VINTAGE

DEPTHS

HENNING MANKELL

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About the Author

Henning Mankell is the prizewining and internationally acclaimed author of the Inspector Wallander mysteries, now dominating bestseller lists throughout Europe. He devotes much of his free time to working with Aids charities in Africa, where he is director of the Teatro Avenida in Maputo.

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ALSO BY HENNING MANKELL

Kurt Wallander Series

Faceless Killers
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The Fifth Woman
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The Return of the Dancing Master
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Kennedy's Brain
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Italian Shoes
The Man from Beijing

Non Fiction

I Die, but the Memory Lives on

Young Adult Fiction

A *Bridge to the Stars*
Shadows in the Twilight
When the Snow Fell

The Journey to the End of the World

Children’s Fiction

The Cat Who Liked Rain

Henning Mankell

DEPTHS

TRANSLATED FROM THE SWEDISH BY

Laurie Thompson

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PART I

The Secret Affinity with Leads

CHAPTER 1

They used to say that when there was no wind the cries of the lunatics could be heard on the other side of the lake.

Especially in autumn. The cries belonged to autumn.

Autumn is when this story begins. In a damp fog, with the temperature hovering just above freezing, and a woman who suddenly realises that freedom is at hand. She has found a hole in a fence.

It is the autumn of 1937. The woman is called Kristina Tacker and for many years she has been locked away in the big asylum near Säter. All thoughts of time have lost their meaning for her.

She stares at the hole for ages, as if she does not grasp its significance. The fence has always been a barrier she should not get too close to. It is a boundary with a quite specific significance.

But this sudden change? This gap that has appeared in the fence? A door has been opened by an unknown hand, leading to what was until now forbidden territory. It takes a long time for it to sink in. Then, cautiously, she crawls through the hole and finds herself on the other side. She stands, motionless, listening, her head hunched down between her tense shoulders, waiting for somebody to come and take hold of her.

For all the twenty-two years she has been shut away in the asylum she has never felt surrounded by people, only by puffs of breath. Puffs of breath are her invisible warders.

The big, heavy buildings are behind her, like sleeping beasts, ready to pounce. She waits. Time has stood still. Nobody comes to take her back.

Only after prolonged hesitation does she take a first step, then another, until she disappears into the trees.

She is in a coniferous forest. There is an acrid smell, reminiscent of rutting horses. She thinks she can make out a path. She makes slow progress, and only when she notices that the heavy breathing which surrounded her in the asylum is no longer there can she bring herself to turn round.

Nothing but trees on every side. She does not worry about the path having been a figment of her imagination and no longer discernible, as she is not going anywhere in particular. She is like scaffolding surrounding an empty space. She does not exist. Within the scaffolding there has never been a building, or a person.

Now she is moving very quickly through the forest, as if she did have an objective beyond the pine trees after all. From time to time she stands, stock-still, as if by degrees turning into a tree herself.

Time does not exist in the forest. Only trunks of trees, mostly pine, the occasional spruce, and sunbeams tumbling noiselessly to the damp earth.

She starts trembling. A pain comes creeping under her skin. At first she thinks it is that awful itchy feeling that affects her sometimes and forces the warders to strap her down to prevent her from scratching herself raw. Then it comes to her that there is another reason for her trembling.

She remembers that, once upon a time, she had a husband.

She has no idea what has prompted that memory. But she recalls very clearly having been married. His name was Lars, she remembers that. He had a scar over his left eye and was twenty-three centimetres taller than she was. That is all she can remember for the moment. Everything else has been repressed and banished into the darkness that fills her being.

But her memory is reviving. She stares round at the tree trunks in confusion. Why should she start thinking about her husband just here? A man who hated forests and was

always drawn to the sea? A midshipman, and eventually a hydrographic survey engineer with the rank of Commander, employed on secret military missions?

The fog starts to disperse, melting away.

She stands rooted to the spot. A bird takes off, clattering somewhere out of sight. Then all is silent again.

My husband, Kristina Tacker thinks. I once had a husband, our lives were intertwined. Why do I remember him now, when I have found a hole in the fence and left all those watchful predators behind?

She searches her mind and among the trees for an answer.

There is none. There is nothing.

CHAPTER 2

Late in the night the warders find Kristina Tacker.

It is frosty, the ground creaks under their feet. She is standing in the darkness, not moving, staring at a tree trunk. What she sees is not a pine tree but a remote lighthouse in a barren and deserted archipelago at the edge of the open sea. She scarcely notices that she is no longer alone with the silent tree trunks.

That day in the autumn of 1937 Kristina Tacker is fifty-seven years old. There is a trace of her former beauty lingering in her face. It is twelve years since she last uttered a word. Her hospital records repeat the phrase, day after day, year after year:

The patient is still beyond reach.

That same night: it is dark in her room in the rambling mental hospital. She is awake. A lighthouse beam sweeps past, time after time, like a silent tolling of light inside her head.

CHAPTER 3

Twenty-three years earlier, also on an autumn day, her husband was contemplating the destroyer *Svea*, moored at the Galärvarv Quay in Stockholm. Lars Tobiasson-Svartman was a naval officer and cast a critical eye over the vessel. Beyond her soot-stained funnels he could make out Kastellet and Skeppsholm Church. The light was grey, forcing him to screw up his eyes.

It was the middle of October 1914, the Great War had been raging for exactly two months and nineteen days. Lars Tobiasson-Svartman did not have unqualified faith in these new armoured warships. The older wooden ships always gave him the feeling of entering a warm room. The new ones, with hulls comprising sheets of armour-plating welded together, were cold rooms, unpredictable rooms. He felt deep down that these vessels would not allow themselves to be tamed. Beyond the coal-fired steam engines or the new oil-driven ones were other forces that could not be controlled.

Now and then came a gust of wind from Saltsjön.

He stood by the steep gangplank, hesitating. It made him feel confused. Where did this insecurity come from? Ought he to abandon his voyage before it had even begun? He searched for an explanation, but all his thoughts had vanished, swallowed up by a bank of mist sweeping along inside him.

A sailor hurried down the gangplank. That brought Tobiasson-Svartman down to earth. Not being in control of himself was a weakness it was essential to conceal. The

rating took his suitcases, his rolled-up sea charts and the brown, specially made bag containing his most treasured measuring instrument. He was surprised to find that the rating could manage all the cumbersome luggage without assistance.

The gangplank swayed under his feet. He could just make out the water between the quay and the hull of the ship, dark, distant.

He thought about what his wife had said when they said goodbye in their flat in Wallingatan.

‘Now you’re embarking on something you’ve been aching to do for so long.’

They were standing in their dimly lit hall. She had intended to accompany him to his ship before saying goodbye, but as she started to put on her gloves she hesitated, just as he had done at the foot of the gangplank.

She did not explain why the leave-taking had suddenly become too much for her. That was not necessary. She did not want to start crying. After nine years of marriage he knew it was harder for her to let him see her crying than to be naked before him.

They said goodbye hurriedly. He tried to reassure her that he was not disappointed.

In fact, he felt relieved.

He paused halfway along the gangplank, savouring the almost imperceptible motion of the ship. She was right. He had been longing to get away. But he was not at all sure what he was longing for.

Was there a secret inside him of which he was not aware?

He was very much in love with his wife. Every time he had to leave for a tour of duty and said goodbye to her, he unobtrusively breathed in the scent of her skin, kissing her hastily. It was as if he were laying down that perfume, as you do a fine wine, or perhaps an opiate, to take out whenever he felt so forlorn that he risked losing his self-possession.

His wife still used her maiden name. He had no idea why, and did not want to ask.

A tug boomed from the direction of Kastellholmen. A seagull hovered in the updraught over the ship.

He was a solitary man. His solitary nature was like an abyss that he was afraid he might one day fall into. He had worked out that the abyss must be at least forty metres deep, and that he would leap into it head first, so as to be certain of dying.

He was at the exact middle of the gangplank. He had estimated its total length by eye at seven metres. So now he was precisely three and a half metres from the quay and just as far from the ship’s rail.

His earliest memories were to do with measurements. Between himself and his mother, between his mother and his father, between the floor and the ceiling, between sorrow and joy. His whole life was made up of distances, measuring, abbreviating or extending them. He was a solitary person constantly seeking new distances to estimate or measure.

Measuring distances was a sort of ritual, his personal means of reining in the movements of time and space.

From the start, from as far back as he could remember, solitude had been like his own skin.

Kristina Tacker was not only his wife. She was also the invisible lid he used to cover the abyss.

CHAPTER 4

On that October day in 1914, Stockholm was enveloped by barely noticeable drizzle. His luggage had been brought by handcart from Wallingatan, over the bridge to Djurgården and the Galärvarv Quay. Although there were just the two of them, the porter and himself, he felt as if he were taking part in a procession.

His suitcases were of brown leather. The specially made, calf-leather bag contained his most precious possession. It was a sounding lead for the advanced measuring of the ocean depths.

The lead was made of brass, manufactured in Manchester in 1701 by Maxwell & Swanson. Their skilled craftsmen made optical and navigational instruments and exported them all over the world. The company had acquired renown and respect when they made the sextants used by Captain Cook on what was to be his final voyage to the Pacific Ocean. Their advertisements claimed that their products were used even by Japanese and Chinese seafarers.

Sometimes when he woke up during the night, filled with a mysterious feeling of unrest, he would get up and fetch his lead. Take it back to bed with him and hold it, pressed tightly to his chest. That usually enabled him to go back to sleep.

The lead breathed. Its breath was white.

CHAPTER 5

The destroyer *Svea* was built at the Lindholmen shipyard in Gothenburg, and had left the slipway in December 1885. She was due to be taken out of active service in 1914 as she was already out of date, but that sentence had been suspended because the Swedish Navy had not prepared for the Great War. Her life had been saved at the very last second. She was like a working horse that had been spared at the moment of slaughter, and allowed back into the streets again.

Lars Tobiasson-Svartman reminded himself of the most important measurements relevant to the ship. *Svea* was seventy-five metres long and at the broadest point just aft of amidships she was slightly more than fourteen metres. The heavy artillery comprised two long-range 254-millimetre guns of the M/85 type, made by Maxim-Nordenfelt in London. The medium-range artillery was made up of four 150-millimetre guns, also made in London. In addition there was some light artillery and an unknown number of machine guns.

He continued thinking over what he knew about the vessel he was about to board. The crew comprised 250 regular and conscripted ratings, and twenty-two regular officers. The driving power, currently making the ship throb, came from two horizontal compound engines whose horsepower was generated by six boilers. In trials she had attained a speed of 14.68 knots.

There was one further measurement that interested him. The gap between the bottom of *Svea*'s keel and the bottom of the Galärvarv Quay was just over two metres.

He turned round and looked down at the quay, as if hoping that his wife might have turned up after all. But

there was nothing to be seen apart from a few boys fishing and a drunken man who slumped on to his knees then slowly toppled over.

The gusts from Saltsjön were growing stronger. They were very noticeable on deck next to the gangplank.

CHAPTER 6

He was jolted from his reverie by a first mate who clicked his heels and introduced himself as Anders Höckert. Tobiasson-Svartman responded with a salute, but felt uncomfortable doing so. He shuddered every time he was forced to raise his hand to the peak of his cap. He felt silly, as if he were playing a game he hated.

Höckert showed him to his cabin, which was situated below the port companionway leading up to the bridge and the artillery firing base.

Anders Höckert had a birthmark on the back of his neck, just above his collar.

Tobiasson-Svartman frowned and fixed his eyes on the birthmark. Whenever he saw a mole on somebody's body he always tried to work out what it resembled. His father, Hugo Svartman, had a group of moles high up on his left arm. He imagined them to be an archipelago of small, anonymous islands, rocks and skerries. His white skin formed the navigable channels that combined and crisscrossed one another. Where were the deepest channels on his father's left arm? Which would be the safest route for a vessel to take?

The secret affinity with leads, measurements and distances characteristic of his life was based on that image and the memory of his father's birthmarks.

Lars Tobiasson-Svartman thought to himself: Deep down inside me I am still searching for unknown shallows, another unsounded depth, unexpected troughs. Even inside myself I need to chart and mark out a safely navigable channel.

Anders Höckert's birthmark on the back of his neck, he decided, resembled a wild beast, ready to charge, horns lowered.

Höckert opened the door to the cabin Tobiasson-Svartman had been allocated. He was on a secret mission and hence could not share a cabin with another of the ship’s officers.

His luggage, the rolled-up charts and the brown bag containing his depth-sounding instrument were already stacked on the floor. Höckert saluted and left the cabin.

Tobiasson-Svartman sat down on his bunk and let the solitude envelop him. The engines were throbbing as the boilers were never shut down completely even when the vessel was in dock. He looked out of the porthole. The sky had turned blue, the drizzle had lifted. That cheered him up, or perhaps made him feel relieved. Rain tended to depress him, like small, almost invisible weights beating against his body.

For a moment he felt an urge to abandon ship.

But he did not move.

Then slowly he began to unpack his bags. His wife had carefully chosen every item of clothing for him. She knew what he liked best and would want to have with him. Each one was lovingly folded.

Even so, it seemed to him that he had never seen them before, never mind held them in his hands.

CHAPTER 7

The destroyer *Svea* left Galärvarv Quay at 18.15 that same evening. At midnight, they emerged from the Stockholm archipelago and headed south-south-east and raised their speed to twelve knots. The north wind was squally, eight to twelve metres per second.

That night Lars Tobiasson-Svartman clung tightly to his lead. He lay awake for hours, thinking about his wife and her fragrant skin. Occasionally he also thought about the mission that lay ahead.

CHAPTER 8

At dawn, after a night's fitful sleep riddled with vague and elusive dreams, he left his cabin and went on deck. He found a place on the lee side, where he knew he could not be seen from the bridge.

One of his secrets was hidden in a rolled-up chart in his cabin. That is where he kept the designs for the destroyer *Svea*. The vessel had been constructed by master shipbuilder Göthe Wilhelm Svenson at the Lindholmen yard. After his time as an engineer at the Royal Naval Engineering Establishment in 1868, Svenson carved out an astonishing career for himself as a shipbuilder. In 1881, at the age of fifty-three, he had been appointed Director-in-Chief of the Royal Naval Engineering Establishment.

The very day Tobiasson-Svartman had been told that *Svea* would be the base for his secret mission, he wrote to Svenson and asked for a copy of the construction designs. He gave as justification his 'inveterate and perhaps somewhat ridiculous interest in collecting designs of naval vessels'. He was prepared to pay one thousand kronor for the drawings.

Three days later a courier arrived from Gothenburg. The man who handed over the plans was a clerk by the name of Tånge. He had put on his best suit. Tobiasson-Svartman assumed it was Svenson who had instructed him to be elegantly dressed.

Tobiasson-Svartman had not doubted for a second that the drawings would be for sale. A thousand kronor was a lot of money, even for a successful engineer like Göthe Wilhelm Svenson.

CHAPTER 9

He clung to the ladder, trying to follow the rolling of the ship with his body. He recalled the evening he had spent in his living room in Wallingatan, poring over the drawings. That was when his journey had effectively begun.

It was the end of July, the heat was oppressive and everybody was waiting for the outbreak of the war, which now seemed inevitable. The only question was when the first shots would be fired and by whom, at whom. Newspaper offices filled their windows with highly charged reports. Rumours were started and spread, only to be denied immediately; nobody knew anything for certain, but everyone was convinced that they alone had drawn the correct conclusions.

A succession of invisible telegrams flew back and forth across Europe, between kaisers, generals and ministers. The messages were like a stray but deadly flock of birds.

On his desk was a newspaper cutting with a photograph of the German strike-cruiser *Goeben*. The 23,000-tonne vessel was the most handsome yet most frightening ship he had ever set eyes on.

His wife came into the room and stroked him gently on the shoulder.

‘It’s getting late. What are you doing that’s so important?’

‘I’m studying the ship I shall have to join soon. When it’s time for my mystery voyage.’

She was still stroking his shoulder.

‘Mystery voyage? Surely you can tell me where you’re going?’

‘No. I can’t tell even you.’

Her fingers caressed his shoulder. Her hand barely touched his shirt, yet he could feel her movements deep

down inside him.

‘What do all those lines and figures mean? I can’t even see that they represent a ship.’

‘I like being able to see what is not seeable.’

‘Meaning what?’

‘The idea. What lies behind it all. The will, perhaps? The intention? I’m not sure. But there’s always something there that you cannot see at first.’

She sighed impatiently. She stopped stroking his shoulder and instead started tapping anxiously at his collarbone. He tried to work out if she were sending him a message.

In the end she took her hand away. He imagined it was a bird taking flight.

I am not telling her the truth, he thought. I am keeping from her what I am really doing. Not admitting that I am studying the plans in order to find a point on deck where nobody could see me from the bridge.

What I am really doing is searching for a hiding place.

CHAPTER 10

He gazed out to sea.

Ragged shreds of mist, a solitary line of seabirds.

Recalling memories involved meticulous care and patience. What happened afterwards, that evening in July, just before war was declared? Those oppressively hot days and the millions of young men all over Europe hastily called up?

After studying the drawings for nearly an hour he had found the spot where his hiding place would be.

He pushed the plans aside. From the street outside he could hear the neighing of a restless dray horse. In another room of their large flat Kristina was rearranging the china figurines she had inherited from her mother. There was a clinking noise, as if from muffled bells. Although they had been married for ten years and scarcely an evening went by without her rearranging the figurines on the shelves, not a single one had ever fallen and shattered.

But afterwards? What happened then? He could not remember. It was as if a leak had sprung in the flow of memories. Something had seeped away.

It had been a windless July evening, the temperature twenty-seven degrees. Occasional rumbles of thunder had drifted in from the Lidingö direction, where dark clouds were gathering from the sea.

He thought about those clouds. He was troubled by the fact that he found it easier to recall the shape of clouds than his wife’s face.

He brushed such thoughts aside and gazed into the dawn. What exactly can I see? he thought. Dark rocky outlines early on a Swedish autumn morning. At some point during the night the duty officer had ordered a change of course to

a more southerly direction. Their speed was about seven, possibly eight knots.

Five knots is peace, he thought. Seven knots is a suitable speed when you are being sent out on a secret and urgent mission. And 27.8 knots means war. That is the highest speed achieved by the *Goeben*, although her steam engines were rumoured to have a construction fault causing severe leakages.

It struck him that you can predetermine the moment when a war starts, but never when it will finish.

CHAPTER 11

On the starboard side, where he stood concealed by the companionway, the shoreline could just be made out in the dawn light. Rocks and skerries rose and fell in the choppy sea.

This is where a land starts and ends, Tobiasson-Svartman thought. But the boundary keeps shifting, there is no precise point where the sea comes to an end and land begins. The rocks are barely visible above the water. In olden days seafarers used to regard these rocks and reefs and outcrops as peculiar and terrifying sea monsters. I can also imagine the rocks slowly climbing up out of the sea becoming animals, but they do not terrify me. For me, they are no more than thought-provoking but perfectly harmless hippos rearing up among the waves, of a kind found only in the Baltic Sea.

This is where a land starts and ends, he thought once more. A rock leisurely straightening its back. A rock by the name of Sweden.

He walked to the rail and peered into the blue-grey water rushing along the hull of the destroyer. The sea never gives way, he thought. The sea never sells its skin. In the winter this sea is like frozen skin. Autumn is all calm, waiting. With sudden gusts of howling gales. Summer is no more than a brief glint in the mirror-calm water.

The sea, the elevation of the land, all these incomprehensible phenomena, they are like the slow progress from childhood to adulthood and death. An elevation of the land takes place inside every human being. All our memories come from the sea.

The sea is a dream that never sells its skin.

He smiled. My wife does not want me to see her crying. Perhaps that is for the same reasons, whatever they are, that I do not want her to see who I am when I am alone with the sea?

He returned to his sheltered spot. A freezing cold sailor emptied a bucket of waste food over the stern. Seagulls were following in the wake of the ship like a watchful rearguard. The deck was deserted again. He continued to contemplate the rocks. It was getting lighter.

These reefs and rocks are not only animals, he thought. They are also stones that are breaking free from the sea. There is no such thing as freedom without effort. But these stones are also time. Stones rising slowly out of the sea, which never lets go of them.

He tried to work out where they were. It was eleven hours since they had left Stockholm. He estimated the speed again and adjusted his previous conclusion to nine knots. They must be somewhere in the northern östergötland archipelago, south of Landsort, north of the Häradskär lighthouse, to the south or east of Fällbådarna.

He went back to his cabin. Apart from the rating on deck he had not set eyes on a single member of the ship’s large crew. Nobody could very well have seen him either, nor his hiding place.

He closed his cabin door and sat down on his bunk. In half an hour he would take breakfast in the officers’ mess. At half past nine he was due to meet the ship’s captain in his quarters. Captain Hans Rake would hand over the secret instructions presently locked in the ship’s safe.

CHAPTER 12

He wondered why he so seldom laughed.

What was he missing? Why did he so often think he must be fashioned out of faulty clay?

CHAPTER 13

He sat on the edge of his bunk and let his eyes wander slowly around the cabin.

It was three metres square, like a prison cell with a round, brass-framed porthole. On the deck immediately below it was a corridor linking the various sections of the vessel. According to the plans, which he had memorised in minute detail, there were also two watertight, vertical bulkheads to the left of his cabin but two metres lower down in the ship. Above his head was the companionway leading to the starboard midships gun.

He thought: The cabin is a point. I am in the middle of that point at this very moment. One of these days there will be measuring instruments so precise that it will be possible to establish the exact location of this cabin in terms of latitude and longitude at any given moment. Its position will be capable of being fixed on a map of the world down to a fraction of a second. When that happens there will no longer be a place for gods. Who needs a god when the precise location of every human being can be established, when a person’s inner location will coincide exactly with his external location? People making a living out of speculating about superstition and religion will have to find something else to live off. Charlatans and hydrographic engineers stand irrevocably on different sides of the crucial dividing line. Not the date line or the prime meridian line, but the line that separates the measurable from what cannot be measured and hence doesn’t exist.

He gave a start. Something in that thought confused him. But he could not put his finger on what it was.

He took his shaving mirror from the sponge bag Kristina Tacker had embroidered with his initials and a childishly

formed rose.

Each time he looked at his reflection he took a deep breath. As if he were preparing himself for descending into a chasm. He imagined being confronted by a face he did not recognise in the mirror.