

Knowledge Workings Theatre Presents



# Keeping Right

The New, Mostly Fake, Swedish Screwball Comedy

**The New, Mostly Fake, Swedish Screwball Comedy**

by T.J. Elliott

<https://offthewallplays.com>

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**Authors Note:** Some events referenced in this play *did* happen: the Swedish Government project to switch from driving on the left to driving on the right (named *Högertrafikomläggningen*) took effect in the early hours of September 3, 1967. Coincidentally, a North Vietnamese delegation was also in Stockholm attending the Russell Tribunal, which was investigating and evaluating American foreign policy and military intervention in Vietnam. ***Except for those facts, every element in this play, including its characters, is likely inaccurate, untrue, or wholly invented.***

*“There is a very large change in our daily existence, our everyday life. The doubts have naturally been great. But our innate hesitancy towards a fundamental transformation of our daily traffic environment has given way before a rational internationalism before a reform that we are confident will benefit traffic safety. I dare say that never before has a country invested so much personal labor and money to achieve uniform international traffic rules.”*

– Olof Palme, Swedish Minister of Communication, September 3, 1967, speaking about *Högertrafikomläggningen*.

**Links to the pronunciation guides for the non-English language words in Keeping Right appear at the end of this script.**

**(The ‘...//’ sign at the end of a line indicates that the character speaking next talks over the end of that line.)**

**Keeping Right** was originally presented by Knowledge Workings Theater Company, streamed live internationally on Zoom, for six performances in December 2020 to a total audience of over one thousand viewers. Directed by T.J. Elliott, with technical direction by Gifford Elliott, dialogue coaching by Hans Sandberg and Claire Elliott, **Keeping Right's** executive producer was Marjorie Phillips Elliott.

The cast was as follows:

**SVEN** ..... **Atticus Cain**  
**FANNY**..... **Winnie Stack**  
**GUNNAR**..... **John Blaylock**  
**ASTRID** ..... **Lynn Kim Do**  
**ROY** ..... **Ed Altman**

## Characters

**SVEN McMANUS:**  
Assistant traffic engineer of the Swedish Traffic Authority, a young Black Swedish-American man

**FANNY BORG:**  
Assistant 'Chef' of Traffic Authority, a young blonde Swedish woman

GUNNAR  
GUSTAFSSON: 'Chef'  
or boss of the Traffic  
Authority, a forty-ish  
Swedish man

ASTRID JOHANSSON: A  
temporary worker at  
the Traffic Authority, a  
young Vietnamese  
woman

ROY MOAB: A middle-  
aged American  
consultant  
to the Traffic Authority

## Setting

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*The time is a little after 4:00 AM on September 3, 1967. In Stockholm, Sweden, five members of the Högertrafikkommissionen, the Right-Hand Traffic Diversion Team, are about to take their places in separate observation posts around the city in order to "coordinate the massive logistical task of helping Swedish people change from driving on the left to driving on the right."*

*For almost the entire play, the five characters remain isolated in separate locations, depicted as different spaces on the stage. They cannot see each other and can only hear each other through a rudimentary radio setup with headphones. At their first cue, each character turns on a light in their post.*

## Scene 1

---

### Sven and Fanny debrief last night

*Lights rise on a single tiny office. We see SVEN seated and wearing a headset resembling a NASA contraption of the period. SVEN is writing a letter, and he pauses to read what he has written.*

SVEN

Dearest darling Fanny.

*Beat*

Aaaaarrgghh! *Din jävla,*  
idiot!

*Crumples the paper and throws it away, only to place another piece of paper on the desk in front of him. He starts writing again*

Dear Fanny, I wish to explain my strange behavior last night.

*Stops writing*



My *behavior*?

*Crumples that paper and throws it away, only to start writing on a new sheet. At the same time, in another office, the lights within slowly rise to reveal Fanny Borg, a young Swedish woman, who picks up the same kind of NASA headset in her hand but does not put it on her head*

Fanny, I feel that I must explain myself, but I don't know how to begin. And even if I knew how to begin, I don't know how I would go on. But Fanny, I want to say that I'm sorry. The sorriest that I have ever been.

*Pauses in his writing*

The sorriest ever?

*Beat*

Too much. Fanny, Fanny,  
Fanny, Fanny. What should  
I say?

FANNY

*Headphones still in  
her hand*

Is someone there?

SVEN

Fanny?

FANNY

Hello?

*The  
lights  
rise in  
GUNNA  
R's  
space*

FANNY

You're very faint.

SVEN

*Louder*

Headset.

FANNY

It's as if you were speaking  
from another world.

SVEN

*Still louder*

The headset must go on  
your head, Fanny.

FANNY

It's like a Bergman film. The  
voices. Which one is that?

SVEN

*Now yelling*

Persona! Headset on your  
head, Fanny.

FANNY

*Startled by the  
sound*

Oh, of course.

*Puts it on*

SVEN

*Still yelling*

Is it on?

FANNY

Don't yell. Yes.

SVEN

God *morgon*, Fanny.

FANNY

English only on H-day,  
Sven. The day we start  
keeping right on the road!  
No Swedish! Follow the  
rules of Gunnar.

*Sniffs her headset*

This thing smells.

SVEN

Roy got them from NASA,  
the American space  
program.

FANNY

Ugh! From Roy? No  
wonder they smell.

SVEN

Fanny, about last night,  
when we...//

FANNY

Last night? Nothing happened. Last night has passed. Didn't your mother quote that Russian writer, Shcherbatskoy, in class?

*Grandly*

"Everything past is unreal, everything future is unreal. Real is only the present moment of physical efficiency." Our past, Sven, is... passed.

SVEN

Last night proved we should leave my mother and philosophy, and especially all Russians, out of this. May I explain why...//

FANNY

*Curt*

No time for explanation

*As she speaks, she  
moves her left arm  
across her body to  
meet with her right,  
and then thrusts  
both arms forward*

on H-dagen... H-day for all  
of Sweden. *Högertrafik*.  
Excuse me, English: Right  
traffic diversion. Today we  
need to focus on going  
from driving on the left to  
driving on the right. With  
no... up the slips.

SVEN

Slipups. Fanny, I can tell by  
your voice...//

FANNY

Sven.

*Melodiously*

Nothing happened.  
Nothing. Checklist...

SVEN

Something happened last  
night.

FANNY

Something? My room. You.  
Me. But nothing happened.  
Nothing isn't something.  
Paraphrasing Heidegger,  
why was there nothing  
rather than...//

SVEN

Please! No Heidegger. You  
quoted him last night just  
as I was about to...//

FANNY

What's wrong with  
Heidegger?

SVEN

Other than his being an old  
Nazi?

FANNY

Your mother quotes him in  
class.

SVEN

My mother is part of my  
problem. What I mean...//

FANNY

Sven!

*Insistent*

Nothing happened. You did nothing. We did nothing. As Sartre once wrote in *Being and Nothingness*, nothingness lies coiled in the heart of being—like a worm.

SVEN

*Herregud!* Not Sartre.

FANNY

Why? Our time together was existential. Sartre is excellent on the subject of nothing: It's "human reality itself as the radical negation by means of which the world is revealed." Last night, Sven McManus was revealed as an enormous nothing.



SVEN

*Annoyed*

Quoting philosophers?  
Fine, Wittgenstein clearly  
said that a nothing would  
serve just as well as a  
something about which  
nothing could be said.

FANNY

Oh, now you borrow from  
Mamma's philosophy class.

SVEN

Exactly, I'm reminded of  
my mother because of all  
your beauty and  
philosophizing and charm,  
and that's...//

FANNY

Most men marry their  
mothers. Why the  
problem?

SVEN

*Fanny, snälla! Jag ville inte  
ta mig friheter...//*

FANNY

English only on H-day!  
Gunnar's rule.

SVEN

*Frustrated*

I didn't want to take  
liberties.

FANNY

*Loudly*

But you were at liberty to  
take liberties. The right  
thing was to take as many  
liberties as you could  
handle.

SVEN

You don't have to shout.

FANNY

Why not? Shouting  
releases tension. Since last  
night did not result in a  
release of tension, shouting  
will have to do.

SVEN

That's why explaining to  
you the reasons...//

FANNY

*Still shouting*

You left me with my legs in  
the air. All the tension I  
wished to release before a  
critical day like H-Dagen,

*Makes arm  
gestures again*

the day of keeping right on  
the road is still there.  
Maybe even more. But as  
the assistant chef of  
*Högertrafikkommissionen*,  
my very strong suggestion  
to you is to not talk about  
nothing.

*Consults clipboard*

Instead, consult your H-  
*dagen* checklist. Headset  
working?

SVEN

We're talking on the  
headsets, aren't we?

FANNY

Oh, you are so expert at  
the talk. Now, H-*dagen*  
checklist.

SVEN

Who cares about *Höger*  
day? We're only doing  
these stupid observations  
because the police took  
over our real jobs in the  
left-right driving shift after  
we did all the hard work.

FANNY

Who cares? We have  
worked towards H-day for  
years in Sweden. From the  
left-hand side of the road  
to the right,

*Again moves arms  
in the routine*

smoothly and safely to  
success. Or is it successfully  
and smoothly to safety?

SVEN

Smoothly? When we know  
almost all the people in  
Sweden don't want this  
change?

FANNY

The moment has passed  
for discussion. Gunnar took  
a decision and acted upon  
it. You might try that  
sometime.

SVEN

Give me a second chance.  
We all deserve a second  
chance.

FANNY

Whoever said such a stupid  
thing?

SVEN

My father says it. To my  
mother. Pretty much every  
night.

FANNY

And every night your  
mother gets further proof  
that second chances in  
romance, especially from a  
jazz drummer from  
Philadelphia, are a bad  
idea. Checklist! H-day!  
Keeping left to keeping  
right. Time passes. Five  
AM. Less than an hour,

*Moves her arms  
again in the left-  
right motion*

and then to the party.

SVEN

What party?

FANNY

The celebration at the inn  
in Sigtuna.

SVEN

Nobody told me about a  
party. At the inn at  
Sigtuna?

FANNY

Gunnar probably forgot.  
I'm his escort. As Traffic  
Authority Chef, they invited  
him for a night in the inn.  
Perhaps something will  
happen there rather than  
nothing.

SVEN

Gunnar and you? In the  
inn?

FANNY

*Suggestively*

In the inn.

*Provocatively*

Gunnar in inn.

SVEN

Fanny! Why?

FANNY

Why go to a party? With  
my boss? Who is likely  
getting promoted as a  
result of *Högertrafik*;

*Hits her head*

the right traffic project?  
And who will pick his  
successor,

*Points to herself*

Fanny Borg, which will  
make me the youngest  
woman at that supervisory  
level in the history of  
Sweden, unless you count  
certain medieval saints,  
which I do not? Why go to  
that party? Is that your  
question?

SVEN

Fanny, Gunnar is married.  
Is he leaving his wife?



FANNY

All men leave their wives—  
every morning. And usually  
shuffle back home every  
night.

SVEN

This explains the way he  
looks at you.

FANNY

He looks? I hadn't noticed.  
What matters is Gunnar  
boosting me to the next  
rung on my career ladder.  
If he releases my tension at  
the same time? My  
grandmother used to say,  
*"Allvar och gamman faller  
väl samman."*

SVEN

What?

FANNY

Being serious and having a  
good time thrive together.

SVEN

But, Fanny, would you just  
use Gunnar in this way?

FANNY

*Pause, cocks her  
head*

Yes. Definitely. Using is  
good.

SVEN

And yet you quote Sartre,  
who would say that  
treating a person as a thing  
to...//

FANNY

Sven, Sven, Sven. As your  
mother said in a class, for  
which I believe you were  
absent, women study  
Sartre, but practice  
pragmatism. Your mamma  
and I discussed Follett's  
distinction of 'power-with'  
versus 'power-over' ...//

SVEN

Please stop. What... stifled  
me last night was you  
talking philosophy while I  
was trying to... get physical.  
I mean, talk dirty, speak  
French—that gets me  
going, but the willies are all  
I get from a girl quoting  
Simone de Beauvoir in  
English about how your  
body is a situation!

FANNY

The willies?

SVEN

Anxiety. Panic. Last night,  
when you started moaning  
about how it was going to  
be a transcendental  
moment...//

FANNY

Yes, transcendental. The  
naked experience of the  
world, Sartre says. And I  
was naked.

SVEN

Yes, naked and quoting *my mother* about causing the other's flesh to be born.

FANNY

That's Sartre, not your mamma.

SVEN

Enough with Sartre! It's just that you start sounding so brilliant, quoting philosophy and talking dirty at the same time that all I could think of is my mother. No man can... *ligga* with a woman like you while thinking about his mother.

FANNY

Your mother talks philosophy and speaks dirty when she *liggas*?

SVEN

The dirty talk comes after Dad gets that second chance. I told you we live in a very small apartment with thin walls.

FANNY

Sven, it's okay. Nothing  
happened. Stop worrying.  
Focus on

*Starts to move her  
arms again in the  
same sequence*

moving millions of Swedes  
from left to right.

SVEN

I just want to move you,  
Fanny. And I can show you  
if you would just give  
me...//

FANNY

Tell and show was last  
night

SVEN

Show and tell. And even  
though last night didn't....  
What if I love you and want  
more than to release your  
tension?

FANNY

Oh, no!

*Takes headphones  
off and back on  
again*

No! These used space  
headphones are defective.  
They make it sound as if  
you are saying something  
very stupid.

SVEN

Being in love with you?

FANNY

Sven, wake up and smell  
the *kaffet*. Nothing  
happened last night,  
certainly not love. How  
egotistical to think that  
saying you love me is going  
to make my missing a  
chance at releasing tension  
all better? No. Two wrongs  
do not make a right.

SVEN

What? How is falling in love  
with you wrong?

FANNY

Because it's not in my plan,  
Sven. Relieving tension  
with you was in my plan for  
one night. A run test.

SVEN

Test run.

FANNY

Right, and you flunked that  
test. Many times, I  
explained my plan to you.  
Even last night again at  
dinner. Soon I take  
Gunnar's job, then a seat in  
parliament, spokesperson  
for the party, some cabinet  
position, and—ta da!—the  
first female Prime Minister  
of Sweden. Do you hear  
any room for love in such a  
plan?

*GUNNAR appears in  
his space*

SVEN

Wasn't there already a  
female Prime Minister? We  
learned that in high school.

*GUNNAR dons  
headset*

FANNY

She was *acting* Prime  
Minister. When I am Prime  
Minister, I won't be *acting*.

*SVEN moans, but  
GUNNAR starts  
speaking*



## Scene 2

---

Gunnar enters with an excuse

GUNNAR

Testing. Testing.

*Stentorian*

Today is H-day! H-dagen!

FANNY

Gunnar, good morning.  
This is Fanny. I am in  
position.

GUNNAR

Fanny, your voice warms  
my heart on this auspicious  
day. You are at...?

FANNY

Hornsgatan.

GUNNAR

Hornsgatan. Excellent!

SVEN

And I'm freezing my ass off  
at Slussen, Gunnar. This  
office is an icebox.

GUNNAR

Oh, Sven. You are on too.  
Excellent. The bus station  
at Slussen is critical in this  
transition. And Astrid?

*Pause*

Astrid?

FANNY

We haven't heard her on  
the line yet.

GUNNAR

What? She is covering  
Kungsholmen.

SVEN

Maybe she got lost. She's  
still new to Stockholm.

FANNY

Is Astrid actually Swedish?  
She doesn't look...//

GUNNAR

Yes, her papers were fine.  
She's from Lapland. That's  
why she looks a little  
different. Are we all ready  
for  
*Högertrafikomläggningen?*

FANNY

English only, Chef. I mean,  
boss.

GUNNAR

Ha. An excellent joke,  
Fanny. Roy, being  
American, insists on English  
only; you know Americans.  
But we Swedish can call the  
day what it is: right-hand  
traffic diversion.

*Performs elaborate  
version of FANNY's  
earlier gesture*

FANNY

Gunnar, are you with the  
Prime Minister now? What  
is Erlander like? Did he  
congratulate you? Talk  
about your future? If he is  
close to your headset,  
could we say hello?

GUNNAR

*Uncomfortable*

Not at the moment, Fanny.  
In fact, I am in my office.  
But I plan to speak to the  
Prime Minister later at the  
party. At the inn. In  
Sigtuna. Tonight.

SVEN

I thought we were going to  
talk to you from the Grand  
Platform. You are the  
architect of  
*Högertrafikomläggningen*,  
uh... right-hand traffic  
diversion. How are you not  
up there with the other big  
shots?

GUNNAR

A leader must be working  
alongside his team on H-  
day.

SVEN

How are we alongside if we  
are twelve blocks away  
from each other?

GUNNAR

Symbolically. A leader is  
with his team even when  
apart.

FANNY

It's like Schrödinger's cat.  
You're both with us and  
not with us at the same  
time.

SVEN

*As an aside*

Oh, now you talk *physics* to  
him.

GUNNAR

Very interesting, Fanny.  
Schrodinger. Yes.

*Shakes head*

Sven, I'm worried about  
Astrid. She is so new.  
Please call her house.

SVEN

Why me?

FANNY

You recommended Astrid  
for the job.

SVEN

She just followed me here  
from university one day.  
And you hired her, Fanny.

GUNNAR

But you have a phone  
number, Sven?

SVEN

Yes, but there's no phone  
here.

GUNNAR

Go to the next office. Use  
the phone there.

*SVEN*  
*exits*

## Scene 3

---

### Gunnar and Fanny alone

GUNNAR

Fanny, we have a moment alone. To speak about... tonight.

FANNY

Yes, tonight. Are you sure that we are invited to stay the night with all of the other dignitaries at the inn, Gunnar?

GUNNAR

Oh, yes. We are there to participate in everything. The beautiful rooms. The toasts. The lavish supper. I hear a jazz band will play. And dancing. And then

*Rubs hands  
excitedly*

complimentary traditional Swedish breakfast.

FANNY

Actually, I am... what's the English? *Jag bantar?*

GUNNAR

Dieting? You? With your beautiful, very well-formed body. Eat, drink, be merry.

FANNY

Gunnar, you forget the old saying:

*Sing-song*

*"rädsla mindre, hoppas  
mer, ...//*

GUNNAR

*Interrupting in a  
sing-song rush*

Yes, fear less, hope more, eat less, chew more, blah blah and good things will be yours. But I assure you, Min kära, one night off the diet and still good things will be yours. Good things.

FANNY

Might one of those good things be promotions? For both of us, of course.



GUNNAR

Perhaps. But by good things... I hope you are not just using me.

FANNY

Gunnar, of course I am using you. And I am inviting you to use me. John Stuart Mill wrote that utility is the ultimate appeal in all ethical questions. I am your utility, and you are my utility.

*Pause*

*Jag är ditt verktyg och du...//*

GUNNAR

*Confused*

I understood the English. Is this to do with the first female Prime Minister of Sweden thing?

FANNY

Thing? Not all. Certainly not all.

*Sven returns and dons headset*

GUNNAR

I was thinking about what you said, but wasn't there a female Prime Minister in 1958? Ulla Lindstrom, right? The newspapers all made a...//

FANNY

*Coldly*

Ulla was only *acting* Prime Minister. A summer replacement when everybody had left. A summer replacement like a bad television show. When I am leading this country, I will not be *acting*.

## Scene 4

---

Sven returns to get his own time  
with Fanny

SVEN

I'm back. The person who  
answered at Astrid's  
number didn't speak  
Swedish. Or English. They  
seemed Asian.

FANNY

Why wouldn't they be?  
Astrid is Asian.

GUNNAR

No, she is Swedish. She  
showed her papers. Her  
grandfather is from  
Jokkmokk.

FANNY

But she barely speaks  
Swedish. She barely speaks  
English—just a bunch of  
sayings.

GUNNAR

Astrid told me that she was  
raised abroad but returned  
to serve Sweden.

SVEN

By the way, Gunnar, I looked out the window here and saw some new traffic lights and signs still covered. Aren't they all supposed to be unwrapped for the shift to the right?

GUNNAR

Really? Still covered? That can't be.

SVEN

Yes. I think so. You better check in with the police.

GUNNAR

What a disaster! Yes, I'll have to use the other phone. I'll be right back

*Exits as FANNY  
shakes her head*

## Scene 5

---

### Sven takes the challenge of stopping H-day

FANNY

You didn't see anything.  
You made that up.

SVEN

What if I did? I'll do more  
than that to stop Gunnar  
from being with you  
tonight.

FANNY

*Prat, prat, prat.*

*Hits head*

Excuse me: Talk, talk, talk.

SVEN

Fanny, you can't go to the  
inn with Gunnar. It's  
wrong. You'll be sorry in  
the morning.

FANNY

I may be a lot of things  
tomorrow morning, Sven,  
but sorry won't be one of  
them.

SVEN

Then I have to stop this project so there won't be a party at the inn at Sigtuna.

FANNY

You, Sven McManus,  
stopping  
*Högertrafikomläggningen?*

*Laughs*

All of Sweden—with the help of 807 traffic agents and 150,324 volunteers—starts keeping right in less than an hour, but you will stop it? How? Like one of your science fiction stories you sneak-read at your desk?

SVEN

Science fiction can come true. Stop Stockholm, and the rest will follow. If I make up my mind, I can make anything happen.

FANNY

Very Nietzsche. And just as nutty.

*Waves fingers  
mockingly*

But your mind is as unmade as a bachelor's bed. Sven, you are a lovely person with a powerful body, which is why I chose you to help me relieve my *tension* last night. But so far in your life, what you have made happen is mostly nothing.

SVEN

That's unfair. I have this job as assistant traffic engineer. And studying nights at university.

FANNY

Exactly. The eternal student. What happened to completing your engineering degree? All you do is take more philosophy classes because your mamma teaches them.

SVEN

Maybe I will become a philosopher.

FANNY

That will not get you the girls, Sven. Checklist! Headsets working?

*GUNNAR returns  
and puts on his  
headset*



## SVEN

Yes, the headsets are  
working, and who cares?  
All I care about now is  
stopping  
*Högertrafikomläggningen,*  
and then there will be no  
party at the inn at Sigtuna  
tonight. Gunnar will not  
ruin his life by having an  
affair with you. And I will  
be releaser of your tension,  
not Gunnar.

## Scene 6

---

Gunnar returns after calling police chief; Astrid enters with a tale

*The lights flash and then stay on in yet another post. ASTRID enters dressed in a long-sleeved button-down tunic with a beret atop her head. She carries several books, most notably one entitled Common English Phrases.*

GUNNAR

What's this about tension?  
You just caused tension  
with the police  
commissioner, Sven.  
Sandstrom was quite put  
out and *rude*. Claims you're  
seeing shadows. Saying the  
Traffic Authority should  
stick to painting road signs  
and let the police make  
sure people drive on the  
right side. Really. After all  
the planning and logistics  
and...//

ASTRID

Reporting for duty. Astrid...

*Pause*

Johansson, sir.

GUNNAR

Astrid, why are you so late?

ASTRID

I am so sorry, Chef. I know that I am a day late and a dollar short.

*Consults book of  
English phrases*

FANNY

What?

ASTRID

I was waiting for the bus until the cows come home. And then the policeman reminded me that the cows weren't coming home.

SVEN

Astrid, we've stopped all  
the buses, all traffic. We  
talked about this  
yesterday.

ASTRID

I had to walk to here from  
Drottningholmsvägen. I  
went through Traneberg,  
Kristineberg, Marieberg...//

## Scene 7

---

### Roy shows up cursing up a storm

*As the lights come on, ROY arrives in his space, which is his hotel room, cursing and swearing as he dons the headset. ROY has a flask from which he drinks regularly.*

ROY

That bastard, son of a bitch, scabies-licking, goddamn mothering, limp dick, scumbucket, dickweed, asswipe...//

GUNNAR

Roy! Roy! Fanny, Astrid, and Sven are on their headsets!

ROY

Well, I do apologize to the ladies. Of course, Sven, I'll bet you've heard worse than that in your neighborhood, right?

SVEN

I grew up in Stockholm,  
Roy. My father and mother  
don't talk that way.

ROY

Oh, well, shit. I thought  
that with you being.... You  
know...

SVEN

The son of a philosophy  
professor and a jazz  
drummer?

GUNNAR

Now for the final question  
on the checklist: each of  
you, in turn, tell me what  
you see right now from  
your outpost.

## Scene 8

---

They discover the headsets don't reach to the window

*Each of them turns toward an observation window unseen behind them but in doing so, discover that their headphones' wiring does not extend to fully look out each of their assigned spots. They start to take off their headsets but then stop.*

FANNY

The headset doesn't reach.  
How did those Americans  
ever put someone on the  
moon?

SVEN

They haven't put someone  
on the moon.

ASTRID

I knew it wasn't true.

GUNNAR

How can this be?

FANNY

*Herregud! Dom  
amerikanska skitstövlarna!*

ROY

Gunny. No foreign  
languages, only English.  
Our deal?

GUNNAR

*Aside*

Stop talking about a deal,  
Roy.

SVEN

Roy, you are in Sweden,  
where Swedish is not a  
foreign language and  
where your people  
installed the headsets. I  
told you they would be a  
problem. We better call the  
police and call off H-day. I'll  
be glad to do it, Gunnar.

GUNNAR

What? No, don't do  
anything.



SVEN

But we can't do the observations. We have to postpone it.

GUNNAR

Ah, Sven, is that how my assistant traffic engineer deals with something unexpected? To give up?

FANNY

How did you know, Gunnar?

GUNNAR

Admittedly, this is a problem. But I have a solution. On the count of three, take off your headsets, rush to the windows, make your observation, rush back to the headset, and make a report.

ASTRID

Is this a competition too?

GUNNAR

One

*ASTRID takes off  
her headset and  
runs out*

Two

*ROY takes off his  
headset and moves  
out*

Three!

*FANNY takes off her  
headset and moves  
out of our sight.  
Sven stays where he  
is*

Anyone ready to report?

SVEN

It doesn't look good out  
there, Gunnar.

GUNNAR

What do you mean?

SVEN

I just get a feeling.

## Scene 9

---

### A cacophony of reports

ASTRID

*Returns and puts  
her headset on*

It is still dark.

FANNY

*Returns but forgets  
to put her headset  
on*

Currently, there is no traffic  
other than a police bus that  
is moving on... was that the  
left or right side of the  
road?

*Simulates with her  
hands as ROY  
returns*

SVEN

Fanny, you have to put on  
your headset.

FANNY

I can't quite hear you.

GUNNAR

*Loudly*

Fanny, dear, your headset  
must be on your head.

FANNY

Now the sound is weak.  
Are we connected?

ALL

*Shouting together*

Put on your headset!

FANNY

*Puts it on*

I observe this headset  
stinks.

GUNNAR

Any other reports?

*ASTRID, FANNY,  
SVEN, and ROY  
start speaking at  
once. Their voices  
come out in a  
babble*

GUNNAR

One at a time, please!

ROY

Fuck me till I cry. I can *still*  
see that Canadian  
ambassador yakking it up  
with the ladies.

*ASTRID,  
SVEN,  
and  
FANNY  
report  
simultan  
eously*

GUNNAR

*En I taget, snälla.*

*Slaps forehead*

English. One at a time,  
please. We will take turns.  
One minute watching, one  
minute reporting. Sven,  
you go first. Then I want  
your reports, Astrid, Fanny,  
Roy...//

ASTRID

Reports? You want my  
reports, too, Chef?

GUNNAR

Who else would get your  
reports, Astrid?

ASTRID

The committee gets the  
ones about recruitment  
of.... For my other job...

*Slaps forehead*

It is so early, I am in trouble  
in mind. A little knowledge  
is a dangerous thing for  
me. In one fell swoop, I am  
one swallow who will not  
make it to next summer.

FANNY

Perhaps two at a time,  
Gunnar, for efficiency.

GUNNAR

Yes, excellent. Sven and  
Astrid start.

*They exit  
reluctantly*

## Scene 10

---

### Roy hits on Fanny

ROY

This is a piece of cake.  
Observations are  
unnecessary with our–your  
plan. We’re all done except  
for that great party tonight.

GUNNAR

Yes, but overconfidence...

*A phone rings*

Who could?

*Looks at his watch*

Ah, my wife! She will be  
nagging that I am not on  
the stage as the Minister  
for Communication gives  
his speech on television.  
Fanny, you are in charge  
until I get back.

*Exits*



ROY

In charge? I like a gal who's  
in charge. You can take  
charge of me anytime,  
Fanny. Starting tonight. In  
the inn.

FANNY

Oh, I am Gunnar's escort  
for this evening, Roy.

ROY

I know. But with me... well,  
a swell babe like you  
angling to be the first  
female Prime Minister  
could meet the current PM  
this evening.

FANNY

How would such a meeting  
happen?

ROY

These Prime Minister types. Arrogant, fancy pants assholes, but they love Americans. Take our advice on everything. You meeting him could just be a quid pro quo for some things I'm delivering to old Erlanger.

FANNY

A quid and a quo? You are doing something for our Prime Minister?

*SVEN returns*

ROY

Well, it ain't nothing. It's how I work, darling, I do favors for people, and they like to do favors for me.

## Scene 11

---

Sven pushes on the idea of failure  
with Roy

SVEN

Who's doing a favor for  
whom?

FANNY

Sven, you can do me a  
favor and be in charge until  
Gunnar returns from  
talking to his wife on the  
phone. It is my turn to  
observe.

*Exits hurriedly*

SVEN

Fanny, wait! Fanny? I want  
to tell you something.  
Fanny?

ROY

I'll bet you want to tell her something. I'd like to tell her something. Don't Miss Sweden and you share a little office downtown usually? A tight little office. Lucky you. She seems hot to trot, and you're pretty much the only game in town.

SVEN

What game am I? I hope it's not hockey.

*ASTRID returns*

ROY

Look, I come into the office yesterday, and the only guy there is you, Sven, old buddy, and I'm thinking you're the fox in the hen house with all of these lovely ladies.

ASTRID

Fox in the hen house?  
Surely, you do not think  
that Sven is going to rip our  
throats open and then eat  
our breasts?

ROY

*Startled by  
ASTRID's voice*

Hot damn! No, no, young  
lady. Fox in the henhouse is  
a saying. Just that Sven  
seems to have it made in  
the shade being the only  
unmarried male in the  
office with so much beauty  
strutting around.

ASTRID

*Holds phrasebook*

Made in the shade is not a  
saying I know. Does it refer  
to the almost chocolate  
tone of Sven's skin?

ROY

What? No! Anyhow. You kids excited about the party?

ASTRID

Sven and I are not on the list.

SVEN

How did you know that, Astrid?

ASTRID

Seeing is believing the documents Gunnar left on his desk yesterday behind an almost open door.

*Panics*

But you should please forgive and forget that secret that was not safe with me, or I might be carrying it to my grave.

*Beat*

Loose lips sink ships that pass in the night.

ROY

Well, sorry you won't be there. Hear that shindig is going to be top-notch.

SVEN

But what if the traffic shift is a failure? Accidents! Traffic jams! No one keeps right! Will there still be a party?

ROY

Of course not. Losers don't get a party. But how would it fail? All they're doing is moving from the left to the right.

*Makes the hand motion that the others have made*

SVEN

It could be a failure in the minds of the Swedish people.

ROY

The minds of the Swedish people? Don't know about that, but later today, everybody is going to be driving on the right-hand side of the road just like they do in the good old USA.

*Leaving*

Tell Gunnar I'll be right back. Need a little more of the hair of the dog that bit me.

*Exits*



## Scene 12

---

### Astrid opens up to Sven

ASTRID

Roy is a stranger from a strange land, but most Americans are. Gunnar is not here?

SVEN

He had to talk to his wife on the phone.

ASTRID

Is he reporting to her that he is taking Fanny to the inn this evening for *bourgeois* sex? That is a very brave example of self-criticism. Will the struggle session be televised?

SVEN

What? No, he just... how did you know Gunnar was taking...//

ASTRID

That is a secret. In fact, my knowing was also a secret, but I thought you knew so it wasn't a secret to you. I confess that keeping secrets is one of my areas for improvement.

SVEN

But why do you have to keep secrets?

ASTRID

In my other job, if you can't keep the secrets, they.... Ồ! *Thật tồi tệ.* I mean. Oh, dear. I let the cat out of the bag and it has devoured the little bird that told me who now will be a skeleton coming out of the closet, and the cat will need to eat the beans that I have spilled.

SVEN

How long have you spoken English, Astrid?

ASTRID

Very recently, English was needed. So, a stitch in time saved nine, but my family sending me out with just an English phrasebook may have jumped the gun without actually letting me keep my gun.

*Beat*

I miss my gun.

SVEN

You are very different from most Swedish girls, Astrid.

ASTRID

I hope that pleases you as much as a punch. Tickling you pink would please me, Sven.

## Scene 13

---

Gunnar returns and picks up his headset

GUNNAR

*Imitating his wife*

What happened to you on the Grand Platform?

*His own voice*

Always criticizing.  
Wherever I am, I'm in charge.

*Dons headset*

Reports?

ASTRID

Shall I report, sir?

GUNNAR

Yes, but you can call me Gunnar, Astrid.

ASTRID

Really? The equality of  
social relations with you is  
a bolt from the blue that  
has me over the moon.

GUNNAR

Astrid, what did you see?

*ROY reenters*

ASTRID

*Checking notes  
deliberately*

Volvo, Saab, Volvo, Saab,  
Volvo, Volvo, Volvo,  
Volkswagen Saab.

GUNNAR

Really? That many cars  
moving already? On which  
side of the road?

ASTRID

Oh, no, they're parked.

SVEN

Astrid, we are supposed to report on the motion, the action.

ROY

*Reentering, dons  
his headset*

No American cars? We'll fix that now that you're making the move to the right. *Right*, Gunnar? Get it? Ordering American cars is going to be the 'right' thing to do.

*Laughs at his own  
joke*

GUNNAR

*Somewhat alarmed*

Sven and Astrid, it's time for you to check again.

SVEN

But Fanny isn't back yet.

GUNNAR

*Det gör inget. Inga  
problem.*

ROY

*Inga who? English only,  
Gunnar.*

GUNNAR

I just told them not to  
worry. Off you go, Sven.  
Astrid.

*SVEN  
leaves,  
but  
ASTRID  
turns  
back,  
replacin  
g her  
headset  
quietly  
and  
carefully*