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Opening extract from

Journey to the End of the World

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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. And that she 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.

'I found it in a rubbish bin,' Joel told him. 'I thought I'd better see if she – Elinor, that is – was telling the truth.'

'She didn't use to tell lies,' said Samuel. 'Not all that often, at least.'

Joel pointed out Medborgarplatsen. And then Östgötagatan. Samuel went back to his room to fetch his glasses. Then he pored over the map and nodded.

'She doesn't have far to go, then,' he said. 'From Östgötagatan where she lives, to Medborgarplatsen where she works.'

It suddenly occurred to Joel that there was something

he had to say. Something he couldn't overlook.

'Can't we go and visit her?' he asked. 'Now that we know where she lives.'

Samuel sat down at the table. Looked hard at Joel.

'Are you serious?'

'She might be glad to see us,' said Joel. 'After all these years. She might want to know what her son looks like. Now that he's fifteen years old and has got a good school Report. In geography, at least.'

Samuel looked doubtful.

'At least we can go there and take a look at her,' said Joel. 'Peer in through the window of the shop where she works. She probably won't be able to recognise me. And you can wear dark glasses.'

Samuel burst out laughing. That was a surprise. It was always a surprise. Samuel didn't often laugh. He often smiled. But laugh? Joel could hardly remember the last time it had happened.

'You're right, of course,' said Samuel. 'As soon as you've left school, we'll go and look for her.'

Joel wondered if he could believe his ears. Samuel realised that his son was confused.

'We'll go as soon as you finish school,' he said. 'I'll apply for a few days' holiday right away.'

'Should we write to her and tell her we're going to visit her?' Joel wondered.

Samuel thought for a moment before answering. Then he shook his head.

'She didn't tell us when she left. So why should we tell her that we're going to pay her a visit?'

Joel had another question.

'She probably won't recognise us. But the question is: will you recognise her? She might look quite different.'

'I'll recognise her all right,' said Samuel confidently. 'No matter how much she's changed.'

That evening, when Samuel had gone to bed, Joel got up again. He hadn't got undressed. He picked up his shoes and his jacket, and tiptoed out. He knew which steps to avoid, because they creaked.

It was still light when he left the house. He wheeled his bike out of the gate, then got on and started pedalling for all he was worth. He raced down to the bridge and when he eventually pulled up he was sweaty and out of breath.

He'd arrived at Gertrud's house. Gertrud didn't have a nose, and lived in a strange house in an overgrown garden on the other side of the river. Joel felt that he really had to tell her about what had happened. Gertrud was his friend. He'd already told her about Mummy Jenny who'd gone away when he was very small.

Gertrud had once undergone an operation that went wrong, and as a result she lost her nose. She didn't have many friends. Joel was one of the few.

As he leaned his bicycle against her ramshackle fence, she came out to greet him. She'd seen him coming, through the kitchen window.

'Long time no see,' she said.

'There's so much to do for school,' Joel said. 'Lots of homework.'

But that wasn't true. And they both knew it. Joel sometimes thought it was awkward, visiting somebody who didn't have a nose, and Gertrud knew that was what he was thinking.

But sometimes Joel felt he simply had to see her. Sometimes Gertrud was the only person he could talk to.

Like now, for instance. When a mum called Jenny suddenly appears out of nowhere, having been missing for so long that he can't remember what it's like to have her around.

Joel went with Gertrud into her kitchen, which was chaotic and nothing like a normal kitchen. That's the way Gertrud was. She did whatever she fancied with her furniture and fittings, made her own clothes, and paid no attention to what other people said or thought.

Joel didn't want to be seen with her in public, but it was all right to meet her here, late in the evening, in her kitchen. Besides, she gave him an opportunity to practise for the future. He'd read that when a boy became a man, the thing to do was to have secret meetings with women.

'We're going to Stockholm,' he said. 'Samuel and me. We're going to meet her. Obviously, I wonder how she's going to react.'

Gertrud thought that over, while she fitted a new handkerchief into the hole where her nose used to be.

'I'm sure she'll be pleased,' she said eventually. 'She's bound to be.'

But later, when Joel was cycling back home, it struck

him that Gertrud hadn't sounded really convincing.

Seeds of worry had been sown in his stomach.

What if Mummy Jenny didn't want to see him or Samuel? What if she was furious about Elinor having written that letter telling where she lived and worked?

It was dark in the kitchen when Joel got home. The door to Samuel's room was closed. But he wasn't snoring. He was probably still awake, thinking about the letter.

Joel went to bed. But he found it hard to go to sleep. He could picture himself and Samuel walking down a street in Stockholm.

Samuel still hadn't started snoring.

We're both lying awake, Joel thought. In our respective beds.

But we're thinking about the same thing.

A mum who's suddenly come back.

2

When Joel raised the roller blind he found that it had been snowing during the night.

The ground was totally white.

He stared out of the window, scarcely able to believe his eyes.

It was the beginning of June. Today was his last day at school. At the leaving ceremony they would sing about sunshine and joy and 'All things bright and beautiful'. And the ground was covered in snow.

A thought struck him. One he'd never had before. Perhaps it was the snow, which could sometimes fall in June, that had driven Mummy Jenny away? Perhaps she simply hadn't been able to stand it any more? All that cold and darkness and snow that wouldn't go away, despite the fact that it was summer already?

Joel shook his head in annoyance. It was a big day. His last day at school. And there was snow on the ground.

He got dressed and went to the kitchen. Samuel had already drunk his coffee. He'd also got shaved. Joel looked at him in surprise. Samuel hardly ever shaved in the middle of the week. Only if he had an appointment with the doctor, or had been summoned to the logging company's office for some reason.

Not only that, he had shaved himself thoroughly. Joel

was often irritated by the careless way his father usually shaved. There was always some stubble left under his chin.

'It snowed last night,' said Samuel with a smile. 'You never know what the weather's going to do in these parts.'

'But what you do know is that you shouldn't live here,' said Joel, making no attempt to disguise his annoyance.

'I've taken the day off,' said Samuel.

'Why?'

'So that I can go to the school-leaving ceremony.'

Joel was buttering one of the three sandwiches he ate every morning. He looked at Samuel in astonishment. Had he misheard?

'Why?' he asked.

'It's a big day,' said Samuel. 'Your last day at school. I think I ought to be there, don't you?'

Samuel had never attended an end-of-term ceremony before. In the early years Joel had found it a problem. Being the only one in the class who didn't have at least one parent present for the occasion. Then he'd got used to it, and didn't bother any more.

Joel tried to assess quickly what the implications were. Was it a good or a bad thing? He decided it was good, because Samuel had shaved properly for once. He actually felt pleased. Ever since that letter had come from Elinor, something had changed. It wasn't just that they would sit in the evening and talk about Mummy Jenny and the trip they were going to make in only a few more days' time. But Samuel knew that Joel wasn't

thinking about anything else. And Joel knew that the same applied to Samuel.

'You shouldn't arrive before ten o'clock. We shall be rehearsing until then. And tidying up the classroom.'

He ought really to have picked some flowers the previous evening, but he hadn't got round to it. Two cars had crashed at the corner of Kyrkogatan and Snällmans väg. Joel had been close by at the time, and watched with interest how the two drivers had started arguing. Joel walked over to the window and stood on tiptoe. He could see a few yellow flowers under a tree where they'd been sheltered from the snow.

Joel ate his sandwiches and brushed his teeth. Then he remembered that he ought to have put on his best shirt and a different pair of trousers in view of the forthcoming ceremony. When he returned to the kitchen he realised that he would have to hurry if he didn't want to arrive late.

Samuel was sitting at the table, looking at him.

'Perhaps we ought to take a present,' he said.

Joel didn't understand what he meant at first. A present for whom? For the teachers?

Then he realised that his father meant a present for Jenny, of course. Joel hadn't thought about that.

'We must have something to take with us,' Samuel said. 'Get a move on or you'll be late for school.'

Joel thundered down the stairs. Sometimes Samuel could surprise him. Of course they must take a present for Mummy Jenny.

He was already in the street before he remembered the flowers. He leaned his bike against the fence and ran back into the garden. Seven drooping cowslips would have to do. He added a few straws of grass to make the bunch look a bit bigger. On the way to school he thought about what they could give Jenny. But he found it hard to concentrate. He would have to get the school-leaving ceremony out of the way first.

He entered the classroom at the very last moment. Miss Nederström looked disapprovingly at him. But she didn't say anything. It was the last day. Then they would all go their different ways. Miss Nederström could just as easily become emotional as she could get angry. Today she certainly wasn't going to quarrel with Joel nor anybody else.

By ten o'clock the classroom had been tidied up and decorated. The parents were squashed in at the back. Joel had noticed Samuel when he arrived: he was trapped in a corner now. Miss Nederström was in a good mood and only asked questions she knew her pupils could answer. Joel was asked a geography question. After the demonstration lesson they sang a hymn and then processed to the church, class by class. The snow had melted away by then. When they were all assembled in the church, the headmaster gave a speech, all the pupils were given their Reports, and then it was all over. Miss Nederström had tears in her eyes when she shook Joel's hand. He felt most embarrassed.

'You ought to have gone on to college,' she said.

'I've got other things I have to do first,' Joel replied.

He'd been thinking about that for nearly a year now. If he ought to try and get a place at college. But the thought of four more years' schooling was too much for him. He wanted to get out. Out into the world.

Samuel was waiting for him outside the church.

'I'm pleased that you could give the right answer to the question you were asked,' Samuel said.

'It's just as well she didn't ask me a question about history,' Joel said. 'I'd have been bound to get it wrong.'

Then they went home. Just for once, Joel also had a cup of coffee. He still wasn't quite sure what it felt like, having finished school. Knowing that after the holidays, when autumn came, there would no longer be a teacher checking up on whether he got to school on time.

Now life was going to begin. Real life. And it would start with the trip to Stockholm he and Samuel were going to make. He wasn't at all sure what would happen after that. He'd been given a half promise of a job as errand boy at the ironmonger's. But what then? What would he do next? It all depended on Samuel. Were they going to move house, or weren't they?

Joel had worked out a plan. There was a big harbour in Stockholm. Ships from all over the world went there. It wasn't as big a port as Gothenburg, but even so: perhaps Samuel would finally make up his mind. When he saw all those ships berthed at the various quays. Joel had made up his mind to take Samuel to see the ships as often as

possible. Naturally, Samuel had forgotten what it was like to be a sailor. How could he possibly have remembered? Living for so long as a castaway in the depths of those enormous forests, where there was no sea, only gloomy little lakes.

Samuel examined Joel's Report in detail.

'You ought to have learnt how to count better,' he said. 'But apart from that, it's good.'

Joel said nothing. Samuel was right. Maths was the most boring subject Joel could think of.

Then they started to talk about the present they were going to take to Mummy Jenny. What should they give her?

'You're the one who knows her best,' said Joel.

'She used to be very keen on hats in those days,' said Samuel tentatively. 'But maybe she isn't any more. Besides, how would I be able to go into a shop selling ladies' clothes and pick out a hat for her?'

Joel knew that Samuel and Jenny had once met at a dance.

'Maybe she'd like a gramophone record,' he suggested.

'But has she got a gramophone?' Samuel wondered. 'You can never be sure.'

'Everybody has a gramophone,' said Joel. 'Apart from us, perhaps.'

He regretted saying that the moment it had crossed his lips. Samuel didn't like to be reminded of the fact that they had so little money. It could make him very morose. Joel didn't want that to happen. Not now.

'Maybe she has the record already,' he said.

'What record?'

'The one we were going to give her.'

This conversation's getting very odd, Joel thought.

'Perhaps we could give her a gift voucher,' he suggested. 'Then she could choose for herself what she wanted to buy.'

Samuel shook his head.

'No, it has to be something real. Something you can put in a parcel. If we had an elk steak we could have given her that.'

Joel looked at Samuel in astonishment.

'Are you saying we should take her an elk steak? What if blood were to start dripping out of the suitcase? The police would think we'd murdered somebody.'

'It's not the elk-hunting season now anyway. We'll have to think of something else.'

It was afternoon. The sun's rays were streaming in through the kitchen window. Moving steadily across the wall. Until they reached the showcase containing the *Celestine*.

'Maybe she'd like to have *Celestine*,' said Joel. 'That would be something that we like as well.'

Samuel spent a long time gazing at the model ship in its case before answering.

'I suppose it was on display there when she went away,' he said. 'You might be right. Perhaps we ought to give her *Celestine*.'

They didn't make a decision. But now they had an idea, at least.

One more week before they were due to set off.

They would take the night train on Saturday evening. They'd arrive in Stockholm on Sunday. Joel had asked Samuel about all the details. Not least where they were going to stay. Samuel had said that there were cheap hotels near the railway station. Joel was also worried that Samuel wouldn't take enough money with him. But that wasn't something he could very well ask about. Instead, he made a point of going through Samuel's wallet when his dad wasn't looking. Samuel had three hundred kronor. That was a lot of money as far as Joel was concerned. But would it be enough? He didn't know.

The days passed slowly. Joel tried to go back to sleep in the mornings after Samuel had left for work in the forest, but he was far too excited to stay in bed. He got up again, ate his sandwiches and went out. No more snow had fallen, and it had become warmer as well. He didn't just cycle around town, but went for quite long rides, exploring the logging tracks. Whenever he came to a clearing where the sun's rays managed to penetrate as far as the ground, he would find a biggish rock and sit down to think. Most of all about what it would be like to meet Mummy Jenny. But also about whether he would manage to persuade Samuel to make up his mind about moving at last. And what he would do if he didn't succeed. If they came back here and Samuel carried on going into the forest to cut down trees.

One day Joel had sat down at the kitchen table and made a long list of all the jobs he knew about. Then he

tried to work his way through them all, and imagine what it would be like, doing each one.

Airline Pilot Captain Joel Gustafson
That sounded tempting, of course. Visualising yourself in uniform. With nerves of steel. Making a skilful emergency landing in the middle of some desert or other. But there again, he knew that a pilot had to be able to do sums. No doubt his mark for maths wouldn't be good enough.

Surveyor Joel Gustafson
What exactly did a surveyor do? Look at things? Measure distances? Wander around by the side of ditches and logging tracks? Noting down how far it was between fences? That would bore him stiff.

He worked his way through his long list as he sat in those sunny glades, wondering what life would be like as a motor mechanic or a gamekeeper, a watchmaker or an actor. He also thought about what he had dreamt of only a year ago: becoming a rock idol. But he had accepted the fact that he couldn't sing well enough, and probably wouldn't be able to learn to play the guitar as well as was necessary.

Some of the jobs on his list he could cross out straight away. What he wanted to be least of all was a lumberjack like Samuel. Anything at all but that.

In the end he concluded that there was only one thing he really wanted to do. To become a sailor. What Samuel had been when he met Mummy Jenny. He could become

a deckhand or an ordinary seaman. Start at the bottom of the ladder. Sailors worked with ropes and did lookout duty. They didn't need to be good at sums. He would never wake up in the same place as he'd gone to sleep in. The ship was always on the move. He would get to see everything that lay beyond the never-ending conifer forests. He wouldn't need to stay in this little town where there was even snow on the ground when school broke up for the summer holidays. He would only sign on for ships that were heading for warmer climes. Somewhere out there was also Pitcairn Island, and the women waiting for him in transparent veils.

Almost every day he thought about what had happened the previous year. When he discovered that Ehnström's grocery store, where he always bought food for himself and Samuel, had acquired a new shop assistant. Her name was Sonja Mattsson, and she wasn't going to stay in the town for very long. She was somehow related to the Ehnströms. Joel had made a hopeless New Year's resolution, that within the coming year he would see a naked woman. And one day he had caught a glimpse of Sonja Mattsson wearing nothing but a transparent veil.

Then it dawned on Joel that Sonja Mattsson had gone back to Stockholm: maybe he would be able to meet her there? She had said she'd like him to visit her if he ever went to the capital. But he didn't have her address.

That thought struck him while he was sitting in a woodland clearing, crossing out jobs on his long list of possibilities. He immediately jumped into action.

Cycled back to town. He knew that if he went to the telegraph office he would be able to find out details of any addresses and telephone numbers he needed. He was a bit worried as he walked up the stairs to the office. A few years ago he had connected lots of lines at the switchboard one night when the operator had fallen asleep. Nobody had realised that he was the one who did it. But you never knew. There were some people who seemed to be able to see straight into his mind.

He went to the hatch and rang the bell. He saw to his relief that it wasn't the same operator as had fallen asleep that night when he had made his secret visit to the exchange.

'I'd like an address and telephone number in Stockholm, please,' he said.

'Do you want to phone them or send a telegram?' asked the woman behind the hatch. She looked stern, and Joel immediately felt nervous.

'Neither just now,' he said. 'I'm going to make a call later.'

'What's the name of the subscriber?'

'Sonja Mattsson.'

'And her address?'

'I don't know.'

'But you are sure she lives in Stockholm?'

'Yes.'

'Just a moment.'

She closed the hatch. Joel waited. He read a notice on the wall that explained how much it would cost to send a telegram.

But what would he put in it?

I'm coming on Sunday by train from Norrland. Please meet me. Joel. P.S. Samuel will be there as well. My father.

That was too many words. Twenty-three of them. He tried to cut it down.

Meet the train Sunday afternoon. Joel.

That was only six words. But then she wouldn't know which train to meet. And she probably wouldn't remember him anyway.

The hatch shot open again.

'There are seven persons called Sonja Mattsson in Stockholm.'

The woman handed him a telephone directory through the hatch.

'You'll have to work out which one it is you want to contact.'

She gave him a pencil and a sheet of paper. Joel took the directory over to a table and sat down to make a note of all the addresses and telephone numbers. Five of the seven were listed as 'Miss'. The other two didn't have a title at all.

Joel wrote them all down. Then he went back to the hatch and rang the bell. He returned the directory and the pencil.

'Do you know which one it is?'

'I think so.'

The hatch closed. Joel wondered why he hadn't told the truth. That he hadn't a clue which Sonja Mattsson was the right one.

As he left the telegraph office he also wondered why

he didn't go to Ehnströms' and ask. But he didn't want to. They'd only start asking questions.

The days were long. But time passed quickly even so. On the Thursday they decided they would in fact take the *Celestine* as a present for Mummy Jenny. Samuel and Joel helped each other to lift the ship carefully out of her case and wrap her up in newspaper. Joel found a suitable cardboard box. So that was the present sorted out. Earlier in the day Samuel had been to buy rail tickets.

'I thought we could sleep on the seats,' he said. 'It would be unnecessarily expensive to splash out on sleeping car tickets.'

Joel had no intention of sleeping at all. No way was he going to sleep throughout this journey.

Saturday finally dawned. When Joel went into the kitchen in the morning, Samuel was sitting at the kitchen table cleaning up his old suitcase with a damp cloth. It was brown, and the handle had been repaired with a piece of string.

'I never thought I'd have a use for this old suitcase again,' he said.

Joel didn't like the sound of that. Did it mean that Samuel had never seriously considered leaving the place where they lived now, and going back to sea? Joel wanted to ask. But he didn't. When they were standing at the quayside in Stockholm, looking at the vessels moored there, he would ask his dad that question.

No, he wouldn't ask. He would plead. Now that they knew where Mummy Jenny lived, wasn't it time to move away at last from all the cold and snow?

Joel didn't possess a suitcase. He would have to make do with his rucksack. He didn't like that idea. People travelling to Stockholm ought to have a proper suitcase. Even if they were only fifteen years old. Samuel would certainly have been able to afford to buy a new suitcase if he'd been working as a sailor.

They weren't going to be away for long. Four days would soon pass. Joel packed his best clothes. He placed the map of Stockholm on top of everything else. Everything was ready by nine o'clock. That left another eight hours before they needed to go to the railway station. Samuel was getting shaved. Joel made sure he did a thorough job of it.

'Your chin,' he said as Samuel started to dry his face.

'My chin?' Samuel wondered.

'You still have some stubble left under your chin.'

Samuel examined his face carefully in the little mirror, then applied the razor once more.

'Is that better?' he asked.

Joel nodded. He was satisfied.

It was a quarter past four when they went to the station. Joel felt indescribably happy deep down inside. It was as if he'd only just grasped what was about to happen.

They were going to make a journey.

And they were going to meet Mummy Jenny.