

UP IN SWEDEN

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UP IN SWEDEN

CAST

HANS

LARS

NILS

BENGT

KARL

HANS is tall, fair, and good-looking.

LARS is also good-looking and athletic, though less startling than HANS.

NILS is slightly built, regarded as the intellectual.

BENGT is noisy and robust.

KARL is quiet and tentative.

UP IN SWEDEN

THE ROOM OF ONE OF THE BOYS. IT IS UNTIDY, BUT WITH GOOD FURNITURE CHOSEN BY THE PARENTS.

BENGT IS LYING ON HIS BACK. KARL SITS CROSS-LEGGED, NILS HUNCHES ON THE EDGE OF THE BED. LARS, WHOSE ROOM IT IS, OILS A PAIR OF SKATES.
HANS STANDS, APART.

BENGT IN HOT ARGUMENT ... I didn't say that, I didn't say that!

NILS You did!

BENGT I didn't! What I said was -

KARL You did, you know.

NILS Of course he -

KARL That's what we understood you to mean. That's what I thought you meant.

HIS REASONABLE TONES PLACATE THE GENERAL MOOD.

BENGT Oh Christ. A SMALL PAUSE. All I said was -

NILS We know what you said. What you said was -

BENGT Will you let me finish?

NILS You don't have to repeat it!

BENGT I hadn't finished!

KARL In any case -

BENGT What I was going to -

NILS We know what you said. Not what you meant to say. We know what you meant to say. What you meant to say -

BENGT Oh thank you.

NILS What do you mean!

BENGT How do you know what I meant to say when you haven't even let me get it out? If you don't let somebody say what they mean -

NILS PARODIES HIM, WAGGING HIS HEAD "There's nothing left to protest about".

BENGT Oh.

NILS That's what you meant to say ... that's what you thought you said ...in fact what you didn't say -

BENGT Piss off.

NILS - "The trouble with Sweden is, there's nothing to protest about".

BENGT Well, it's true.

KARL What about the planet?

BENGT What about the planet?

KARL I don't know. The ozone. Cosmic threat.

NILS No, that's only because we're not afraid of the bomb any more.

BENGT What's that got to do with it?

NILS There has to be a cosmic menace.

BENGT Why?

KARL What for?

NILS How should I know? To placate the devil I daresay.

THIS BAFFLES KARL AND BENGT COMPLETELY.

KARL Anyway, that's not the point. What I want to know is ...
TO BENGT .. what were you on about Stalin and Nero
for? And Hitler.

BENGT I never said Hitler.

KARL No, I said Hitler. He's one of them, isn't he? A ..
what do you call it ... a despot. A tyrant.

KARL Why Bring them in .. anyway, they're dead. HE GRINS.

BENGT I was trying to -

KARL I don't want to be like Hitler.

NILS Why not?

KARL You kidding, I'd rather grow a full set. HE STROKES HIS
FACE LOVINGLY. TO BENGT I think you're screwed up
in the role-model area, Bengt, old potato.

BENGT I was only ... look, people like that, all I'm saying is
there's a logic there .. they think to themselves,
why not .. I might as well.

KARL Might as well? Might as well what?

BENGT You know.

KARL HONESTLY No I don't.

NILS What he is trying to say - what I think he is trying to convey, in his own inimitable, Caliban mode, was the Macbethian exposition -

BENGT Eh?

NILS .. posit the meaninglessness of the world, dadada, with existential overtones -

BENGT What?!

NILS .. thus predicating - via the absence of nemesis .. the maxim of freedom of choice - am I right?

BENGT We-ell, not exactly -

NILS Don't bother to answer, this sally into the absurd is highly untypical if not downright surreal, particularly on a Saturday afternoocn.

LARS ABSORBED IN OILING HIS SKIS NOW, WITHOUT LOOKING UP
Shuddup.

NILS Now that - is more in character.

KARL He was only -

LARS Shuddup.

BENGT If you'd let me finish in the first place -

LARS LOOKS AT HIM. HE SHRUGS AND SUBSIDES.

PAUSE.

KARL My mother's still on about medical school.

NILS Be very useful, you could help her with the genital warts.

KARL THROWS A CUSHION AT HIM, LIES BACK ON THE BED, HIS HANDS BEHIND HIS HEAD.

KARL All right for you. She's been on the moan since my father Boil on her bum last week, she went out and made her will. I think I'll go trans-sexual. Yeah, it's either that or the Eurovision song contest ... nul points, famous for life.

PAUSE. BENGT LOOKS ACROSS TO LARS.

BENGT Anyway, what are you going to do?

LARS GIVES HIM A COLD LOOK, DOES NOT DEIGN TO ANSWER.

BENGT Hans?

LARS VIOLENT Shuddup!

KARL TO NILS I envy you. Heidelberg, then then Berkeley. Mind you, Paris was a disappointment.

NILS So you said.

BENGT Oh, why?

KARL Got my money pinched the first day and the algerians in the cafe ALL beat me at pinball, and they were terrible.

BENGT I think I'll go to Ecuador. Or wherever the birdshit comes from. Make a fortune.

NILS TO LARS What are you going to do?

LARS SHRUGS AND LOOKS ACROSS TO HANS. WHO TURNS AWAY.

LARS How the fuck should I know? Get the fuck out of here, I know that.

BENGT Join the mercenaries. Why not? My father met a man who was in the Foreign Legion, he was telling us last night at dinner. It was when he was in Marseille, putting the boat up for the winter. He went in this bar, actually it was a gay bar, being my old man he's the last to notice, anyway this guy comes up to him, he spoke Swedish so naturally they got talking. My father said he was fantastic to look at .. the whites of his eyes, you know .. he said he was really fit, really tough. Apparently this guy was German, he'd been an officer in the German army, but in the end he bought himself out, he couldn't stand the strain, he was bored cross-eyed .. now he's a corporal in the Foreign Legion.

KARL A corporal?

BENGT He told my Dad that was a respected rank. He said it was so tough some of them commit suicide - two of his lot did in the first year. There's no confinement to barracks, all the punishments are physical.

LARS They get beaten up, you mean?

BENGT Yeah, just punched out, teeth, jaws, fractured skulls.

KARL Wow.

BENGT They get all different nationalities, mostly guys in some sort of trouble, If they stick it five years they get a French passport .. no questions asked.

NILS What was he doing in the gay bar, was he on the run?

BENGT No .. he loved it! He was made a corporal after two years, apparently that's almost unheard of, almost unknown. He said he didn't want anything else, he was with men, he knew where he was, what he was, and why. They'd been in Ethiopia, killing people.

HANS LOOKS ACROSS AT HIM BRIEFLY. SHORT PAUSE.

NILS No good for you.

BENGT Why not?

NILS You wouldn't last six weeks - no discos.

BENGT He said one funny thing. He said there were two sorts of guys, the bright ones who'd gone wrong or made a mess of their lives, and the thugs. It was the thugs who cracked up, he said. I thought my father had got it wrong but he said no, he'd asked him again. The really heavy guys couldn't take it. They went bonkers. Still, I don't think I'll join.

PAUSE. THERE IS TENSION AS HANS REMAINS APART, OMINOUSLY STILL.

NILS TO KARL Didn't you go to any brothels when you were in Paris?

KARL ASIDE I told you.

BENGT You didn't tell me. SINGS 'The night they invented champagne' ... urgh, urgh ... what was it like? Good eh?

KARL SHAKES HIS HEAD No. They were all ugly. Either that or a bit old or both .. anyway, I was frightened of catching something so I just watched. You had to pay all the same, they're a swindle.

BENGT They weren't good-looking?

KARL I went with the Algerians. They only get ugly ones.

A PAUSE. THEY BROOD ON THE FUTURE.

BENGT SQUEAKY VOICE, IMITATING HIS MOTHER "Well, why not architecture .. he does lovely cartoons .. show them the one you did of grandfather".. BOLDLY, TO HANS, WHO IS STEPPING OVER HIM. What are you going to do?

HANS DRAWS HIS FINGER ACROSS HIS THROAT WITH A GUTTURAL SOUND. A GLANCE BETWEEN LARS AND NILS.

KARL Perhaps we should leave. Do good works in the .. I don't know .. in the jungle.

BENGT It's not our fault! I didn't ask to be born here, anyway, it's cold in the winter. You're not responsible for where you're born.

NILS You're responsible for who you are.

KARL Only partly. A lot of it's laid down - genetics.

LARS JEERING AT BENGT True, true.

BENGT Get off.

NILS Not at all. OK, the collision of the molecule in the atom is random. The second law of thermo-dynamics states inevitable chaos -

BENGT Eh?

NILS That things, left to themselves, collapse, decay. But .. do we live by thermo-dynamics? We do not.

KARL No?

BENGT We live by the gun, we die by the gun ... MAKES NOISE OF A MACHINE GUN, FOLLOWED BY BOMB NOISES.

NILS We live by the beautifully structured laws of nature. By photo-synthesis. Let there be light.

HE LIES BACK.

Heredity, yes, and random encounter - the step under the bus, the inhaling of malevolent virus but - HE SITS UP ACCUSINGLY. That does NOT absolve us from decision. We are the problem solvers. I think it's what we're for .. don't take that religiously.

THE OTHERS EXCHANGE PATIENT GLANCES. NILS IS OFF AGAIN.

LARS ABRUPT So what are we going to do?

KARL If everybody went off to do good works it would be ridiculous. I mean, what I want to know is, when you see on television, and there are all those people like skeletons, the helpers - you know, the doctors and nurses, and the international reps who're arranging the drops of food in the field, they ain't thin, so what are they eating and where is it coming from? I ask myself.

BENGT They .. I suppose they have to keep themselves going, otherwise there wouldn't be any point.

KARL Makes you think though.

BENGT I expect they nip off to the lav for a quick bite of choc bar.

KARL Anyway, what's the point of us going abroad, we haven't got any skills, like hydroponics .. we're not trained. TO BENGT Are you trained?

BENGT Don't think I feel like training. How about you, Lars?

LARS STILL WORKING ON HIS SKIS I'm training Ilse at the moment.

BENGT Maybe we should join some subversive movement. Keep the revolution alive.

NILS Ye-es. Down with commerce.

BENGT PUZZLED What? BUT NILS SHRUGS. My father says it's going to be us against Islam next. He says that's where the next battle lines will be drawn. The new Crusades! All for Sweden and the Holy Cross!

LARS MUTTERS IRRITABLY TO HIMSELF AT THIS.

KARL TO NILS What did you mean, down with commerce?

NILS What I said.

KARL Old Lindstrom said we should be pleased everything's going capitalistic. He said the communist centralist dream resulted in oppression and paralysis of the national will.

BENGT Yeah, well, he would.

NILS To own and to shop, to shop and to own. Everything to be bought and sold, all life a transaction.

KARL I know. He said there was danger of banality .. but that this was a problem we had to solve .. that trade was better than the old way where when you were short of wheat you went in and took it off next door.
I don't think I could kill anybody - TO NILS -
could you?

NILS I'd kill .. to save my life, the lives of .. anybody I cared about.

KARL Would you? That's a surprise.

NILS Why? We're killers, all of us.

BENGT No, I'm not. And neither are you.

NILS Yes I am.

KARL Rubbish.

BENGT Yeah, stop pissing about.

HANS He means it.

SILENCE.

BENGT TO HANS What about you?

BUT HANS TURNS AWAY.

NILS We all know where he stands.

HANS What's that supposed to mean?

NILS You're a killer. You can't wait to do things in.

A LITTLE PAUSE.

BENGT Oh come on ..

KARL SEEKING TO CUT TENSION The warrior class, you mean?

NILS It's true.

SLIGHT PAUSE.

HANS Makes me perfect for the job then.

NILS Oh I didn't say that.

KARL You're not allowed to enjoy it, anyway, he's no good.
You're no good, you're too tall.

HANS IRRITABLE What?

KARL You have to be short to be a guerilla.

BENGT Otherwise you get your bum shot off.

KARL He could learn to crouch lower.

BENGT No, definitely a disadvantage. Have to be you in the
in the front line, old Karl.

KARL I'm not killing anybody.

LARS SNEERS Not even in the cause?

KARL Cause of what? Oh bugger off. I couldn't even do
myself in.

BENGT Oh, that's different. I couldn't do that. It's funny
but I really couldn't. Wouldn't have the nerve, I
suppose. Would you?

NILS What?

BENGT Commit suicide.

NILS What for?

BENGT I didn't say what for, I said could you do it?
To yourself. Kill yourself.

NILS Suicide's an illness. Depression.

HANS Oh Christ!

HE TURNS ON NILS, GLARING DOWN AT HIM, PALE AND FRIGHTENING.

Got a name for it, have you? Got your label?

LARS Ah, forget it.

NILS I only said -

LARS Forget it ... Professor.

BENGT What's the matter? All he said was -

LARS We heard.

HANS Got it all sorted out? Docketed? What's the diagnosis, Herr Doktor? What's the prognosis? Got your prescription? Come on .. what's the verdict?

NILS Leave it.

BENGT MYSTIFIED I just said I couldn't do it, that's all, that I wouldn't have the bottle.

NILS QUICKLY Neither would I.

HANS I would.

NILS Yes, I know you would.

HANS Oh .. he knows, he knows!

HE TURNS AWAY RESTLESSLY THEN BACK TO NILS.

HANS Well?

NILS Well what?

HANS What is your response to that piece of information -
 that you know.

PAUSE.

KARL NERVOUS Presumably some people have the nerve, the
 courage for that sort of thing .. and some haven't.

SLIGHT PAUSE.

HANS Well?

A PAUSE.

NILS Well - if you - if you .. ah .. if you really want to
 know I find it somewhat unbearable.

A PAUSE.

HANS Some what? Somewhat? Oh! He worries!

HE STROKES NILS' FACE THEN TURNS TO KARL WITH A
GLITTERING SMILE.

Do you think he's in love with me?

KARL How should I know?

LARA Cut it out.

SLIGHT PAUSE.

NILS In answer to that question - yes, I think I probably
 am.

DEAD SILENCE.

HANS Ohh .. he's in love.

NILS I don't want to kiss you. Climb into bed with you.
Screw with you.

HANS Oh! OF MOCK DISAPPOINTMENT.

NILS I'm just in love with the idea of you.

BENGT Fucking hell.

LARS TO NILS Are you trying to be funny or some thing?

HANS To think! And I never guessed. Shall we get engaged?

NILS Piss off. I mean it. I know you're never supposed to
talk - I mean, directly ... we're never, ever supposed
to say what we mean - about feelings. Dead uncool man.
HEAVY VOICE I mean, we are MEN.

I don't care. I'm changing things. new trendio - newstyle.
Anyway, I'm too tired to keep watching myself, I've
got exam fag.

We're ALL bloody in love with you! Everybody you come
across is yours - yours and his. INDICATING LARS.
I think you'd drop dead with shock if ever the day came -
HE PAUSES, STARTS AGAIN it's all your way,
it always has been. You take it for granted, the pair
of you - you never even have to think about it!
Our leaders. From the first day you came to kindergarten.
Better at everything ... quicker .. stronger .. fitter -
every damn thing. Easy. No bother at all. Ever. Only
once - only once did I see you sweat.

HANS Oh?

NILS You missed a fortnight's school when you broke your
ankle.

HANS So?

NILS While you were away we'd begun to do calculus. You hadn't been instructed and you were baffled. I saw the sweat on your face - you were hysterical! You'd never had to TRY, like the REST of us ever .. not once in your life! You didn't know how, you'd always walked it! Broke you up. Till the next lesson. You were five pages ahead of the rest of us, you'd flicked on, no trouble at all. I don't think I've ever seen you with a bloody spot on your face. Not one.

HE SCRATCHES AT HIS OWN SPOTS MOODILY.

KARL I read somewhere that if you washed your hair with medicated shampoo - it said spots came from the dandruff falling on your face.

NILS Bollocks, the more you wash it, the greasier it gets.

karl Not if you use the medicated -

LARS Oh for Christ's sake!

SLIGHT PAUSE.

HANS SAVAGELY, TO NILS Since you know so much, just tell me the bloody point, that's all.

NILS I can't.

BENGT The point of what?

HANS Of anything, you thick fool. I can see the point of being a woman - open your legs and a bloody great wet football comes out. Follow that.

LARS No thanks.

NILS Perhaps there is no point. Or it could be that you were just born too late.

HANS As I say. No - point. Not - a - jot.

NILS And doesn't that put you into a rage.

HANS Oh?

NILS Your fury knows no bounds.

BUT HANS TURNS AND MOVES AWAY.

You're in a rage the whole time these days. A killing rage.

BENGT Come on ..

LARS Yes, why don't you leave it?

KARL Right.

HANS TO KARL Are you a monster?

SLIGHT PAUSE.

KARL I don't think so - no.

NILS Of course we are.

THE OTHERS LOOK BAFFLED.

Haven't you noticed the way they treat us?

KARL Who?

NILS SNARLS Them! Under all the mateyness and the advice - oh God, the advice. They're not like that with the girls. Girls are easy, all you have to do is raise your voice .. besides, they're nice to have around. Decorative. WINNING TONES "Hull- o! What can we do for you?"

BENGT To you .. hahaha!

KARL I don't know what you mean.

NILS Yes you do. The way they try to keep us in hand .. the way they want us to join ... what is it to be old chap, university, the army ... it's not too early to talk about pension schemes .. planning, that's the thing! Pin us down. In case we .. break out or something.

HE LOCKS UP AT HANS.

It's as if we've got guns to their heads. God knows what's wrong with my father. Every time I come into the room he gets up and leaves.

THE OTHERS LAUGH LOUDLY.

KARL I've told you, change your shampoo.

BENGT I know what he means. My old man .. fatassed little prick .. I could knock him down when I was twelve. What does he bother for?

KARL Your Uncle Bertil's even shorter, he's done all right for himself - three wives and a house in Lanzarote, no flies on him.

BENGT Yeah, he'll have to go, he wears mirror sunglasses. I fancy getting one of those rifles that comes in a black attache case and you slot it all together ... click, click click ... boom, boom.

LARS LAZILY You'd wash your face in poup if somebody told you to.

BENGT What do you mean?

THEY WRESTLE IN UNFRIENDLY FASHION. WHEN THE SCUFFLE BEGINS TO GET NASTY HANS GIVES BENGT A KICK WHICH LIFTS HIM ACROSS THE ROOM. HE AND LARS GLARE AT EACH OTHER. THEN BENGT TAKES OUT A COMB AND COMBS HIS HAIR.

- NILS No, trouble is, we've messed up Darwinism.
 In the old days all the weakies pegged out.
 They didn't make it. I mean, two hundred years ago you
 two .. HE WAVES A HAND AT LARS AND HANS, WHO ARE SIDE BY
 SIDE .. well, there were plenty of wars, work for guys
 like you swords, horses ... death or glory and a
 whole country for a bonus. Now, everything's
 technical. A bloody girl can press a button, pull a
 trigger. What's the occupational hazard for being an
 astronaut - piles!
- BENGT Nah, nah, nah .. plenty about still.
- NILS What?
- BENGT Formula One.
- KARL The Olympics sorry.
- BENGT There's that twit who keeps not keeping to the pole and
 his toes fall off. That must be tough. Eeny, meeny, miney,
 mo ... Eeny, meeny, miney eeny, meeny
- HANS UNDER HIS BREATH Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck,
 fuck, fuck, fuck ...
- NILS Rubbish, of course. All the causes aren't over
 there's everything to conquer, discover ..
- HANS Fuck, fuck ..
- NILS More people are killed by natural disaster -

HE SLOWS TO A HALT AS HANS CONTINUES TO MUTTER DANGEROUSLY TO HIMSELF. THEY ALL LOOK AT HIM COVERTLY. HE SEEMS TO HAVE FORGOTTEN THEIR PRESENCE, BANGING HIS HAND AGAINST THE WALL.

KARL I know what you mean. But what if you don't want - I mean, I don't want to save anybody, cure people, you have to want to. What I want is an exciting life. But without any danger. I want to live ... I want to live glamorously. But how can you? Except by going into the movies and that's silly. I mean, it wouldn't fool you, would it, dressing up and farting about, waiting for the stuntman to come and fall off your horse. It's OK for getting women, that's why it's so popular. My French friend Antoine's only a second cameraman and he does really well.

PAUSE.

BENGT I think I will push off.

NILS TO HANS What happened to Paola?

HANS DOES NOT REPLY. NILS TURNS TO LARS.

What happened to Paola?

LARS How should I know? Bloody women.

BENGT Yeah, they get above themselves. I was with Mai the other night, all she does is talk, talk, talk and make leather ear-rings. She'd been down the Skagen Club with all those lesbians - what do they get up to that's so marvellous, I don't beleive in it, it's just a lot of dykes showing off.

LARS Shall we go down there? Rape the lot of them?

BENGT Yeah!

KARL Why not?

NILS No, they'd only make a fuss.

MURMURS OF AGREEMENT.

BENGT Bloody women.

PAUSE.

NILS What then?

BENGT God knows.

KARL Perhaps it's exam fever. Maybe we shouldn't do anything
.. just mooch around for a bit. Get our bearings.
What's the hurry?

HANS It's got to stop.

LARS What?

HANS Everything.

HE BANGS HIS HAND ON THE TABLE, MAKING EVERYTHING
SHAKE.

Wake up, get out of bed .. don't wash .. don't clean your
fucking teeth .. crap .. eat .. screw ... ride the
fucking bike, read a fucking magazine

It has to stop.

NILS How?

HANS By not going on with it.

PAUSE.

BENGT What do you think we should do, Nils?

NILS MIMICKING HIM WITH SUDDEN IRRITABILITY "What shall we do,
Nils?" Make up your own bloody mind.

HE ROLLS OVER ON THE DIVAN, FACING THE WALL.

LARS Go round the world on a raft .. backwards?

KARL Sideways ..

BENGT Nils?

KARL Yeah, come on, you must have some idea. All right for
you, sodding off to university.

BENGT Bet he ends up a teacher.

LARS And he never came out again!

NILS That's right. I've copped out. Thank you, one and all.
Why don't you ask him? POINTING AN ACCUSING FINGER
AT HANS. He's your leader, fucking Hercules over there.

BENGT Ghenghis Khan, you mean.

KARL Ivan the Terrible?

NILS Attila the fucking Hun - ask him!

KARL OK. If you say so. What shall we do, Hans?

LARS Good question. I'm bugged if I know.

NILS Tell them, Hans.

BENGT Yeah, we always do what you want. Tell us.

HANS TURNS TO FACE THEM. HE LOOKS AT THEM EACH IN
TURN.

HANS You want me to tell you?

CHORUS Yes.

HANS You want me to tell you what to do?

CHORUS Yes!

HANS D'you mean it?

CHORUS Yes.

HANS Ah, but will you do it?

LARS Sure.

HANS All of you?

KARL It depends on -

HANS No, no, none of that. All of you or nothing.

BENGT We'll do it!

KARL Just tell us ... solve the bloody - find us something
to - we'll do it!

HANS Whatever it is?

CHORUS Yes!!

HANS TO NILS You?

SLIGHT PAUSE.

NILS All right.

HANS Everybody swears - right?

CHORUS Yes.

PAUSE.

BENGT OK?

KARL The suspense is killing me.

LARS What are we going to do?

HANS MOVES AWAY. HE TURNS, LOOKS AT LARS, THEN ACROSS
TO NILS.

NILS What's the matter?

HANS I was wondering if you could bear to take the glistening
look off your face.

NILS What?

HANS You heard me.

NILS I honestly don't know what you mean.

HANS "Honestly"?

NILS No, I don't! What do you mean?

HANS Nothing.

NILS No, come on, you can't HE SHRUGS just tell us.

HANS You know already.

NILS Know? Of course I don't know - how should I know?

HANS Don't you?

NILS What are you talking about? I'm not a bloody mind-reader.

HANS Oh? I thought you were.

PAUSE.

BENGT Come on!

HANS He'll tell you.

KARL What?

BENGT I thought you were going to.

LARS We don't want his -

HANS I'm right, aren't I?

HE STANDS OVER NILS, WITH A COLD SMILE. NILS LOOKS UP AT HIM , ROLLS OFF THE DIVAN AND MOVES AWAY.

Well?

NILS Perhaps ... perhaps not.

HANS You fucking know. You always fucking know, you know it all, don't you, you make it your business, you crap .. shit-eater .. it's all know with you. I hope it gives you pleasure .. satisfaction.

NILS I'm not always right. I'm often wrong.

HANS Not this time. Tell them.

A CHORUS OF DISAPPOINTMENT.

NILS Why me?

HANS I just want to know if you're right.

NILS QUICK He wants us to kill him.

SILENCE.

KARL What?!

LARS What are you talking about?

BENGT Yeah, what is this - some sort of a joke?

NILS Sit down, Bengt, you make me tired when you stand up.
He wants us to kill him. HE LOOKS TO HANS. Right?

HANS BOWS IRONICALLY. BUT HE SITS ABRUPTLY, AS IF
SUDDENLY EXHAUSTED.

BENGT Bloody hell.

HE SUDDENLY BURSTS OUT LAUGHING.

KARL Shut up. TO NILS I'm sorry, I don't understand.
What do you mean?

NILS I thought I made myself pretty clear.

KARL But - why? I mean .. how? ... I mean ... what are you
talking about all of us?

HANS Not necessarily. TIRED One of you if you like.

KARL I see.

BENGT Draw lots, you mean?

LARS VIOLENTLY No!

KARL TO LARS What do you mean - no, not draw lots, or, no, it's a bad idea or -

LARS JERKS KARL'S HEAD BACK CRUELLY AND LETS GO. KARL HOWLS WITH PAIN.

KARL Shut up!

LARS TO HANS Who?

KARL HOLDING HIS NECK Oww ..

HANS Who do you think? LOSES ENERGY. I don't really care. It's all the same to me.

LARS Well so long as you don't expect me to -

BENGT You can count me out!

LARS If I really thought you -

NILS He's not asking you.

LARS Oh?

NILS No. LARS GLARES AT HOM COLDLY. He's asking me.

SILENCE.

BENGT Oh come on.

NILS That's right, isn't it?

HANS DOES NOT REPLY.

That's what you want.

HANS Not at all. It's what you want.

NILS SHOCKED No! I don't want that. In no way.

HANS I see. Then suppose I were to ask you - in any case.

NILS The answer would be no.

HANS Suppose that the circumstances -

NILS Under no circumstances -

HANS If I were dying .. of Aids, cancer -

NILS It doesn't apply. You're not.

HANS As always, the flight to the concrete.

NILS There isn't an exam, a test you couldn't have beaten me in. If you could have been bothered, you contemptuous bastard. Why should I do anything for you?

HANS You're the one.

SILENCE.

NILS Well, I'm sorry. The answer's no.

HANS SOFTLY Can't I persuade you?

NILS Absolutely not.

HANS You won't reconsider consider ?

NILS SHAKES HIS HEAD.

NILS No.

HANS AN ABSOLUTELY TERRIFYING, SCREAMING ROAR Well somebody then!!!!

THE OTHERS ARE SHOCKED INTO APPALLED SILENCE. THEIR MOUTHS DROP OPEN AND THEY DRAW AWAY FROM HANS, SHOCKED.

HANS KILL ME!!!!!!!

HE WHEELS, ROARING

KILL ME!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

HE STANDS, CENTRE STAGE, MAD.

A LONG PAUSE. HE STANDS THERE, HEAD LOWERED, GRINDING HIS TEETH, HIS EYES ROLLING.

KARL AT LAST, IN THE SILENCE, WHISPERS What is it? Is he trying to be funny? I'm sorry, I just don't think this is a joke.

HANS LOOKS AT HIM, SPEAKS IN A QUIET, NORMAL VOICE.

HANS He thinks I'm joking.

HE CROSSES TO NILS, PUSHES HIM SLIGHTLY.

Tell him.

BUT NILS SHAKES HIS HEAD. HE IS UNABLE TO SPEAK. HE GIVES HANS A SWIFT LOOK AND TURNS AWAY.

BENGT Look HE CLEARS HIS THROAT ... look, we've always done things together. Ever since kindergarten. CLEARS HIS THROAT AGAIN. What's going on?

KARL No, I'm sorry. We're not in this together. If it's not just fooling around, anyway, nobody in their right mind ... if he really feels ... if he's that miserable he should see a doctor. I'm sorry, I don't know what's going on.

LARS TO HANS Why him?

HANS SHRUGS I just want him to kill me, that's all. If not him, all right, you .. all of you, I don't care, suit yourselves. SLIGHT PAUSE. We're supposed to be friends.
PAUSE.

BENGT All very well, cock. We'd get into trouble for it.

HANS Not if you got rid of the body.

NILS How are we supposed to do that?

HANS It's only meat, for God's sake - offal. Bury it in the forest. HE FLICKS A QUICK LOOK AT NILS' BLANCHED FACE. NILS STARES BACK STEADILY.

NILS The animals would dig you up.

HANS Chuck it in the incinerator.

BENGT Oh very clever! What the hell do you weigh? What are we supposed to do, take you along to the butcher's ... oh, how much do you charge to joint people, we've got a guy for disposal - very funny.

LARS Lay off.

BENGT Anyway, it's a daft idea .. you'd smell. I remember poor old Gunnar, you could smell roast dinner before they got the car off the track. I was right behind him but I was full lock, I couldn't get out till I fetched up round the bend -

ALL Yeah, yeah. All right, Bengt. THEY HAVE OBVIOUSLY HEARD HIM RECOUNT THIS STORY MANY TIMES.

BENGT It was not being able to get at him. The bloody doors were glowing, white hot .. !

KARL It wasn't your fault.

PAUSE.

LARS We could throw you in the lake, with weights. HE HAS DECIDED THAT THIS IS A GAME, AND HE IS GOING TO PLAY. No that wouldn't do, you might get fished up, it's not deep enough. We could eat you. HE GRINS, WOLFISH.

BENGT Get off.

HANS Ye-es. Yes, that might do. TO NILS What do you think?

NILS I think nothing. It's not worth talking about.

HANS Oh, why not? It's rather an appropriate idea.

NILS No.

HANS Why not?

NILS What's in it for me?

HANS Take your pick - fillet, chump, porterhouse ...

NILS I'm a vegetarian.

KARL So am I - well except for eggs and fish. And sometimes -

NILS IGNORING HIM I am also an agnostic. I do not, therefore, believe that if I ate your thigh mine would be more beautiful or efficient. Nor that if I ate your eye, mine too would be cobalt blue. Even if I believed it, it wouldn't happen, it's Lamarckian ... ergo, nothing in it for me. Dead, you are of no interest. Alive, you keep me going, one way or another .. even if it's just to mop up your castoffs, even when I know you can beat

NILS me at anything you care to mention .. even that, because ..because .. I have a notion that despite your bloody looks, and your style and your remorseless intelligence, and your fucking, fucking facility I may .. I may, in the end, just tread right over you. Because, in the end, mine is the better position. Because .. in the end ... I want it. There's a cause in it .. a runner ahead, an obstacle .. an impossibility. I shall beat you .. just as I have always beaten you. Just as I always will. Me and my sort. You're there for me to knock down. I need you. Why should I involve myself in Gotterdammerung ... I don't need the twilight of the Gods - there's nothing in it for me.

HANS You were always a bloody dealer.

NILS Yes.

HANS I need someone.

NILS NODS TOWARDS LARS Let him do it. He's the buddy. The acolyte.

HANS I'd rather it was you.

NILS LET'S GO For God's sake why!

HANS You're more methodical. You play by the rules. SLIGHT PAUSE It would need your help.

NILS I'm flattered.

HANS You're efficient.

NILS Lars is efficient.

BENGT JEERS Lars?

NILS He gets what he wants. A dapper man, Lars.

HANS Hah! Just the same, not Lars.

KARL Because you're friends, you mean?

BENGT Oh come on! This has gone far enough.

KARL It's because they're friends. They're still ganging up on us, I don't see why we should protect Lars, do Lars' dirty work .. anyway, with you .. HE POINTS AT HANS .. out of the way, he'll be top man. I'd rather settle for you. Lars has a mean streak.

LARS KICKS OUT AT HIM SIDEWAYS.

KARL See what I mean? HE PICKS HIMSELF UP. That's how it would be, wouldn't it?

NILS Lars ascendant.

HANS Not necessarily.

BENGT Oh come on!

HANS Not Lars.

NILS You surprise me. The spirit of Beau Geste is no more. Eheu fugaces.

HANS Don't be more of a prick than you are.

BENGT Well if Nils won't do it, I'm not doing it - what about little Karl?

KARL For Christ's sakes! ..

BENGT Or you could do yourself in - why not? .. then we're

BENGT not involved. There's drugs .. distalgesic - or you could jump off a building, of course you might not kill yourself your might end up a quadraplegic, you could go in for the cripple Olympics, you'd do well .. let me think ... I know - you could run your CBX 1000 into a brick wall - no, same again, you might just end up a blithering idiot ... yuh, yuh, yuh HE IMITATES A BRAIN DAMAGE .. not easy, is it? Can you strangle yourself .. it it possible?

KARL Shut up!!! TO HANS Why don't you go off and join something? Be a bloody guerilla in South America, Albania, I don't know at least you've got a chance!

HANS Chance?

KARL Oh it's useless - he's useless when he's like this, I think it's totally self-indulgent the way you let yourself get depressed and drag everybody else down with you, it's not fair. You've got everything! You can do anything you want! I also happen to know that you're a kind man - all right, I'm not going to tell .. that's half your trouble, Hans. You're so afraid of being seen to be human, you seem to think it's some kind of weakness, there are different sorts of courage, you know. Anyway, it's imperialist ... refusing to accept help, if you want to know it gets right up my nose.

All right! It's all very well being anti everything .. it's easy! What's hard is I mean now we're going to have to get down to it, throw our caps in the ring. What are we For? I mean, I'm fucked if I know, but there's a hell of a lot out there, just look around. As a species we're just crawling out of the slime. I just wish somebody would tell me what's going on here, nobody ever tells me.

NILS There's no conspiracy.

KARL Isn't there?

HANS Are you going to do it or not?

NILS I can't.

HANS Why?

NILS I don't want to.

HANS I thought you were a friend.

NILS SHRUGS I owe you a lot of favours, I'm aware of that.

HANS Not the same thing.

NILS Oh, all right. Yes, we're friends. And enemies.

HANS A WINTRY SMILE That should make it easier.

NILS You permit me to enjoy myself? ANGRY. Thank you.

HANS I'm sorry. I didn't mean that.

NILS You're full of shit.

HANS Just do it.

NLS Please don't ask.

HANS I can't go on.

NILS I know that.

BENGT What you need is a new woman, Hans!

NILS Give it time.

HANS Time? Time! There isn't any. There is no more time.

HE SITS, HIS HEAD AGAINST THE WALL, EYES CLOSED.

LARS, OFFENDED AT HAVING BEEN REJECTED FOR NILS,
SPEAKS COLDLY.

LARS You have been getting wild lately.

HANDS TO NILS Please ...

NILS Why me, for God's sake! Why should I ruin myself - it's too much! Stick a shotgun in your mouth, go and jump off the Blue Mountain, sit in the car with a hosepipe on the exhaust why do you want me to do it, for God's sake? Why does it have to be me?

BENGT It's because you're the brains, Nils. We always come to you.

NILS The bloody caretaker, you mean. My life's bloody staked out for me before I begin!

HANS An act of friendship .. that's all I ask. I need help.

KARL No. It's gone far enough. Either get off it or I'm leaving.

NO-ONE RESPONDS. HE PICKS UP HIS COAT BUT NO-ONE MOVES. HE CROSSES TO THE EXIT.

Get off it, it's a bloody dangerous game.

HE GOES. SILENCE.

BENGT Sodding little twit. He'll be back.

LARS Bugger off.

BENGT GOES.

NILS Now what? You can't force me.

HANS Just do it.

NILS Why?

HANS MUTTERS Do it.

NILS Why?! THEN SOFTLY Why? I have to know why, can't you see that? Tell me why.

HANS SURPRISED I thought you knew.

NILS Perhaps but I'm not sure. I need to know if I know.

HANS Is that a bargain?

NILS Tell me why.

HANS Because because if you don't if you say no ... if you won't do it I shall go home .. go into my father's study .. get his shotgun and the rifle and I shall go down into the street and mow down as many children as I see.

PAUSE.

NILS All right. In that case in that case, I'll do whatever you want.

HANS UNSHEATHES A KNIFE, HANDS IT TO HIM.

HANS If you push here, like this, upwards, and give it

HANS a twist, that should do the trick.

LARS You'll make a mess.

HANS Not if he does it right. The blood will stop flowing as soon as he gets to the heart. Find a towel if you're worried.

LARS Right.

HE GOES. HANS AND NILS ARE LEFT ALONE, BOTH ON THEIR FEET, CONFRONTING EACH OTHER. HANS IS SMILING SLIGHTLY. LARS RETURNS WITH A RIDICULOUSLY DOMESTIC LOOKING TOWEL IN BRIGHT PINK AND YELLOW, WITH FLOWERS.

Is this all right?

HANS WITHOUT LOOKING Oh Christ.

HE AND NILS EXCHANGE A BRIEF, EXCLUSIVE SMILE. LARS SPREADS THE TOWEL AT THEIR FEET.

LARS HIS VOICE THICK All right?

THEY LOOK DOWN BRIEFLY AND NOD.

NILS Yes, that's fine. TO HANS Are you ready?

HANS Yes, I'm ready.

NILS No farewell speech?

HANS VOICE THICKENED You always were, and you always will be, a second-rate, time-serving, pedantic little shit.

NILS I'm sorry. I apologise. I don't know what made

NILS me say that, it was totally out of place. Put it down to nerves.

HANS Get on with it.

NILS I've always known you despised me. But then you despise us all, don't you?

HE OFFERS THE KNIFE AT HANS. AND MAKES HIM WAIT FOR IT. HE MAKES HIM WAIT A LONG TIME. AT LAST, AT THE VERY MOMENT WHEN IT LOOKS AS THOUGH HANS MIGHT .. JUST MIGHT CRACK .. INDEED, HE BEGINS TO FALTER .. NILS SLASHES HIM DOWN ONE CHEEK.

HANS HOWLS LOUDLY, BELLOWING LIKE AN ANIMAL, AND CLAPS HIS HAND TO HIS FACE. HE WHIMPERS WITH PAIN.

NILS CRISP There. That should do it.

HANS HOWLS AND STAGGERS ABOUT, DRIPPING WITH BLOOD.

LARS Christ! Christ Almighty!

NILS TO HANS What's the matter, lost your way?

HANS STAGGERS, BLINDED BY HIS OWN BLOOD.

LARS Christ ..

NILS Come on .. come on, come on

HE WAVES THE KNIFE WILDLY, SLICING THE AIR. LARS BACK AWAY IN ALARM.

LARS Christ!

NILS JUMPS ON THE BED, WAVING THE KNIFE.

NILS Come on down! Come and join the rest of us, the second-class squits!

LARS Christ, he looks terrible ..

NILS He looks marvellous!

HE JUMPS DOWN, TOWARDS HANS AND LARS.

LARS Get out .. put the bloody thing down - have you gone mad?!

NILS Do you want me to do the other side - do you want to be evened up? Come on ... while we're about it .. make a job of it!

HANS LOOKS UP AT HIM THROUGH HIS FINGERS, BLOODIED AND WEEPING WITH SHOCK. NILS SURVEYS HIM.

What are you, in the end? You make me puke.

HE THROWS THE KNIFE AWAY.

I've no time for it.

HE LOOKS BACK AT HANS AND CONCERN TAKES OVER.

Oh God.

HANS, ON HIS KNEES, WEEPS QUIETLY.

NILS Come on. Come on, love. You're all right, all over now. Stitch you up, you'll be as right as rain.

LARS What the hell!

BUT HANS NODS SLOWLY, LOOKING UP AT NILS.

NILS Come on, you're losing blood. HE HELPS HANS TO HIS FEET.
We'd better get you to a hospital.

HANS MUMBLES Thanks.

NILS Bring his coat.

HANS I mean it.

LARS What?!

NILS That's all right. You'd do the same for me.

HANS WITH A TERRIBLE SMILE Beau Geste?

IN PAIN, HE TRIES NOT TO LAUGH. NILS LAUGHS WITH
HIM. LARS GAPES AT THEM.

NILS TO LARS His coat. TO HANS Come on.

HE HELPS HANS OUT.

LARS STANDS, BLOODIED AND BEWILDERED. THEN HE REMEMBERS
THE COAT, LOOKS ROUND VAGUELY. HE FINDS HANS'
JACKET !! A BEAUTIFUL NEW SKIING JACKET IN SHINING
BLUE AND GREEN. HE GAZES AT IT FOR A SECOND, STILL
BAFFLED, THEN THROWS IT OVER HIS ARM AND FOLLOWS THE
OTHERS SWIFTLY.