

Henning  
**Mankell**

**Journey**  
to the **End** of  
the **WORLD**

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## **About the Book**

'The cold isn't going to go away,' said Samuel. 'But it's warm in Brazil. There's no such place as the end of the world. But there is a place called Brazil.'

Joel is fifteen and has left school, wanting to become a merchant sailor and travel far away from his home town in Northern Sweden. But first he must face up to the past and meet his mother who ran off when he was little. After such a long time how will Joel and his dad cope with such a reunion and will Joel ever sail the seas. . . ?

***To the memory of my parents***

# **JOURNEY TO THE END OF THE WORLD**

Henning Mankell

Translated by Laurie Thompson



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## Foreword

This is the fourth and final book in the series about Joel.

The first part was *A Bridge to the Stars*. Then came *Shadows in the Twilight*, and *When the Snow Fell*.

In this book there are occasional references to characters who appeared in the earlier stories. I have not always bothered to describe them in detail again. What they look like, or why they do what they do.

Anybody who wants to can always check up by consulting previous volumes in the series of stories about Joel.

But it is not necessary, of course.

Most of what you need to know is to be found in these pages.

Henning Mankell



## One night in March

the year when Joel would soon celebrate his fifteenth birthday, he wakes up out of a dream that has made him feel frightened. When he opens his eyes in the darkness, he doesn't know where he is at first. But then he hears his dad's snores rolling in through the half-open door.

That's the moment when his dream comes back to him.

He'd been walking over the ice on the frozen river. He didn't know why he was there. But he suddenly noticed that the ice was beginning to crack under his feet. He started running to the bank as fast as he could, but all the time more cracks opened out in front of him. He would never be able to get to the bank. Then, as if with the wave of a magic wand, all the winter ice vanished. Apart from the small floe he was standing on. Then he noticed there was something odd about the water. It wasn't black and cold like it usually was. It was boiling. And all the time the floe he was standing on was getting smaller. In the end there was nothing left of it. Fierce, white crocodiles were snapping at him. And he was falling. Falling straight into their jaws . . .

When he wakes up he notices that he's covered in sweat. The hands of his alarm clock gleam in the darkness. A quarter past four. He's so relieved to have escaped from his dream. He pulls the covers up to his chin and turns to face the wall in the hope of going back to sleep. There are still a few hours to go before he needs to get up and go to school.

But he can't sleep. He lies awake. Persistent thoughts fill his mind. Three more months and his school days will come to an end. He'll get his final Report. Then what will he do? Where will he find a job? What would he really like to do?

The thoughts won't go away. Especially when he thinks about Samuel. For as long as Joel can remember, his dad has been talking about moving away from the little town they live in. As soon as Joel finishes school, Samuel will become a sailor again, and take Joel with him. But the years have gone by and Samuel talks less and less about the sea. And ships. And all the ports waiting for them out there in the wide world.

There's a lot to think about. Joel sits up in bed and leans his back against the wall. It's March already. Before long the snow will start to melt away. It will be his birthday next month. He'll be fifteen. That means he'll be allowed to ride a moped. And see adults-only films. His birthday will be the day he no longer needs to sneak into the cinema without being seen. He'll be able to walk past the caretaker with a ticket in his hand.

Becoming fifteen is an important event.

But he feels worried. What will happen?

In the end he manages to go back to sleep.

Outside a solitary dog runs past the house. It's on its way to somewhere only the dog knows about.

But Joel is asleep. In his dreams the spring thaw has arrived already.

And the ice is melting . . .

# 1

Joel was halfway down the hill just past the vicarage when his chain came off. He was so surprised that he swerved and lost control of his bike. He crashed into the hedge round the horse dealer's garden and flew headfirst into some currant bushes. One cheek was badly scratched, and his left knee was bruised. But when he scrambled to his feet he was able to stand up and rescue his bike from the hedge. He'd made a big hole in it. As the horse dealer had a fiery temper, Joel rapidly wheeled his bike away and leaned it against the vicarage fence.

It was an afternoon in the middle of May. There were still patches of snow left in the shadow of house walls and on the verges. Spring had not yet brought any warm weather with it. But every afternoon after school Joel took his bike and rode through the streets of the little town. He felt worried and restless. What was going to happen shortly? When he left school?

A few days after he'd had that dream about the river with boiling water, he'd asked Samuel. He'd prepared himself carefully. They usually had pork and fried potatoes on a Sunday, but as it was Samuel's favourite, Joel had made it for that night's dinner even though it was a Tuesday. Joel knew that the best moment to take up an important matter with Samuel was when he had just finished eating and pushed his plate to one side.

And that moment had come. Samuel put down his fork, wiped his mouth and slid his plate away.

'We have to make up our minds,' Joel said.

Although his voice had broken now, it sometimes happened that things he said came out like a squeak or in falsetto. He spoke slowly and tried to make his voice as deep as possible.

Samuel was usually tired when he'd finished eating. Now he blinked and looked at Joel.

'What do we have to make up our minds about?' he asked.

Samuel seemed to be in a good mood, Joel thought. That wasn't always the case. Samuel could sometimes be peevish, and in that case Joel knew there was hardly any point in trying to discuss something important.

'What we're going to do when I've left school.'

Samuel smiled.

'What sort of a Report are you going to get?'

Joel didn't like Samuel answering a question by asking another one himself. It was a bad habit that lots of grown-ups had.

But he had prepared himself thoroughly. Joel's school marks were always important for Samuel.

'I'll get better marks than last autumn,' he said. 'I'll be in the top three for geography.'

Samuel nodded.

'When are we going to move?' Joel asked. He must have asked Samuel that question at least a thousand times before. Nearly every day, year after year. The same question. 'When are we going to move?'

Samuel looked down at the blue tablecloth on the kitchen table. Joel thought he might as well continue.

'You're not a lumberjack,' he said. 'You're a sailor. When I've left school we won't need to stay here any longer. We can go away. We can sign on for the same ship. I'm fifteen now. I can also be a sailor.'

Joel waited for an answer.

But Samuel continued staring down at the tablecloth. Then he stood up without a word and put on the coffee

water. Joel wasn't going to get an answer, that much was obvious.

He suddenly felt angry.

He'd made a big effort and prepared Sunday food even though it was only Tuesday, but still Samuel couldn't give him a sensible answer.

He thought he ought to swear and tell his father a few home truths. Tell him he had an obligation to answer now. Joel had no intention of asking the same question another thousand times.

But he didn't swear. He cleared away the plates, scraped the remains into the slop bucket and put the crockery in the sink.

'I'm going out,' he said.

'Don't you have any homework?' asked Samuel, without looking up from the coffee water that was just coming to the boil.

'I've done it already,' Joel said. 'Besides, soon there won't be any more homework.'

Joel waited. But in vain. Samuel said nothing else.

Joel took his jacket and went downstairs.

No answer this time either.

Joel thought about this the following day as well, when he was mending the chain on his bicycle. He hadn't put his question to Samuel again, but had the impression that his dad was thinking it over. Why that should be the case, Joel had no idea. But that's what he suspected, and the feeling was very strong.

It also worried him. When Samuel said hardly anything and seemed to be lost in thought, he could sometimes lapse into one of his phases. When he would just disappear, and then come home drunk late at night. It was a long time since that had happened last, but Joel knew it would happen again. Sooner or later. And that was something he always dreaded. Being forced to go out looking for Samuel, and

then dragging him home when he was too drunk to walk without help.

Joel tried to wipe the oil off his bicycle chain using a sheet of newspaper that happened to be blowing past.

Let's hope it doesn't happen at the end of term ceremony, he thought. That Samuel turns up at church drunk.

Anything but that.

He turned round and gazed up at the church tower. The clock told him it was high time for him to go home and put the potatoes on to boil. He mounted his bike and started pedalling. On the gravelled area behind the petrol station, some boys were dividing into two teams. Several of them were Joel's classmates. He pedalled even harder. He always needed to make the dinner: he'd always been his own mum. And Samuel's as well, sometimes.

When he left school he'd stop doing the cooking. If Samuel wanted to eat when he came home, he'd have to prepare the food himself.

Joel kicked open the gate and freewheeled to the side of the door where he could park his bike. Then he raced up the stairs and wrenched open the kitchen door.

And was stopped in his tracks.

Samuel was sitting on a chair at the kitchen table. Alarm bells started ringing. Samuel wasn't supposed to come home as soon as this. On the few occasions he had done so in the past, he'd either been ill or started drinking. But he didn't seem to be drunk. His eyes weren't red and his hair wasn't standing on end. He didn't seem to be especially ill either.

He looked up at Joel and seemed to be surprised.

'What's the matter?' Joel asked. 'Why are you at home already?'

Samuel pointed to a letter lying on the table.

'Who's it from?'

'Take your jacket off and sit down, and I'll tell you.'

Joel kicked off his wellingtons and hung his jacket over the back of his chair. Then he sat down. He was very much on edge. What could there be in a letter that was so important that it made Samuel come home earlier than usual from his work in the forest?

He noticed that Samuel was very tense. His lower lip was trembling.

'I've had a letter from Elinor,' he said. 'I haven't heard from her for ten years.'

Joel waited for what was coming next, but nothing did.

'Who's Elinor?' he asked, when the silence had been going on for long enough.

'Elinor used to run a bar in Gothenburg,' said Samuel. 'In the days when I was a sailor.'

Joel sighed silently. A few years ago Samuel had met Sara, who worked in a bar in town. Samuel had sometimes spent the night at her place. But then the relationship had come to an end. Sara had broken it off. And Samuel had started drinking. Now he had evidently received a letter from another woman who worked in a bar. Maybe Samuel had spent the night with her occasionally, as well? But why was it so important?

Samuel can be odd sometimes, Joel thought. Just as odd as all the other grown-ups. They think backwards when they ought to be thinking forwards. He gets a letter from somebody he hasn't heard from for ten years. And his lower lip starts trembling. But when I ask him how soon we can get out of this dump of a town and go to sea, I don't even get an answer.

Joel looked at Samuel, and thought that perhaps he ought to ask him something. Give the appearance of being interested.

'What does she want?' he asked.

'She's told me that she knows where Jenny lives.'

It was some time before that sunk in.

Then it seemed as if Joel had been caught up in an earthquake. He was shaking, and it seemed the house was about to collapse and fall down to the shuddering ground.

Somebody called Elinor had written a letter about Mummy Jenny. The one who had vanished ages ago and not been heard of since.

Samuel had put his glasses on.

'It says here,' he said, 'that Jenny lives in Stockholm. In a street called Östgötagatan. In a district known as Söder. Andthatshe works as a shop assistant in a grocery store in a square called Medborgarplatsen.'

Joel stared at Samuel.

'Does it say anything else?'

Samuel took off his glasses.

'It says that she's remarried.'

'But she's married to you?'

'We never got round to getting married. So we didn't need to get divorced either.'

Joel was confused. Had Samuel and Jenny never been married?

He was interested now. He wanted to know about everything in the letter. He held out his hand. But Samuel placed his own large hand over the white paper.

'The letter's addressed to me,' he said.

'Jenny's my mum,' said Joel.

'It's written by Elinor. Elinor was a friend of Jenny's. That's why she's written to me.'

Joel tried to think straight.

'How can it say that she's remarried if she was never married to you in the first place?'

Samuel nodded slowly.

'A good question,' he said. 'But I suppose that's just what people say.'

'Does it say anything else?'

'Elinor's suffering from back pains.'



‘Does it say anything more about Mum? I couldn’t give a shit about Elinor.’

Joel was surprised by what he’d just said. Samuel looked at him in astonishment. Joel felt scared. Samuel could sometimes fly into a rage. Even if he used to swear himself, he didn’t like it if Joel swore.

‘Elinor’s a nice lady,’ said Samuel. ‘She’s worked hard all her life. It’s hard going, serving in a bar. Just think about how difficult it was for Sara, the trouble she had with her legs.’

‘That’s not what I meant,’ Joel mumbled. ‘But does it say anything else about Mum?’

‘No, nothing.’

‘Who’s she married to?’

‘It doesn’t say.’

The conversation petered out. Samuel put his glasses back on and read the letter one more time. Joel could see how his father’s lips were forming word after word. All Joel could do was try to understand what had happened.

For the first time, somebody had been able to tell them where Mummy Jenny was living. Whenever Joel had asked about that before, Samuel had merely shaken his head and said that he didn’t know.

But now, all of a sudden, everything had changed. Mummy Jenny had an address and a job. And unfortunately, a new husband into the bargain.

Joel started to scrub the potatoes. Samuel had started reading the letter yet again.

‘Can’t you read it out loud?’ Joel asked.

‘The letter’s to me,’ said Samuel.

They ate their dinner in silence. Boiled potato and black pudding. They had no lingon jam left.

Joel had burnt the black pudding.

After dinner, Samuel went to his room. He switched on the radio and lay down on top of his bed. As he had closed the

door of his room, Joel was forced to peep in through the keyhole. He could see that Samuel was gazing at the only photo of Jenny he still possessed.

Joel went to his room and also lay down on his bed. Grown-up people who had important things to think about often seemed to lie down on their beds to do so. As Joel was almost grown-up himself, he thought he'd better join them. But he was too restless. He got up again and went to look out of the window. It was still light out there. He tried to imagine the house where Mummy Jenny lived. Then it dawned on him that he actually possessed a map of Stockholm. He'd found it in a rubbish bin at the railway station a few years ago. The only question was: where had he put it? He started searching. And finally found it right at the back of his wardrobe. He took it to the kitchen and spread it out on the table. Samuel's door was still closed. Joel could hear music playing on the radio. He bent down and took another look through the keyhole. Samuel was still holding the photograph of Jenny. But now he was staring up at the ceiling. Joel went back to the kitchen and pored over the map of Stockholm, trying to remember what Samuel had said. Mummy Jenny lived in a street called Östgötagatan. And worked in a grocer's shop in Medborgarplatsen.

Joel started running his finger over the map. He found Medborgarplatsen first. His heart started beating more quickly. Mummy Jenny seemed to have become more real, now that he had found the place where she worked. He kept on searching.

He had just managed to trace Östgötagatan when the door opened and Samuel came into the kitchen to join him. Joel gave a start, as if he'd been found out doing something that wasn't allowed. Maybe Samuel wouldn't want him to pin down Mummy Jenny's address? But Samuel just came to stand by his side.

'I didn't know you had a map of Stockholm,' he said in surprise.