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The Bite

Translation: John Irons 2007©

Jonas Nilsen's mother has a TV in her cell. And a small writing pad and a desk and a book shelf with five books. She has a wardrobe with shirts and trousers; she has a calendar on the wall with photos of puppies. PUPPIES 2007 it says on it. She has a mirror and hairbrush and a radiator behind a grating.

And on a shelf above her bed she has a photo of herself and Jonas. It's six years since the photo was taken. Jonas is sitting beside her on the stairs back home in Krattbo. She is wearing red lipstick and a green singlet. He has dark tousled hair and dark eyes. He looks sceptical. Irritated. Even though he's holding an ice cream in his hand. Even though there is still a month to go before his mother is going to kill a man.

Marita Nilsen goes over to the photo and strokes Jonas' cheek.

She feels nothing under her fingertips.

Just cold glass.

Jonas Nilsen took plenty of time in the bathroom. He stood in front of the washbasin and leant forwards towards the shaving mirror. It was a mirror that also was a magnifying glass, it was two in one – in principle you could see everything. All spots, cuts, all the hard, black small hairs over his chin, the ruptured blood vessels that made his cheeks red, the snot in his nostrils if he leant his head backwards.

Jonas leant his head backwards.

When he had finished studying his nostrils, he opened the bathroom cupboard and fetched out a carton of dental floss. It wasn't enough just to brush and rinse. You didn't get rid of food debris like that – especially not the scraps that had managed to get stuck between the back teeth. If you weren't thorough, the scraps could sit there for weeks on end. And then you risked getting cavities. Jonas stretched out the floss between his thumb and index finger as the dentist had taught him. He didn't want to risk anything at all.

There was a pull on the door handle.

Jonas Nilsen ignored it. He opened his mouth and leant his head backwards again to be able to get at things properly, to see what he had in the way of dregs in there, bacteria gnawing away that would soon cause him pain.

‘Jonas?’

It was his father outside the bathroom door. Jonas knew he had already been standing there for a while, without saying anything.

But anyone locking the door to the bathroom does so because he needs to be alone.

‘Unlock this door.’

Jonas fished out a small piece of apple. If people didn’t need to be alone, there wouldn’t be any need of keys.

‘No.’

‘What are you up to?’

Jonas withdrew the dental floss from his mouth and discovered that it had turned red. He threw away the bloody floss in the bin and stood there in the middle of the floor while he listened to his father’s heavy breathing through the crack in the door.

‘Nothing.’

‘Exactly. So now you can damn well open the door! I can’t be bothered with any more of your nonsense.’

There was another pull on the door handle. Hard.

‘Oho!’ Jonas said.

His black hair fell down over his eyes. Now he couldn’t see the world. Now he couldn’t see his own pale, ugly face in the mirror. He scooped out a little hair jelly from the small red box that stood on the washbasin, and stroked his hair back. Then he raised his gaze once more – and this was the first time he noticed the ceiling in the bathroom. It was wallpapered. Psychedelic. Brown and orange. The colours made him feel giddy. If he kept standing their looking at the pattern, he would soon find it difficult to stay upright.

They came half an hour late. That didn’t matter – they had to sit in the staffroom for ten minutes and wait for the headteacher.

Jonas’ father was unable to sit still. He moved his coffee cup backwards and forwards, he slopped some lukewarm coffee onto the pinewood table and wiped it off with his thumb, he fidgeted with the leaves on the nylon flower, closed his jacket and opened it again, stretched his arms into the air, turned towards the door even though no one was coming in.

Finally, he looked at Jonas.

‘Hm?’

That was the only thing he had said since Jonas came out of the bathroom. Jonas shook his head. His father took a deep breath, held it, breathed out heavily through his nostrils, almost causing them to whistle. Pfi iiiiiiiiiii-iiiiiiip. There was something he was trying to say, but

it took time, it took hours to squeeze out a few sentences, and when he had started, it was all over. Jonas' father never managed to come to what was important. Not now either. Fortunately.

'There you are.'

The headteacher was taller than both of them; she was taller than most people, which was why she had a constant bend in her neck and the back of her knees – as if she was curtsying and bowing at one and the same time. She took Jonas by the hand, but there was something awkward about it. Her hand was cold and almost slippery. She too was nervous.

'So nice to have you back, Jonas,' the headteacher said.

She nodded while speaking. Jonas' father also began to nod. That's what Jonas' father was like: sullen at home and sheepish outside it.

'Yes. Yes...thank you.'

Jonas could see he was relieved. Tense, but relieved even so. This was obvious from the small, vibrating fold his father had at the corner of his mouth. An attempt at a smile. A beginning.

'Well, that's fine, then,' the headteacher said.

His father licked his upper lip. He'd shaved off his moustache, his spittle lay there glistening while it dried. It looked like sweat. It looked as if he had been running. Jonas saw him draw in breath. Get ready. Then out it came.

'I'm... I'm... I'm – not so damn sure about that.'

The fold at the corner of his mouth vibrated away. Then it slipped. Jonas Nilsen's father did not get any further – it must all have become too much for him. He didn't manage to smile at the headteacher. Instead he raised his hand to ruffle Jonas' hair. He never ruffled Jonas' hair when there were just the two of them. It was probably just so as to avoid the social services. Avoid being branded a bad father.

But Jonas drew away, leaving the hand hanging in empty air; the headteacher followed it with her eyes and went on nodding. Nod, nod, nod. All the time she kept on staring at father's hand, which didn't get hold of any hair and fell loosely down towards his thigh once more: awkward.

'Oh yes, I think it is,' the headteacher said, and now she looked at Jonas. Jonas noticed that her eyes weren't simply blue but light blue, almost turquoise, and everything about this woman was well-meaning, but nothing was good enough. Nothing worked.

She wanted him to say something.

Jonas was good at talking. At getting people to relax. Laugh. He was good at making faces, imitating, getting down on all fours and barking like a dog. Crowing like a cockerel. Jonas Nilsen was good at finding something that probably fitted the situation.

His father wanted him to say something, too. Preferably something funny. That would fit the situation now. Something to lighten the atmosphere. It was so heavy. That applied basically to most things.

When Jonas didn't say anything, his father jacked up his jogging trousers with his thumbs and pushed out his hips while he sniffed, cleared his throat. It was the headteacher who suddenly opened her mouth.

'Do you talk much about her?'

Jonas' father started to pull at the hairs in his nose with his thumb and index finger. Jonas looked at the headteacher's red blouse. Then he whined. A long, slightly shrill whine – like a dog. The headteacher gave in. Took the hint. Suggested they go and say hello to the class.

'What do you think?'

His father breathed out, he had his hand round the car key in the pocket of his jogging trousers – he would soon be able to slip away.

'Well, then... I'll be off, then. Ellen?'

He ought not to have called the headteacher Ellen. Jonas heard it. And he knew that his father had heard himself say it, for at the same moment his hand moved towards Jonas' hair. He wanted to try and ruffle it again. This time, Jonas wasn't fast enough. He felt his father rub the top of his head, press down the stiff, black hair – now his father was going to get hair jelly on his palm, to get all sticky, and that was the point of it, that was what he wanted, Jonas thought. His father wanted to remove a little of Jonas' hair jelly, but Jonas didn't want to have any jelly removed.

'No,' Jonas said.

'Hm?'

The headteacher was on her way to the door, but now she stopped up.

'What did you say?'

His father closed his eyes. Jonas thought that behind his eyelids he would see hundreds of millions of shooting stars against a red sky.

'Stay with me.'

'In there?'

Jonas nodded.

Now the headteacher squatted down. Now she was lower than Jonas. Now she no longer had turquoise eyes. Now her gaze was dark and concerned, and Jonas knew what she was thinking: This isn't going to be all that easy even so. It's not at all certain that it will turn out all right. Now the Doubt came. Let the Accused Have the Benefit of the Doubt.

'I think...' the headteacher began. *'Do you know what I think, Jonas?'*

The top button of the headteacher's red blouse had come undone. Jonas looked straight down into the cleft between her tits. They were

squeezed together. They looked as if they had a problem breathing, as if they would like to come up for air. Especially the right one. The right tit was bigger than the left one, or rather perhaps it was the way she was squatting, perhaps her knees were pressing extra hard against her right side.

'I think it would be braver if you went back to the class alone,' she went on. 'Don't you?'

'No.'

The headteacher's tits swelled as she drew a deep breath.

If Jonas leant forwards, he could help them out. She wouldn't have time to stop him. Not if he was quick. She wouldn't manage to keep her balance.

Then he felt an arm on his shoulder. It was his father, who pulled him away.

'OK. You won. Damn you, Jonas.'

His breath came towards Jonas like a stiff wind. Coffee.

Six years earlier. Jonas is eight years old. There is a teddy bear in the playroom. TV. His mother isn't wearing striped pyjamas. That's good at any rate. He's been afraid she was going to look like one of the members of the B-Gang. But she looks normal. She's wearing normal clothes. Blue shirt and white jeans. Not even hand-cuffs. Jonas is a member of the Mickey Mouse Club. That means he's on the side of the Good Guys. That means he's always on the look-out for villains and robbers and murderers.

'Jonas.'

Jonas would prefer not to look into her eyes. He lifts up the teddy. Holds it against his face. It smells sour.

'Jonas.'

She tries to take the teddy away from him. He holds on, but she is stronger, so she wins. His mother places the teddy on her lap. Like that. So. Now he's got nothing he can hide behind. She tries to bend down so he has to look at her, but he closes his eyes. Then he wins.

'Aren't you going to say anything, Jonas?'

'No.'

'Can't you tell me what you've been doing at school?'

'No.'

'It's really nice having you come and visit me, Jonas.'

Suddenly he wonders if he would have been allowed to be in the Mickey Mouse Club if Mickey Mouse had known what his mother has done. He feels a pain growing in his stomach. And legs. And then it all bursts out. Then the monster's roar comes...

'BLOODYFUCKINGCUNTWHORE!'

It's not much. It's enough. His father holds him by the arms. Carries him out. You're not allowed to swear in the prison. The staff don't like it. The inmates don't like it. They're trying, in spite of everything, to start a new life. Jonas bangs his head against the dashboard in the pick-up many times and thinks that this is fine.

Jonas had lain down on the floor when one of the girls in the parallel class went past. She was wearing a skirt. He could see her panties. Brown. So he wrote: Birte Jensen has brown panties above the washbasin in the gym cloakroom. The thought the other boys might want to know that. Before possibly considering sleeping with Birte. It's not so sexy with brown panties. He thought he was involved in a kind of information service. His class teacher Marius told him to pull himself together.

‘This isn’t something any boy thinks is funny,’ Marius said. ‘They think you’re the pits, understand? Birte is really upset. I think you ought to apologise.’

‘I think Birte ought to make more of an effort when it comes to clothes,’ Jonas said.

Then the headteacher came to school in a skirt. The headteacher had nice ankles even though she was so tall and thin and old. Jonas Nilsen managed to be impressed. But then nothing more. Marius lifted him up by his sweater. It was a green lambswool sweater. It was ruined. Torn. It could only be thrown out. Jonas thought about suing him. He suggested that when he and his father drove home in the pick-up.

‘We can sue him. We can use mum’s lawyer.’

‘Belt up a bit, Jonas,’ his father said.

Then he didn’t say any more. This was how he always tended to be.

Now Jonas Nilsen and his father were following the headteacher towards the classroom, and today the headteacher was wearing trousers. Tight trousers and the tight, red blouse. Her backside shook as she walked.

‘Here we are.’

She opened the classroom door without knocking, and disappeared without saying anything to the class teacher.

‘Hello, Jonas. We’re doing equations with two unknowns. Marius was standing at the blackboard in a Surfer T-shirt and jeans down to the knees.

Teachers ought not to be allowed to go around in droopy drawers. It looks bad. That won’t make people respect you. People respect a suit.

Jonas ran a hand over his collar – he was wearing the striped suit and a white, stiff shirt. Jonas Nilsen was well-dressed – and pleased about that. He fiddled with his Adam’s apple a bit, felt their glances, knew that they were looking at him without him looking at them.

It was then he understood that something had happened.

Didn’t even need to turn round. Simply knew it. Felt it. Something was different. Mistake. There had been a mistake. And suddenly he knew what it was.

They had always sat in pairs at double desks. Apart from Jonas Nilsen. He had a double desk to himself. It was best that way. Surveyable. But now the one half was occupied. It had been empty. No one on the chair next to Jonas Nilsen. Plenty of room for his satchel and gym-bag. Plenty of room to have with his father when Jonas came back after two weeks’ expulsion. Your own double desk was a privilege. They had taken that away from him. Distributed the perks. Removed them. That is what you

do with laboratory rats to get them to crawl through the plastic ring. No more access to fresh water. And then we can see what happens.

'Who's she?'

'Tone,' Marius said. 'She came last week.'

Tone had long, mousy hair and a small cross at her throat. She didn't smile at him, looked down at her maths book, was busy with equations with two unknowns, she looked as if she was tremendously interested in just that.

'She can't sit there.'

'Oh yes,' Marius said. 'She most certainly can.'

'My father's to sit there.'

'I think your father could think about going home now, Jonas.'

'And where am I going to put my gym-bag?'

'Out in the corridor,' Marius said. 'Just like everybody else.'

Jonas could feel himself growing angry. His head ached. There was this pressure behind his temples. He went over to Tone. She didn't look up. She wasn't writing in her maths book. She was reading, with her hands over her ears. Now he couldn't see the cross at her throat any more.

'Shift yourself.'

'Bloody hell, Jonas.'

It was his father's voice. His father's voice a long, long way away. Behind the mist. Wrapped in cotton wool. Through an old microphone, in an old TV show from the 80s, before Jonas Nilsen had been born.

'Shift yourself.'

'That's enough, Jonas.'

His father's hands were round his shoulders. He knew that Marius was there too, that Marius had jumped over bags and gym-bags to try and stop him. Too late. Only a little kick was necessary. And then the desk tipped towards Tone and the maths book.

'ISAIDSHIFTYOURBLOODYSELF!'

Tone fell down. For a moment she lay there quite still and looked up at the ceiling. It wasn't until she got up that Jonas realised why she had sat leaning forwards, hidden behind her arms. It was her tits. They were enormous. Completely out of proportion with the rest of her body. Jonas Nilsen knew quite a bit about tits. But he had never imagined they could be as big as Tone's.

'Hallelujah,' he whispered. '*Praisedelawd.*'

He had only meant it to be a quiet little exclamation. Private rejoicing. But the whole class had heard him. Now they started to laugh. He looked round for a moment. Wendy was laughing. Ingrid was laughing. Those on the back row were laughing. They were laughing over by the sink. And

everyone was looking at him. Everyone was looking at Jonas Nilsen in his suit. He looked back at everyone. And then he didn't have any choice. He slowly sank to his knees and raised his voice.

'Praisedelawd.'

'Happy now?' Wendy asked.

Wendy and Ingrid sat at the double desk behind Jonas. Behind Jonas and Tone. It was Wendy who was the talker. She had dark, smooth hair. Ingrid had mousy-blond curls. She wasn't as attractive as Wendy, and she knew that, which is why she on the whole kept her trap shut. Now she was rocking her chair backwards and forwards and shaking.

Jonas nodded.

He sensed Marius behind him, understood that he was trying to say something, to quieten down the class, regain control, 'now let's take things easy, you lot, we don't want any of this'. He heard Marius breathing, felt his hand round his shoulder, but that wouldn't work. It wasn't enough.

'Hallelujah,' Jonas said again, louder this time.

'Now that made me happy.'

Ingrid's face was bright red. Wendy let her tongue flick over her canine tooth. There was a gleam from the tiny diamond. Almost-silver. She leant forwards towards Tone.

'Jonas is the class pervert,' Wendy said.

'Praisedelawd. Hallelujah,' Jonas said yet again.

'Thankjudjeesusfuckinchriiist.'

He began to shuffle across the floor on his knees. He thought that now his suit was going to get dirty, but he went on even so. Even Marius had to keep a smile from his lips. And his father. The only person who wasn't laughing was Tone. But she wasn't peeved either. She looked straight at him. As if she could look right through him. As if he was made of glass. It was impossible to know what she was thinking.

Then she opened her mouth. Her voice was thin and sharp. It was more of a breath than a sound. Even though she had cleared her throat before continuing.

'You don't have to swear,' she said.

Then she righted the desk, the chair, her maths book, and sat down again.

Jonas is eight years old and his father is trying to throw out the newspapers. But Jonas fishes them up from the litter bin. Cuts out the articles, the headlines, hides them under his mattress. From time to time he takes them out and reads them in the light of a small, yellow torch.

It's not allowed.

It feels dangerous.

'It's important now for us to take one day at a time,' says Karin from the social services. 'Keep things in focus. Try and get some normality into this.'

She is sitting on the small sofa in front of the dining-room table, talking as if Jonas isn't there. But Jonas is there. Behind the sofa. He's not stupid. Jonas Nilsen is a member of the Mickey Mouse Club. He's in need of information. All the details. That's only natural. That's how detectives work. Otherwise they never get to the bottom of things.

Krattbo man killed by female drunk-driver, it says. Bold lettering. He reads it over and over again. Follows the words with his finger. Locks the door and takes out the cutting when he feels like it. Bangs his head against the bedpost. Shouts out 'BLOODYFUCKINGCUNTHELL' and waits for his father's footsteps on the stairs. But no one comes.

Marius was standing at the parking lot unlocking his motorbike when Jonas came out into the schoolyard after the last lesson. The motorbike was one of the many things Marius did wrong. Jonas thought that was why he had trouble keeping order in the classroom. Motorbike and droopy drawers. Sometimes Jonas felt sorry for Marius. He thought that someone ought to save Marius from himself.

'You ought not to ride a motorbike,' Jonas said.

Marius turned round. He didn't look surprised. Just a bit worn out.

'Hello, Jonas. You don't think I ought?'

Another mistake. Well, really. As if he was still young. Which he wasn't. He was grown up. What's wrong with 'Good afternoon'? Jonas shook his head.

'No.'

'It's not dangerous if you ride carefully,' Marius said.

He gave Jonas a gentle, kind look. Jonas Nilsen had spent many years learning how to avoid kind looks.

'How are you getting on?' Marius asked.

Ha! It wasn't that easy. Jonas Nilsen was not without experience.

Everyone knows that attack is the best form of defence.

'You ought not to ride a motorbike out of consideration for the pupils,' Jonas said. 'Would you like a piece of good advice?'

He didn't wait for an answer. If he was going to help Marius, he would have to be quick. That was what it was all about. Not any other nonsense. Just how Jonas Nilsen could help Marius. Now it was important to keep things in focus.

'Remember the difference in ages.'

Marius opened his mouth and shut it again. This meant he didn't want to hear any more. That was a pity. So Jonas couldn't go into more detail.

'She'll be out again in only a month's time,' Marius said.

'I haven't got any opinion about that,' Jonas said.

Big mistake. Give him an inch and he'll take a mile. He ought not to have said anything. Bloody hell. The big cunt, Marius. 'BLOODYFUCKINGCUNTSHITHEAD.' Jonas stepped backwards.

'I think perhaps it's time we two had a talk, Jonas.'

'That doesn't quite suit me today, unfortunately.'

Jonas was hoarse. He could feel his calves were starting to tingle. That was where he normally got butterflies. Never in his stomach.

Marius let him go. As if he had felt the same. As if Jonas' butterflies that flown from his leg into the stomach of the class teacher. Empathy. Perhaps that was why Marius shook his head and put his crash helmet on.

'No, I didn't mean now. I meant Wednesday. In the lunch break. Shall we say that?'

Marius didn't wait for an answer. Just raised a hand and rode off. When he had gone, the whole of the schoolyard was empty. Jonas was standing there alone again. He stood there at precisely the same spot until his father's blue pick-up stopped outside the fence. It took ten minutes. He didn't move a finger.

Persson was paying them a visit. Persson had tattoos up his left arm. He had a gold tooth. His breath was bad and he had sweaty arm-pits. He had an Alsatian you couldn't trust. Snoopie.

'How's it going with the women?' Persson asked.

He didn't look at Jonas. He looked at something he had on his arm. A speck of dirt. Poked at it with his finger nail. That only made things worse.

Then he looked at Jonas even so.

'I said, how's it going with the women. Haven't you learnt to answer

when adults talk to you?’

Jonas didn’t reply. Stood in the kitchen doorway. Rolled up onto his toes. Down again. Looked at his father, who was searching for something in the closet.

The kitchen was long and narrow. Dirty. With long, brown, stained workbenches that were over thirty years old. It was impossible to see what was dirt and what was meant to be like that. They never ate in the kitchen, they didn’t have a table to sit at, but his father and Persson used to drink in the kitchen, standing up. Leaning up against the greasy workbenches.

Jonas looked at his father. Persson followed his gaze.

‘Haven’t you taught him any manners?’

His father came out. Grinned. Was holding a six-pack of Ringnes in his hand.

‘Belt up, Persson.’

Jonas’ father opened one of the cans. The froth bubbled up and ran down over his fingers. As he raised his arm to lick it off, Persson reached across the table for a can. Jonas had to suck in his breath when the acrid smell of sweat hit him.

‘Want one?’

Jonas shook his head and Persson turned to his father once again.

‘Can he talk?’

His father gulped down the beer. Closed his eyes. Opened them. Looked at Jonas.

‘That’s enough, Persson.’

‘Don’t be so touchy, Anders. I must be allowed to joke a bit with Jonas without you doing your nut.’

Persson bent down towards Snoopie and waved the can at her.

‘Snoopie. Come here, then! Yes, come on!’

When Persson talked to Snoopie, he used a baby voice. As if Snoopie wasn’t a fierce dog but a new-born, defenceless baby. Snoopie got up and wagged her tail. Then Persson poured half the can of beer into a bowl and put it down on the floor in front of her.

‘Don’t worry, Jonas,’ Persson said. ‘I’ll help out a bit.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Anders and I have been talking. I’ll help. Take care of you a bit.’

‘I don’t need taking care of,’ Jonas said.

‘Ha! That’s not what I’ve heard. I’ve heard we’ve got to do something about your puberty,’ said Persson. ‘Keep you on a short lead and put a muzzle on you, just like Snoopie. So you don’t do your nut. *Before your mother comes home and brings you up a bit.*’

Jonas' father chuckled. He opened another can of beer. Snoopie growled on the floor.

'In that case, you'll have to get rid of Persson before she comes,' Jonas said.

His father chuckled even more. Persson chuckled. Snoopie lapped up the beer from the small yellow bowl.

'You think so?' Persson said.

'Yes. I don't think she'll appreciate having you here. I think she'll feel you're an obscenity. Can I go now?' Jonas said.

They laughed and drank, and drank and laughed. No one said yes. And no one said no. So he left.

Jonas had had a photo of Wendy in his wallet since the school year began. Sometimes he took it out and stroked her face. He was hoping that one day she would close her eyes. But no matter how much he stroked, she always stared back at him. As if she was afraid of what she would miss if she wasn't on her guard all the time.

It wasn't allowed to take photos of girls if they didn't like you to.

The headteacher had come into the classroom and talked about it. Squatted beside the teacher's desk. Made herself as small as possible and asked them to stop circulating photos of each other without asking first.

'I don't want to have to start confiscating cell phones at this school,' the headteacher said.

But this was a paper photo. Cut out of the school catalogue.

That wasn't the same.

No one would have circulated a photo of Jonas no matter what. He was outside the circle. He was in a circle of his own.

Wendy had nice tits. The previous year they'd been a lot smaller. The year before that they hadn't been there at all. But everything comes to him who waits, etc.

The day after Jonas discovered Tone's tits, he took Wendy's photo out of his wallet. To begin with, he wondered if he should give her the photo. In a way he felt he owed her an explanation. Wendy was still fine. He liked her hair, her smell: lemon, tobacco, green Extra. He like her close-fitting clothes, the varnish on her nails that were always whole and clean and always in colour: green, shocking pink. Perhaps he ought to say that, perhaps it would make it easier it he explained how nice she was when she laughed and the diamond in her canine tooth gleamed. Jonas Nilsen wanted to make it easier for Wendy. He was still keen on her. As a friend. He didn't want her to feel sad at any rate.

But Wendy was never alone. Not in the canteen, where she sold

milkshakes and smoothies along with Ingrid. Not in the smoking corner, where she stood with her boyfriend, who had come over from upper secondary to neck a bit. Not at the fountain, where she had a water battle with two of the boys from the class above.

Jonas tried to follow after Wendy the whole day – he had the photo his hand and his hand in his pocket. Everything got warm and sweaty. The paper curled, the photo of Wendy who never closed her eyes got folded, and finally he gave up.

After the last lesson he went into the boys' lavatory, locked himself in the stall farthest in and threw her down the loo.

Marius wanted Jonas to relax. Re-lax. Because of his temperament. They talked about it in the group room that Wednesday.

'You mustn't get so angry, Marius said. 'Do you know what you need? I think you need a woman.'

Jonas did like Marius talking like that. Woman. They weren't women, they were girls – woman was vulgar, woman was porno. *My class teacher's trying to unload porno onto me.*

Jonas didn't like the group room. It was small and narrow and you couldn't open a window. The sill was full of dead flies, and Jonas always got a headache if he had to be there more than ten minutes. It would have been different if Marius had asked his advice. But it was the opposite. It was Marius who had decided to do the talking. But before he could start, he had to find something in his bag. Marius had a small O'Neill bag that he wore over one shoulder.

'Trendy and pathetic,' Jonas said. 'It's bad for your back. You know what you ought to get? A briefcase.'

'OK,' Marius said and took up a piece of paper from the bottom of the bag. Jonas thought it wasn't even certain he'd heard him. 'There's a camp,' Marius said.

'A porno camp.'

'I was thinking of this summer.'

'Full of topless women.'

'I've read a bit about it on the Internet.'

'Which is a hang-out for perverts.'

'They've got lots of activities that I think would suit you. Fishing and mountain-climbing and...'

'Wet T-shirt competition.'

'Take a look.'

Marius placed the sheet of paper on the table in front of Jonas. SUMMER CAMP FOR PUPILS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES. Simple and fine.

Let's not sweep things under the carpet. We haven't got a carpet to sweep things under anyway. Let's call a spade a spade and an idiot and idiot.

There was a photo of a young girl in a life-jacket. And a brace on her teeth. It was impossible to see if she had any tits or not. The life-jacket was in the way.

'It's not certain things will be as you would like when she comes home, Jonas. Do you understand that? It might be a good idea to have a Plan B. Think about it.'

Thinkaboutitthinkaboutitthinkaboutit. Think about this: Marius was a pervert. Marius went on the Internet in search of topless women with learning difficulties and crooked teeth.

'Thanks for the invite,' Jonas said.

He gazed out the window. The weather was fine, but the windows of the group room were so filthy that the sky looked grey.