

Amplexus

or

The last embrace

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Motto:

*“Au grand loto de l'univers/ J'ai pas tiré l'bon numéro/
J'suis mal dans ma peau/ J'ai pas envie d'être un robot/
métro boulot dodo”*

(Daniel Belavoine: *SOS d'un terrien en détresse*)

Characters:

Carola – 93 years, 1 month and 25 days old (Libra)

Anders - 98 years, 1 month and 2 days old (Gemini)

Kristian - 57 years, 10 months and 9 days old (Aquarius)

(The actors must look 30 to 35 years younger than the characters)

Where? - Helsingborg, Sweden

When? – 13th of December 2049, The feast of St. Lucy (Lucia)

* **Amplexus** – means “embrace” in Latin – a type of mating behaviour (particularly in frogs), in which the male (significantly smaller) clings to the female’s body to fertilize her. The play is structured into musical tracks, each title being a song of the Swedish pop group

ABBA, symbolizing the main metaphor of the scene.

Italics will be used in some lines to emphasize a word or a phrase.

ACT I

In the morning. In the background, an ultra-modern furnished kitchen, connected to the living room. Anders sits by the window on the left. Carola is standing, cooking with her back towards the audience for the duration the entire play. There is a dining table for six in the middle with only three chairs. During the audience's entrance, ABBA's "One Of Us" plays on the TV.

TRACK 1. One Of Us

The doorbell rings. Anders walks stage right and opens the door. Kristian enters then hugs his father. He puts his coat on the rack and the shopping bags on the counter. He gives his mother a kiss on the cheek. The two men sit at the table, facing each other, without saying anything. They lapse into a smile from time to time. They start eating grapes from a bowl in the middle of the table. This action makes them slightly stand up, repetitively, to grab the grapes. The bowl remains between them, in the middle.

Carola (*with her back towards them*): I bought you grapes! They're not that good. You can only taste their true flavour during autumn. Just like life.

Kristian (*with his mouth full*): Mother, you can find them in any season nowadays.

Carola: Indeed, but their soul is alive only in autumn, I'm telling you! Fruits must be eaten in their season. The fall is long gone and so are the good grapes.

Kristian: They are always good here.

Anders (*straight forward, hiding his emotions*): You don't visit like you used to.

(*Kristian remains silent. He grabs another grape.*)

Anders: Erika?

Carola: The kids? How are the kids?

Kristian: They went to Erika's parents for the weekend. They figured I won't be that talkative. I've got so much work to do this week.

Carola: You're working too much. You always did.

Anders (*trying to make a joke*): Is that so? They said on the TV that stress has been suppressed.

Kristian: When we're no longer humans, maybe then...

Anders: Maybe then – Sure!

Kristian: But, look, I came for lunch. Just the three of us. It's been a while.

Anders: We needed that! Isn't that right?

Carola: You didn't take any days off this year, did you?

Kristian: Actually, I did. We're going to Brasil for Christmas. Erika's parents bought us tickets as a gift this summer. I thought I told you. Rio!

Anders: Samba!...

Kristian: ... De Janeiro!

(they both laugh)

Carola (cold): Did you hear that, Anders? How generous of them, Erika's parents.
(enthusiastic) We went to Rio, too. Ten years ago, to be precise, when you were dating Erika's sister.

Anders: Ha, I have forgotten about her – Ulrike. You moved out then.

Kristian: Absolutely! I was all grown up.

Anders: By the same token, you should've moved back when you got to the second sister.

Kristian: Or run away for good.

(they smile timidly, fearing Carola's reaction)

Anders: How's Ulrike doing? Is she still with that Brazilian?

Kristian: Still with him. Zé... Zé Carlos *(laughs)* Zé and Ulrike!

Carola: I see. Your in-laws organized a family reunion for you. The kids will be staying with us?

Kristian: That's out of the question!

(a short break)

Kristian: No, Mother, you know Erika disapproves of this.

Carola: I never understood why. Seriously. We're their grandparents and they always have a wonderful time here. Say something, Anders!

Anders *(calmly)*: Baby!

Kristian: I know, believe me, but my hands are tied. She insists we take them with us. They were eight months old when we first took them abroad. The Maldives. Diapers, poop and heat – a newlywed's dream.

Carola: Then you'll have the time of your life again with two four-year-olds to look after.

Kristian: That's won't be the case. They grew up. They both behave themselves.

Carola: They are too shy. I don't see anything in Freja's or in Theo's eyes of the kid you used to be. The terror of the neighbourhood. I loved that in you. Kids nowadays are born already

old. Little philosophers. They can already taste the great endings. Oops! That was a bad joke. So dumb!

Anders: Very dumb! Especially...

(Kristian remains silent)

Carola: We...

Anders: We're no longer conquering anything. Is that right? We're no longer conquering anything.

Kristian: We're no longer searching for anything.

Anders: That's it!

Carola: To find what? Is there anything left? We've been civilized for much too long now.

Anders: Actually, our will tends to vanish.

Kristian: An absolute zero!

Carola *(as she opens the oven, the smell of fish fills the room)*: All I know is that you really like fish.

Kristian: Herring!

Carola: Will be ready in a minute.

Kristian: Wow! Thank you, Mother. If only Erika was here...

Carola: I'm still trying, dear. I always have.

Kristian: I know and I really don't see why...

Carola: That's nothing to worry about. It's enough for me to know the two of you are doing well. That's all!

Kristian: Yes.

Carola: And that you have wonderful children!

Kristian: Absolutely wonderful!

Anders: Whom we'd enjoy seeing more often, though. We'll soon be gone, and...

Carola: That's rubbish!

Anders: Our rubbish! Ours, baby!

Kristian: *(stands up and goes to the window)*: Helsingborg – the mirror city. Papá used to tell me this every time he'd see me at the window. Across the bay there is Helsingør, where Hamlet – the mad prince – would sleeplessly walk around.

Carola: A prince very lucid in his insanity. Your father played that part for almost eleven years. Over three hundred performances. They cast him when he was in his second year at the University. The king of the stage, as the newspapers called him. The leader of his generation, handsome and...

Kristian (*calling him*): Papá! Papá Olaf! Whenever I come here, I feel he's with us. I still have his clippings, his interviews, photographs – and I can still smell his tobacco pipe smoke. I hated that smoke when I was a kid. You know, mother, Papá usually visits me in my dreams.

Anders: You're the only one in the family that still believes in ghosts. I bet Olaf is laughing himself to death.

(*Kristian grabs a grape*)

Kristian: I sometimes wonder... all those acting studies... honestly, I sometimes wonder how it would've been...

Carola: Being an architect is amazing!

Kristian: Absolutely! I even...

Carola: Being an architect is amazing! I've always wanted that for you.

Anders: Carola, do you hear yourself? You wanted that for him. You!

Kristian: Done! Done! Done! I've finished the salad! Endives.

Anders: (*gravely*): Let's break the ice! Long story short: we brought you here to talk about wishes. Actually, about trivial happiness.

Carola: I think I'll need the extended version of the story.

Kristian: Uncle?

Anders: Forgive me! Does it sound tragic? It's not. I have less than two years left until the FINALE and I don't want to end it like a coward.

Kristian: I thought you'd got used to that idea. The FINALE is a game, one that many await.

Carola: Exactly, it's a game. Surveys show that over 97%...

Kristian: Some also train for it. (*he laughs, then he realises he was out of line*)

Anders: Forgive me, my queen, but when you can almost taste death, surveys don't matter anymore. Floki, dear...

Carola: Floki!

Kristian (*smiling*): Haha! You haven't called me that since...

Carola: Since before you left for University.

Kristian: He was just my favourite uncle back then. Forgive me! Is there something going on? I don't understand.

Anders: Don't you worry. That's why we brought you here. I want to leave and I want to tell you why. I need to be alone in my last two years. I can't postpone this anymore. It's something I want to do for myself.

Kristian: I don't get it. Did something happen between you two? Mother?

Anders: We're doing great. Just like always. I know. Sounds terrible. It may seem like I'm a coward, but as the FINALE gets nearer, I'm obsessively thinking about leaving. To be alone. To turn the silence up. Away from these walls.

Kristian: Dead End! Sweden has an extradition agreement with every country, for sure. You won't be able to run.

Anders (*laughs*): Kristian, I'm not one of them, you know it. I love my country and even now I'm playing by its rules. The eternal Sweden, the only country that still submits disco music to the Eurovision.

Carola: What about it, if I may?

Anders (*to Kristian*): I just want to be alone. What's wrong with that? I have postponed it for too long. It's something I have never actually experienced. Seriously. I want to enjoy myself, before the FINALE. That's all. I want to find out what is like to be truly me.

Carola: Without devoting yourself to anyone...

Anders: Baby! Baby!

Kristian: "*The closest we can be to ourselves is near the family.*" You told me that countless times. You were always for keeping everything in the family. (*laughing*) Mother, for example.

Anders (*irritated*): I'm sorry, my dear, but after living my whole life with my family and my family alone, I disagree. The family swallows your personality, it deforms it until you no longer recognize it. I have my right to change my mind. Right?! I want to be able to be my own king. Your father had the stage for all of his his masks. He changed them like he changed his underwear. I found freedom right here (*he dances in a triangular shape around them*) First by myself, then with you. (*he repeats the move, but in reverse this time*). Look, I'm talking like a professor again.

Carola: He's been rehearsing this for more than a year now as if it was a role.

Kristian: And I guess you, mother, are the merciless director.

Anders: I made the decision. And I am definitely going to this "audition". I can't miss it. (*in a TV anchor voice*) And now, we'll finish eating this delicious fish and recall all those beautiful memories we had together. That's all.

Kristian: That's all? You're pretty sure, I see. And angry. For a year now... for a whole year, mother...

Anders: Happiness is a duty, Floki.

Kristian: Absolutely! And if you were to appear in my dreams as a ghost, I wouldn't want you to be an unhappy one.

(*break*)

Anders: I'm just curious. That's all.

Kristian: I couldn't possibly think of something else.

Anders: There isn't anything else. Believe me!

Carola: We all get it, Anders!

Kristian: Absolutely!

(break)

Kristian: I remember how Papá Olaf used to tell stories about our ancestors: "Hidden deep in the night..."

Anders *(in a narrator voice)*: "... ready to stand in front of the flames at the end of their lives..."

Kristian: Yes! You remembered. "... To burn their old face."

Anders: "And the following morning they would wash their real face with the snow from the mountains. Death would take them in a simple and decent way."

Carola *(joking)*: Cold Swedes with even colder hearts.

Kristian: They sure know how to love. *(everyone laughs)* And here we are, with our strange way of completing each other's memories. It's like we embrace our words.

Anders: Family myths, Floki! Family myths.

Kristian: That keep us together.

(break)

Carola: Darling, what's for dessert?

Kristian: What's for dessert?

Carola: Darling, it's the feast of St. Lucy... we're always having... cranberry lussebulle¹, your first love.

Kristian: Lussebulle. With cranberries! Thank you, Mother.

Carola: At least I know you a bit better.

Anders: Carola, baby, how thoughtful of you. Baby! Your mother is perfect, isn't she?

Kristian and Carola: Absolutely!

While Carola is serving the desert, the two men continue eating grapes as they did at the beginning of the scene.

¹ *Lussebulle - saffron buns, a traditional dessert served on the 13th of December, St Lucy's day (Lucia) which is celebrated in Sweden and in other Scandinavian countries.*

TRACK 2. When All Is Said And Done

Fish bones lay on their plates. Carola is still with her back towards the audience. Apparently, she's making a cream with the mixer, but the appliance is completely silent. Kristian is not in the room. Anders is zapping from channel to channel. He skips L. Olivier's Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy and pauses on a History channel:

*"The daily duties of the Viking woman included meal preparations, housekeeping, looking after the children, taking care of the farm etc. As in many other societies, the line that devised female duties from male duties was the main entrance of the house: women were responsible for the household, while outdoor activities were men's responsibility."*²

TRACK 3. Thank You For The Music

Kristian enters, holding a family photo album. The two men look through the photos. Carola comments the photos with them, but she's still with her back towards the audience.

Carola: *Olaf and me at his first opening night. Here's Olaf and me after I gave birth. Olaf and Kristian were bringing my birthday cake. Olaf was a bit drunk in this one, he was kissing me on the street. Olaf teaching me how to ski. First day of school – I was with Olaf and Kristian's colleagues. A backyard barbeque. Ah! Anders was there too! Here's Olaf signing autographs. Here's Olaf with his back towards the camera. I don't know why! On the seaside with Olaf, when Olaf left his beard grow.*

Kristian: I think some whiskey would work wonders. Thank you, mother... Ice? There's plenty outside...

Anders: Thanks, baby!

Carola: Amaretto for me! (*pours*) I'm doing everything in the present tense. Here and now. Anders is doing everything for when he'll be in the casket. He already sleeps with his hands on his chest.

Anders: I hate it when you talk about me in the third person.

Carola: Oops, another bad joke!

² http://www.historia.ro/exclusiv_web/general/articol/femeia-n-societatea-vikinga

Anders: Baby, these hands get to sleep however they want. They've been feeding us all these years. They only knew how to caress, applaud and cheer.

Carola: Forgive me, I don't know what got into me.

Kristian: It's normal, we're all going to miss it.

Anders: We're getting old.

Carola: So what? We're not the first. *(break)*

Kristian: Tell me, am I to blame for this?...

Anders: Floki, melodrama doesn't suit us. I want the three of us to have a good time and I want the *after party* for myself. That's all. I want to drink the leftovers. I want to have half-eaten lussebulles and to sleep under the table. This is what Olaf and I used to do when we were young. Don't take this away from me! And I'm begging you, don't cry my name. Anything, but that! I won't be hearing anything anyway. I want absolute silence so I could hear my mind. Because it pains me terribly. *(ironic)* My beloved brother thought internal symphonies are more powerful than the passing of the years. That the soul heals its wounds on its own. Wrong! He died young and didn't get the chance to live. He didn't even imagine it. The years passing by are shattering. *(break)* We people hide our smile so perfectly, you'd think we don't even have it. Look, here we have a living example! Still alive. *(forces a smile, using his fingers to pull the corners of his mouth)* I need to start walking now. Ceaselessly. Don't you think I'll be running. I'm just going to walk without stopping. Ever.

Carola: Baby! Enough with the Hiroshima! That's too much information for him. *(break)* Do you remember, when I was twenty years old and I asked you "Will you still love me after fifty-sixty years?" You'd bring me stolen confiture from your mother at the IKEA factory where I used to work. Except Olaf proposed first. *(shows him the middle finger)* At that ABBA concert you didn't want to come. Their last concert. Mind-blowing! What can I say? You were having exams with your greatest love – History! And me? How could I refuse my dear Olaf? So donnish! So charismatic! A star in the making. And that's that. I was on a confiture diet for a while. But, I admit, I never stopped loving the cranberries. I used to thievishly buy them. I should've been overweight by now. I am lucky instead. And whimsical. When you endlessly do things, you become the perfect machine. I am the perfect machine. Serial number one. *(short break)* Dear Anders, even now you buy me too many sweets. None of us know why. I gulp them down and I have an ambition of being thin. *(she grabs her waist with both hands and)* This thin.

Anders: Like Agnetha from ABBA!

Kristian: Really? Like Agnetha from ABBA! *(they all laugh)*

Anders: The sex is still pretty fine.

Kristian: Every time I come here...

Anders: It's getting better and better. Getting old seems to be prolific in terms of new ideas. Some of them quite amazing. You'll see for yourself...

Carola (*laughs*): Indeed. Sometimes it scares me how good it is.

Anders: And your food is delightful, Carola. Perfect.

(*Kristian comes beside them*)

Anders: And you, Kristian, are our greatest achievement.

Kristian: Let's not forget that Papá Olaf had something to do with this, too.

Another scene of L. Olivier's Hamlet. He turns the volume to the maximum. Anders drinks the last drops from the glasses, gets up and puts them in the sink. He opens the fridge and puts his head inside, to cool down. The light fades out until the TV light and the one from the fridge are the only sources left.

TRACK 4. The Name Of The Game.

A talk show about Sweden, the country of perfection, on TV. Anders is zapping from channel to channel. Kristian grabs the dishes and puts them in the dishwasher. Carola is smoking a cigarette, with her back towards the audience.

Anders (*to Kristian*): Do you hear this? These people are insane. They want to market artificial breast milk so they could send the kids to kindergartens at the age of one and six months and to increase our lifetime from ninety years to ninety years and six months. No, they are completely nuts, I'm telling you. Financial discounts, that's what we are. They get to choose how long our life is. You know, death doesn't scare me, but it humiliates me. During this "grand" FINALE, she always finishes first. So what if this is a celebration?! So what if it's televised? This farce will end at some point. Yes! For sure! The time when everything will be unmasked is close. (*break*) I'm paralysed with disgust. The humanity, if there is any left, suffered a terrible mutation and we're lethargically standing before her. She's disguised as this barbarian raffle of the FINALE: "*The great Swedish solution.*" The cruelty of this torture resides in postmodernism. We used to have the assassination: bang-bang and there you are! History teacher for forty years! Good business! For what? Bang-bang and there you are! I can't choose my "Grand Finale" even if I wanted to and even if I have an argument for every bad ending of the past generations. The history kept rewriting itself until it got to be a boring parody with a garish mise-en-scène. We're trapped here, in an excessively theatrical heaven. Bang-bang and that's that! Our extreme civilization is the twin of barbarism. (*raising his voice*) Life

itself has become a torture, a mockery, a play I don't know how to act. I never had the talent, though I desired it too much. *(walks towards the window)* Floki, dear, I feel... like a man who blew his load and doesn't even know whether he touched her or not. I'm a child who's crying desperately, who's kicking and screaming because he can't express what he wants or what hurts or I don't know what else. Whatever... I'm a ravaged being. A nobody. *(break)* But we cling to others and we survive. Isn't that right? Like frogs when they have sex.

The choir: AMPLEXUS! *(His last line becomes a long psychedelic reverb)*

Kristian: Erika hates fish, I'm no longer used to...

Kristian throws up in the sink, next to his mother. They both stand with their back towards the audience, next to each other, in complete silence. She puts her hand on his back and gently comforts him. She hands him her cigarette. Anders rushes past them and exits the room.

TRACK 5. Take A Chance On Me

ABBA's "Take A Chance On Me" can be heard over the TV. Four holograms of the singers' dance on the screen. Kristian embraces his mother. During his staccato monologue, he moves away from her, reaching the forefront. Meanwhile, repetitively, he sucks a slice of lemon to keep his nausea under control. Anders is not in the room.

Kristian: My grandmother... yes, yes, yes... Uncle, grandma never left the house. Grandma never left the house. I only remember her lying in bed, covered in tens of blue and yellow sheets. *(break)* Grandma never left the house. *But she had to... for the FINALE. She let herself be caressed by the sun and the wind like they were lifetime enemies. But she went out in full glory, covered in tens of sheets. She looked like a pile of Swedish flags. That morning she washed her face like our ancestors did – in front of the fire, in the courtyard. The neighbours were watching and you, mother, couldn't bear the embarrassment and locked yourself inside. You locked yourself inside. You didn't quite love your mother-in-law. (break)* Grandma said that grandpa had a very long beard in one of his shows and that he stepped on it and broke his neck. Ccccrh! Grandma lied beautifully to his nephew. Grandma never left the house. *(break)* Uncle? Uncle! No, I shouldn't have married a woman from Norway. Erika won't attend the FINALE. Sweet grandma... she used to read to me all the time. She would read to me so she'd remember. In those washed up sheets she'd hide her loneliness. I only know my grandpa from her stories. I fought hard with her when it was bedtime. She would always loose. When she'd skip chunks of text, I'd violently push her out of bed. Once she fell and hit her head pretty bad. Since then she started to forget even more. I knew every one of stories by heart, she couldn't

possibly fool me. “Floki, everybody has their own flock of birds” – she’d say. *(laughs)* She’d comfort me and kiss my forehead. Then she’d wipe away her kiss with her hand. “Floki, never marry a Norwegian woman.” *No, I shouldn’t have married a woman from Norway. Erika won’t attend the FINALE.* I wonder if those stories were true or if she made them up for me. God, I’m the worst storyteller. Absolutely! *Uncle! Grandma never left her house. Grandpa was from Norway. The last one of his family who died in his own bed. Mother, why won’t you help me? Why won’t you help me to remember better? Why won’t you speak?*

Carola: Because I’m listening.

Kristian: That’s not enough for me. We have to do something. Fuck Sweden!

Carola: Fuck Sweden!

The chorus: Fuck Sweden!

Anders: Fuck Sweden!

Anders enters with his stuff packed. He is shaved and wears his suit.

ACT II

TRACK 6. S.O.S.

Carola is dancing with a glass of Amaretto in her hand. She has her over-ears headphones on. We can’t see her face. Smoke and cake smell come out of the open oven. Anders is sitting on a chair that is near the window, and Kristian sits on his lap. They are both drunk. We can hear laughter from the outside (from the streets) – proof that life exists outside these walls. Quotes about tipsiness.

Kristian: I’ve trained myself all these years to love you, but this is even more tiring than actually playing the game. It’s bloody hard. I simply can’t put on my superhero costume today. Maybe it’s not even necessary. You’re already healed and ready to pass the disease to someone else.

Anders *(laughs and hugs him):* From now on you’re my favourite poet. The king’s poet.

Kristian: Another skill I missed.

Anders: You know that art is inherited.

Kristian: I'm sure it's hidden somewhere in you too.

Anders: I doubt.

Kristian: You can't deny.

Anders: I doubt that, Floki, dear. Me? An actor? Never have I ever! I never liked the idea of my drunken head falling into a box of fixing powder. I know, I have no poetry in me. I'm terrible. Olaf, my beloved brother whom I miss so much, cherished being an artist, but he could barely survive. Liquor would stuff his dressing room and thousands of makeup products would hide his misery. I chose to look in the mirror and see my true self with every scar left by this life. I never cheated. Not one second. Never have I ever.

Kristian (*exaggerated*): Some would call that power. *You* told me about the horrors of this world... *You* called me and broke the news that father died.

Anders: Forgive me. It's terrible having to witness an abdication.

Kristian: "One last bow", like Papá would say.

Anders: I have to go. I have to go. I only hope death is not the only way to escape.

Kristian: Yes. To die on stage, crushed by a fake wall is not cool.

Anders: It's not about Olaf... Whatever, at least he was killed by a wall, not *in front of* a wall.

Kristian (*suddenly stands up and goes to the window*): Helsingborg. I love this city because you can peek through other people's windows. Across the bay, in Helsingør, – the mad prince – would sleeplessly walk around. On the other side, the blocks of flats look like small sepulchres, where worms throw eternal parties. Disco parties. So many shining lights! So many unchained minds!

Anders: What a calamitous whoredom!

Kristian: The ones that are watching us right now, what are they witnessing?

Anders: A last embrace. Nothing more. They blink and continue living their miserable lives. We are already living in the future. Here, where everybody's healthy, where accidents almost never occur and life has a predefined length. But did we ask for it? (*break*)

Kristian: Helsingborg. I spent all my life on the first floor. The least noble. Even death is uncertain here. When you told me father died, I wanted to jump (*makes a few pirouettes and then leans against the wall*), but I feared a ludicrous ending, broken in some tree or crushed on top of a car. Or even worse – hanged by a clothes line, still alive, people mocking me. But this thought disappeared as sudden as it appeared. I hadn't and I'd never have the guts.

Anders: Suicide had been suppressed. (*they both laugh*) They said this on TV!

Kristian (*to the TV*): And... here we are! The FINALE is now televised.

(Kristian sing the first verse of the Swedish anthem)

Anders: The illusion of the numbers is to blame. One hundred. You're allowed to live exactly one hundred years. However, this number means almost nothing, knowing you have no say in this.

Kristian: By the same token, one hundred years could be too much. The time we live is not ours.

Anders: Any reproach? Anything?

Kristian: Nothing. Absolutely!

Anders: One last wish?

Kristian: Nothing. Absolutely!

Anders: Let's keep drinking!

Kristian: Let's keep drinking! *(break)*

Anders *(climbs on the table)*: I have no idea if this is going to work out. I've been frozen for too long now. The soul is burdened, but it became wicked. My thoughts got smudged. They yearn me. And I freaking love it. There's another one living inside me. A strange guy I'm starting to love.

Kristian: He wants to fill his lungs with fresh air. To rev the engine until he reaches delirium.

Anders: The guy is violent, like a tropical rain.

Kristian: It's the last iceberg that started to melt. They were talking about you on the TV. *(they both laugh)* But can't you see it? You manage to make the most of this liberating insanity. Nothing is embarrassing for you. That's why I love you. I don't even have half of your power and I'm ashamed by that.

Anders: It's embarrassing when you're ashamed by your own lies. You learn to tickle yourself. You no longer have psychological needs. You tickle yourself and that's enough. *(he tickles himself)* We're a poor family who got banished from heaven of the talented. My father and Olaf were two amazing actors. You quit acting and I didn't even try. We carry the burden of failure. And an overwhelming dose of envy...

Kristian: Absolutely!

Anders: In my youth, when I was shopping with Olaf, I would ask him to pick stuff for me. Now, all I want is to get to choose. This network of memories which some would call life crumbled around me and I am stuck under the ruins. There's so much to live for and not enough time...

Kristian: FATHER, what do you do when your soul hurts like hell?

Anders: You wait for it to go away.

Kristian: If you punched me really hard in face right now, I'd be dripping guilt, not blood.

Kristian hugs Anders. Carola stumbles while dancing and falls down. The two men stand up quickly. Carola is laughing hard on the floor.

TRACK 7: I Have A Dream

Carola: Enough! Enough! Enough! Aaaaaaa! Did you hear that, Anders? They're saying on TV that the final bullet is more beautiful than your whole life summed up. Thousands of times more serotonin than an embrace. An orgasmic death.

Anders: Which won't satisfy me. And which I don't want!

Carola: Unsatisfied all the time!

Anders: Baby!

Carola: Fuck you, Anders! Fuck you! "Baby! Baby!" Because I wasn't lucky enough to get a stage name, I am stuck with a fucking backstage name. *(to Kristian)* And you sit down! *(to Anders)* Annoying. "Baby!" Sometimes I have the impression that that's my name: Baby, Baby Macbeth. *(laughs)* Listen to me, it's a perfectly designed death, baby!

Kristian: *(in low voice)* Designed by others.

Carola: Shut your mouth, already!

Anders: An abnormal death! Floki, the fact that you just sat in my arms can't be replaced by an idealistic bullet. Don't you see anything new when you look me in the eyes? I am sure that the world sees the change. This morning, at the tube, I felt the encouragements on strangers' lips. A big muted bravo! The funny echo of my un-lived life. I'm a fascinatingly beautiful aberration. Dashing! Aren't I?

Carola: You are, for sure. You're fantasising, darling. You're paralysed by the absence of immortality. That's it. Everything is out, only death is still here. Get over it! We're in the queue as well. But dignified.

Anders: My childhood is getting clearer and the feeling is getting stronger – when Olaf and I were playing with our dicks in the sand.

Carola: Dicks aren't what they used to be either. Oops! Pardon my language, Kristian.
(the two men laugh)

Carola: Did you hear that, Anders? They've been sending dead people in space, lately.

Anders: You mean they've been throwing them away.

Carola: Perfect conservation.

Anders: Astral junk.

Carola: They fly among stars.

Anders: Languishing in nothing.

Carola: More space.

Anders: Swedish minimalism.

Carola: Every cemetery shut down.

Anders: Humanity itself has been shut down for a long time now...

Kristian: Children! Children! Stop playing! Let me use my fantasy voice! (*changing his voice*) You know, what you once thought was unbreakable has fallen. Even empires fall on kings' heads. Your best parts are now just a poor canvas of broken bones, rotten meat and boiling blood. These are the signs of life's disintegration. What you once dreamed of has become an impossible reality. Now show yourself to the world, because' danger gives great minds empowering gifts. Go, my wonderful father, fly! (*laughs*) When you're saying tragic things in another language, the pathetic becomes the sincere. Am I right?

Anders: I'll let you play!

Carola: He lets you play. (*This is what you both want*)

Anders: Did Agnetha from ABBA have crooked teeth? I forgot. (*shows his teeth*) I haven't seen someone with imperfect teeth since forever. (*Carola shows her teeth*) It's getting harder and harder to find something wrong with the world we live in. What am I talking about? Imperfection is long gone.

Carola: Still, our family is full of cracks.

Anders: An archaeological site insufficiently exploited.

Carola: It's a fountain of psychological flaws for you.

Kristian: You love to look for them, father.

Anders: Temporary pleasures.

Kristian and Carola: Absolutely!

Anders: Olaf said tragedy was born in the family. You and me are as different as chalk and cheese, even if we have the same root. He – the king of the stage, me... me – the second-hand king... a band-aid... if you pull it off, there will be only scars left. But... it's high time I created my own saga. I benefit, though, of a ninety-nine years postpone. I am unstained!

Kristian: I feel like a fucking fish taken from an immense ocean I don't know fucking anything about and brought into a fish tank I know everything about. You know what I'm saying?

Anders: Permanently change your outlook on the world. It's more than enough. Bang! Bang!

Carola and Kristian: You're dead! You're dead! You're dead! *(they laugh hysterically)*
You're my dead!

Kristian: Absolutely. The outlook alters the world. We look at it and it looks back at us. All my childhood I had the strangest feeling that we're living in a theatre setting and the walls – the walls and the table – the table and the chair – chair... everything was a big lie. A big, big lie. Settings, props and wings. But we, no matter how fake we were, were still alive and nobody – nobody could possibly act our drama better than we did.

Anders: I got old and I don't know how. But now I could go out in the street and actually see the street.

Carola: Anders, behind that door it's blizzarding. Anders, Anders...

Anders: Baby, my soul is accustomed to the blizzard. *(break)* "The guilty beings who watch a play.", Hamlet, act II, scene... I don't know what scene that is...

Kristian *(slapping his face several times)*: Courage passes some generations.

Carola screams extremely loud and throws the luggage out the window. Kristian gestures he needs to use the bathroom and rushes out.

TRACK 8: Waterloo

Carola and Anders eat cake together, with their bare hands.

Carola: "My, my, at Waterloo, Napoleon did surrender. Oh yeah, and I have met my destiny in quite a similar way." I'm tired again! You used all my feelings, baby! It's ridiculous, you know? You're an overabundance communicating itself endlessly.

Anders: You *could've killed me in my sleep anytime.*

Carola: "Simple! Bang-bang!" I know.

Anders: Every family has its monster. *(smiles)*

Carola: Anders, I get it, your eyes opened and now you can't close them anymore. My biggest problem is that I get it too well. *(Anders feeds her lussebulle)* Still, I'll miss our little nothings, you fool! You combing my hair before bed, kissing my ears, but especially you waiting for me to fall asleep first.

Anders *(proud)*: Always.

Carola: Yes. I think that's it. You've always feared being compared. (*She unzips his trousers with her index and takes a look*) You had nothing to fear. I mean it. Anders, your good night embrace is the most important ritual to me. You're a big jerk if you leave! You toad!

Anders: When you open your arms, I don't know how could I not respond. I never saw someone who opens their arms like you do. Maybe Christ on the cross. But I haven't met him.

Carola: You haven't?

Anders: No! (*they both laugh*)

Anders: We used to laugh because of different things back then...

Carola: Your tongue hasn't aged.

Anders: I have something else that hasn't age and you know it!

Carola: You're sick! And mean.

Anders: Mean like a child! (*they kiss*)

Carola: You see a bit of blood and you stick your finger in it.

Anders (*taking her hand; they both look in the audience – beyond them*): The terminal is a place that precedes the take off. Nothing arbitrary. I'm taking a bite of the farewell cake and I'm not afraid, because I went through all my favourite dishes first.

Carola: You prefer to lose others than losing yourself. Don't I matter at all?

Anders: What's this, Carola? One last nasty scene between us? Shall we throw away all...? Is that what you wish? You have to understand! Please. (*he kisses her*)

Carola: I understand too well. That's why it pains me. That's why there's all that talking. So I don't choke to death. Anders, you know well you weren't my true love. We just completed each other's loneliness. That's all. But now, what am I supposed to do with that king bed? My favourite Gemini! Should I get my old teenage habits back? (*they kiss*) No. I will stuff it with memories and you'll be there. An oxygen mask I can't live without.

The chorus (*theatrical*): My my/ I tried to hold you back, but you were stronger/ Oh yeah/ And now it seems my only chance is giving up the fight/ And how could I ever refuse/ I feel like I win when I lose/.

Carola: My realism murdered your imagination. I get it. I do get it. But no matter how bad the performance will be, someone will be kind enough to applaud. A standing ovation.

(*break*)

Anders: Say something!... My beloved Libra!... Baby!

Carola: It's awful.

Anders: What?

Carola: You.

Anders: In the last few days I befriended the mirror. I danced in front of it, every night, while you were showering on ABBA's music.

Carola: I love ABBA.

Anders: Me too. The mirror started to laugh with me. Not at me. How could you live with the day of your death on your mind? How? *(break)*

Carola: You're too full with death. Olaf's memory suppressed you without me knowing. It fed on you like a big killing frog. It sucked you dry. That's why our embrace has always been a failed one.

Anders: Encore! Encore! Carola, we don't have to act in front of each other. Not even that lame psychological realism. Baby, I got dried on the vine like rummy grapes. *When death will come, I will think of something else and I would let her stealthy embrace me.* That's all. I am a **counterfeit** hero. Sedated. *A sham. Refurbished. Outspread.* I refuse to beg for other's pity. I won't come back for these last standing ovations. *(They embrace and they remain in this position until the end of the scene)*

Carola: It's easy to be the first man of a woman's life, but it's so hard to be the last. I won't be cooking anything starting tomorrow. The kitchen tap won't be working anymore and frogs would escalate the pipes, would invade our walls, embracing in mating dances. AMPLEXUS!

Anders: I'm sorry, dear Carola, but I'm not dead yet!

On TV there's a Hamlet-Ophelia scene, which they act identically, in parallel. They kiss like two teenagers that don't know where to put their hands.

TRACK 9. The Winner Takes It All

Kristian returns with a notebook. He stands in the doorway. He starts reading. After the title, he pauses for a bit, then continues in a child's voice.

Kristian:

The Potty Crown

I was a terrible kid.

The parent of my parents I was.

I never stopped for a second
to ask, to take or to demand.

Above the salt,
from where I banished the rest,
I started my first
despotic career.

My dear parents,

The state of grace we're in is almost at an end. A new life awaits in the middle of the dead end.
It sticks like a stubborn splinter that won't be pulled out, as hard as you may try to remove it.

Both parents applaud. We can hear the standing ovations of Hamlet on TV. It starts raining outside. An armistice is sealed. They look out of the window.

TRACK 10: Lay All Your Love On Me

Kristian is on the phone with his wife, Erika, looking out the window. Meanwhile, his parents are having sex, leaning on the kitchen furniture, their backs towards the audience. ABBA's "Lay All Your Love On Me" plays through the speakers. The water from the tap flows without any restraint. A Hamlet-Ophelia scene is on TV. Anders puts his keys on the table. He repeats the triangle he did earlier, in the air. He exits. The mother and the son sit at the table. She lets her hair down. They won't look at each other. The Swedish anthem is on TV – Du gamla, du fria. After a while, the doorbell rings. They don't react, even though they hear it. Carola gets up and starts vacuuming, covering the sound of the doorbell.

ACT III

TRACK 11. People Need Love

The walls of the house fall down. Outside it's blizzarding. We can see the depths of the stage and everything around it. The lighting changes to something neutral and cold. Carola

takes off her kitchen gloves, washes her hands and covers her face while turning around. She's joking with Kristian. Then she turns her back at the audience while sitting down.

Carola: That's it. It's over. I'm no longer the perfect statuette. I fell off the display and I shattered in millions of useless pieces. Anders was the only author of this decay. Anders. Even if we slept in the same bed, even if we breathed together, we couldn't possibly dream the same. But I didn't figure it out in time. Stupid! Stupid! Is it awful that I don't want to be alone? *(break)* I'm ridiculous. I know. A twist of events is what I could use right now. Come on with that twist! Come on! *(break)* Anders had guts. I lean towards him to embrace him but he slips through my fingers, like a ghoul at dawn. He lives at last. *(break)* Olaf! Olaf! I need you to embrace my body. Not this one, my younger body. Olaf, you'd be here. I know it. Ghosts are always curious to see the ruins of the fair. A world on the verge of extinction, that does nothing but feel sorry for itself. *(she wipes her tears)* What a shame. I'm crying like an idiot, today... the feast of St. Lucy. When I was young, I had the sensibility of a rugby player. Nothing would... Don't you ever feel sorry. For a long time I've known what I'm *not*, and I sailed by. I will carry my part beyond the standing ovations. I'm pathetic and I'm not ashamed of it. I cry when I have to. I laugh when I have to. I, unlike Anders, won't change anything. It wouldn't even make sense anymore. I did it too many times. I've always thought like a supporting character. I was, somehow, a mother before I was a woman. *(laughs)* You cried so much when you were inside. God, how you cried! You were almost screaming. Like a despot. I hope you're happy now. And I guess Anders became valuable. Like this... exposed to the public. That's exactly what he wanted. But you know better, he was a jealous husband, who wanted his wife to have the same dreams as him. But we couldn't possibly dream the same. And now, I'll be damned, the entire house is ready to call for him to return. It's too late. Enough! Enough! I'm not waiting for anybody, anymore. I'm not waiting for anything, anymore. *(break)* We waste our lives under the same roof, but we remain some shitty enigmas for the ones around us. I am staying here... I, I... It would've been nice to be put me in a better light by our story. I accept my pain and I promise to carry it until the end. I promise! And believe me, nothing is more powerful than the promise of a mother. Also, I have the holiness of a pack animal. Always with my back towards everything. Always decorative. Stupid! Stupid!

Kristian: By the way, why would you only hug me when you thought I was asleep?

Carola: That's a story for another time.

Kristian throws his clipped nails in the trash. Carola washes Kristian's hands, finger by finger. She kisses him on the forehead. Kristian puts on his coat and exits.

TRACK 12. Dancing Queen

Carola turns around and faces the audience. She throws her kitchen bonnet on the table. Her hair looks stunning. She opens a kitchen drawer and grabs a pair of wonderful high heels. She puts them on. She stands with her head held high, looking at the audience, holding a glass of Amaretto. She's smiling. The walls come back up. ABBA's "Dancing Queen" plays through the speakers. She's standing still. Fade to black.

FINALE (But not the Grand Finale)