

JACHMAN AND HANK

by

Nick March

Cast

Hank, *a soldier*

Jachman, *his superior*

Nick Mercer

JACHMAN AND HANK

The noise of a facility. Strip-lighting on a bare interior. There is one door. Two men in fatigues sit on chairs. A notepad with a pencil on a table behind them.

Jachman is banging the back legs of his chair on the floor metronomically.

HANK

How about this? *Ja, ich habe meinen Kopf geh-lost!* That's what he would have said. If he'd had the presence of mind.

Jachman stops.

JACHMAN

It's not the funniest joke in the world.

HANK

You have to take humour where you find it.

Pause.

Do you get it?

JACHMAN

It's funny because he's lost his head.

HANK

It's missing. Gone.

Pause.

He's dead.

JACHMAN

That's not really a joke. In the strictest terms.

HANK

I'm forgetting something.

Hank thinks and gives up.

Ah, I thought it was funny.

(studying his unamused companion)

Agree to disagree, Sir.

Hank salutes.

Pause.

Do you want to know how his head came off?

JACHMAN

Corporal -

HANK

Please. Hank.

JACHMAN

I don't want to -

HANK

Just ask me.

JACHMAN

(giving in)

How did the head actually come off?

HANK

That's the thing! I don't know. That's what's so funny. I don't know what got him.

JACHMAN

How could you? In a situation like that.

HANK

(musing)

Rats?

JACHMAN

Scalp and all? The body untouched.

HANK

Maybe.

Pause.

I never said that his body was pristine.

Pause.

It was smart. Very interesting. And in a way -

Pause.

Jachman looks at Hank.

Very funny.

(laughing)

I'm sorry, Jack - it just - really tickles me.

JACHMAN

Do you know what really is interesting?

HANK

What's that?

JACHMAN

We've been here for - what - a week? It feels like forever. No natural light -

HANK

Forty-eight hours.

JACHMAN

How do you know that?

HANK

Body clock.

Pause.

I have Swiss roots.

Hank laughs to himself.

JACHMAN

So you're pleased to be home?

HANK

We're a few borders away. Still -

Pause.

I'm only joking. The Swiss are a neutral people.

(gesturing to his clothes)

I've taken sides.

JACHMAN

We've been here for forty-eight hours.

HANK

Two days.

JACHMAN

And we've yet to be questioned. Answer me seriously. Why?

HANK

Paperwork. Red tape. Even goons are subject to the machine.

JACHMAN

Bureaucracy?

HANK

More than you could shake a head at - I can hear them through the walls. *Ja, es war den straw zhat broke zie camel's back.* Death by a thousand cuts.

JACHMAN

Bureaucracy.

HANK

It keeps us alive! Clap your hands.

Jachman raises his hands to the point of a clap,
finally letting them fall together.

That's the spirit.

JACHMAN

Are we going to die?

HANK

No. They have rules. Protocols. Conventions.

There is a loud knocking on the outside of the door. Jachman starts. It ceases.

They're only messing with us!

JACHMAN

I have another question for you, Hank.

HANK

Shoot.

JACHMAN

Why would they leave a notepad and a pencil?

HANK

To write our farewells?

JACHMAN

Unlikely.

HANK

To crudely weaponise?

JACHMAN

Impossible.

HANK

That's true, the pencil's blunt. Paper cuts?

JACHMAN

Answer me seriously.

HANK

To the jugular, Sir.

JACHMAN

I am going to kill you, Corporal.

HANK

How?

JACHMAN

With my bare hands.

HANK
(bristling)

Now who's lost their head?

Jachman paces.

JACHMAN
Do you have a sweetheart back home, Hank?

HANK
How do you mean?

JACHMAN
Somebody you love - who would miss you.

HANK
Amour proper? Shenanigans?

JACHMAN
Yes.

HANK
(enthusiastically)
Hanky-panky?

Pause.
No.

JACHMAN
I have a wife. A daughter. Aren't you scared?

HANK
For them?

Blackout.

JACHMAN
Ah!

HANK
(to behind the door)

Oi!

The strip-lighting comes up.

Infantile!

(to JACHMAN)

We used to do that in the school toilets. You know, when the switch was on the outside?

JACHMAN

We need to escape.

HANK

Good idea. We'll build a boat.

JACHMAN

And I need you to be serious for ten minutes.

HANK

Understood.

Jachman searches the room. Hank is strangely concentrated

JACHMAN

What are you doing?

HANK

(breaking into laughter)

I'm timing you, Sir.

JACHMAN

I am going to kill you, Corporal. If it is the last thing that I -

Blackout. Jachman rushes past Hank and slams into the door, banging his fists.

Stop! *Halt. Halt.*

Hank and Jachman are still. The knocking resumes on the door. It ceases. The strip-lighting comes up.

How long was that?

HANK

My watch has stopped.

JACHMAN

Ha!

Jachman takes the notepad, unfolds it and drapes it over Hank's head.

Is your sundial finally in the shade?

Jachman puts the pencil in Hank's mouth and sits down cross-legged on the floor.

Stay quiet. While I think.

Jachman is restive.

Tell me more about this man you saw.

HANK
(muffled by the pencil)

There isn't much to tell.

Pause.

Do you want me to make notes?

JACHMAN

Only if you have something of merit to say.

HANK
(spitting out the pencil)

Well, he was without a head.

JACHMAN
(lying down)

You've told me that.

HANK
His body was rigid, Sir. Rigor mortis. Much like you now -

Jachman sits up.

Shall I continue?

Jachman gestures an affirmative.

He was holding something, Sir. It looked like a letter. I didn't have time to go in for a closer look.

JACHMAN

Who has the time?

HANK

That's it, Sir! He was very smartly dressed. Not like you or me, Sir. A Commander? A Major? He had a revolver in his other hand.

JACHMAN

Left-handed.

HANK

A wrong'un.

JACHMAN

You didn't read the letter?

HANK

Probably nothing, Sir. A love note. Or a whim from upstairs.

Hank lets the notepad fall from his head,
laughing.

JACHMAN

I'm glad you see the funny side.

HANK

You have to take humour where you can find it. That's my motto.

(thinking)

That's it, Sir! I've got it!

JACHMAN

What?

HANK

(laughing)

There was dandruff on his shoulders! It was like talcum powder. All around his lapel.

They laugh.

JACHMAN

It was like Christmas had come early!

HANK

Well done, Sir!

Jachman stands, picks up the pencil and, suddenly humourless, walks to Hank.

JACHMAN

(toying with the point of the pencil)

I'm glad you're on our side, Hank.

A knocking outside the door.

Footsteps. The door opens.

A black boot steps into the room.

Blackout.