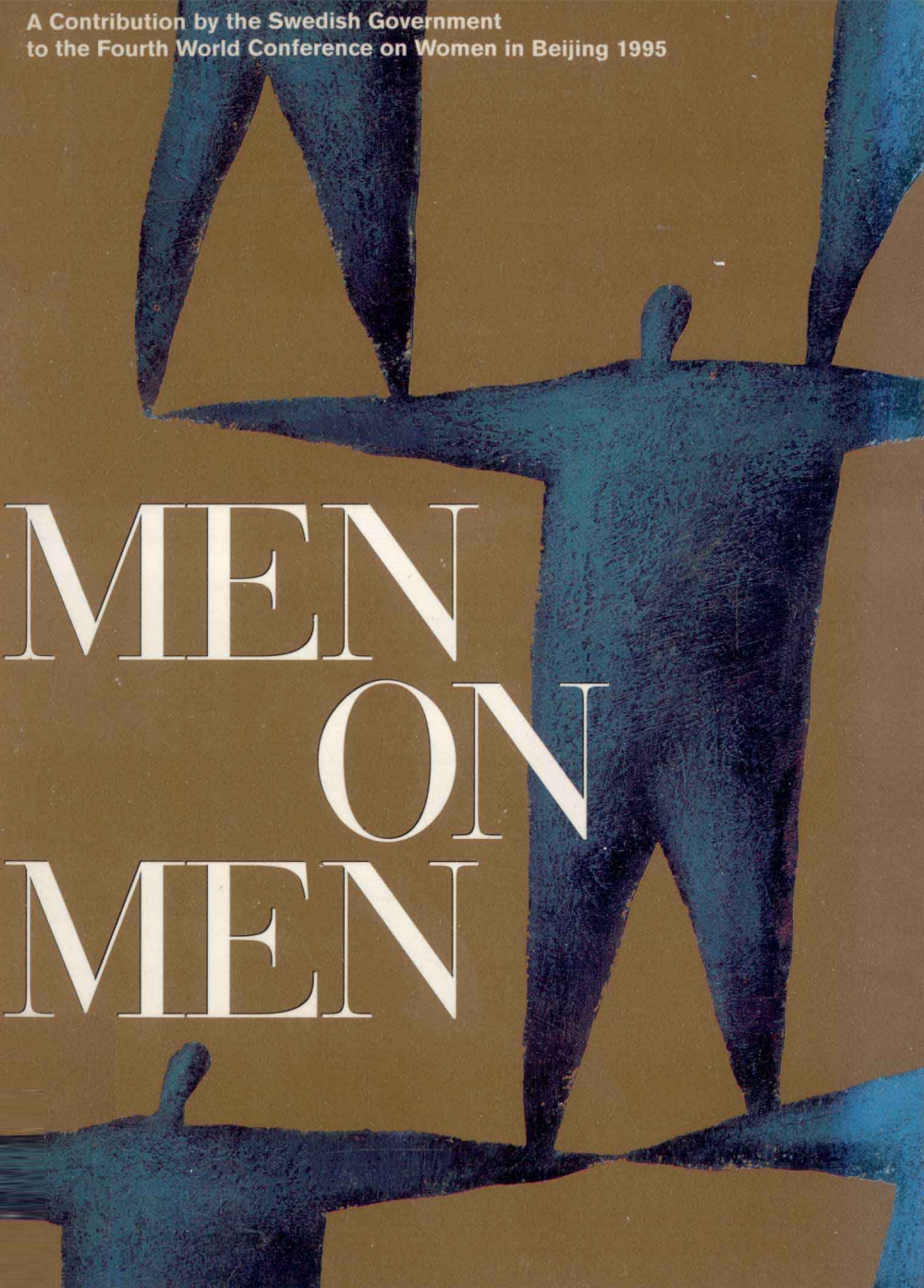


A Contribution by the Swedish Government  
to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995

The background of the cover features a stylized, abstract illustration of human figures in a dark blue color. The figures are depicted from the waist up, with their arms extended horizontally to hold hands. The figures are arranged in a line, with some appearing to be standing on a surface. The overall style is graphic and minimalist, set against a solid brownish-gold background.

# MEN ON MEN

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**Eight Swedish Men's Personal Views on Equality,  
Masculinity and Parenthood**

This anthology was published by the Equality Affairs Division of the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Sweden, at the initiative of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Equality Affairs, Ms. Mona Sahlin.

The authors alone are responsible for the opinions expressed.

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Translation by David Canter & Rebecka Charan

Illustrations by Tomas Lindell

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# Why?

**WHY IS SWEDEN DEVOTING** substantial efforts and money to an anthology on men in its preparations for the World Conference on Women?

This is not due to a lack of equality between the sexes in public administration. I chair a government entirely appointed on the basis of competence and qualifications, which means that half of its members are women. Only 59 per cent of Swedish Members of Parliament are men. Local government is also approaching balance. There is still some ground to cover in the Swedish society, notably in the private sector and the labour unions. But the need to put ability and skills first will also lead to progress in these sectors in due course.

The truth is, we can no longer afford to be patriarchal, to be sexist, and to discriminate. In order to make economic progress, we need social progress. The work, the creativity, and the decision-making capacity of women are desperately needed in order to make Swedish business and society competitive.

This doesn't answer the question "why?" some may object. Yes it does. A mere change in the traditional roles and patterns of women means stopping half way. Merely breaking down the barriers faced by women on the labour market and in public life is not enough.

The next breakthrough is a change in men.

When I started working for Prime Minister Tage Erlander in the



late fifties, the Cabinet Office was virtually an exclusively male environment. Over the past 3 1/2 decades, I have seen the political environment change.

And my personal experience is that it has become immensely richer. It has meant a more humane atmosphere. And it has led to a more relaxed attitude, in which it is increasingly accepted that even centrally politically placed persons not only have, but also benefit from combining responsibilities and pleasures in private and public life. In other words, politics is better if politicians are also active parents. And mixed workplaces are more fun.

The other side of the coin must be shared parenthood. I was very impressed when I heard Nelson Mandela urging those rallying in the South African election campaign, not just to vote for ANC, but to take turns, as husbands and wives, to fetch their children from nursery school. Many men in my generation, myself included, look with pride and a touch of envy at fathers of a younger generation.

As this anthology shows, distancing ourselves from the old patriarch macho image has a liberating effect, perhaps particularly for men. It means being able to choose a personal attitude and relationship which is not pre-determined by tradition.

I believe men have great stakes in equality between the sexes. But there is more work to be done, more examples to be set, and more ideas to be put down in written form, before men at large become the good partners for modern feminism and before women become partners in men's search beyond the old traditional role.

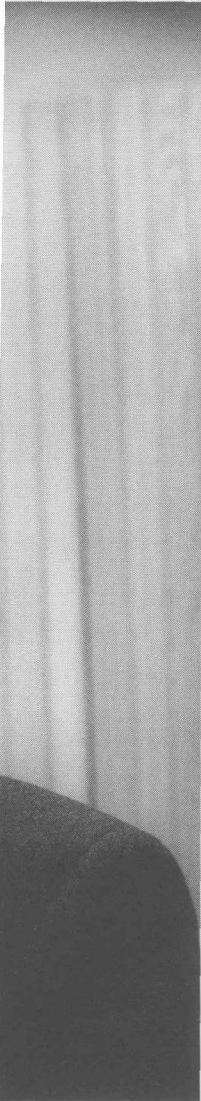
I hope this anthology will contribute to this. That's why.

**INGVAR CARLSSON**  
Prime Minister of Sweden





10 *Men on Men* NIKLAS RÅDSTRÖM



**W**hen does the knowledge that our fathers give us cease to be theirs and become ours?

*Perhaps at a time like this:*

*After a few weeks in the summer cottage, "S" was obliged to do something about his father's personal hygiene. "S" took him out into the garden and lathered him in with a flannel. Then he rinsed him with the garden hose, full of water warmed by the sun. Perhaps it is at a time like this, when "S" washed his father's weak, old-man's body on a summer afternoon with a soapy flannel – arms, trunk, crutch, thighs – that knowledge is passed from father to son.*

**NIKLAS RÅDSTRÖM**

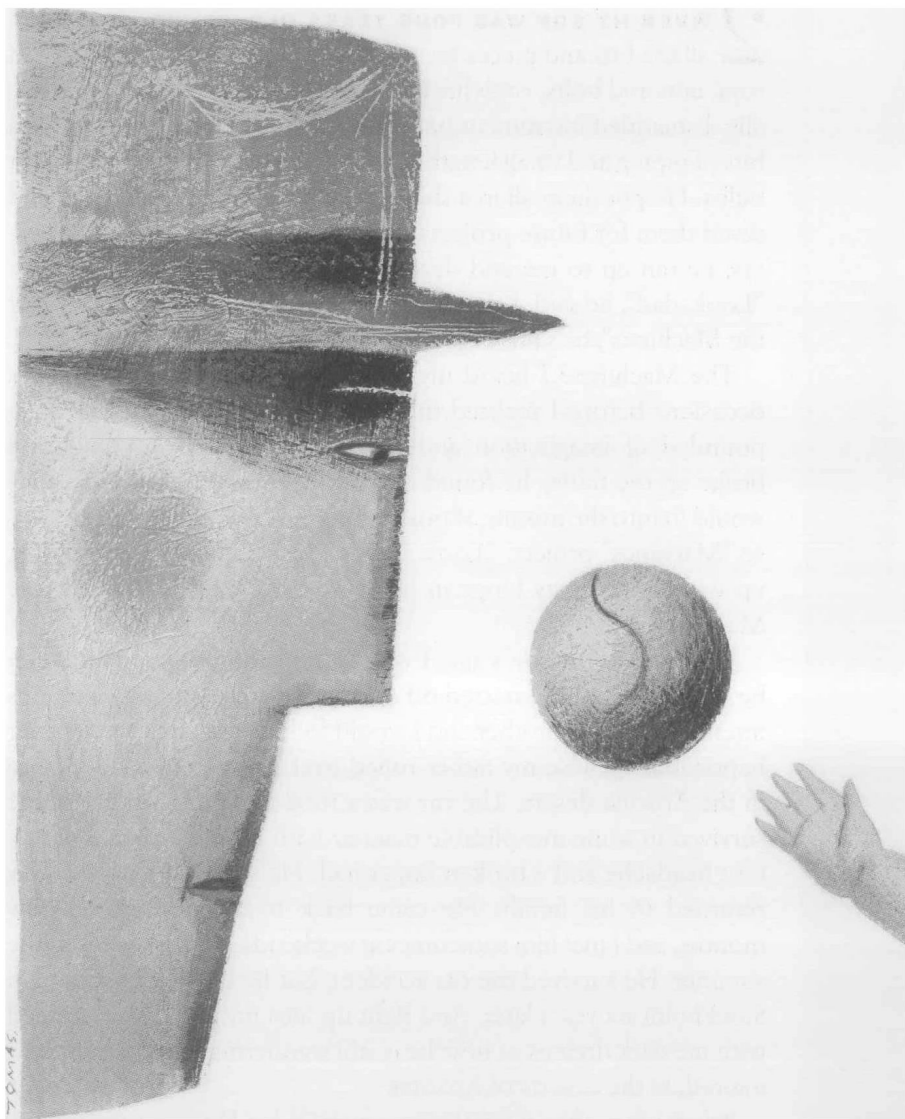
Niklas Rådström was born in 1953. Since his debut in 1975 he has published over 20 books within various literary genres: poetry, novels, short stories, travel books, essays and children's books. He has also worked as a playwright, an opera librettist and a film-writer. His novel *Medan tiden tänker på annat* won the August Prize for best novel of the year in 1992. His latest novel, *Ängel bland skuggor*, is currently being published in five different languages.

NIKLAS RÅDSTRÖM

## Getting by without being Almighty

**1** ONCE UPON A TIME, there was a boy who watched his father disappear. Perhaps his father went off to war. Maybe his father had an accident when overtaking a car on the motorway. Perhaps he wound up sitting on a park bench with half a litre of vermouth clutched to his chest, or maybe he met a new woman and started a second family, with other children and other possibilities, lost and found. Perhaps it was simply a question of Time stretching out a hand and saying "That's it!" "So soon?" the boy's father wondered, and tried to run away. "Yes, now," Time said, and that was all there was to it.

At any rate, there was a ball still lying in the back yard. The boy and his father used to stand behind the house at dusk, throwing the ball to each other. When the boy was very small, he had run after the ball, tripping over his own legs, and fallen flat on his face on the dusty yard. But he had got up and tried to throw the ball to his father, who was waiting for it. With a swing of his childish arm, the ball had flown aloft, only to fall at his father's feet. And darkness fell, and turned into night, and the silence told the boy nothing. "When is daddy coming?" the boy had asked his mother. But his mother's only response was stifled sobbing in the darkness.



**2** **WHEN MY SON WAS FOUR YEARS OLD**, he started to collect all the bits and pieces he could find. There were pieces of old toys, nuts and bolts, cogwheels, the springs of an old clock, a partially dismantled instrument panel taken from a breakers' yard, odd bits of piping and small lengths of steel wire, switches and dud light bulbs. He put them all in a shoe box in a cupboard in the hall and saved them for future projects. Every time he made a fresh discovery, he ran up to me and demonstrated it, filled with happiness. "Look, dad", he said. I nodded encouragingly. "We can use this for the Machines", he said.

The Machines? I heard my son repeat the word on countless occasions before I realized that it meant a gigantic project compounded of imagination and dreams. My little son sometimes broke up the things he found to make them the right size so they would fit into the mosaic of possibilities represented by the immense "Machines" project. "Look, daddy", he said, and came running up with half a rusty hinge in his hand. "We can use this for the Machines."

When I was my son's age, I watched my father disappear when he left his family. He started off on a long trip in America, perhaps intending that my mother and I would follow him later. But it never happened, because my father rolled over his second-hand Dodge in the Arizona desert. The car was a total write-off, but my father survived in some inexplicable manner with no more than a persistent headache and a broken finger nail. He survived, but he never returned to his family. He came back to Sweden after a few months, and I met him sometimes at weekends and for a week in the summer. He survived the car accident, but he died in a hospital in Stockholm six years later. And right up into my adult life, I carried with me dark dreams of how he is still wandering around, seriously injured, in the deserts of Arizona.

A few years after my father overturned his Dodge, I started my

own dream project. I drew a mass of imaginary travel agency posters for exotic destinations in far away countries, and stuck them up on the walls of my room. I wanted to travel, and I did not want my longings to leave my imagination, to be crushed on impact when they caught up with a cold reality. Perhaps I wanted to travel to a place in my mind where my father had cheated death and lived his life, waiting for me to come and join him.

“Look, daddy”, my son said as he ran up holding a handle from a kitchen cupboard. “We can use this for the Machines.”

The Machines? I never understood what he was getting at. At the end of the summer, the shoe box stood there, transformed from a treasure chest full of glittering dreams into a carton of junk. For several years I wondered what the “Machines” really represented, and finally I asked my son. “Do you remember when we collected a mass of things for what you called the Machines?” He nodded. “What did you really want to do with those Machines?” I asked. “Can you remember? What did you want us to do?”

My son just looked at me. “But daddy”, he said. That was when I still thought you could do everything.”

**3** **A FEW YEARS AGO** my friend C went blind because he failed to take proper care of his diabetes. He continued to accompany his son to school and tried to help his daughter with her homework, and with her ideas about life and the future. When C held his son’s hand on the way to the bus stop, the boy caught sight of the bus as it turned the corner. The boy started to run. He let go his father’s hand and my friend tried to stumble along behind him, trapped in the darkness behind his sightless eyes. His white stick was not enough to enable him to keep up with his son, as he ran. As the bus passed them, the boy stopped, turning towards his father who was in the process of colliding with a wall. “Why don’t you look out, daddy”, he said, “and try to hurry up a little.”



A couple of years later, C had an operation to his eyes. There was no hope for one eye, but he might regain at least partial vision with the other. His teenage daughter sat close to him when the doctor came to remove the protective bandage from the eye which had been operated. No one knew whether the operation had been successful. The bandage was carefully unwound from his head. The doctor murmured a few soothing words, but they were hardly more than empty phrases. C's eye was swollen and ulcerous, and the eyelash was almost stuck down over his eye. Everyone was watching C, who was sitting up in bed. And then he raised his hand to his daughter's smiling face. The last time he had been able to see her had been more than four years ago. Perhaps he said: "How grown-up you've become."

**4** **ONE OF MY FRIENDS** when I was a boy, who was called K, never found out who his father was. He grew up alone with his mother in a suburb in the southern part of Stockholm. When he was sixteen, he went to senior secondary school in the city. He was strongly-built and good company. From time to time he worked a few shifts in the docks, and he dreamed of going to sea. He did not look after himself very well, he tried different kinds of drugs and he tested out his courage in dangerous games and pranks. I remember that he often hurt himself – his foot in plaster, a broken finger, a sprained wrist. He always had some sort of sticking-plaster or bandage to display. Every day, he took the bus in from the suburbs to get to school.

One afternoon, almost at the end of the school year, he was with his mother on the bus back to the suburbs. When they had come halfway, his mother put her hand on his arm. "You always asked who your father was", she said. K nodded. She raised her hand and pointed down the bus. "That's him", she said, and nodded towards the bus driver. "It's him driving the bus."