



VINTAGE

**A TREACHEROUS
PARADISE**
HENNING MANKELL

CONTENTS

COVER

ABOUT THE BOOK

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ALSO BY HENNING MANKELL

TITLE PAGE

EPIGRAPH

PROLOGUE: *Africa Hotel, Beira, 2002*

PART ONE: *The Missionaries Leave the Ship*

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

PART TWO: *The Lagoon of Good Death*

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Chapter 28

Chapter 29

Chapter 30

Chapter 31

Chapter 32

Chapter 33

Chapter 34

Chapter 35

Chapter 36

Chapter 37

Chapter 38

Chapter 39

Chapter 40

Chapter 41

Chapter 42

Chapter 43

PART THREE: *The Tapeworm in the Chimpanzee's Mouth*

Chapter 44
Chapter 45
Chapter 46
Chapter 47
Chapter 48
Chapter 49
Chapter 50
Chapter 51
Chapter 52
Chapter 53
Chapter 54
Chapter 55
Chapter 56

PART FOUR: *The Butterfly's Behaviour When Faced With a Superior Power*

Chapter 57
Chapter 58
Chapter 59
Chapter 60
Chapter 61
Chapter 62
Chapter 63
Chapter 64
Chapter 65
Chapter 66
Chapter 67
Chapter 68
Chapter 69

Chapter 70

Chapter 71

Chapter 72

Chapter 73

Chapter 74

Chapter 75

Chapter 76

Chapter 77

Chapter 78

EPILOGUE: *Africa Hotel, Beira, 1905*

AFTERWORD

GLOSSARY

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About the Book

A Treacherous Paradise sees Henning Mankell turn his talents for writing gripping thrillers to a world where power and powerlessness meet and passion is a dangerous commodity.

In 1904, Hanna Lundmark escapes the brutal poverty of rural Sweden for a job as a cook onboard a steamship headed for Australia. To her surprise, she finds love in the form of the ship's mate, whom she marries, but disaster strikes when her husband is struck down almost immediately by a fatal illness. Jumping ship at the African port of Lourenço Marques, Hanna decides to begin her life afresh.

Stumbling across what she believes to be a down-at-heel hotel, Hanna becomes embroiled in a sequence of events that lead to her inheriting the most successful brothel in town. Uncomfortable with the attitudes of the white settlers, Hanna is determined to befriend the prostitutes working for her, and change life in the town for the better, but the distrust between blacks and whites, and the shadow of colonialism, lead to tragedy and murder.

About the Book

Henning Mankell has become a worldwide phenomenon with his crime writing, gripping thrillers and atmospheric novels set in Africa. His prizewinning and critically acclaimed Inspector Wallander Mysteries are currently dominating bestseller lists all over the globe. His books have been translated into forty-five languages and made into numerous international film and television adaptations: most recently the BAFTA-award-winning BBC television series *Wallander*, starring Kenneth Branagh. Mankell devotes much of his free time to working with Aids charities in Africa, where he is also director of the Teatro Avenida in Maputo. In 2008, the University of St Andrews conferred Henning Mankell with an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters in recognition of his major contribution to literature and to the practical exercise of conscience.

www.henningmankell.co.uk

ALSO BY HENNING MANKELL

Kurt Wallander Series

Faceless Killers
The Dogs of Riga
The White Lioness
The Man Who Smiled
Sidetracked
The Fifth Woman
One Step Behind
Firewall
Before the Frost
The Pyramid
The Troubled Man

Fiction

The Return of the Dancing Master
Chronicler of the Winds
Depths
Kennedy's Brain
The Eye of the Leopard
Italian Shoes
The Man from Beijing
Daniel
The Shadow Girls

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

A Treacherous Paradise

Henning Mankell

Translated from the Swedish by
Laurie Thompson



Harvill Secker
LONDON

'There are three kinds of people: those who are dead, those who are alive, and those who sail the seas.'

PLATO

PROLOGUE

Africa Hotel, Beira, 2002

ONE DAY IN the cold month of July, 2002, a man by the name of José Paulo opened up a hole in a rotten floor. He was not trying to make an escape route nor was he looking for a hiding place, but he intended to use the damaged parquet flooring as firewood since the cold of the African winter was harsher than it had been for many years.

José Paulo was unmarried, but he had taken over responsibility for his sister and her five children after his brother-in-law, Emilio, had suddenly disappeared one morning, leaving behind nothing but a pair of worn-out shoes and a number of unpaid bills. His debts were owed almost exclusively to Donna Samima, who ran an unlicensed bar close to the harbour where she served *tontonto* and home-brewed beer with an astonishingly high alcohol content.

Emilio used to spend his time drinking and talking about the time in the distant past when he had worked in the South African gold mines. But many people maintained that he had never set foot in South Africa, and had certainly never held down a steady job in his life.

His disappearance was neither something expected, nor something unexpected. He had simply slunk away during the silent hours just before dawn, when everybody was asleep.

Nobody knew where he had gone to. Nor would anybody miss him all that much, not even his own family. It is doubtful whether Donna Samima missed him, but she did insist that his bills should be paid.

Emilio, the talker and drinker, made virtually no impression on anybody even when he was in the vicinity. The fact that he had now disappeared made no real difference.

José Paulo lived with his sister's family in the Africa Hotel in Beira. There had been a time, which now seemed both distant and incomprehensible, when this establishment had been considered one of the grandest hotels in colonial Africa. It was ranked as comparable with the Victoria Falls Hotel, on the border between Southern Rhodesia and Northern Rhodesia before those countries achieved independence and became known as Zimbabwe and Zambia.

White people came to the Africa Hotel from far and wide in order to get married, celebrate anniversaries, or simply demonstrate the fact that they belonged to an aristocracy that could never imagine that their colonial paradise would one day collapse. The hotel had been the venue for tea dances on Sunday afternoons, swing and tango competitions, and no end of people had been photographed standing outside its imposing entrance.

But the colonial dream of paradise was doomed. One day the Portuguese abandoned their last fortresses. The Africa Hotel started to crumble the moment the former owners had left. The deserted rooms and suites were occupied by poverty-stricken Africans. They deposited their few belongings in the carcasses of what used to be upright pianos and Steinway grands, in dilapidated boudoirs and bathtubs. The beautiful parquet floors were chopped up and used as firewood when winter was at its coldest.

Eventually there were several thousand people living in what had once been the Africa Hotel.

Anyway, one day in July, José Paulo made a hole in the floor and chopped up the parquet. It was freezing cold in the room. The only source of heat was an iron cauldron in which they cooked their food over an open fire. The smoke was channelled out through a smashed and badly repaired windowpane by means of an improvised chimney.

The half-rotten flooring had already begun to smell thanks to its neglect. José thought there must be a dead rat underneath it spreading the stench of decomposition. But when he investigated, all he could find was a little notebook with a calf-leather binding.

He managed to spell out a strange name written on the black cover.

Hanna Lundmark.

Underneath the name was a year: *1905.*

But he was unable to make head or tail of what was written inside it. It was in a language he didn't recognize. He turned to old Afanastasio who lived further down the corridor, in room 212, and was regarded by all those packed inside the hotel as a wise man, because in his youth he had survived a confrontation with two hungry lions on a deserted road outside Chimoio.

But not even Afanastasio could read the text. He approached old Lucinda, who lived in what used to be reception, for assistance, but she didn't know what language it was either.

Afanastasio suggested that José Paulo should throw the book away.

'It's been lying there under the floorboards for ages,' said Afanastasio. 'Somebody hid it there in the days when the likes of us were only allowed to enter this building in the role of waiters, cleaners or porters. No doubt this forgotten book tells an unpleasant story. Burn it. Use it as fuel when it gets really cold.'

José Paulo took the book back to his room. But he didn't burn it, without quite knowing why. Instead he found a new

hiding place for it. There was a cavity underneath the window ledge where he used to stash away any money he occasionally managed to earn. Now the few filthy banknotes could share the space with the black notebook.

He never took it out again. But he didn't forget about it.

PART ONE

The Missionaries Leave the Ship

1

IT IS 1904. June. A scorching hot tropical dawn.

In this far distant here and now, a Swedish steamship lies motionless in the gentle swell. On board are thirty-one crew members, one of them a woman. Her name is Hanna Lundmark, née Renström, and she is working on board as a cook.

In all, thirty-two people were due to make the voyage to Australia with a cargo of Swedish heartwood, and planks for saloon floors and the living rooms of rich sheep farmers.

One of the crew has just died. He was a mate, and married to Hanna.

He was young, and keen to go on living. But despite being warned by Captain Svartman, he went ashore one day while they were topping up their supplies of coal in one of the desert harbours to the south of Suez. He was infected with one of the deadly fevers that are always a threat on the African coast.

When it dawned on him that he was going to die, he started howling in fear.

Neither of the men present at his deathbed – Captain Svartman and Halvorsen, the Ship's Carpenter – could make out any last words that he uttered. He didn't even say anything to Hanna, who was about to be widowed after a marriage lasting only one month. He died screaming and – eventually, just before the end – roaring in terror.

His name was Lars Johan Jakob Antonius Lundmark. Hanna is still mourning his death, having been devastated by what happened.

It is now dawn the day after his death. The ship is not moving. It has heaved to because there will shortly be a burial at sea. Captain Svartman does not want to delay matters. There is no ice on board to keep the corpse cold.

Hanna is standing aft with a slop pail in her hand. She is short in stature, high-breasted, with friendly eyes. Her hair is brown and gathered in a tight bun at the back of her head.

She is not beautiful. But in a strange way she radiates an aura suggesting that she is a totally genuine human being.

The here and now. She is here. On the sea, on board a steamship with two funnels. A cargo of timber, on its way to Australia. Home port: Sundsvall.

The ship is called *Lovisa*. She was built at the Finnboda shipyard in Stockholm. But her home port has always been on the northern Swedish coast.

She was first owned by a shipping company in Gävle, but it went bankrupt after a series of failed speculative deals. And she was then bought by a company based in Sundsvall. In Gävle she was called *Matilda*, after the shipowner's wife, who played Chopin with clumsy fingers. Now she is called *Lovisa*, after the new owner's youngest daughter.

One of the part-owners is called Forsman. He is the one who arranged for Hanna Lundmark to be given a job on board. Although Forsman has a piano in his house, there is nobody who can play it. Nevertheless, when the piano tuner comes on one of his regular visits, Forsman makes a point of being there to listen.

But now the mate Lars Johan Jakob Antonius Lundmark has died, killed by a raging fever.

It is as if the swell of the sea has become paralysed. The ship is lying there motionless, as if it were holding its breath.

That's exactly what I imagine death to be like, Hanna Lundmark thought. A sudden stillness, unexpected, coming

from nowhere. Death is like the wind. A sudden shift into the lee.

The lee of death. And then nothing else.

2

AT THAT VERY moment Hanna is possessed by a memory. It comes from nowhere.

She recalls her father, his voice, which had become no more than a whisper by the end of his life. It was as if he were asking her to preserve and cherish what he said as a valuable secret.

A mucky angel. That's what you are.

He said that to her just before he died. It was as if he were trying to present her with a gift, despite the fact – or maybe because of the fact – that he owned next to nothing.

Hanna Renström, my beloved daughter, you are an angel – a right mucky one, but an angel even so.

What exactly is this memory that she has? What were his exact words? Did he say she was *stony*, or *mucky*? Did he leave it up to her to choose, to decide for herself? Stony broke, or mucky? Now as she recalls that moment, she thinks he called her *a mucky angel*.

It is a distant memory, faded. She is so far distant from her father and his death. From there, and from then: a remote house on a bank of the cold, brown waters of the River Ljungan in the silent forests of northern Sweden. He passed away hunched up and contorted by pain on a sofa bed in a kitchen they had barely been able to keep warm.

He died surrounded by cold, she thinks. It was extremely cold in January, 1899, when he stopped breathing.

That was over five years ago.

The memory of her father and his words about an angel disappear just as quickly as they came. It takes her only a few seconds to return to the present from the past.

She knows that we always make the most remarkable journeys deep down inside ourselves, where there is no time or space.

Perhaps that memory was designed to help her? To throw her the rope she needs in order to climb over the walls confining her within an atmosphere of unremitting sorrow?

But she can't run away. The ship has been transformed into an impregnable fortress.

There is no escape. Her husband really is dead.

Death is a talon that refuses to release its grip.

3

THE PRESSURE IN the boilers has been reduced. The pistons are motionless, the engines ticking over. Hanna is standing by the rail with her slop pail in her hand. She is going to empty it over the stern. The mess-room boy had wanted to take it from her when she was on her way out of the galley, but she had clung on to it, protected it. Even if this is the day she is going to watch her husband's body being tipped into the depths of the ocean, sewn into a canvas sailcloth, she does not want to neglect her duties.

When she looks up from the pail, which is filled with eggshells, it feels as if the heat is scratching at her face. Somewhere in the mist to starboard is Africa. Although she cannot see the faintest trace of land, she thinks she can smell it.

He who is now dead has told her about it. About the steaming, almost corrosive stench of decay which you find everywhere in the tropics.

He had already made several voyages to various destinations. He had managed to learn a few things. But not the most important thing: how to survive.

He would never complete this voyage. He died at the age of twenty-four.

It's as if he was trying to warn her, Hanna thinks. But she doesn't know what he was warning her about. And now he's dead.

A dead man can never answer questions.

Somebody materializes silently by her side. It's her husband's closest friend on board, the Norwegian carpenter Halvorsen. She doesn't know if he has a first name, despite

the fact that they have been together on the same ship for more than two months. He is never called anything but Halvorsen, a serious man who is said to go down on his knees to be readmitted into the Church every time he comes home to Brønnøysund after a few years at sea, and then signs on again when his faith can no longer sustain him.

He has large hands, but his face is kind, almost feminine. His stubble seems to have been painted on and powdered by somebody trying to be cruel to him.

‘I gather there’s something you need to ask about,’ he says.

His voice sings. It sounds as if he’s humming when he speaks.

‘The depth,’ Hanna says. ‘Where will Lundmark’s grave be?’

Halvorsen shakes his head doubtfully. She suddenly has the impression that he is like a restless bird about to fly away.

He leaves her without a word. But she knows he will find out the answer to her question.

How deep will the grave be? Is there a sea bottom where her husband can rest in peace, in his sewn-up canvas shroud? Or is there no bottom, does the sea continue downwards into infinity?

She empties her pail of eggshells, watches the white seabirds dive down into the water to capture their prey, then wipes the sweat from her brow with the towel she has tied to her apron.

Then she gives way to the inevitable, and screams.

Some of the birds riding the upwinds, waiting for a new slop pail to be emptied, flap their wings and strive to escape from the sorrowful howl that hits them like hailstones.

The mess-room boy Lars peers out in horror from the galley door. He is holding a cracked egg in his hand, observes her furtively. Death embarrasses him.

Needless to say, she knows what he is thinking. She's going to jump now, she's going to leave us because her sorrow is too great to bear.

Her scream has been heard by many on board. Two sweaty deckhands naked from the waist up stand by the side of the galley and gape at her, next to where one of the long hawsers is coiled up like a gigantic snake.

Hanna merely shakes her head, grits her teeth and goes into the galley with her empty pail. No, she is not going to climb over the rail. She has spent the whole of her life keeping a stiff upper lip, and she intends to continue doing so.

The heat of the galley hits her hard. Standing next to the stoves is similar to the life of the stokers down below in the engine room. Women in the vicinity of boilers and lighthouses brings bad luck.

The older generation of seafarers is horrified by the thought of having women on board. Their presence means trouble. And also arguments and jealousy among the men. But when shipowner Forsman announced that he wanted Hanna to join the crew, Captain Svartman agreed. He didn't worry too much about superstition.

Hanna picks up an egg, cracks it, drops the contents into the frying pan and throws the shell into the slop pail. Thirty living sailors must have their breakfast. She tries to think only about the eggs, not about the funeral that is in the offing. She is on board as cook: that situation has not changed as a result of the death of her husband.

That's the way it is. She is alive, but Lundmark is dead.

4

SHORTLY AFTERWARDS HALVORSEN returns and asks her to follow him: Captain Svartman is waiting.

‘We’re going to sound the depth,’ says Halvorsen. ‘If our ropes and lines aren’t long enough, the captain will select another place.’

She finishes frying the four eggs she has in the pan, then accompanies him as bidden. She suddenly feels dizzy, and stumbles: but she doesn’t fall, she manages to keep control of herself.

Captain Svartman comes from a long and unbroken line of seafarers, she is aware of that. He’s an old man, turned sixty. The tip of the little finger on his left hand is missing: nobody knows if that is congenital, or the result of an accident.

On two occasions he has been on a sailing ship that sank. On one of those occasions he and all the crew were rescued, on the other only he and the ship’s dog survived. And when the dog reached dry land it lay down in the sand and died.

Hanna’s dead husband once said that in fact the real Captain Svartman also died, together with the ship’s dog. After that catastrophe, the captain stayed on land for many years. Nobody knows what he did. Rumour has it that for part of that time he worked as a navvy and was a member of the vanguard sent out by state-owned Swedish Railways to build the controversial Inlandsbana – a railway line linking the south of Sweden with the north of the country following an inland route rather than the existing coastal railway: the Swedish Parliament was still arguing about it.

Then he suddenly went to sea again, now as the captain of a steamship. He was one of the select few who didn't abandon the seafaring life once sailing ships began to die out, but chose to be part of modern developments.

He has never told anybody about those years he spent away from the sea – what he did, what he thought, not even where he lived.

He seldom says anything beyond the necessary minimum; he has as little faith in people's ability to listen as he has in the reliability of the sea. He has lavender-coloured flowers in pots in his cabin, which only he is allowed to water.

So he has always been an uncommunicative sea captain. And now he has to establish the depth at which one of his dead mates will be buried.

Captain Svartman bows as Hanna approaches him. Despite the heat he is dressed in his full uniform. Buttons fastened, shirt pressed.

Standing next to him is the bosun, Peltonen, a Finn. He is holding a plumb bob, attached to a long, thin line.

Captain Svartman nods, Peltonen throws the bob over the rail and allows it to sink. The line slides between his fingers. Nobody speaks. At one point there is a black thread tied round the line.

'A hundred metres,' says Peltonen.

His voice is shrill. His words bounce away over the swell.

After seven black threads, 700 metres, the line comes to an end. The plumb bob is still hanging down there in the water, it hasn't yet reached the bottom. Peltonen ties a knot and attaches the line to a new roll. There too is a black thread marking every hundred metres.

At 1,935 metres, the line goes slack. The bob has reached the sea bottom. Hanna now knows the depth of her husband's grave.

Peltonen starts to haul up the line, winding it round a specially carved wooden board. Captain Svartman takes off

his uniform cap and wipes the sweat from his brow. Then he checks his watch. A quarter to seven.

‘Nine o’clock,’ he says to Hanna. ‘Before the heat becomes too oppressive.’

She goes to the cabin she has shared with her husband. His was the upper bunk. They often shared the lower one. Without her knowing about it, somebody has taken away his blanket.

The mattress is lying there uncovered. She sits down on the edge of her own bunk and contemplates the bulkhead on the other side of the cramped cabin. She knows that she must now force herself to think.

How did she come to end up here? On a ship, swaying gently on a distant ocean. After all, she was born in a place about as far away from the sea as it’s possible to get. There was a rowing boat on the River Ljungan, but that was all. She sometimes accompanied her father in it when he went fishing. But when she said she wanted to learn to swim – she was about seven or eight at the time – he told her he couldn’t allow it. It would be a waste of time. If she wanted to bathe, she could do that by the bank of the river. If she wanted to get over to the other side, there was a boat and also a bridge.

She lies down on her bunk and closes her eyes. She travels back in her memory as far as she can, back into her childhood where the shadows grow longer and longer.

Maybe that is where she can hide away until the moment comes when her dead husband disappears into the sea for good.

Leaves her. For ever.

5

HER CHILDHOOD, DEEP down there. As if at the bottom of an abyss.

That was Hanna's first memory: the cold, writhing and twisting away inside the cavities in the wooden walls, close to her face as she slept. She would wake up over and over again, and feel how thin the gap was between the newspapers pasted on to the walls – there was no money for wallpaper in the squalid house in which she grew up – and the cold that was constantly trying to gnaw its way through the wood.

Every spring her father worked his way over the house, as if it were a ship on a slipway, patching and mending wherever possible, before the onset of the next winter.

The cold was a sea, the house a ship, and the winter an endless waiting. He would keep on filling the holes and gaps until the frosts arrived in full force. Then it was not possible to do any more, they would have to make the best of it. The house was launched into the winter yet again, and if there were still any leaks allowing the cold to seep through, that was too bad: there was nothing else he could do.

Her father was Arthur Olaus Angus Renström, a lumberjack who worked for Iggesund and shared a log hoist with the Salomonsson brothers who lived further down the river. He worked all out in the forest for next to nothing. He was one of the many men of the woods who never knew if the money they earned for their efforts would be sufficient to live on.

Hanna remembered her father as strong, and with a friendly smile. But also at times melancholy, lost in thoughts

she knew nothing about. She sometimes had the impression that he had trolls in his head when he sat at the kitchen table, seemingly in a different world, with his hands like lead weights in his lap. He was sitting there in his own house, with the rest of his family, but nevertheless he wasn't there at all. He was in a different world where stones had turned into trolls, reindeer moss had become hair, and the wind whispering through the pines was the chattering of voices of the dead.

He often used to speak about them. All those who had lived in the past. It frightened him to think about how few were living in the here and now, and how many more were already dead.

There was an illness, an epidemic that all women knew the name of: thumping sickness. It broke out when men had been hitting the bottle and thumped everybody within range – mostly their children and the women who tried to protect them. Her father certainly did drink to excess at times, albeit not very often. But he was never violent. And so his wife, Hanna's mother, didn't worry so much about the schnapps as about his melancholy. When he drank he became maudlin and wanted to sing hymns. Despite the fact that at other times he was keen to burn down churches and drive out the priests into the forests.

'Without shoes,' Hanna recalled him shouting. *'Chase the priests out into the forests without shoes when the cold is at its worst. That's where they should be banished to, into the forests, barefoot.'*

Hanna's maternal grandmother, who lived in a draughty cottage on the edge of Funäsdalen, scared the living daylights out of her when she talked about her damned son-in-law who would condemn all his offspring to hell as a result of his blasphemous prattle. There they would find in store for them scalding temperatures and sulphurous gases and red-hot coals under the soles of their feet. Her grandmother preached threats and punishments with evil

eyes and didn't hesitate to scare her grandchildren so much that they used to burst into tears and were unable to sleep at night. Hanna thought that the worst punishment of all was when her mother forced her to keep on visiting her grandmother.

She remembered how Grandma was always angry. The old woman never stopped complaining about her daughter. She couldn't forgive Hanna's mother for marrying that good-for-nothing Renström, despite her warnings. Why had she fallen head over heels for that man who had nothing to commend himself? He was small, bow-legged and bald even before he celebrated his twenty-fifth birthday. And he had Finnish blood in his veins, and he came from the depths of the forests – from as far away as Värmland, where it was impossible to distinguish between day and night.

Why couldn't she have picked out a man from Hede or Bruksvallarna or somewhere where honest folk lived?

Hanna's mother was called Elin. She submitted to her ancient mother, never contradicted her, accepted everything her mother said without a word of protest. Hanna could understand that it was possible to love somebody who treated you badly, no matter how odd that sounded. That must have been the relationship between Grandma and Elin.

Elin.

Hanna had always thought that it was a name that didn't really suit her mother. Somebody called Elin ought to be slim and delicately formed, with hands like milk and fair hair hanging down over her back. But Elin Wallén, Elin Renström after her marriage, was powerfully built with lank reddish-brown hair, a large nose and teeth that were not quite regular. They gave the impression of wanting to jump out of her mouth and run away. Elin Renström was certainly not a beautiful woman. And she knew it. And perhaps she also regretted it, Hanna sometimes thought when she became old enough to take a critical look at her own face in her father's cracked shaving mirror.