to devour me and asked why damn it to hell I hadn't turned the flue. I said that I hadn't known that it had to be turned. Then maybe this here can help you remember, he said, and hit me with his fist below my ear so I went crashing down. That brutal animal. He wasn't even allowed to sail as a mate—the ordinary seamen said that he didn't have a certificate And the skipper only had a certificate for domestic shipping. Only had permission to sail in coastal trade. Damn it, this was some tub. If I hadn't had such a nice upbringing, I'd have said country bumpkin to him. To the mate, I mean.

I clambered up on to the galley and turned the flue. Afterward I tried to clean the galley and scrape the soot off the food. It was only somewhat successful.

A little before noon one of the ordinary seamen came to see what we were going to have for lunch. His name was Leo. A few years ago I read in the newspaper that he'd been knocked overboard by a breaker in the Mediterranean. That was on one of ØK's* ships. When he saw the mess, he asked whether I'd been a cook before. In order not to get into a row, I said I'd been a cook's apprentice in one of Stockholm's finest hotels for two years. He said that was a lie and wanted to know if I had a discharge book. I said I'd pawned it for a night's lodging at a hotel in Halmstad. Then he didn't want to ask anything else, but I could see by looking at him that he'd return to these questions another time.

7

We lay off Skagen* for three days and couldn't get any farther. The craft couldn't go close-hauled.* We were really moving fast— we weren't lying still; the craft rolled over the waves, but every three hours we got to the big buoy and hadn't gotten the slightest bit farther. We turned incessantly. I no longer thought it was such fun to deal with the foresail. We were going to the Faroe Islands, and if things kept up the way they had been, it could certainly take a while before we got up there.

When we finally got out into the North Sea, the seaman's proud and romantic life began for real. By now of course it was well into that time of year when the fall storms begin to entertain seamen. I was so sick that I no longer bothered to crawl to the railing—I was content with holding my head outside the galley door. Besides, my stomach was empty—I could only force a little bit of gall and some stomach cramps. I was completely sluggish, performed my work automatically, and took the drubbings I got without a murmur. I wasn't doing so well. There wasn't a mattress or blankets in my bunk, so I spent the nights in the canvas room where I rolled myself in a tarpaulin as well as could be done. It was prohibited, but the skipper and the mate never went into the crew cabin.

I really had enough to do: I cleaned, made beds, emptied spittoons, and cooked. The ordinary seamen were nice to me, begged for extra coffee, and bad-mouthed the mate to please me. To please them, I stole from the provisions astern and from the skipper's booze. Myself, I lived on raisins and water.

One morning we saw several islands on the horizon. They resembled large grassy heaps lying about on the water. It was the Faroe Islands. They disappeared again from sight, we turned the craft, and a little later they reemerged, this time closer. Then night fell and when it became light again, we were lying quite near them, and a long narrow rowboat with long narrow oars was on the way out to us. The men in the boat had on funny little knitted caps and ox-hide shoes.* It was the pilot's boat. The pilot was the tall thin old fellow standing at the back of the boat, said Leo. When they reached us, the old man clambered up the ladder and went aft, where he took the tiller out of the skipper's hands without saying a word. He cast a skeptical sidelong glance up at the sails and shifted the tiller hard as if to show the skipper what a big idiot he was.

When we dropped anchor at Thorshavn* roads,* the mate said that I couldn't have permission to go on land. I went down and complained to the skipper, who set aside the ban and quarreled with the mate for an hour down in the cabin. The mate's name was Theobald Jensen. When he came up, he was white with rage and set me to scrubbing the galley so that in any event I wouldn't get too much enjoyment out of my visit on shore.

8

The mate hadn't had any need to be afraid. I didn't desert on the Faroe Islands. I mean, that would've been crazy. We unloaded some of the cargo in Thorshavn and got rid of the rest in Selletræ,* returned to Thorshavn with the dead freight, and loaded dried fish. One evening I went ashore with the two ordinary seamen: we went to the movies with three girls; it was



Leo who'd taken care that I also got a girl. Outside town there was something they called the woods; we went out there when we got out of the movies. It turned out to be a collection of small, low bushes. It was cold; Leo was far ahead with his girl; he talked nonstop and smoked one cigarette after the other. None of the rest of us said anything. I hardly dared look at my girl; she was a chubby little one, who was just as embarrassed as I myself was. When we reached the bushes, we stopped automatically. The sky was bright and cold, and there was something run-down and trampled about the low brush; all the small, narrow paths into the thicket made you depressed and uneasy.

Suddenly we were standing alone. The others had each found their path, but the chubby little girl and I stood there like two children life was now suddenly demanding something from, which accordingly had to be done, something that actually you'd love to do, but didn't really dare do. In any case, that's the way I felt.

I'd heard enough stories to know what I was supposed to do in such a situation, but I knew ahead of time that I couldn't pull it off. It was as if the stories got me more excited than reality. I mean, now I was in fact standing there in the situation that I'd so often visualized in my fantasy, and what I really felt like doing was running away from the whole thing. It was very awkward—what must the girl have thought of me. In any event, I had to do something. I happened to think of Siska—that was something totally different; with Siska there hadn't been any need for me to make a decision—it all went automatically. This girl expected me to do something.

I put my arm around her and kissed her. She immediately opened up like a flower and pressed herself up against me. I unbuttoned her coat. The rest of the story was ruined by the fact that I felt ludicrous because I lost my balance. When I again pressed her up against me and kissed her, my lips turned wet with her tears. We took each other's hand and walked back to town. She said that I should write her and asked whether I thought I'd be going to any interesting countries. Her brother collected stamps.

The dried fish were destined for Grimsby* in England. After we'd been at sea for a couple of days, it was brought to light that the ordinary seamen's love affairs had had consequences, so the skipper had to put on his glasses and get cracking with the thick physician's manual lying in his cabin. What does life have to offer a seaman. Even love is poisoned. Leo was stuffed to the gills with cheap cynicism and claimed you weren't a real man till you had such a bout. I was happy about having survived the trip to the woods so successfully and was glad to wait a bit yet to become a real man.

The ordinary seaman's bad luck gave the mate material for a bunch of impudent things, and one Sunday morning he and Leo were sprawled on the deck scuffling. By the way, it was a lovely calm morning, the sea was smooth as oil, and twice we'd seen a whale far off. We were going to have boiled beef for lunch; it was a pleasant change and easy to prepare. Naturally we lived mainly on dried fish—after all, it was free, you could just go get it from the cargo hold. The skipper didn't worry about its not being especially well suited for human consumption. During the scuffle the skipper kept below deck, but the rest of us were attentive spectators and were happy every time Leo's fist established contact with the mate's jaw. Finally the mate got hold of a spike and hit Leo hard above one eye so blood flowed down over his face.

Next day the wind rose and off the Orkney Islands* we got into violent weather. The cargo shifted and we listed. For several days we lay to* with sails reefed and waited for it to clear up. The waves washed over the deck and the storm made music in the rigging, so you couldn't hear your own voice even if you screamed at the top of your lungs. The ordinary seamen took turns turning the tiller; they were in oilskins and tall rubber boots; I had on the clothes I'd come on board in and was sopping wet from head to toe. It's incredible that I was able to stand it: other people get influenza from sitting on a bench at Langelinie pier* without a coat on an early spring day and some die from

wet feet. In the afternoon that day the storm was at its high point and we thought the coast was getting closer and closer; the mate sent Leo up into the rigging to reef the sails. It sounded like a death sentence.

While Leo was up there, the skipper took the tiller and after that was over with, he took Leo along down astern and gave him a tin mug of cognac. At that time I felt that the whole world stood and fell with whether Leo returned alive down from the spar, but now after the fact I feel that, after all, in a way it didn't matter whether his existence had been brought to an end that afternoon in the North Sea or that night several years later in the Mediterranean when he was washed overboard.

10

When we got to Grimsby I deserted. I'd planned it before I'd seen the English coast and was just waiting for a suitable opportunity. We got into the dock in the evening, but couldn't berth alongside the wharf till the next morning. Late in the morning some brokers and such came on board and there was a terrible hullabaloo about the cargo, which had shifted and was partially ruined. The buyers refused to accept the fish, there was a lot of running about by a bunch of people, some of them were very worked up, and the skipper's face was like a thundercloud. Leo said the whole thing was a charade on the part of the agents to push down the price of the fish. Finally it was worked out and the unloading began later in the afternoon.

The fish was hauled up in baskets out of the cargo hold; a dozen girls and young women had come on board to put the fish in baskets. They immediately inundated the ship from front to stern, a couple of them sat down with me in the galley, made me blush at their vulgarities, and persuaded me to make coffee. Unfortunately, there was certainly no doubt that their crude advances were due to the coffee and not my person. Imagine what I looked like: I hadn't washed in the time we'd been at sea, my hair was long, I had on a tattered jacket that was stiff from scraps

of food, soot, and other pleasant forms of dirt, my shirt was greyish-yellow and hadn't been off my body since I was in Falkenberg, but for all that my pants were the worst. Even an expert wouldn't have been able to say what material they were originally made of; one pants leg was torn and I had had to tie a piece of twine around my ankle to keep it together. One of the girls was good-looking: she was black-haired, had brown eyes, and was chock-full of charm and roguery; she had on an old washed-out silk blouse that sat tight around her breasts, and a sackcloth apron, that slid up when she sat down and showed her round, bare knees. She managed to persuade me to sneak aft and steal a bag of coffee for her from the skipper's cupboard.

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After I'd washed up after dinner, I fetched a bucket of fresh water, heated up it on the stove, and took it down into the cabin where I cast off all my clothes and scrubbed myself with a wad of cotton waste and green soap from head to toe, made my hair sopping wet, and made an elegant part with the help of Leo's pocket mirror. When I came up on deck, the girls were knocking off, the ordinary seamen were putting on the hatches, which were full of salt and bits of dried fish everywhere, the skipper and the mate were below decks, the evening calm was beginning to settle over the dock; only over at the coal cranes, where work went on around the clock, was there a racket and rattling, which could be heard that much more strongly because of the beginning quiet. The girl with the round knees was standing on the wharf, she had the bag of coffee in her hand; out in life there were experiences and wonderful things—it was only on ships that life was depressing and meaningless. I'd fled from home to avoid rules and compulsion, but I was constantly getting involved in slavery again because I'd been raised to knuckle under to compulsion. But now that was going to be over with. The slavery was going to be over with. I'd desert this very evening.

I went down into the cabin and packed my things in a little

bundle; I left some postcards from the Faroe Islands and a picture of a Swedish film star there. When I came up again, the ordinary seamen were in the galley. Doubtless to drink coffee. I stuck the bundle under my jacket and left the "Constantia."