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Praise for The Game Changer

Dave Dröge's words are enriched with an artistic flair that allows the reader to feel as though they are more than just a spectator in the story of flamboyant Henk van Wijnen-Swarttouw. A mixture of modern era and a touch of old school, The Game Changer allows the reader to easily picture the charming life within Rotterdam. The wine, decadent buildings and lively characters of the novel piece together a picture of beauty and intrigue. Best read with a pot of fresh mint tea, I would recommend this for anyone who is interested in learning about life within Rotterdam whilst indulging in a spoonful of romance, crime and art history.

Thomas Anderson

Rudyard Kipling once posited that triumph and disaster are imposters and should rightly be treated as such. Both charlatans are on constant display in this novel of one man's seismic struggle to come to grips with forces assaulting him from all sides. Set in modern Rotterdam--which itself is one of the major characters of this tale--a self-made, successful businessman has taken to somewhat outlandish behaviour to cope with his current difficulties. Dröge makes the bustling Netherlands port a focal point of his story by seamlessly inserting its unique history, architecture, and environs into the lives of its inhabitants. His characters--from Dutch natives to Middle Eastern immigrants to Russian businessmen--capture the disparate values and frequently conflicting agendas of people who make up the citizenry of modern city life. This is a comic tale for today's times--sophisticated, ironic, and often messy -- a lot like life itself.

Joe Kilgore

The Game Changer has countless different angles and subplots for readers to devour, ranging from visceral descriptions of Rotterdam to complex familial relationships and tough moral quandaries.
Readers are exposed to a broad gamut of emotions - jealousy, deception, depression, fear and exhilaration - all played out beautifully among the lanes of this Dutch city. Overall, the novel is ambitious and affecting. It is rewarding in surprising ways, and doesn't shy away from the darker corners of modern life, nor the inherent conflicts of personal revolution.

*John Stoughton*

Issues of art, obsession, and social revolution coalesce into an explosive set of encounters that change all characters in unexpected ways. The Game Changer's complexity and evolution make it a recommended novel for those who enjoy their psychology complex and their social issues realistic, with a dash of intrigue thrown in for good measure.

*D. Donovan*

The main character’s response to his offspring’s artistic decisions recalls many of Sigmund Freud’s theories. (...) The novel is such an interesting and unique example of Dutch existentialism that it's well worth the effort.

*J.W. Bankston*

Blending the professional challenges of Henk’s life, as well as his familial and inner personal struggles, creates interesting entanglements not often found in today's fiction books. And, it mimics the conflicts experienced by real people who find challenges in straddling both the corporate and relationship realms. This book is not a fast, easy read, but the reader's efforts are well rewarded.

*Deborah Lloyd*

Very well written- from page one Dröge keeps the reader engaged and enthralled. Read this one!

*Authors Reading*
The Game Changer
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What this universal disillusionment of reality means, I cannot say. I can only imagine that it would be unbearable, if we were not compensated in any dimension. In one way or another, we feel a deep satisfaction about this looseness of the fabric of reality, we have an interest in its bankruptcy. There has been talk about the destructive tendency of my book. Seen from certain fixed values this is perhaps true. But art operates in the pre-moral depths, where value is only found statu nascendi. As the spontaneous expression of life art determines the duties of ethics, not vice versa. If art only confirms what was already more or less fixed, it would be unnecessary. Its role is that of a probe that is lowered into the unnamed. The artist is the device that registers the processes in depth, where values arise. Destruction? But the fact that the content has become a work of art means our spontaneous inmost confirmed it, has voted in favor.

Bruno Schultz

This book covers the history of the Dutchman, more specifically, the ‘Rotterdammer’, living before the tilt. It describes the period of the revolution and its rise. During this uncertain time, he struggled, threatening to degenerate into populism, an understandable and logical step given the particular circumstances which he had to survive. Few thought that contemporary arts could pull the Dutchman, and more specifically the Rotterdammer, out of the doldrums. Others saw art as part of the problem; as an extension of The Bon-Ton elite. The social revolution came unexpectedly to almost everyone, but not for Henk van Wijnen-Swarttouw and his lovely daughter Julia.
Robbery And Vandalism Shocks The Art World

**Major Art Theft**

*Eddy Hofs*

*Early Saturday morning, a spectacular art robbery took place in the city center of Rotterdam.*

From an architectonically historical house opposite the museum Boymans van Beuningen, prominent works, including a Henry Matisse, a Paul Gauguin, a Kees Verburg, a Charlotte Dumas, and two Lucian Freuds, were looted along with bonds, a double bookkeeping record, and other valuable belongings.

The robbers took off through the ‘wet balls,’ as these futuristic eco-domes are called in the vernacular, using special spy software in conjunction with the NoTunnelvision software from Professor van Splunteren, taking a water taxi at full speed and rounding the Southbank to sail quickly through the port area towards Deltahotel, Vlaardingen. From thereon, they presumably took a speedboat. Thereafter, no trace was found. They left the water taxi undamaged.
Arts Funding

Annegreet marked up his minutes. After dictating the shopping list intended for his housekeeper, he waited no longer. He waved her away with a quick hand gesture, upon which she obediently closed the folder, placed the magazine on his desk, and left his office. Seeing her beaten look, he knew he could look forward to tough news. His fingers slid along the tracks. To his horror, he was forced to skip a page. With his index finger, he followed the ever-rising track. His head was bright red, and a drop of fizzy sweat slid down his forehead. He opened the back of the magazine’s name index, searched his name – H. van Wijnen-Swarttouw – and hit the blade open.

As many as 327 places plummeted!

Excited, as though struck by a dislodged gig, he slammed his clenched fist on the Quote 500, ran out of his office, jumped in his dark green Maserati, and raced off, possessed. Shockingly, the anti-blocking system stopped way over the finish line. In his chaotic rush – his head was spinning with all the things that needed doing – Henk did not see Cor Figuee waving exuberantly. The light turned green.

Cor Figuee crossed. Though understanding, as well as embarrassed, he let down his hand and turned his head away from the car, in which Henk was searching for the right information on the dashboard. How could I be so stupid; the man has no time to lose! With van Wijnen-Swarttouw at the rudder, Cor Figuee and his colleagues hoped to avert bankruptcy. With him, they
hoped to rebuild what was once a healthy and thriving company; a business where they all slogged, for more than twenty-five years already, with blood, sweat and tears. Cor Figee, an inconspicuous fiftier, rambled towards the trailer. Today he was worn out, yet he considered himself still capable enough to win a boxing match or two. As the final touches were put to ‘De Puntzak’ (as locals called the new Rotterdam Central station), he forcefully walked past the red and white ribbons marking up the tunnel, which was daubed with graffiti. In passing, he looked at the colorful pictures. Mesmerized, he stopped at a caricature of his boss, painted ironically in seventeenth-century merchant attire.

‘Jan Pieterszoon Coen is back,’ the graffiti artist stated in bloodshot letters, signed by Jules D.

‘Art funding, I presume,’ Cor Figuee whispered.

He could hardly control himself any longer. When will they get these slackers? They can’t paint and coolly call themselves artists, where I seem to have some talent in tragic realism, in craftsmanship. Then, at least, after working meticulously for months, you could rightly state that you had accomplished something; a painting with intrinsic value, he whispered to himself, annoyed. People did not listen and passed in a rush, brushing his shoulder as if he did not exist. Grimly, he dove aside, afraid to touch anyone by mistake. Yet, Cor Figee could not suppress this injustice. Fearfully distracted, he raised his voice. How did these artists get it into their crazy heads to shame our savior; this self-made man?! Don’t they see that the Netherlands is falling behind, don’t they see how bankruptcy threatens us? Do they not understand that a winter of starvation is coming; that gas burners will fill up the streets as they did in 1941?! With hand and foot movements he powered his words, with which he now confiscated half the tunnel. A mother with a four-year-old son ran around him, bowed over, the mother keeping her distance and pulling her child away, painstakingly grappling the boy’s arm. Cor
Figee turned right, maintaining a steady pace. Packed with adrenaline, he continued his route, where he'd gotten halfway through the underground and, now ashamed of his failure, had turned silent. Confidence: that word sang through his brain during the subway ride towards ‘De Harp’ (the Erasmus bridge), where he got out and hurried beside the tourist boats.

Always rely on good outcome, that’s the spirit, he inculcated like a mantra. This ferry functions perfectly! Finally, we can avoid the Maastunnel. Did Henk van Wijnen-Swarttouw arrange this? It sure looks like it!

Punctual as ever, Cor Figee left the dock, ready to meet his Russian clients. This Russian order possibly meant the rescue of their shipyard business. Cor Figee was the right man to arrange the perfect deal. Avoiding mistakes was his purpose in life.

That, at least, would save a sip on a drink.

Eager to start working, he took a file out of his briefcase. Behind his steel, solidly constructed desk (the metal department made some extremely unfashionable, stainless office furniture), he turned the page. According to Henk van Wijnen-Swarttouw, all this would be a formality. The Russian deal was cut and dried. Cor Figee was a lucky guy: he could finish it off smoothly and easily, but because of his fatigue of the previous night, Henk could not remember anything.

Another urgent question haunted him – how or what started all this? – as Henk looked at the refineries across the Maas river and knew that their distant lighting would only shut itself off well after sunrise. He let it go as much as possible and stumbled along the quay with its cast-iron poles, oval and heavy and strong enough to hold the thickest rope. The logos of Shell, ABN Amro and Ballast Nedam were sported on the prows. He had sailed away for a weekend or two with three of these historic ships, but now he could not set foot on board any of them! They would not let him; not anymore. He walked on, along the
World Museum, with its typical balconies and ornate facade, over the higgledy-piggledy lying cobblestones under the chestnut trees, which confronted him uncomfortably with his disillusionment – the hangover that, for an hour or two, had given him a hellish pain behind his tired, worried eyes. It had all gone way too far. How long could he continue this fight against windmills, without any help? As always, he drove a block or two further to avoid a confrontation – that is, in the hypothetical event that Julia would cross his path – past Inntel at Schiedammerdijk and parallel to the Harbor and Maritime museum, where he finally turned left into the notoriously famous Witte de Withstreet. Here, his daughter started her exhibitions. On the other side, in a dashing display in royal blue neon letters applicable on the wall of a lingerie magnate, Andy Warhol’s timeless slogan: ‘in the future everybody will be famous for fifteen minutes’ was shown to the public, just below the baroque contours of the colorful Arabian Hotel Bazar. Inadvertently, Henk turned his head to his very own art gallery window. Just in the nick of time, he turned his eyes rapidly away from this windowpane. Still, six months to go, a promise is a promise. It just had to happen Saturday night: that was part of the art project she had in mind. Henk left the street and crossed the intersection where the old town, or what was left of it after the German Bombing, seemed almost extinct, while the last café visitors – at least, the antisocial among them – clumsy marked their territory. As nearly defeated dogs, they tried it one more time, throwing their rubbish away in a fruitless attempt to retain power, while control over the situation had long slipped out of their hands. It was exactly how Henk felt nowadays: helpless and out of control.
Saturday Night

The following night, the full moon relatively brightly lit above the river, the tide now firmly in and pounding on the quay. A storm raged, and most strollers timorously decided to crawl into their save havens, their homes or cars, when I stumbled posturing, beaten by the upwards flurries. It was four o’clock in the morning when I passed the bridge, located at the beginning of the quay, at the intersection of the Westzeedijk and Parkhaven. Some fans of heavy storms and rainfall still boldly walked around the port of Rotterdam, deliberately seeking a tough confrontation with the forces of nature. I liked to see them, those fanatics, but was glad that the park gave me protection. The trees retained their deep green needles. I vaguely remembered which famous garden architect had designed this park, but since my tiredness struck me more than these heavy flurries, I could not remember his name. Meanwhile there was a buzzing - a deep, sonorous hum hung above the park. It was as if every moment a gust could erupt into a violent, devastating force. At Park Hill, however, I decided to turn onto the quay to defy the winter storm at its peak; to hear the water toss, gouge and shake the chained ships. During the disaster of ‘53 it had come down much more fiercely, I guessed, reaching the top and peering over the stone edge where the raging mass pounded her wild waves down on iron ships fixed with thick-as-a-brick ropes and braided metal cables. To withstand the storm, I forcefully grabbed an elegant lamppost. The lights were something ominous at this always-being-at-work port of Rotterdam; a port of world magnitude now kept as quiet as possible, holding on and hoping this heavy storm would blow over soon. Forced by the flurries, I eventually
strolled via detour towards my car, past the stately mansions on the Parklaan heading to the ferry port, and from that point on to the Schiedammerdijk across the Harbor. Through the usual route, I drove home.

Was I avoiding her? Anyway, it happened totally unexpectedly. In a brief moment of carelessness, I turned my head to the windowpane and saw a giant text display hanging above the entrance in jaunty but still fancy handwriting:

**The Saturday Nights Of Julia**

In front of the window of one of the most prestigious art galleries in the Witte de Withstreet, mine, my girl hung, voluptuously flaunted into the night!

I braked and turned inadvertently with a beeping parking alarm, got out, and stared, bewildered and distraught, from an angle of fifty degrees at the painting, involuntarily looking - a reflex - a fraction of a second between her wide-open legs.

Immediately I checked to see if anybody was joining me. Just when I wanted to breathe a sigh of relief – I was hardly managing, because of the strong wind – something shot away. A cheeky seagull flew by, wildly swinging, pushed up by the whirlwinds above my head, the remains of a Surinamese sandwich eagerly wedged between his beak, and swooped down in front of the balcony of the third floor, to return to the Maas river. He still had to cross the road against this heavy storm. The cans and empty bags decorated with green leaf for marijuana rolled further, boosting and swirling, to where I'd once proudly opened the gallery in which my lovely daughter candidly, with a naked picture of the grandson of Sigmund Freud and with her legs
spread wide, provided the city with some groundbreaking painting, alright! I turned my head to the left and right to make sure no one saw me, and caught myself tilting my head a bit.

I did this just as intently as if I walked through one of my workshops, inspecting a last drawing and checking to see if everything looked as it was supposed to be. And so I utilized this opportunity to enjoy it quietly, as any fan would. A pathetic sadness overwhelmed me with nostalgia. The grandson of that reviled psychiatrist was a gifted painter with a unique talent for immortalizing all that was truthful. Why had she toiled with an imitation painter who worked exactly like him? Julia did not even like Lucian Freud! Did she want to confront me, expose my poor taste, and show me she was right? Or did she want me to despise her, thereby forcing me to give up my desire and debunking my idea of keeping her with me forever?

Was it a strange kind of mercy or compassion that sprang from a sinister, distasteful idea of herself in a dubious and mostly unflatteringly bold lead? Did she hurt me in vain, hoping I'd give up my impossible wishes? Our agreement was crystal clear. I could not live without honors: after finishing school, she would be allowed to use our art gallery during her sabbatical - still six long months ahead! The gate creaked and groaned under the natural disasters of the storm, but it did not forsake its hold. When I marched myself, affected, onto the marble staircase, literally wanting to slam this night shut behind me, I heard thumping and giggles - a confrontation I had to avoid by all means! In doing so, I forced myself to frantically take the fence as an example not to capitulate, climbed the fire escape, and crept like a thief in the night into my own bedroom!

Downstairs, El Bachir could not keep his eyes open, slumped on the bench and warmed by the fire. This was unlike Julia, who relaxed, leaning against his trained chest, dreaming of a meeting
with the Rotterdam artist Kees Verburg. She kept this project provisionally for herself, flitting from one idea to another without a definite plan. Her lovely blond head, much bolder than suspected by her father, nowadays, was full of artistic expressions, creations, and suggestions for performances. At their first meeting, Julia made up in the side room, really not much more than a messy loft. He painted her body. Afterwards, she gazed admiringly at his studio, but not without getting rid of her colorful powders and putting her clothes back on. In her tight jeans, she jumped up, inching along all onset attributes. Then she halted in front of the wall which held a newspaper clipping with text written by Kees Verburg. Julia read it carefully:

'Every serious work of art is a new era; a turning point in time, foregoing, separating, and again connecting. Serious art breaks the stupid, insignificant linearity of ever-moving time and provides flexibility and pliability; sometimes with a slight nod or then again with a sharp snap. Serious art compels time to stagnate, allowing for contemplation: the flow of thought should be interrupted by benchmarks with which one can relate. Time is a river that glides and passes you - the river always flows to no man's land - calm and steady, then accelerating abruptly with wild and dangerous undercurrents. She is always impressive. Sometimes she makes us muse gently, floating, and then again she knows how to move us violently. The river is a stream of thought. Consider her from the side: see the river and see those who let themselves get dragged into the current, because most of us just want to be part of becoming one with the river. They go bluntly into the water and think they can refresh themselves by yielding. They assume that following her indicates enlightenment. We live in the hell of an enlightened age where everything is obvious as darkness clenches in its cave. Fear the critical mass of darkness; for suppression means danger. Know that among
sparkling light, darkness rules; know that the more people surrender, this swirling mass keeps getting fiercer.’

Julia stretched out, beneficent, and dropped her blond hair on the back of the couch. ‘I must do something with this,’ she whispered to her silhouette as she stared at the ceiling where the light of the fireplace played with these shadows.

The following Saturday, the water looked silver. A Siberian cold reached Rotterdam way before spring. Delfshaven resembled a nocturnal painting of Anton Pieck. The craft shops across the water, which sold their statuettes in a limited edition, got no attention from me as I walked past the old fishing boats and historic steamers, studying the facades at the waterfront where I came across a sign of a well-known brand: Pilgrim. Eagerly, I stepped over the oak threshold, escaping the icy cold. I wanted nothing more than to stop the worrisome situation around Julia, so what would work better? The café was packed. The sound of popular music warmed my inner self. When I struggled to the bar, a free stool beside a busty lady caught my attention. Thirsty for alcohol, I ordered two gins.

‘Is this for me, old man?’

Deep into the night, with this cheerful sing-along and hospitable environment, I ignored this brutality and shoved a glass in her direction while lifting mine into the smoky air, hit him at once, and called the bartender. Exhausted, I beckoned the waiter, failing the mental power to alert him about legislation on smoking.

‘Why have I never seen you before?’ she honked in my ear. ‘Well, cheers... to your health!’

‘Thank you. Likewise,’ I replied. It struck me that she regularly visited a solarium, or else had just returned from a safari trip. Her camisole, black and sleeveless with a pop-art kind of image of a blue-gray cat, fitted tight around her chubby body,
bulging her female parts. Her presence was enjoyable. Her coarse way of speaking and busty barstool fortitude… I could not quite put my finger on what made her so attractive. Her bravado was a natural form of self-confidence prompted by being straightforward, while she knew what went on in the minds of those drunken sailors she had animated for hours for all these years. She radiated a certain reality of the street life of the Rotterdam harbor; I guess this caused the attraction. *If you want something too bad, though, you lose sight of reality: you have to guard this with your life!* And so I chatted merrily and loosely, when a boxer came between us; a young man, in the prime of his life, a fighter on his last legs. His nose and right cheek were battered and his face was beaten with bruises and bumps.

‘Will that be okay again? Did you win the boxing match?’

He put his arm around her rather broad but female shoulders, full of reddish-brown freckles, and looked at me hazily. Presumably due to lack of intelligence, it shot vengeful through my brain. It was not an unpleasant feeling.

‘I lost at points only,’ he finally said, and ordered three beers.

‘Do you fight on a regular basis?’ I asked, shaken up.

They both laughed, I did not know why: he like a farmer with toothache - any movement in his face was painful - she without hesitation, drunk as a barfly. They began whispering like little children. I tossed back my drink.

‘I understand that question,’ she said. ‘Mister Right, he is. Nevertheless, it’s true! Not?! You should really see a doctor; believe me, Willem.’

‘You know I will not,’ he replied, and ordered three gins.

‘Those bastards! I will get them, those slackers!’

The waiter put the glass in front of us. ‘Sure, Willem,’ he said, nodding meretriciously with confidence: no. I actually smiled startled, and returned my mouth to scolding.
‘Asshole!’ Willem called out loudly into the crowd while Johanna and I drank the gin in one gulp.

‘What happened then, dude?’ I asked, easily mingling my posh way with Rotterdam slang from early childhood. This was no problem; especially after several gins.

‘Those slackers caught me and stole my phone! What cowards!’

‘They really are,’ said Johanna. ‘But they’re only a small group within their community.’

‘Harness it is: they should send them all back. Those bastards will not break me. Willem says whatever he wants!’

‘Did you meet them just like that?’

‘They followed me from the other pub... a bunch of cowards, they are! I will tear them down!’

‘Here’s a towel with some ice,’ said the bartender against the retired animation girl far beyond my age (that is to say, I took it that Aunt Jo was retired, by now).

‘I would consult a doctor. It looks pretty serious,’ I suggested, and meant well.

‘Do you think so - consult? I want a cure!’ he exclaimed, and grabbed his Pilgrim beer. To his disillusionment, Johanna did not answer his questionable look, upon which he stumbled into the crowd and vanished.

‘Oh well. Willem was drunk, yesterday, and then he is hardly able to master himself, you know... with those immigrants. Well, cheers, old man! To your health!’

While enjoying another drink, we continued our frank conversation, on which occasion I told her about my dilemma. I had to tell someone. To my amazement, she knew quite a lot about painting; and not just from the recent art theft at the Kunsthall or from impoverished drunk artists who grabbed her breasts a million times. No, she’d met a few wealthy art dealers and a lot of miserable artists during her animation years! Now she’d eased
off, working several evenings a week as a barmaid at the same
pub where she had used her tricks of seduction on them.

‘Times are changing, old man... really, Henkie, the respect,
the coziness and the comradeship have gone, replaced by a hard
and cynical world without that Rotterdam humor and without
borders. These girls come from Eastern Europe nowadays, and
they don’t work for pleasure. It’s a whole lot harder for those
girls!’ she suddenly stated aloud.

Before I could answer, she continued: ‘I really feel bad for
them, Henkie! Deep down inside, they are sweet, lovely girls;
people like you and me. How can they help it!? Surely they can
do nothing!’

Then she burst loose, and a torrent of words washed over
me with pathetic wistfulness. In no time, I longed for peace and
quiet. In her pub, they are lucky, she told me proudly. They can
at least speak out for themselves and animate, pay real attention,
and joke and lark in exchange for expensive drinks.

Pigeon-hearted she would use a term like ‘in the good old days’,
I quickly asked: ‘Are they all so neat and obedient? Are you kid-
ding me?’

‘Shut up, old man, it is a profession! What these girls do out-
side that door is their business! A lot is expected, right! If they,
on some porch or I don’t know where, go for a shag, I do not
have to know, old man! Freedom provides happiness. I do not pre-
tend everything was better back then, Henkie: that’s nonsense.
Aunt Jo is not retarded! But you wouldn’t believe what those
lovey girls do nowadays for some cash. Holy fuck!’

‘Well, yes... if you say so. You’re probably right.’

Behind us, they pushed, so I outstretched my arms against
the edge. ‘Take a pill, dude!’ someone shouted. ‘Go fuck your-
self!’

‘That daughter of yours? She wants something; she wants to
tell you something. Take Aunt Jo’s word for it! She knows you
are looking at her performance! She knows very well that you check out her latest artwork in the middle of the Witte de With-street, in your very own gallery, Henkie!’

‘Do you think so? Tell me something!’

‘Aunt Jo knows everything you will ever need.’

She smiled in her charming straightforward manner, clearly experienced in handling vital men at a respectable age.

‘We will order two more,’ I suggested, but the waiter countered this idea. Shaken by adversity, I picked out a pile of banknotes from my pocket to convince him, but they fluttered into the air. Willem rushed over helpfully.

‘Your business can’t be that bad!’ he called out, ducking between jeans and crawling on his knees to fetch any note he could possibly grab. Half of them slid straight into his pocket.

‘To the outside world, it looks great,’ I muttered.

‘Fuck off: that’s a lot of money!’ Aunt Jo reacted. ‘A pile! Hard cash, Henkie!’

‘Okay then, your sooo right; all of you people,’ I replied with a double tongue, then thanked Willem with a big tip and waddled out into the icy cold.

Delfshaven looked more picturesque than ever, but it was as still as an Anton Pieck painting. In a daze, I walked to my office near the ferry, where I stopped in front of one of my cars. After clicking the remote several times in vain – did this piece of technical ingenuity refuse, or did I use the wrong key? - I actually decided, with my drunk noodle, to be prudent. Concerned about her latest artistic expression, I took a short trail to the Witte de Withstreet. Julia wants to tell me something, a daughter communicating this way is wonderful! The hallmark of an exceptional band. Squealing tires rushed around the corner, their loudspeakers on full war strength. Thank god this aggressive rap music is disappearing, I thought, when a second car coming slowly from
another angle hit me by surprise. It sounded like worldly reggae mixed with soul and trance-like dance. In passing, I saw a couple of dope-smoking youths and two girls, one of them observing me like I was her father. With a piqued, suspicious glare, the reproachful gaze of a spoiled child, she inhaled her cigarette. The car was halfway when I finally set foot into our famous street.

Long before I reached it, I saw the crowd. Julia’s second window placement, and it was already this popular? A group of clubbers stood in a semicircle in front of our gallery, all lined up as though my little girl performed like an ordinary street artist! In vain, I tried to see what was to be seen. Monique's collection had never enjoyed this much interest! I did not manage to catch a glimpse, however, by cautiously shuffling along behind them, immersed in eavesdropping. Some black and white photos filled our gallery space completely, beautifully arranged at an angle of forty-five degrees from each other at different heights – the lilywhite pedestals seemed to almost float in space.

Julia was depicted in a self-portrait, the camera loosely in her hand, looking like a celebrated pornstar, but yet not fully developed, as if she was playing with her image of a sexsymbol. A parody on demands that society imposes on women to dress sexily and behave seductively? A critical art work? The way she photographed herself in compromising poses, challenging the mirror, her spindly legs in an enlarged image, her face in a strange mixture of overacting with indifference, yet aggressive exclusivity, affected me as being artificial; something contrived. Still, I could understand why it was labeled performance art: They were black-and-whites that resembled porn, but with much more meaning! Social criticism by grotesque exaggeration and caricature magnification! A fine piece of art or not, meanwhile, my little girl showed off in semi-nude poses that filled our gal-
lery window while a group of young men, a few with a girlfriend at their side, were keen to stare at her wide-open legs, her knees pulled up, half wrapped in a panty, unrecognizably black.
Trembling hands

Henk opened the tailgate of his BMW 5i station wagon and placed the parts on gravel. Assembling a wheelchair proved less straightforward than dismantling such device! Wesseling stared out of the passenger seat into emptiness. The soccer field, the whitewashed fencework - all this faded when, from nowhere, smells of bygone years loomed as his elderly nostrils filled with the reality of the past. Pretty soon he did not have to close his eyes anymore; in his mind, that crucial game against Quick Boys appeared; the championship duel. The audience stood in rows, folding along the side, shouting and bawling. After his decisive goal, a second before the final whistle, he went into ecstasy, taking his Orange Black T-shirt off, sprinting across half the field, turning his football shirt around, and hurling it as he arrived at the stand, tossing it into the audience. The champagne popped out of the bottle. They lifted and carried him to the canteen, where fans buried him and his teammates under flowers and congratulations. The entire board was neatly prepared to applaud, all raised to wear three-piece suits, gentlemanly hats balanced on their heads. People clapped and laughed frantic tears of joy. And all this in wartime! The mental shock was as immense as the wild arm movements of Wesseling exposed.

Meanwhile, Henk had fixed it; that is to say, a passer-by came to the rescue. After he hoisted Wesseling into the wheelchair, Henk pushed it up the gravel path along the muddy practice field. A lumping ball, covered with clay, disappeared, wedged under the front axle. Elenoor screamed in rage: she wanted the ball back. Otherwise she would call the police, she threatened, white-hot
with boiling anger. Her cursing continued; she could not resist. The younger boy seemed to ignore her and ran to Wesseling, deftly ducked under the white painted railing, and asked shyly if he could retrieve the ball from underneath his wheelchair.

‘What’s your name?’ Henk asked.

Elenoor swore and called out hysterically: ‘stop this thief!’ and ‘they steal our ball!’ Daan tried to reassure her; something that did not succeed from this distance. If they’d been closer, it would have had little chance, as well, however: Elenoor did not fit into a box, and professionals in psychiatry couldn’t label her.

‘Daan,’ replied the boy, and impatiently wiggled on his leather kicks. At night he dreamed of being able to play with the latest model, made of soft Taurus leather.

‘And your last name?’ Henk asked.

‘Fige, sir. Daan Fige.’

‘Hmm, Fige… Fige?’ murmured Henk. ‘Okay, grab your ball then! Come on!’

The boy did not hesitate and dived under the wheelchair to reach down with an outstretched arm as far as he could. His hand slipped, locking the ball firmer than expected. He tried to dent it as far as possible… and it worked! With bright red cheeks he immediately shot the ball with a stunning bow effect towards Elenoor, after which Daan stood in front of Wesseling with a proud shy grin, his orange T-shirt covered with mud.

Wesseling looked blurry, absent. In his mind, he had arrived at his own youth: ‘Dive! Those JerrieKrauts shoot your balls off!’

‘Will you come and look at our team?’ Henk asked, meanwhile, tapping his uncle reassuringly on his shoulders, knowing this calmed him a bit.

‘Yes, my father plays.’

‘Oh! All right then, my boy, they’re going to start,’ Henk said, and pushed the wheelchair forward. Not even on the sidelines
yet, Wesseling put both hands theatrically into the air while his scarf blew back and forth in unpredictable movements. A handful of the storm-captive audience applauded. The first field goal of Cor Figee, a perfect shot from at least thirty meters, was narrowly knuckled across the bar by the diving goalkeeper. Daan darted away like lightning, underneath the fence and into the muddy practice field. Did Elenoor want to watch the game, as well? Suddenly she called for a pink cake. The boy realized that nobody could make her forget this; nobody could stop her from asking until she had one. How hard would she scream when he proposed following the match, first? Once they arrived in the canteen, he provided her with the children's delicacy, after which Elenoor started to draw signs into the fogged window. He heard a loud cheering, an applauding crowd. Had they scored already? Daan ran outside and sprinted to a spot where he could watch, although it was largely through the fishing net. On his way, he took a bite. Hey, hello, who painted this spot? Jesus, which groundskeeper has been this busy over here! Cor Figee put the ball right on. As well as might, it actually seems infeasible, he wanted to walk five measured steps when he saw the football moving slightly. The referee whistled. Cor Figee took a few steps and bent down again. A wrong placement he could not afford; not this time! The audience screamed - goddamn fans of Quick Boys, no doubt. He tried to get an extra mile. This ball should lie perfectly still, otherwise there'd no penalty from Cor Figee! Boy, that dot was so badly chalked, this maintenance guy should be banned from the club! Who had done this; and above all, what could be done about it?! As well as he could, he placed the ball half wide, which produced an aesthetically, not too pretty picture; but what else could he undertake? Cor was not back yet when the referee whistled louder than the first time. Don't refrain; no one will benefit! The run-up was followed by a perfect shot that would make Ronald Koeman glow proudly and
yes, hard as nails, the ball popped onto the goal post. The bounce back was so forceful, the ball flew past him. A defender shot him blindly into the bleak, rain-heavy air. A dull bang into the mud, and through a squall, the football sucked in and dropped like a pendulum onto the practice field. Daan jumped, the remainder of his pink cake clamped inside his tiny hand, under the parapet, ran through the quagmire, and saw that although the ball was covered with dirt, it lay on a dry piece of land and seemed not too top-heavy; during which he, as he ran, calculated how a chipped ball, using the outer side of his soccer shoe, was still possible. In his photographic memory, saving the position of the goalkeeper, he hit the ball so perfectly that, despite the impossible corner, it neatly turned between the Quick Boys goalposts. It was quite comical to watch, especially since the goalkeeper had just taken a sip from his water bottle and bent down to grab his towel from his bag.

Elenoor just walked out of the cafeteria and shouted ‘Goal!’

The audience laughed and clapped. The boy’s face turned bright red as he stood petrified in that quagmire; everything covered in slush. The match went on, the audience turned away, and the teams continued their struggle.

He partook of a bite. He did not like those pink cakes. Why had he taken one? Did he not dare to take another candy, unwittingly avoiding a diatribe from Elenoor? After the match Daan visited the locker room. The steam from the shower vapors prevented him from seeing anything. The vapor against anti-cramped muscles and joint pain so strongly smelled that he sneezed. The smell pressed, painfully and yet enjoyably, into his young nostrils. Overwhelmed by the wanton atmosphere and entourage of grownups, he shook his head when one of the team players called him.

‘Congratulations, I understand you will play for Feyenoord,’ the man stated, and then stared expectantly but reservedly into
the steam, to the other side. Cor Figee did not respond. He was too busily dedicated to his bag, the question forgotten. The shoes he left out: they were still way too muddy, despite stalling with damp grass and scrubbing with the shoe broom. He lined the socks off by the millimeter, right next to the neatly folded pants and tracksuit underneath, logically ordered. This immense concentration yielded a fine soccer bag. Might there ever be a contest for ‘packing clothing after playing,’ he would win the competition, miles ahead.

When all was ready, he began his monologue about work and about the positive outlook they now had with this new owner. The nonsensical criticism – that Van Wijnen-Swarttouw is a smooth operator and a brutal investor – he shrugged off as disgraceful; as libel and slander. Cor Figee did not realize that he repeated the text Henk his PR manager uttered. Had he indeed realized this, however, it would not have bothered him: the truth must be told and defended tooth and nail, even in the locker room; even after a tie. What am I saying? Especially in the locker room! That has always been the case. And so he proudly told them how he and his colleague from the Council convinced the other to hand in ten percent - that is, to start with. In a spirited, grueling meeting, they accomplished this. It was their only chance to show solidarity; to demonstrate that they had faith in Henk's qualities and bravado, in his exceptional insights, and last but not least, in his unique helicopter view. He brushed off the suggestion for a beer. There was no time to lose! Nicely, according to traffic rules, he drove home, though he occasionally scolded on traffic lights which, would they agree otherwise, always turned red when he arrived! Elenoor and Daan got out and waved at him, perplexed. Moments later, Cor reached the harbor, where he took the briefcase from the trunk, right next to the soccer
bag measured pinned with skipping rope. Here there was nothing wrong, but the meeting still to overcome!

With trembling hands, Cor Figee took a sip and hoped no one at the table noticed his left eyelid jumping from the stress, the long days, and above all, the responsibility of meeting this major customer whose account could save the enterprise from going down. The Russians with bloodshot eyes commanded stronger coffee. Cor Figee nodded apologetically, stammered ‘yes, yes; of course,’ and squeezed the handle of the coffeepot till ridges carved his palm. Why had Nell not replenished them?! It irritated him beyond measure, that lack of discipline and understanding! Nell seemingly had no awareness of the importance of this vital project! What bitter disappointment! In the kitchen she shuffled along behind him as he cleaned the coffeepot in a possessed manner. There, she almost touched him! Just in the nick of time, he drew his shoulder backwards. Dogged, his teeth gritted, he decided to talk to her when everything was all over and done with. There must be a reason for her behavior. Maybe she suffered from problems with her husband and children, because it was Sunday? Work comes first: without work, a man cannot bring home the bacon!

Back in the sober-equipped meeting room – also, this place was filled with self-made tables without appealing design – he apologized politely. The Russians ignored him completely, in a lazy kind off manner. Three times, with just a few seconds pause between, he repeated his apologies. The middle Russian tipped the tablet screen while the other two just kept jabbering in their own language. Cor poured the coffee and neatly placed the cups near his guests, asking kindly if everything was alright; if they wanted more sugar or milk. Some gruffness is part of their culture, apparently. It just seems this way because we do not know their habits and customs. That’s how it goes. Proudly, he showed his gifts. At each
of the three Russians he placed a beautiful Delft blue windmill and a splendid set of clogs of refined, painted timber. Crotchety, they took knowledge of his gifts, but when Cor proposed starting, they seemed deaf.

Should he speak up louder, or tap his spoon? That would be rude! An exaggerated cough, perhaps? No way: far too striking and bold. What to do? It’s a shame we do not have Russian counterparts walking around in our office. The majority of all residents in Rotterdam are immigrants, nowadays. There are so many that natives belong to the minority. Even our new queen, actually! No, that’s not the problem: the word ‘immigrant’ can be abolished. They perform excellent work, anyways. But what we are rightly concerned about is a rude minority with the highest crime rates; a small group demanding positive discrimination subsidies despite the free university-educated imams. And even then, they still manage to derail! Meanwhile, it takes tons of public money scraped together, but this helps nothing: a woman in a skirt is a whore and without a headscarf she is a disgrace; an unbeliever is stupid and deadly wrong; and a gay person is sick. So their subculture dictates compulsory, keeping their dual citizenship and living luxuriously in the Netherlands while eagerly abusing our child support system by sending money to their ‘homeland’ for children who only exist on paper.

In short, it is not so much their own fault, Cor Fige nuanced: norms and values differ, but this is way too much for us to handle. And yet, it all could have been so beautiful if only we had Russians on our staff! Nervously shaking, he spilled coffee on the map while he tried to open the carefully constructed dossier for this vital project. ‘Damn!’ Cor Fige shouted, and, shocked by his own voice, cringed while inspecting the damage.

Skittish, he peered around, his head down between his shoulders. For the first time since their arrival, the Russians re-
acted: they mumbled something and straightened their ties. The middle Russian put his tablet in his briefcase.
The hangover hit me hard: with a left uppercut it threw me back on bed with stabbing pain between my eyes. When I pondered over the message hidden in Julia's new art form, this pain became untenable. I had to blow it. Cranky, I took two aspirins, spilled water while pouring, took a few sips in my mouth and pulled the duvet way over my head; but her black and white photographic images kept burning into my brain. So, as a distraction, I jumped out and fabricated a healthy breakfast with boiled eggs, mixed fruit, and fresh orange juice. Monique had slipped up on me earlier and Tatjana left me in the dark more often every day – yet she managed to come up with a good reason again and again, so I could not dismiss her, technically, without losing money! Forced by these circumstances, I cooked dinner all by myself, which pleased me more than expected. I placed the Chinese porcelain, filled with a salmon steak cooked in a blend of lemony ingredients, on the white oak table of Jan des Bouvrie and saw, to my dismay, Buitenhof, our sophisticated and intelligent talk show: again, they did not mention our immigration problem! As if Rotterdam does not have one of the largest ports in the world! What’s wrong with these people?! Thereafter, in the show ‘books’, I saw the same faces all over again! I thought this was possibly even more painful: there were no exceptional writers with controversial visions! Again, that gang of easygoing bourgeois bohemians; those campaign socialists who loved to shower each other with compliments on telly, as if the Netherlands consists of Amsterdam canals and ‘t Gooi only! Annoyed, I clicked on the transmission. How long will it take before this explodes in their faces? A year or two; maybe three - not more, for sure.
The current crisis is partly caused by these rigid cultural sectors. We entrepreneurs know better. Creating and questioning and challenging the status quo is simply our core activity; a matter of common sense. Renewing is in our entrepreneurial blood. *This media world must be reformed, blunt it!*

Yet, it was not my shrewd way of doing business or my inspiration for changing these socio-economic issues, but my love for art and, specifically, for our gallery in the Witte de Withstreet, which made Monique blossom. Her enthusiasm convinced me to purchase this gallery and thereby complement our love: a fatal mistake! And now, in these days when everyone eagerly waits for a warm spring sun, it struck me that she was not here to enjoy Julia's performance. Her work is provocative, but that is not the worst problem I face nowadays, I thought; and closed my eyes. Monique cut the opening ribbon, and this birthday gift, our gallery shop, proved to be a bull’s eye hit. Perhaps my last ever, on her address. Just when I pitifully wanted to take a bite, Julia rushed downstairs, chased by a young man of foreign origin! A Moroccan boy? My heart jumped, but I did not forsake and asked if she wanted to eat something, prepared it, and put it neatly next to my (by now) tepid salmon. The young Moroccan impersonated the kindest person ever, however, my thoughts went out to Julia and her artwork. What did she want to tell me? Did she want to clarify she was an independent woman, one who made her own choices? Did she want to let me know she chose her own friends and did not agree with beauty ideals of fashion models? When you approached it like this, her artwork seemed brave. Fatigue made me stare at her, confused. I could not stop it. My darling countered with a casual, elegant movement along my trembling mouth, which provided the same feeling as when Monique emptied me unexpectedly from a haze of wonder and deep inner life by an unexpected touch or a sup-
porting understanding smile with which she indicated that I could not help it. It was as if making an error was human; as if she accepted my imperfections in a way so as to take for granted the stupidity of a baby or an elderly person. But now I was staring in the same manner - as if an ignorant adolescent – at Julia, and could not help catching a glimpse of her spindly naked legs under her loose-hanging shirt! The fatigue of the last Saturday night caught me and the resistance vanished, touched by this socially inacceptable situation, yes, as a man enchanted by an attractive woman! Terrified that I would stiffen up like a mummy from ancient Egypt, I sat frozen on my spinning chair, designed by Jan des Bouvrie. Fortunately, they ran back up the stairs, ignoring my yearning glance. Julia giggled. I could put on hold the unhappy thought of what they were doing by focusing on the Buddhist show.

The following days went by painfully slowly. I kept worrying and what's more, I could think of nothing else anymore, even during work. The love of our villa was my only beacon of tranquility. When would she be tired of her artistry and finally start her medical schooling? Will she be healed after this sabbatical? Will she leave this boy behind? From her sixth birthday, my little girl had desperately wanted nothing else but to be a doctor. It could have been so beautiful! Bend with the wind and sing, Henkie! After blowing off steam in the artist scene, she might become fed up. Maybe Julia just wanted to show me she'd grown up? Or was it worse, and was the nightmare of living solely with my housekeeper after Julia derailed as a heroin addict in some psychiatric clinic for former artists actually a nightmare that might come into being? I must stop this at once! Doing business was a matter of survival. It rumbled severely in those sectors in which I operated, my holding caught in heavy rainfall, or in an all-devouring hurricane! And so I pondered and compulsively used
pills, lots of pills and alcohol; though I needed the intoxication of walking, this healthy habit I cherished. It might all stop abruptly and brutally blow up in my face.

When it finally became Saturday, the sun stayed longer above the familiar warehouses stately situated across the Maas. Moreover, in the last week we were treated with the first traces of upcoming spring. A foretaste of it had arisen: a gentle sea breeze from the southwest replaced the cold. The freeze-resistant bulbs started blooming and people became joyful. They had been looking forward to this sunshine as a child craves a favorite candy, but I myself especially looked forward to a decent artistic expression of Julia! *As a faithful believer,* I might have prayed for the creation of beautiful fine art without the intent of shocking anyone, but I only believe in action, folks. I expected something better from my daughter: I mean, she had not finished the gymnasium cum laude for nothing! From my clever girl, I had hoped for *a subtle game,* a refined way of overcoming powers. Through this game with my habits and thoughts, some kind of pleasantly painful excitement intensified.

What will I discover in our windowpane the next time?

I decided to shorten the walking route by taking a water taxi to Delfshaven, since I realized Julia had not installed her new art which she had perfected Saturday night.

And so, I deliberately waited. Taming this urge gave satisfaction: deep down inside I enjoyed this *not knowing.* Accumulated chills, refraining from mental cravings I felt during my walks, during whatever I performed until it became early Sunday.

And so it happened: I started to fantasize how her artwork had amused or shocked the curious audience, though a combination of these two characteristics was not inconceivable, either. Then I realized I could not yield to her provocations. Moreover, through these city walks I became interested in homes that I'd
hitherto ignored, unthinking and blind to my environment. In short, during this *delighted painful agony of not knowing* what I would find, I got to know another side of Rotterdam.

Weeks ago, I had asked Annegreet to collect secondhand clothing, and now I dressed up at the office as a wanderer who could barely pay his bills; a homeless one who lived on the edge.

In this fresh loft outfit, I felt free as a bird!

My three-piece suit put in the suitcase, ready for dry cleaning, I immersed myself magnanimously in this jumble sale stuff. Just when I left my corporate premises, our lovely Veerhaven was treated with an orange glow over our majestic buildings at the quay, rapidly replaced by a deep red shadow. The temperature decreased to just above freezing. My black wool sweater felt loose and my leather jacket looked tough, full of irreparable damages. Something in me was hoping to meet Johanna again. A young kind of bravado struck me with a naughty kind of fun. Age was widely interpretable today. An average well over fifty would soon determine our social climate, so why should I, Henk van Wijnen-Swarttouw, not experience an old-fashioned pub-crawl and complete these worrisome days with pleasure? Tax authorities and the prosecution haunted me like groupies!

And so, you have to do it yourself. Mercy does not exist. The need being free and alone became stronger and stronger. During the week I rejoiced over the next Saturday when I'd hit Rotterdam city incognito like this. Today, this second-hand clothing fitted like a glove! I felt as free, as I'd fantasized, and realized how Julia's excesses had some positive effects. Only to Johanna I could explain all this in detail.

The night and the pubs - are they not invented for this sole purpose? Are they not made to share strange, crooked thoughts and conflicting feelings or worries you cannot express at work or at home? When I unexpectedly meet nobody, I can still tell
my story to the bollards build on the quay wall, right in front of the World Museum, I joked, childishly modest.

A freighter passed by. *It was one of those solid, deep-set guys with a cigar in front.* The unsightly logo of my father’s firm moved prominently, slippery as an eel, alongside. I watched it move painfully slowly, till it disappeared behind the refineries.

Annoyed, I took a long swig from the camouflaged bottle I had fished out of the attic, filled with Vlaardingen ijsmoppen liqueur, my favorite booze for on the road. I could not wait for spring to make its appearance in the early morning, roaming across the Willemsbrug. How different last week had transpired, when I grabbed the poles to save myself from the toughest flurries! Now everything looked calm, but this paradoxically intensified my agony, the deadly fear of losing Julia in a crowd that engulfed everything and everyone in its swirling mass. It hit hard as a nail and would not leave me alone. *Please: a non-provocative work of art, this time!* Serving as scapegoat or as killjoy, no one can endure for long. I tried, I did my best, but there was no sign of retreat! Nowadays Julia’s timid glance seemed permanently displaced by some kind of wicked savage variant with matching presentation in her everyday outfit! The similarity with Monique became less and less. Yes, because of this walk, this mental pain and agony became pleasant, like being helped by a higher authority who forced me to walk on a pilgrimage for many hours, deep into the night, until I finally reached our gallery window at the quietest hour of the week: Sunday morning between five and six o’clock.

On the stoic, rippling water, cargo floated and conveniently dodged a water taxi with a cabin teak frame. For a moment the boat seemed submerged; an optical illusion. I thought of them as fun, but as always, I took the modern water taxi full speed over the river, causing waves higher than the bow, as he com-
pleted the Southbank to moor between the wet balls and my destination: Hotel New York. I was escorted by a trainee immediately upon entering. As agreed, she completely ignored me, coming towards our table as she moistened her young lips with bright orange lipstick. I had to bend over to give her a kiss on her cheek. She continued looking in her mirror, inspecting her makeup, pulling her smartphone out of her bag of cat hair (something I hated - it reminded me of that crazy ‘artist’ who strangled her own cat as a statement against animal cruelty) to communicate endlessly through social media. But with whom?!

She wanted nothing less than the most expensive champagne, and after ordering dinner, she only took a few tiny bites of vegetables and chunks of fish, leaving three quarters of her meal untouched. She looked at me, bored, and stared out of the window. Although I tried to enjoy the fried monkfish, the entourage and the other guests, who occasionally cast a glance at our table, curious about how this Saturday evening had been arranged, an anxious feeling came over me about my inability to please her. After an espresso she walked from the table to converse endlessly with a young man sitting at the bar! When he wanted to offer her a drink, I beckoned her for the tenth time; after which she finally, annoyed, nonetheless strolled with me to the watertaxi. While my excitement grew, my neck muscles relaxed. When the water of the Maas River gushed along the bow, I began to tremble with healthy liveliness, overwhelmed by the powerful and yet so puny feeling of sailing at this speed upon this broad, cultivated water surrounded by freighters, corrugated iron sheds, cranes, and pallets full of shiploads waiting on the dock, until the illuminated Deltahotel presented itself.

In the distance, the hotel looked like one of the many refineries along the waterfront. We wobbled onto the pontoon. Now I
grabbed her waist, but at least she tolerated this (out of laziness). It was like she did not actually want it, but did not bothered to correct yet, as if she might anytime give me a wigging! Because of all this, I felt as if I were balancing on my toes, delicately acting to oblige her wishes. In arriving at our room (invariably I hired number 33, my lucky number), I was allowed to sit on my own chair, after which she took a few photos of herself, her legs and knees drawn up, the transparent tights in her crotch so dark that there was nothing concrete to see, situated in the strange position of being a combination of a model and porn actress; a challenging pose leaving nothing to imagination! As she smeared her bright orange lipstick, leaving sloppy stains on her chin, she wantonly changed her bored glance into a defiant look.

Did she consciously over-act to please me even more?!

Suddenly she looked up.

‘Why are you staring?!’ she cried maliciously, piqued.

‘Sorry,’ I said, remorsefully.

More than an hour later we walked downstairs, straight to the bar. As we both wanted to take the water taxi, the uncomfortable question of whether we would ride together occurred. This, however, she solved ably by ordering a Night-Sin and starting a monologue with a talkative businessman who clearly belonged to an ethnic minority, crossing her devoid legs in front of his greedy eyes and strong hands. He began talking more enthusiastically by the second! His impressive chest and shoulder muscles jumped out of the backstitch of his three-piece suit sleeves, though he pretended to stay cool. Well, these two remained for one cozy chat, alright. Behind them, across the street, a cloud of dark gray smoke blew out of a chimney. Between the sparkling lights of tubular structures and tanks, I felt my guts churn during the taxi’s sharp left turn past the windows of the waterfront's bulging hotel section, where the businessman with sunken cheekbones ordered a cocktail, placing his hand meretriciously
below her waist. Indulgent and devoid of envy, I was overcome by a mixture of fear and joy, freedom and relief, and felt compelled to travel onward alone.

The taxi moored between historical ships with dark brown sails and yellow ropes, traditional Dutch iron barges with mid-ship leeboards and gaff rigged masts, creating a nostalgia atmosphere of the past - that is to say, until Rotterdam was brutally bombed. Delfshaven was one of the few locations spared by the *national socialist violence*. Climbing on the wharf, I walked straight up to my goal. The happiness of the last week shot back along my spinal and tickled my scruff entertainingly. In my mind, Johanna’s playful look of experience loomed. Hurriedly, I scanned the place, but Aunt Jo was nowhere to be found! As a desolate wanderer, I hung at the bar without talking to anyone, obsessed with finding this experienced lady of entertainment, yet my mind wandered, presumably by seeing these dancing young girls, into thoughts of what I would find in our gallery window! Also, the unfortunate fantasy got to me that Julia would walk in and embrace these girls, only to find her father, half-drunk, hanging out at the bar! Overcome with despair over how to help myself out of this checkmate situation, I did not hold back anymore; so after closing time I really was drunk - yes, it was many times worse than a week ago - and along the sailing ships I wobbled till I threw up between the quay and the third ship, an old steamer with a sooty pipe firmly planted on deck. The sight was unpleasant. I saw my vomit floating away, the mixture spread sparsely in the icy water. Beaten, I finally waddled into our shopping street moments later. With gum between my jaws and pounding legs, open mouthed, I admired the images of Julia and her boyfriend. So this was the surprisingly nice Turkish – or was it a Moroccan? - boy at breakfast!
Gardening

I had no clue how it became Monday. My only recollection was that I had just taken a couple of aspirins when I saw Feyenoord win against Ajax. Haha, and in that pancake stadium! This had to be celebrated at once! Somewhere down the line I must have fallen asleep on our colorless, snowy white Jan des Bouvrie bench. Tatjana was nowhere to be found. It was high time for handing out some walking papers! Wrinkled, I woke up and hoisted myself the moment meager sunlight breached. I decided to old-fashionably plant violet and narcissus bulbs, but not before I chatted with Wesseling - well, with his nurse, that is. He had been up again last night, she told me boldly. They'd found him in his striped pajamas, looking for his favorite bar around Town Hall. He began to get quite lost (I mean, his favorite bar was not even situated around that square; he'd better look in the Post-street). My voice calmed him down: hearing me again seemed to smarten him up nicely.

The downy gray clouds were gathering above the center when I parked my discreet BMW station wagon in front of the flower shop's rosary garden. I'd quickly loaded a pile of those boxes when a compelling, high-pitched tone, echoing through the chaotic street, caught my attention. Irritated, I turned around and wanted to make a dismissive gesture when I saw who was hanging out of the van. What do you know - it's that battered boxer what's his name, Willem! He wore a sailing cap and was dressed in a green coverall. His face seemed recovered from the worst bruises, but his nose looked like it might stay crooked and dented for a while.
‘Mr. Director!’ he exclaimed. ‘Wait, I've got something for you!’ he shouted, and opened his rickety van with a piercing noise, slamming the door aside. Popping it clicked, stuck in the door opening. ‘Watch this, man!’

Leaving my tailgate carelessly open, I went for it.

‘What is it?’ I asked, curiously looking into the van, where a series of Japanese bonsai higgledy-piggledy leaned at each other in cardboard boxes full of mud stains.

‘And? How much do you want?’

‘All of them. I'll take them all! They are beautiful,’ I told him, enchanted by their ticklish, whimsical shapes.

He followed me closely through the center, tailgating me until we were right in front of the iron gate of our villa.

‘Put them down there,’ I said. ‘How much for this joke?’

‘I can put them in for you. I am an accomplished gardener, with a certificate, and so... you know.’

‘Oh, right... but I want to do it by myself.’

‘Do not whine, old man. I do it for nothing, okay? Those Japanese, you get them for a friend’s price! As pub mates, we must help each other, otherwise things will never work out! Open that gate. When I am done, I'll expect a few beers afterwards.’

And so Willem the Boxer gardened cheerfully in his green coverall, full of dirty stains, and with his battered nose (by criminals - that is, if I could believe his story). ‘Those dirty slackers,’ he grumbled against nobody in particular.

I put a first Pilgrim bottle on the table and went to my home office, where I promptly received an email from the actress. She asked if I was sure of my wishes. Annoyed, I emailed back that she'd obviously gotten instructions: clues that may not be violated under any circumstances! A quick and appropriate response seemed adequate, but now this fountainhead of questioning led to concern: why did she send this mail? Furthermore, she asked
for extra money when I had indicated that she could send the bill anytime! Immediately I realized this would keep me busy until Saturday night, causing a deadly fatigue that overtook me with abject melancholy. Much too discouraged to fall asleep without hope for relaxation or staying out of this web of obsessions and doubts, I pulled myself up, carrying my slightly obese body to the open kitchen, where I took two beers from the ice cabinet. I opened one and poured the contents back, along with a light pink pill from my pillbox, then grabbed a third one, also opened this bottle, and walked, slightly drunk, into the garden.

‘Here, Willem, dude,’ I babbled with an amicable-posh accent. ‘It looks great; they fit the timelessness square of our villa. Don’t you think so?’

‘Oh... yeah, my idea, dude. Cheers!’

Dazed, we peered at the bonsai trees. Willem had placed sparkling white gravel grains around them.

‘Looking pretty, those grains...’ I mumbled.

‘Yes,’ he said calmly. ‘Wow, you certainly brought that baker home, Henkie! What a place it is!’

To my surprise, all weather stations stated how a stubbornly high pressure from the south would soon present itself. An optimistic gust announced a promising spring day, though it was winter still, this mid-March Saturday afternoon in which I wrapped myself in that sloppy black wool sweater again. The pleasantly soft breeze calmed everybody, but I kept feeling miserable nonetheless. Without sleeping pills and wine from the Vosges, I could not function. So, even during daytime, I invariably carried a bottle of *ijsmoppen liqueur* in my shirt pocket. Let those Vlaardingers manufacture liqueur and Schiedammers gin-no, that wasn’t a problem I could hardly face, let alone solve! The sun still hung above the characteristic warehouses across the Maas, proud and gallant; by recent renovations restored in
their glory, causing a deep orange shimmer on Parkinson Bridge. As always, it hung stately over the river, a beacon of Rotterdam stability.

Pity the ordinary people, I thought compassionately, to be offset by sparkles and white silver and pointed elongate waves, accented under the bridge as if, looking at the image from a fixed position while the movement progressed and passed indifferent-ly on their way to Hoek of Holland, a kind of star rain or a myriad of fire particles descended. Haha, that glare of wave tops was, of course, an illusion! Would I meet Johanna in that night pub of fine Pilgrim beer and babbling nonsense music? It had haunted my mind to ask Willem where she worked, but he kept talking about everything and nothing surrounding his work as a gardener in the city that had changed too much in multicultural Rotterdam… in short, everything was discussed - all but the nagging question that burned on my lips and that filled my days with affected melancholy. These endless days were followed by sleepless nights where I desperately yearned for a turnaround; for a radical change in life! Julia had stayed away, so to find out where she was sleeping, I texted her, since she rather did not like to be phoned, unasked. Her not responding made it worse. The atmosphere during the evenings when she came home was under strain. It seemed as if we were a married couple living together for too long, a popping, unresolved quarrel behind us, living in a kind of impasse.

She, however, seemed the least burdened by this overstrung situation! After positive reviews about her artwork I seemed to no longer exist. I was no longer of any interest in her life! After that positive piece in the art section of that damned newspaper, interest in her work had entered into acceleration mode. Some critics turned out to be fierce opponents, while others admired her artwork, simply entitled ‘Julia’s Saturday Nights’.
The controversy actually worked. In that respect, I knew perfectly well that she was rightfully expecting to be congratulated; but because I felt in all fibers how spurious that would sound (I was, moreover, afraid she would perceive the desperate tone of her father’s voice as a sign of weakness), I omitted every compliment studiously. Especially now, with my business empire on the verge of collapsing, I could not afford to compliment her publicly! Real fear for her success reared its head. And so our distance became serious. An adolescent conflict threatened to escalate into a fracture - at least, that was my sad conviction at the moment I walked along the quay and stopped on the street corner where the complex of the Erasmus University loomed behind the high stature pretending Novotel.

I decided on the spot to turn counterclockwise to the Honingerdijk and bust through Kralingen towards the Golf Club, normally a lovely trail for someone with spring fever. As I started to look for inconsistencies, I seemed to want to enjoy the worries about Julia’s filibuster activities, mixed with feelings of pathetic melancholy - yes, especially in this neighborhood, where I myself had searched for love in my adolescent life. These melancholy musings I cherished while cruising in slow passes along the well-known historic houses, vainly hoping for an applicable figurative spring sunshine along the way. Meanwhile, I secretly enjoyed the ambient sounds of fathers bringing their children to the hockey club, the same way I had once accompanied Julia. Fantasy images suddenly occupied my mind when I understood that something unpleasant was waiting, later this evening, in Room 33 of that beautifully situated Delta hotel. Well, I actually enjoyed undergoing this yearning for the unknown. Did I want to challenge this frustration? Did I want to overcome pain instead of embracing it? Monique had tried to convince me this was the way to do it: ‘embrace’ adversity, frustration and anger. But how on Earth do you do that!? Images of the past mingled
with the present in a dark conspiracy of dazzling sunshine, until I was awakened by the deafening scream of a girl who, in front of my nose, danced on the sidewalk like some kind of maniac. She was having fun, alright. What a crazy game!

Dumbfounded, I walked to the clubhouse of the Kralingen Golf Club, with its beautiful thatched-roof of ‘33, made from traditional Dutch beech. I nestled myself at the bar.

The clubhouse was completely empty; everyone was sunbathing or playing golf. In this remote corner, I had a wonderful view of the ninth and final hole of this par-three forest course; a course with a rich history and ancient trees which, like this clubhouse, had endured The Bombing, 14 May 1940.

What was going on during that time of brutal occupation? Did the Germans play golf? Had they deliberately unleashed no bomb on this golf course? Some entertainment is always welcome, even in wartime!

When I ordered a mint tea, I realized that I was wearing my casual undercover outfit. Suddenly, a liberating feeling swept through my veins. Had I always been engaged with appearance, with my image? Now I could not care less! What was I thinking, all those working years?!

After I had beaten back the second Baco, I accidentally set the glass too loudly on the shiny bar. The bartender, as always, a student in a tight suit, insightfully rushed to my aid. Yes, that’s how it’s done in Rotterdam. Those guys, at least, know how to serve customers and be alert in their work!

‘One more of the same?’ he asked, smiling professionally while picking up my glass and rubbing it underneath, wiping.

‘Please,’ I said, reassured.

At the exit of the ninth hole I recognized Annegreet in the distance, her characteristic, graceful elegance without exaggeration. She hit a decent first ball, leaving only 130 meters to overcome. Before that time, I had to leave. The third Baco was waiting nicely, with a slice of lemon. I observed how Annegreet
hit her second ball: a hideous roll that nevertheless approached the green, lightly mown for this time of the year, to stay still only twenty meters short. I took a last sip. Her partner hit a neat, chipped ball which slightly dented into the right side of the green. By the time Annegreet managed to chip her ball and look up at the canteen, I turned as if by lightning, charged off, and left the clubhouse unseen.

From there I walked up the gravel path along the practice hole and further, through the parking lot and right into the Kralingen forest. I turned to the right and started walking under chestnut trees, firmly, without a definite plan, since I had to kill a few hours before my appointment at Hotel New York. And then it happened: a strong sense that I ‘had to atone something’ would not let me go any further! I instructed myself to remain calm and walk - yes, deliberately - endlessly strolling through the park. Something told me that I only thus could find the answer; only this would bring me closer to my goal. But what was there to condone? Weeks, perhaps months of walking, and then the answer would surely come to me naturally and surprise me in its simplicity, or so this clever intuitive voice whispered.

Terrified of what the future might bring, I shuffled through the forest where three golden retrievers horsed around together, as exuberant dogs can: fully oblivious. Exactly the opposite of how my life had unfolded, I mused, childlike and melancholic, admiring their cheerful, casual playfulness. I produced my bottle and took a swig. The dogs reacted swiftly to the towering whistle of their mistress, replete in pitch-black shining riding boots and with a fearsome whip in her hand; one that she raised high into the air. She commanded them to go sit in return for a biscuit. Nicely, with the three in a row, the panting lapping tongues hung out of their cheerful doggy heads.

Those guys had plenty of fun with their obedient gaming!
Nearby was held that yearly jumping competition attended by the Royal Family. Maybe I should have conceded to Julia when she'd wanted a dog? When was that - eight or nine years ago? I only needed to close my eyes but to see Julia's angry face when I explained why it was not allowed, and a year later her enchanting smile - I would not have missed that for anything; that wonderful moment when I brought such a fluffy puppy home after all. According to her grandfather, she looked just like her mother. But even after her growth spurt, even today, this is still the case sometimes: how she turns into the kitchen and asks something, how she comes downstairs and nonchalantly sits down on Jan's snowy-white couch, or when she pours with graceful hand movements like an Indonesian dancer. Our family life without Monique has not yet stopped, I tell you.

The dogs disappeared. And so I strolled even slower until I reached the Kralingen Lake. The city finally awakened from winter; the park flooded with prams, playing children, and, by now - to label them native - twenty-headed families with smoky barbecues and a battery of sober headscarves for the poor girls and their mother to finish off. Behind them stood a gleaming Mercedes with giant wheel diameters; a little further, a hunted gay couple – two Turkish or Moroccan boys? – hide in the bushes.

A shiver, a liberation, and at the same time, a clear sense of being alone in our urban forest slowed my steps.

Did I confuse being alone with real loneliness? After the next shiver down my spine, I suddenly knew what to do. My breathing deepened. The football rolled over and remained there, lying at a distance of a meter or two into the grass.
The Sacrifice

Henk gave the ball *a punto*. The eleven-year-young boy scared up by the speed for a moment, but managed to put the ball dead under his left foot and thanked him by lifting his hand seemingly nonchalantly - in fact, he was hugely shy, though he looked laconic and arrogant – and ran, the ball completely under control, away over the bumpy grass. He shot the soccer ball, manufactured by indestructible leather (unfortunately, they do not fabricate them like this anymore), skillfully from his left to his right as he disappeared behind the chestnut trees. Henk continued his route, walking to the café The Garden, situated next to the windmill, when Daan kicked the ball in a sleek, elongated bow to his father. Cor Figuee jumped so fast that he almost injured himself and, enduring immense pain, grabbed his right thigh with both hands - *an injury I cannot afford, now that the Russians are visiting!* Tonight I'm dining with them and then hitting the road. Guess where that will no doubt lead! Yeah, right - well, someone must accompany them and show them Rotterdam by night, so why should I not sacrifice myself for this purpose? *If I do not sacrifice myself, who will?* Why does no one understand the importance of this customer relationship?! Yes, if you lose your job, then the penny drops! For now, I will take care of all pennies. There are countries where a man is seen as a hero when he provides for his family, for household money. Would I live over there? I was chiseled! Valuation, feminine devotion and profound respect are what you enjoy over there when you take care of toppings! As Dutch, we are already lost. Where and when did it all go wrong? Here you can nowadays expect defamation and ridicule: talks like: 'Haha, look at that guy, there goes such idiot
with his sandwiches in a Tupperware box. Good morning, this morning, Miss Jannie… is the week already cut in half, lol! Then you’ll get home, destroyed by hard work, only to find that there is no food on the table - no, at the tennis court it was too cozy. *You do understand that certainly, dear? Goddamn!*

The furious shot Cor Figee produced, killed with a seemingly simple thigh action, picked up elastically, causing the strength of the leather ball to be hampered in a centimeter or five by his leg muscles, in such way that it obliquely rebounded at the right height at exactly the right speed for the other foot of his son Daan to descend to his devastating left, with which he drove the ball into the top corner of the goal. The mesh of the goal net all vibrated lively, they had too!

As Henk left, Julia turned her head sideways while he ran admiringly. She looked at the effect of the ball, lagging in the grass while her headphone played the old-fashioned Seattle rock song lyrics: ‘*fuck you! I won’t do what you tell me*’. The gravel crunched under her sneakers, which had no logo. What a talent, that boy: I wish I could do something that good. Being a football player at Feyenoord seems his destiny. Maybe I will later operate on his knee in the Erasmus MC - only, I will never know! The moment he is on my operating table, I will not realize that this is the same kid; I will not recognize him.

This thought made Julia sad to the bone.

Why does Mom force me to see that crazy German shrink, Herr von Stürmer? Dad better attend him instead; everyone should understand that. What if I step out of that raging stream; out of that maelstrom of the swirling river in which everyone drowns sooner or later? I see the mud constantly increasing! We must leave the river before it’s too late! Would I recognize him then? Only Tatjana understands. She possesses much knowledge about languages and history. Dad has an eye for scouting: it is in
our genes, she thought as she ran around Kralingen Lake, where the sun broke through clouds and brightly lit the white painted wings of that historic flour mill. Julia was forced to squint her eyes. Talent spotting: I can do that, because I do not possess it myself. We are good at this, at least. What art project will I execute next week; that of Quinten, or something totally new? Art for art’s sake - is that equal to leaving this maelstrom, to swim out of its current?

A short distance away, in café Stobbe, a young woman sat on one of the wooden tables, her notebook open. She wore earphones with elegant buttons, phoning her mother, who was prune slogging for an Italian family in Milan. Fortunately, they could use Skype for free. The waiter could not hear her; but anyway, it was fine. Listening in would not be fair - that would not be customer-friendly. We will not eavesdrop on our clients as that NSA or the German Sicherheitsdienst do, disrespectfully. No way: there's always decent work to do, he thought as he placed a glass of water on a napkin and nodded politely. On middays like this, a reasonable crowd normally flowed inside; but this permanent financial crisis had taken its toll. Well, let’s clean the place thoroughly once more and put all tables and chairs in, then shine wash them. Let’s hope for a better day tomorrow. Keep smiling, was his slogan; his working mantra.

‘Ah! You scare me? Come here,’ said Tatjana, and hugged Julia, who was soaked with sweat. 'How long were you standing behind me, silly you? How did it go?’

‘Great!’ replied Julia, beaming and straining until her face suddenly changed in a severe cramp. 'Who, your mother looks so… pinched…’

The waiter placed a glass of water on the table and asked, though it was unnecessary: 'Two with something sweet?' Tatjana nodded routinely and trustfully, without looking up. In the be-
ginning, when she had just arrived in the Netherlands, it had taken some real effort not to respond enthusiastically, so to keep men at an appropriate distance, but now this belonged to her standard arsenal. In the café Stobbe she felt safe, but when she shopped with Julia, it all became less easy: Turkish and Moroccan players turned in endless circles around their deliciously tight buttocks. Her mother screamed for joy when she told her this - it had something to do with a famous Romanian joke. Their resemblance, however, was threatening: often they were mistaken for twin sisters, although Tatjana was five years older than Julia. She dimmed the sound on her connection.

She had a tough night ahead. The waiter raised his thumb. Fortunately, she can smile. That's much better than that serious look she usually has, he thought while picking up an empty glass.

‘She’s proud of me. My happiness is her standby. She has worked hard for many years to provide me a future through education in Bucharest, arranged my permit, and on top of it, a costly trip into paradise: into the Netherlands. That guilt, that burden I carry with me. I must succeed! Addressing it every day is my goal. She does not want my money; she categorically refuses. Sometimes it is almost too much!’

‘I’m eighteen now. We are supposed to tell each other, we agreed upon that! All mothers act stupid in one way or another. Why doesn’t she stop this dreadful work? Eighty hours a week caring for a demented elderly lady is too tough to keep up with, for anyone! I’m going to ask Dad. We will get her out and into the Netherlands! Are you sure she has free days? I’ve heard that that is not even true; that nurses must work for seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day, without a break! Those Italians are criminals! This is exploitation; we must...’

‘You promised to keep your father out of it. It all goes well with her. Have you talked to your mother, finally? And you just did it again. I promised I’d point this out to you: You said those
Italians... it does not come through like how you mean it, this way; how you want to say it - you see what I mean?’

‘Yeah, right, but I will not visit Herr von Stürmer! We must leave the river before we drown! I’m going to bring talent together. And, thank you, wrong habits are hard to break... so stupid! It is persistent. In a pessimistic mood, I sometimes think it is impossible to change this behavior.’

Tatjana thought deeply before formulating a reply, played with her tea bag, and sipped before she stated: ‘You have so much talent. If you could realize how much, the world would be at your feet. Believe me!’ she stated emphatically.

Julia grabbed her glass with both hands and enjoyed a warm sip, but looked intently incredulous over the rim of her transparent mug. Everything Tatjana said, she took for granted, as the truth... except this. She wants to do me a favor, she thought, she wants to give me confidence. It is so sweet of her. I’m going to hug her and immediately set to work with Quinten. There is no time to lose!
Pets! And again! She hit back; at least as hard. His gaze froze. I hopped on the tip of my familiar seating position and stared intently at her expression. What would she undertake?

Her near nakedness was uncomfortable. It grabbed me by the balls. She was really touched! Her right cheek was colored by the flat hand blow to a meaty welt. Both of them stood neatly aligned. I strictly carried out my assignment and filmed from the cuff, turning to the two fighting peacocks on the screen. They kept staring at each other endlessly. Was this supposed to symbolize: a marital quarrel? It seemed like a contest; a competition over who was the strongest: man or woman. She looked determined, but he was physically stronger, as an all-round gymnast; powerful without bloated muscles.

Yet another clash! A furious rap! Spot on! He did not want to, but had to turn backwards and reflexively grab his battered cheek, an instinctive reaction accompanied by a mischievous look: why this rough?! Then he rallied; the cheek darker, a drop of blood beading and thickening along his lower lip.

It’s a game, Henk, I admonished myself, realizing that it was my job to keep filming. You want to undergo this, so do not back down. Come on, man!

They stared at each other grimly. Julia challenged him by sarcastically laughing and reported a tick off, harder than the last one. By reflex, he took a full blow. Her head snapped to the side. The camera recorded it flawlessly. I saw it neatly on my little screen and blushed with pure excitement, a mixture of fear and anger rearing its ugly head. Had I become afraid of my own reaction?! Her face was bleeding; she'd tried to hit back.
‘Good girl!’ I yelled, but he parried it easily and raised his other hand for a devastating blow, so I threw the camera on the hotel bed and jumped on top of that immigrant fighter!

Glass clanged and I heard screaming: two hard punches beaten, together on the hotel bed, followed by intense pain. Julia screamed in a different key, unintelligible for a born and bred Dutch girl! Was this Moroccan, modern Rotterdam slang, or a combination of those two extremes?!

I could barely breathe, gasping for air. He jumped away when I lifted my head. That worked with difficulty, and not without undergoing severe pain in my neck. In the mirror I saw him, putting on his jacket. He drew furious mockery, received money, and then growled something stupid. She refused with a dismissive gesture of a Surinamese aunt who never surrenders.

‘Get out, Mohammed!’ she screamed outraged.

‘All right, that’s my Julia!’ She might still wear a headscarf, but she refused him nevertheless!

The immigrant fighter with loose hands fiddled, left it in his pocket, and shut the bedroom door. That punk pulled away with our hard-earned money! I tried to run after him, gasping for breath, and noticed only now how severely I was shocked.

With her fingers on my back, she whispered that I had to lie down, took her headscarf off (finally!), gently pulled my shirt out of my boxers, and checked the side of my heavily battered body. Apparently, I had been mainly hit there. Strangely, it did not feel that way, I thought at the moment she rolled me over to survey me.

‘It is not too bad, but keep an eye on it tonight,’ she said. ‘He practices kickboxing. I’m sorry.’

Stay with me, I wanted to ask, but I realized I had to go out into the cold, lonely night. Groggy, I went down the dimly-lit stairs. At the reception desk, beautifully recreated in the form of a teak sloop, I looked over her shoulder. Two cocktails had been
placed on the oval circular bar. On the window side sat the same businessman as a week ago. Behind him there was now a fully enjoyable, magnificent view of the ever-working factories and their twinkling lights across the Maas river, which locals here called Waterway, strangely enough. Along slipped a cargo ship with that unsightly logo of my father’s business group, downstream, moving in the direction of Hoek van Holland.

And it could have been so beautiful. Hesitantly, I tenderly kissed her cheek, took a step backwards, and let her go.

Release her, Henk, you got to release all tension!

When I tumbled, stumbling over that strange upright beside the planter, the story of Willem the Boxer came to mind - how he was chased after the hopeless fight in which three youngsters cowardly stabbed him in the back, completely for no reason! Instinctively, I turned my head sideways, to the left and back. The anxious excitement that I felt was no longer enjoyable. Sadly, Julia was not experienced enough to realize that danger doesn’t always imply excitement! Could things get worse then this? If something became clear, then it was that I wanted to get rid of it; that I could not bear this suffering any longer! How long would they have continued the quarrel if I had not intervened? Luckily, I was able to come in between and rescue Julia from the hands of that aggressive immigrant ‘Rotterdammert’, I thought proudly. The silver moon's lapping waves shone as if the Maas river knew no danger; those peaceful shimmering wave tops iridescent, up in the distance, expanding huge tanks and moored barges: one misconception as a pure illusion, alright! A flock of seagulls flew past the counterflow, patiently undergoing and intuitively realizing that new opportunities would come along after a single-handedly operating seagull flew above deck of a freight-
er, agile, risking his live by marking the wheelhouse with a graceful arc and thereby alarming the other gulls so they could more timely save altitude. Conveniently, using the anticipated thermal, their white-gray breasts proudly raised against the dark sky, lit only by refineries, and unconscionably passed the troubled loner. The scout that paved the way for them did not receive a thank you, as usual!

This art project will go on forever. I urgently need to talk to Aunt Jo, but apparently, my intuitive reaction represented of some sort of denial, running away from the physical pain I felt upon seeing Julia in our shop window, or in any art form, for that matter. Yes, to my own surprise, I walked directly home from Delfshaven. Was this becoming a habit? To wait painfully long and not at all unpleasantly - that is to say, the whole week - and experience it by sitting on my flinty chair in hotel room 33? It is, after all, my lucky number! Better freak out over there than in our streets, or worse, at home or even in the office. In this way, it is to endure, I instructed myself magnanimously. And so, on the stroke of three o’clock, I waddled from the beautifully renovated museum park in our street where a police car (one of those boosted vans) stood pontifical, parked in the driveway in front of Boymans. In my mind appeared, in the mirror with aluminum frame, that tormented gaze of that Moroccan kickboxer! Had he somehow discovered our address? Three police officers, including one female, waited impatiently in front of our fence. The gangling called furiously while the woman spoke into a kind of modern walkie-talkie. The third agent suspiciously stared, while holding something in his right hand.

‘Did you see anything strange?’ he asked, ridiculously brutal.

‘I live over here; this is my house!’

He looked at me mistrustfully and considered my remark. ‘Is that right? And your name is?’
‘Henk van Wijnen-Swarttouw. But feel free to mark it up, that’s fine! Is my daughter home?! I demand you give me that information!’

He seemed insecure, fiddling with his electronic device. Endlessly, I waited for a decent answer to my (I must say) glaring question. ‘The emergency center received a report. Can I see your passport, Henk?’

‘Hello, Sjaak! I asked if my daughter is home!’

‘Mr. Agent’ to you - otherwise I will provide you with a special ticket. What’s her name? Then I can make a note right away. We have nifty stuff, nowadays. Everything will be sent to our central station in a fraction of a second; sometimes less - seriously efficient and practically flawless. A robot never makes mistakes; that’s on its creators. If she had been at home at the time of the burglary, she is no longer there. Your daughter, I mean. There’s nobody here, man. Really!’

‘What are you trying to tell me?’

‘What do you mean? She’s not there, or does not open the door for us.’

‘Julia!’

‘Oh, Julia van Wijnen-Swarttouw, I suppose? Your passport? You carry it with you?’

‘My passport lies inside, wacky! What has been stolen? Wait; first I will call my daughter myself. Hold on...’

The sign of my outstretched hand as a stop sign did not suit him, I believe, from his disapproving look and how he grabbed his holder. She still did not answer, so I sent a message via voicemail, which she disliked even more, but time was short.

The agent forced me to open the gate.

I was hoping for a false alarm when I noticed the vertical side window next to our front door was bowled out! Broken glass - the feeling when you see how an unwanted person has brutally invaded your villa is indescribable; many times worse than ex-
pected. I was overwhelmed by a feeling of impotence, followed
by vengeful thoughts. A horrific attack, injustice, a battered per-
sonal living space - it’s like you’re being held hostage, and from
that decisive moment, should remain permanently on guard, as
though you could be robbed at every moment!

Yes, even now, though I am tired of walking all night, after a
heavy fight, it provoked aggression, putting me into a state of
utter alertness and preparedness. Besides, the main issue was
that Julia was unhurt - at least, optimistically as ever, I thought
so - and immediately the question shot through my head: what
were they looking for? Why exactly our villa, and not at our
neighbors? Did that immigrant kickboxer come back for more
of our hard-earned money?

‘You are drunk,’ observed the officer.

‘And you have to go and catch some criminals,’ I replied,
sharp-witted.

‘Where did you go tonight, Henk?’

‘Breaking in houses, Sjaakie!’

_A policeman without much resilience_, I thought, annoyed, when
suddenly I heard a strange flute. A message from Julia!

Quickly, I read her too-hastily typed text balloon. The note
contained a shocking amount of grammatical errors. Then I re-
read her message. Delaying and nervous, I deciphered some
kind of deeper meaning. Meanwhile, his colleague whispered:
\[you’re talking to that notoriously-famous enterprise doctor!\] (Yes, this is
one of my autodidactic learned tricks. Information is power, so I
developed prime hearing skills for any conversation in my vicini-
ty.) Finally, they left, embarrassed, with their tails between their
police legs, those charlatans!

Being home alone, I did not attempt to sleep, stayed downstairs,
and prepared a cup of coffee using the built-in grinder, pouring
it into a painted mug adorned with a miniature painting of our
Blue Magical yacht (manufactured by a famous boat builder whose name I cannot divulge without making me guilty of perjury). The view of the dimly lit garden with bonsai trees relaxed me. To stay alert, I sprinted to the medicine cabinet, slipped on my socks through the endless hallway, pulled out my stock of pills, took them to my home office, put them in an envelope, and pasted a yellow sticker on it. I wrote: ‘Deliver at Pharmacy asap!’ To my full awareness, I was perfectly sober. Eager for information about the burglary, I started collecting data, printing it out and depositing it all in a separate folder. Now surely I knew that sleep was not an option anymore; not until I had unmasked the guilty one(s)! And so I pulled the documents of the stolen goods out of my insurance papers and placed them in a second folder. Meanwhile, I was working on a checklist. First, I made some arrangements with insurance experts – those guys can be hard to persuade. I wanted to build in additional security around the house, but only after I knew why surveillance had not worked adequately. When searching for detectives and investigative methods, through a wrong click on a strange website, I stumbled accidentally on a new method of inventory; an innovative method recommended for monitoring all personnel as well as potential thieves. The package could be downloaded as demo version, but I immediately bought the full-blown version. Through smart structures and filters, a mind map with scenarios about what could have happened and who could be involved appeared on screen. It was important to reduce all possibilities, deliberately excluding any eventuality. This mounted tool of professor van Splunteren, a professor of law, was useful, alright! All options remained open: the percentage calculated on the basis of a complex, transparent algorithm. However, this still seemed a bit of a limited way of assessment and research. Immediately, I realized that I needed help in gathering information in real life, just so I could collect enough parameters to get a reliable judgment. And
so my next action was to seek a private detective - relying on police being utterly pointless - but only after I had eaten a healthy breakfast. *There could be no clear thinking on an empty stomach.* While eating, I found three candidates, after which it immediately came to mind that I better not invite any of them except Julia. I wanted no one in the house, anymore! I decided to visit the candidates at their offices instead of letting them into our beautifully situated villa, dignified as it was by being situated opposite to Boymans, where I by now, sadly to say, no longer felt completely at ease - where I tended to look at every corner of the living room, out of the window into the garden, checking the hallway by the front door for unwanted guests who might be busy breaking in! Meanwhile, the question of how Julia’s message could be answered still haunted me.

And then it happened: while searching for a private detective, I mistakenly clicked on Sherlock, a shop with products in espionage. Here I read about the potential for monitoring a tablet, laptop, or smartphone after installing this James Bond kind of spy software, all unnoticed and revealing of what that person did! Yes, everything could be seen without knowledge of the person in question! At first, I considered using this application for main suspects; but suddenly - I do not know how this happened - Julia’s art project loomed in my mind. *Perhaps because this site mentioned something about protecting your children?*

That eavesdropping scandal, a continuous flow by US intelligence and German Security Services collecting data, could also be to blame. Anyway, the wily misbegotten idea now occurred, to install this software on Julia’s phone and tablet, notebook, and so on! Although this seemed necessary, I felt remorseful in advance. My very own daughter, my eighteen years’ young girl, and I, Henk van Wijnen-Swarttouw, just had decided to spy on her. However, there seemed to be no alternative! I mean, doing nothing and as a believer hoping that everything comes naturally
and falls in place nicely just isn’t a realistic option - no, folks; for I had experienced too much of that in life: *without action, no result.* Reading, I involuntarily remembered something: the electronic ankle bracelet, used to monitor criminals within an adjustable number of meters around, was followed by the thought of a chip shot painlessly into a pet cat or dog, behind their skin! Can such device administer a disciplinary shock - for example, when your girl starts drinking too much or becomes sexually active?

Useful applications went through my imaginative mind.

Something that goes without saying is that the creativity of a born entrepreneur is limitless. When I looked at our clock – designed by Gucci, a good friend of mine back then – I noticed that I had missed the show ‘books’ of the VPRO. The sophisticated ‘intellectual’ Buitenhof had just begun. After an item about the skyrocketing costs for an advertising page in Vogue, 180.000 euro, they announced the next topic: It’s been six years since a financial crisis started; what can we do to stop it? And so, indifferently, I zipped to another channel until I happened to stop at an erotic hardcore broadcasting.

A whopping tripling of wages! After the shock of the burglary, I received, during a pleasantly warm afternoon and just before I met my private detective, a short but powerful message which came down to *take-it-or-leave-it.* She indicated that she would continue her performance. Rotterdam honor code: a deal is a deal. She would remain in hotel room 33, but only under the condition that the price increased by multiple of three. Hello! Could this be a bit more modest please, dear? Moreover, she offered me a ludicrous amount of time in which to provide her with an answer - in about just two days, tops! I got the impression that she would rather quit, since she boldly called this my last chance, so I emailed that it was perfectly okay with me. Meanwhile, I inserted my initial findings into the professor’s ‘noTunnelVision’
tool. When Annegreet signaled how carefully I handled all collected data, I registered the suspiciously curious look in her bright blue eyes, and wondered if she would go fishing with me. She would not. A stroke of luck, unless she decided to do so purely for tactical considerations! She left my office as unobtrusively as possible. Only after I figured all was safe did I put my tablet in my briefcase to leave the building in disguise.

The entrance of this stately mansion on Westzeedijk contained not only the nameplate of the private detective, but also an indication of a second company; one I knew by heart. Here a beloved colleague working in ship attributes held office: ropes, floaters - you name it, he had it in store. An enviable sector in these difficult times when a persistent economic crisis seemed to never leave us: one which remained relatively stable, safety floating as strikingly as their colored buoys which these guys undoubtedly traded.

Optimistic as ever, I walked in. The private detective appeared younger than expected, and was dressed in jeans. *This boy needs to convince me by conversation*, I thought, as he told me how he was back just in time from an undercover operation in Eemshaven, where he'd spent several days investigating a suspicious Chinese boat. That inspired confidence, alright. After a curious glance at his casual clothes, I found compelling evidence (although it could be a cover-up - always stay alert!). It was a series of grease stains on his pants.

‘There was no time to dress up; apologies. Sit down,’ he commanded in a remarkably calm voice.

There might be eavesdropping equipment installed. It was important to stay on guard and choose my words carefully, so I waited till his secretary left the classic room through sliding doors, oak with unnecessary cut out frills and awkward edges.
Between the wide gaps I saw how she took her place behind her surprisingly-modern desk with its three monitors.

‘Did you hear about the burglary?’

‘Shall we name the base; I mean, both of us?’

‘Okay, after you.’

‘Henk van Wijnen-Swarttouw is it, not? Henk! First of all, thank you for your interest in our agency. My name is Edwin. My real name you will not receive; that’s part of my professional code. We closely monitor burglaries in Rotterdam and its surroundings and collect all data via a Reuters subscription.’ This sounded good. ‘We receive information directly from the police as well, since we work closely with all government agencies.’

That sounded less credible! I took my notebook out of my suitcase and tried to gain time.

‘Police... you said, Edwin?’

It worked. He began to elaborate on this relationship and how it could be otherwise; how much it was under intense pressure. It proved to be a form of careful scanning; a continuous game of who gives whom information within the statutory obligation. We can organize it better, they hold something back — that kind of posturing... I knew it all too well, those government agencies and their reduced way of thinking, compared to businessmen, let alone their acting upon it all!

‘You have spy software?’ I asked, aware of getting straight to the point, and watched how he responded. Yes, bingo! He became suspicious. I saw it in his facial expression.

‘That’s right. Are you interested?’ he asked, even more distrustfully.

This rhetorical question startled me. He wanted to gain time, but why? The ultimate question! I decided not to lose sight of him and to observe his movements. There is so much truth in non-verbal expressions.

‘Yes, I feel that need... Edwin.’
‘Oh yeah?’
‘Yes, E d w i n.’
‘That’s possible, we have it!’
‘How much?’
‘There is enough available.’
‘Can you install it on Julia’s iPhone?’
‘Your daughters phone? No problem.’
‘And how do you know she’s my daughter, E d w i n?’
‘She is mentioned in tomorrow’s newspaper!’

Damn! Just when I thought to unmask him, he comes back with something like this! The suspicion grew, seconds flew by. We heard a door slam; a heavy slam. On his desk a green light popped on and off, on and off. Skittish, he cast a professional eye on two giant flat screens upon which fragments were displayed; nearly a dozen per screen. Just when I wondered if this was all live, his secretary gallivanted down the stone stairs. She turned left. When she was almost out of sight, she appeared immediately in one of the other little views, in sight of the camera lens. ‘She goes a w a y, E d w i n.’

‘Yes, I'd say that, alright. There she goes,’ he stated.

We followed her to the next street corner. She had an interesting pass, shall we say. Then he calmly began browsing through his paperwork. The endless rustle made me nervous. I longed for my pills, inhaled routinely but missed.

‘Here it is,’ he said. ‘Have you seen it?’

‘I do not read newspapers.’ I lied to delude him. ‘But tell me, Edwin: exactly when did you get the idea to preserve this article?’

‘It rolls off the press tomorrow. Remarkably, it is all about your daughter. What do you think?’

‘You’re fooling me!’ I said, and snatched this premature report out of his hands. In addition to mentioning a burglary in some historic villa situated opposite of the famous Boymans
museum, it was suggested, in sloppy journalism language, that it probably was where ‘The Saturday night Artist’ resided.

‘A home where she is staying,’ I muttered. ‘How strange!’

Without hesitation, I shot a picture for my file, Suspicious Journalistic Reports, and asked him bluntly: ‘And how does Edwin actually know that Julia, my daughter, is this artist in question? Like any true artist, she works with a pseudonym to efface herself for the higher goal of making art; well, to be judged indiscriminately, since her father happens to be a notoriously famous businessman.’ I cannot help that, folks. Someone like Cor Figeee would not understand it - I mean, his son can safely use his own name.

‘A matter of detective work. No one in the city is aware of this,’ he assured me, calm as hell. He sounded convincing. ‘That is, not yet. It is easy to find out. I mean... she has been hanging works in your gallery shop window for some time now, Henk!’

‘For real, Dude, you’re not serious!’

That wily private detective deliberately ignored my remark and continued coolly: ‘A reporter will dig further, so I expect that by tomorrow, someone will come for an interview about the burglary in your villa, at least under the presumption that you have some kind of relationship with this mysterious artist,’ he said. ‘But usually the level of intelligence is disappointing and you can withhold more than expected. I mean, the press just wants to score: their customers simply want to savor a juicy anecdote.’

‘I know, it’s easy to manipulate,’ I replied routinely.

And while Edwin suspiciously weighed my words, I suddenly understood Julia’s message: she wanted money to shelter from the outside world, to hide from the press! This enabled me the legitimate opportunity to once and for all put an end to this ‘Saturday Nights’ project; this quirky art stuff in which I, unsolicited, threatened to fill a starring role sooner or later.
With screeching tires I sped towards Wilhelminakade to pass the Luxor Theatre at Manhattan at the Maas River. The week had slipped by. Edwin executed his investigation properly. Per convention, he sent all information digitally; therefore I could import it by simply pressing a button using that wonderful ‘No-Tunnelvision’ tool of our professor-in-law-and-order. Unfortunately, however, after all calculations, no offender was evident. I placed my roaring Maserati in front of the water taxi, after which I ran onto the pontoon without a briefcase, three-piece suit or tight necktie - just wearing that shabby garb. At last, Saturday night was ahead! Armed only with a mini camera, I took a seat on one of those wooden benches. Because I'd promised the captain a tip if he completely threw the throttle open, we again ran with unprecedented emergency through the port of Rotterdam. Wild waves pitched over the railing, way above my head, the ominous air hanging menacingly above the fatty silver rippling of the river. Alarming thoughts clenched my mind, since I had been busy with detective work and putting it together, all week. It was as if all the underlying tension built up in the course of time, and rebounded. With what would Julia come up with next?

Looking at Edwin and Annegreet, I tried to catch signals, convinced they had undertaken an attempt to size up. Curiosity usually conquers decency and self-control. Annegreet seemed upset the past few days, disappointed in herself, but Edwin was a professional; that guy I could not read. When I thought about the elusive moments of my secretary, I began to worry, though. Julia... how would it be with her after being hit by that Moroccan kickboxer?! After her boyfriend was firmly tapped in the face like that? What sick relationship did she maintain with that guy?! Everything for performance art, without restrictions, seemed to be her motto, nowadays! No, I had little or no faith in a positive turnaround! There was no end in sight in this pitch-black tunnel. Nothing came to my aid! It looked so bad that I began to
worry about the depression itself, because when it dwindles, when all hope is gone, there are two possibilities left: depression or complete acceptance, followed by a euphoric feeling of liberation, inevitable leading to rampant hedonism. In short, I became more afraid than ever of things to come!

With a sweeping bend, the white edges spread over the waves of the floating river where we passed Delfshaven, since we wanted to treat the port with a magnificent spectacle of modern navigation technology, deliberately ignoring the chunky round storage tanks which were filled with raw oil or liquid Russian or Iranian gas along the other site of the shore. And so we literally and figuratively abandoned them where, illuminated by hundreds of electronic lights, plumes whirled up, at which the funnel closed and emissions faltered, undoubtedly exactly according to the agreed quota, that nasty mess swaying into the already-polluted air. At that point I was distracted by the shocking, intuitive, recurring idea that not Julia’s boyfriend, that shady, friendly Moroccan, but our gardener and boxer Willem was aware of my nightly walks - namely through Johanna!

I mean, this information had not yet been included in the ‘NoTunnelvision’ tool! *What would happen after the introduction and running the data analysis software once more?* I wondered when I bumped up, pushed by the captain's sudden maneuver. My head banged against the metal ceiling of the wobbly cabin. Reflexively, I grabbed my hair, wrapped my beaten arms around my head, and dove onto the metal floor of the water taxi. Crouching, I bounced on the ground. The only other passenger, a broad-shouldered man with a too-flashy (for my taste) three-piece suit (his suit made him gleam like an idiot!), massaged his bulky shoulder and neck muscles as he watched me, amused. I recognized him immediately! Through a wide arc, figuratively marking one of those cargo ships full of containers, we arrived along the
 elongated view window of the Deltahotel, where we stopped at
the sloshing pontoon bridge thirty meters from shore.

Guided by the surge which by this swell gently moved, we
waddled and wiggled off the ferry bridge. The muscular busi-
nessman shuffled to the ship’s bar without saying anything,
while I asked the receptionist for the key to room 33. She noded
kindly in recognition, but slightly naughtily; something I felt
uncomfortable about. With my heart pounding like mad, I hiked
upstairs into the hallway and held my camera ready. As agreed,
the decoration on the hotel room had been retrenched. I neatly
took my place on my chair. She slipped out of the bathroom and
shuffled behind the bed, her body, her taut, trained belly aimed
at the lens. The music sounded mysterious and dark. Something
in me signaled that I could ignore her face and zoom straight to
her waist area and the rest of her naked body. Her hand was
shaking violently. Did she hesitate? She looked imploringly at
me for a split second, as if to say: may I please stop?! Then she ra-
lled. To my surprise, I actually managed to continue filming until
the very end; until the notorious sign was completely ingrained
in her belly, now marked by streams of blood that dripped down
offensively. Defeated and half in a daze, I staggered downstairs
and left the hotel. These images were thus showcased in our
window to that vengeful crowd for the entire week - to a greedy,
massive public staring at her gorgeous long legs; a crowd judging
harshly without trying to understand the deeper reasons behind
her artworks!

Not knowing what to do anymore, I called Willem and heard a
mixture of music and small talk in the background. Trembling, I
hung up and continued my way. This kind of walking supported
me, at least. Everything considered, I remembered why, during
these days, I got the impression that people deliberately evaded
me! Annegreet could have instructed everyone in the office not
to speak to me, but obviously this was hardly possible outside in a wider, open space. The riot, my reputation, and the uproar in the business and art worlds... Julia began to establish something substantial! Only now did I realize what was happening!

The burglary and her art performances make me wonder about the real issues in life: being a businessman, an artist, or nothing of any significance! Tonight, I had to brainstorm with Johanna; I needed to decide how to end this all. On the way, I heard terrifying sounds as I saw the picture of Julia's scarred belly in my mind's eye, shades over the cobbles sliding where the sloshing river waves in a hypnotic tempo irregularly rolled up the quay, moving ever higher. In an almost endless state this continued to move, until I finally reached Delfshaven.

Without pause or hesitation, I dived into the pub, searching desperately for Johanna. Again, she was nowhere to be found. Exhausted, I ordered the heaviest whiskey they had when I suddenly heard the sound of a familiar voice.

‘Old Man! How are you doing?’

Her curves grabbed my, by regular dining with potential clients beneficiently shaped body - many Indians would kiss my feet and worship my healthy belly. She flashy rubbed my half-bald skull. ‘Haha, Henkie cannot do without Aunt Jo,’ she squealed with delight. ‘Come on, order some, you fool!’

The cone from her mouth spoke for itself.

For a moment I considered it better not to discuss it with her after all. ‘Sure, one minute,’ I said, feeling volatile, ordered and, on a whim, took out my log. ‘This is a secret,’ I stammered, gently whispering and clutching the book tightly under my arm, my fists clenched.

‘What is it? Show it to me, Henkie!’
The bartender put the glass down and filled mine, pouring some over the edge. ‘That will not make you mourn,’ he said, and disappeared without a chat.

Fortunately, he could not read what lay in front of me.

‘Notes. It’s a logbook in which I accurately keep matters of interest, like all disrespectful statements Julia made. Read this, for example!’ I intoned over the music - an extremely fast beat that apparently forced me to tell everything. I sought the passage in which she had fallen out from me in ways unparalleled in our father-daughter relationship. Johanna read the fragment with full attention. It was a fragment that did not lie. She flipped through the rest. Above each quote stated, tidily written, was a date/time stamp plus a detailed description of the clothes Julia was wearing and a brief description of environment and circumstances in which it all took place.

Her lips curled questionably. She snatched the log out of my hands, flipping through everything once more, took a sip of her drink, and read at length, then closed the notebook, put it under my hand with hers over it, looked at me intently, and said:

*You’re crazy, Henkie!*

Then my phone vibrated. Who could that be? No whistle this time, I thought, amazed, and slid the round, nervously blinking green horn to the right.

‘Yes!’

‘Edwin. Do I speak with Henk?’

‘Can you not hear me?’

‘Now I can.’

‘I’m on to something. Are you coming?’

‘Where is it?’

‘In a pub.’
‘Okay. Where exactly?’
‘In Delfshaven...’
‘Oh... well then, uhh... I will see you there and then!’

*Edwin... I will have to follow him closely as soon as he sets foot in this joint,* I thought.

‘Your little girl gets big,’ blared Johanna. ‘I went there myself, you know, looking in your window. Boy oh boy, it does not look good for you. I was scared to death! When your teeth are on edge, you start to feel your very own belly... You know what I mean, Henkie?’

Now I got scared for real. If Aunt Jo was impressed, then it became tricky, alright.

‘How long will it take before the incisions in her abdomen will heal? What do you think?’ I stammered, ‘She did not cut herself deeply, did she? As lightly as possible she made visible the sinister *Magen Star* by how blood dripped down. I can assume Julia did the same. I mean, she did not hurt herself worse than the actress, did she? I must finally put an end to all of this! Force my little girl to stop. I will have to violate our agreement. It is the only way, Johanna!’

‘Henkie,’ she said unexpectedly in a deadly serious tone, her arms tightly hanging around my neck, ‘normally I would say: leave it - the sooner you do, it might work out fine. But this?’

She released her grip and hit me with her flat hand on my chest, profoundly searching for support, seeing friends as distraction, just to better organize her thoughts. She ordered a new round, enjoyed two gulps, went to the toilet, came back, and whispered: ‘I think you should continue to give her freedom... What’s it called? Give her the *benefit of the doubt*? Hold on, Henkie, hold on!’

When my private detective and crime fighter stepped in, Johanna left. Through all commotion, I did not realize what this
actually meant. Edwin put his money where his mouth was, luckily for me; without annoyingly fudging, as politicians and policy makers tend to do, he told me he had approached that first artist who'd painted Julia in imitation of Lucian Freud. This way, he hoped to gain insight into Julia's eccentric Rotterdam art world, where she was working on the next Saturday night project performance, a project which now was identified by critics, as the *The full-blown Artist project*. In short: her star rose.

We left the pub and hopped into his Q7 diesel with its childish, tinted window frames. ‘Do you want a Valium as well?’ he asked, as if clairvoyant. ‘Your daughter is a smart girl, but is a bit mad and impetuous. She wants to receive your hard-earned money through this artist friend of hers and remain out of the picture, you see. I’m not sure whether it’s a marketing gimmick, attention seeking, or whether she is actually frightened, after the burglary that took place. What do you think?’

‘I do not know, Edwinus!’ I replied, confused. ‘Even I am speechless at this point in time!’

‘We are going to install sound equipment in his brush holder or his easel, his tripod... well, somewhere in his house, anyways. The money box has a built-in signal. You’re coming along just to distract him, Henk. Can you do that; can you keep it up? If you want to stop, this is the moment! You seem pretty tipsy and quite nervous, if I may be so bold as to notice.’

Did he not mean overly excited and near a nervous breakdown?

‘Sure! It is intended that...’ I muttered awkwardly, ‘or, after that... well... No, no, we’ll go through with it!’

My attempt to remain decisive failed miserably. For the first time in my life, doubt prevailed. It could not get any crazier - a bit longer and I will subscribe to The Guardian instead of The Financial Times!
Well, I just miss my pills, I thought, searching my breast pocket for nothing. What would Julia do if she found out I'd tried to follow her? I wanted her at the start of the medical study, but only in one piece and under good terms! She had been drawn. The admission letter I had placed in the suitcase on top of the fragrant-smelling cash, hoping this would finally persuade her. I considered adding a congratulatory card into the suitcase after all. Johanna thought it was a good idea, but unfortunately, I did not have enough time... Although?

‘Hold on. Let’s buy a postcard, first. Look, over there!’
‘A what? We are almost at the place; it is around the corner...’
‘In that night shop, a congratulatory card! I want to put this in the money suitcase. This is important, it takes a snap! Stop this car asap!’
‘Let’s not waste a second...’
‘Do you think she’s in danger?’
‘We assume the positive; we conveniently take it that your daughter has everything under control, despite those strange guys she hangs out with and the excesses of art she creates. But is that realistic? What do you think?’

He spoke just like a detective: confronting a person with danger through manipulative language. My little girl and having everything under control were obviously contradictions. Too bad the ‘NoTunnelvision’ software proved to be too limited to detect these kind of nuances. I must soon mail Professor van Splunteren, it occurred to me pointlessly, when we startled dodged a brightly painted van loaded with oil paint of decent quality. Karel Appel-like work?
‘Nicely done!’ I cried spontaneously.
‘Thank you.’
‘Huh, what do you mean?’ I asked as he parked in front of an old rundown building, where we got out and walked under the arch, passing a soberly illuminated wall into the courtyard. It was
unclear where the door was situated. A light illuminated and clapped, wheezing, as an exfoliated side door opened and a remarkable man with messy dark gray tufts of bristles, crisscrossed confused sideburns, and wildly overgrown brushy eyebrows walked, slouching, toward us.

‘This is the so-called money br... briefcase?’ he asked.

Typical of an artist: unworldly.

‘Yes, this is the case,’ said Edwin, professionally accommodating with a ridiculous immediacy. ‘When will Julia receive it?’

‘I d... do not k... know.’

‘Mr. Artist does not know?’

‘Please say... Q... Quinten. 'Mr.' sou... sounds so official, ‘he stuttered. ‘Shall I introduce m... myself?’

‘How can we be confident that Julia gets it? When are you gonna give it to her?’ Edwin repeatedly asked.

‘She explained it to me. It regulates itself.’

‘Okay, then. Take care of it as if it were your child,’ I deliberately stated, raising my voice (you have to let them know who’s the boss).

Dazed, he stared at us, muttering incoherently: ‘Uhm... I’m working on a new painting, uhm, well... it is a... a piece of work about m... modernism...’

‘It contains a combination lock. Julia may call her father and the secret code will be revealed,’ Edwin told him bluntly. We had not discussed this! Apparently he thought it was fair. Well, crime fighters do what they have to, in their own way. Is it not wonderful? I let it go and just smiled at both of them.

‘Sure,’ Quinten muttered without enthusiasm, and picked up the suitcase as if it were an old dish towel, something utterly unimportant. ‘My painting is covered. Will you guys drink mint tea or something else? I can serve delicious cookies from M... Macedonia.’ Dumbfounded, we turned down his offer and left his
messy house, which smelled of dried oil and cedar, to return home without too much confidence in any good outcome.

The iron cage contains thick, shiny bars of silver hue and continues moving on its wheels, climbing the stage of the nightclub, pushed by powerhouses in Roman costume, where my girl, sensually dancing and barely dressed, boosts her act under sounds of sinister music, as a sharp knife heated by an artist with brush-gray eyelashes, his face made-up as the Joker, carves her body a graceful tattoo kind of art... and ever bloodier. Behind the cage my eye, despite everything that happened between iron bars with Julia, caught a glimpse of a huge painting about cosmopolitanism: modern gardens of paradise colors and beautiful parrots, and although intuitively attracted by this spectacle, I realize damn well how I use this admiration as diversion, to look away and figuratively ignore her performance.

When I was gasping for breath, upright, I noticed that the deck bed had turned wrinkled and wet. I think I had panicked and chanted her name when I woke up, startled, clasping the blankets like a child after a nightmare. A volatile, restless shower did nothing to bring me to my senses. And so I got dressed and raced into the Maserati, to the artist with that beautiful name, to his dilapidated house; sprinted down the courtyard as if it were yesterday, under the arch, and stepped into the same exfoliated side door. The artist stood behind his tripod easel, his back and paintbrush concentrating on moving towards that painting that was meters high (I estimated it at three and a half), in a bizarre form of composition and coloring; modernity with terrifying clarity. It reminded me of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, but with a contemporary, liberal version.

The canvas, although clearly unfinished, looked impressive and dizzying. He turned half to the left and put his paintbrush
into the wild palette with a curved posture, carefully mixing the selected colors until he suddenly noticed something in the corner of his eye and spun around. His neck muscles pulled tight. Life-sized eyes of pure panic stared at me while his paintbrush fell. He reached for his knife, which lay beside the multicolored palette, wobbling on the table of chestnut wood, and leaned forward. His sharp knife pointed, threatening, into the open air - how quickly he had found his perilous object. As he stormed at me with a furious look, I knew, in a reflex of self-preservation, what to undertake. Do NOT run away, Henk - it is too late! I closed my eyes as a sign that I understood clearly and said quickly: ‘I have not seen anything! If I saw something by accident, I’ve already forgotten. PLEASE COVER YOUR PAINTING!’

It remained silent.

Painstakingly, I kept my eyes closed. I heard shuffling, foot by foot; felt the icy knife point, stabbing, into my scruff. A drop of sweat beaded on my forehead and moved downwards past my nose and into my mouth. I tasted bodily salt. In my mind, I saw his razor-sharp blade emerge and dangerously slide down my cheekbones. ‘You can open them,’ he said after a few seconds - seconds that I had experienced as hours.

‘I must find Julia,’ I stammered.

He read the seriousness from my sweaty face.
‘Sorry... Uhm... the case is picked up,’ he stated.
‘By Julia?’

‘One of her friends, I believe...’ His gaze wandered, making sure his artwork was completely shielded by the bulky curtain. ‘A str... streetfighter, probably Moroccan - or he could be T... Turkish... he seemed like a gentle fellow.’

A whistling filled the open space which was full of sinister cloths and carpets, paintbrushes, and strings with colorful curtains askew, half overlapping on the floor in entwined layers. It rang first as a note from an organ in a cold church, or so it
sounded to my attentive senses. I opened the message and read Julia’s downright blunt question. She wanted to know the code, and needed it: right now. I had to think deeply... all-important knowledge comes to you when need is the greatest. Well, this was such a time. Only, I did not know what to do! In a counter message, I gave a quick answer, stating I would send the code, alright; but only after she proved she was safe and sound. I asked her to send a movie as concluding evidence.

‘Do you want fresh mint tea?’ Quinten asked.

Satisfied, I slipped my clever phone down into my pocket.

‘Yes, I do...’ I mumbled.

And so we drank the refreshing tea and waited impatiently, in utter tension. But for what? There was something on the lips of the artist - his mouth moved, but he did not dare speak up.

Eventually, he asked, softly, like a frightened mouse: ‘Eh... and w... what do you think of it?’

I stared at him dazed. ‘Oh, that, you mean? Well, I have glimpsed only a bit. It looks like a dazzling work of art; a kind of Babylonian Gardens Vertigo, only more modern. In short, I am interested in your painting.’

His face shone like a child. The happiness of an artist who gets sincere recognition and attention is so touching. It always moves me when that happens.

Suddenly, another of those beautiful whistles resounded through the artistic space. With trembling hands, I opened the brand-new text message. Was this a link to some kind of movie? Julia, put something online! Hurriedly, I clicked on it. My daughter stood, happier than ever, in front of a camera with irresistible mimicry as a consummate actress in a slick German advertisement for a refreshing shampoo! She said that her father and all the other people - her fans, the press, and so on, did not have to worry about her well-being. As befits a young girl, she leaped enthusiastically at the lens. Her lovely head disappeared from
view and her purple vest filled the screen of my phone until the feather-soft fabric was lifted upwards and we (Quinten peered over my shoulder) observed her tight tummy. Everything was intact! Thank God, there was no scar from that scratched bloody Magen Star! Haha: my girl had reassured everyone with a well-known, two-birds-with-one-stone message. Proud as a peacock, I clicked the film back into its storage folder. Now it was me who, happy as a beaming child, peered into Quinten's dog eyes, after which we naturally, reflexively, dropped into each other's arms as he comforted me with awkward ministered pats on the back.
Heart of Artist Ferdinand Didden Returned
Rotterdam newspaper, Jannie van Jole

An unknown group of artists returned the red beating heart, based on the casting by Ferdinand Didden, within the statue Jan Gat.

In 1977, artist Ferdinand Didden made a perfect-fitting heart for the famous war monument by Ossip Zadkine: ‘De Verwoeste Stad’ (The Ruined City).

After an anonymous tip, I manage to make an appointment with the spokesman of a radical group of artists; those who had defaced the famous monument.

A lanky man with sideburns and bushy eyebrows came to the meeting point. Bloody nervous he explained what they'd aimed at. They argued for a modern version of the historical sculpture; a variant in which the red beating heart functions as the center point for the bubbly city Rotterdam is today. Rotterdam has the gaping hole cultivated within Jan Gat; an absent and broken heart. It represents nostalgia and grief that will never heal.

‘We w… will d… demonstrate that it can be different,’ said their spokesman, stuttering and somewhat shy, apparently terrified of revealing his identity.
Top Priority

Jules Didden, son of the late artist Ferdinand, drove in its outdated van, a cross-painted style between Herman Brood and Karel Appel, over the cobblestones towards the World Museum: a bumpy ride. Behind him, paint markers clattered at the sides and rolled on the floor, full of rust. Jules Didden narrowly avoided the Ganesh statue on the terrace, cast in the form of a Japanese Zen garden with a Balinese temple house. For the rest of the week he had injected enough fumes: he breathed graffiti. Everything was covered in paint. Acrylics tickled down his crotch. The goal had been reached: he had painted the shipping magnate and the politician. Now he could work on the cast of his father, the heart he was rebuilding in a factor of fifty times larger, as a seaworthy object. It was far from complete, but after fourteen years, there was progress. The moment he opened the gate of his dilapidated building, Julia called her mother via the non-traceable internet.

‘How are you?’
‘Super!’
‘You sound happy?’
‘Yes! They have posted an article in the Times. I’m starting to make a name for myself... it’s so exciting!’
‘Great for you, dear.’
‘Lavinia is sympathetic. How is it over there?’
‘We are working on a new business model; it takes time, there's bureaucratic red tape. Within the next weeks we hope to begin the procedure. How’s your father? Can you handle him? Tell me honestly!’
‘I am hardly home... It’s okay.’
‘I’m worried about you, Julia. He did not go to the psychiatrist; he is not showing up! Persevere and, meanwhile, ignore him as much as you can! In a few weeks I will pay him a visit. Make sure you take good enough care, will you? You've got so much going on, with the upcoming exhibitions and all. Are you sure you do not want to make an appointment? It can be done safely, in secret! Do not hesitate or think it is weird. Are you going to do anything special tonight?’

‘No, not much. I have to go.’

‘Okay. Give Caesar a big kiss, dear,’ she said, while her latest girlfriend, Xuxa, walked naked through the living room with its tropical plants. Then Monique called Jeroen, who was still her brother-in-law.

At the same time, but on the other side of the Atlantic and just crow flies from Henk’s villa, a key fell apart from the thread for the umpteenth time. Damn, that key does not fit. *This should have been finished by now!* Tomorrow I will get some decent material from our department. Quitting halfway is not an option - no, it's an impossibility! The sound was hollow and sharp: cling, cling, cling... the key clattered through the engine and slammed onto the paving stones, where it remained, wobbling a few times, irritatingly ticking. Suddenly, a high beep ravaged his left ear. Goddamn! I will never make it! Why do they fabricate such inferior stuff? Everything just does not fit and breaks off! Do they sometimes deliberately wear out decent people; people who work hard for a living? Well, they succeeded, alright! Congratulations, then. *Cheap is expensive*, will be their motto. Products need to break down as soon as they leave their shop. And they are right, actually, I have to give them credit; only, their expensive stuff is also rubbish! Let’s skip dinner and finish this. Work always comes first.

The garage door opened with a creaking sound.
His fate asked him to come to dinner. The question was not compassionate or open.

'Come and eat, the children are waiting! If you do not come right now, you will have it on your conscience. You can rest assured that you’re again the one who ruined the atmosphere,' she screamed, outraged. ‘Always the same story! Think, for once, of another person, you egoist,' she complained bitterly. She kept on going for a long time. This, Cor Figee could not handle - not now, not anymore. Goddamn!

Brutally, he slammed the door in her evil, tormented and vengeful face. Teeth grinding, and with an ingrained sense of guilt towards his children (they sat at the table waiting in vain, that he did not understand this, that he did it all over again), he embarked on this decisive task. He exchanged his overalls for a three-piece suit with a briefcase after a fleeting shower and left his family home; but not before reproachfully blaming himself on how he had found no time to eat because of that pesky key; because of that inferior material. He bit his lip.

From the hallway across the room he heard the familiar nagging and screaming at the dining table.

What a madhouse! Why did I deserve this? It goes deep into my bones. This is unsustainable! Since the Russians have dinner independently, I can only pick them up at half past nine: otherwise it will never work! It might still be fine after all; it just requires preparation. This is no time to take it easy. There was nothing that he could think of to do, other than enduring her diatribe, ignoring the children and leaving them alone to their fate. After yet another malicious response by Cor Figee, there was the anticipated hysterical screaming, through bluster and abuse, during which she explained to the children, while they were eating, what a terrible father they had and how disrespectful and selfish he was. Then she suddenly entered a shrew-like cocoon of silence. But it failed: she did not hold out that long.
Her hands began to tremble - at first, only her fingers, followed by uncontrolled movements of her legs, her body ever more tense. She started again from scratch; only this time she loaded all frustration onto Daan, who looked exactly like his father. Something like that goes without saying. He wanted to rush in and rescue his children, but he hesitated to give her a thrashing and once and for all teach her a final lesson. He could bear it no longer and left his townhouse.

That was close! I must learn to control myself. With those tensions at the office, one has to be extra careful. Sometimes I’m not myself anymore! It’s vital not to do stupid things. My children cope: they are young and resilient. I, myself, also possessed this around their age, and it was not so economical, either! It’s all in the game: the fateful life of a ‘Rotterdammert’ citizen who has to work hard for a living; for the fillings on sandwiches eaten by his lovely family.

He started his car. Fortunately, the engine worked. Just in time to reach his goal: to save the business, once and for all.

If this failure leads to nothing, all will be lost. Some people seem to swallow pills for everything and nothing, just like that. It’s ridiculous; it costs us a fortune. A pill for nerves, another for depression, and what not. Yes, I could now use a pill, as well - maybe two or three, even. No, no, just put your shoulder under the wheel and let it rip. That, at least, goes without saying! We will get the signatures of those three Russian fur hats! If they do not notice my ticking eyelid or my trembling hands, it will be fine. That is when I would want to take a pill, but they do not have them in stock, do they? Those pharmacists realize perfectly well that if people get rid of their symptoms, they will not need to fill their daily box. No cash, no bonus! Better help everyone to get addicted to their medicine against nervous breakdowns. Or even worse: help children on Ritalin for diseases that do not exist, or sell party drugs similar to speed which are obtained at
the expense of the taxpayer - that chemical trash has no other purpose than that! Is it not true? This is how those fakes, that unscrupulous scum, sell their drugs! Will that light turn green, for once?! Hey! Unbelievable! Who designed this traffic light?! They should fix it! That technical design was originally thrown into the trash can. What stupid mess! Now I suppose the bridge will finally close. Yes, of course it does not! I will drive over it, in the Schie canal: goddamn!

In the lobby of the Breitner hotel, three Russians waited impatiently. Out of boredom, they bitterly complained about the lack of service. Had their account, that gray mouse guy Cor, picked this hotel just to stick it to them like some political joust? The Russian with the upturned nose of a schnauzer dog wanted to call the boss and complain about it, but he was restrained by his colleagues, as they were afraid of unforeseen problems from above, higher in the hierarchy. You never knew where you stood with those Dutch. They could focus on the most pitiful things and make them a matter of life - a matter of principle, they call it - suddenly, just when it suited them! Then they will approach your boss with the indignation of a naive adolescent! There was no way to understand or make sense of them. Sometimes you roared with laughter over their forced efforts to arrange daily life events within that tiny West European country: they wanted to settle and organize everything while actually believing they were preserving freedom. Give us Russians security, prosperity, and pride - then freedom comes naturally. We will not save the world anymore and keep it from Nazism; our sacrifice is now restricted to our expanding Soviet Empire. Let’s wait and see and at least have some fun during this visit into this insignificant country of the frog, where, purely coincidentally, the largest port in Europe is situated. Fatalism is in our blood and life is chaos, but it’s all good. Let us not arouse any suspicion and strictly follow orders: come
home with valuable information, without signing anything. Since none of the three Russians had authority to sign, this seemed a rather simple task.

Finally, the bridge closed. According to Henk, it was just a formality before the Russian deal was sealed with champagne. He had chosen Cor to take all credit simply because he liked him and because he wanted to reward him for his tireless efforts; purely as a token of appreciation. Cor Figee, however, by no means got the impression that the case was cut and dried or otherwise in the pocket. This discrepancy concerned him. This could cost me my job, maybe! A silly misunderstanding can grow into a fatal error in no time! Tonight, his goal was simple: get those Russians drunk and then let them talk easily; pull out all background information needed to finally close the deal. After consuming enough booze and experiencing our Rotterdam friendliness, which knows no time, they will surely bite. Then, Cor Figee would not hesitate anymore and would arrange the deal in every single detail, into a solid contract, followed by a festive reception in which his chief would add his signature. Photographs will be taken by the international press; everything would be prepared to utter perfection, by Annegreet. Especially now that the Russian Year was celebrated in the Netherlands, they could catch it and grab it by the balls, so to speak. Much attention will be paid, worldwide, for a prestigious project like this. This could quickly lead to new customers! The innovative company where he had been plodding with blood, sweat and tears for twenty-five years will surely flourish and prosper like never before. He dreamed, actually not too happily, when suddenly a tram turned the corner, making a squeaky sound and unhesitatingly deflecting into the Westersingel after almost hitting his twelve-year-old Opel Astra. My God, what unqualified and barely integrated immigrant drivers do they possess, these days? Get lost,
will you? Are they revolving criminals, forced to work through a rehabilitation project as they enjoy triple benefits? Without motivation, you cannot drive a tram - am I right, or am I right? Even my neighbor understands this, though she has a mental disability, low IQ, and additional handicaps. This incident nearly cost me my revamped car and our business! If this deal does not take place, we will all die! Things are not severe enough yet: stay calm... especially now. Do not do stupid things; trust the preparation and the exceptional cunning of your boss.

Had Mr. van Wijnen-Swarttouw organized these new tram-lines, they would glide smoothly through the city center without collisions and with a driver that had a high level of intelligence, a guy who at least enjoyed a decent education and motivation. Why? Because he'd made an effort, that’s why! They'd better withdraw that subsidy to gangs of totally unmotivated revolving criminals right now, instead of cutting down on subsidies for people with mental problems - people who cannot do anything, who cannot do without daily subsidized activities such as my neighbor, that girl Elenoor. These people need it because their handicap effectively keeps them from functioning in society; because they really are not mentally or physically able to contribute! Is something like this not called 'civilization': to defend the weak instead of those slackers?!

As Cor Figeer run out of breath, his Astra narrowly dodged a headscarf or three. They stumbled over each other’s robes and collapsed awkwardly. From under their tent, a bunch of extraordinarily huge bums appeared in sight, leaving Cor horrified!

Hurriedly, he braked squeakily, jumped out of his car, and nervously assured himself of the health of these charming ladies. That turned out better than expected: without any scratch. Intent was out of the question. The smelly steam from their mouths, however, was as unbearable as the sight of their unkempt appearance. He became nauseous and dizzy. Relieved and
irritated, he had no time for calling ambulances: he hoisted them up one by one and then excused himself, after which he continued his chaotic route. No second to lose! Where is that Breitner hotel? Finally, with sweaty palms, he ran from the car and dashed through the revolving door - lateness was clearly wrong-doing; that should never happen! No three Russians were in sight. Where are my guests holed up in this lobby?

Beaten, he stumbled back to his twelve-year-old Astra, which still spluttered like a charm. Ignorance and guilt was his deserved share. Just when he'd disappointedly sunk down behind the steering wheel, depressed, then, slicing and shoving, the three fur hats jumped jovially onto his hood, babbling and sharing a bottle of vodka; invitingly holding her in the thin, rather cold air.

‘Strange guys, those Russians,’ muttered Cor Figee, perplexed. Okay, then, we’ll make the best of it.

He smiled like a farmer with toothache, but soon a spontaneous and generous smile appeared on his normally seriously frowning, deeply incised wrinkles, caused by mental exertions he had to sustain. If no one does it, where are you, then?

The Russians were in a good mood tonight: this quarter actually threatened to fall onto the right side, for once.
Decision Making

The following days went by smoothly. Julia had reassured me, and so I was able concentrate on identifying those devilish burglars. As I relaxed, I felt a renewed sense of pleasure in life, but the answer to that question was not of any interest to me - that crazy chicken-and-egg question, causes as effects, and consequences appearing to be causes... whatever, folks. I allowed myself no time for those philosophical questions, which, as we all know, are insoluble. And so I poured the divine wine, l’ecology Vin Blanc du Waldemar van Splunteren, to get into the mood for a meeting with my personal private detective. The professor had another passion; I received it neatly in a wooden box with straw. Apparently, he saw me as an entrepreneur in a harbor where security was top priority, operating in sectors ever-cluttered; thereby, I should be an excellent early adopter of his software tool. He asked for no reciprocate action and the wine tasted excellent, exhaled and all; so why not?

I looked at all potential perpetrators with Edwin. First, Anne-greet; then some other fellows, like that insightful accountant Cor Figee, the so-called boyfriend of Julia, this El Bachir guy, Willem… then Johanna, and finally: Julia! Edwin insisted on this. I personally felt it was a horrible situation, but I rejoiced, since in this way I was able to get a better idea of her comings and goings. Make no mistake, I said to myself after admonishing in a skeptical voice that terrorized my skull with innuendo: Edwin is a professional with clear and specific goals: one who wants nothing more than to find the perpetrator and collect his bonus, Henk. Reluctantly, I showed him my log. He had left me no choice but to trust
him. Granted, his motive was to make money; but not only that: honor and doing well, catching burglars and criminals - he lived for those purposes, as well. He wanted to clean our harbor from the rig, so that it remained viable. In short, it was a win-win situation, to make money with a brilliant goal like this. This boy was just doing a good job! And so I told Edwin confidentially about my performance in the Deltahotel.

Well, to make a long story shorter: way after midnight, the bone-dry wine with its complex aftertaste virtually emptied, I intuitively understood that we had to mark that eastern European businessman and his female actress as main suspects.

With exaggerated interest, he listened to my imaginative story. Occasionally he interrupted to ask what I knew of them; what foreign clothes they wore. Then, quite honestly, the truth slipped out: this actress indeed looks exactly like Julia - yes, practically a double; a twin!

'And her partner is clearly of Eastern European descent,' I stated honestly.

From one subject to another, we ended up discussing that controversial political issue, multicultural Rotterdam. And so we talked about the city and about the problems that plagued us for more than a decade. Edwin - who would have thought this - turned out to have studied sociology at the Erasmus University and, years later, had made a decisive change from the political left (for convenience, I use the left to right dimension which, as we all know, is way too one-sided) to the populist, conservative right angle! For a sociologist to make a move like that is downright dangerous; therefore Henk van Wijnen-Swarttouw will not say anything frivolous about it! They can claim that I'm too critical, but in Rotterdam the only remaining solution is integration without forced assimilation. In short, realistic cosmopolitanism; not such utopian variant as outlined in that post-Babylonian painting by Quinten, but obviously also not those popular ad hoc solu-
tions of Aunt Jo and folks like Edwin, for that matter! It was high time to cut through some tricky knots.

Edwin was a professional. I could count on him as a specialist in security, but I could not trust him personally, anymore. There remained two options: continue professionally, or completely break up. I used my charm to kindly show him the door and took a nightcap or three of Nolet, Ketel One.

The following week rumbled by. The day after this dramatically experienced midnight drink, only Johanna remained a safe haven; only her would I trust at this decisive moment in life. As if in a daze, purely on routine, I worked on, when a further setback occurred: that project with the Russians was not even a done deal yet! I wanted to put my signature on it, but according to Annegreet, that account manager, Cor Figee - he to whom I so generously provided this score - seemed to miss the open target! You give them the opportunity and they mess it up before your very eyes. I'd rightfully expected him to catch this golden ball in the air with both hands. Well, it will not be long, I hoped. For now I depended on the professor's 'noTunnelvision' software, while Edwin kept our agreement and sent some new clues. My possessions, he stated (my safe appeared ransacked in that burglary night as well), would possibly be identified and located in Amsterdam, of all places! He urged me to take a look, meeting his friends. I could hardly believe my very own ears, but he claimed to have friends in zero-twenty (Amsterdam)!

Purely as precaution, I took the train in undercover mode and inconspicuously situated myself in a second-class compartment; that place where you are one among the populace, say, just for convenience. Nevertheless, I experienced this as pleasant. Some *not-at-all-unattractive* student read her textbook, looking rather bored, while her boyfriend sat still, sillily playing some game on
his tablet. She had little regard for the guy. An ideal time to start a conversation occurred, and so time flew by; before I realized it, we'd arrived at that dismal endpoint: Amsterdam Central Station.

The journalist in question I could meet at a book launch, at the debut party of an elderly author dressed in a peculiar light blue suit. He's a guy who loves drawing pop art strips called 'graphic novels' spilled with literary texts about his miserable life in this corrupt and above all forever lost 'city'. They are mostly about sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll, including all profound misery that thereby inevitably comes into being. I knew this so-called friend of Edwin, I knew this journalist’s name. He was the kind who rumbled through walls - some kind of Panorama Type; a friend of both gold-digging girlfriends of pilots, members of the Hells Angels, a friend of famous people as well as the African underworld. In short, I was all alone and in real danger. And so, an exciting passtime of curiosity – playing detective – shot over my spine when the train stopped at the platform. Just then, my phone rang: Wesseling! Not exactly the most convenient time! I turned around and sought the best place in the area to talk as quietly as possible. That lasted about an hour or two - maybe three or more. He had a story to tell about a nurse; a lovely girl. I had to come quickly and have a good look! Haha, leave Uncle Wesseling alone with his excitement, I thought as I searched for the blue sign for the taxis. The front one in the line let me off at the pub called 'The New Maria'.

To my surprise, outside, in front of the doorway, a group of visitors stood shivering while inside, at the semi-circular bar, a young writer was shining like a madman. He was actually beaming with suppressed pride, pleased with his newly won literary prize, though he seemed to be wary of rivals and on guard for unex-
pected attacks. Next to him, his brother, neatly dressed in a silk suit and a brownish sweater, was groomed as a man from the wrong hand. This occurred to me at the time the host in his bright blue suit jiggled until they kissed each other intimately, as Russians tend to do so freely. Cor Figee had to see this: here, he could still learn something! I ordered a Pilgrim beer which, to my surprise, they did not possess; these overblown suckers in zero-twenty. Where could I find the journalist in question, the man with the all-decisive clue? My second outfit matched the others perfectly, so I squeezed myself between the shabby, black, gray-clad crowd, among the bottles of beer-drinking writers, cartoonists, and other artistic paupers, into the back of this dark cafe, where I accidentally stopped at one group when a flashlight blinded me. A picture that I rediscovered the next day, printed in the newspaper The Parool, showed the journalist in question in a close embrace with the leader of the counterpart of the Hells Angels. Unfortunately, I did not manage to stay out of the photo. Slyly, I followed the photographer and waited until he had left before I got off on that journalistic tyrant. You never know over here! On a whim, I decided to imitate (as well I as could) our artist with that brilliant name of Quinten; a name that reminded me of the novel 'The Discovery of Heaven' by Harry Mulish. It was one of the few novels I’ve read, but only because I was lying in a sickbed without further opportunities to do anything else, really - in Trondheim, of all places. This happened to be the only Dutch book in the vicinity!

‘You have a lead on... uhm... Edwin?’

‘Henk, is it!? First, get us two beers...’

'Haha, I'll do it myself!'

Dumbfounded, he studied my azure blue eyes, burst out laughing, and, to my relief, grabbed a mentally young girl with blossoming cheeks. He demanded her to pick up a few bottles.
‘Edwin is a member of our secret, underground club. He said you’re one of us.’

‘Uhm... uhm... yeah, I s... sure am one of you, Arthur. But without a membership. What have you got?’ I asked, tenaciously imitating Quinten's unforced rhythms. It gave me the guidance and direction to behave inconspicuously.

‘No one seems to know. We will cover your business.’

‘The latter is not necessary, but I’ll take it into consideration. What are you guys inquiring about?’

‘Bulgarians or Romanians. Presumably they fled our country, by now. They usually pull out straight away.’

Dumbfounded, I stared into his not-so-innocent eyes, pondering his drunk suggestion. ‘Oh... well, someone must have helped them. Someone must have known what was in my safe. The money is numbered. Amateur burglars are not that clever, are they, now?’

‘How much?’

‘I cannot tell you.’

Arthur’s pupils grew rapidly into the size of tennis balls. I suspected he was hiding something. Did he want to know everything about me because I was such a successful but discredited entrepreneur; one that had a safe with content which he and his mates could join to their advantage? When I repeated his question in my mind, it occurred to me that he had asked it casually and unobtrusively - somewhat disinterestedly, even. In short, I had to stay on guard and not let the half-hearted beer get the best of me! Some helpful lead of Edwin! Meanwhile, the mentally young blonde was holding her cheek near Arthur, vividly close to his face: not the most pleasant location imaginable! With a firm grip, he violently suppressed her. Did she smile, flushed with annoyance, embarrassment or some kind of excitement? That poor child!

‘Cannot, or will not tell you?’ he squeaked.
His words contained a particular threat, although it was with his rather ridiculous tone of voice, much like that eccentric singer, what’s his name, of *let there be rock*.

‘Henkie is a real director.’ Arthur squeaked as hard as possible to stay understandable, because some fool felt the need to scream into the microphone in a sort of Fado imitation using a self-designed language. Annoyed, I turned towards the bar only to spot that graphic-novel author in smurf suit surrounded by bagpipe blowers!

Anyway, the problem of taking action, of non-decisiveness, and of not being able to trust the police now loomed large right in front of me, grinning with dark skin and tattooed upper arms, firm shoulders, and ditto neck muscles. Around his forehead was a terrifying skull bandage! His scruffy hair was kept together as if it were a trophy on a scalp. Did this gay outfit fighter deride me on the spot!?

‘So, Mr. Director is being ambushed by some Eastern European gang and needs us, now!’

‘He will not tell us what to look for. That is not a lot of information!’ Arthur noted with satanic pleasure.

‘No, that will not do,’ the big man snorted. He hit my shoulder and squeezed; and so my neck naturally bent while Arthur rolled his knuckles over my almost-bald head, roaring and tipping his beer against mine. The precious liquid splashed around.

‘Tell us what you are looking for and we will help our brother in his noble struggle against injustice,’ squeaked Arthur.

‘A codebook... a kind of notepad, it is! There are figures and an awkward set of numbers inside. It's all lined with dark red leather and features a golden lock!”

‘Look! You see? Henkie the director can talk after all! Where are the figures meant for; what do they mean?’

‘I assign codes to each painting, like the ones that once so beautifully hung in our villa. It’s an unbreakable system.’ I lied
just to be sure, because the codes consisted of a highly personal security system rewired by myself using, as a key point, a calculation that could be found on my laptop, based on an unbreakable date-time algorithm multiplied by the number pi.

‘So it will be of no use to us alone?’ the checkered gang leader asked suspiciously. I could hear the utter disappointment in his surprisingly gentle voice; a tone that betrayed that there was a sweet boy deep, deep down inside him, safely hidden from the ruthless outside world we all live in.

‘Not without my laptop,’ I replied. Sometimes it’s better to be honest and build trust in order to get more information.

‘We will look for you,’ he said, and hit me with a flat hand. I lost my balance. Arthur shrugged.

‘Look, Henkie, we now have something to work with! You have friends that will help you. First, get us a few beers!’

In order not to arouse suspicion, strictly for tactical reasons, I ordered a few bottles, shared them, excused myself, wrestled further into the café's narrow space, and put a foot on an aluminium fire escape. A jazz band played downstairs. Arthur ran after me, grabbed me halfway through, and squeaked: ‘Wait: how did they crack that safe? Tell me!’

I gripped the railing and my fear of heights got the best of me, so I turned half around and leaned dizzily downward into the depth. ‘Edwin will send you all relevant information,’ I said curtly.

Haha; this was entertaining, all right.

‘So they cracked the code?’

‘No, no, that’s just odd! We are puzzled! The perpetrators must have known the combination; it cannot be explained otherwise!’

‘Oh,’ he said, puzzled, and ran upstairs, back to that poor blonde girl with eyelash extensions.
Downstairs, I leaned against the rickety edge and moved involuntarily - it happened automatically and unconsciously - against an elderly lady; the kind who once, in a not too distant past, must have been handsome in appearance. Approximately the same type as Johanna, but from the Amsterdam art world.

She has become penniless, no doubt, unless she robbed a bank or two in the meantime, or maybe married a philanthropic patron or a wealthy shipping magnate! Only a few lucky ones can make it. Her clothes looked as shabby as faded glory.

Well, I started a confidential conversation that, since she was possessed of cartoon characters, resulted in a literary reading of this comic book from our sky-blue debutant. An erotic passage with pop art-style comics caught my embarrassed attention. It reminded me of a scene in the Deltahotel, room 33. Wait; was there some clue hidden in this comic, maybe? Is this why Edwin had sent me to this Godforsaken ‘city’?

It seemed to me that this was far-fetched; so, for a time, I put the idea behind me – put it on ice, so to say – and talked about the creation of drawings. That was a bit more complicated than I’d suspected, involving preparations of a kind of storyboard sketch in which text was aesthetically blended with illustrations. She worked as graphic designer integrator in the process, something with a special name, the exact phrase of which I had forgotten by the time I consumed my fifth beer. What came back was the idea and intuition that this comic was hiding an important clue or two. I became convinced of this more and more, the longer we talked.

‘These are beautiful, you see?’ she asked, pointing out some designed specimens: pop-art drawings that did something to my state of mind. They acted much like the impact of a disabled man in a wheelchair, his outstretched hand glaring, ready to disappear between the legs of that bent lady of the night, with her lacy suspenders, while she herself blew him a kiss in the air.
through thick lipstick, half turned and looking, challenged, backwards, causing revulsion mixed with lust to engulf me in a fraction of a second. It was as if the aversion intensified lust, just because you did not want it or through contradictions of some kind, conveying the impression of rawness, as well.

‘So proud of it,’ she sighed.

‘And rightly so!’ I called out sincerely. ‘You’ve put it wonderfully in this composition. Can I buy a copy? Are there still some in stock?’

‘It’s been busier than expected. I will look for you,’ she said, and disappeared into the dancing crowd to get back to me with a signed sample. It was an offer I could not refuse. After consuming another beer, I saw that a cloth coat of faux fur (or was that wishful thinking?) came to pick her up. Not much later, I followed their wise example and waddled, old-fashionably awkward, outside, as well. There was no taxi, so I started walking through the icy streets of zero-twenty in the direction of Central Station, drunk, abandoned, and pacing along the chilly water between houseboats in back. A wider street, then a narrow alley - a taxi that stops, questioning, available, and babbling and half guilty, taking my chances, I gave him the instructions. The window was half open as we passed the canal houses and ancient streetlamps, bicycles and locks, bridges with cast iron, and traffic lights to arrive at a dark, depraved square with a diagonal church around the corner to the right. I gave a big tip and wandered through the street with its rustic red lighting and smart shops with colorful stuff for smoking dope, snorting and swallowing. At the shop where English bachelor gifts are displayed, at the corner, I rang and went immediately upstairs, accompanied by Jerommeke, sinking into a widely plush sofa where, next to me, to my amazement, sat not only a few single men staring intently, but in the other corner even that famous singer who sulky glazed at the lady so artfully hanging onto the shiny golden
dance pole, legs wide open and beating in the air, dangling, her head, wavy hair spilling down like a great work of Mother Nature. The young lady, swinging, strong and supple, with artistically challenging, red curly hair and a fine-mesh holey sweater with nothing underneath, was as cocky and attractive as in ‘The devil’s advocate’. And just as irresistible!

Suddenly she sat next to me, one leg crossed over mine, half on my lap. Frank looked at me with malice! Was he jealous?

I smiled in satisfaction and rubbed her back, and her equanimity stretched up her neck. Her curly scruffy hair felt feather-soft. Cautiously, I lifted a strand, dropped it into the neon light, and saw, chatting among some bright orange haze, a lady with the bartender. I put my head on her divine neck and gently touched her nipples calmly, two fingers around them, but suddenly squeezed rather hard. Tense, I asked her the question.

‘If I do it myself, in two minutes,’ she answered.

Meanwhile, she kept a suspicious eye on Frank. According to her, he was a balky Turk with a wig on, so I gazed at him once more, half blinded by the bright neon light. No, no - this really was the late Frank Sinatra! Shortly after that, I must have left this unsavory affair. Glowing, I strolled along the historic canal houses until I reached a roundabout where I ordered a megalomaniac huge taxi (that miserable train I skipped; once is enough, folks) to get me back to the real city - Rotterdam - as soon as possible.
The limousine turned, rounding Hofplein into Coolsingel as the famous fountain gushed its firefighting water high into the air, lit by ocher yellow lights. Henk, to his amazement, recognized the three fur sparrows and that serious guy Cor Fige in between: a sturdy, continuous moving along the Gabo tree, also called the Needle Stop, or, by others, The Tennis Racket. A few Rotterdammers spoke of it as The Thing, or Stylized Flower.

Henk instructed the driver to open the window right next to the artwork. ‘Is it all in the pocket by now, do you have it under control, Cor? Don’t let those Russians make a mountain out of a molehill... they will only be too happy to do so. A national hobby, that’s it! Haha. Go for it - we want that signature!’

Before Cor Fige could formulate his answer, the grotesquely elongated taxi vanished into the dizzying night.

A few slow inhalations of soft, fresh air filled his lungs with proud content. The oxygen caused miracles. Just keep on working hard: that will surely save a considerable sip on a drink or two! This account was for him. It was a matter of scoring the simplest goal. The three guests with fur hats were fishing for the meaning behind Van Wijnen-Swarttouw's emotionally, outspoken Dutch words, but Cor Fige babbled softly and normally as ever, shrugging off their questions, reassuring, yet resolute. *Let these guys stay curious, but if they really want to know what is going on, let them guess. I have others things in store - something that will embellish them all.*

The Vodka bottle emptied, they demanded a new one. Cor Fige could not escape this demand, though he thought it wasn’t fair to his Fate. He doubted: go to that old-fashioned cozy pub
of Aunt Jo's or to a modern nightclub. *Those Russians wanted Modern, no doubt; and besides, I would rather not confront Aunt Jo with this patronage.* There was nothing else to choose from than going to the White’s: an affair with chic decor and sky-rocketing prices. If the Russian fur hats ordered champagne, they would cause unnecessary expense! Nevertheless, there seemed no alternative available.

As they stepped inside, the worn jackets hanging in the wardrobe by some swollen Jerommeke the Second, Cor Figee related, as gently as possible, the unpleasant news. He spoke as madman about the taxpayers and raids by Special Forces - raids held against declaring this world-wide standard expenses post. That word - roundup - did it: they meekly went for their bulging wallets, at least, the smallest of the three appeared to be holding their cash. Well, that was solved. Once inside, it took just two and a half striptease shows and some additional Vodka until they finally forgot about which party had paid. The three Russians relaxed and enjoyed the surroundings, so Cor Figee left, reassured, to take a break and took his place at another bar, right next to a tall girl in a bikini who looked to be in her twenties. He hated these shady places; but yes, it was inevitable: someone had to sacrifice himself for the good cause! He was just doing his job, as he should. Henk himself was too busy: that made sense. This naked girl, dressed in a micro bikini, introduced herself nicely: Lavinia. Funny, there was something posh about her, though unfortunately they were sitting in this tawdry glittery place, a place where coziness reached a new dramatic dimension: its lowest point. What else could he begin, then to order a drink for her, as benefits a gentleman? The danceable music was too loud, but he actually managed to make himself understood, clutching his arm, forcing it over her shoulder, and talking close into her lovely ear, by which he mistakenly sniffed her subtle perfume which tickled his nostrils and way lower. Her glittering,
icy earrings touched his cheek. The spell set, they talked for hours and hours until the morning sun rose over the stately mansions. Cor Figeé explained his troubles at home and his stress at work, and she told him about Transylvania and her life as a child in her native city of Cluj-Napoca. Since Cor Figeé was not aware of the legend of Dracula, she told him its deeper meaning; the original version of that renowned story.

The next day he walked in right on time and with a sleep-deprived visage (the expression with which he had displayed for so long), through the red/white ribbon-deposited tunnel where they still had not even glossed over that figure in graffiti of his boss, so disrespectfully portrayed as slave driver magistrate. Despite his hangover, he complained about it to a passing lady of apparently foreign origin. Her light brown skin and black curly hair, which shone beautifully, provided him a brief moment in the clouds. Was it a kind of aftermath; a déjà vu after last night?

She understood very little of his incoherent words, nodded kindly and in a friendly manner, but clearly had her own thoughts as she hurriedly got onto the subway wagon. Her clients would panic if she did not arrive on time. The squeaky door opened; this time to get out. She immediately ran to the escalator and sprinted into the Binnenweg. There was nobody at the door of the daycare workshop for disabled. Would they single-handedly go into the city? This thought haunted her until the van with her clients arrived. Fatima sighed deepely. Elenoor was the first to get out, and yelled to three passing coloreds: ‘Hello, black Petes!’

Elenoor’s imitation was fueled by the public debate, the issues in the daily news. This blew the story into unprecedented proportions. A few of the mentally limited group laughed, but the rest seemed not to bother about her rather rude remark. One of the elderly sat in a rickety wheelchair, balding, with semi-
transparent orange tufts of hair, so obviously chuckling in embarrassment with her hand over her mouth, that it was cute and pathetic - innocent in all its sincerity. The middle-aged man, the only one with Down’s syndrome, did not understand the consternation and was surprised, looking for support or some kind of explanation. Elenoor could not cope with the overflowing news and the items that she did not fully understand, so she expressed such remarks at the clumsiest moments! Fatima could not blame her - of course not; her training had focused on resisting spontaneous insults, a bit similar to Tourette's syndrome, although it was a completely different set of disorders.

Where someone with an IQ of over seventy and without other limitations would think several times before expressing such painful convictions, her clients (and especially Elenoor) spontaneously, even guided with a generous smile, stated them just like that; all accompanied with some twitching, from which you could clearly understand (though, to a good listener, this was perfectly innocent). If offended people fetched the story's outline, it was all resolved quickly. Deep-seated hatred or anger, fueled by fear of the unknown, was not the case. Moreover, it was mostly from ignorance. They responded, according to Fatima, their supervisor, in a too-direct way sometimes, but always touchingly naïve - yes; always disarming. Interest and understanding of others and for the weak in society was in Fatima’s blood, locked into her character. Her brother was reflective: he was better at numbers and physical action. El Bachir agreed on this. It had never caused a sibling quarrel. Mother was proud of both children.

Yet, Fatima wished that her brother was there to protect her when, just before coffee break, two boys stormed into their workshop. She recognized the slang, their tight shaven heads, and their brutality. The younger of the two began to scold. ‘T had spotted her without a headscarf and with bare arms, work-
ing with a bunch of lunatics: that’s reason enough, alright. The other boy jumped over the counter, where he landed beside Elenoor and shouted: ‘Open up, idiot!’

Elenoor pressed both hands firmly against her ears as she squeezed her eyes shut. Her upper body began to shake unpredictably. Was she getting an epileptic seizure?

While the oldest boy guarded the door and laughed himself silly, the youngest behaved even more maliciously, now. When Fatima stormed right at him, only then did she see the razor-sharp ten centimeters’ dagger! Today she was the sole caregiver; a blessing in disguise. Such a dagger she knew only too well. The sense of responsibility and the fear that Elenoor might end up with a psychosis - how could she explain this to these overgrown toddlers?! Those stupid boys, in a haze of madness, are barely sane; but not because they have a congenital abnormality of their brain structure caused by lack of oxygen at birth. No, this is due to the bad influence of peers and their subculture.

This thought made Fatima sad. Naturally, she put a protective comforting arm around Elenoor, opened the drawer, and let that almost-already-lost-forever boy grab all contents of the register, all the cash on hand; but failed to mention that most of the money was hidden in the back. The boy brutally snatched the small cash, mostly coins, from the trays. In doing so, he gave Elenoor a shove so that Fatima, who had jumped between them in order to protect Elenoor from falling, hit her back against the edge of the counter.

A severe pain shot through her spine. Then, more, since she was hurt, this made the boy feel empowered and he scolded Fatima for the bang of paras who had to move out from their city; out of their Rotterdam. While one boy threatened her with the knife, the other spit at her - the phlegm flew tightly over the counter right into her face and long black hair. They ran, rhythmically singing, to the front door, the cash held high as a trophy.
Trembling with rage, Fatima closed the door behind them, swept the filthy slime off her cheeks, and took the dirty fluid from her beautiful, black shiny lure, turning to the hushed group of mentally limited people and observing their clenched hands, trembling, and the terror in their eyes. Kristin rocked her torso in the wheelchair and repeated a strange noise. Bertus, the man with Down's syndrome, locked himself in the toilet. Hours later, he opened the door - luckily, just before the fire brigade had to break in for the rescue.

'This will not easily be negated or forgotten,' Fatima whispered to the news reporter Eddy Hofs, who came by on his moped for an interview.

_This goal justifies all means_, thought Edwin. He caught the conversation and sharpened his crime fighting ears: a woman working with disabled people had been robbed on the Binnenweg; their workplace ransacked by two boys with a sharp knife! He heard how Fatima had apologized politely for the ethnic background of the robbers. After a critical observation, she explained that she herself was also a born and raised Dutch-Moroccan. This information about their background simply seemed relevant to her for finding the perpetrators. Things stayed quiet for a moment. Then Edwin jumped and clapped, bowed deeply, and nodded respectfully. Mollified, he put out his scanner. Yes, he was moved; our fighter against injustice. Her sweet voice, full of passion for the disabled, stirred hidden tears in his armored heart. Police investigating these cases were often not conclusive: a fatal mistake! The education of boys like this was totally sub-standard! They received a cup of coffee at the police station, after which they were sent home with a stiff warning, or worse, were patronized and pampered like victims. At most, they sent a psychologist to their families, an unenviable lady or gentleman with the best intentions, who defiantly had to experience how
every effort was in vain. Edwin sent this vital information to his special group of helpers - watchers of which he was the moral leader - Rotterdammers born and raised with their hearts at the right place; righteous men who lent a helping hand to clean up the rig. We must do it ourselves, before those boys are recruited for fighting in the Middle East. Then, tried and tested, they will come back as guerrilla fighters: it will be too late! Yes, by then they will be really dangerous. We could use more Polish guys; they’re terrified of them. But hey, they just want their sandwich fillings; we blame our eastern European colleagues for nothing. We already have more than enough of those men from Poland in the house, nonetheless. We can solve this better, ourselves.
No Small Talk, Polish!

After having slept my day away, I lay in bed, pulled the comic book from the nightstand, changed my mind, and cried out in a monotone robotic voice: ‘Telly on, please, sir’. This technical improvement did not fully crystallize: nothing happened. I could hardly wait, after speaking all the information collected into that NoTunnelvision tool from our professor of ethics, law, and order. Would a culprit finally roll out? After hesitation, the screen jumped to the show ‘Books’ of the VPRO, where a Belgian psychiatrist portrayed our neoliberal society as evil; as a society in which people drown and lose their identity with only one logical outcome: loneliness and depression brought about by progressive feelings of powerlessness: a situation deliberately maintained by that ruthless pharmaceutical industry, he argued flawlessly.

‘That slacker does not know what it is to labor!’

Annoyed, a bit, by my own shouting, as well, I made the screen disappear by clapping twice, sprinted downstairs, made myself some Indian tea, put the envelope with ‘For Pharmacy’ on my tray, and took it all upstairs as laid-back as possible, since running would not be a good idea with this hot tea cup. I opened the envelope, took out two pills, and swallowed them before jumping back into bed, where I carefully started to study that comic book from our light blue Fado singer. A rough kind of work, the confrontational illustrations with raw lyrics pleased me. On the fifth page, I found a first indication, so I wrote it down into my logbook of jottings. Halfway through the comic, the alarm clock hit half past four. It was important to bring in these instructions on time, so I ordered a lavish dinner by deliv-
ery service – the urge to cook had suddenly vanished altogether—
took a shower, put on an easy outfit, strolled downstairs, opened
a bottle of l’ ecology, and shuffled across to my home office,
where I first admired the bonsai trees.

They were getting prettier by the day! Would Julia like them
this way? I made a beautiful colored picture and sent it to her
phone, which was smart enough to receive this image. Time for
some real progress. Being connected to the cloud, I could get all
data on my iPhone, tablet, notebook, and on my desktop.
Handy stuff: those Silicon Valley guys have come far from their
garage boxes!

What if I sent Cor Figeé and Coen Veldhoen to the West
coast, this year? Would that help us? At least they still know how
to conveniently handle soldering irons. There was no time to
lose, so first I inserted all information from Eddy, the journalist,
and then I played back my recordings (which I occasionally halt-
ed so as to better articulate the matter, since the dictation
software might falter). At times, it came up with the strangest
results! Finally, I read aloud from the comic. I run that secret al-
gorithm of the professor's and expected those Bulgarians or
Romanians to roll out as the highest potential perpetrators, but
this was, to my surprise, not the case.

No, the software came with far-increased percentages. It
should not get any crazier, for Johanna and Willem! Haha, what
stupid mistake Professor van Splunten's software had made!
After a re-run, however, this was still the outcome. Their per-
centage had grown to way over fifty; but was only a bit above
seventy-five; justified specifically by targeting suspects. Only
then should attention and resources be focused. Shocked, none-
theless, I reconnected the emotion-recognition software.

By then, an interesting link was revealed between the actress
— Julia’s lookalike — and her broad-shouldered manager. So,
without hesitation, I matched them. Now she and her body-
guard paraded at the top of the list! On an individual level, however, Julia remained a prime suspect; possibly because she alone had access to the vault? I obviously ignored her percentage of eighty-nine. I knew she could not have done it. Unless... oh!

Wait a minute... She could be blackmailed by that friendly-looking, socially moving Moroccan boy; by that kickboxer (or whatever martial art sport it was which he practiced)! I was familiar with the fact that people often possess two sides of the same coin: that elderly who were aggressive in everyday life suddenly could become sweet as sugar, while extremely sub-assertive people, during dementia, often exhibited aggressive behavior – I was forced into this realization by my uncle Wesseling and could not possibly ignore this idea. Julia had stayed away without letting anybody know anything, though previously she had been just another shy and naïve adolescent. I realized that all this had changed, put under pressure by her boyfriend. Only now did I understand that this was caused by his Arab influence! Livid, harboring a primal feeling of trying to protect her at any expense, I felt I needed to free her from his fatal circle and his brute force which he displayed without sympathy for any women without a headscarf!

So I tried to get it into my mind, how that guy had walked downstairs with icy calm and started to eat breakfast, display his exaggerated kindness and appealing to me as ‘sir’, knowing exactly how it should be done, neatly and consistently professional. Yes, it had been so wonderfully put that it actually became disrespectful. A kind of challenge, it seemed; a purposeful method of getting under your skin. Socially, you could do nothing about it. With every second, however, it became clearer that he had not meant anything with this kindness! But, to be honest, I had not seen much aggressive intrusiveness towards Julia. No, I could not imagine this from that guy. Still, I started wondering if Julia was in danger, since I had not passed along the suitcase code.
The doorbell: aha - Julia, no doubt! But why would she ring? Oh, wait; I had the lock turned, tonight. After a burglary, you are on guard full time. You see, Henkie, everything will turn out fine. With a pounding heart I shuffled to the door and loosened the inside lock.

‘Hello,’ stammered Quinten, shy, conjuring a smile beneath his wild gray scruffy hair and eyebrows that had lacked epilation for decades. Something was bothering him. It was embarrassing, being this shy at his age; but it was also irresistibly endearing.

‘Come in!’ I cried, and caught and locked the door, checked it twice, then guided him into the living room. I imperiously made him sit in our soft leather Jan des Bouvrie, conjured two small glasses, and poured us solid drinks of Nolet Ketel One.

‘My painting,’ he stammered. ‘I can’t finish it...’

‘What do you mean? It’s almost done and ready!’

I received no response. He stared endlessly into his glass. Then I saw his tears and swollen eyes.

‘Quinten, take a sip! Come on, pull yourself together, man!’

‘Okay, then...’ he said hesitantly. ‘I really do not drink, normally.’

‘Do not whine; drink up!’

In silence we lubricated our drinks. For me, personally, it was a pleasant silence. Hypnotized, staring into a void, I wondered why this was such lovely experience. Perhaps his companionship led me away from uselessly worrying, thereby helping me catch my breath.

Then, with trembling hand, he held his Kethel One higher, shaking, desperately asking for a second one with his doggy eyes; so without hesitation, I placed the bottle in front of his nose and declared: ‘In our port, it’s all quite simple. Work with your hands, dude! No talking: polish, Quinten! Use your muscles, figuratively or literally; see for yourself, man!’

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‘Yeah, but... this is... uh, a rather complicated matter... the objective depends on the progress made... no, that’s not right... I, uh... the objective is uncertain... that...’

‘Jesus! Come on!’ I shouted sternly, and poured.
He took a tentative sip.

‘It’s... uh... a visionary thing... I have it in my head, but cannot get it depicted... It is not getting any better, really, it isn’t...’
The doorbell interrupted his pitiful story, so we simultaneously took another swig at my command, which again was interrupted by the caustic tone disturbing our peace, and again; until finally I opened the door.

‘Henkie! How is it hanging, man?’ said Willem and Johanna almost synchronously, a beautiful harmony in their tonal combination.

Behind my back I heard thumping, so I turned around into combat stance of Bert van Klaveren, a famous boxer of Rotterdam, my shirt half out of my pants. Fear of confronting another burglar does not disappear just like that. Quinten shuffled behind me, waved shyly, and silently disappeared like a thief into the night.

‘So! Also boxed earlier, Henkie,’ Willem joked.
‘That should not be mentioned. What are you doing?’
‘Let us in,’ called Johanna. ‘If that is allowed! Okay, then?!’
‘Sure, its fine. I have to overcome a few hours before my appointment at the Deltahotel, anyways. Have you guys eaten yet?’

That was not the case. In my element with these unexpected guests (Monique hated this so badly), I pulled a bottle of l’ecology open, curious about what Joanna would think of this wine. She rather critically felt it had a buttery soft finish of excellent length, and that ripeness and freshness fairly mingled, but she doubted the length of its total exhalation: the aftertaste tingled slightly under her tongue.
‘That will not do, dude! That should not be, man. Try a wine from Umbria,’ she bluntly suggested.

In the open kitchen, preparing some steak with Rochefort cheese (the delivery of which I was unable to cancel in time), I told them about the outcome with complete honesty and full confidence. We soon enjoyed a quality dinner: I mean, food delivery can (obviously not) compete with my self-taught cooking. Here we cozy emptied the second casket of Professor van Splunteren until we tumbled outside after an hour or three. Creeping along, I reached for Willem’s van.

Johanna wanted to take a few hours' nap, so Willem drove until he threw me out and, as he was reversing before driving away, slammed into a double-parked Volvo, while I wobbled into Hotel New York like I usually entered that Delfshaven pub around this time: not sober anymore. Hollow sounds echoed ominously through the smoking area of this vast storehouse: shrill sounds of crockery, knives and forks tinkling and forming a cacophony where everyone seemed to eat dinner so serenely that they irritated me immensely.

‘Hello, are you not going mad from that typhoid noise?’ I wanted to shout; but in reality I simply excused myself politely in front of the moonlighting student who was neatly present, as always behind that golden leaf plinth and, you know, straightforward as it fits a Rotterdammer: without bullshit or any kind of superciliousness.

Back at the front porch, I started the track & trace app.

I inspected those bright green dots, monotonously flashing on the anthracite Google Earth map. In the area with the position, Maastunnel I buzzed in. Johanna had arrived, so it seemed, and Willem was wandering somewhere downtown, no doubt looking for the right bar to enter. Zooming in further, I spotted the actress, only I could not find her accomplice anyplace! With a smooth finger movement I managed to finally locate him in
Vlaardingen, near the Deltahotel. A second bright green dot overlapped his, so I curiously clicked on this button: it was Arthur! *What business did he have to fulfill with that muscular accomplice of the actress?* Then I looked for Julia's green dot, her boyfriend. And, last but not least, the money suitcase.

‘With me! Listen and shiver!’

‘How are you?’ Edwin asked hesitantly. ‘Did you find what we are looking for in Amsterdam?’

‘Julia! I cannot find her green dot anywhere!’ His distrusting silence marred my mood, which was below freezing.

‘Strange,’ he said. ‘It could be that she is out of reach... shall I look for you?’

‘Yes! Let me know immediately!’

‘Ok, I will. Good night, Henk.’

What could he possibly mean by that?! I hung up and stared at the crashing waves while his words ‘good night’ raced through my mind. This might mean I could expect something pleasant, after those confrontational works of Julia's had demolished me!

A cautious smile transformed my mouth against the busyness of the harbor and the ever-flowing Maas River, the ships, the waves with water taxis, and the sparkling points of bright lights where the Port of Rotterdam reminded me of my business worries and of how they had all gone strongly and smoothly back then. Where did they go; swimmingly? *Persevere, Henk: it will end positively!* So, because I was known as an optimistic guy in spite of everything (sometimes I did not even understand how I could stay opportunistic and how I could keep it up, fighting like this), I walked energetically to the golden pedestal, from where that lovely student in political science escorted me neatly to our regular table, one with majestic view across the Maas River.

To my delight, I was allowed to give her three kisses on her soft cheek. She did not look up, routinely and flashily turning her haughty head, which I could only reach by responding
quickly. Then she proceeded with her social media communications. While I watched her attentively, the thought of Julia occurred to me mercilessly, along with the desire to get a little attention - a kiss on my cheek instead of hers; that kind of small gesture. Had anyone seen me, I would have looked ridiculous!

All this suppressed energy tormented me in such way that it actually aroused me, paradoxically enough; as if, through a mix of agony and nail-biting irritation, strangely, lust rises, or something like that. I did not understand it, exactly, myself!

But tonight she looked more like Julia than ever before, and the situation became untenable! Boiling hot, I felt a drop of sweat drip from my forehead. I jumped up, and made my way to the toilet, hit some icy cold water in my face a few times, and then braced myself. ‘Come on, Henkie,’ I repeated Johanna's encouragement, ‘Stay strong!’

And so I sat down again when my eye caught her long slender legs and pantyhose with its tiny diamond glints in the form of a fishing net. That’s for a big fish, alright! It was not exactly a piece of clothing that every woman could wear, but Julia surely did! It's more attractive if it fits like a glove, and ever so challenging that it frightened me, as the question arose as to whether she was wearing a full implementation with those exposed holes. I mean, did this pattern cover her petite body fully except for her naked arms and elegant shoulders? Would she strip off her tight fashionable dress, later on? In a flash, I looked at the suitcase. I ordered her usual menu, but with a glass of wine from Umbria, aged correctly. I could easily observe her from head to toe. Something tickled between my calves while she quietly partook of a tiny bite of her salad niçoise.

Everybody in this dining looked our way deliberately, which provided me with untold stuffiness. She sat slightly slumped at our dining table, and did not bother to make me notice. Yes, it was indeed her foot that, in an annoyingly slow motion, stroked
my ankle and upwards. Every moment that I thought she would stop proved a misconception! Had I ever disclosed myself this long with a fiery redhead? Because I expected to be released from my distress, I remained at the table, every second more desperately sipping the deep red, not adequately breathing wine. Meanwhile, she never awarded me a dignified look, and carried on as she always did: leaving her food, constantly clicking her phone, searching whatever, viewing and reading all kinds of stuff - anything that I could not attend! Without flat-out lying, I could not deny that I enjoyed all this intensely. At the moment it came to a climax, she let me recover briefly. Desperately, I threw my charms into our battle. With everyone else, that worked perfectly fine; but with her, it seemed rather counterproductive, nowadays. When had this turning point started? Embarrassed, I considered the steps necessary to reverse this trend in order to bend this into a peaceful, serenely rippling, father-daughter relationship, as it should be.

And while Julia boldly took an offer from a businessman who wore expensive, casual clothing, I reluctantly payed the bill. That guy wore one of those sloppy sweaters, unremarkable in appearance but with a price tag of around a thousand euro, and sweater of which I had many similar ones hanging in my closet. How pathetic, to make himself look ornamental with a sweater like this. When she lustfully rose to wander away flashily, I could (and no one took note of it) cast a cursory glance at that suitcase. In engraved lettering, carved from expert chisel work, was written: fuck your money suitcase.

In my fright, I saw how her black velvet dress was located at waist height somewhere between 'flirting' and 'take-me-now', or a more daring cut, even. You might better qualify it as being between 'take-me-now' and 'please-rape-me'.

Did she deliberately take the money suitcase in front of me from the table, so that I could read its engraved lyrics? Appar-
ently she found it rather amusing to leave me guessing about what this scripture meant. Had her haute couture dress been bought by me? Would I immediately, after a short water taxi ride, receive my reward in room 33, finally? Was there an explosive hidden in the suitcase?

Reflexively, as the taxi shot brutally up and down, I caught her in a fall. Julia's fragile body, on fire, clung to me like a free bird, causing a deep desire to bubble up, to protect her at all costs. *Was I falling in love with the actress?! It could not get any crazier!* We walked onto the pontoon towards the entrance of the Deltahotel and fervently embraced, looking like a soggy couple. She played her role, alright. We shuffled in, where the receptionist stoically removed a key from the board. In the mirror of the elevator I noticed her lanky legs again, and the tight holes in that soft fabric. The icy water had protected me, beforehand, but now there was nothing left to do than to surrender to my fate.

Hips swaying, she waddled ahead of me on her towering stiletto heels, the velvet dress, her feminine shoulders and golden blonde hair claiming that she is not Julia - she is not Julia! Clasping the money suitcase firmly, I neatly, as agreed, took my regular seated position. The tendency to push her against my chest and never let go kept getting stronger. Supportive still, I turned my camera on. She looked for something on her smartphone and put it into the player, after which our room shrouded itself in sensitive (or to say, bluntly) horny music. This night promised nothing respectful. Donna Summers filled our private room. I had always found her voice irresistible.

Julia, my little girl, knew this perfectly well, and she dimmed the lights into a colorful sultry haze by hanging a rainbowed, transparent-colored scarf over the lamp before she moved elegantly as an Arabic belly dancer. During this passionate dance, she pointed in graceful hand movements to the engraved suitcase's lyrics. Obediently, I buzzed in. Knowing how to shoot as
an amateur – I had followed a crash course through the cloud – I enlarged the image. On the display I saw how she dropped seductively on her knees, smooth hips rotating, her arms reaching as her delicate hands threatened to push the soft fabric along her thin dress a little further above her tanned legs, over her swaying hips. In her hand, a glittering golden tube of bright red lipstick, sloppy, was half put beside her young lips. Haggard, her body movements were as elegant and seductive as ever; her fragile, right as a glove dress only sporadically showing a few ripples of Julia's irresistible figure.

She danced to the sultry panting J'Taime, grabbed the suitcase, set it on me, and ordered me to hold it firmly. That worked arduously: the quality of the film was not getting any better! Choppily, I did as she instructed. Sensual and wilder, coming closer, challenging her fragile legs to firmly grasp my knee and clutching her too-young body shape against mine, she disappeared, sliding back behind that suitcase as the camera shook fiercely. Could I still stop this, even if I wanted to?

The words ‘fuck your money suitcase’ consumed the picture completely! My legs trembled, shocked, and I struggled. On the screen, I saw the suitcase fluctuate. With difficulty, I kept filming in the heavy, awkward silence. Freezing, the blasts were replaced by gently raving shocks of anxiety followed by pure resignation. The harm being done, I brought the camera above her greedy mouth, her bright orange-red lipstick wildly leaking down, glued on the lens, printing a kiss. Defeated, I watched that graceful shape on the hand-blown glass.

Precisely in accordance with my mandate, I filmed until she left the room, the money suitcase eagerly clamping. She turned her naughty head one last time with that look in which you could discover anything; a glance that could kill and love, which involved doing everything you wished for, if only without
sympathy or real love! In shock, I kept filming the closed door for a long time. *Who would have filmed Julia?* That question haunted my worrying mind; so childish! I knew this would remain the case until I had an adequate response to this urgent, all-decisive question. Trembling like a leaf, I put the camera on the bed and lay down beside it, run out of effort, terror, and, let's just admit it, full of pure satisfaction. My pills - I have to go home and get my pills!

A strange whistling abruptly woke me. Dazed, I stared at the blurry signal on my smart phone.

'Henk!'

'Yes?'

'She's in New York! Julia is in the Big Apple!' Edwin roared enthusiastically. ‘And she is not there with her boyfriend, that Moroccan guy, since he is located in his double passport's second home, though he actually was born in the Netherlands - but, hey, you know how it is. Even a large part of the third generation feels more Moroccan than Dutch, as this is also deliberately maintained by their community and the policies implemented in Morocco, identical to the Turkish policy, in how they purposefully nurture that *diaspora*. It's...' ‘Spare me your nasty political gossip, Edwin!’ I interrupted crudely.

‘Okay, Henk. I am sorry, man.’

‘What now?’ I asked, and allowed the news to settle, since this new movie obviously had not been shot by that overly friendly boy at breakfast. Did Julia have another boyfriend already? Wait: this time around it could be a hard-working entrepreneur; a self-made man, maybe! A glimmer of hope blossomed. ‘Edwin, thank you, man! Keep up the good work!’

Dropping my head back, relaxing, I stared at the ceiling and decided, driven by a sticky feeling, to first enjoy a lovely shower.
Under the warm jets, I would definitely get the idea of how to spend the night usefully: work, but stay social and have some fun, was my grandmother's advice and her motto in life. Julia will be fine. *All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,* is what she always said, lol. Julia did not need my money, but took it gladly anyways: good girl! That apple did not roll far from the pear tree after all! In my delight, optimistic about these latest developments, it was for me to solve the burglary and the robbery of my safe's contents. After showering I still sat, rather wet, on the edge of the bed, my towel tied around my loins, when I started the app with bright green dots. Johanna had moved to another part, so I buzzed with curiosity. Aha, she is in her very own bar! In my mind she appeared vividly in sight: her firm stance and shiny, tapping rod. *Let me take a look there, just to combine pleasure with work,* I thought. Had I not always done it this way?

I quickly got dressed. Such jeans could take a lot, and this thick wool sweater was fine: it made me look careless without being fully a wanderer.

In a positive mood, I left the hotel and walked into the Saturday night on my way to Delfshaven and further, towards Aunt Johanna's cafe. At the first turn in Vlaardingen, crossing the harbor canal, I threw a casual, seemingly nonchalant eye on the curfew. Jesus, how long had she danced sensually? At my right wobbled a powerboat taxi in the sloshing waters of the Maas River. On the embankment, the waves, caused by a freighter with the exotic destination Rio de Janeiro, broke. The colossus towered high above the Delta Hotel.

That made me think about how, as a distraction at the end of the year, we always flew to Curacao for a few weeks, sailing our fifty-meter yacht along the coast of Brazil. This typical Dutch cold and wet day reminded me why Monique was mad about that holiday trip. Wistfully, I thought of life as I'd known it be-
fore the downward trend that had plagued my business empire; a free fall that I’d tried with all my might to mend and bend into a win-win for all of us. Workers, shareholders, family - everybody was counting on Henk his boundless energy, his optimism and perseverance, his joie de vivre and, not to forget, his charming opportunism. Could I turn the tide once more?

The skipper spurted ahead, after an affirmative nod, at full speed across the river, to Delfshaven. From there it was just a doable thirty-minute walk. In the darkness I could see the cumulus clouds. You sensed summer knocking, ready to finally break through: terrace weather, short skirts... Between the authentic, forever-anchored sailing ships – as if they were retired – I put foot during a loud clattering of dark brown canvas.

A gust of wind hit mercilessly and blew the captain’s hat, swirling, into the cold water. He shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly. I did the same and saluted en route to Johanna’s pub. With gusts pushing in, the back street is never a bad walk. I went out of the harbor, past the striking tower, and further, taking the Oude Binnenweg towards the Heemraadsingel, where I hit right, avoiding the Witte de Withstreet, and from there walked until the intersection, onto the Oostzeedijk. Across the street, a police car slowly drove by. Are they still studying on the theft of my art? Although the name of the café was engraved on the façade with some ornate Gothic lettering, it was everything but a historical building, like in Delfshaven, since in this area everything had been destroyed by The Bombing. For a moment, I hesitated. Just before the door, I halted. Could I get in without notice? I weighed my choices and stepped in, energetically entering. I had something else on my mind than obsessively guarding my reputation - a reputation that even the largest sticking his head in the sand stinging optimist would not label as kosher anymore. What could I say - it was a reputation which could best be classified as totally lost. High time to let myself go for a party!
With my skills, I could still become a director of the association for homeless people and thereby earn myself a tight two tons a year, I thought. Just before I put in a first foot; a deafening noise drew all attention, louder and louder until roaring engines were drowned out by some Polish variant of techno house music. One by one, their robust machines tapped, upon which this peculiar musical atmosphere occurred. Seemingly, this dance music was selected by those Eastern European ladies working at Aunt Jo’s place.

Arthur hung at the bar, chatting. He tried to convince her of something. Incognito, I walked further into the room.

Hidden behind a colleague attender, I stealthily moved into the darkest corner, where one of the hostesses attentively placed a bottle of beer on my side table. Surprised, I saw it happening from my rocking chair: Arthur and Johanna raised their glasses. A toast? Arthur was casually dressed, and grinning like a naughty boy. Johanna looked suspiciously back and forth. The gang members stepped inside, wearing tough leather patches and bandages. They seemed big and strong between their brutal presentation and dress code of the gay club, I thought, amused, and took a first sip. Now, it is quite dangerous to attend a pub like this if you've just convinced yourself to take it as it comes and loosen up, so before I knew it, I was fingering the rigidity of the curvy allure of the first beautiful Polish lady: a fitness freak, this much was certain; and as feminine as possible!

While squeezing her hips and legs, I noticed there was not an ounce of fat too much. Though she was not exactly skinny, she was no walking bones, as a professional model appears: rather, on the contrary! I started to relax and let myself slide back, pulled her, as giggling prey along, exhausted from entanglements, business disputes, lawsuits, and a teenager who confronted me with her latest identity and nonsensical (but not quite harmless!) attempts to escape her cultural roots while I unexpectedly, just a few hours ago, had experienced a thrilling denouement in my
favorite room: number 33. I could not care anymore if I was being played; this entertainment lady sat on my lap voluntarily and had power over me as she tried to persuade me to peer into her mesmerizing, crisp blue eyes, certain that I definitely would give in and order a bottle of Moët & Chandon.

Right, haha! Henkie is not crazy, folks. Over her crown and white painted hair, I saw that the gang had scattered tactically around, each instructed to take a position. They were wary. I sighed deeply, treated myself to another sip, and ordered the ardently-desired champagne for her while she leaned against me as if I was her first lover. Twenty minutes later a charged atmosphere hung over the room, where guests admittedly played with the girls, squeezed their buttocks and caroused their beers, but did not let themselves go completely. Something felt faultlessly wrong; any old-fashioned businessman would have noticed asap. Arthur slid from his stool and walked to a man with a checkered head, heavily muscled arms and shoulders: Dimitri, that business partner of the actress's! Eastern European visitors, scrawny but trained and fit, faded away, with sunken cheekbones, like addicts. Arthur threw an arm jovially around Dimitri's shoulder. He looked straight ahead while the gang approached. Johanna's jolly laughter stopped. The atmosphere grew grimmer. Some sunken cheekbones rose up, asking to keep out. Had I done the right thing by following Edwin’s lead? If a skirmish arose, it could be bent to my advantage, no doubt! After being guided into the right direction, public opinion would see how this fight had proved my determination and sincere intention to catch the perpetrators, convincing the judge that I had given everything; that I'd even risked my life trying to solve the robbery! My tactical, analytical mastermind was working at full capacity. In hindsight, we could toast on the attention it generated. I decided not to blame Edwin, after all, for his idiotic political choice.
From my position, I looked into the kitchen where Johanna hurriedly phoned, and played the scenario in my mind of how this classic bar scene could be turned in my favor.

After this, I will sent a text message to my journalist friend Eddy Hofs. This guy was always ready to roll, working twenty-four hours. It's great working with him. Feedback immediately followed, indicating he had jumped on his scooter. With a little luck, he would be able to make an exclusive report within ten minutes or so. Now it was time to meet him outside and let him take an 'unexpected' shot when I fled from the uproar in this shady pub. Under pressure from these nimble journalists, I would reluctantly explain that I was trying to search for the perpetrators of the burglary and, foolishly, had hired a private investigator for this purpose and (even more unwisely), had reached out to this dangerous motorcycle gang for help. Risking my life, I had entered this pub.

This would give me a tough image: determinated, but perhaps too irresponsible for business – such a reputation is always a plus – whereas the judge would conclude that I, in an unorthodox way (as everyone knew me, no offense) was looking for the burglars who had stolen my umbrella and the bookkeeping of my private holding as well as some precious family jewels. It's all a question of credibility; the rest will follow. Of course, it was a culpable error not to retain a copy of the bookkeeping. Work cannot be done without breaking eggs. The audience, the crowd, understands this.

Delighted by this ingenuity, I let the animation girl lift up her champagne glass and ordered her to throw it back in one gulp - just like that, out of petulance. She did as I commanded, but immediately expected another order. Not able to reply, I let her go, followed her elegant pace straight to the bar, and shortly afterward, took a routine kiss and my second Pilgrim beer, after
which I suddenly peered into her mischievous eyes, seized by a hypnotic attraction!

When I looked up, I saw Eddy sitting across from me in the same rocking chair; and in his lap was a similar - yes, an identical - lady with blue eyes and painted hair!

Dazed, I turned my head to the middle of the pub, where Dimitri and Arthur had one arm wrapped around each other's shoulder: best buddies!

Of the next twenty-four hours, I could not remember anything. Johanna lay heavily snoring next to me. Scared and broken, I jumped out of that waterbed and left her home, feeling seasick. Smelling of dried beverage stains and smoke, I walked, half dazed, back to my villa. The irresistible urge to take a closer look intruded, however. I mean, our gallery could be daubed by vandals or activists! Evoking controversy is not only not an easy task anymore, nowadays, but the risk of unpleasant side effects always looms. Would the store still stand? I couldn't restrain my curiosity. This felt rather oppressive and hypocritical. No longer being able to enjoy procrastination is the beginning of all misery in the world, I philosophized loosely, turning the corner past Hotel Bazar. Across the street, in our gallery window, a jerky film was being shown. It was clumsily done as if by a nervous, amateur filmmaker. Someone who was in a panic or under the influence of alcohol or drugs must have filmed this material. Apparently, there was a blockage in my acceptance of reality. Only within the next two to three seconds did I recognize the sultry dance, the suitcase, and the mirror with silver rim - yes, nearly everything! Next to it was a second flat screen of exceptional dimension (I estimated both their diameters surely a meter or two) upon which the film with Julia was shown - the YouTube movie about which she'd indicated that no one had to
worry. Again, I saw how she proudly showed her practically recovered belly.

Dismayed, as well as depressed, the combination of these two videos was painful. I stumbled back to the villa. Across the road, it finally got to me; so in a coffee shop, ‘The Blade Grass,’ I took three pre-rolled joints and a cheap (admittedly styleless) disposable lighter. I fiddled nervously at our iron fence not much later. This fun cigarette gave me little pleasure, acting only as consolation. In my imagination, I saw the scene on our surveillance monitor: as a wanderer (or, even worse, as an ordinary burglar), I tried to get inside of our railing! If I spotted myself on the other side, it would mean nothing less than immediately calling the police. Upon entry, the pervasive smell of cigarettes filled the living room. Monique would turn in her grave - if she was dead that is, I thought jokingly. Distraught, I put out the tubular cigarette into the ashtray, started my computer, and read Jeroen's message. I had no time for open doors, folks. In a volatile way, I instructed him to reassure everyone asap. Now it was time to address the matter thoroughly, to get started with my defense. My two lawyers had done a fine job, but still, the matter of room 33 kept popping up! So, after hours of work, I could not hold it any longer and spontaneously gave her, carte blanche, a free interpretation of the evening. Click … send.

Immediately, the fear hit me: what had I done?! I'd put myself at the mercy of the imagination of an actress. I mean, she may look exactly like my smart girl, but being original is a different quality. The actress is Slavic and knows nothing of the creative process. What would she come up with, now that she had freedom? Creativity is for a few lucky ones; not everyone has that gift. Old-fashioned in my perspective, the tension build-up was pleasurable – I was even hoping in vain for a girlfriend experience - and I poured myself a lovely lunchtime drink. The
uncertainty of surrendering to an act, it being absolutely impos-
sible to guess the contents, but without that unbearable tension
of knowing that my girl was coming... why had I not thought
about this previously?

An intriguing melody filled my office - something of Bach,
this time? Hurriedly, I answered.

‘Yes?’

‘There is news.’

‘This is not about your golf handicap, is it?’

‘Haha, no; although I was able to play an excellent score to-
day. The letter from the supposedly-righteous arrived. It will kill
our business; they seem to want to take you down personally!’

‘Tell me something new. What do they demand?’

‘They talk of eight years unconditionally, Henk.’

A blurred image zoomed in and out much as an automatic
lens, disoriented and then again making a lame attempt to focus.
The bonsai had grown into young adult trees; at their edges I
clearly saw bright, pale green buds with tiny rolled leaves. They
appeared larger not just individually, but as a whole, as well. I
began feeling that Willem had planted too many of them.

‘Don’t worry, I have everything under control. This time I’m
going to win with flying colors. You know me, Jeroen.’

‘But... Julia, she...’

‘Do you know where she is?’

‘You should know it yourself.’

‘She must be outside Europe. Probably she went...’

‘Jesus, Henk! Everyone is worried. Aad is fierce. You need to
do something before he intervenes. Did you make enough time
for her? Can I ask Sonja to call her up? Yesterday we talked
about it. She wants to help you with all the love of the world.’

‘We'll leave Sonja out; that would be counterproductive.’
‘Go talk to her, then,’ he pressed me, pushy at heart. ‘Call me if you need anything. We have to stick together; support each other.’

‘Keep practicing the swing, and keep Aad and everyone as calm as possible. It will be fine soon!’

‘There you go,’ he said, suddenly rather cheerful.

Threatened granddad Aad to move the family away? This latter, energetic tone I did not know about him - it suddenly sounded a little bit farfetched. After a gloomy fall of my eyelids, as if gravity'd grabbed everything twice or as if the ground owned my skin, I fell back in my soft kangaroo leather lounge chair. Was it because of that turn towards Green Sustainability in just about everything? Was I being haunted because of this? I was in danger of losing everything, simply since the business's focus was quietly but surely being sucked away by this charity mentality; this global health vision which did not match the worldwide business model that dominated us. It was a green model that seemed rather hypocritical and piecemeal at first, yes: that only social status was sought, to implement this sustainability. This all went the wrong way rapidly; a self-fulfilling prophecy of unwillingness to participate for the marbles in this shortsighted game. Suddenly I understood everything! Like a parasite in my own brain, I had been affected. I was losing my business effectiveness; it nearly killed this unique quality I possessed so proudly! The crowd could elevate a cheater to a given height, especially when it was done with flair or if remorse arose, but even when penance took place afterwards, I would not appreciate it by now. No, being a spoilsport signified leaving the final group in stages. A spoilsport equaled nothing less than committing social Harakiri! Would I become a corporate killjoy? Was that my inevitable fate? Or was I already one, but had not realized it until now?! More pressing, even, the question came up of whether I could defend
myself under these conditions. *Jesus, man, pull yourself together and do something useful*, I stammered in the mirror; but I did not know what to do, or how. The only thing that came to mind was to consult Johanna or visit Quinten, drink a cup of mint tea, and philosophize over those lovely gardens of Babylon; the splendidly painted gardens which he called, in an exaggerated way, *modernistic*. Haha, that weirdo!

Still, I wanted to know what had happened during the last few days, and recorded flawlessly this dull rustle followed by loud clattering of that damn Financial Times (which they still dared to call a quality newspaper but was now owned by the fully commercial TMG). They deliberately damaged my reputation! Why did I torture myself by keeping this subscription - to belong to the so-called *smart elite*?

Yet still, despite everything that had happened, I could not isolate myself. Although I endlessly cherished this hope of being corrected, even this thought could not help me get rid of my feelings of misery; of childlike despair.

After taking my place behind my computer screen, I felt better; my anxiety slowly slipped away. Hard work had always helped me. Just as I began to open a second file, I noticed an incoming email from Eddy. Jesus! That Moluccan gang had beaten the whole thing to smithereens! Shocked, I grabbed the phone.

‘Eddy, man! Just got your message’

‘Have I spelled it out nicely? Best that I do not mention you being in this heavy fight at Aunt Jo’s place, I guess?’

‘Just a moment,’ I said, reading his journalistic lyrics. Could I trust Eddy fully? To be sure, I reread his report once more, and indeed, nothing was written about little old me!

‘You’re missing a part!’ I replied. ‘Come along, then: we can add our experiences together into a proper piece of journalism.’
'Okay, then,' he replied, and hung up.

A smart journalist, that Eddy Hofs.

Receiving this second chance - being thrown into the womb, so to speak - was no accident. My innate desire of doing business had only momentarily fallen asleep. And why? It was caused by Julia's infectious passion for life and for animals as well as for all humans - through her passionate, naive commitment to welfare apart from money, as if nothing else mattered! Through her art, she wanted to reach out and call for Liberty; she wanted to reconcile with Mother Nature without forgetting the impossibility of escaping that same force, human nature. She had dragged me into her youthful sentiment; she had infected me! When she'd insisted and became fanatical, I gradually let her notice.

Then it had caught me by surprise. I began to develop an eye for this combination of durability and doing business. I continued working while maintaining our natural resources; an innovation in the current business climate that had led to some instance successes in this highly conservative, thorough, but always playing-on-safe sector. But at the same time, how could it be otherwise? This led to friction; to an insoluble conflict with my father and his Rotary club members! I had become a threat; an irritating, stinging thorn in the side of those in power and their political puppets in The Hague and Brussels, for that matter! Entanglements between politics and training institutions, trainees working several years at port companies or in the oil industry under the title 'government relations' before they started to occupy some towering civil servant functions, retaining dual interests, were completely covered and legal; subsidies affirmed! The pure politician, nowadays a novelty, was overpowered by infiltrated consultants with flawless policy writings supported by 'scientific' studies that totally depended on the lender. Decently vetting the unfathomable financing of the royal family, for ex-
ample, is not even considered: they see this as an electoral slippery road. Charlatans, they are!

Through these confused thoughts about all my business conflicts and struggles that could never be explained to a lovely daughter - it would permanently damage her - I was, despite my optimistic disposition, overwhelmed by melancholy; by those unbearable splenetic feelings of being good for nothing. She’d better start her medical training: then Julia would at least be safe. My boundless optimism had dragged me through all those years, so the lack of it now took me by surprise. I have to do something! Still, I waited for Eddy and did 'my thing', as it is counter-described nowadays. The rest of the week, I worked obsessively on my lawsuit defense.
Approval

Despite the worried looks of Annegreet and Edwin, who nevertheless seemed pleased with the public outcry, everything flew by in a daze until next Saturday, when Henk accidentally stared into the mirror and, for minutes, stood staring at someone he barely knew. Dazed and half beside himself, this did not come close, anymore, to the excitement and tension of the moment; that pleasant feeling that always provided him with hope for better times to come and for the satisfaction of desires, however transitory. No, this fear was real and urgent. Obdurately abandoned by the liberating moment, he was thrown back into survival mode. An inevitable process of confusion was put at the entrance and would now rapidly lead to total madness, after which he would never be able to coexist without a nagging idea of being chased, unless he somehow managed to escape all this. And so he wanted to leave. Yes, everywhere he was present for more than five minutes seemed wrong; seemed too much for him, and so he moved out, far away, until it drove him to the madness he was trying to avoid.

And so, like a hunted dog in the animal-unfriendly Spanish Middle Ages, Henk wandered, lost, through the city when Cor Figee, working across the Maas, received an electronic mail: an exception. Thus he had enabled the alarm, and set it vibrantly loud. His colleagues were shocked when it rang, but Cor Figee laughed scornfully, enjoying their annoyance, and opened his unique message. This was important news, although private. A special alert from Edwin, a signal on behalf of the self-organized militia, grabbed him by the throat: two derailed boys, probably
about thirteen years old, had robbed the shop of his neighbor’s daughter Elenoor, reviled her, pushed and insulted her in various ways, and spit her in the face! Those fucking bastards! Goddamn! *When they touch the mentally limited, they touch Cor Figee! Do they dare, those dirty cowards!* They are way too easily manipulated. Well, well, what fun! The depravity of humanity is most clearly seen when the weak in society - the mentally limited, elderly, or animals - are bullied; or worse, molested. Between ten and thirteen; presumably just on the brink of adulthood! They may very well never be corrected again! Now, we have to re-educate them strictly and fairly, or it might forever be too late!

Edwin had underlined something. Henk attentively read the yellow highlighted text. Elenoor could get along fine with her neighbor friend Daan - it was touching to see how those two interacted. Cor Figee understood only half of it. She cheered his son on the football field; she was his biggest fan and attended every match. When she heard the fantastic news: Daan was selected for Feyenoord and could start next month, Elenoor beamed, laughing. That was her football club: cups, shirts and posters filled her room, scarves hanging. Her mouth fell open spontaneously. Both arms thrust into the air, she lustily sang the anthem at this wonderful news. And now, it was underlined: this was no coincidence. Had they been fighting? There was jealousy. Those boys wanted to tackle Daan by depriving her; by delivering Elenoor the fright of her life. What a cowardly act, what perversion! *There was no time to lose: I should immediately talk to their parents; otherwise those boys could not be saved*, Cor Figee thought. Talk with the football coach. Who else? Well, anyway, this must be done by talking as soon as possible! What a feat, with those Russians panting on my neck. That deal comes first, work comes first - there is no other way! No bread, no play. No pain, no gain. Now, how can I organize all this at once? In his mind,
Cor heard his Fate cursing about how he never allotted free time on behalf of his family. How do you stop such a bulletproof, glass-piercing voice in your tormented brain? Will it ever stop? His colleagues had left, going home in time for dinner, while Cor Figee stayed until dark and longer. As long as needed, he kept working on one of the many branches of Henk's holding, situated in the Waalhaven. My boss has other worries - financiers make it difficult and the government does not cooperate nowadays. No, in this political climate it is damned difficult for Mister van Wijnen-Swarttouw to operate. I want to fix this incident myself - that might save one gulp of a damn strong drink, alright.

The flickering street lights did not help him. Henk walked purely from routine, disoriented as a visually impaired man who finds his way step by step, until he reached the Willemsbrug, crossed it, and arrived finally at his appointment: Hotel New York. Because of all the tension, he had not eaten for hours: it was a good reason to attack. Rather lifelessly, he let himself be accompanied to his usual dining table. He followed Julia's look-alike purely indifferently, this time, feeling dangerously heartless. Violent fantasies shot through his mastermind. He tolerated them, and while he watched her almost listlessly, the icy indifference shook through his veins. Did she step out of character and skittishly stare into the purgatory of his piercing eyes, after which she gradually crept back, startled, into her acting role? For a brief moment he came to his senses and sensed the yearning for excitement bubbling up from his innermost desires: he was already lost, but she could still help him. Only Julia was allowed to discipline him. Reluctantly, he let her go when she chattered with the waiter in modern Rotterdam slang until she finally ordered a bowl of potatoes and two bowls filled to the brim with spareribs; enough for an orphanage! Two trays placed on their
dining table were filled with cold water and floating lemon slices, while the porcelain almost bulged with burnt pork, not quite bal-
al or kosher! The Burgundian food contrasted with her elegant gala dress, black velvet with diamonds, fancy earrings, and her pinned-up hair. She stared at him flashily. Hands neatly on the edge of the table, knife and fork ready, she peered as firmly as the Rock of Gibraltar or a Persian fighting cat into his fatal, doggy eyes. In her severity he read the command to begin while his shame grew, aware of their strange relationship. His cheeks glowed. Henk did not know why he did not dare to move. Was he hypnotized? Defeated, he turned his head away, looking at the orbiting radar on the Port of Rotterdam where all his business problems had started. And it could all have been beautiful! He considered what to undertake, businesswise, as his stomach growled like an idiot. Petrified, he sniffed the scent, causing a touch of fun that dispelled his miserable, rather depressive mood. Could he again enjoy this desire for something unattainable? It took a split second before he tried to move his hand to the plate. He stared into her ocean blue eyes in despair, but she didn’t react, despite his pleading look, until the world began to circle slowly, as if a start-up carousel gaining momentum, spinning faster and faster till all blur evaporated.

Desperately, he tried to follow her silhouette as the sole remaining landmark; as last stand.

‘Is everything to your liking?’ he heard someone ask. That nonchalance hurt his feelings. Did the waiter not understand that it was too much for him to handle?

‘Delicious. The rest you may take back right away,’ she said quietly, after which she endlessly chatted and flirted in that slang language which Henk could not comprehend. He could not let go of the childlike thought of, on the fly, grabbing a piece of pork from the plate, but he was not able to move his arm. His hand was stopped by an invisible cordon that hovered around
the table; a wall of invisible energy the waiter had pierced with ease. Professionally, he put the full plates on his arm and made him pay. This would not fizzle out.

Finally, they were carried away by a water taxi as his stomach growled. His grumpy-as-thunder look, just like after such rare moment when Feyenoord lost, fully occupied Henk, leaving him no choice other then to sit away from her as far as possible on that uncomfortable sofa. Also, the escaping water could not captivate him anymore. Those yellowish, heavy smelly ports, the containers full of crap across tasteless new buildings which they called Costa-del-Sol at the Maas River; all this could now be stolen! Only in Schiedam, with that elongated mill, ugly but efficient, old but crammed with grain for gin - yeah, that's what he could use now, to lush himself.

Then he heard the ringing glass. Surprised, he looked around. Her diamond sparkles irritated those bare, spindly legs, long and uncomfortable. Between them stood a bottle: gin of Nolet? He could not quite see it and stared, grimly zooming, and brought his head closer between her legs.

‘Jesus, come here with that!’ he called out grievously.

She shook her fragile head stoically, using cleverness with which she put him on the edge by wiggling provocatively from left to right, slyly smiling in slow motion, on and on and on, until the image grew and everything around it, the river and the banks, faded in a fuzzy haze of emerging anger.

As he sat neatly but stiffened, yearning for a mini sip, she inexorably continued. Would he soon, in room 33, get his reward? Was this all part of her performance act - the pontoon, the hotel, the waterfront, and her hip-swaying legs in the pitch-dark night, from the reception boat into the elevator, until they reached room 33, where she commanded him to take his regular
seat? Routinely, but with his stomach rumbling, Henk took the camera out of his wool sweater.

‘No!’ she snapped, and snatched it out of his hand, placed it on the bedside table, and dimmed the light.

Stirring music sounds filled the small space. Despite his capricious malice and indifferent look, she began her act, dancing sensually like a full-blown seductress. His painful delighted state was back by the time she stripped off her gala dress and casually let it slip. The bottle of gin in her hand, she jumped on his lap. Instinctively, he put his powerful, tiny hand around her waist to prevent her from falling. She kept moving wildly enough to let herself crash, clattering on the stone surface! As a ‘thank you’, she hit him hard with her free hand, right on the cheek. Shocked, he looked up, furious, with large pupils of bewilderment.

‘No, no!’ she commanded sternly with a higher-pitched voice, overruling the sensual sounds of Eastern European dance. She opened his mouth by squeezing both his cheeks. He choked, and felt the painful joy return. She stared at him, wiggled, and jumped on and on, a few times, down on his lap, then smiled uncontrollably and took a sip of gin; at which he placed his other hand gently on her hip. Pats! With a furious swipe, she poured another drink of gin inside him while his cheek quivered.

‘Jesus!’ shouted Henk. She ignored his desperate voice and poured alcohol over her wet, seemingly young breasts. That strange octave-high voice emphasized the yes-part as an encouragement to lick the moisture, as he obediently followed her instructions, his sore cheek against her roaring laughter. Unresisting, he opened his mouth, licking her nipples on invitation, her supple body wild on his lap, that weird, inviting 'jaaha' invariably ending on a higher note every time. In his mind, he felt another wallop. She wiggled even more roughly and fiercely jumped up and down. He was now allowed to suck, but could not contain himself: brutally he threw
her tiny body off onto the hotel bed. Her lanky long legs fell aside, spinning and almost outside the bedframe, and her wild blonde hair covered her eyes as she challenged him: ‘Do it!’

He took off his clothes and she tore his shirt and hit his cheeks. He could not help firmly catching her wrists, squishing them. He had caught her as in a fight and noticed how she, hot and sweaty, suddenly offered less resistance; how their bodies melted in a perfect fit as if they were meant for each other. Almost endlessly, he kept on bumping. Had she put something weird in that bottle of gin, or what? Challenging him, she looked sharp; her eyes peacefully closed, now - those Persian cat-eyes of pleasure, her hair over her face, relaxed, her head rising, her arms faintly recalcitrant. Sweat poured when she commanded, ‘Come; come now!’ Henk did not want to, touching her deeply, loving those minutes, until he came like never before.

*Was Julia behind all this?*

Had the actress and Julia discussed how to bring Daddy into a state of wanting to live, work, and give; fight, receive, cry, and never give up?! Liberated, Henk took his place at the bar with its stunning views over sliding tankers, silver metal tube constructions and the refineries in Pernis. He admired the mechanical activity. The Deltahotel at the Maas gradually felt like coming home. But who wants to live in Vlaardingen, with all those immigrant workers overhere? *Despite everything, Julia saved me from self-destruction, that sweetheart!*

The renewed energy pumped through Henk’s veins vividly, through the body of a nearly fifty-year-old businessman who had not exactly been idle. He ordered an Ijsmoppen liqueur and lemon from the waitress behind the bar who was apparently of
Indian or Pakistani descent, but neatly integrated into society, without giving in to that excessive assimilation stuff, say, for convenience. Her skin was not forcefully bleached. She had simply become Dutch while retaining her roots: you could tell right away because she behaved jovially and was relaxed with customers while keeping her friendly, yet professional, appearance. And moreover, she worked at a solid pace. Substantially useful - it should always be like this, flashed through Henk's mind, when a billiard-bald man sat next to him, a stool or two in between them, and ordered exactly the same thing.

Coincidence does not exist. The man scrambled purposefully to his cauliflower ear, rubbing his billiard ball head and tapping his simple-looking yet expensive spectacle frame of high-level carbon a bit higher up on his prominent, tip-tilted nose. This was a battered man, tanned, strong, and tested: someone who'd fought all those tropical work years. Only after his liquor arrived, did he turn his head to Henk, smiled briefly, and emptied his glass. Aha, an old warhorse!

'We need to talk, Henk,' he said, and waited for the waiter to pass, three baked salmon and a salad balancing on his forearm.

'Good idea.'

'Come on,' he exclaimed and snatched, surprisingly smoothly, the oval glass from the edge of the bar, beautifully built in the shape of a hull. Henk followed him, on foot, to a glorified cabin room; a sitting area with a dark blue sofa where white anchors decorated a space with limited visibility and gold leaf partridges served as windows. They took their places in a comfortable angle of forty-five degrees.

The waitress had discreetly followed them.

'Do you want to see the menu?'

'Yes, please, my sweet, sweet girl.'

'I'm honored,' said Henk, more serious than ever.
She thought he joked and sneeringly smiled back, after which she left the room quietly, safely moving back behind the bar.

‘Listen up. I'm not here to put tits on a log. I'll help you.’

A warm glow crept up on Henk and rolled over his spine like a soothing massage. He foresaw something special. Immediately, Henk got the message: there was a twist possible, working with this experienced entrepreneur.

‘Jan is still capable of good stuff’

‘WAS capable. I follow you from a distance, nowadays,’ said the bald billiard, full of experience.

Jan's words sounded like an orchestra of strings, melodious and deep, and filled Henk with moist tears. The small room seemed to be made for the two businessmen, as everything around them faded like a period in which time seemed to extend to infinite peaks and valleys, sharp edges and gentle sponges, wavy and sloshing and soothing as a peaceful, safe beacon. While enjoying a snack and a drink or two, they discussed experiences of entrepreneurship in those rumbling sectors that the Rotterdam harbor is rich and famous for.

Jan talked about his golden, honest fight with the union and work-councils, his often difficult discussions with the central bank and his hard-hitting battles under the belt with those reclined, cigar-smoking arrogant sloths which Henk's father rallied. He did not conceal the truth, as expected! This was how it should be. As soon as they understood that he would never give in, they tried to convince him to participate in their club, where pricing agreements - cartels is such a loaded word – had hermetically closed the market for entrepreneurs; for real entrepreneurship such as Jan himself. Innovation had made the port great and even now would likely still be able to turn around this upcoming downfall. It's never too late unless it is too late, man! To his astonishment, he'd acquired, after all those years of fighting, respect and praise for his tenacity, perseverance, and
stubbornness, Which was publicly expressed as he put his signature on the sale of his business, his rivals expressing their appreciation for his tireless efforts and his run against the current as he'd expanded his business upstream. He had taken falling on teeth and pick yourself up to a whole new level.

Henk listened to this experienced businessman’s narrative about special moments in his career, such as in Lebanon, where he'd thought he had found an investor; an oil sheik. It proved to be a trap set by the PLO; a scam that cost him a lot of money in Beirut, and almost his life. Threatened with death, he had just caught the plane in time. Breathlessly, he listened to Jan’s life story until they naturally changed the subject into Henk’s criminal law case; his being under immense pressure of a collapsing empire of shipyards, his wharves (of which orders were taken away by hopeless government actions) failing, as always, and the political joust of that arrogant Old Boy’s network which (could it get any worse) his own father participated in as chairman!

It was a network that Henk had kept aloof from since his first days of doing business as an entrepreneur; a network to which he had always taken principled opposition. He wanted to do it himself, through his own strength. In the beginning this seemed admirable. His father had even dropped the word ‘pride’ during a family celebration, with the proviso that he saw it as a temporary novelty; a boyish bravado to dissent against the current power purely to do things differently. In subsequent years, this pride turned into slight annoyance, growing rapidly into persistent irritation, a permanent frustration, and, not to mention, a tough competitor in the shipyard business. Rummaging in the sector is fine, movement is great and will stimulate innovative solutions. Now they were father and son, competing like madmen with the port of Rotterdam as opera décor.

‘This is harmful for everyone,’ said Jan.
‘Why do you want to help me out? Do you do it because you have a score to settle with my father, or because you want to minimize this damage for ’everyone’?’

As always, also Henk did not beat around the bush.

‘Does it matter?! The motives... usually they are as clear as the water that flows through the Maas after a discharge from some old diesel engine. You know what I mean. Your way of doing business is like mine.’

Henk could not compete, and so he nodded.

They let the waitress take another order, ate a substantial snack, and talked on for hours, until Jan tipsily revealed how his ex-wife was demanding half of his money.

Henk thought of Monique and how lucky he was with that woman. Maybe it was not too late! And so he outspokenly told Jan of his student days at Nyenrode at de Vlecht; how he and Monique had met through a member of her idealistic college group, how they'd fallen in love, gotten married, and conceived Julia by surprise. Everything seemed perfect: they were overjoyed. Suddenly – this turnaround swung dangerously around like a dislodged pulley from a port crane with a perilous moment that you did not foresee; also born skippers make mistakes, that can happen to the best – she could not stand anymore seeing him slide into that dubious, if not despicable, level of his father’s way of doing business. *They were working to gather power and prestige, to gather as much blood money as possible,* she had put it bluntly.

The drinks surely began to take their toll, especially for Henk, as evidenced by his double accent. ‘I was shocked... boy, ohh sboy... she backed sdown; was on the point of radically changing course' (hicups) 'She left before thisss sboy could fulfill her demands!'

‘Practically the opposite of my situation!’ exclaimed Jan, sharp as ever.
‘That's... uhm...' (hiccup) 'Yeah, man, that's right! sBoy... where is my sPath... I ask you... you know. I can get her back, but winning her back seems...' (hiccup) 'Not?!

‘You'll have to tackle it. nothing is impossible. You didn’t sell the business yet. Fight back and win’

‘And... then J... s Julia Sjezus, Jan, she is...

‘I have seen her art! As a self-taught enthusiastic art lover, without pretending to know it all, I do admire her pieces. It is in the confrontation, the shock effect, that art occurs and sticks in your head full of prejudices – she confronts your brain, loaded with false judgments caused by ignorance. What she produces, her performances - they are great, man! She is doing very well, Henk. I tell you!’

'Das sooo beautifully spoken, sjezus man; thanks!

‘Yet, it must be difficult. Is it?’ he asked, and placed his shortened forearm with its firm grip on Henk's painful shoulder.

'Yes, svery tough... Jan sjezus...' (hiccup)

Then Jan bowed his reddened bald head forward, holding it close to Henck's chubby face, and said, ‘I believe you.’

‘Sjan... old giant! How are you going to sjelp me?’

'Make an appointment with that council. Let’s do field research: we will go back to basics of entrepreneurship.'
On the sofa

As if infected by a deadly virus, I was shunned, these days. An-negreet snatched the papers from my desk without looking at me and left the board room as soon as she could. I knew her by heart, we worked every day. This was not a good sign. When the opportunity arose, she stayed away longer than usual. After a few days, I found it necessary to put a stop to this misbehavior.

‘What is going on?’ I shouted, overstrained. ‘What's wrong with you to begin with, Anne? You must tell me; otherwise I'm going to take action. The water has risen up to my lips; those justice department charlatans! I cannot handle of this all alone.’

She must have heard the desperation in the breaking thrill of my voice, being sensitive by nature. For a moment I thought she was really going to cry aloud. Sadly, she laid her submissive head down and stared at that carpet once donated by some Arab sheik - a beautiful carpet it is – gosh, who was that guy... Mohammad al Rama... well, who cares. ‘Do not look,’ she sniffled awkwardly. ‘Stay away from your gallery shop window for a few weeks and avoid reading tabloids. I have to advise you to do this, in these dehumanizing days.’

What the hell? ‘I do not read that gossip bullshit, dear,’ I replied with a firmly raised voice in a valiant effort to debunk her crocodile tears. ‘Listen up, Anne! I will leave. I'm not accessible till tomorrow morning, unless the justice department calls, or Jan, of course, that old warhorse. Connect him through immediately, will you?’

That helped. She marked everything how I know her: diligently and flawless. I can rely on her; we know each other inside out.
'Do you have time? Shall I give you a blow job?'

'Not now, Anne!' I stated firmly.

She might be a tall blonde and beautifully round shaped, with her lovely size 44, but I had no time to kill; not anymore. Walking fast, I left the office and started my BMW 5i stationcar which was waiting nicely in front of the management sign, my incognito voiture, putting it in reverse and giving it full throttle. In my mirror I saw those curious little faces from the office pop down while I squeaky drove away, rounding the corner and driving along Inntel, onto Schiedammerdijk, parallel to the Harbour until the Maritime museum, and then going left into the Witte de Withstreen, where Julia now apparently was showing something shocking in our gallery window that might just ruin my reputation forever, costing me my last bit of self-respect. I double-parked and left the car flashing, stopping all traffic. With loud honking I underwent to see the dishonorable bewilderment - that is to say: I saw myself busy in hotel room 33, filmed with a hidden camera, an artwork in flamboyant, rainbow-colored neon letters, dubbed by Julia as: *This Saturday Night is for Daddy!*

Had the actress and Julia found each other?

And those rainbow colors, do they not mean sexual preference for the same sex? Women are my life! Numbly I looked at the rest of this amateur film showing myself in an unflattering role. If the lawsuit were not to be my downfall, this will be it. Suicide is the only medicine; the only way out left. In short, I became a tad dramatic.

‘Are you that, for real?’ a dwarf with an old-fashioned hat asked boldly. (Who wears such a felt bonnet, nowadays!?)

‘Let me introduce myself; you can brauch my help. Professor Von Stürmer is the name - psychiatrist is my occupation.’

‘And why do you think I will need your help?’

‘What do you think, yourself?’ he asked, pedantic, and turned his head to our window where I, clearly recognizable (a hidden
camera had filmed the filmmaker), was wobbling on my regular chair until I could not stand it any longer and, challenged to the bone, had jumped onto her. I closed my eyes in horror for my twisted, naked self, as if peering into a distorting mirror!

‘Do you have time for an appointment?’ I asked.

‘Now?’

‘Yes, right now!’

‘Uhm... actually... a client has accidentally lost his life... Well, alright, I'll step into suspension. My practice is close, ich rent das Hemradsingel,’ he babbled in his strange German accent.

‘Ridiculous; no one hires the entire historic canal street!’

An awkward silence followed. A wimp he is, with that weird German accent, that raincoat and way too short mini legs. Does he recognize or acknowledge the mental pain I emit? What an overwhelming experience he bears on his tiny little shoulders! What a smart guy this shrink is! Of course I understood that this agitation could indicate projection or subcutaneous anger, implying that I could use his help, and yet this gnome annoyed me immensely with his small hat, his shabby goatee, and greedy little mouth where a disrespectful set of teeth were housed. They were half-rotten teeth which forced you to keep looking away - a minor surgery would have been enough to fix it! But no, Mr. shrink thought this was not necessary.

Lying on his soft couch, I heard a strange sound; the gentle tapping motion of a pendulum. As he paced, I understood where it was coming from: he savagely shook his finger back and forth in his ear, where something niggled: earwax? Sordid - what a bastard psychiatrist was this ‘Von OberStürmführer’! I have to leave!

‘Close your eyes,’ he muttered, suddenly irritatingly gentle and swaying a dated watch on a chain till a hazy daze overtook me like a thief in the night, greedy for all he could get his tiny hands on. I lost all orientation and vaguely noticed that I was
incessantly talking about everything and nothing, till even that realization disappeared.

How long had the session lasted? Sleepy, I sat at an outdated desk of mahogany, a cup of mint tea from Schwarzwald wedged between my trembling hands and a professional secretary at the other end of the table. She was neatly dressed for not standing out, her hair up, as in a movie from the fifties.

‘Are you ok?’ she asked kindly. She was a treasure of a Belgian lady whom you could get spontaneous *goesting* from. *These kind of people still exist*, I thought, amused, and took a sip of tea.

‘If you have finished your tea, it is safe to get into your car,’ she said mysteriously. ‘But do drive cautiously; stay here as long as you need. Sometimes it takes a while before clients come to their senses. It does not keep me from doing my job.’

And indeed, she worked quietly, her actions calm and routine, by which a serene calm came over me. It felt like a warm blanket, so I actually dozed off to sleep again. A caring-looking young man, tight clipped but marked with a multitude of tattoos (even on his neck he had something ‘immortalized’), awoke me with a friendly nudge.

Once outside, I walked groggily to the place (in aptly popular Rotterdam slang) called *purchase gutter*. In a shop with commercial pseudo-art I saw our Monarchs depicted in that caricature sketch of Willie. I would never understand the royal family's way of doing business. Indeed, one of my very own companies was royally baptized — that is to say, after I took this firm under my wings and just before being pushed off that steep bankruptcy cliff. They'd already toiled a year or hundred for this prestigious award! Besides, I had unselfishly lent my fifty meter long Blue Magical yacht to Prins Willie for nothing less than their honeymoon, and did I receive anything concrete in *goodwill* for that gesture? Nothing! Not yet - they know they can get away with
anything, folks. But by now I knew more; yeah, by now I had an idea of how this giant fork came to be so handy attached to this majestic stem, so to speak: the crown had conspired with my father and his cigar-smoking, reclining club of barons with their ancient, patriarchal stamp. That stale blood money and their arrogant approach formed a granite block; a virtually unbreakable system with the Dutch royal family! The royal family had served as the linchpin of their haughty association which, at all costs, wanted to retain power. The only thing they granted the crowd was bread and butter! Jan was right: real innovation and entrepreneurial spirit had slowed down to an absolute minimum, nowadays. Still, I remained open, looking for positive surprises, and worked optimistically on the latest improvements within our harbor company. Despite the huge crowd at the cheap fish market, I did not stand out with my old garb or captain's hat from the fifties. Apparently people did not recognize me as the notorious, savvy entrepreneur who single-handedly, against the current of those bon-ton elite (an elite between quotation marks, largely consisting of swindlers creating fantasized digital money - I mean, their increasing lack of *noblesse oblige* became by the second more startling), had built up an empire. I was someone who had become a vital player in the ever-rumbling metal sector; someone who could make a difference in the coming years.

But Julia's latest artwork meant vicarious shame and public disgrace: people might also recognize me and therefore ignore me, now. Yes, behind my back they would surely gossip: Henkie is not yet fallen into madness, I tell you! The suggestion of this dwarf when I was lying hypnotized on his tiny, soft sofa - this idea of his to see for myself how the contemporary street market operated; to taste the current city atmosphere - was a splendid one. So, I wanted to pull this off soon as possible.

How did things look right now? The one who knows the crowd can own it, and he who owns them is free from tight
doors and protected by the most powerful of lordships! But what if you knew how to unite that mass into something stronger? Yes, that's what I needed to do right now: control them - do nothing less than gain them all! A curious toddler, he was, that German von Stürmer; an odd string bean, but very useful nonetheless. But let’s first interrogate Quinten on how the current art scene witnessed the port of Rotterdam.

Jan had rightfully stated: go back to the basics. The one who gets the support from the artist movement has won half the battle, he suggested optimistically. Knowing him, I had full confidence in this vision. It was a pity that the royal family was ahead of me in this matter. If you want to expand, he said, just do it! His encouraging last phrase ‘nothing is impossible, my fellow righteous businessman,’ was spinning in my mind.

A little over two weeks we had set aside for this inventory. Then we would meet again and grind our plans. Concrete them, my father would say. Meanwhile, Jan inquired himself about my company, about my practically collapsed empire. There I had given him complete freedom to consult with my right hand man, Jos Borgers de Witt. And now here I was, setting off, my investigation started; but still I had nothing concrete.

Possibly, because I did not recognize these strange sounds - something presumably Arabic? Or was it a peculiar mixture of one hundred forty languages in some kind of new slang, coming from all kinds of different countries around the globe? The number of nationalities is now almost innumerable! Thick, waddling aunts without makeup and with headscarves from bygone days, a copy of the Arab world (as often shown on TV – for example, in transmissions over mountain slopes around Kabul or anywhere where there is black gold in the ground, really) shuffled right before my feet, accidentally pushing me from behind with the rusted prows of their strollers against my heel, without even trying to excuse themselves!
This information is useful: let me note this in my log *Inventory of the crowd*. Courtesy is learned; this is a given sociological fact. In short: they do not know better, these people. But where did the Rotterdam merchants go off and sell their stuff?

Moroccans sold their dates and nuts, but where did they, the working class? Behind me I heard a German accent shriek with laughter. Startled, I turned around, leaving me face to face with that damn Von Stürmer with his sterile goatee, poorly maintained teeth, and unpleasant-smelling breath, grinning in his light beige raincoat, a fancy squirming bound notepad wedged into his hands. ‘What’s this good for?’ I snorted.

‘The first day I follow my clients on Füss. Ignore me, das ist ein command!’

‘Agreed, then, Stürmer - have it your way,’ I said, so-called defeated and with conscious articulation, as slowly as possible, because when I spoke his name this way, he winced in pain. As I had already figured out during the initial consultation, I was able to catch him with this and regain power.

The Moroccan merchants resembled those clerks at the DeltaHotel - that Indian maid, for example. I realized intuitively that they had the same background: first, second or third generation workers or former visitors, born and bred in our country. Were they our future?! One way or another, I noticed a certain hardness and condescension, as if they looked down on our culture and our beautiful country; as if they only used it at their advantage while meanwhile coolly maintaining a double agenda! My intuition was sharp today: yeah, I saw it clearly - how the boy slyly exchanged my ten euro note after I bought more than three euros of mixed nuts, how he put the exchange in his fishnet and handed change over the bins full of sweetness. He had deliberately omitted the five euro note; there were only two euros in his fishnet! And I noticed even clearer how he politely
excused himself when I caught him on his mistake by jokingly suggesting ‘it’s like stealing from a thief, young man.’

His sarcastic smile hardly stayed straight, looking like something lethally beligerant, and his lame excuse spoke volumes!

Disrespectful, that’s the word. Were these kinds of jokes customary in Rotterdam, back then, in those days when merchants built our town from scratch? A thrice, no!

Agitated, I continued on my way and ran into all sorts of utterances and corruptions of our beautiful Dutch language into a kind of rap; into a mix of Antillean, Romanian, and Arabic. Von Stürmer shuffled behind, supposedly hidden behind a seated lady weighing some hundred twenty kilos. Fat bulged on all sides of her much like balloons billowing from under her pink sweater and leggings. I walked on.

The sun slipped adroitly between the covers of the stalls and blinded the lot, on which occasion I decided to buy a pair of sunglasses from a collection touted by a young Italian or Egyptian (his ethnicity was too hard to tell, really). In a flashy three-piece suit, he spoke to me.

Henkie will never underestimate a smooth guy.

Let's see how much I can haggle. It is simply a hobby: as late as possible, trying to find that boundary and trying to cross it way beyond what most people consider possible. I grew up with this; it’s a gift. Monique, gullible and naive at the time, thought I rebelled during my study at Nyenrode just because I disapproved of the way our professors worked. But it was a facade: pretending to be a born trade unionist; someone with a heart for personnel and their struggle against the wealthy elite, to which my parents belonged; I played a brilliant role; a role that I had invented myself - an ingenious play in which I could approach her. That fraternity of neo-Marxists with whom she camped like being in the army... how else could I get close to her? *Love for the beauty of women pushes creative spirits to unprecedented heights.* The real
purpose was winning Monique’s heart and, over time, penetrating her wealthy family. So I hit two perfect birds with one stone: the shock my father administered was nothing less than a straight hit! And so I made the illustrious boxing move of Sugar Ray Robinson in the air. When extending my elbow, I saw, between two stalls and behind the dented, rickety minivan of that Egyptian scalper, a passionately devilish dwarf, filming.

The Egyptian (he did not seem Italian after all) showed me some sunglasses. ‘For sporty types and fighters, these are a must have. They’re tough... professional boxers love this material! Put it on, sir? It looks good on you, sir!’

The thing pleased me indeed, immediately. I inquired about the price. Twenty euros, haha! ‘For two euros, I'll take it and buy two from you, my friend.’

A supposedly indignant look was followed by a kind of gibberish, as if I had insulted him. Now he gained respect, alright! I kept watching him calmly. Meanwhile, he rattled on: a good sign. He wanted to sell; I was close to a minimum price. Stürmer noted something in his notebook, after which he flew quickly, hiding behind the van. Time must be your friend in this kind of grueling negotiation; otherwise, you had better not start it. Merely thirty-five minutes later, I was three euros lighter and two beautiful sunglasses richer. That’s the game; I love it. One of the glasses fit perfectly on my captain’s hat.

‘What do you think of the port of Rotterdam?’
‘It stinks,’ said the young Egyptian.
‘You mean figuratively?’
‘What?’
‘I'll take them. Thanks for the information!’

Immediately, I grabbed my logbook ‘Inventory of the crowd’ and wrote: ‘Shrewd Egyptian merchant, young and ambitious, struggles with our so-called pungent harbor smell.’
Energetically, I walked past the market stalls, proud of my gains, among the thick camel-tan Arab women with headscarves who sold their colorful fabric of the roll: so, old-fashioned by the meter, let say just for convenience. It looks like they used the extremely thin fabric to cobble up their dresses. From there I walked calmly to the city library - popularly and aptly named ‘the gasworks’ or ‘snowy mountain’ - incidentally situated right next to the ‘pencil’ (the building, indeed, looked exactly like an upright pencil). There I stepped inside, searching for a decent cup of coffee. At the entrance of the library I was, however, blocked by Rotterdammers in tracksuits wearing baseball hats with a stray pit bull of mammoth proportions - whopping big beasts they were, potent through intensive training combined with hormone preparations from the health shop 'The Garden'. Those dogs were put on a treadmill on the third or fourth floors of simple homes with old-fashioned carpet and curtains from Crooswijk or in the city Centre, or so I visualized this daily scene - or maybe it took place in an apartment behind the Meent or against the ‘purchase gutter’, perhaps?

I decided to deliberately ignore this important signal and took a seat at the reading table, where newspapers and magazines were lying, askew over one another. Fortunately, the table was too high for Stürmer's tiny hands. He failed to stab his pedantic nose into the news. This explained a lot! My eye fell on the financial daily. How could I leave that one alone? Through all the fuss this morning, I'd forgotten to dig through her decently! With the encouragement of Jan in mind, I did what made me big: looked for on-the-brink-of-bankruptcy teetering enterprises, companies with less than optimal cash flow, hunting for vital clues and bargains within sectors which rumbled all the time. Those Russians are interested in all of them; there is something to gain here, alright! Admittedly, I had, for weeks, failed to check this. The number of bankruptcies had increased alarming-
ly. ‘This cannot be true,’ I cried when I found, to my surprise, that one of my own companies stood right between them. The toddler shrink hit me with a flashlight, immortalizing me with an unsightly, aggressive grimace. The bartender looked questionable: if only the date of the newspaper was visible from that picture! One more time, and this dwarf will be thrown out!

I became complacent, ignoring the psychiatrist and my enterprise, unjustly as bankrupt, and searched frantically eagerly further, when I came across a technically innovative company: cream of the crop, with virtually no support from the government. He built it up with first-rate entrepreneurial spirit... what was his name? If that goes down, while the government spends public money in privatized development projects of redundant office buildings and shopping centers, we can all pack our stuff! Then again, you keep running after the ball without touching. No; we can expect nothing from those corrupt gangs in The Hague and Brussel! This company seemed just too perfect. Global calculations raced through my mastermind while I pushed visual balance sheets back and forth; one by one they floated through space in 3D images. Entrepreneurship seemed impossible; my reputation almost broken. Still, I phoned Jos Borgers de Witt and commanded him to look into it. Perhaps he could persuade Jan to come along. He knew what to do, so I drank the first sip of my now-lukewarm cup of dirt, ordered a new one, and asked about the menu. The ensuing peace - they played cheerful music from the Caribbean – made me flip, relaxed, through that famous art section of the Financial Times.

There was nothing about The young artist', only a full-page story about Quinten's lifelike, large paintings, covered with thick curtains. Hey, wait one minute! I read the text again. Yes, here it was surely stated! Julia will unveil these works of art at her next
gig! Saturday night live! My heartbeat went crazy. Was this a hidden message towards her father about *cosmopolitanism*?

A presentation of an artwork within a work of art? Brilliant!

Did these youngsters listen to my advice after all? Would Julia’s club artists have understood that *neo-cosmopolitanism* is the only solution for all those critical multicultural issues? No assimilation or integration where everyone can go on in headstrong disturbance, unless we want to wait for the next *National Socialist bomb* to explode! As anarchism means absolute freedom, so does multiculturalism mean one chaotic barrel of hydrochloric acid in which tension sooner or later will be too high. Without a modern variant of cosmopolitanism, we will be distraught! Is it not true? I admit that even Henkie was not quite sure, anymore.

A strange whistling filled the dining room. Startled, I looked up. My smartphone blinked as uneasily as a compass beaten on a runaway. Woh, this must be urgent, alright! After clicking a VIP invitation, that new presentation of Julia in the Witte de With-street appeared. Perplexed, I ordered lunch. This latest *target marketing* and *branded journalism* stuff is useful. Obviously, a signal from an electronic nano-chip hidden in this newspaper was sent to my smartphone without my permission. I was impressed by these latest capabilities of technology and marketing: the two were now actually in a tight entanglement, much like a marriage.

I plugged in my earphones (yes, I use old-fashioned headphones, folks.) Then I looked at her announcement. Julia was sitting perfectly upright in a square display and looked as professional as a newscaster. This must be important stuff!

My daughter’s voice was fragile and strong at the same time, as she spoke: 'Here you are, a special guest, one of the lucky ones. The performance will be held in the same gallery where you are repeatedly treated to uncompromising work as an expression of
the free will without restriction, while maintaining authority of its own moral standard or a lack thereof. You were merely a spectator; a kind of voyeur running for this profound form of free expression of the cutting edge in which everything is mocked and applauded. The artist who satisfies or torments himself, melts or degrades, but also the audience - yes, even if you're a voyeur, you are part of the artwork. Even when you are not watching, you are decisive; a human being. The viewer is only a feeble equivalent of the artist, though; a marginal and pathetic figure who wants to be entertained without creating anything, and someone who oversees, curiously at best, which man is capable. When creativity wins out of slavish submission to globalizing power structures - slavery in which you, as an insignificant pawn in the wheel, act as a negligible number, an insignificant cog whose convertibility will not be long, who will be disposed - yeah, it can take place any time, now. Only the artist lives on!

I swallowed in vain. My mouth was dry. Julia looked so resolute and ruthlessly sure about her naive childish argument, as if she was a kind of Tania Niemeyer, fighting the good cause until death follows! Was my girl becoming a guerrilla fighter for art? Where was the nuance; where remained the doubt?

She continued coolly: 'You can be unexpectedly wiped out and put aside unless you unite as a crowd with a clear voice against these powers. Only then will you acquire the minimal chance of ultimate freedom. We need to find forms of communication and organization in which private investors and philanthropists with dual agendas are not the ones who decide what is beautiful, interesting art; in which man is not withdrawn into his own culture or sees himself as a global citizen with no connection with his homeland or the country in which he is staying. You, the voyeur, the public member who at least has the
courage to observe, have a slight advantage, since you'll be the first to recognize that something is missing.’

Behind Julia hung Karel Appel's 'Drift Attic'. I assumed it was a replica (unless she had abused the money suitcase). A few tables away, Stürmer rambled angrily and for me, though he whispered way too loud, lifting his sterile tiny head occasionally and staring at me rather pitifully and compassionately, then quickly ducked back in and spoke. Did he use an app that could actually understand him; that saved everything in digital text form despite that weird dialect? The cafeteria was empty except for the waiter and Von Stürmer, so I asked what he thought of current Rotterdam city - a great city, lively - and of the port area.

He never heard of it! Yes, he had briefly seen the footage shown in the Puntzak while passing by. ‘Something with ships and cranes?’ he asked stupidly. When I told him how it used to be, miles behind Manhattan at the Maas, with all that activity of the past flourishing with full cargoes, occupying dry docks for ship building and repairs, he just stared at me glassily! Purely by routine, I took this information to heart and wrote it down in my inventory log. Meanwhile, my thoughts strayed.

How militant was her new artistic movement? Did I estimate Quinten in value, or was there, behind his dastardly façade of social embarrassment, a devious freedom fighter situated within? Was he maybe a member of some art society that had found Julia as their newborn charismatic leader, using my daughter for their obscure propaganda?! That would explain his capping his impressive works of art until her presentation! I will not let it happen that they abuse our innate familial charisma; certainly not that of my little girl! When he had asked what her father, as a born entrepreneur, thought of his large-scale canvas, his intentions might have been hidden already.
Proud, despite everything, I had given away our gallery and mingled suddenly with a genuine fear of this underground movement, a group in which, possibly, that irritatingly-kind Moroccan boyfriend of hers participated! At the market, true, I had gained some respect for those young Egyptians and Moroccans. At least they tried to do business! Yes, they appeared to have healthy entrepreneurial blood, but this influence threatened to rumble in my family like an unstoppable train in an irreversible process of danger and misfortune!

Tense, I walked out of the gate. It opened and closed automatically from the chip in my key - such a wonderful engineering feat by Edwin! *Something that automatically works for you is always wonderful.* For this occasion, I had given another assignment to the actress. My survey of the crowd had produced a series of notes without concrete results, but since I had a week ahead before meeting Jan, it was still possible to get a good impression. I remained optimistic and noted everything of interest. This afternoon I wanted to be old-fashioned, as if a tourist myself, take that Spido tour of the harbor and sail with them over the Maas to find out what our tourists think of our harbor city.

Spring actually came up, with a bright sun warming us as hope glowed and changed the atmosphere, resulting in a significant decrease in aggressive slandering (if it becomes tropically hot, then this obviously works counterproductively). Walking along the Café Melief, I decided to make an unplanned stop, ordered a beer, and enjoyed the view of the half-open terrace from under the historic roof which was proudly held up by rods and barbs. One of the few cafés, this place had survived The German Bombing. It is a unique place. While observing passersby, I wrote a few sentences in the log every now and then and ordered a second beer, soon followed by a third one. On reflection, this idea of sailing through my own harbor as tourist
with the actress did not appeal to me anymore. What a stupid idea! That Spido boat tour will not vanish today or go away any time soon, so I sent her a cancelation message. Meanwhile, I enjoyed the atmosphere of freedom that flowed through my veins, even if it was unfortunately a pathetic, melancholy form of freedom; a freedom on credit. How long would it be before the judge deprived me of this freedom? Thumping from under the bar interrupted my contemplation. Some idiot tried to climb onto the stool next to me, rumbling on that wood, jogging and pushing against my barstool. Annoyed, I considered kicking him away, but I could manage.

‘These are my first bevindungen. Soll ich dass report vorlezen?’ He asked, frolisome, the workpiece in one hand and the index finger of his other fiercely burrowing into his earpiece as he peered up gaudily with his mini-eyes. His finger shook like crazy, back and forth; his little head moved similarly.

‘Better not,’ I replied, grumpier than desired - it went without saying - after which his miserable head swelled to an overly ripe tomato and the contours of his goatee distorted to an elongated barge; one that Julia had drawn at age five, already.

Finally, he managed to jump on his barstool. Immediately he hit me with the report as he repeated his question in authoritative German accent: ‘Zoll ich read dass report, Herr Henk?!’

Ever again, and with a firm and persistent, squeaky voice, he repeated this. His power was limited. I did not notice a great deal of his beating, and seriously considered pushing and hitting him off his giant stool, but I kept a low profile. Even I myself did not know exactly why I was annoyed; maybe because he was a dwarf? A woman, you do not hit, as well. Or was it because of keeping the peace when you can?

Anyway, since last week, I’d had a soft spot for this pub. I did not want these lovely people to be disrupted. Magnanimously, I left him alone and hunkered down behind his blows. After a
minute or three - it did not take much longer - he gave up his courage. That rascal, always with a felt hat on that tiny head, climbed from his barstool down onto the table, his legs frantically swaying back and forth. Jolly and enthusiastic, he turned, the report in his fingers resting lost in his peplum. Something kept me rooted to the ground in the corner, possibly through embarrassment or through bubbling curiosity.

Suddenly I took pity and said: ‘Okay, go on then! Go on: begin to read. For once, it's okay.’

Now, that was a mistake!

 Barely catching his breath, he managed to make matters worse, in old German, with the confident demeanor of an accomplished public speaker, his legs swinging over the bar's rod as he lectured on and on and on. After a while I ordered another beer, let one be put in front of him, and, relieved, set foot outside the packed terrace. In the bright sun, a table vacated. Stürmer kept on rattling as if it were an incantation religious text which was to be pronounced as a whole, and I saw him swinging through the drop-down wooden barbs.

‘That's a deep sigh,’ said a secular, middle-aged woman who was sandwiched between two tables. Was it her second living room? She leaned back a little further, eyes closed, deliciously turning toward the sun.

‘Today it is not enjoyable...’

‘Tell me,’ she replied energetically. ‘We're taking our chances. Ten horses will not drag me out!’

‘The problem is all mine, it's fine with me.’

I reflected for a moment and then asked, thickening my accent: ‘What do you think of the port of Rotterdam and stuff, by the way?’ Sometimes, I admit that this question helps communications over here. Johanna and Willem were loosened in me, so to speak.

'Become modern, has something, does it not?’
‘For sure, it has charm,’ I lied while I took a picture for my research archive.

‘What can I get for you?’

‘Oh, make that a Pilgrim.’

‘Well, yeah; me too.’

‘Huh?!’

‘No, it is all good. It’s coming,’ I said, and seized this opportunity. Von Stürmer had risen from his seat, so I used a spotless one and washed my hands afterwards with an incredible amount of soap, then made my way to the flashy bar, where I immediately ordered. When I had settled in and re-entered the patio, I saw Stürmer babbling with the lady from my interview!

His goatee was shot back in a messy, oily oblong pointed shape; his hat felt askew on his little spinning chin. Making myself even taller, I looked down on him, into endless depth. He looked up and shouted: ‘Halten sie sofort ein espresso!’

It sounded like an upright order, fiercely coming from that antiseptic little mouth of his, which made me suffer a blush on my angry cheeks. The astonished faces of that sunbathing crowd, with several ladies and gentlemen of clientele undoubtedly thinking of the second world war, almost begging for an honorable action, a reprisal, before they themselves would otherwise help out in their eighties - arrived at a respectable age that is. They would not hesitate! And so I did not hesitate either, grabbing him by the collar and throwing that toddler right out into our shopping street, after which I gave a good kick in that sterile dwarf’s ass!

‘So,’ I cried, apparently calm, ‘that weird shrink has been chased away for good, folks!’

On the inside I was boiling with rage. An observant pub mate could tell this by the clenched little fists I nervously pushed into my chair. It was all becoming too much for me, now, with that guy.
‘It's about time, lol,’ she smiled broadly and without a trace of embarrassment. ‘What a nasty goatee - and then that Jerry Kraut language - good riddance. Well done!’

Now I had to be grateful for Stürmer, since with this action I had obviously made some good impression upon this delicious lady, a woman of the world, no doubt; one for my own heart - one who is not afraid of making pleasure in life. She had something boldly resolute about her, as a born Rotterdammert from the old school, like Johanna. But she was obviously someone who kept up with modern times, too. I did not know exactly how to judge her. I carefully studied her jewelry. She wore a lot of gold stuff, a sweater of a valuable brand, and stepped into fancy shoes under her elegant jeans.

‘That's right,’ I said. 'Are you in some kind of business yourself?’

‘Well guessed, man!’ she said, and took a swig. ‘This is delicious, with this weather. We should take it for granted while we can. I mean, now that the sun finally shines. What do not you think?’

‘What business are you in?’ I asked as we closed our eyes and enjoyed the bright sun's rays.

‘Oh, projects - anything goes. I come from Hillergersberg. Wait, stop... let's start again, lol. Let me introduce myself properly, dude. Antoinine is the name, but everyone calls me Antoinet - it fits so comfortably on a strumpet,’ she joked, self-critical. At least, this seemed like conscious storytelling.

‘Aha!’ I said, and took a sip from my bottle of beer. 'Henk van Wijnen-Swarttouw. Pleased to meet you.’

‘That's a big mouthfull. Nice to meet you as well.'

There was silence. Did she mean everything as a sheer hint? Occasionally I sipped an ever-more laurel sip from my Pilgrim beer bottle. After a while, I dozed to sleep.
‘Wait! I know you,’ she stated. With a flat hand I gave myself a slap, purely to stay alert from now on.

‘In the port of Rotterdam we have to deal with adversity nowadays; some unhealthy corruption. Never mind, we'll win it all right back and will persevere. It will all come out fine if they leave it to me,’ I rattled on routinely, as usual.

‘You're not a born Rotterdammert, right?’

‘Almost. Schiedam. it is. When I was eighteen, I went to a house at the Vecht river, where I followed a study at Nyenrode University... that is a kind of business school. Quite sophisticated, it....’

‘I've heard of it, dude.’

‘I was stuck. There I met my current wife and several years later built our holding, which includes some distressed companies from our Rotterdam shipbuilding and heavy metal industry. Monique is off to Brazil.’

‘Are you divorced? That's nothing special.’

‘No, no! We are still married. I'm going to win her back!’

She watched me a long time, assessed my abilities, and replied: ‘All is possible. You will succeed; I can see that!’

'Yeah, like hell I will. Want another one?’

And so we drank and chatted on until the sun turned orange and gentle shadows crossed the deck chairs as they carefully shoved over the clinkers. A drug addict stumbled out of the joint next Melief, tossed herself onto our terrace, stumbled awkwardly on a wicker chair, and held up her hand for alms. Her white face was pale and stained with road dirt, cheeks sunken, and her teeth were many times worse than those of Von Stürmer: they looked dramatic, black almost. Exasperated, we waved her away, after which she waddled on until she crashed against a flexible billboard. Suddenly something occurred to me, and I shouted, ‘Hold on!’
I pulled out my camera, took a color image, and began to decline an interview. That became an interesting conversation; much deeper than expected. She appeared to be a mother of three children, the oldest of which was about the same age as Julia. Then we vividly discussed puberty. Because of years of lacking a decent income, as she candidly revealed, her children were taken from their home by child welfare and placed into a Muslim family. Fortunately, the truth was, I remembered after walking back to the terrace twenty minutes later, that those families are strict but fair. You could not even begin to think that they were placed with some loving gay or lesbian couple who, full of understanding, would teach their children how to have respect for foreign cultures, people who want to take the opportunity to develop themselves in a neo-cosmopolitism way. I admit it; I had become a bit cynical these days. Maybe I was missing my tranquilizers?

Between the open rooftops, I could just see how Antoinet had transported herself to the bar. Now I was faced with a serious choice: continue to go downtown to Johanna’s pub, or go inside with the danger of lingering. The waiter waited: I could settle the case, but routinely gave a round of beer for the terrace. There was plenty of time. I wanted to write down this interview so that Eddy could publish it.

‘What is this?’ Antoinet asked cheerfully.

‘A log. I'm trying to get a helicopter view of the crowd,’ I said, and waved my fingers in the air as quote marks at this last phrase, this not only for Elias Canetti's loaded word ‘crowd’.

The music turned into something cheerful.

Antoinet was gripped by it, ignoring my compelling answer, and ran away without reason, dancing with a tipsy companion. I think she'd knew him longer than just today. I thought this was perfectly fine and seized this opportunity to go around, with my old-fashioned notepad and pencil ready. To only rely on modern
technology seemed unwise these days; we can better spread our chances. I really got the hang of it. Within two hours I had conducted a dozen interviews, and so I walked out of the café with Antoinet's phone number, three social media connections and a half-filled journal full of pencil annotations that could be expanded later. The main notes were found on some coasters: I wore them on my body, anxious and terrified of losing them as I hopped into a Pedicab (a kind of rickshaw from India).

Along the way, I called Edwin to talk about the crowd's inventory. Though I had gathered quite a bit of information, it was still totally inadequate. To such old-fashioned entrepreneur as Jan, one should come well prepared. Edwin liked the idea and he knew my generous allowance, but did not understand my question, so I instructed the rickshaw driver to pick him up.

Would it remain quiet tonight for a change? Or would that motorcycle gang come over for revenge?

‘Here's the pub!' I cried, overly excited and full of bravado, nerves shrieking through my sore throat. Edwin jumped out of the Pedicab and started tapping against the lamp post. Was it too much for him, all this multicultural tension? In Johanna's window we saw Willem demonstrating boxing movements in slow motion, handing out an uppercut.

I pushed the heavy curtain aside, and saw, to my astonishment, on that well-known corner and half in the dark, Professor Dr. Herr von Stürmer with that girl from last week on his lap! The swing wobbled merrily to the beat of his scrawny legs and his arms, dangling at her roguishly charming neck, were marked with bleached hair as white as that swivel chair of Bouvries. That devilish dwarf whispered something exciting in her ear, and her flushed cheeks spoke volumes! It was in spite of the irritation, which bubbled up over, such a ludicrous spectacle that Edwin and I spontaneously erupted in fits of laughter.
'Love and happiness?' I asked in a vacuum space. 'You cannot stop it if you want to. She’s blushing as I have not seen her yet!'

'I think she’s mad about that tiny toddler,' stammered Edwin. His amusing giggling gave way to an evil look.

'Being stalked by your very own psychiatrist,' I suggested, 'is no easy task. It does not leave you unmoved, emotionally... I mean, he's a confidant person in your life!'

'Who?! I know that guy, he's a regular customer,' cried Willem, suspended backwards from the steel edge of the bar. 'Is HE a shrink? Then I'm prime minister!'

Von Stürmer could hear it, but that did not seem to make a difference. We ignored the dwarf and his advances towards the Polish female beauty – or was she that Romanian girl? I was not on my stool when Willem started talking about the experience last Friday. He'd wanted to tell his story; a quite sensitive one. Tineke had run away from home.

'She will be back before you notice, Willem,' Johanna reassured him. 'Where can she go, you know? Is it not so?'

'I am not sure,' he said desperately. 'To see a girlfriend, or something? I don’t know what to do!'

My curiosity got the better of me, so by mistake I asked him what had happened.

'Those slackers!' he snorted in a hurry (it had nothing to do with his story). 'There was nothing going on, guys! That stupid bitch! I went out with friends - you know the drill- and drunk too much, maybe. We drove in a car with a buddy of mine. He parked in front of our apartment. Two girls from the pub drank with us. We just had to grab them! There was nothing to see; everything was fine. Satisfied, I stumbled my drunken head upwards. I moved as quietly as possible under the duvet because I did not want to wake Tineke, knowing how she gets angry at night, but I knocked down a reading book on the bedside table:
**Hundred Years of Solitude**, which I’m reading on advice of a soccer friend. Startled, I heard her turn in her sleep, muttering unintelligibly about some stranger. Carefully, as quietly as possible, I put the novel on the side table. Fortunately, she slept on!

Satisfied, I slid my hand casually between my tired legs, where I felt something sticky: the girl had insisted on using a rubber! I fumbled it lose - that was pretty tough, with my drunk head - and pushed it rapidly between the mattresses. *Always handy, those double beds,* I joked quietly, and felt asleep, relieved, snoring like a mad man. This morning I was wakened by the alarm, tapped the thing off, and suddenly remembered to throw that flexible thing away, scabbed for it, and missed! So I searched on... and only then did I see it: that pumped swinger was attached tightly with a pushpin to the cabinet, with a written note: *'And, did Sir enjoy it tonight?’*

‘That's odd!’ shouted Edwin.

Johanna agreed: ‘Yeah, quite a strange one. She must have written it on a whim.’

Meanwhile, she routinely filled our glasses.

Behind us, we heard Von Stürmer babbling in the old German dialect. Could it be more annoying? We stared ahead to our frothy beers: a neat row, all sympathetic with Willem his misery.

Out of compassion, we maintained a long silence until Willem recalled: ‘Had these German bombings destroyed the city back then, then all things would even be worse now; you know what I mean?’

We all agreed without speaking a word.

But then, softly whispering, we unintentionally heard a voice from behind us. I turned half around on my bar stool. That devilish dwarf had forced the Polish beauty to read my psychiatric report!

At the moment I admonished him emphatically to stop it, if he wanted to stay alive, we were startled by the sound of a roar-
ing engine. All faces turned to the front door. False alarm? The engines moved away. Johanna put the dance music back on.

‘Do you, by any chance, access the cloud?’ I heard him ask beside me in that German dialect. ‘Maybe we can agree on antreffen?’

‘Man, get off!’ I cried. ‘And antreffen does not exist; that is only half Dutch, idiot!’

Screaming with pleasure, he jumped back on the ground, his mini hands raising high into the air, apparently expecting that I would hurl down his order. I turned back, ignored his request, and poured another beer down my throat. At my wrist, I felt one of those attractive, firm thighs. The Polish Beauty leaned, relaxed, against me, as if we belonged together: like in a girlfriend experience finally! Her cheeks were still florid and reddish! With this I could not compete; she was still shining from head to toe.

‘What do you want with that silly toddler?’ I cried, piqued.

‘He is charming and strong; big,’ she chuckled with pleasure. ‘He's an aristocrat of old-fashioned gallantry and with his heart at the right place. Well, and then his little sausage legs and arms and that roguish goatee mustache has their advantages, you know... and his...’

‘That's quite enough!’ I interrupted her. ‘Here's your order! For you, lovebirds!’

‘Tuft, a fringe of goatee beard,’ said Willem.

Hell yeah, it was an idiotic fringe, alright, with which psychiatrist Von Stürmer roamed around! From now on I would have to constantly think of that remark about a talking pussy, and I would not be able to see Prof. Dr. Von Stürmer without shooting into laughter from loathing, malicious pleasure.

‘Well, tell me why,’ Edwin called out brutally. The beer had gone to his head, so I ignored that.

‘That's right,’ I said casually, and spoke of what I was doing without betraying the reason behind it; for business and politics
were not separate, nowadays. Without hiring a lobbyist firm, you were irretrievably lost! That was another error from the past that I, if only I could come out unscathed from this lawsuit, wanted to restore. Jan and I had to break that political system! Besides the separation of church and state, a strict separation of politics and business seemed necessary. Thereby, let innovation and entrepreneurial drive win this decadent, deadly game that slowed down all development, allowing them to maximize profits which basically entailed nothing short of stealing from obedient, tax-paying citizens! In short, this beautiful, flat land was becoming one giant cash cow for my father's Rotary Club and their government friends to subtract from!

Fortunately, I was able to think big again through the positive influence of Jan, that old warhorse.

It was grandiose thinking that led to dreaming of unprecedented breakthroughs in that current, corrupt to the bone power system which held the Netherlands gripped and drowning quietly in polluting industries, stubbornly conservative without cherishing nostalgia and without learning the proper good things of the past; without lasting breakthroughs in sustainability. As lapdogs to the big boys, we were all operating as subordinates to anonymous multinationals. Such a 'gentleman' of a director easily left with an outrageous bonus; then you would have to put up with another idiot all over again! No, these types of companies were unscrupulously paralytic.

As a final blow, more companies fell into the hands of Russian and Chinese shareholders. In short, it was now or never. Jan and I had to save Europe. The will to power with responsibility flowed through my veins, naturally happy. Edwin was recorded in my memory under 'politically sensitive'. I limited him to the job of gathering information, as he eagerly searched in my log of accompanying photos of interviewees and occasionally stopped, remarkably looking at brunettes with long eyelashes every single
time. I intuitively had the truth at my side: this was useful, but indeed not sufficient. It was a good time to pronounce my not-to-be-rejected proposal.

‘That spysoftware for entrepreneurs can do much more than you showed me so far,’ I began cautiously, attentively observing his natural counter-reaction.

He blinked suspiciously with darting eyes and that nerve tapping in his right cheek returned.

The data of all products on the shelves worldwide - Google actions for bonus cardholders, airmiles, fuel cards, all social media lyrics ever typed, all payments and all data from passports, smart phones, travel info, and so on - moreover, all this combined with geographical location within a millimeter precision by a date/time combination per person, would provide me a wealth of insights! That would really help me! You know it damn well will, Edwin’

‘The secret code is strictly confidential; that’s why its secret.’
‘If I did not believe it,’ I cried enthusiastically. ‘Yes? And? Give me the code or what?’
‘Then I’m going to be out of line, Henk.’
‘Fine! Bring it on!’
‘I can only do that when you sign for all liability, including all legal consequences with NSA. Will you do that?’
‘Deal!’ I exclaimed, blissfully happy. ‘This is a goldmine of vast proportions!’

Sometimes you need to avail yourself of the same resources as your enemies, though this is ethically not tidy. I had discussed it casually with Jan: integrity in the political and business climate was so hard to find nowadays that we were forced to temporarily join this craziness. After tilting the system, people will be more free; then their privacy will be better protected than ever, because we intend to replace the top-down power structures with bottom-up initiatives once we're give enough space and freedom
to develop. Of course, this also has unexpected results for us. That goes without saying; that is part of the deal - not this divide-and-rule strategy, but a climate for innovation from the ground up, built from clay, soil, and with people in a meaningful balance of consumption and production. Such a thing does not happen out of the blue. The prosumer, rather than the consumer - that's what we want to achieve, and we want to give absolute power to the people themselves as gift. With sufficient insight into the crowd, we can be taught the benefits of our sustainable revolution in the field of labor, health care, education, engineering, and trade. After some unorthodox austerity, the software of Professor Splunteren can act as a crowbar. Money is not the number one motivation; not anymore. I wanted to win back Monique. And besides, as entrepreneurs at heart, Jan and I will be able to earn our living in this world of prosumers, no doubt.

‘Your daughter; we must go,’ babbled a talking pussy under my barstool. Startled, I looked at the clock dangling behind Johanna. Damn, he was right! I quickly turned to Edwin.

‘Come Monday, along with the paper and the code, then I will put a l'ecology du Waldemar wine at the right temperature and I will make you a proposal you cannot deny nor refuse!’

‘All right,’ he said. ‘See you Monday.’

He disappeared just as you would expect from a private detective: noiselessly. Just when I wanted to throw Von Stürmer into the rear of the rickshaw, Jan, my newfound companion, walked by. He was half inside already, so I shouted: ‘I have to go. Until next week, oh uh... I've got news for you!’

‘Good, do not talk, but polish!’ he suggested, and gave me a well-intentioned thumbs up before he disappeared behind that heavy curtain hanging from Johanna's pub.

Meanwhile, I had instructed the driver to cycle towards the Witte the Withstreet. That turned out to be no easy task: we blew out of decency! Yes, our boy labored allright, as a worker,
as it should be. The Northwester of seven knots almost blew us into the Maas River when we turned left along the Harbor Museum, the last stretch right into the wind blow. The guy kicked himself to the limit! Stürmer was lucky that I had put him safely away: a missed opportunity, really.

In the distance, the garments of artistic guests fluttered around, chipped against the dark red carpet, brass railings, and neon lights. Would they recognize me from the artwork that featured frontal nudity in room 33? I had the idea to use the actress as an excuse. When she played my girlfriend, it would maybe cover up the embarrassing scene. That artful gift from Julia to her father would then seem much less oppressive! They would see the double of my daughter: a young adult woman, *a mistress*. Then they would laugh at the joke Julia had made.

What a wonderful idea!

And so I checked my phone and read how the actress sporty comprehended me cancelling our Speedo cruise, but immediately, equally coolly, had accepted a booking from another client: a double booking! *The last word has not yet been spoken!* On Monday I will email her, I muttered, annoyed and audible to Von Stürmer, who laughed as distastefully as ever. I considered asking him if personal gloating was a hobby and whether that was the Freudian reason behind his grave error to become a psychiatrist, but in the end I let it go. Arguments with little shrinks are inimitable; everyone knows it is useless. In short: I was alone. Suddenly I had an inspiration. *Haba, this might help,* I thought, amused.

‘You are my lightning rod, give it your best shot, would you?’ I asked, delighted with this stroke of genius. ‘Oh no, that will automatically happen.’ Haha, I could not resist it anymore.

‘Only when sie then will come und unabhängig vorlezen my verbesserte version of your psychiatric report, montag auf zehn at my office,’ he responded with a contrary order.
That wily dwarf!

‘Agreed,’ I said reluctantly. What could I do? Considering the circumstances, this was my only option!

Strong blows loosened a piece of material, presumably an iron plate from the construction site, on the roof of the parking garage. The uproar left many people scared; it almost seemed to indicate another German Bombing (this idea irrevocably shot through my mind, at least. I mean, The Bombing was obviously inappreciably heavier.).

‘Are you afraid that the Germans come zurück?’ he asked in that exaggerated old German accent of his.

‘Shut your nasty mouth, Von Stürmer!’

Again he squealed out of sly pleasure as his goatee flew like a madman up and down while he giggled. Those tiny twinkling eyes and his small sausage finger cleaned up his little ear as he impatiently jumped high into the air with those short legs: up and down, up and down. Damn! How can I shut down this toddler once and for all? Not yet, I instructed myself to keep calm. You need him now, Henkie. And, it must be said, he took his assignment seriously: **grundigkeit** knows no equivalent.

Professor van Splunteren determined how many counters to open by multiplying the number of participants by pi minus the current date-time stamp, thereby ensuring the smooth delivery of all invitees. In the second row, my shrink sang those German songs and I could hear people whispering, astonished. Once he arrived, he climbed onto the stage and gave a surprise performance: a lecture about how psychiatric treatment could help people mentally and psychologically through silence as well as by spoken word, preferably German.

By addressing the unconscious, he stated bluntly, we reach the poet who dwells within each of us. I got the impression that he prospected customers as he abused my mission to fill his practice! That wily dwarf! All attention shifted to his puny body;
to those ultra-short crook-legs and tiny little arms which seemed like stumps. But it came in handy.

I slipped backstage between the dark blue curtains, where I found Quinten. He was busy with his painting alignment, covering it up. No, wait... with two paintings!

Had he painted two gardens of Babylon?

Now I was even more curious about the presentation.

Where was Julia? I wanted to speak to her, anyway, although I knew it would take some effort not to get angry: a strange mixture of wanting to set her straight, since that is only fair, and being proud of her work. I had to overcome this pathetic melancholy! So clever - how she tried to get an ever increasing audience for this ‘Saturday nights Project’. How could I not be proud? Aspirin combined with valium and alcohol worked properly. I took them with a delicious, free sip of water from our beautiful designer tap – a Dornbracht lot, with rinsing.

If only Monique could be here, I sighed. Leaving home with an Indian from Brazil and leaving your husband and child in the lurch for a woman with gorgeous buttocks! Why? Was it after this event that Julia had changed? Only last year she’d delved into that strange world called art! What haunts Monique and causes her to follow a Brazilian woman? What they do with their buttocks in that country is unheard of; but still! Will Monique fall again, like a log, for the instigator of the tilt of our political system; the one person that all those years made her sick, the one she had to flee away of to find a natural woman with bright green fingers and beautiful curves? Hers may also be seen alright. Will she fall in love with me when everything is irreversibly cast in the bag? Persevere, Henkie, I said to myself in the mirror. Keep up the good work! She will come back. If anyone can do it, you will manage! Meanwhile, visitors enjoyed their design art
chairs, thighs clasped together in excitement. Suddenly the light dimmed and the audience began to whisper nervously.

Our gallery fell unannounced into velvet music as strange sounds, ominous, intriguing, and steadily growing in intensity, surrounded us. They stopped abruptly and the light dimmed further into intimacy. Wearing an off-white blouse against a pitch black background, Julia sat at a reading table, an open book. She looked relaxed. At her left, two heavy curtains covered paintings, keeping them from being exposed. One of these two will be the painting that I knew by mistake - *The Gardens*, I liked to pronounce it. Julia avoided my gaze and stared right through me. I became more curious about that second work of art, by the minute.

A male voice spoke: ‘This passage was written by a writer from Vlaardingen, of all places, freely inspired by the work of the transition professor at the Erasmus University.’

Julia's eyes looked peaceful as she nodded and began to read with her beautiful, clear voice, sweet but determined, resolute but fragile, echoing through the silent hollow space. We all listened, breathless.

‘You will enter and take a place at the cherrywood table which wobbles on a tripod. I stand at the bar and cannot take my eyes off you. Relieved of the heavy burden on your shoulders, you’re free; free as a bird, without restriction and lies, without a falseness of modernist spirit, with its unsightly massive buildings where you went to work as a number every day without prospect of improvement except for the decadent climb higher into this tower of Babylon, higher and higher, up to the highest levels of ignorance. Now you are free and beautiful, beautiful and real, genuine and full of nature, authentic and sincere. I await my chance. Someday, I'll follow you. When I shake off the heavy burden of modernity, you will be able to enjoy sunshine,
wind and stars, and under the bright, black stars you will lose all sense of time and space... as if you do not exist. You'll go up in a moment of unthinking, unconscious alertness and physical sensation.’

I got indescribably hot feelings, while freezing at the same time! An 'aahh' sound came from the audience. I wondered why only women produced such primitive tone. Was it a form of disinhibition that men did not possess? An unconscious, evolutionary expression of surprise? The beautiful illuminated canvasses, both three and a half meters tall, filled the stage while Julia slid down the screen behind them as a title became visible:

Universal Aspects Of The Human Spirit

A new form of cosmopolitanism, extracted from sharing the knowledge of using local energy sources in which the consumer was now prosumer, as opposed to the multicultural swamp in which we were drowning. The first painting showed the heavy burden of modernism on bare shoulders, supported by a deadly-tired man. The second: ultramodern gardens, soaking wet salty balls in the Maas, among solar and wind energy self-sufficient homes, timelessly floating, in which dependence on profit-making energy companies belonged to the past. This painting contained only beaming faces. In short, it all looked wonderful: a new world was at our feet. So this hypermodern version of the Gardens of Babylon, this magnificent mega-project of my daughter and her artist friends, was called Universal Aspects Of The Human Spirit? What a weak title, I mumbled, confused. Works of art are so easy to crack. This applies even to the Classics. Let's make sure it will not become Utopia, bogging down in nightmares, I thought profoundly, and independently philosophized further on this
matter so that it took a while before I became aware that Julia was gone.

Nervously, I ran around our gallery looking for my girl. Stürmer followed as dutifully as a lightning rod. Yeah, a deal is a deal: I must admit this about that German dwarf king. It was so embarrassing when I finally saw him again, with his tiny head blissfully gazing upwards and smiling from ear-to-ear under the skirt of a lovely lady dressed in a soft yellow summer dress. This intolerable behavior provides me a rightful alibi not to show up at his next psychiatric consultation, I considered as compensation; but completely unexpectedly, the lady in question overheard his German gibberish and, startled, looked down between her legs, where she saw him thoroughly enjoying the view. That darling got bright red cheeks. Then she helped him jovially to his feet. As if hypnotized, she remained in his toddler neighborhood, chatting freely and telling him about her love life and her deepest emotions! This gave me the opportunity to continue my search, and so I shuffled along discreetly behind the stage, right up to the preparation of two immense paintings, where Quinten was busy packing his backpack as if his life depended on it.

‘Have you seen Julia? I lost her!’ I torpedoed his dream of fleeing.

‘She has left us,’ he said dramatically.

Quickly I started my track and trace app, on which the light green dots gracefully halted, except the one from Julia!

‘Looks like she is in some fast car, the way she flies like mad on my Google Earth map’, I muttered tensely. No, wait, is that right? Did she take a water taxi? Yes, as the location clearly shows it cannot be otherwise: she is speeding over the Maas towards Schiedam, along that towering mill of Nolet and their Ketel One!’
‘It could be a power speedboat.’ I heard a whisper from Quinten over my shoulder.

‘This is secret software. Go away!’

‘Sorry, Henk.’

The image of the heavy, naked worker, modernism resting on his shoulders, had overtaken me and held my attention. Yes, even now that Julia had escaped, it remained stubbornly haunting and could easily be called like an embedded pattern in your brain or, in more modern terms, as a difficult-to-remove file on your computer disk. A bit like a melody. ‘What do you hope to achieve with this diptych?’ I asked, genuinely bewildered, if not enchanted by the contrast of the paintings.

‘We are a thorn in the side of the powerful; we cannot do much more,’ he said grimly. ‘The resources are lacking, but we persevere. And with Julia, we might finally be able to get the attention we deserve.’

‘Aha!’ I cried. Now he misspoke himself.

My intuition was still working. ‘So I see! And who would these ‘we’ persons be, who want to use Julia for their obscure purposes and propaganda?!”

‘Come Monday for a fresh mint tea,’ he replied. ‘I will explain it all.’

There was no question. Had she created all this? ‘Julia will be there,’ he stated stoically.

‘All right,’ I stammered. Because of that last remark, I simply was not in a position to refuse. ‘That will be a late one, then. Of that gadfly, the resources you lack; we are going to change something substantial.’

‘Ex… excellent,’ he called, and went out the back door. The commitment of honor knows no boundaries.

I decided to leave Von Stürmer to his deserved fate, shot out the same door, and, with good spirits, walked into that storm. Rather strange, if not ironic: such a storm in the night, I mumbled to myself,
and felt happier by the minute. The upcoming event and Julia's voice and lyrics had emptied my head. Along the way, I deliberately walked around but got robbed for the umpteenth time. I meekly handed the young man my purse for thieves – on the advice of an experienced city walker, there was one in my pocket all the time, filled with peanuts. Then I routinely shuffled along the banks of the Maas, the ferry port, and through Park Hill, along the Euromast and the Texaco station and Dijlkzicht, where I turned right and, under the light of the NAI, strolled back to my villa. My feet hurt, my shoes pinched, and yet, at home I felt empty, but curiously, I was not distraught - even satisfied. And so I plopped down, wonderfully carefree - how crazy it may sound in these harsh conditions - into my Jensen supreme dynamic box-spring to sink into a deep sleep, dreaming about *futuristic megalomaniac tilts.*
Patience Is A Virtue

After two o’clock, Buitenhof and Books of VPRO broadcasting were skipped, and Henk decided to use the rest of his Sunday to study all the software options: it was no easy task. While his supreme Jensen gave him a variable massage, stimulating all blood circulation and relaxing his legs, back, and neck, Henk started Van Splunteren’s No Tunnel Vision app.

‘Woah,’ he shouted again and again at his housekeeper, after figuring out an ingenious new option of the professor. Tatjana heard him, but worked stoically, preparing dinner while he declaimed from the bedroom: ‘The digital world we are presented with as naive consumers has a deeper, dangerous level, Tatjana!’ Only now did he realize that the mightiest and the super powerful of this world possessed information an average citizen lacked. Yes, only now did he understand fully the unequal struggle. Henk immediately saw endless possibilities. As a lightening system of intricate strands of glass fibers, it appeared colorful to his innate business mind as he muttered: *It takes a second, but then you have something useful, allright.*

Tatjana ignored his remarks and continued her janitorial duties, counting her earnings from the past week. Not too bad, it builds up into a nice stipendium, she thought with delight. If only I could share this with Mother, she would be so happy! I’ll send her a substantial part. I will make up some excuse so she will finally accept my gift. Is that not a lie for the good only?! I think that’s a beautiful expression they use over here: “a lie for the best purpose.” She giggled at her own thoughts and enjoyed her daily work in the kitchen. But Henk went on, elated, and decided to try something. *What,* he argued to himself, *would happen*
if I analyzed Limon Ltd. in the Bahamas? He filled this in and started the professor's algorithm. The cash flows of the other Ltd.s appeared, unrelenting, in one chart. If the justice department ever got their hands on this information, oh lord! How could this software unravel all my U-boot constructions as if it were child's play? Startled, he sent the results to Jos and Levi for legal inspection. In the kitchen he tried to relax, the Vlaardingen ijsmoppen liqueur always cold, but this did not help, yet. He opened the envelope 'Handing Out at the Pharmacy' that irritatingly moved back and forth on the counter right in front of him and finally grabbed the untouched box of Valium pills.

The chain of businesses in relation to the Port of Rotterdam - what result will that give?

Strained, he peered at the timeline which indicated how the defying calculations of that relentless algorithm of the professor's had progressed steadily. The delay had its reasons. If the professor was not this educated, I would not be able to see all these calculations! To his relief, everything seemed ironed out. This offers perspective - with THIS holding, I can still go on! How relieved Cor Figee will be. Yes, with this part of the company I can start building a prosperous society for workers: good news for everyone! Wait a minute... I could invite the works council... to my villa... just to make a good fresh impression, build confidence, and discuss current affairs. Jan had not suggested such a thing for nothing, that clever captain. At which point, I will be able to show Monique how brilliantly I am working. After the lawsuit, in any case: only when I receive my acquittal, not in the least by showing the judge how sublimely I'm about to undertake this business opportunity and turn it into something beneficial for all the citizens of Rotterdam! Monique will not believe me beforehand. I'll organize the meeting with the Works Council, as Jan stated, then it will run smoothly, he convinced.
himself. And so Henk sent word not to refuse invitations, and instructed his maid to fetch enough refreshments.

He had fallen for Tatyana's name, and was able to leverage her talents. She could, for example, translate documents perfectly into Russian, to name something vital, nowadays. He was pleased with her. But then, about this Cor Fijee guy. When those boys from the council worked as hard, there would not be a problem! This holding will, in no time, become one of the largest companies in our harbor, if they work like my housekeeper. Why isn't that deal with the Russians not yet sealed? He resolved to ask Cor Fijee to explain what was going on. *If this branch is to be the pivot, I cannot afford to leave it to amateurs!*

The house looked surprisingly luxurious; something Cor Fijee did not expect. The most expensive porcelain was exaggeratedly shining on the polished sideboard. The mother of the boys wore a cobalt black, inelegant headscarf and thereby certainly met Cor's stereotypical expectations. Nervously, he walked behind the man of the house into the living room, the mother, with her thick bottom, shuffling behind him, where he took, upon request, the lowest seat; the one the father of the two boys pointed at. Her husband looked equally tense. An older brother of the boy introduced himself. Cor Fijee jumped up and shook his neat hand. In response, the young man tried to turn his hand into a fine grind; something that failed miserably.

Before his job as an account manager, Cor Fijee had worked many years in a shed, hauling fifty-kilogram bags of flour, among other occupations. In short, he had caught the wrong guy. Cor Fijee smiled benignly: he did not let the boy escape. The eldest son's suspicious face of twenty years (he'd underrated him) was scrunched in a panicking, painful cramp while the boys of around ten to thirteen, quietly waiting on the bench, watched
their brother's silent humiliation, horrified. Transfixed, they stared at Cor with open mouths.

Meanwhile, Cor Figeé peered, outraged, at the eight thousand-euro watch on Muhammed's Muhammed and at his Armani blouse and expensive shoes, gleaming and polished by a Hindu neighbor. He held the firm grip for a moment more, thought it was enough by now, and let him go.

So, let's see if they also provide those delicious sweet biscuits at tea, as in the case with my Turkish neighbors whom I visited once with Daan - nice people, fully integrated, penniless, and golden honest. But I have no time for those kinds of visits. First comes work: that makes sense, allright. Of course, there were attributes drawn from Turkey; photos of scenery hung on the walls, to show off. *What does that count for?*

Cor Figeé had watched them all with some admiration and listened with interest to their stories. Migrant workers in the classical sense, they were: tough workers, and he loved them all! People with a heart, though it was not his hobby to converse with them without some work order. Somehow it was just a Netherlands-Turkish family who wanted to adapt to the place and time in which they lived, as shown clearly by the name they had given their mentally disabled daughter. Elenoor, at least, seemed to him to be no Turkish name.

From Daan, he heard that Elenoor's sister (her name he has forgotten) began in an independent wine trade at the Meent, but immediately received death threats for doing business as a woman, and even without wearing a headscarf! Knowing what you start is the motto that is necessary for doing business. *These are mistakes you should avoid,* Cor Figeé thought as the two boys sat, neatly dressed, on the couch, their hair tightly cut to the millimeter and their gazes, mesmerized, turned towards their father as they anxiously showed fleeting hands and then quickly pulled them back under their lower legs.
Cor Figee explained the dire situation. The older brother translated it for his parents. The boy that Cor Figee recognized as the right-winger of Daan his football team whispered something unintelligible into the ear of the other: 'Keep calm and politely nod! Soon he will be caught by Muhammed and his gang. He is already dead!'

Cor Figee tried to explain, as clearly as possible, how these overgrown boys, the oldest only two years older than his son Daan (by his exceptional talent, he played football with him), forever threatened to be derailed by their behaviors, and in such way that they would spend the rest of their lives on the path of crime, if no intervention was made.

'This is the perfect time to make some drastic changes: let's educate them before it's too late! Otherwise, it might never work out!' And so he spoke as a madman for the good cause, but wondered if his words were being correctly translated by Muhammed. Seeing at the nonverbal reactions of their father, it did not look like it: the man smiled, friendly, at the oddest moments, and when he should have laughed, he peered into Cor Figee's eyes, serious and slightly angry. Into the oldest son's facial expression he read the sentence, the threat, and the distrust, if not the outright disgust for a Dutchman like Cor Figee. It became clearer by the minute how Mohammed's bloodshot eyes, with their jet-black pupils, spit vengeance. Cor Figee remained as polite as possible and nodded, friendly. This was a gross misconception - if only he had ignored that challenge! Why was he still being tempted by childish games? Cor Figee tried his best, but wound up leaving the beautifully appointed house, almost rustic ally situated in an upper middle class neighborhood, with a doubly uneasy feeling. Had this been all for nothing?

He felt cheated. Would those boys be beaten up right after they closed the door? And by whom, actually? It looked like their father was fearful for their eldest brother! Where have
manners gone, like saying 'sorry' if someone puts a foot on the hand that you stick too far into the grass when you are picnicking in the museum's park - that sort of simple thing!

Defeated, Cor Figeé walked under the Banana (also called the 't Drying Rack by people from outside the Dutch Architecture Institute) and then further, until he entered the beautifully renovated Museum Park. The sound of squeaky tires and thumping behind him compelled him to respond alertly. Cor Figeé turned as fast as lightning around his axis, but it was too late: he felt a dull bang in his back, crashed down like a block of concrete, lifted his battered head, and saw nothing but a Mercedes CLS with a large wheel diameter. The grotesque monster looked like a warship, and blocked his view of the Banana. There immediately followed a series of cowardly blows and kicks to his face! Still, he managed to grab an ankle and squeezed the Armani substance in those complex, fragile joints. Painful groans were heard, followed by rattling hubcaps from a rickety van. When he opened his eyes, he recognized the beautiful image of the bonsai tree drawing. That bus is as old as the night is in Kralingen! Two men got out, beat-driven and effective, on the loose. The doors of the Mercedes CLS AMG Coupe with its V8 engine popped open hurriedly and the rubber fluttered as plumes of uprising smoke. The pimp's car fled, defeated. They hoisted Cor Figeé up to standing, but he could not remove the dazed look from his disoriented visage.

'It could be worse,' Willem panted, while El Bachir, still questionably, inspected his damaged eye sockets.

'This boy, he signed in yesterday. We can use him, I thought so, is it not so?! He's a great fighter. Yeah, he certainly is - what do you think, man?'

'Seems like it, Willem,' stammered Cor. 'Thanks!'

'I wanted to give something back. Fatima works at the Binnenweg with people with mental limitations like Elenoor's, at
that place where those boys committed their cowardly robbery. She is the one who called the police,’ he gasped excitedly, eagerly noble in explaining his participation, as if he uttered an apology.

‘Ah, so! How's she doing?’

‘Well, she's proud of me, but doesn't show it. You know how it is.’

They were silent.

Willem raised a clenched fist in the air in victory. El Bachir returned the blow with an identical gesture and walked along with Cor Figee while Willem drove away in his van.

Now that El Bachir was near, he wanted to try to make contact again, muster courage, and ask about his girlfriend. His heart had been stolen. Why did Julia not call him back; why did she not answer his messages? Through an account under a fake name safely created in an Internet café, he had seen her and made a new connection, but after he'd let her know who he was and sending a love-message to, she'd disappeared from view, unreachable. Yet, El Bachir did not believe Julia had deliberately blocked him. He suspected sabotage; a stalker who chased her and happened to be an Anonymous hacker, maybe? The reasonable doubt snuggled around like an assassin in his tormented lover's brain. Nervously, he rang the bell.

At the same moment, Cor Figee touched his scarred eyebrow, straightened his back, and surveyed his rather expensive jacket. The garment looked somewhat wrinkled, but luckily remained intact. Sometimes honorable workers are indeed rewarded. When the door opened and he caught a glimpse of her glance, he stepped aside in panic and stumbled three marble steps down into the garden. He could have almost held on for a brief moment by grabbing a pair of bonsai trees in the front yard, but they were too fragile to hold onto. And so he groped futilely, for a
split second. He would not decimate his boss's garden under any circumstances! Startled, he let loose. The trees were, fortunately, intact, but Cor Figee shot between them and rolled awkwardly, on his back, down the marble stairs.

Tatiana could not stop giggling.

Laughing in embarrassment, she put her hand in front of her naturally-full lips. Was he customer of the night who'd recognized her? That nice man - they had talked for hours and hours. Now he was struggling in the by our friend Willem the Boxer refurbished garden between the gravel grains! She glowed with excitement and felt her face flush. At night she wore a wig and eyelash extensions; but still he'd recognized her - he must be in love! What had happened to him?

Only now did she see his battered face. Had he taken a beating? She wanted nothing more than to coddle him and pick up the first aid kit, but it was better to wait a while and watch which way the wind would blow. Later on, she could try to see him, talk to him, and take care of him. Maybe she could lure him into the kitchen or the back room. She decided to set up the first aid kit when the opportunity arose. El Bachir saluted, as he'd done a few months earlier, at the warm welcome she provided. A dear and oh so clever boy, they fit perfectly together.

Such a shame that Julia has no time for him anymore. Maybe I can attempt a mediation, she thought. This sophisticated old man of the night looks tired, excited, and unhappy. He needs a real woman; one that will care of him when he goes to work. That is a heavy responsibility which he carries... I'd want to be there for him, but he does not see me, naturally. That is understandable. I'm way too young, and what if he did recognize me? He knows where I labor in those night hours! I could never explain it: real men judge rightly; they do not give in to an entertaining lady who wants to please them with a single erotic act, such simple act of having fun without relationship worries. Oh no! She was
disgusted with herself. He was way too smart, honest, and straightforward, and would never ever give himself to such a wicked woman of the night!

Sobbing, she ran into the kitchen.

It was something about the oven, right? His captain wants someone who takes care of his house and who can clean and cook: that makes sense. And what talent she has! I can forget it. How did I let this into my head? I do not stand a chance! But why does Van Wijnen-Swarttouw send her into the dangerous night to that sleazy glitter full of pole dancers?! Can she dance? Can her legs grab such a shiny, thick pole, too? Probably - that is not the point. Wait a minute; does she sometimes participate in that research project of the crowd that Edwin spilled the beans about? Ah, that could be it! Then, she is even more versatile!

Cor Figees admiration grew to unprecedented levels.

What a woman; how well-rounded she was! She seems to know even El Bachir; probably he's a pathetic customer of that seedy nightclub. He is still young, and women of his culture are squeamish and detain themselves till marriage. It's quite natural that this boy would end up in those disrespectful places. But how on earth can El Bachir simply enter my boss's villa, as though he were one of the family?

Cor Figees wracked his brain, but could not come up with a logical explanation. His boss was waiting for them behind the pinky-white Jan des Bouvrie bar.

That lucky bastard got into that niche market just in time, with all his shades of white - that guy just has a Golden Cock! It can happen, Henk thought as he eagerly shook the silver cup back and forth, placed it on the bar, and gave Cor Figees a firm handshake. Did he deliberately ignore El Bachir, or was this due to agreements occupying his mind? Members of the council have a lot on their minds, allright. El Bachir passionately asked about Julia. Slowly, a light kindled. Cor Figees wanted to come between them and let
his boss know how heroic this boy had been in combat against the deranged idiots from North Africa and those well-known regions of trouble. His chief shrugged off the brave fighter as being a nobody. Julia's art project took all her energy and attention; she had withdrawn from social life; from the flowing river and all nonsensical issues of the day. Only then can a good work of art be achieved.

'That's her right; and so it is with artists', Henk explained, and ordered him to give it two months' thought before correcting, telling El Bachir he would inform him personally and would call in, guaranteed! 'My word is worth gold, my boy!'

Cor Figee could not agree more. Poor El Bachir stared at them in turn, begging and despondent. His world collapsed when Henk escorted him to the exit.

Then he closed the door and sighed: ‘So, he is gone, all right. No foreign-looking Rotterdammert, and certainly no Moroccan immigrant-looking Rotterdammert, will be dating my beautiful daughter! What do you think, Cor? We cannot have that, can we?’ he snorted, babbling on with healthy excitement.

The adrenaline from the fight still gushed through Cor Figee's once-trained body. He clenched his fists and wanted to use them to hit something like that luxury Jan des Bouvrie chair or that life-sized antique vase, or Van Wijnen-Swarttouw himself, if necessary! How could he explain what this young man was capable of without betraying the secret vigilante society they participated in? How could he tell Henk how noble El Bachir had helped him? Injustice he could not stand: it was part of his genes and blood to fight against it. Just as he opened his mouth to talk about this socially hypersensitive subject (he had decided to give his fists a rest), he was saved by the doorbell. His colleague from the council and that old entrepreneur Jan stood like brothers on the sidewalk: Coen in the three-piece suit of a wage slave and Jan in his old familiar, casual garb. Inequality is healthy,
Cor thought, when, a few minutes later, they were enjoying the cocktail personally designed by Henk – ijsmoppen, Nolet baptized – and discussing current affairs such as the impending deal with those Russian fur hats and the future of the Heijplaat.

It was not long before Cor Figee forgot about the helpful El Bachir altogether. After Lavinia had presented the first bites and served her drinks, the deal was clinched. The only thing that concerned him from now on was how to get another glimpse of her. His boss called her Tatjana - was that a nickname?! He could think of nothing else than that decisive moment at the front door with his stumbling steps on the marble and how she had, in that split second, entranced him with her irresistible, charming eyes and lovely, disarming smile. *How can I meet her again? Drink coffee somewhere in the Puntzak, perhaps?*
Anticipation

The following evenings drifted into the darkness. I missed the actress. How fast it goes! Should I tackle her roughly, for that trifle with the Spido? I considered sending her a new assignment. This soothed the chaos in my head, so I tracked her down with that nifty t& t app (which functioned perfectly on my tablet) while lying in my relaxing chair. I had just lowered the TV screen from the ceiling, upon which I noticed, to my utmost pleasure, that Feyenoord was winning again. Humored, I studied her pale green dot which floated somewhere in the city Centre, enthusiastically zooming until I stumbled upon... huh?

Boymans!? Where we dealing with a psychic? Did the actrice intuitively feel that I needed her appearance? Never underestimate those Eastern European women! Without hesitation, I sent her a message without content. Bloody nervous, I stared at the display. I shoved my fashionable reading glasses (I had bought, for a change, one of those Youp van 't Hek ones) carefully higher on my nose. What would she say? The light green dot moved and the doorbell rang. Here she is! I opened the door, but hesitated. No, this is not ok! Some kind of task must be performed! I closed the door in a hurry, quickly thought of something unique and sent her another message; this time containing some content, and opened the door again. To shorten a long story: I felt reborn, the next energetic morning. Yet, unhealthy doubt snatched the rudder brutally out of my skipper's hands.

How dangerous was it to gamble on winning the lawsuit, a criminal case with potentially fatal consequences, while simultaneously going for a tilt of the whole system, as such?!
Luckily, that appointment at Von Stürmer was the first in my busy schedule. I wanted to get rid of this one.

A strange whistling filled the room.

This should be banned, so early in the morning, I thought, and walked piqued towards my desk, where I saw to my horror that the stack of files still stood at a huge height - I estimated it at some ninety centimeters or more! To make sure, I started to look for my tape measure. It must lie somewhere in the kitchen drawer or nearby. Where had Monique hidden that thing? After a long search, I found an alternative: a ruler of 44 centimeters in length. Indeed, the stack could have been two and a half! For convenience, I got rid of the file that lay on top when, again, that annoying whistling buzzed. I suspected a connection between the two, so I tried to find out by putting the file back on the stack, placing my hands on the table and pretending I was working, precisely the way I normally do. Humming, I grabbed, on the fly, the parent file. Fortunately, no annoying bell occurred! I put the file back again, paused, pulled my hand from the papers, and decided to call Jos. Then the buzz came back.

Maybe he knew what to do!

‘Finally!’ he shouted. ‘Where are you?’

‘At home, why?’

‘The judge expects you... you’ve got ten minutes to get here. I tried to reach you; you took your phone...’

My faithful BMW5i would fail the task; I could not do this without a perfect piece of ingenious technology. And so I started my roaring Maserati, dark as Van Gogh's Champs d'Oliviers, the only powerhouse that could solve this minor problem. At breakneck speed I stormed out of the house, happy with Edwin's automatic fence security, jumped into my car, and drove at full speed to the Witte de Withstreet, from which I screeched along the Harbor Museum and the luxurious, newly renovated Inntel. Here, I
ordered the actress to jump out of my sports car, all in vain hopes of getting another bright green traffic light. That worked wonderfully well.

In the courtroom, my lawyer Levi and my right hand man, Jos Borgers de Witt, nervously jumped up from their benches at the moment I rushed in, headlong. The judge turned his head to the clock on the wall and the secretary secretly was sliding her finger along an imaginary bar. I had no idea what she was doing. She awoke with a start when I charmingly excused myself for the surrounding uproar. My pupils magnified when I saw her: it was Johanna. Why the hell had Levi summoned her to come?

‘Sit down,’ the judge said sternly. ‘We will not formally charge this late entrance.’ I had to believe him. Then this judge with his hawk eyes began his formal kick-off.

‘When a football coach arrives too late or is clearly amiss, a sportive competition might do him some good. Think of Barcelona in the finals, with a stand of one on one against Manchester. They actually managed to turn the psychological warfare and made the public forget they were appalling, deliberately minutes too late coming to the pitch, and got some minimal benefit out of this. Maybe you'll succeed in this, as well.’

‘That was in halftime,’ I corrected the judge. ‘This is different; now it is just the beginning.’

His wig hung neatly past his ears as his stoic, tight, straight face looked at me. 'You're right,’ he said. Aha, he was a cool frog, this hawkeye! He was like Tatjana. I'd have to adapt my defense!

'Let's start. I will give the floor to the officer. Please posit the indictment in a speech of sixty-five minutes.'

That was interesting. I am referring to the way he pronounced the word ‘please’. Was it with an exaggerated politeness to the prosecutor or in general? I will soon find out. These manners
can, with the right push, boomerang back into his stoic face, ha-ha. My optimism prevailed, despite the demand of ten years in prison, which the officer stated in unprecedentedly harsh words. Johanna greeted me suggestively, with a straightforward look. I got the impression she had something positive to report in my defense. The officer spoke slowly and continued with an ever-more boring speech that ended with repeating his sentencing. Apparently he had decided to start brightly and then let it slide. His start seemed unnatural; thus atoned for his story of expressiveness and truthfulness. Was this flamboyant start sometimes prompted by third party writers?

Haha, what an idiot - who tells a story this way?

When he raised the ludicrous idea that his disjointed narrative could best be considered as one elongated valid argument – he even pretended that this sentencing was on the academic side, generously compensating me for my public humiliation which, as everyone knew, in many respects had been painful – I could not keep a straight face. I could tell, by the judge's reaction, that he disliked this arrogance; but as a self-made man, I could never be considered a victim as if I have no stamina, haha! I really did not stop laughing now, barely holding in my loud laughter (which was no picnic for nobody).

Fortunately, the word was finally given to my lawyer, Mr. Moskolevi, a Jewish guy. These kinds of streetfighters are not too bright, but adamantly and solidly caustic in everything, like pitbulls putting their teeth into it. He began with a few slimy sentences – a clever tactic – then disputed the public prosecutor as well as, believe it or not, the judge's own hand! Yes, that is how those streetfighters work for you. Let this guy push it! The bad feeling came over me that he'd outplayed himself this time, however, by purely attacking on the basis of character; but you have to give these types of lawyers a free hand, no matter how
difficult that may be. His concluding speech was powerful and made remarkable references to articles stated in the *Code of Law*.

Overwhelmed by this accuracy, I was barely able to suppress an enthusiastic clap until the judge released me by introducing the first witness: Johanna!

He proclaimed her as an expert on deeper soils. Hello, is that necessary?! Irrespective of the consequences to my case, I was nevertheless curious about her testimony. Alas, in the next few weeks I would put everything together, deepen it all and then, unexpectedly, I would come up with a profound statement by which the judge would be bluffed and convinced of my innocence, so I was not too worried - not yet. Listening to Johanna was like being at a birthday party. Reinforced by the wonderful introductory speech of Moskolevi, she took off. Whether you belonged to the defense, the judge, or the prosecutor, or even if you were a suspect, in every case you'd fall for her determined way of speaking.

‘Your Honor, uh - right on, people. Well, did I state this correctly, yes?’ asked Johanna. She looked uncertain. I did not know her this way. Apparently she was impressed by the serious stature of the court's judge, reflected by his long dress and wig.

The hawkeye coughed neatly, with his hand to his mouth, before he spoke: ‘A left rear of the women's football team may be slow and force the winger to run, but when the contest is over, she can be content to enter the locker room, provided she did everything that lay within the range of her limited capacity. Please continue, ma'am.’

I guess this blunt remark was meant gallantly.

'Thanks, dude... uh, I mean, thank you, sir! Hihi; sorry. Old Henkie - I know him from our local pub,’ she began, and turned to Levi, who nodded encouraging. An awkward silence fluttered like an icy blizzard over the elected crowd in this historically-
charged venue. The hand-carved woodwork gave the parlor an alluring atmosphere.

Johanna had nothing to say about that fateful Saturday night; the night of the Moluccan gang and their battle with Eastern Europeans. Moskolevi, that wily Jewish lawyer, had prepared it all. She painted a picture of me being a charming interlocutor, someone who was concerned, in an admirable way, about the future of his daughter, who was in puberty. When she dwelled on about Saturday night of 'The Saturday night project', the judge actually got a fiery red face! I will be damned! He is aware, in fact; Julia's work had affected him!

You think they are cunning; but then they surpass themselves and conjure an even brighter rabbit from under their legal Jewish yarmulkes. But, just now I became convinced of the positive impact of Johanna's argument, yes, just when I was sure I was to be acquitted and free to go, I heard rumblings from beneath that traditional wooden bench. An angry knocking smothered her fascinating story. ‘Your Honor,’ chirped a voice from beneath an oversized cowboy hat. ‘Enschuldigung for my interruption, aber ich want to...’

‘Whit whom do we have this pleasure?’ asked the judge, nimbly. Perhaps it was his way of relaxing a bit.

Moskolevi, however, had his recusal request ready for action - that is, I should hope so.

‘My name is Professor Dr. Wilhelm H. von Stürmer; my occupation is psychiatrist. The suspicious one ist ein client. Here I have his preliminary report. Soll ich dass vorlezen an jeder?’

The judge's eyes pulled wide open. ‘When a cunning striker from impossible position - for example, from behind the goal line - suddenly enters the game's terrain, the referee cannot help but continue the match. It can cause a spectacular goal, all right!’

‘That stimt,’ replied the scholar dwarf. ‘Der manschaft hat won contests, sie sind püntlich, aber dass...’ It fell silent for a
long time. Everyone was waiting for the final anecdote of that tiny little shrink Von Stürmer, but nothing useful came out of that puny mouth in his dwarfish, childlike face.

‘And?’ asked the judge, confirmed by some abrupt gestures.

Von Stürmer made himself as big as possible - actually, even a little bigger. He stood on his toes to get close as possible to the Hawkeye’s nose of the suddenly-meek judge who naturally bent over his desk, when the psychiatrist looked him straight into the eyes and stated: ‘The suspect ist fugitive, you honor. He needs to be further investigated. In my preliminary report, I came to the conclusion that he does not adhere to agreements. You know better than anyone else, wass dass bedeutet! Someone who cannot halten appointments ist severely psychiatric! This morning he should have attended my office, reading his own report. As grossharthzig standing für him, I will give him a second chance. He soll erklären; this erste ist an essential step. Allow me handling over the report and lassen see dass declaiming für all present?! Danke! Then his promise is fulfilled ist das smooth viper slipped aus dass grass!’ he shrieked furiously.

‘Huh? What do you mean by that last remark?’

‘Dass ist a Alt-Deutsche ausdrükking, entschuldigung.’

‘Immediately hand over this report!’ the judge said, raising his voice, full of suppressed anger.

I saw Moskolevi pull out the recusal request from his briefcase, always willing to fill in the missing, yet empty boxes with some locally made up, devastating, all-destroying lyrics.

Meanwhile, I discreetly glanced backwards. There were two guards at the exit, wearing tight trooper uniforms. Levi’s interruption was repulsed by the court. He rallied to open a new attack, cracked his vertebra, made himself wide and went back to his designated position, brooding on a subsequent attempt to disrupt things. Now I was faced with a choice: obey this curious judge (and therefore this irritating toddler with his felt hat) or
get out of this law environment. A holster in the shape of a gun dangled from their leather belts, their pants ironed with their folds neatly aligned. I chose to take the report. Levi Moskolevi, Jos Borgers de Witt, and Johanna stared, bewildered and slightly beaten, as if there was a third option; an opportunity that I'd missed for open an goal (or so it seemed to me).

While I dutifully called out, loud and clear, Stürmer's devastating text, I deciphered the resigned acquiescence on their faces. Moskolevi, laden, deposited his second recusal request in his suitcase, after which I finished my psychiatric report. Afterwards, a painfully icy silence fell in this hall. It seemed to have patent on this. I shivered from this figuratively freezing.

‘A draw can be a fair result,’ philosophized the judge, who hit his all-decisive hammer on the wooden desk. ‘For now, you can bail out with the summation of ten thousand euro. Your daughter needs you, mister.’ Johanna had saved me; wonderful! The threat was averted, for the time being. Would all be okay, after all? In the hall, with its marble stairs and a ridiculously high ceiling, Johanna waved, excited, while she and Levi Moskolevi walked to the exit hand and hand with Von Stürmer between them, swinging his feet way above the floor.

Before I left the haughty (so as to call it, in all of its so-called austerity) decadent building, I decided to perform a simple test. I flipped my phone open and clicked on a prepared hot key. It produced a siren. Dashing, uniformed guards, guns armed, ran into the courtroom in the chilly marble hallway looking for nothing in particular. I recorded their actions close by and shot some secret photos for my file, named 'Operation Alcatraz'.

Exactly three hours later, the fountain spurted (one of the most beautiful ones within the gardens of ancient Rome, maintained by the Catholic capital of the cardinal) its firefighting water into the high, relatively dark sky, clearly contrasting with the horizon
of an almost infinite depth with its silver white storage tanks, as in a painting by Carel Willink.

Did I just see Julia's silhouette looming in a distance?

Unfortunately, it was just a mirage. I had postponed Edwin's visit until further notice, yes, I had deliberately disabled the smartphone eavesdropping device. The first hits dispensed to the public prosecutor were the important ones. A mountain of legal homework of high quality was inherited; that sixty-minute charge in which the prosecutor tried in vain to demonstrate that his inspection team, three men strong working for years on my case, had benefited from jaunts to some of my lovely golf courses at Aruba, the Comoros and Nanchang, where they had found nothing on me but a forgotten passport.

Really - all this effort to come up with such banal argument?! But this time they had sunk their teeth into my dossier. Well, let Jos and Moskolevi brood about how to skin this cat. This week I dove into it myself and established my brilliant reply, but tonight is a night off. After finishing work, nothing is greater than to feel like a free man, I muttered happily, looking forward to finally meeting Julia again, to be able to speak to her in private. Would I submit my project with the ultimate tilt; my own interpretation of Steve Jobs' 'think different' philosophy? How will she take it?

Unlike Monique, she will probably jump into the air with joy. Her artists' club was a key point! They were a nonconventional group of liberal artists who served as a catalyst for a reversal, unparalleled in history! Art and culture can do more together than most businessmen want to admit. Jan was right: our cunning Royal Family has been ahead of us in utilizing art as the ultimate weapon!

We, born entrepreneurs, have underestimated art's potential.

Strike back before it's too late and the Netherlands heads for bankruptcy, was the binding advice my intuition urgently whispered to me. And let's be totally honest: if something stood for innova-
tion in technology - fair competition instead of those Old boys and Royal Blood who were always bailing each other out - then obviously it was my holdings of heavy metal companies in the Port of Rotterdam! Yet, Monique had gotten it right, during the last years: something like this sneaks up on you unnoticed. I had misused my power. Even I went for profit without a vision for our country, the workers, and the environment - yes, even I eventually lost sight.

Now it was a matter of working for our grandchildren (how long do I had to wait, Julia?), to ensure their future. They themselves no longer had sufficient cash flow, let alone self-esteem! He who derives wealth from capital is poor anyway; everyone knows that. This tilt project will straighten out everything. The knowledge of technology that resides in my company and the parts on which my father preys as did Michiel de Ruyter on the British flagship during that march towards Chatham - with that, we are able to initiate the tilted world. That sly fox tried a hostile takeover on our most innovative feature. Now we're going to do it! Haha, he will receive a taste of his own medicine! If we play it well, we will be leading.

‘What are you gonna do, Henkie?’

'Ah, there you are. Oh, that should not be mentioned,' I lied tactfully. 'Let's go. Whoa, what a pretty dress.'

‘Sycophant,’ she said, but did not hide her cunning smile, which spoke volumes. It's so funny how females are susceptible to the simplest of all compliments. We walked along the World Museum, over lumpy vowels and bollards.

Here the strongest ships moored.

‘I've always wanted to do that, go sailing on such sailboat. Look at those giants, Henkie!’

‘Haha, not too bad. But do you see the ones next to that antique steam tug? The rear stands on one of my subsidiaries.’

‘Huh? Good afternoon, tie a whopper! What a big one!'
‘If you want, I'll take her out this weekend. It promises to be sunny, with a strong southwester. That means a lot of sailing fun.’

‘Weirdo! You do not really mean it do you? I will come on time! And Willem would also will... you know...’

‘That is ok, sure,’ I interrupted positively while I watched a seagull along the quay, fighting for a piece of bread.

An attentive specimen squirmed loose and smelled the fish lower on the hillside, but before she could take a first, well-deserved bite, she was overwhelmed by the physical violence of her colleagues, those parasitic wolverines. Within seconds there was absolutely nothing left; only a few crumbs!

‘In these waters, everything will be plunging smoothly again like in the old days - not only those futuristic waterlogged balls will float, but a whole range of self-sufficient dwellings. Along the quay, there across the street, will be my business and that of Jan; and if all goes well, that of my father. His Royalty Club, too, will eventually build eco-friendly machinery and ships carrying sustainably-produced goods around our climatically-endangered globe. We will fulfill our natural leadership before the sheiks from Abu Dubai put their nefarious plans into action. Speed is required; to sit still is to lose time!’ I argued, inspired.

‘How is your daughter?’ she asked. I guess my speech was meant for deaf ears. Oh well, never mind.

‘There are opportunities for improvement. I'll tell you soon. We'll dine in the Euromast,’ I suggested. ‘There we'll have a magnificent view over the harbor and downtown.’

‘Really, Henkie!’ she responded pedantically, but categorically refused.

I suspected a fear of heights, so I changed course; no problem for this experienced captain. I decided to take a water taxi to sail to Herman de Blijker, where I often went with the Dry-dockers, having lunch at that wonderful time before the dastard-
ly lawsuit started to swallow my attention (admittedly, Julia's art project also took up a lot of mental energy).

From that point on, we walked along the New Ocean Paradise boat, between the Bears boat, the pancake boat jetty and the water taxi boarding area, upon which we then navigated, with slight bend, towards the harbor, where, on both sides of the riverbanks, those pale green domes marked up the Maastunnel. Across from the SS-Rotterdam ship which was docked at the wharf (a majestic view with its characteristic drooping boats and pennants flapping loosely, hanging from the cockpit to the bow and the stern), the Majesty tried to move enough water to be quick enough, but was soon overtaken by the Aqua Liner which, with its modern orbiting radar, passed along as we shot forcefully with a sharp bend between the tourist boats towards the life-size artistic text ‘Everywhere I'm from here’ halfway across the Maas before reducing momentum to moor in front of the Hotel New York. During the trip I called the guy in the Euromast, whose name I had forgotten (a rarity, but it can happen, folks). I moved the reservation to the coming Wednesday due to different business cases that held an excellent opportunity for a synergy that swirled around each other – before such an effect comes up, you have to adjust. It felt like I was a captain of importance again, but in a fierce storm. Keeping a cool head, braving the elements against the wind, standing along the railing of the wheelhouse as proudly as a born leader who continues to believe and stay optimistic, full of bravado to inspire his troops - yes, the tougher the storm blows, the harder he tightens his teeth into the matter and, as natural compensation for his diligent effort, the more fun and relaxing entertainment a captain gets, naturally, along the line.

The evening started late: summertime had entered our harbor city. Johanna visibly enjoyed herself as well: how easily she
talked about her secret love life! This started to puzzle me. Was she playing a devilish game with my tiny heart? She did not ask about room 33, but she wanted to know everything about Monique and how I had tried to restore our broken relationship. Underestimation always happens when you're not on guard, and usually with someone you will never, ever expect it to happen with; but luckily I had her in sight. She pretended to be jolly Aunt Jo, but I sensed her dangerous deception! Being open to women can be disastrous!

Were they all chasing my well-earned capital?

Did she deliberately play an innocent sweetheart; a classic, mother and son rampage? Professor van Splunteren's flawless software did not identify them as prime suspects for nothing, after all! Why was she helping me? To win my trust. Cleverly played; very smart indeed! Something you often see is that clever façade, that smokescreen of vulgar dialect with which they dazzle you. This old man did not fall behind yet.

‘You're a sweetheart; it's a long time since I've been asked by a man to have dinner. I do not know how long it's been, Henkie!’

‘Are you fooling me?’

‘I mean it, old man! We animating girls want to experience something romantic, just as well, after all those nights in the pub, after drunk men stare at your tits and stuff. What do you know?! I had my fun. No worries.’

‘Ah, so... yeah, I understand, sure,’ I replied as a diversion.

Now I had to think clearly. How could I lure her out? Suddenly I knew what might work. ‘Willem is a gardener, right?’ I asked casually.

‘My boy has had a big heart for gardening from childhood on - he always has, Henkie! He's always busy with the earth, you know. No temptation or trick can win Willem's attention over the love of a cactus. That is a good one, is it not?’
'Yes, I see,’ I replied casually, and carried on, but she played her role with gusto. Her experience in keeping me company had become her second nature. Whatever I tried, I was not able to lure her out.

‘Are you happy with the way Willem did your garden?’ she asked. ‘He spoke about how much you miss your stolen paintings...’

The brutality! Filial and pitiful, I gazed into the dark. Night after night when I poured myself another well-deserved drink of Nolet, I could not help but mourn the loss of my favorite artworks. Quinten's suggestion to hang up replicas and thereby ease the pain was well-intentioned, but I could not do it. It’s hard to comprehend: casually stay and work in Rotterdam, continue digging as Hendrik the Gardener, and on weekends cheerfully dive into the pub where Johanna played barmaid as if she knew nothing as well? How to cope with this? They must work with third parties; possibly with those Romanians or Bulgarians from her animation cafe?! Calling that biker gang for help had not made our research any easier - a fatal mistake, because how could I approach those Eastern Europeans diplomatically, after the last remnant of their naivety had been beaten out of them!

‘His bonsai trees are beautifully situated. They look great,’ I replied tactfully, and asked as unobtrusively as possible: ‘Did Willem, by the way, collaborate with the Bulgarians or Romanians in the last weeks or so?’

‘What? Who... Oh! Huh? To garden, you mean?’

A strange counter-question! She covered it up by staring at me as sweetly as possible, like a cornered cat in a heat cage. Address it now, Henkie.

‘Is Willem familiar with Lucian Freud’s work?’ I asked as calmly as possible. ‘There once hung two of his paintings in my living room. You know this, Johanna: I was attached to these
works, if not in love with them. If he has overheard something, I would like to...

'Freud, a psychiatrist like our dwarf king?'

'King? Who? Von Stürmer?!

'Yes, the girls call him this, you know.'

'Why on earth would they do such a thing?!

'No idea, Henkie! Say, how is it with your girlie; with Julia? She exhibited something new, is it not? Something with a deeper meaning, or something special?'

The skill with which they change subject! Cunning, they are, coming from those slums. I would not easily get a break, for sure. And besides, I could not wait to speak to Julia, so I wanted off, but became overwhelmed by Johanna's apocryphal animation stories. An hour and a half passed. Only then I could finally redeem myself and trail off to Quinten.

As if the devil was playing with me - this neighborhood is not the most secure - again, I was robbed, so I went to routinely handover my ‘thieve-wallet’ to my nervous aggressor who was possibly a drug addict. But alas, I grabbed onto nothing; an empty pocket! Since everyone is corrupt in a broad sense, not just moneywise over other ways, I calmly weighed my chances, studied my assailant, and saw that he was nothing more than a timid coward. I tried to estimate how likely it was that he would strike, giggled a bit, and offered him the loose change in my pocket, twenty euros. As service, on return, I simply urged him to make his escape, man to man, without uttering a threat and with full respect for the other party involved. In short: a golden, honest proposal under the circumstances, I would say.

Dumbfounded, he just stood there blurry-eyed, gawking.

He wanted to take the money but ran away, frightened - just my luck - when a few doors down the road, three students rushed into the street, gesticulating and babbling. A few blocks
away my eye caught on an *everything and nothing* shop that was still open - some obscure store, it seemed - so I rushed in and bought a cheap wallet. That was easy. It would have been way more difficult to buy an expensive one!

Immediately, I put a five-euro note into it.

More than enough for a simple pilferer! Now I was not far from Quinten's port. I started my track and trace application, buzzed in, and saw that I was a block too far away, so I navigated myself back to his door and stepped expectantly inside. The first thing I was told was that Julia still did not want to see me face-to-face. She had canceled our appointment!

I grabbed the soft fabric of the rocking chair that had been temporarily upholstered by Quinten and waited, sunk deep in sin, for his delicious fresh mint tea and Eastern European cookies. 'Naked, huh, this room… without my painting?'

‘For sure.’

'And now, what to do next?'

‘Well... I have to turn in a minute,’ I sighed.

‘Sorry,’ he said, and paused.

We drank our tea. There was a long pause.

‘Would you like a taste of your own medicine, or a cookie of Macedonian making? I get them here, around the corner,’ he said as he turned the knob of a metal object.

Then something vague or woolly (absolutely unique) filled the messy room; sounds that transported me with melancholy musings that I had tucked deeply away. The hallucinatory trance was stalking me like a thief in the night. Music penetrates so easily into one's mind, especially if you're receptive. Then it flows smoothly into your masterbrain. Hard drugs I never betrayed myself with, even though I had to cope with the most miserable setbacks - setbacks that sledgehammered me - but a joint I could really use, by now.
Sporty, I handed the twisted peace pipe to Quinten. To my amazement, he flatly refused. No soft drugs for that artist; not even a cigarette in innocent fun! Was this the right group of artists?! What kind had Julia accompanied herself with?! He said she was working on a next piece of art and that she wanted to work with me, but on the condition that Quinten acted as a spokesman, so the other artists and she could concentrate on their creative process as needed. I weighed these words.

Did she ever want to talk to me anymore?

I took a few deep catches and blew it all out. ‘Agreed, then,’ I replied, and watched his reaction. His goofy facial muscles contracted lethargically into his cheeks. Pondering deeply, he took a sip and a bite of the sweet tea biscuit sprinkled with snow-white powder. I waited impatiently. Killing time, I blew in lateral movement of smoke. He did not respond. No word shot out from under his rather shy and wild shabby gray hair.

‘Alright then! Listen and shudder,’ I stated. ‘At lunchtime I walked along a wonderful property that is for sale next to the canal, and a convenient location for the... let’s call it the surgical center of artistic activities. It is situated near Veerhaven 4, but without noticing it clearly, it's centrally located and thus practically on neutral ground, let's say just for convenience. It was for rent. So I bought it for you guys and put it on my squeezed Orange Ltd. Tax benefits, Quinten, hapa. I will not bother you with the details unless you really want to hear them. We have no time to lose, my boy. I strongly advise you to immediately withdraw and start! Here are the keys: twenty rooms and an attic; more than enough room.’

‘Uh... that is... a pr... prime location in the city. We...’

‘Therefore, I say: it’s for you, man!’

‘This, uh, takes time. Wh... what are we gonna do?’

‘Tilting the lot. Wait, let me call Eddy!’

And indeed I called him immediately, grabbing my phone.
'With me! Come on... what is this place?' I asked Quinten.

He named his address, but since I could not understand much of it, I handed over my phone and left them to figure it out. I shrank back, my eyes squeezed shut, satisfied, and inhaled deeply again, blew it out, and jabbered something of utter importance against the brightly colored totem pole. Better than that charlatan of Mother Theresa, folks. Like a palette used for years, I sat beneath the paint splashes.

Eddy drove quickly our way on his rickety moped. Yes, we can leave that to this dedicated freelancer! In no time he entered, took a sip of fresh mint tea, and smoked a joint of his own, which he conjured from the inside pocket of his shabby, worn leather jacket - all this to the dismay of Quinten, the only artist present. After he inhaled a second time, he told us a peculiar story about how he'd gotten in trouble yesterday. On his way to a mission, making a report with accompanying photographs of a whopper of a freighter (a super modern tanker, and one of the largest the port of Rotterdam, the world’s biggest harbor, had ever received), his gas tank ran empty.

The old rusty thing began to baulk. Eddy was not only penniless in general, but also without any penny in his pocket. With a sputtering moped he could barely reach 's Gravendijkwal. And now it comes: to his amazement, he managed to borrow money from the lavatory attendant just on speculation!

That this is still possible!

What a story, I thought as the night finally set in under endless deep-layered music of psychedelic dance or trance (or whatever it’s called). I instructed Eddy on what to undertake to put together two teams of investigation journalists with excellent qualifications, purely to counteract my father and his Old boys, who were already in possession of blatantly manipulated media channels, conglomerates and consortiums. The time for getting involved in The Game without obtaining direly-needed integrity
would soon belong to the past. Our teams were allowed to work objectively and independently, in diversity. Eddy stared at me incredulously. It took me the rest of the long night, until five o'clock in the morning, to convince him that I actually meant it.

The first team was allowed to independently report my trial, so without compromising anything, they could really shoot everything in my surroundings, and the other could focus on our tilt project. Both teams were given the will and discretion to indulge in the creative production of profound journalism, writing articles and making documentaries about this unique period of Rotterdam and the Netherlands, all for posterity, say, just for convenience. It is so much better to be ahead on those historical kind of events of utter importance and magnitude, folks. Some things I learned from my father; I'm not going to deny this. Tactically put, it might be wise to honestly explain how this rumbles through all business sectors and show how that can lead to great things. That wily old fox's apple did not roll too far from that beautiful pear tree, full of blossoms.

The following day flew by as if in a daze. Quinten shuttled between my office and their brand new home. And every now and then I personally followed his trail up to the Westzeedijk, sloping down the path past the dome of our Russian Orthodox Church and straight into the Westersingel. The chance of coming across Cor Figee with his three fur-hatted friends was real. Thus, I was operating as inconspicuously as possible and shuffled quietly across the property I’d purchased, purely in the vain hope of catching a glimpse of Julia - surely without harassing her... without stalking her, as those irreverently childless judges called it bluntly! In shame, I dared not approach her with my own hands; not after she had delivered her to dear daddy this never-to-be-forgotten Saturday night present! When could I finally look her in the eye again and ask, face-to-face, why she wanted
to mentally torture me? When would it be enough, and when would she finally succumb her anger?

Yet, my admiration for her commitment and achievements in the art world increased. I heard, via Quinten, how hard she worked on new utterances. With heart and soul she threw herself on secret projects of unprecedented scale. That apple did not roll far from the steep hill down into the bushes, as well! My optimism for a bright future took the upper hand at such times. Driving away the petty, compassionate feelings about our poor contact, it drove the lingering lawsuit into the background (also, that proceeded far from smoothly). Some persistent setbacks, such as the discovery of my forged passports and the inscrutable financial structure of my squeezed lemon and curved banana Ltd.s, were not well received by that grumpy, hawkeyed judge; a man of logic without pragmatism, who seemingly thought he was able to afford to live outside reality. *What a dork.* That weird string bean in his idiotic toga dress - imams are nothing compared to him; child's play! It could not get any crazier, or I'd have to force myself to take drastic measures.

Von Stürmer's testimony – he now worked with fierce eagerness of a reckless operating Somali pirate as independent expert – did not bright my position, either. My new habit of listening to Quinten's music while smoking blunts with Eddy until early in the morning, until we forged our plans, gave me the most satisfaction these days. Yes, our tilt project progressed steadily, so I did like this, at least. The Rotterdam crowd could be influenced much more easily than anticipated. *Beneficially temporarily manipulated,* we called this jokingly, half to reassure our consciences and half because we believed it. Eddy and Quinten I trusted one hundred percent. We shared everything, convinced of the need to tilt the entire Rotterdam population. The people needed to
become the heart of the engine of sustainable industry, going forward and reaching ever-higher goals. The rest of the Netherlands will naturally follow in its wake as a top-heavy ship that ultimately cannot be wise enough but to follow the guidelines of the expert pilot in compliance with the practice directions of the tug upon which it riveted, without handling three double agendas.
Julia's Art

Julia did not hide the reason for her unexpected visit: she wanted to know if her father was unaccountable, which would complicate things drastically.

The psychiatrist, Herr Von Stürmer, recognized the family trait - to a point - and smiled at Fraulein van Zanten when he gallantly took Julia's light-purple jacket. While he hung this ecologically-manufactured coat from recyclable wool on the peg, his secretary asked if she wanted a cup of tea with reibekuchen. Or maybe she'd rather have a glass of mineral water from the Austrian mountains? Coffee they did not seem to have in store.

Meanwhile, Julia studied the sculpture.

The art piece was situated on a marble pedestal next to the entrance of the room with the notoriously famous sofa. A beautiful eagle clutched something in his beak. Was that a rose? His expression looked more like that of a friendly owl; it was such an odd combination! If only for that reason, it already enjoyed her approval. Chuckling with artistic pleasure and the sheer release of tension through childish amusement, she walked into the patient's room in which psychiatrist Professor Dr. Von Stürmer pointed her beau to the feather-soft couch.

Nervously, she climbed onto this old Colossus of a divan she knew by heart (although she'd frantically tried to outrun memories of Lausanne), her covered head skittish against the light-yellow pillow which was pinned down on the same color mattress while she stared at the ceiling where previously her father had admired the Greek ornaments. Before she realized it, she'd dozed off; and without knowing it, she started to speak softly:
‘The building has been satisfactorily decorated. When I wake up, I feel safe over there, and invariably dream of Daan, a boy I've seen in the Kralingse Forest, playing soccer. I will never know whether he is the one when I operate him, because by then I will no longer recognize him. As a result, I realize that art purely for art's sake is not enough; not when we want more than just to gurgle on for survival, riding the eternal flow of repetition that winds its way through the endless valley of the world's will. Conduct, pause and reflection can only take place if the artwork is big enough, when it wants to express about being, without losing itself in creating a goal without meaning. It is therefore decadent only when it wants to undo the presence of its magic, while there is another opportunity to grasp my point of view. Unfortunately, I am still figuring out what, how, where and when this opportunity will occur and how it will disclose itself without falling into the trap of dogmatic faith, but I think I will find out through the creation of my art works. They will lead me to a glaring answer to this all-important question - at least, if my father can control his envy. Despite his bravado, I see him as a slave of his desires; a slave to please, to charm everyone and to win them over. All this actually sprung out of self-pity.

I know how he despises this, and yet I think he acts out of self-pity when he approaches me and appoints me as the utmost important thing in his life. The guilt that I feel has been stripped of its influence and focuses on my mother only. Why did I want to battle with her from early on, from birth? Is this why she left us? Children play games and parents should guard borders. Through their ambivalence, contradictory to each other, I lost my way. My fate is unclear. My parents are guilty. How can I give my fate a push in the right direction when everything is now uncertain? Only art can help me. Only art can heal me.’
This also applied to Jules Didden, who worked like a madman, day and night, on his long-standing project. He wanted to honor his father, unfortunately prematurely deceased, with a heart boat, unique in the history of Rotterdam. He wanted to continue his work. On the wall in his shed hung a brilliantly painted portrait of whistleblower Edward Snowden, his (still a guy then) hero of the last hour, though he himself was firmly convinced that this would be his greatest hero for the first two decades or so.

Meanwhile, across the Maas River, Cor Figue knew only one remedy for his boundless fascination for Lavinia and his aggression after that cowardly reaction of his new chef: work hard, by hand. A welder had reported in sick, and that Russian delegation was investigating his file; a thick folder with an incredible amount of detailed descriptions and explanations which made a detour in footnotes via lengthy annexes accompanied by an explanatory list of legal regulations referring to international codes. The Russians provisionally had their hands full. There was more than enough time to dive into the workplace; and boy, did he enjoy that! Cor Figue realized that he had to be cautious. The mechanical properties of this metally limited depth of penetration and its high viscosity could easily be negatively influenced, especially when no butter-soft annealing was used, or extra tension - it could terribly go wrong! In case of nickel, it is important to prevent corrosion and brittleness. In short: to achieve an excellent welded joint, he had to adjust the weld’s seam. That surely differed from another sip of a Ketel-One drink, allright! After hours of concentrated work - hours that flew by in no time - his sweaty face shone under the hood of his heat-resistant headgear and his arms tingled. His well-deserved wage was simple and intense happiness through diligent labor.
Because of my private investigator, I want to be honest about this, things turned out differently than planned. That particular Wednesday, he called, neatly on time. De l'ecology vin blanc du Waldemar was waiting, admittedly at the perfect professor-recommended temperature, but a difficult dilemma became now a persistent problem: his political color forced me to operate cautiously and especially to release nothing about our mega-project's unprecedented scale. On the other hand, Edwin belonged to a group of people we desperately needed, people who wanted to overturn power - a pragmatic group that worked for their living. Guys who would roll up their sleeves. *Not talk, but polish.* They would never let us down. So, casually commandeering not to arouse suspicion, I signed Edwin's disclaimer.

In passing, I mentioned that I wanted to help the artists gain more visitors for their artistic exhibitions. With these new options in spy software a piece of cake, I presumed (I mean, the possibilities seemed endless and easily adjustable at any distance) that the crowd was actually controlled remotely, as with a joystick. If the CIA could do it, we surely can, as well.

He was generous enough to help me. We tried a few things and brainstormed until I got a brilliant idea: send all residents with a 'bonuspas' a message containing an announcement of the new exhibition of two paintings in the Witte de Withstreet. After visiting those participants, they would automatically receive fifteen hundred free bonuses. Haha, what a good idea! I did not hesitate, adjusted the parameters, and pressed the button. Curious about the result, I anxiously waited for calculations, for preliminary estimates. ‘This is illegal,’ said Edwin, imbued with a
truth that seemed utterly absurd. ‘What strange form of theft, to give someone something that's not your own. Have you done this before?’ he asked rhetorically, cheeky. ‘Do we not call this handling over a cigar out of your own box?’

‘You suggested it yourself, or am I mistaken?’ I replied, cunning as ever. He had no answer; besotted with those glassy eyes, he stared at me like a silly child.

‘The difference between having thoughts and performing the operation has always maintained a thin line between freedom and jail,’ he said prophetically. Maybe he knew more? Or did he try to lure me out? Was I moving in a political direction he disliked to the bone?

‘Hoho, Mr. Smart-ass! You are certainly complicit when you've been planning it, as well, but this only applies after the transaction is physically carried out,’ I explained as resolutely as possible. That hit him hard in the face. Infuriated, he threw his glass back in one gulp. His all-knowing expression went into spasms. ‘Shall I pour?’ I asked, amused.

‘Do not bother!’ he snorted. ‘You put your signature under the document with which I am acquitted, so your pretty balloon will vanish into the air. It will vanish in vain before it leaves the ground.’

Damn, he was right! I felt tricked, like when, by all means as a thought experiment only, in the Strait of Malacca the cargo of our hijacked ship was stolen.

‘Tell me!’ I yelled. ‘Are you trying to tempt me?’

‘Sir Henk is pissed off after a biscuit of his own making?’ he began in an arrogant tone, as if a right-wing populist crime fighter would stand above me. It really should not get crazier, folks!

‘There's a criminal case against you,’ he snorted pedantically as his mouth shot up in a sly, content grin. Now I knew for sure: this was becoming tricky, allright.

‘No kidding; thanks for the tip, E d w i n!'
‘Certain things occurred, so I had to investigate,’ he continued, icy calm, 'and then it happened. I came across a strange blockage in our professor's system. I searched on... and yes, I had to address it: you've wantonly kept your name out of the calculation of Professor van Splunteren! After removing the block, a new name rolled out…’ he irritatingly drummed with his fingers on the desktop, ‘one certain Sir...’ he shouted and raised his hands theatrically in the air. 'A certain gentleman called Van Wijnen-Swarttouw rolled out as a main suspect with a security rate of well over eighty percent! All the more reason to conduct a further investigation. I put the copy of the result in a safe place, if you know what I mean.’

Dazed, I stared at that half-pint.

‘What do you have?’ I stammered, upset. That is to say, I did not believe him. It was absolute nonsense, of course, but a serious suspicion with shocking report (and, please note) written by my own private detective with support from the professor's software tool - no, this I could not afford right now, not during the lawsuit.

'Friends, service is where our life is heading, as you know damn well. Without control, corruption creeps in, sometimes unnoticed, accidentally, and sometimes intentionally. It is true, knowing that...’

‘Spare me your insipid insights!’ I cried, piqued.

The blood crept, out of pure annoyance, from under my nails to the surface. This indicates, in general, as most people think, persistent denial; but that is a misconception. In reality it is a signal that you have been wronged.

Fortunately, I was able to mentally regroup.

‘Tell me what you want,’ I asked, intending on a man-to-man negotiation.
He calmly turned the wine around in the glass so lazily that I was tempted to strike the hand-blown crystal out of his fighter's hand... I could hardly keep myself from doing so.

‘A month sailing along the coast of Thailand with the Blue Magical,’ popped out on the fly, as if he had thought of this option all along and finally claimed his wishes. Would that damage anything? I wondered immediately. My business instinct came along to help me, as it always did.

'Get lost, Edwin!’ I cried, letting him believe this was too much. ‘I will never, ever accept this offer.’ Meanwhile, I weighed his words. He would leave the court - pretty ideal, actually. Yes, this is exactly what I needed; and so I replied: ‘Well, only if you leave tomorrow and stay away for six months. It's a great location... wonderful for a man alone,’ I encouraged him. ‘The culture and the traditional girls along the coast are breathtaking.’

Surprised, he stammered, ‘Shall we toast our deal?’

And so it happened. Edwin went for a luxurious sailing trip, but only after handing over the keys to his vault titled 'HvWS' and after signing a letter drafted by me in which he stated his appreciation of my efforts: my attempt to find the perpetrators and unmask the robbery. Such dedication he'd never experienced before in his years of working as private detective, this letter recounted. I faxed this proof to Levi & Levi, Lawyers.

Synergy, improvisation, accepting chaos and making it work for you, redirecting it into your advantage - a brilliant skipper knows how to organize. Edwin left the villa. So I poured myself a drink; such a strong boy from Nolet, this time, Ketel One – just in celebration of this tactical victory.

The next day I worked possibly even a bit harder on my defense, day and night without sleep, actually, until Saturday around eleven, when I tiredly inspected my sailboat in Veerhaven. Willem walked onto the pier, a picnic basket dangling enthusiastically
while he waved his hand into the air. Johanna was hanging on his arm, smiling from cheek to cheek. ‘Here we are, Henkie!’ she boomed. ‘We can hoist outselves into that little boat of yours now, or what else?’

 Completely forgotten! The sun shone more exuberant than predicted, a beautiful day for sailing with wind force five lay ahead. As I was helping Johanna aboard, Willem tumbled from the gangway. Splash! I sprinted into the wheelhouse where the actress critically evaluated herself in micro bikini, a loose sweater over it. Accomplished as a model, she turned before the elegant elongated mirror around her axis, around her delicious figure. Soon, I would help her rub it in, but first I had to save Willem! And so I grabbed, on the fly, the bright orange lifebuoy from the cedar cabin and slammed back myself to the accident, where Willem wrung out his soaked Hawaiian shirt on the foredeck while Johanna sorted out the picnic basket.

 ‘I will put it out to dry smoothly,’ she said, clever as ever.

 The actress tottered along on high heels, clumsy in front of the rig and that narrow staircase, so I kept the buoy close by. She began to dry Willem off with a towel upon which that logo of our Aruban golf resort was adorned, currently only a mediocre run by Jeroen under supervision of my wife's father, Arie. She attentively studied her prey, washed our gardener carefully, touching his muscular body with its healthy-looking beer belly like mine. I shrugged my shoulders and disappeared into the wheelhouse, hung the buoy on the cedar rack, and looked over our sailing route.

 Will we go to Willemstad, or will we keep it simple and sail to Brielle? I felt like doing a real sail trip and chose the fortified city; a great place to dine. I knew those restaurants by heart. Julia, I let loose. I let her find her own sailing route and tried to give free hand to her artist group, the S.A.F. Nothing less was my intention. A captain of top quality knows when to give his
nationals autonomy and operational responsibility. Only then he
does he have enough time in the cockpit to pilot his entire ship.

How beautiful will it be tomorrow, during Liberation Day, sailing
majestically into Veerhaven? I can look forward to that audi-
eence; they will be present in large numbers. Our champagne was
safely stored at the right temperature, locked up, just in case,
with a padlock - something that reminded me of my old man. I
admit it; this habit I enjoyed. At the time, I did not understand
why he enjoyed these richly-flowing champagnes. I was way too
young. When I finally got it, I was not allowed to sail anymore.
No, suddenly I had to study and study, as if his pitiful lack of
any decent study could single-handedly be offset by me accom-
plishing two or three courses in a row, preferably, with honors!
However, the company's blood is thicker than water, and opens
closed doors. I've caught up amply. The toast conferred upon
making deals, giving the right impression to customers from
leading international firms after tirelessly escorting them around
the harbor, whether they are Chinese, Taiwanese or our never-
to-underestimate German neighbors. Yes, even Russians I have
coached day in and day out, over and over again. Let's make sure
you always look picobello, pay attention to your guests, and be atten-
tive. And now I have my men walking around, like that guy: Cor
Figue. He can do this in his own perfect way. But sometimes I
dine with them myself, still, when it really comes down to clos-
ing a deal. A captain of magnitude should honor his guests by
proudly showing them his ship.

It was high time to hoist the sails. The direction of the summer
wind was favorable and it blew slower than had been predicted.
I estimated it at only three to four knots, so we could easily sail
along the right side of the Maas without shifting. After a look at
my rimmed display with its gold leaf that displayed actual radar
information prominently in the upper left-hand box, this idea proved correct. With one press of a button, I smoothly scrolled the main sail up through the slot-crammed ball bearings. A robust system, that slide.

My three guests enjoyed the sun and view on the foredeck, as we passed the site of the historic Delft, built by craft techniques of yesteryear, beautifully showing off, on the right, that exceptionally high mill beside that world-famous distillate factory for Ketel One gin. The dark brown canvas of the present rickety-looking sails flapped loosely and nonchalantly, fueled by the not-too-wild wind gusts. When we turned our heads to the other side, it became clear that we were in one of the largest ports for the shipment of raw materials. There was an increasing amount of shale gas from America and crude oil from Russia, in Pernis partially converted into other products; ore and scrap, and also agricultural bulk commodities such as grains, seeds and raw material for animal food and even liquefied gas from Iran - yes, absolutely everything passes through the port of Rotterdam. The first sailing day of the year caused a buzzing; everyone had his sailboat ready for the summer season and left after semi-annual maintenance. Yes, everyone wanted to show off on this first sunny day of sailing. How I loved this! Now I no longer wanted to be in Aruba - no way; there was nothing like the first sailing weekend in the Netherlands!

Unfortunately, this scene reminded me of how the craft of building a boat, a centuries-long tradition, was killed by those Dutch metropolis lobbyists who had approved inhumane factory farming in the resulting sour and smelly polders; farms which run solely on subsidy at the expense of innovations in helicopters, aircraft, shipping and handling, the assembly of modern products that can be sold worldwide which can really and truly be profitably deployed! Even investment in modern windmills was abandoned at the expense of farmer profiteers! This tech-
nique we have to import from Denmark to our windmill country, believe it or not! Really, they let it all vanish just like that, but it's never too late: Rotterdam as an innovative European center for highly sustainable assembly and manufacturing is still a possibility. My breath caught excitement by the prospect of this still rather Utopian vision. *Everything lands on its feet*, so I encouraged myself. We will just have to pull that 24-carat rabbit out of that towering hat - *a turnaround rabbit*.

‘What you’re going for, Henkie?’ asked Johanna in her cheery summer regalia, unabashedly filling my vision. I was embarrassed and shocked, ’cause whether I liked it or not, I could not deny two whoppers giving me an awkward tingling down under.

'Hoek van Holland, then a wide bend of a hundred eighty degrees to the Haringvliet, and then we sail to Willemstad.’

‘Hey, the Hoeks Corner! I've family over there. Cousins with shovel hands building greenhouses and stuff, you know, Henkie!’

‘We'll sail further, until Willemstad.’

'Are you kidding me?’

‘You, me?’

‘I do not think so. Aunt Jo never let herself horse around like that! It's a beautiful boat, old man. You got that right. It's not a bathtub, you know what I mean?’

‘I have big plans for our harbor. Only I must win that damn lawsuit, first. By the way, I have to confess something...’

‘Huh? To me? Act normal, man!’

‘Well, actually, I did not trust you for the full hundred percent... but never mind, let it flow; it is some kind of occupational hazard, you know: a disability. If you sail high up along the canal, sometimes you catch a huge mountain of crosswind.’

‘Huh?! Stay nicely with two forty-threes right on the ground, will you? We are all people. You are simply under pressure. I
understand that, old man! Enjoy the coming night,’ she con-
cluded, winking.

I had the strong impression that she was referring to the ac-
tress! She nudged me meaningfully, after which she wound her
arms around my waist while pushing her head against my chest.
Our bighearted Johanna did not begin to think of getting jeal-
ous; oh no, of course not, I realized, crazily enough, for the first
time.

If the actress can stay away from Willem, who knows what
the night will bring in Willemstad, I murmured gently and inau-
dibly. Still, I was anything but reassured.

The actress’s behavior looked to be the same as that flagrant
challenge Julia began to undertake a few years ago, around her
fifteenth birthday. Was it when that fateful turning point, the
Tilt, occurred? Hard to tell. She was young when it happened,
possibly caused by the appalling level of hormones in our beef.
Until she was fourteen, she ate meat like no other until she sud-
denly, after contact with an animal-loving classmate, converted
to a friendly movement of activist philosophy with its animal
protection ideas. Those young girls engage in worldly matters
that hardly can be reversed. Suddenly she saw it as a mission; as
a purpose in life that sanctified every means: do not eat animals.
From innocent Daddy joshing - yes, downright funny every now
and then - her behavior changed simultaneously with the rise of
her female form inorny teasing and arguments that were hard
to overthrow! Was it during this time Monique got into trouble
over Julia’s adolescent behavior and her deliberate intention to
demand full attention of all men? Yes, even of Daddy?

Well, I do remember one boat trip if it were yesterday.

We sailed on a warm spring day from the ferry port up the
Maas River towards Brielle, where we lowered the heavy anchor
into the lake to take a swim. Caesar, our Pyrenean mountain
dog, lively played on deck with Julia. I whistled from the water,
and after wagging his tail while running around her, he jumped from the railing to catch the hard plastic bone I had thrown. Julia dived after him. In the evening Monique provided dinner: a pleasant surprise of poached salmon and blanched eggs quenched with Le Montrachet; a dinner with which she surpassed herself as an amateur. A well-deserved second place was usually her part, after my self-taught cooking. There must be difference in quality: that's life, folks. Well then, under the sounds of the latest of Marco and, as always, finishing off with Frank Sinatra, we leisurely enjoyed the surroundings. It all looked fine, still, at that moment in time! How it happened I still do not understand, but the next morning I set foot in our steamy shower, still sleepy, and got enchanted by Monique's bare back in the foggy air. I grabbed her from behind and pushed myself affectionately against her back, touched her waist and breasts and lower, and stammered ‘finally’! How long did it go on? A few seconds, at least... 'till a haunting cry. Who stood in the doorway? Huh, Monique! Julia opened the shower from the inside! Her hair dripping wet, she turned around, defiantly smiling, leaving her fresh lavender shampoo tingling enchantingly in my nostrils. She grabbed a purple towel with my Aruba golf resort logo from the pile and tied it nonchalantly around her too-young (but by now fully grown) body, perfect with feminine curves, tight and round, while Monique peered at her in shock, with an open mouth. When she had left the shower Monique turned to me, accusing to the bone, almost pleading, and angry and sad at the same time. Oh, those eyes! Innocently, I shrugged my shoulders. What else could I undertake? I smiled guiltily, but also in a stupid way, because it was obviously an accident. What did Monique suggest then?

Where did I put it? Somewhere in my briefcase!

I placed the suitcase on the bench, slid it over, and opened the lock. I tossed the files destined for Jan next to me on the
leather sofa. They bounced back while I ducked quickly in, searching - yes, there it was: my logbook with the entry ‘disrespectful statements made by Monique, directed at her lovely daughter.’ With what had she reproached Julia?

I flipped back until the pages became blank, and from there moved gradually back in time. The last pages studded that period I was looking for. I must have fallen asleep, because a high wave caused me to roll down from our montblanc white sofa. Did I dream of the burglary just because Johanna and her son were this close? Bewildered, I started the spy software, since I wanted to exclude all possibilities. And so I run that algorithm suggested by Edwin without limitation. There it was: I rolled out, as the prime suspect, myself! Just like that, out of the blue! Okay, the vault contents, maybe; but the Matisse, Kees Verburg and two Lucien Freuds I would never steal! Theoretically, taking this curious caper, the spy software, unjustly exhibited in a serious manner, I would have hired people to rob the safe for me; men who could not watch and who would do nothing when they saw the high-quality paintings: real art lovers!

Romanians or Bulgarians with an understanding of art, for example, would not let this opportunity slip. They could not restrain themselves! It was not such a crazy suggestion, really: in countries like that, they for years had time to delve into philosophy and art, just because there was no possibility of grabbing a decent job under that communist regime. And let's face it: in their shoes, wouldn’t any art lover, myself included, do the same thing? But did the sophisticated spy software see all this in detail? A thrice no! It swam before my eyes, naked.

I did not understand, and sought distraction by turning on the radio. Where had I hidden my pills?

The realization shot through me like a deadly lightning attack: they are lying at home in some yellow envelope, waiting to be returned to those pharmacy slackers! After the painful mem-
ories that floated, unsolicited, above in my brain, I now became afraid of the next one: would I survive the night? And what would Julia come up with and, moreover, with whom? Maybe she was creating a work of art after which I definitively could not dare show my face anymore! I tried not to fantasize further, as instructed by Psychiatrist Von Stürmer, and to concentrate only on my driving; but the harder I tried, the more violent the incident - the memory of the shower - appeared, vividly.

My coxswain hands were shaking. Willem and Johanna enjoyed themselves on the deck, overlooking the banks, the river, the sun, and enjoying their music (he had brought his ghetto blaster, as if he had come to bake in the loose sand at Hoek van Holland Beach). The actress slipped inside, into my wheelhouse, acting slyly and sizing up the situation.

She casually offered a massage and did not hesitate to provide a preview. While the captain of this seaworthy ship kept a close watch behind the mahogany helm, she began coolly with my shoulders, and then gently shifted attention to the chest and stomach, stooped unexpectedly to the stir in front of the zipper of my haute couture jeans, which she opened with confidence. Then she began to fumble hastily, but with full attention, at my boxer shorts. Due to the elongated window of the wheelhouse, I checked, during this erotic tension, on how Willem and Johanna were doing, but they thankfully kept on deck without approaching. I had to keep my attention on sailing, so I grabbed the steering wheel more firmly. For a moment I thought that Johanna stood up. She waved and smiled broadly, enjoying her first sailing trip ever, so I stuck my thumb up enthusiastically as a sign that I had seen her and put my hand, skittish and shaking, back on the wooden steering. I had to put out all effort not to, by mistake and in shock, throw the wheel around when I, both hands still firmly on that mahogany, mercilessly came, and could not help petting her tall blonde hair with a grateful glance with
one hand, observing how her insatiable tongue hung out of her mouth, and how she lurked nearby with enlarged pupils, asking for more of the same. She had not yet delivered all, for this weekend! I could count on a tough night!

The sun lowered as we made an arc of a hundred eighty degrees and headed, perpendicular, into Willemstad harbor. The strategically located port was lit like a silhouette in a puppet show against the clear, darkening sky; the remains of the fortress, the warehouse for the supply of old warships to be seen today from the water or from the rampart, breathing the rich history of yesteryear - an intact history with no modern, eye-catching structures. No, the people here had respect for the nostalgia radiating through their town. Here, it had retained its original value without neglecting renewal and innovation. Because of the connection with this branch of my family from my mother's side, I always visited Willemstad with great pleasure. Yes, it felt like coming home when we set out the gangway and I, as befits a captain, entered the bank and put foot onto those classic cobblesstones. Then Willem took the lead, shot wide, and walked naturally into the first pub in sight. I motioned Johanna to linger there for the time being, after which I received, in her well-known way of speaking up, ‘Sure, Henkie! Leave that to me, dude!’

So inattentive and loose-like it was: do not worry, it would all land naturally on its feet, since the actress and I had an appointment to keep with Jan. She was allowed to guide me like a showpiece. I'm not going to lie about it. It was a great feeling; my reputation was not completely nullified! And I wanted to keep her away from Willem - I wanted to keep her, I'll admit it, for myself, this entire weekend! Maybe she acted as compensation for the memories which haunted me like an escape; a
runaway from something that hung in the air like an approaching hurricane at sea. Yes, I needed her all right.

I gallantly accompanied the actress over the threshold and went for the waitress, just to make sure I had reserved the enclosed area with its portholes. How often had I dined here, with its paintings and portraits of famous skippers; a great atmosphere for entrepreneurs. Jan was sitting across the room but did not spot us, so I called him with a firmly raised voice when suddenly the music stopped and the barmaid informed us about a two-minute silence for Remembrance Day. Blushing (how I disliked this), I ducked into the toilet while the rest stood motionless. It seemed forever instead of the regular two minutes until a liberating word from the speaker echoed through the place. I was barely back when Jan asked if I wanted one of my own cigars as he opened his wooden box and shoved it under my nose. That mischievous look on him spoke volumes, lol. A good sign!

Naturally, we routinely began our conversation about our mega project, and Jan involuntarily gaped at the actress every now and then. I had instructed her to play the same role as when we met in the Hotel New York. Jan unsuccessfully tried to ignore her, and precisely because of this – he did not ever receive some brief eye contact, no; no tiny moment of attention – he kept trying it, growing more provoked by the minute. He was exactly where I wanted him. Undoubtedly, he wondered constantly if his annoyance was maybe caused by his inability to resist her. My status grew, and I honored my reputation. And so it should be, folks.

After an hour, he began to cast furtive glances. Half sarcastic and a bit surprised, he asked with his eyes, almost distraught. An hour later he tried to debate with her, but she just gave him an even more bored look.

Whispering, he asked how on earth did I meet her.
‘This is one of my lawyers,’ I replied with serious intonation and a non-accomplished expression. The look of that guy, haha! Internally, I nearly ruined it with laughter, but I could not show it; not yet. His appreciation prevailed, though he undoubtedly felt cheated. After two hours of consultation and discussions while enjoying a snack and a drink or two, he kept staring at her with a now drunken, jealous look. Had he given up his manners?

To test that, I excused myself politely. Through the porthole I watched how Jan talked to her without limits. Would he make an attempt to seduce her? Outside, I immediately called Eddy.

‘Woh, that spy software works well! Rows deep, man, down the Harbor Museum! A new report follows in the Monday edition of the Daily Rotterdam. We can get this easily in the international press as well, I believe, especially now that Julia…’ but Eddy hesitated to proceed.

‘Now that Julia… what! Eddy Hofs!?’

‘Uhm.... now she has announced a new work of art, done in a playful manner. Can you imagine: it's not even there, and it provides such commotion already. THIS is what we call an artist of repute. Your daughter might become world famous!’

‘Thank you, Eddy,’ I said, and hung up, overlooking the harbor where the masts of seaworthy boats were bobbing in cadence, swinging as a nostalgic wall clock, heavily influenced by a strong south-westerly.

As an artist of international stature, she had announced something new, I repeated while I stepped back, dazed, and ordered a strong shot of Nolet, Ketel One. The fact that a simple announcement caused such agitation did not reassure me. How playful was it? I thought when my imagination kicked in. Those two journalistic teams are operating independently and asynchronously, so there's nothing to gain there, no. I have to let Julia go artistically and concentrate on the business side of the matter. Not everything is controllable: release it, Henkie; release the ten-
sion, I swore to myself and walked back to the portholes, flattered by my trained body. Although I was at present a little bit on the heavy side, I still was in top condition compared to the curvaceous actress. I asked about Jan's findings. Annoyed, she wrestled herself free and pushed herself aside half a meter towards the direction of that old hand at 't box! Dawn! Had those two agreed on something secret?! Jan started talking.

‘Your father and his old boys have conceived a plan for how to conduct a hostile takeover for your entire holding structure.’

‘You're kidding!’ I said, startled. ‘Everything, you mean?’ Afraid that he would, in my eyes, perceive the glint of outspoken joy, I closed them as if I were the Dalai Lama’s right hand and peeked through my eyelashes towards the deliberately unfolded box of cigars - to neutral territory, so to speak. ‘I cannot let that happen, of course!’ I snorted angrily, and hit my strong fist vibrantly on the table. Some cigars jumped out of the box.

‘Playing the game ethical has ended! We have to gather evidence against their formative cartel agreements! The Port Authority must be involved; it cannot be otherwise. They want to finally break me, it seems! And this while I only try, in a decent way, to convince all parties involved - the unions, the port authority, the works council, politicians and banks, competitors, financiers and customers - so that after the trial, which will fizzle out, we can start doing business in durable form. All this now appears so totally inadequate and limited! We are being screwed by a jealous government agency in collaboration with unethical, conniving competitors and their sneaky spies. Kill the whole motley crew; those amateurs without conscience! All I do is work close to the market and gain flexibility! They leave me no choice. Somehow it’s a relief, you know? It’ very strange indeed, how I feel this empty and still angry as hell.’

To calm me, Jan rested his sausage fingers on my shoulder. That helped wonderfully.
‘And I was planning on doing this, guys,’ I decided with sorrow. When Jan announced, I really did not know what to expect.

‘Hold on,’ he said, and increased the tension before he enthusiastically told us how he’d learned about a financial officer; one who worked close to the market as well and, no less importantly, one who worked at my father's accounting firm when he'd suffered gambling debts! It was an excellent opportunity to infiltrate. So when I enthusiastically began to figure out loud how we would be able to skin this cat, the actress struck me, scornfully interrupting. Those two had already discussed everything in detail: the actress gets a suite at the Delta Hotel and connects with this ‘whistleblower of middle age,’ a man who, fortunately, seemed to have a weakness for beautiful women. After all the information was collected, she would be allowed to choose a luxurious apartment in Paris: her ultimate dream.

‘Jesus, Jan,’ I cried, frustrated, ‘what do you think of Antwerp or Brussels instead?’

She hit me mercilessly in my crotch, smiling.

And so I got the feeling I was already powerless in this affair and walked, upset, towards the bar, where I treated myself. When I returned with three glasses of Nolet, Jan shoved the cigar box towards me and said, roaring with laughter: ‘Take another one out of your own box, my friend.’

‘Yeah, yeah, fine,’ I said, played sullen, and raised my glass.

‘Let's toast to our threesome's happy ending!’

When we stepped outside, we said goodbye to Jan – he'd had enough for tonight. We lingered on until the noisiest pub, situated at the corner of the historic Marina, packed with customers where they did not pretend bravado, were slipping off. Happily, I could keep her away from Willem and felt, possibly because of this night together, so closely connected to her that the next morning this feeling admittedly, for long afterwards, frightened me in a bewildered way.
Could I see the relationship with the actress as an exercise in letting go of Julia? That unholy question haunted me when I popped the cork of the champagne bottle, missing Johanna, as we lowered the anchor in front of the Delta Hotel in Vlaardingen the next afternoon. We had departed Willemstad at eleven in the morning. Willem had awakened everyone with his ghetto blaster. The only way he and the actress could take off now was with an inflatable rowboat, ‘unless we, a hundred meters upstream, do some double mooring at the jetty or that pancake boat,’ Jan suggested uncomfortably.

‘Sorry, I cannot do that, my friend,’ I said with a stoic look like that gown dress in court.

Willem rolled his eyes and rowed as though he were in an accident, climbed awkwardly onto the shaky scaffolding of the water taxi, and hoisted the actress from that plastic thing, this childish boat that he pulled on shore awkwardly deflated, folding it provisionally and taking it under his arm, the oar in his other hand, while the actress followed with her shiny handbag swinging as if she walked on hot coals.

Could I trust her, by now? My thoughts switched sides between Julia’s secret artistic expression and Jan with the actress. The Saturday night had stayed for us, she had suggested coolly. Come on, Henk, if you cannot trust Jan... I instructed myself, but my jaw froze and I pushed my grinders and forced them together when I saw how she ‘accidentally’ fell against him, allegedly stumbling when he caught her, surprisingly gallant, with his stocky body.

‘There she goes, Henkie,’ said Johanna.

‘And we, too,’ I replied, and pulled the anchor. ‘The ferry port delivers; our champagne is adequately stocked.’

‘Is there adequately stocked beer as well?’ Willem asked.
‘Hey! See, dude, how shabby the Dockings are over there, as if it's a junkyard! Nothing happens there anymore?! Jesus, that looks like nothing, now, does it not?! Obvious they do not maintain anything, Henkie?’ asked Johanna.

‘We are working on a solution.’

Willem remained silent. He knew nothing, but Johanna I had told it all before. Apparently it did all go in one animation ear to, with equal speed, crawl out of the other without sending a signal to her entertainment brain. Silently, we sailed further on the Maas landward towards the direction of Manhattan at the Maas River until Aunt Jo saw a nostalgic ship in sight.

‘Look there! That SS-Rotterdammert looks a whole lot better today, gentlemen.’

‘For as long as that lasts - it is for sale.’

‘Costs a few bucks, but then you have something,’ said Willem, encouraged by Johanna. ‘Better than that mess in... I cannot say it... out there in that wimpy IJ water... you know... North, somewhere...’

Because of a stiff wind, I had to remain alert, so I hurried back to the helm to avoid a disaster, since we were heading straight towards those copper green domes.

‘In Amsterdam, you mean, in 020!’

Entering the ferry went surprisingly smoothly. Maybe it was because of Willem, as I'd instructed him to protect the bow by jumping off. He did better than expected: he was a natural. ‘You should have been a sailor,’ I suggested, and offered him a free hand.

‘Haha, get lost, Henkie!’

‘Well come, we'll pop openthat second bottle!’

Stooping towards the fridge, however, I was startled by an annoying sound from shore.
'A fest on board?' he babbled quizzically, and fired off a series of unashamed amateur photos of my luxury yacht.

'Von Stürmer!' I cried shockingly loudly. It reverberated through Veerhaven like a vicious reaction as I took an embarrassed step onto the mahogany edge of the low-swinging door. Some people on the other boats turned their heads in our direction. Haggard, I gazed up at that devilish dwarf, the debtor. He looked tight. I did not know why until Johanna called out: 'Wait a minute: that shrink went to Scumbags! That cannot be wrong, man. It was beautiful craftsmanship for these guys. Not?!

'To whom?'

'Look at that neat tie; the handlebar mustache as smooth and taut around, synchronous and shiny like an eel... it cannot be otherwise, guys. I recognize it immediately when someone has gone, you know. He even took one of those tattoos of the Scumbags!'

It was something eccentric, this retro movement of well-dressed men, super tight with tattoos and shiny wax and everything. Yes, even on that devilish dwarf; that charlatan of a psychiatrist, it showed off wonderfully. A hankering for nostalgia, cherishing good things from the past - what's wrong with that, anyway? That will only vastly strengthen our Tilt project with its magnitude proportions. What we do not throw away indiscriminately falls perfectly under sustainability!

From Quinten, I had learned that anything is better than the fake green logos of McDonald's and some undisclosed political parties: it is all a hoax, folks! Big boys are sucking the local economy dry! They empty it; everyone knows. As prosumers, we can commit ourselves to maintenance, re-use everything of value, and release the antiquated, utterly absurd and inhumane models of continuous growth through release of disposable plastic products.

'And his teeth are fake,' I mumbled, stunned, beaten from the field as a captain without a compass flawlessly working un-
der a cloudy dark sky. Stürmer was now definitely irresistible! I had to keep him away from the actress and from the Delta Hotel... and especially from Julia!

‘Begone toddler of nothing in particular!’ I cried, upset.

But without pretending to have heard my suggestion, he clicked merrily on the machine gun button of his gründliches camera and dribbled, full of baseless confidence, along the quay wall, inspecting my yacht. He photographed the empty towels where Johanna and Willem had sunbathed and the prow where her name, Julia, in graceful fancy letters of republic blue, was flaunted so beautifully, painted in pearl white satin. My fear that he would try to climb on board appeared happily unfounded when that Polish girl from the animation bar strolled under the canopy of the World Museum and took him, exuberantly waving, downtown. And so, we could open that second bottle safely.

let Willem pick the music, popped the cork, put three crystal glasses on the oak table on deck, and slid next to Johanna, who occupied one of those comfortable (turkey white) chairs of Jan des Bouvrie, the guy with the golden cock. Then we raised our glasses, filled with champagne, and wanted to tap them against each other in peace, but were startled by a raised voice - this time, fortunately, without that annoying accent.

Excited, I took a good look towards the shore.

Here was something I had not expected! Two men strong, very cheap uniforms, Tax Authority knitted on their black blue jackets, peered impatiently inside like little children who planned to steal from the candy store! If they could grab other peoples' hard-earned money, they will - but not this time!

Politely excusing myself, I reluctantly took those two - both with smart-ass grins on their idiotic faces - to my office at Ferry Terminal 4. There, I began to talk to them immediately, much as a madman. I tried to send them into the darkness's lump of
complex structures by explaining the jumble of an unprecedent-
ed amount of business activity. All this provided insights
without giving away my holding structure and without showing
any actual flows. No, I sent them, fully aware, into a thick
branch of the companies in which they might well get stuck or
lost. Both options would be fine, haha!

Returning to my sailing ship, it appeared that Johanna and
Willem had cleared out. The champagne bottle wobbled in the
middle of the oak table, a glass half-filled. I called Eddy. Sure
enough, within fifteen minutes he sputtered into the port, a
plume of smoke from his exhaust, waving while fastening his
moped to the lamppost. Apparently he was afraid I would kill
the champagne bottle by myself! In any case, he quickly arrived
at the scene and found the gangway, after some instructions
from my side.

‘Do you know Scumbags?’ I asked.

'Who does not know them?!

'Oh, me! Yes, then! Can you investigate them? I want to
know more about this popular, almost irresistible craving for
nostalgia. Where does that come from; and above all, what does
it mean? Perhaps we can include it in our project.’

‘Oh, man,’ he allowed himself to slip out a deep sigh.

However, he recovered so rapidly that I totally missed it, be-
ing busy with a thought experiment peeling off my tree to see
whether there are no snakes crawling in the grass, harmless vi-
pers that could serve as prey for those Tax Authority toddlers.

To correct himself, he said in an energetically and overly ex-
cited manner: ‘Okay, then! I'll do this for you, Henk; of course I
will! I am always ready for you; you know that.’

‘I know that much, Eddy - sure I do. Cheers!’
Eddy nodded sympathetically and recorded all the information. He went for it 24/7, always accessible. *What a great journalist,* Henk thought while he observed him closely as he angrily wrote in his notepad. They both lingered, savoring the orange glow that slid across the Veerhaven like a fleece blanket. While enjoying specially prepared grapes, Eddy told him about a report from one of the autonomously functioning research teams.

They had stumbled upon an employee named Cor Fige as they worked on an intriguing documentary featuring the curious ambitious working title: *An Ordinary Man From The Port Area*

At least two people from his own business were needed, the Professor on the transition management team had suggested. In this, he seemed inexorable, so Henk had randomly chosen two by picking, with his eyes closed, from Annegreet's staff list. That was him. The man's son was a talented football player. Henk had invited this man to take his place on this secretly-operating innovative transition team; a team with which he wanted to definitively overturn the worldwide economy system.

But could this happen now, after this frank, open journalism report? What did he recall about this Cor Fige guy? He had acted on the Russian deal; a piece of cake, actually. He was, for three years, a member of the council, too. Altogether it was no picnic! Perhaps it was a bright idea to make a good impression by sponsoring his son? Redirecting matters to your advantage is always an option for consideration.

Eddy spotted Henk's fierce look - through gritted teeth he listened to the unpleasant news - and wanted to reassure him. ‘This report mainly covers Cor Fige's family life,’ Eddy
smoothly explained. 'A working-class family where doing hard work for a living is hammered into those little children's mouths, you know - yeah, right on man,' joked Eddy, deeply inhaling his pleasurable cigarette. ‘An average Rotterdam family, you see?’ he decided optimistically. Henk read the journalism report, listened to the story line, and fell asleep; perhaps reinforced by the smooth, sweet smell of smoke that blew sideways into his face.

Meanwhile, in a rather less fortunate neighborhood, Cor Figee his Fate could finally fall asleep, though it took some sleeping pills and a bottle of house wine from the Aldi. She dreamed of being wild and wet from a heavy courtship with Cor who, in a metamorphosis, gradually turned into Daan. The reheated stew of the day had tasted great yesterday - that is, for anyone except her husband who (how could it be different) worked overtime. Elenoor had dinner on her invitation: with her, you could at least talk cozily! Unpretentious towering conceit was so much better than guys like Daan, with their sly tricks.

'He asked me blandly if I want to take him to that Feyenoord football stadium just to play a game of football; an ordinary sport like that! Yes, and be sure to wait for him - wait and wait in the cold and pouring rain or in some stupid soccer canteen. No, I do not start doing that! Whoever thinks I have time to do that is not of this world; that is someone who still has much to learn! Dear Mother can turn up and drive back and forth. If he is selected, it means giving him such a ride three times a week. I'm not that crazy, am I? I'm not a slave! This is not going to happen! And why should he play football all the way over there, so far away? We have a football club in the district right here! What's wrong with that?! Oh, they wear shin guards there? Nonsense; what an exaggerated state of ball kicking! It's much too dangerous, too. These attacks on the shin - before you know it, you're lying in the hospital! He's going to some kind of decent
sport where people have old-fashioned fun with each other; a social sport - one where girls participate. Women can exercise, too; watch out!

'If my neighbor understands me - at least, she completely agrees. This, Cor cannot expect. After all, I did it for my kids! And now he wants to jump on his child's little bike and independendly go and ride to Feyenoord. Is he crazy?! That's something for wanton boys; get lost. This he inherited from his father. If I had a real man, like our neighbor, that road worker, then he would at least hit it. That would teach them that boys need that. Why does he not attend a decent sport?

'Sometimes it is better to take measures. I sacrifice myself. I take the blame on my plate. If nobody helps you, you stand alone. I have read all this in the Bible. We have to solve things ourselves, as good Samaritans. Being a mother is my thanks for being helpful; for caring. All mothers are screwed, if the father is not there for the children. Garbage we are: discarded, just like that! No, I can't listen.

'They abuse our goodness and our kindness and they feel who is weak - whichever suits them! Without a father at home, it is hard enough. I wish I was married to the neighbor across the street, that lonely man. How could I have been so stupid back then?! The doctor and Janette understand me. He's an excellent doctor who writes me tranquilizers; a heavy drug I apparently need! Take this, lady, he pressed me. It is better for everyone, including your son.

'I wanted to marry the doctor, too, so when I visited him, I had Eau sprayed on; but unfortunately he proved allergic to the perfume: he kept sneezing! That did not pass! He should control himself! He went on a rampage; he never stopped coughing! What an elderly old poseur! I've always been unlucky in love. All bad people are doing well; then, it is easy! I'm glad I still have my Bible to read.'
Cor Figee stepped on the ferry to the Waalhaven. Along the way, he mulled over the forthcoming work: those renewed demands from the Russians meant overtime, and were not so economical, either! For weeks, days and nights there would be no alternative; business goes beyond measures.

Without work, there will be no toppings on your bread. My exceptional football talents used to be ignored; that's how youth is. His night, working, flew by in a daze as it usually does.

That first ferry back was for him; that was nothing new under the sun. The skipper knew Cor Figee. That differed one sip of a drink. Onboard, in the early morning, light and happy with his progress, he enjoyed the silence in the Waalhaven and the view of those heavy steel cables along the solid quay with sufficient depth, a concrete construction which could progress through rough handling and upon which activity would, immediately after everything was settled with those Russians, prosper again as in those early days.

He could barely keep his eyes open and felt he needed an hour or three in bed. At home he could dive into his own bed. Taking work home was not a realistic option. Sometimes Elenoor came to play with Daan, and it was impossible, then, to read anything, really; to work on files or detect errors. Any mistake can be fatal, and although sometimes they were insignificant, Cor Figee found mistakes, allright... provided he could look for them in peace and quiet.

The bedroom he could at least close; only, no dossier belongs in the bedroom. No, he had a much better idea: within just a few hours he would go back with the ferry and deal with those brisk trade statements. The hands he could best get out of his sleeves permanently could make all the difference, like a hearty sip of a Vlaardingen Ijsmoppen liqueur! The ferry dodged a whopper of a cargo ship, he saw vaguely, sleepily peering into
the morning mist at the sober activity on the waterfront. Was it becoming ever quieter? Was the reduction in work visible even here?! Soon we can all pack up and pull the burners out, eat bulbs! Somber, he checked his folder. Everything was situated exactly at the right place. He again counted the pages. Yes, it was a complete document. Still, you could not be certain enough of that, so he opened the folder and checked the papers once more and counted them all. Happily, everything was intact, yes. Satisfied, he closed the binder, snapping shut the copy safely located in his trained hands. The ferry slid down the embankment. A young man, hardly recognizable from his solid hood, jumped from deck. Aba, an early bird! All right, my boy! He starts working immediately, to go with that market flow!

The guy torpedoed Cor Fige in his haste to get to his boss and commence work. It was a rush job, for sure; a project that cannot wait. 'All right, put it on my fellow working man,' Cor encouraged proudly, wishing this was his son. A shimmer blinded his vision. The young man sprinted to a fat Mercedes which waited for him at a corner of the shed and jumped into the passenger door that was flung open by the driver. The pimp car took off, the side door still ripped open, rusted over concrete train tracks with squealing tires into the Anthony Fokkerweg.

Smoking rubber obstructed his view of the license plate, but what difference would it make? He had already recognized the hubcaps. Cor Fige felt something strange and went to sit on the ground, although the concrete slabs felt cold as ice. Gasping, he heard himself blow out air, choppy and obese. A strange stuttering sound left his throat, the pain in his side untenable. He clutched the file folder tightly in his arms as his vision became blurry. He was sweating like a madman, but the binder was, at least, safe. Voices faded as he staggered at sight of the Romanian costume in which Lavinia greeted him with open arms. It fit perfectly with her winning smile. The cart bumped onto the rural
country road, muddy and surrounded by pink blossoms of pear trees full of ripening fruit. Nearby the traditional Romanian farm, the wagon sucked itself to a halt in the deep muddy grooves. Cor jumped enthusiastically off the wagon and kissed his new bride resoundingly, delirious with joy at her sultry, not too flashy lips and elated as never before. She answered eagerly with a loving, intimate embrace. Then, suddenly, however, she grabbed him with a rough bite and shook him fiercely. What was that?! She turned away from him and he fell, rolling over. His muscles could not parry this primal force.

‘Will you stay calm? We are checking the wound,’ she said firmly. Her voice sounded different without her Slavic accent. ‘The doctor will be here soon; he will examine you. It doesn't seem too bad. It is your lucky today, I believe, Cor Figee.’

He awoke from anesthesia and slowly, half-blowing, came to his senses. ‘My binder; where's my binder? I have to check out my working files!’

‘All possessions are stored in the locker next to your bed; all that you were carrying at the time. Your business partner will be coming soon.’

‘Who? I have no partner!’

‘You insisted on calling him. Don’t you remember? I will alert the doctor about your amnesia (a fancy word for memory loss). It may be that you will receive a visit from the police today, as well. Don't be scared when they are suddenly at your bed; something like that can be intimidating. I will stop them from coming until further notice, if you want me to. That's the power we have, you see.’

‘No, no, let them come! What happened? How the hell did I get amnesia?’

‘You were stabbed in the Waalhaven by an unknown young man. I just heard it on radio station Rijnmond. He is a fugitive now; no worries. I cannot tell you more at this point in time; it
will be a police matter. You are staying in the port hospital, where we patch up patients as quickly as possible before your ship leaves Pernis again.’

‘I'm not sailing! I work in the office!’ Cor Figee cried, aghast. It struck him that she'd insinuated this. Everyone makes mistakes. That is human nature; even nurses are not infallible. Only hard work and regular monitoring can prevent serious errors, but these silly remarks indicate laxness! *Staff training and monitoring must be refurbished; maybe I can help them.*

‘Allright then; that can be enough, sometimes.’

‘What? Oh! Can I have some water?’

‘Sure, I'll go get it for you. Stay in bed; the doctor won’t be long, Mister Figee.’

Cor scanned the room. There was no one to observed him as he searched the lockers next to the sink. The doors were lockable, but all stood ajar. His work lay there unprotected! With a painful grimace he rose from the hospital bed and pushed the nearest closet open. The binder lay on top of his three-piece suit from the V&D (one of his best bargains of recent years: it seemed indestructible).

Because of forced cutbacks in business declarations (a change of direction he agreed with), he could not afford expensive suits. His new boss had a great vision and had intervened after unnecessary amounts had been spent. Cor Figee checked the contents for completeness: all files were intact and untouched. Perfect! That saved a swig on a Ketel One drink. He tucked the folder under the covers and pulled himself back into bed. Not completely sure of himself, he crawled along behind and inspected things accurately from that position. Possessed, he counted the pages. The Sister was wrong. His memory was perfectly fine: there was no sign of missing pages. From under the sheets he could also inspect the mattress's unevenness easily. He
smoothed things as thoroughly as possible, down to the foot of the bed.

Then there was a man's voice, calling him: 'Cor?'

Who was this? He recognized him from somewhere, but from where, and on what occasion? His *Civilized Dutch* sounded shocking, neatly articulated, deliberately pretending not to come from Rotterdam. Lifting his head from the foot of the bed, wearing the sheet wearing like a headscarf, Cor Figeé stared at the stabbing, jet-black eyes of none other than El Bachir, his eyes gleaming like pearls from the Ivory Coast, with full attention and empathic understanding as he looked at his vigilante colleague. *He seems a nice guy, but do I understand him better after staring, intensely aware, into these pupils?* That question kept Cor Figeé busy for a long time until he heard a second male voice, his head still covered with the pale white sheet. It was a softer tone and was pronounced with a gold honest Rotterdam accent.

‘Mr. Figeé... is it not?’

The doctor, apparently of Indian origin, stood right in front of him at the foot of the sickbed. Between the sheets, Cor Figeé glimpsed and admired his beige linen woven belt while the doctor was browsing. El Bachir, diagonally adjacent to the longitudinal side, took seat on one of the rocking chairs.

Behind him, the doctor appeared a monkey suit.

‘Mr. Figeé is... p r e s e n t?’ he asked.

‘Yeah, that's me!’ he answered with a sigh and a hand held high, by which he gripped his drinking glass on the end table. The sister had used a straw, as he felt only now, causing his other hand to toss the plastic thing away. ‘That is for kids!’ he snorted beneath the pale white sheet.

‘Routine, probably,’ said El Bachir. ‘She probably confused you with another patient; a boy. How are you doing?’ he asked while his hand reassuringly covered Cor's thigh.
‘Can you dismiss me, doctor? A project awaits me, upon which the future of our company rests! I have work to do; before it's too late, that is! What time is it? How long have I been asleep?’

‘You will receive drugs. You have is a deep wound that missed vital organs by half a millimeter. Lucky, my friend; you were so lucky today. I hear a little angel sing,’ the doctor said in good spirits.

‘It could be true!’ Cor Figeé answered boldly, and prepared himself to stand up straight.

‘Be brave and stay in your bed!’ commanded this gentle doctor sternly. ‘The nurse will arrange everything. In an hour, you can go home - at least, provided you stay calm in the weeks ahead.’

‘In that case... Can you appear at our police station late in the afternoon? It's behind the Coolsingel. I will move on smoothly, then. I've just received another urgent call,’ the uniform informed them. He did not wait for an answer and disappeared. The doctor left the room as well, tapping three times on the top of the door frame in passing.

A clear case of an obsessive-compulsive disorder? He did this three times, always precisely at the same height. The nurse, who was studying to be a clinical psychologist in her limited spare time, was not fully convinced. 'For a diagnosis, I need more data. A complete collection of his life history is essential. Only then can I judge this. For example, using some wristband tracking whereby I can observe him twenty-four hours a day - that would be handy! Pull the plunger and put it on. He's such a nice colleague. How can I manipulate him to participate?

‘It's all good,’ stammered Cor Figeé while he sat back and checked volatilely under the sheets to make sure his folder with all its files was still intact.

El Bachir raised up and asked, finally: ‘What shall I do?’
'No idea, El!'

'You asked me here, supposedly for some urgent matter. You seemed to be in panic or something, Cor... in shock.'

'I was stabbed in the Waalhaven by a hood who jumped into a well-known Mercedes! You know, those cowards of Museum park; guests who nastily attack your back! I knew no one else to call; not now that Edwin has disappeared from planet Earth. Do you know where he hangs out nowadays?'

'He's been on a prolonged business trip for months... something to do with espionage equipment. Whether he is carrying out an undercover operation, we are not allowed to know. The vigilante work he does as glorified hobby.'

'Who does not do it like that? I have no time for it, either; let alone strength. Will you go to the police with me? Then we can inform them about where these attacks in the back are coming from! Do you have time, or do you need to work? Work always comes first! You know it does, El!'

'No, that's ok. I have to report something: my identity papers were stolen,' said El Bachir. 'My mother is a doctor, by the way. She can look at you; check you out. Here in the harbor hospital, they work quick and dirty. Given the interests of navigation, it should be like that: leaving a ship in dock costs tons of money.'

'Should I get a second opinion, do you think?'

Half an hour later they stepped outside and drove to El Bachir's place. The house of Mother, easily big enough for accommodating her two grown children with their own bathrooms, toilets, and entrance, was right next to former prime-minister Ruud Lubbers's cottage in Kralingenpark, situated opposite of the golf course and not far from the equestrian center. They could live at Mother's home until there was a lovely opportunity, a godsend, in sight. He parked his light blue Peugeot 306 of more than seven years behind a towering hedge, completely out of sight of
their driveway. 'She is a specialist surgeon at Erasmus MC,’ he stated, staying ahead of Cor Figeé's questioning.

‘Okay,’ he replied, confused. He could not disguise his admiration, but then again, he certainly did not want to hide it. On the contrary! *Becoming a doctor*, he thought, was pretty amazing. How the hell did she manage?! Incredible! In this *black Piet* country! How can this be? Their skin color is a light black - would this make a difference? Would a sooty color, really pitch-black, be more affected by the social problems of integration than lightly tinted dark skin? It certainly might save a sip or two on some drink!

You should look at the man opposite you as an individual. It is exactly as Mandela said: let us not see skin colors - white, yellow, red or black - sitting opposite us, but a person. Okay; he was talking to a child in a kindergarten, but who cares? If someone works hard and is dedicated, as befits Rotterdam, there is nothing to worry about. People are all the same: get lost, man! Goddamn it! How different this is, in most countries in the world. Do people actually realize what it is like out here in the Netherlands, in our tolerant country?

‘Everyone is, in principle, equal in opportunity in our beautiful, flat country,’ snorted Cor Figeé when the lady of the house opened the front door.

‘There you are so right! Let me introduce myself. I am Nizam Ali.’

'Cor Figeé. The pleasure is mine.’

‘A man of strong grip,’ she said, and led him into the living room. ‘My son explained it all. Do you want tea?’

‘Good,’ Cor muttered as he walked past the kitchen where Fatima and her best friend sat, attentively hiding in textbooks. Besides her mentally heavy job at the Binnenweg, she studied law at an evening school at the Erasmus University, going for a real master's degree.
El Bachir wanted to show the way to Cor Figee, but was distracted by his sister Fatima; she presented him a document and asked him to look at her friend Roosje van Ballegooijen's letter. She had not managed to get a job. This pure nature Dutch girl had studied both law and psychology and graduated cum laude. She was not overly beautiful, being a little on the chubby side, but looked extremely friendly and energetic: she made an excellent first impression. It was a difficult time for starters, but also for older people who'd lost their jobs, proving more persistent than had been predicted by politicians. Because of the substantial outflow and the result of aging, the promised and predicted jobs up for grabs still proved untraceable.

Cor Figee thought hard: would companies soon, as had been announced for years, be fighting to get an employee? Was it just for justifying this practical reason that the borders were opened to Eastern Europeans from Romania and Bulgaria and such? Or were most jobs already automated? Strange; usually young people get a job so they can work hard, neatly molded and forged into the right iron cast until they end up in burned out. Unwise, of course: you have no use of them when this happens! Then you have to patch and reuse and wait for the next burnout. There used to be better deal, with personnel. Why are young people not united in trade unions? Had those games made them stupid?!

‘The level of general education is saddening,’ Cor Figee muttered.

Meanwhile, El Bachir read the letter from Roosje. He advised her strongly to change her name, handwritten under her otherwise excellent letter, into something more exotic: some beautiful Chinese, Turkish or Arabic name, maybe. ‘Those currently do very well,’ he said seriously. He wanted to help her. However, Cor Figee drowned out his suggestion in no uncertain terms: ‘Hello! Is it not better to stay true to yourself? Do not deny
yourself for tactical reasons, Roosje! We are all human. *Keep your beautiful Dutch name!*’

Mother Fatima looked on pityingly.

El Bachir shook his head in disapproval as he pulled open his own mail. ‘My passport!’ he exclaimed enthusiastically. ’There's a note that reads: ‘Sorry, it is of no use to me.’

‘Mr. Figee is right,’ said Nizam Ali, her straight hair pinned up in a bun, actively investigating her son's surprised look. She had her hands full carrying a tray with saccharine snacks and an eighteen-karat golden teapot delicately painted in red lines. ‘Please keep it signed in your own name, Roosje. There is nothing wrong with a Dutch name on your resume. Be proud of your heritage - so I taught my children,’ she proclaimed, raising her voice in mild reproach to her son, who was fidgeting nervously at his financial consultant tie. ‘A good friend, Surinamese, is a brilliant trend watcher,’ she suggested, handing out the delicious snacks. ‘He explained it to me perfectly: our society will soon be freed from racism by an employment situation where the Surinamese *hustling* will prevail, where the majority of our workers will weave together short assignments, chores and odd small jobs to fulfill themselves via your home network. There is no place for discrimination or otherwise, then.’

‘Well, should we be happy about that?’ El Bachir asked, surprised, in a clear, ironic tone. Cor Figee walked behind her. He had no idea about this trend, and stayed silent.

‘Are you in pain? I will look at it. We will do that upstairs in my office.’

‘Not too bad. A slight irritation; that’s all, really, miss.’

Elegantly, she placed the tray on the table with its transparent silver frame. ‘You’re going for declaration?’

‘I'll go,’ El Bachir interrupted. ‘Maybe it will turn out handy. It has, after all, to do with Fatima and her work; with that cowardly attack at the Binnenweg.’
‘Are you sure? What do you think, Mister Figee?’

‘Virtually, yes... almost,’ said Cor, and sipped some hot tea. Due to an unexpected twinge, he tipped his teacup and the deep pile carpet discolored. ‘No! A thousand apologies, ma'am! I never make this mistake; I'm sincerely sorry!’

‘Fatima, you may clean the carpet!’ she cried in a loud voice towards the kitchen. ‘Come on, I'm going to examine you. We'll see if the port hospital acted correctly. They might have dropped a stitch in a hurry.’

‘Not all errors are preventable. The staff will have to do with the training and control system that has been designed, implemented, and rolled out through the entire office. There are always opportunities for improvement, Ms. Ali.’

While his colleague/neighborhood security guard was subjected to medical tests, El Bachir could not resist asking about Julia’s father. ‘Your chef, Mister van Wijnen-Swarttouw - you know him very well, do you not? I mean, he behaves quite... how shall I express this... ficklely... according to Julia. Problems were raised with the family. Some want to let him be examined by a psychiatrist... I mean, he's so... well... he is sometimes a little lost, if I may be so blunt.’

There was a peculiar silence for a while, during which Cor investigated suspiciously, looking him straight in his black eyes.

Outside, you could hear the crows squabbling. After an obvious hesitation, El Bachir continued: ‘They have approached me. His wife has not moved to São Paulo for nothing. A few things happened. The rumor that he is becoming downright disturbed seems serious. What do you think?’

‘Go wash your mouth,’ sneered Nizam Ali, assisted by a firm, dismissive gesture. Then this aunt fiercely stood up against her irreverent offspring, Cor Figee thought, and he let the words flow out by heart.
‘No way! My friend, that is, by all means, his strength! Mr. van Wijnen-Swarttouw is so unlike us mortals,’ Cor Fijee began passionately with a noble speech while Nizam Ali patiently knocked intently on his chest, listening to his lungs, from which the most peculiar noises shot. ‘The great men of the world see everything as we cannot see it, El! Sometimes this leads to friction, especially with their neighbors, as with their wives and children. How can it not be otherwise? I do not know his wife, personally. Maybe she’s jealous. That happens. Van Wijnen-Swarttouw has a *helicopter view*; an understanding of the business world that is completely unique and goes miles beyond our qualities! That causes problems. Johan Cruyff is not the easiest to handle either. When you observe so much more, it is difficult to work with mortals who do not see; who do not have your exceptional insight. Be wise, El! In the difficult circumstances in which we find our country in this heavy storm, we need people like Van Wijnen-Swarttouw to pull us out of the doldrums, and we need those of us who will elevate us from the ground up; who will help climb us out of the embankment at a wharf that is under water, if we are already standing in the Maas up to our knees! If we do nothing, it will not be long before we will all search for burners in our attic, dusting them off and desperately trying to fix them. Everything we will throw in there, you can bet on it; everything that gives warmth in harsh times of icy cold, starting with your consultant tie and briefcase! An elite is based on quality; one who oversees and offers business intelligence is now needed more than ever. They have the qualities! At least it saves a huge whooper of a sip from a triple whiskey or two! The Royals are indeed among them. Do you not believe this!? They are exceptional people who want to take the lead in what we sorely miss. How can it ever change for the better, otherwise? We desperately need men like Van Wijnen-Swarttouw to
make the Netherlands great and, mark my words, *world leading* again!’
Awakened by the singing birds in my garden full of bonsai trees, I rose out of bed with a feeling of satisfaction, prepared a full pot of coffee (where was Tatiana? I needed her for a translation from the Russian), and started off as energetically as ever. All things happened simultaneously. Now it was time to pull on the ropes, knowingly let some loose, here and there lay a knot or two, and meanwhile monitor the course of the ship closely, but unnoticed. Tonight, at Quinten’s place, I would hear what Julia had announced. After the usual call of an hour or two, I could continue. Patience is a virtue when Uncle Wesseling is on the phone, but his stories got straggly - unfortunately. I mean, dementia is a nasty illness. Still, I enjoyed it, as he explained the school and town atmosphere, as stunning as it all was at the time in those days before the war with Germany. Rustic and solidarity groups and community work all together, putting their shoulders under the wheels and playing football with those heavy cannonballs. That thing could hardly be moved around, especially after a rainstorm! It was golden, honest work, until that damn Jerry Krauts bombed the neighborhood, flattening everything! Yes, Wesseling had been through a lot for an old fellow. At thirteen, he told me for the umpteenth time, suddenly they appeared: a ton of high explosive bombs completely destroyed a large part of the city Centre and the Kralingen. Well over eight hundred Rotterdammers found a senseless death. The immediate cause was that heroic resistance of his brothers in arms, the Marines. While Wilhelmina, sitting high and dry in England, partook of her high society dinner, they’d cut the throats of those Germans, he said doggedly. And now, in his twilight years, he was assigned
a nurse with Islamic headscarf, unintelligibly gibbering in some peculiar lingo. He watched her as she stared at him reproachfully from the corners of her eyes. He saw how she forged her nefarious and sinister plans, lurking on sweet revenge for whatever made-up reason. Also in this some kind of tilt was needed, all right!

I hung up. There was plenty of work available; it all lay steadfastly on my desktop, awaiting me.

The stack of more than three feet happily shrunk, but what would happen when I put the complete stack on Jan's files?

Luckily, I had found my tape measure in Julia's guest room, where she had not been for weeks, now. When would she finally come back? Had she combined their project with my tilt idea?! The stack wobbled slightly. I could not help but straighten the papers, squarely aligning them, using both hands. I had to use my forearms and my biceps. After the tower was showing off, straight up, I dared to let loose of the monster carefully. It stood neatly, haha. Such beautiful sight! I took out my flexible measuring tape. This ribbon was easily manageable and was a hundred and fifty centimeters long. Could things be more convenient? As expected, the whole thing towered well above the imaginary line of ninety centimeters! So I picked up a pile from above, weighed it, recorded the result in my log called 'weight measurements of dossiers,' and pulled the tape measure along. I had tackled more than twenty centimeters, and this was fine for the time being. After a few sips of coffee, I began transporting the top of the biggest pile – I had the whole thing split in two – one by one into the chipper. Next to my desk a sturdy boy stood; one who could handle serious piles of paper.

You must accompany it with care, in the right tempo, thereby letting the papers glide smoothly, without significant interruptions. The heavy hum invariably ended with a high-pitched
noise: it was like beautiful music, lovely and delicious, organized in such a way on a Monday morning.

With renewed energy, I was curious about Jan's details. I could not control myself and took his folder from under the dwindling pile. But then the dossier about my father's company lit up my Monday morning eyes. First they blurred and then, after deliberately focusing, became crystal clear: it was an incomplete report! The actress had the dubious honor of complementing shortcomings. But what was already described was indeed worrisome: his old boys Rotary club had deliberately targeted my empire, which appeared to be the main reason for my lawsuit and fall down into the icy depths of unpopularity until I was almost *persona non grata* in my very own home, our beautiful flat land with windmills! After all was considered, I could not otherwise but conclude that introducing myself as the leader of our tilt was simply out of the question. Even after I won the lawsuit, a completely renewed confidence in me seemed impossible. Well, maybe I could learn how to survive like the Royals, scandal after scandal managing to bend into a perfectly decent percentage of popularity of well over fifty percent again.

But Quinten, for example, would disagree. The love for the Royal Family had grown steadily and was deeply rooted in the art scene nowadays, folks. Yes, even in this circuit of independent poverty without any substantial resources, this family had successfully penetrated the world: what an achievement it was! Hats off for super-rich, our Blue-blooded Royal family tree! But it was too late for doing business: my days were numbered. Or did I want to see it that way? Had I lost interest in this pioneering role, now lacking respect?

As a successful businessman, I should know myself all too well. Why did I doubt how to steer this flagship around, wandering in a Noordwester storm and, yes, above all, why did I doubt
who was the best captain at the steering wheel? Did they finally break me mentally?! Or was it the opposite: was my honor or struggle to survive obstinately trying to maintain a status quo situation?

Let’s first win the lawsuit and then we'll start the revolution.

Perhaps the solution will reveal itself. And so, as if in a daze, I worked on and on, ever harder and harder, until I saw the daylight in the garden change its color into a soft orange over the snow-white pebbles, steadily becoming soft pink and pastel purple mixed in deep aborigine. The bonsai trees retained their dark green color. My stack seemed to have dwindled nicely after reading. I breathed a sigh of contentment. There was only a brilliant thirty-three centimeters to cover! This offered perspective. High time for a bite and then I'll move my ass to Quinten.

Would he talk freely and elaborate on how Julia worked on their up-scaled art project? I could not wait any longer. Maybe I could score one of those delicious Surinamese sandwiches, or some vegetarian bite, during my walk. Around ten o'clock I arrived at the gate and entered his courtyard. The side door opened, after which I fell on the couch next to the colored totem pole, content as ever, when Quinten and Eddy entered from the antique tiled kitchen (the last half century, maintenance was omitted) with a tray of Marrakech. That is, Quinten wore the blade and Eddy pulled out a few joints; he had been so attentive, to prepare them. After half a cup of silently drinking our mint tea with honey from the Vosges, Quinten started his story, sipping, meanwhile knocking away the smoke from the fun cigarette. They'd gone through a brilliant creative process, he stated.

‘Not normal, tjillen, this man,’ he whispered into the shabby room which served as both a workshop and living room.

Their project remained mysterious to the outside world. Visitors to the performance act were not allowed, under penalty of
an advanced, robust, and moreover, legally unbreakable agreement, to tell anything - and I mean absolutely nothing - about what they had observed. Every visitor got exactly half an hour to experience, see, and undergo the exhibition which was held in the harbor in one of those futuristic floating wet balls. What it was, exactly, remained top secret. There could be only one visitor at a time, docked with a specially convened chartered water taxi adorned with the artistic logo of the SAF, a modern take on the famous sculpture 'The Destroyed City', from which the red beating heart was stolen and replaced by the artist, glued into the gaping hole of Ossip Zadkine’s masterly statue. Spectators paid to reserve a spot, with prices ranging from pennies to ten thousand bucks.

Because of the secrecy and exclusivity, on the first day of launch we were inundated with entries (there was a special website set up to take care of bookings). ‘It looks like a superb plan,’ I stammered. ‘But I do not understand much. And if I do not understand it, then executing it will be difficult, guys!’

‘Anyone who lets himself be known, pays with a fine of fifteen hundred euros,’ said Quinten. ‘Thus, the spark to have the courage to participate at all becomes insufferably challenging. I mean, we know mankind; is it not true? A spectator to this exhibition represents a testament to dare to trust himself. How tough is it for you, after you visit, to post the stamped ticket, your certificate of participation, onto your social media page! The only problem, seems to me, is to convince women to participate; but when I suggested this, Julia waved away this idea as preposterous and an outdated, sexist fantasy. ‘Note that there are more women than men in the show’, she said firmly. ‘Women are less afraid of betraying anything through a slip of the tongue.’ No, women will massively subscribe, said your liberal daughter.’

Why did he explicitly articulate that she was my free-spirit daughter? I know this best! In my mind, I turned a package around
and round of around ten million euros. Pushed by swirling smoke, it remained miraculously floating in the air until it descended on our wooden table and fell between the teapot and the bottle of gin, where it lay a bit askew, motionless. I thought about picking it up to count it. Was it a decent ten million? It stayed on the wobbly side of Quinten's table, just up for grabs!

Inhaling, I poured the gin back while the stack of banknotes shot vertically into the air and grew larger until it reached the ceiling. We further discussed how we could use the report of the Club of Rome for a no-growth strategy, but transition and the use of sustainable forms (a different way of thinking, but also how investment banks were operating nowadays) educated the marketplace participants to the idea of an acquisition, providing cumulative growth as an end in itself in terms of cashing in as quickly as possible. I mean, infinite growth is impossible and is equal to creating another well-known bubble, as every businessman of the old stamp knows by heart. But how on earth could we transform this system and bend it into our ultimate Tilt? How could we radically change the European Union's allocation policy and at the same time eliminate unhealthy entanglement between policymakers and lobbyist firms? The content was way too difficult for these guys, but I needed them to get into creative brainstorming. And so, we formed an initial idea, nurtured by their influence and presence, the attributes in the artistic workshop, and not in the least because of those euphoric cigarettes.

‘Okay, we will fill up our Sustainable Artist Foundation, our cooperative, with loads of well-earned money,’ I called out, and waited patiently, enjoying their curious boy-like faces before I went on. ‘It's a risk, but I will make this my responsibility.’
Haha, the artist and reporter stared at me so glassily. Eddy blew smoke: a sweet smell filled the room with melancholy thoughts of the greatest saccharine Turkish snacks.

‘Uhm... is good, man,’ said Quinten dryly, his eyes shining with equanimity and joy.

‘What is it?’ Eddy asked bluntly while he kept smoking his joint.

‘From the viewpoint of reinforced secrecy, I cannot communicate about it yet,’ I said cryptically. ‘You guys will, naturally, find out when the time comes.’

‘Okay, then,’ Eddy muttered like a loyal dog.

Stoned as a gamba, he squeezed his eyes shut, satisfied.

I shot out a fit of laughter and could not stop; burst out laughing until tears limited my vision and moistened my chubby cheeks with hyper-healthy tears. Then I told them my ingenious idea without any trace of caution for my confidants. Under a pile of cloudy sky that gave lengthy moments of sunshine – it was bloody hot, these days – I carefully studied the initial results. Pretty impressive stuff. Satisfied, I embraced Julia in my mind while being sensibly restrained, as if she actually was the mature one. Radiant, with a barely disguised pride, she sportily answered her father’s hug.

This ship sailed in the right direction; if could we only share the moment with your mother, I whispered, overly sentimentally, in her lovely ear. This she seemed to shy away from, though. I suddenly felt strength in her arms and shoulder muscles and some kind of shiver, as if she had goose bumps, followed by a deep meditation that lead to nothing useful.

The door opened. How I flew over there, I could not remember. I was called in. In the stately hall of the court, psychiatrist Von Stürmer sat on that wobbly pew which hung onto the wall, held on by two ornate cast iron pins, rock-solid whoppers. His
light beige suit did not contain the slightest wrinkle, despite its size, and caught my eye. Whether I liked it or not, an outsider would suspect him to be an important person until he came closer and spotted the tattoo in his neck and his twisted mustache, gleaming with shiny sickie, leaving the viewer in utter confusion and turning away, averse. Possibly he was someone from the underworld; a dangerous criminal whom his innate desire, going through life as tiny dwarf, was offset to hunt people down and scare them all! Painstakingly, this outsider would step backwards in disgust.

Upon entering the courtroom, my shrink was called to testify! The hawk-nosed judge seemed particularly interested in Von Stürmers' further research and complemented him on his sharp new look. It could not get crazier, folks. To everyone's surprise, after a few seconds of phrases of legal distinction, the psychiatrist decided to comment positively on my progress! This was especially odd because I had not spoken beforehand. Whence this change; why this tilt in his tiny German shrink's brain? He compared me with a Ferrari that just had to show off, the crowd wanted to see that. Consequently, the Ferrari sometimes crashed with incredible speed, turning spinning laps with tires that towered gray plumes, boosted by the boiling hot asphalt. Setting top speeds ever sharper corners, cutting off competitors who'd caught up with devious maneuvers, a Ferrari can do nothing but win. The crowd demands it, argued Stürmer. Well, what could I say? I decided to leave this vision for what it was – the nonsensical silliness of a born idiot – and deliberately did not answer the insinuating questions of that gown dress. Simply ignore him; do not stir up the fire; then it goes out faster. I know this as well as every celebrity and businessman of stature and significance. I took them all to the balls pub across the Maas River. It appeared that Jos also did not understand Von Stürmer's turnaround. Levi, however, claimed to have the answer. He strongly suggested
that clearly this was caused by a recent meeting between the psychiatrist and Julia: he'd seen something big in her art project and wanted, thereafter, to support her father as best as possible, purely to please Julia! Her request to help me was approved by that toddler!

An electric shock shot from my head down along my spine, straight through to my big toes. Von Stürmer had communicated this without reasonable explanation and further information! Levi had exploited this opportunity by calling him as a witness. He could not care less about his motives; that is left for journalists and psychologists who take pleasure in limbo reasoning for human actions, actions that are incomprehensible and non-logical, to rule, he argued dryly. The scornful, lived-through laugh from this Jewish streetfighter, he who had come to know humanity as no other, spoke volumes! Nothing by any human being was mad enough, he explained, icily pedantic. How could he be so sure?! The Bombing was long gone, by now! It seemed to me a smart piece of occupational disability which I, by the way, wholeheartedly granted him. Meanwhile, however, I was overwhelmed by a wonderful feeling of good fortune: Julia had wanted to save me. She finally wanted to help her father!

The following weeks were dominated by this peculiar performance act in the floating wet ball. We unleashed a competition divided into sectors between wealthy: footballers, Hollywood Stars, bank directors, and extremely rich: my colleagues of the Quote 500, but international. I decided to move ahead quickly and, starting today, focus simply only on those Forbes 500 boys and girls. That Dutch motley crew did not fit my stature and masterful brainpower anymore; they clashed with my virtuosity. Moreover, that persona non grata status was playing tricks. Deliberately, I raised the penalty for breaking into that safe haven contract of ten million. International press traveled with VIPs
from all over the world. Wealthy celebrities wanted to belong to and be seen at this exclusive exhibition: they wanted to prove their ability to stay silent. The funny thing was that they were in competition with their colleagues, but they did not realize how, beside these days of the most powerful, richest people, the pen- niless also participated.

The illusion already given up, those people were not afraid, anymore, of an expensive slip of the tongue. Such a claim had no meaning for them. Maybe they foresaw our Robin Hood plan; perhaps intuitively. Others realized what a financially dan- gerous game they played by participating, but could not care less and found it merely amusing how this contradiction was magni- fied. They took up the challenge, thinking they could get away with it as with anything else - a fatal mistake! Precisely why this last group was my target: the silent billionaires, the real rich such as the Rothschild’s, those who studiously avoided publicity - yes, I wanted them to sail, incognito, towards our exhibition wet ball in another secret way, purposefully without the SAF logo char- tered second watertaxi! To achieve this, we let the celebrity millionaires come on the same day, causing a horde of press photographers to come to the event, armed with cameras along the banks of the river like giant mushrooms. You could see their lenses crisscrossing the harbor, a looming, rapidly growing group of white mushrooms as they cropped up and disappeared in the weeds on days when ordinary people participated. We shared silent billionaires in secret on public days among prole- tarians, thereby letting them attain the show unnoticed by the press - a greater pleasure you could not provide them as a gift, haha! Yes, they had a better time than during their exorbitantly expensive feasts! The enlighting idea that an average Joe saw them as one of them, as a poor man, was one of the greatest pleasures in their rich lives. The publicity-horny VIPs served as lightning rods. This was nothing new under the sun. And naturally, we
made the most of the extraordinary power that moved up to the third place: *media conglomerates*. Interviewers tried to fire their questions, but no one answered, proud of their silence after visiting Julia's floating pavilion. Precisely why this attracted ever more journalists to this unique event. The urge for a 'scoop' and the desire to be the first journalist to get something got bigger and bigger. Nowadays, it is all or nothing, as we know it.

And so it all went smoothly; but of course, this could not go on forever. Quick action was required. Those fifteen minutes of fame will fly by in no time! Using the spy software, I selected two persons per country and let them leak information by eavesdropping; simply a matter of manipulation. Probably they judged the contract as not really a threat, and they did not take it seriously enough. The participants chatted their haughty mouths off, leaked the contents of the exhibition in one of their private parties or in the bedroom.

The burden of proof I left to Levi and his partner in his law firm, his brother Levi. They proposed a summons. This brought ten times ten million for the S.A.F. in the drawer; a nice starting capital. There was resistance, of course, but the contracts were watertight as a gaping hole in the hull, expertly welded shut by the best welder of Rotterdam and the Pitbull's Levi & Levi to seal it. No worries, folks!

During the weeks that followed I decided to bring a claim of a hundred million, which I wanted to expand as soon as possible to around one hundred people and thus to a billion, into the stock market. The IPO I named jokingly *'Sustainable Art Claim'*. So damn applicable, if I do say so myself, haha! This brought in a nice sum of cash; two hundred million to be exact. Provisionally, that should be enough to finance all the attorney fees (although the tariff of those guys grew exorbitantly). The contents of the lawsuits we kept secret, but after we reached a
hundred claims, I decided to throw them out into the open, since they offered an excellent opportunity to generate attention to our idea of an overall tilt. And so our art project, turned into Game Changing in just a month or three, basically out of the blue, got publicly recognized as a battle of David against Goliath; as Robin Hood against the richest people. The S.A.F. became notorious, and I had to organize my personal security.

Finally, the self-confidence of the man in the street grew; a tilt in itself that acted as catalyst. The harder the rich warded in the courtroom, the greater the public awareness grew that these multiples of ten million through the SAF could be used to create a sustainable living environment in and around Rotterdam. The crowd began to realize that the most beautiful harbor in the world could, in the coming years, be successfully converted in accordance with the guidelines and principles of the Club of Rome and the transition professor at the Erasmus University.

With this, Rotterdam could again play its natural leadership role in the world. In short, the crowd began to stir and the principle of 'power to the people' (versus ‘power to the happy few’) began to flame like wildfire and ignite in one of the major port areas in the world; an area with people who do not mince words but tell it like it is; people who practically, without haughtiness and hard work, earn an honest living. Not talk, but polish is the motto in the Port of Rotterdam. It always has been!

We started our struggle against the ruling system (the richest people and their corrupt politicians, tax evaders and market educators or those who possessed investment banks; even special interest and lobbyist firms, accountancy and consultancy firms) with a relatively modest use of their resources obtained by the use of their own, ethically odious manipulation methods. Well, how we could have achieved it differently, I would not know,
folks. Payback, this could not be otherwise; I understand you all comprehend.

The Saturday which I had been looking for longingly gave me a peaceful feeling and enough satisfaction to allow me to lay in bed till noon. I began to enjoy the silence in the house and could reduce the intake of pills into limited proportions. Maybe I had less need for them because of the nightly discussions and the fun I had with the guys? Anyway, this afternoon it was my turn. Today, I was visitor in the wet ball of my daughter Julia's exhibition! And afterwards, I planned to go straight on the water taxi to Manhattan on the Maas for dinner with the actress, who had managed to get information on my father's network, as icing on delicious cream pie, followed by a visit to room 33, where she wanted to 'try something new'.

What a great Saturday in the offing, haha! Before I left, I studied the latest files of my father and his Old Boy’s network.

That starting capital was merely a bonus. The main resistance did not come from those international cases; no, the conflict of interest with the Dutch politicians and administrators in the harbor was a much harder nut to crack. I treated myself to a double espresso and prepared a mushroom omelet, accompanied by a glass of fresh fruit drink from the blender. Where was Tatjana? The goal was not only a tilt as an ideal, but Amsterdam had already fixed up the IJ riverside. Because of my father, they had expanded their port immensely! Ditto, this applied to Antwerp. The synergy benefits after full transition left me no option but to beat the old man. Just when I wanted to leave, my eye caught an image of a Sherlock Holmes detective bureau logo of... Edwin! What the F*! How could I have missed this vital information?! Fortunately, this file was saved from the shredder! Stay razor sharp, Henkie!
Curiously, I opened the binder, looked at a trio of clipped newspaper articles, and read the clumsy, summarized information about the Pink Panthers, a criminal gang from Eastern Europe who somehow felt the need to compare their criminal work with the legendary series in which Peter Sellers played the leading role. As if their robberies include a comic note just because they robbed a jewelry store in Saint Tropez dressed as women in t-shirts with floral motifs and balloon big d-cups beneath their showy flirt-with-me cut dresses and managed to escape in a speedboat, leaving their outfits in the harbor, floating, after which those bras were mistakenly seen for drowning women, causing gendarmes to jump bravely in for the rescue.

Who would do such a stupid thing? Wait... also, they had used a speedboat - this could indeed be called striking! Were they behind the brutal and cowardly robbery of the vault in in my villa? Had these Pink Panther boys stolen not unmonetized, valuable paintings? I wrote it in my already-full notebook schedule: I have to study all episodes of that series, looking for any conclusive evidence. Yet the Daily Rotterdam had not mentioned any floating bras! Furthermore, this concerned Serbs, not the Bulgarians and Romanians who drove massively in our streets with not-quite rickety cars: brand new BMWs and Mercedes were no exception for them! My intuition told me it could be true, but then it probably was some kind of copycat gang of Bulgarians or Romanians; a group of lunatics. That happens often, folks. Yes, that could be it!

Walking past the World Museum and the newly installed statue, I listened to the message that was recorded by Annegreet. The bottom line was that the wet ball of the SAF was floating in the Waalhaven, adrift, hit by a gust of wind from the northwest. When my car and I arrived, the colossus rolled uneasily against the jetty exactly at the location where the first submarine was launched. I am talking about that wonderful time just before our
lobbyist firm was influenced by the government and threw a spanner in this nutritious food chain. The banks withdrew, so I had to rely on the use of friendly relations on their positive response to make a guarantee on behalf of the Port of Rotterdam. A noble and respectful purpose: keep our guys at work in the harbor. From that moment on, everything hung, disjointed, as past glory of yesteryear. Johanna had addressed it correctly; haste was required. The tilt process had to start as soon as possible! Approaching Julia’s wet ball exhibition, the captain and I were overwhelmed by a subtle piece of dance music.

It sounded unreal and ominous. The deserted construction site and the rusty rails and hangers, after their best time, acted as dramatic backdrop.

‘An hour, sharp’, he cried, and fled from this dilapidated corner of the Waalhaven. The modern soaking wet ball, that futuristic dome, was lit, unreal against the towering embankment. Timid, yes, and with a sheepish expression, I hoisted myself up and put a tentative foot on this piece of modern art. What I saw, heard or/and felt, I cannot make any statements about, as you will appreciate, no doubt; but the water taxi returned by the minute to this offshoot of the Waalhaven.

With both hands I grasped the ladder; this time to get away.

‘To Hotel New York!’ I commanded sternly.

I stood tall and proud, leaning over the quarterdeck railing, and there, staring at the raging Maas along the bow and enchanted by the powerful sound of the engine, I saw our Blue Magical anchor in front of the idyllic coast of Rio like a beautiful ship's lady among the yachts. Monique was strapped in the cabin, screaming desperately for help. I ran downstairs and tried to rescue her, but could not release the braided rope knots which were reminiscent professional sailors, something I had taught my daughter in her childhood. Inevitably I got distracted by Julia, who, in a challenging bikini, stared at me in the doorway
exactly as a consummate actress would! She smiled slyly. I did not know her like this! Her Moroccan boyfriend stood beside her with some kind of Chinese cleaver; a whopper of a thing, razor sharp and swinging dangerously! As he kept an obsessive eye on me, he put the knife on Monique's throat! I sprinted, screaming, onto the deck, but no one heard my cry for help. Then I was suddenly alone, like a lost sailor tossed on a bounty island.

‘You can get off,’ the captain said emphatically, both hands held in a bowl around his mouth.

What a weirdo, that guy, haha.

‘Take it easy, I'm not deaf,’ I parried.

To kill time, I threw a few euros in the slot. I was tense, and not only in a healthy way. What morbid form I had figured out was the best way to handle things? The dominant, ruling women, or being submissive and as a lapdog awaiting attention until finally, after a long yearning satisfied or completely ignored indefinitely, yes; even till action itself made its appearance, but purely because I forced her (let's avoid the word rape, which is far too complicated). Uncertainty can be experienced as pleasure, that's for sure. Yet, my head stood for clarity tonight; or rather, the rational mind protested.

Reluctantly, I sat down at our table and asked uncertainly: ‘What are we gonna to eat tonight?’

A feeling of ignorance came over me like an assassin. How could I take away all unsafe voltage, which I needed in order not to be indifferent towards the action? This would no longer last. I had to correct myself. ‘Wait! I'll order for you,’ I shouted. ‘I know your taste!’ A lie, as long as it was received as an irritation, could still generate some healthy tension.

‘Great, thank you, Harry,’ she said softly and sweetly.

‘Henk, my name is Henk!’ I was the first who was annoyed allright, goddamn! This cute little voice... did she play my imagi-
nary lovely wife of yesteryear; one that had never existed? Of all possible roles in the world, I did not expect this one!

‘You're a little confused, I believe, Harry,’ she said understandingly, and put her hand on mine. I pulled him back. ‘Have you taken your pills?’ she asked, sweetly and pedantically.

‘Nope.’

‘Can you order please, darling? Excuse me,’ she murmured almost unintelligibly – I pricked up my ears – and she put her fingertips across my cheek towards my chin, gently pushing her leg, while, attentively as well as condescendingly grinning, she turned her head towards mine.

On her handbag I read the text: ‘fuck your money suitcase’.

This seemed to me to be no life! Why did I deserve this?!

A line was crossed, so I followed her secretly to the ladies room - there was no one to see - pulled her just in time into an empty cubicle, shut the door, and took her hard to the task in progress. The word 'rape' does not cover the action, folks.

‘I'll go first,’ I commanded sternly.

Along the way back, I studied the magnificently illuminated tanker that slid past. It was a huge guy with a cigar; one from the Caribbean. I praised myself on lucky enough to be able to enjoy this view. Unfortunately, that unsightly logo of my father's company was still flaunted on the side. Would I be able to take revenge? Did I have sufficient aggression and bravery inside to accomplish this?

If you want something too much, you lose sight of reality. You have to guard against such things. And then again, somewhere deep down inside, I wanted to convince him, somehow hoping to repent; to reconcile and cooperate in this tilt of port labor, the Netherlands, and the world - of the entire planetary system, for all I care, folks! It was prompted in part by practical reasons, because how could we manage when we could not get into some kind of peaceful co-operation with our own family?!
Hope is for suckers: action is required. Tough action and hard work; that's the only thing we can rely on, I heard my father – how ironic – teach during one of our many family dinners. It was something my mother, faithful and especially gullible (something that goes hand in hand), had no reply against. Out of necessity, I spoke to her about these matters, still, posthumously. I should submit this to my psychiatrist, purely as a hypothesis.

Yes, a good idea, Henkie, man: put it on, I encouraged myself. I opened my cell phone and computer and instructed Annegreet to immediately arrange a consultation appointment. Done. But where was Julia? Finally, there she is! Satisfied, no surprise, she walked to our table.

To my disappointment, however, it was not Julia, but the actress who looked so much like her that you easily could be mistaken! She pushed her legs over my knees and gave me a wanton tap against my cheek. Moderately hard, though. Was I ashamed of this rebuke? In reflex, I turned my head in all directions except her slender girl's body. I accompanied her with my hands around her waist. Anyway, this time we ate what we wanted and talked incessantly: the ice was broken.

And so I felt like floating in those first weeks with Monique, frankly and freely a little shaky, but certainly in love. Now I no longer wondered if this was nothing more than some crazy game. If it was, then it was an enjoyable one. Freely, she recounted, gallantly supported by elegant hand gestures as if she were a pole dancer, her childhood. Could this become a special evening; a night in which the illusion of equality between different ages and men and women was nurtured and celebrated and even preserved as if it were real? We let ourselves be carried away in this fantasy in such a way that we actually believed it, for a moment or two.
A wonderful, euphoric feeling of freedom as a reward lay ahead. In this state there was no jealousy; no lust without love, greed, vanity - yes, even no intemperance. I cannot remember exactly what woke us up from this dream and at what time that happened. We let them serve dinner for two and enjoyed the same bottle of wine, wisely followed by two coffees without liqueur, and a little later, fraternal as an Olympic sailing team that shares everything with each other, headed with the water taxi towards the Delta Hotel.

The breaking of illusion sometimes goes unnoticed; then it will take place again in a clear moment in time through a marked event or unexpected incident, but sometimes it gradually comes after, when it takes months (if not years) of slumber like a tiny cliff that is worn by the flowing water; by the tide we carry. At other times it takes place with a bang: the illusion shatters. An implosion is rarely discussed, although you could see the slow form this way. How would it all work out this night, I began to wonder when the grotesque sloping glass front over the water appeared from behind the tank installations in the Wilhelminahaven. But the beginning of this kind of thought in itself was bound to be fatal, especially when it was followed by some jealous fantasy about what had happened during your absence.

As a free-spirited, newly graduated couple, even as an ambiguity between a friendship and love affair, and probably merely as some odd combination, we walked down the jetty, taking the sloping ramp straight into the lobby. We routinely got the key from the receptionist's hands; that habit was ingrained. I do not have to explain why her furious look aroused suspicion. Was this the beginning of the end? Still able to maintain that illusion, although purely by inhibition, we left our hike up through the elevator and walked, excited as teenagers, into room 33. There, however, it became awkward" a strange whistling sound echoed
through the corridor. She raised her eyebrows, but I merely thought her phone had a whistle like that! Perplexed and taken aback, I read Jan's urgent message: he meant it as a warning, *all-for-the-good* I guess. Or was it a kind of envy? Anyway, his question would not let me be. Whatever I tried afterwards, I failed miserably. Watching a few glasses of bubbling water, yes, without doing anything, we went down anxiously, approaching a smaller oval-shaped bar built especially for VIP guests. The magnificent view over the Maas happily offered consolation as hundreds of lights of the refineries worked as a sedative.

‘Have you got something going on with Jan?’ I slipped the rather inappropriate question.

‘Why are you so stupid to ask?’ she said.

She sounded genuinely disappointed.

‘Sorry,’ I said. ‘Let's talk about your work.’

‘Yeah, that is better,’ she responded enthusiastically.

Strange, indeed! I mean, why was she relieved? Why easily change to another topic? Did she not bother, or was she as quickly as possible avoiding the thorny issue of our burgeoning love? I could not control myself and felt as hot as in the tropics, even while she extensively talked about her findings during her espionage work and dinner with my father. Sweat dripped off my forehead and further down to my nose and mouth. I needed a napkin to dab it all off.

‘Two Bloody Mary’s, mind you!’ I shouted to the Tibetan waitress.

The information agreed broadly with what Jan had told me, but she expanded on details that, I can say honestly, I'd rather not hear right now. Information means power and knowledge about the other party offers the possibility of manipulation, blackmail, fraud or tactical maneuvers, all falling within legal, lawful realms or just beyond a thin, purely practical thread of indifference. Through her efforts, we could move on, happily ever
after. But now we had to address the evidence of cartels, and the
time had come for the next phase: sow divisiveness; convert a
rather passive role of information gathering into a highly active
one. Could she handle this?

‘Gossip is not my strong point,’ she replied.

Perplexed, I took up my glass, brought the rugged juice to
my mouth, and turned my head towards the windowpane. The
refineries were working through the entire night, as they usually
do. This gave me some mental support. ‘Okay, forget it.’

‘All right,’ she said. ‘But I can get it over and done... alone
that is... doing it my way. Your father loves me. Others have
made a first attempt, as well. It's a matter of playing my female
cards: let them think they are likely to chessmate me, then stir
the fighting until the smoldering fire is transformed into a flam-
ing inferno.’

‘Oh...’ I stammered awkwardly.

Damn, here is what I was afraid of from the very begin-
ing!

She knew the ropes; of course she knew, you fool. Could I
back down? It might turn out perfectly; this she was right about,
since one of the most effective ways of sowing discord between
business partners is a private matter, as we all know very well.

‘Ok, go ahead,’ I said. It just popped out.

How it happened, I do not understand. Affectionately, she
patted me on my barely naked bulb, as if I was her lapdog, or
worse, a kind of Humbert Humbert friend. The fear was waiting
for her. In a way, somewhat pleasantly painful feelings took over
totally, this time around. I knew damn well how this could cause
nothing but misery; how it might tyrannically determine your
daily minutes.

Invent something and resist her power; do it now, Henkie!

‘The coming week you will receive instructions for our next
Saturday night,’ I said, and felt strong again. Haha, that ball was
under my control.
‘Fine; surprise me, darling.’ she coolly replied. I spotted that ironic tone in her lovely voice!

'I have to go now. Do your best,’ I stammered, shocked, and recorded her affable smile, kissed her tenderly and smoothly on the mouth, payed the bill, and ran outside, where I jumped into the water taxi. Thereupon, I let myself be teleported to that local pub in Delfshaven; but no matter how hard I sailed away from the scene of the accident, it did not help me: she'd permanently gotten my balls.

The rest of the week, I could only think of her. An incredible fatigue hit me with hopeless and powerless feelings of despair. Offshore, I sprinted into the bar, pushed myself through the crowd, and ordered two drinks... and yet another, then a new one; after which an empty stool became vacant. Finally, I was captivated by music, small talk and the routine way our bartender had of pouring drinks, never ever looking up from the crazy behavior. No attention at all he paid, as if he accepted all their pathetic quests for luck, or even better, their methods of temporarily forgetting their unhappiness in relationships. A bewildered man next to me spoke in a foreign language, but I could not understand a single word! Something about him particularly amused me, so I ordered him a drink. We poured it backwards in a fraternal manner.

I then spoke of things I had seen in that dripping wet ball. I had to tell someone, and since he did not understand a word in Dutch, it went without a hitch, haha. We drank a few more, and as a result he began, in his own gibberish language (something far away - Russian, it seemed) raving about... well, about what anyway? I laughed, nodded occasionally, and shook affirmatively or dismissively. Usually I guessed it right. Occasionally he halted abruptly and stared at me incredulously, thinking, then snorted with laughter and hit me like a brother on the shoulder. We or-
dered a final round. Then the conversation fell silent, just like that. Dazed, I peered, defeated, into an open space. Johanna and Willem kept fearfully hiding out. Were they playing hide and seek? I waddled out and took the shortest route to the Witte de Withstreet, where I turned right and stopped in front of our gallery window. Attentively, I studied the works of Quinten, my torso and vision brought closer to the canvas, focusing on an important part of the enormous painting – right at the center – located on a towering mountain topped by some kind of Greek building with columns.

Wait a minute!

Did Julia stand there, depicted between two pillars as a charismatic symbol of this world order without a leader, as a personalization of the rollover process?!

The next afternoon I spent with Tatjana, the darling awakened me by playing a subtle piece of music on which occasion I stretched out, beneficent. How simply a man can enjoy a roof over his head and a duvet! Where had my desire for control of the Dutch port authorities (or, even bigger, of an international consortium that extended from Madagascar to Moscow, from Tokyo to Los Angeles, from Sydney to New York) gone?

Did I sublimate this energy, as suggested by Stürmer, with this desire to control all women in my area? It was true that I worried all day about what the actress was doing... and with whom, and above all, with whom she was doing exactly what! Once more looking at that show Buitenhou, which again did not discuss the change needed in our almost feudal financial system, hierarchically arranged without democratic control (I mean, even public government influence seemed impossible now – investment banks alone determined what happened), I shuffled gently to my home office with a coffee in hand. The stack ogled. I snatched a file from it and read it carefully. The S.A.F. would,
after I signed this document, be owned by Julia, or so I read in this official report of the twin brother Levi, and whispered: *when the time comes, I will hand it to her.*

This kind of knowledge of which the other is not aware; this game was what attracted me to go into business in the first place, enjoying the withholding of knowledge till the moment of revelation, and then revealing it all. I could immensely enjoy myself, and rightfully so! Having fun with this exercise of power certainly was not a negative trait. I mean, you need to develop a thick neck, as captain.

No, folks, I had developed strong shoulders and felt called to make extra good use of them. 'Nobel!', that is the word. Admittedly, I did enjoy doing it; but then again, I worked merely for other people. Yes, actually I was working for *humanity as such.* Exploiting synergy benefits, putting the right person in the right place, discovering and developing talent... that is what it mainly comes down to! Simplicity is something else. Julia did not realize it, my sweetheart. My father's genes, my genes, her own... Just as I had opposed them, she'd tried to do this with all her adolescent energy. But Julia will be a born leader too, I mused, while moist tears filled my eye sockets with the blissful satisfaction of a conqueror.

*A Game Changer!*

Moisture rolled down my cheeks. It was high time for a soothing tension tamer tea as a replacement for my pills. My girl - a modern and meaningful leader. After drinking the first mug, I decided to combine the pleasant with hard work: a thorough study of the Pink Panther series. The following afternoon and evening I enjoyed the classic episodes, deliciously alone. Julia, meanwhile, was busy performing for the S.A.F.; I could rely on
that. Still, I could not help myself and viewed one of those other fabulous movies with Peter Sellers in his role as Dr. Strangelove. Humor is an effective weapon in the propagation of some politically charged positions - a sly director he is, that Kubrick guy! My log called "evidence in Pink Panther movies" indicated a link between the theft of my paintings and the Romanian or Bulgarian copycat gang, a Serbian criminal organization named after this legendary series. It contained some interesting leads. Satisfied and way over midnight, I brought in the dates. The analytic tool of the witty professor took quite a bit longer. Apparently, these hints hampered the calculation process! Or was this due to that emotion recognition module I had added? I hoped it did not frustrate the algorithm, and waited. A result table rolled out. Unfortunately, my name was still situated on top of the suspect list, but the second name was now Peter Sellers! Haha, Professor van Splunteren! I printed the list in PDF format and emailed it as an attachment to the south of France, where his excellent bottled wine was coming from (that is, unless he was some kind of charlatan)! At exactly two o'clock, I fell asleep on the sofa in the living room – I had replaced the inhumane calfskin fabric for Julia – after viewing some undisclosed images that simply were shown, at least, when you bought a complete purchased tv package deal.

At breakfast, I prepared myself mentally for the important day ahead. Annegreet had distributed pictures of the presentation which I'd visited together with the mistress through our mail group. Yes, she had rolled it out to the entire holding structure! Everyone was aware of us lovebirds! Beyond shame, I optimistically walked in my office at Veerhaven No. 4. My sailboat bobbed calmly in the water across the way. Barely inside, the receptionist sported a healthy color of embarrassment. However, subcutaneously she shined proudly for being able to work for
me. Annegreet had properly addressed the issue. Our staff now understood the capabilities of the S.A.F. as an opportunity for new and exciting work, as a chance to recover our empire using the Waalhaven spearhead. To finish this off, I summoned my staff to the canteen. Opportunistic, as was needed every now and then, I with a quip put on my seventeenth century merchant attire, my Jan Pieterszoon-Coen suit, and, perfectly dressed, treated my people to an old-fashioned 'do not talk but polish' speech on how to recapture the port, a golden honest ‘putting our shoulders under it’ speech. Well, this was simply my way, folks.

Julia will undoubtedly do things differently. With a euphoric sense of invincibility for my exceptional effort – a captain may receive some; he is only human, too – half an hour later I took my place in my comfortable armchair with shiny its blackish back, towering, overlooking the ever-flowing Maas. I handed out some walking papers - this had to happen too - and snatched those letters by Annegreet which were already laid down on my desktop. It is urgent, she announced; and not for nothing! The enriched logo of my lawyer was pictured on top of expensive stationery. Was pure gold processed into that leaf logo?

The letter mentioned an official claim of ten million in connection with leaked information about the wet ball exhibition, payable directly to the S.A.F. at the expense of... Wtf?! How could Levi know I'd slipped a few things, in a mindless mood?! Did that Russian-speaking immigrant, tourist, asylum-seeking activist for human rights, illegally hired rocket scientist, or drunken sailor over there work undercover for Levi and his brother Levi, maybe? Defeated, I stared stupidly at my skipper's agenda. In two hours, I had an appointment with my shrink.

_I'll be there on time_, I thought, so I worked for an hour and a half, then parked within his stately fence. Just in front of the sign 'visitor' I put my roaring Maserati alongside an American-
brand car with a slick black-and-white photograph. Good business! I climbed the stone stairs at an angle, reported to his lovely secretary, and waited for my turn. In the wicker basket holding a series of magazines, I pulled out a title, coincidentally, the Playboy. Look at that: the photobook by Anton Corbijn had received a whopping five bunny’s!

Something like that is a bonus. Would it be an idea to let this magazine qualify as Julia’s art? I shot a few photos of this stylistically beautiful bunny for my file ‘loose ideas’ and partook of my excellent mint tea with reibekuchen, when Herr Von Stürmer suddenly appeared in the doorway, quietly. Beside him stood one of those haircuts.

‘Ah, there ist herr von Wijnen-Swarttouw,’ he snorted, so jolly that it irritated me to the bone. I mean, after all, it was still just Monday morning.

‘Have you spoken to Julia?’ I asked.

‘Is it sensitive information for Herr Henk?’

The blood drained from under my fingernails. The secretary stared almost shyly above her reading glasses, secretly curious. I kept staring at her, taking her for granted, beaten completely off guard.

‘Can you lassen fraulein van Zanten bitte sofort alone?!’ he ordered as sternly as an Obersturmführer.

He pushed me, upon entering his room, immediately by surprise, onto the plush. Not such a difficult a task when you are a tiny dwarf! Before I knew it, I was once again admiring the historical ceiling with its Greek mythological casts.

‘You wanted to see me?’ he asked professionally. ‘Forget about me and tell.’ Fortunately, he had learned to get rid of that unpleasant touching and stirring his ear, probably he had been reprimanded by the boy of Scumbags. It remained quiet until I heard rumbling, secretly followed by a mouse-like shuffling.

What did I want to talk about after all?
Dazed and stunned by the fug hanging in the air, only interrupted by endless pitter-patter, I studied the mythical figures of ceiling lime. There hung some kind of heavy, serious atmosphere in this room; a room in which absolute quietness was prolonged, perhaps endlessly sustained, as long as the client deemed necessary.

Because of this, I felt a heavy burden on my already-way-too-heavy, luggage-bearing shoulders. I did not reply, stubborn as I am. How long it took, I could not judge. In the background, I could hear a clock and some other sounds for miles away, in the Waalhaven: firm, brisk work! Good, put it on! Then, I heard my own voice. It gave a speech: ‘Can it be that I posthumously... I mean, that I represent my mother's firm reply, actually directed against my father and his pragmatism, without faith in the broadest sense of the word and, worse, without nurturing a tiny glimmer of hope for a better world, as such?’

There remained icy silence, drawling. That slick-looking dwarf, super tightly dressed, apparently did not bother to speak up and answer his heavily-paying client?! I wanted to lift my head to give him a thorough beating, when suddenly I heard his voice babbling: ‘Naturlich dass can be, complexes remain in the background.’

What was this referring to?
'Go on, Herr Henk.'

‘Contradictions kill me; the conflict continues even if we save the world, even if we tilt the entire bankrupt system! A few days back, I got the magnificent idea of reconciling working with my dad. It might not be impossible, yes, or even desirable or stronger, but it might become necessary. Only thus can we fulfill The Tilt; a tilt from the inside, as it were. What’s the name this transition professor gave it? We are forced to play their game. I was only out for revenge. That may no longer be my motivation. Through Julia and her art work, I finally understand it all. I was
Julia and she is me at an early age... now she is portrayed alone between two pillars on a mountain, a futuristic viewpoint on a highly sustainable port. Have you seen her in the painting made by Quinten?

‘That ist ein Schwarz dot.’

‘Damn, you devilish dwarf from the Black Forest!’

He laughed out loud, roaring jollily at the same time - yes, he was cheerful allright, intensely enjoying confronting me with this apparently fake reality.

'German psychopath!'

'Herr von Wijnen-Swarttouw,’ he replied, ‘stop sofort with amateur psychiatrist spielen! You want to control women. You do not want to understand, let go, help or defend them,’ he murmured, annoyingly pedantic. ‘You want to even check them, becoming one as your object of desire: to finally kill them (murder is not the word). Envy is what drives you; to some extent a natural phenomenon, but with you it is unnaturally grown, and not durch die Entwicklung von ein erwachsene geben und nehmen process reversed. You want to dominate und controller, exploring ways to make this zu betrieben.’

‘How did you get THIS stupid idea, Von Stümer!? You stupid German dwarf of a midget!’ I torpedoed him. It relieved me; I have to compliment him on that, at least.

Suddenly the sofa came up to sitting position.

‘Schluss! Your time ist vorbij. Herzlichen glückwunsch. Machen sie an appointment with my Sekretärin. I'm busy… besetzt!’
Change of Direction

Fortunately, we still have pictures, he joked, slightly pitying since he realized he was going to miss this art. An extraordinary sum was offered for his magnificent portrait of Edward Snowden, depicted as meek hero of the future; a hero who could make religions redundant. 'It must be this way,' murmured Jules, meanwhile working on framing another painting. With sawdust up his ears and neck, the cedar smelled deliciously sweet; a masculine scent, a little camphorial. According to the legend, it accelerated regeneration, but he did not believe this. The circular was too blunt and long overdue for a new one, but the bulk of the revenue he could spend on homeless shelters. His voluntarily teaching Dutch language to immigrants was helpful, but not sufficient. On an hungry stomach it is, though, learning. He loved working with wood in all its fibers - he loved it. Were he able to build the heart boat of cedar, he would not hesitate, but this project required different material similar to the original, colorful and merry-making. Saving material was not negotiable; he rather felt dead on the spot than able to make compromises in his work.

'She's the One! She is the one,' yodeled Prof. Dr. Von Stürmer at his secretary while opening the door of the reception room. Miss van Zanten observed his exuberant jollity from behind her neatly organized desk. She was surprised that his spindly legs ran this fast around the couch.

‘Glücklich, ah, so happy!’ he called, and stretched his arms.

We did not attend the Netherlands for nothing. It hung in the air: natürlich, Rotterdam, the largest port von Europa, who
else! Her vater ist simultaneously perpetrator und dass victim of dass neo-capitalist system, dass aber ist now decreed as tode! Haha, from such swampy grund bottom new impetus will florish. Julia: she is the One! Not that lady of Pussy Riot: dass ist ja quatsch! Julia will tilt the bunch! We sit close to fire and must not slacken attention. Hear sie, fraulein van Zanten? Her need to step out the maelstrom will be gross, out of the hands of her vater zu bekommen! The signs are favorable: she will provide a kink in the unbridled flow of cosmopolitanism versus multiculturalism without verlieren of dass reality. If El Bachir, her boyfriend, remains close by, it will happen; especially now that he has contacted Cor Figege. There is no risk of subsequent Krieg anymore; it is over. Bitte, jawohl, dass ist jetzt important, ihrem friend! Do you hear, fraulein van Zanten?

His secretary stared intensely above her glasses, enjoying his enthusiasm, nodded sympathetically, and then stoically continued. The label ‘secretary of the year’ she did not obtain without a fight.

In a much poorer section of Rotterdam, Wesseling rolled in a temper like an obsessed poisoned frog, or perhaps more effectively, as a horny honey bear, through the chilly corridors of dementia, through the maze of his nursing home. The wall as well as the floor was covered with pale green linoleum, while light gray stripes accentuated the width. Such a pursuit he loved endlessly. Until he had reached his goal, he spurted like an overripe banana through the hallways. Just in front of the broom closet, he enclosed in on her in his wheelchair by using the handbrake: now she could not escape. Johanna pushed the door open gently and, chuckling, disappeared into the closet, apparently in her last attempt to get away. Through these moments, she knew why she did it: she merely enjoyed her second job as supervisor in a home for elderly people with dementia. A few
hours less sleep could not get to her, though she was getting a bit older every year herself. She arrived around five for services. Immediately after work in the pub, she drove her bike to the hostel and, chatting with the housekeeper while enjoying a cup of mud, she helped as well as possible. It was a bit difficult at times, since she was the only nurse on a ward of around two hundred elderly people. This early service was heavier, but she still managed, although barely. The fun she had with the residents, most of them as mad as a hatter, gave her a mountain of energy.

Willem also worked odd jobs, albeit forced, but with the same pleasure, working as technical operator - oh yes, he ruled one of those modern cranes on the second Maasvlakte. The safety helmet and overalls with its flamboyant logo gave our boxer and gardener a feeling of being useful; of belonging. They provided him with a sense of pride.

For Daan, this was still a long way ahead: at a school for disadvantaged youth he learned cooking and did chores and sports. Through these diverse activities he became adept at collaborating, hugging his network of relationships. Respect for others and standing up for his personal interests was self-evident. Daan got self-esteem; thereby, his performance increased. Homework was no longer a meaningless activity set aside or written off as not tough or cool. He soon managed to prove himself without falling into uncertainty, a form of social anxiety that often, especially since the boy had a handsome appearance, was converted into misunderstanding, provoking expressions of alleged arrogance and indifference. It was all taken care off. But with Henk, things did not go that smoothly.

After a promising start to the week, his mood was spoiled by, of all people, this wisecracking shrink made in Germany! He hit himself with Annegreet's letter opener and pounded the blunt-backed device on his forehead. It did not help. Annoyed, he
gave up and told Annegreet that he had a secret business lunch for the rest of the afternoon to first let himself be tackled by a slender Chinese listening to the name Anna: purely nonsexual, just to lose all knots. The strength in her hands was unprecedented. What training cannot do!

Then he drove at warp space to Lloyd's quarters and ordered a drink in the Cafe Verhip; a strong boy of Nolet this time, immediately followed by another one, purely to unlearn it. Tonight, brainstorming with the guys of the S.A.F., he muttered; but even though he felt his breathing become calmer, on his way home he noticed that Von Stürmer's accusation still played tricks. Turn it all around by hoisting Julia into her well-deserved charismatic leadership; it must be adequate... Julia will invent her modern variant. And then, who cares?

A variation that understands today's youth - fine! Helping her by taking away my own power though this means: a personal tilt. Hello; is this conclusive, Herr Von Stürmer?! A new era will arise, he thought, already more optimistic again, and slumped reassured into Jan's beech-nut-ebb-white sofa, called Annegreet and instructed her to send a bunch of roses to that psychiatrist's charming secretary. Working for such a criminal adjacent Underfoot of a shrink is not an easy task! That poor child! As if he was served by a higher authority, suddenly the doorbell rang. On the doorstep stood a firm aunt, shrewdly aggressive, stabbed into a gray blue jacket with a knitted logo. She immediately fell to the bush and said, ‘Could you please sign a receipt?’

‘I'd rather not!’ Henk replied, and slammed the door.

Too late: she had thrown the envelope inside!

Now that this monstrosity lay there, right in front of his nose, Henk might just as well pick it up. Especially in view of the law - not a bad idea. It was the claim of ten million euros! Even Henk hesitated for a moment, despite his exceptionally smart mastermind. It was not before nightfall until he was able
to recover. Of course he would. Do they really think they can break the best-known company physician in history by a simple claim of ten million bucks?! And why does that cowardly parasite of a bailiff threaten to immediately confiscate my villa? Can you at least try to be somewhat more tactful, guys? Thank you! In a proper conversation: man to man. Personal attacks and character assassination it is! Outraged, Henk called his lawyer.

‘Is Levi there?!’
‘Hold on,’ said his brother. Henk waited patiently.
‘With Levi?’
‘Undo that claim, or you're dead!’
‘What are you talking about?’
‘Those ten million' get it out of the system! And forthwith!’
‘Our rate is not as high as you sketch it,’ Levi replied very politely. As ever, he sounded quite plausible: you would give them your last million! Halfway into his valid counter-argument, Henk suddenly apologized: ‘One moment. I'll call my brother; he is the one handling these claims.’ The bonsai trees were, fortunately, in good shape - much better than ever, actually, with that deep darkness around their trunks.

Finally, he appeared. ‘Sorry, Levi has just left. I'll get him to call back to you once I've got him - Sir Wijnen-Swarttouw, is it? Thank you for your patience.’

Always the same story with these guys: these identical twins have it easier in life; an unequal struggle! Thus, Henk decided to save himself trouble: never ever pay, and work on the pile of files for an hour or so. The first map he had not taken off before the doorbell resounded through the living room. Infuriated, he ran into the hallway. He slipped on his socks going forward, and tripped over the mat.

'Monique?’ He stammered awkwardly like a little child. ‘You... uhm... you look, uhm... nicely tanned...'
Nothing happened until he finally realized he had spoken to the security camera's display. Then he turned sideways, opened the front door, and repeated, 'M... Monique? You... you look... uhm... tanned...'

'And you're overwrought,' she said meekly. 'What's wrong with you?'

'Oh, busy, busy, busy... Monique, there are just a few things I must handle simultaneously, but nothing that the father of your beautiful daughter Julia, who must make it WITHOUT HER MOTHER, cannot control!'

'Are we about to start this way?'
'Why not?!
'Just let me in and stop this, please.'
'I'll take you to the balls joint. We can eat something?'

Hesitantly, she replied, 'Okay, well... If you're enjoying yourself this way, it is okay.'

A few seconds later, he parked his Maserati right outside the entrance to his office, Veerhaven 4, his fixed hideaway. *Let me at least drink a bottle of wine with her. I'll allow her, though she has no right to have my attention,* Henk sportingly mused as they marched along the quay; a quay which brought a series of vague memories to mind - memories of togetherness; none of which he could use to evoke a more concrete picture; no recognition of something that had long since passed. Would he be able to recapture her? She looked casually self-assured; she had become a woman of the world.

'This is a Brazilian dress, I take it?'
'Is she not beautiful?!
'Is a dress a feminine genus in Dutch grammar?
'What do you think?'
'I doubt it.'
She smiled without aloofness and said, ‘For convenience, I assume that it is indeed female,’ but then she hesitated before she explained: ‘Xuxa selected this one for me.’

A fiery redhead provided Henk with an uncertain tickling in his scruff. ‘Why are you really back ?!’ he asked, way too excited.

‘For Julia. I come to watch or experience her show.’

‘Performance! To attain her performance, you mean!’

‘I want to surprise her. Would that work? I signed up under a secret name.’

‘That I strongly discourage! In addition, oh wait… it's fine; you may better notice it yourself, indeed, haha.’

‘What do I need to notice itself?’

‘Go!’ Henk laughed, as elated as a toddler with a chuckle.

‘You're gloating. Why?’

‘You will see for yourself, Monique!’

Pronouncing her name made him feel good; it relieved mental pain. 'M o n i q u e,’ he repeated grimly.

Silently, they looked for a good spot. He would see how everything unpacked, and moved the wicker chair overly gallantly from under the table: strange behavior in this Balls joint, allright. Monique smiled, as relaxed as ever, startled herself, restored through acting a serious look, and said: ‘Xuxa and I will get engaged. We stay in the Manhattan hotel. You know, it's opposite, towards the Puntzak.’

Sighing, Henk dropped down and curled up in one of those Balls bar chairs which perfectly matched their establishment and parried: ‘Should the female victim not officially separate from her tyrannical boogeyman first, before she can start with a lesbian?’

Across the way shone the SS-Rotterdam, grotesquely majestic and yet so beautifully historical; a megaproject ship repair that almost cost him a fortune and all goodwill. Stalling was an option: stretch and bend further, postpone until it naturally leads
to cancellation. However, he had tried this already for long enough. And all in vain, really: it'd started to work counterproductively. Should he not definitively outline a different strategy? Xuxa - what did he know about her? Nothing! This actually was an excellent opportunity to get to know her; to find out. Knowledge is power, as every proletarian knows, let alone a captain of his magnitude.

‘I have another one, as well,’ he lied.

She stared at him in disbelief, it went without saying, and hesitated. ‘I uh... gee... that's great news! I'm so happy for you,’ she replied finally, and leaned across the table to give him a relieved kiss.

Henk stumbled half and tried to turn his head but let her lips end in his concha. *Did she take acting classes in São Paulo or Rio, maybe; or is this real?* Henk asked himself, surprised by her joyful spontaneity. *She wants something, she needs me!* Hope blossomed in his mastermind, which started to plan ahead at full capacity.

‘Let's have dinner; let’s celebrate, Monique! We can bend our forthcoming break in mutual trust and friendliness,’ suggested Henk in his not-to-be-refused, charming way.

‘Ah, so...’ she stammered, overwhelmed by the consequences of her happiness. ‘Uh... yeah, that's a good idea; sure it is.’

‘Great! That's settled, then,’ he exclaimed enthusiastically. ‘We will have dinner with the four of us in the Euromast and enjoy that panoramic view. This fits perfectly with celebration of our renewed friendship! Leave it to the captain,’ he winked confidently.

Without hesitation, Henk changed course, grabbed the phone, and booked a top table for a top guy and three tablemates with that beautiful view over the Rotterdam harbor.

Monique studied the menu, worrying about how she could still cancel this. The ardently desired separation procedure should not be jeopardized. Henk studied her facial muscles; her
feminine shoulders and slender neckline with hair falling so loosely over it; her thinking wrinkles that he knew so well, which betrayed how she was as attractive to him as ever before... It is not too late; this cookie can be re-baked!

‘Will you sign the papers afterwards?’ she asked reluctantly, as if she pretended to be interested in the menu. In her timbre he heard pure despair.

‘Sure, Monique. How long are you here for?’

‘We will spend the next three weeks in the Millennium Tower and will afterwards get engaged in Rio. Do you promise it’s okay, beforehand?’

‘I swear!’ He lied for the second time.

She peered over the menu and unsuccessfully tried to read his real intentions, but his poker face was inscrutable. Between scandals in business and by the state of his derailed daughter, Henk's granite looks and armored skin was so highly developed that he fooled himself. Now that her love had disappeared like snow under the Brazilian sun and even turned into pity, there was nothing else to do other than live in a misty haze of denial. He could only guess her true feelings as not much more than a passer-by; as a completely unknown wanderer in Verhip.

Meanwhile, in another district of Rotterdam (in the Stobbe, in that Kralingse eatery, to be precise), Lavinia and Cor Figee sat at a dining table which was raised up in a corner of the restaurant. There was room for only three other tables. Each of them had a romantic candle that lit up the dark wood. The waiter acted as normal as possible, yet Cor Figee felt that something was going on between them; but he could not put his finger on what it was, exactly. The subtle expressions indicated that they knew each other, even more than he knew her and she, him! It hurt. He could not continue his risky game of sensitivity in this way.

It was hard enough to be here without a concrete work as-
signment! Cor Figeé started feeling guilty and wanted to leave the restaurant. Lavinia saw through him immediately and intervened by distracting him, making sure he wouldn’t leave this property before they had a drink, at least. She let her eyelashes fall theatrically and excused herself politely. Now he was left with no choice but to wait for her. It was impossible that this dear man would act so rude as to cowardly run away without, as a gentleman, saying goodbye. This gave her enough time to figure out a way of keeping him close. Now that she’d finally gotten him over here, without his wife and children, she could not afford to let him go!

Finally, Cor got over his hesitation and second thoughts. Her work in the nightclub, though he detested it, was no reason for him to ignore her love any longer. He magnanimously took a step further and considered how the conversation would proceed by candlelight... he did not begrudge her a fair chance. Should he leave now, she would not survive. His marriage would soon break up and was almost stranded; he’d had his wife agonizingly long confronted with his golden heart. His wife had abused his sincerity and his noble character; she knew him inside out; she could read him and knew he would do anything to save their hopeless relationship! Sometimes it appeared not feasible, but such is life. How could she convince him that she was different - yes, opposite of his sick, jealous wife?! The night of their first painful embarrassing encounter, he had made no advance whatsoever and did not attempt to abuse her as a prostitute. This dear man had undertaken nothing!

He had seen her as a young woman of the world, not as fun for only one hour a night, and not as a disposable utensil, unlike most men who visited the nightclub. How generous was this gentleman, when you considered that his marriage was nearly lost and therefore he must have been putting aside his deeper feelings in favor of honesty and respect for her as a woman with
needs; a willing woman he preferred to meet in a romantic location and not in such a nightclub of ill repute. And she felt that about him as well, wanting to meet in Paris along the Seine or walking over the suspension bridge in Prague.

We have all read the *Kreutzer Sonata* (except perhaps some Dutch men). In Belgium, they read the classics from other countries. People read the literary classics everywhere except in the Netherlands! His stories clearly show how his wife is the jealous party and he is naïve, but from what I’ve heard, it is clear that he let her determine things, despite his generous charm and superior intelligence. Intelligence can sometimes produce the biggest idiots. A loving heart has nothing to do with intelligence: every Romanian woman knows this. Studying or working hard is no disclaimer for misfortune.

We will have to be careful, or she will surely kill him!

And this while he has not lifted one finger to touch his secret lover; she who now is languishing at the table waiting for him, terrified he will leave her tonight before they can have a profound conversation! His wife thinks everything is a struggle; that love is made up of hatred and aggression and fighting. I will show him that there is more - another kind of love; a love of which he possesses only suspicions that it must exist, in life. He never may know, this poor man! Using Skype, tomorrow, I will send pictures to my mother, Lavinia mused as she pushed the swinging doors open. Cor Figee sat alone at his table, observing the waiter he did not trust. He stared way too long! Cor jumped up and rushed upon the bartender. Close by, however, he reluctantly and quietly ordered a drink of Nolet.

The waiter drew back, startled, and let the order be served by a colleague. Upset, he ran into the hallway. Did the waiter enter the toilet while Lavinia was there?! Coincidence exists only in fairy tales! In one moment (maybe it took a minute longer, but
certainly not more), Cor Figue had some doubts, still, until he screamed: 'Goddamn, this is not going to happen!'

He toppled the drink back and stormed into the hallway where he furiously - yes, rigorously - swung open the door of the ladies room. She gripped both hands to her heart and could only produce an 'ahh' sound of release.

'Sorry, wrong door,' stammered Cor Figue with excitement, and dropped down, overheated, into the men's room. Fortunately, he stayed. Maybe he will put the desperate fight with his jealous wife behind him, tonight; he must finish it before she stabs him for real! It's not too late; now is the time. I thought he could not contain himself any longer - it was a mistake; a human error. This cafe is pitch-dark; the signs for the toilets unclear. Human depravity by too much fantasy is everywhere and present in everyone, and yet I am embarrassed. I inherited this from my mother's side. When I go to our table, he will be ashamed of his mistake! Will he dare to face me? I am afraid this will end badly! If I stay close to him and wait for him here at the bar, he cannot go around me, and then the ice will break. Perhaps the waiter can help me put him at ease. I will hold him to a count.

Cor Figue stepped from the corridor back into the cafe and walked unobtrusively along the bar.

The waiter and Lavinia were talking and stared towards him at the same time. *What a mistake! I'd better be going!* In his panic, Cor Figue could not find the exit, though. They beckoned him simultaneously with urgent gestures, with serious waving actions. He hesitated and strode off to the empty dining table, unexpectedly took his place by brutally raising his chair and clearly audible beating it down onto the wooden floor, upon which he now sat sullenly, with arms crossed. Some part of him wanted to stay, despite everything. Now she actually seemed relieved; she appeared excited and boisterous, cheerfully smiling at the dining table. Surely she has arranged another date with that
gangling! What are you doing here, still? Get away from this femme fatale's influence!

But the spell had already occurred, and the illusion this still could be broken was wasted energy, although Cor Figee did not know it yet. The worst tension disappeared as soon as he was in her neighborhood for more than a few seconds. After a swig of drink's difference, he started to notice! The waiter apologized politely, as requested by Lavinia, and came, to their mutual surprise, out of the closet, after which he no longer could hide his advances on Cor Figee. Suddenly she had to deal with a rival!

When the waiter, casually aware, unnecessarily touched his male client several times, his long fingers sliding over Cor's backbone, Lavinia noticed that Cor Figee, as she'd expected, alerted him in a gallant manner about his straightness and his natural aversion for any brutal advances like this. As a charming man with a good heart would, he omitted his horror, though it took visible effort, and excused himself politely enough; at least without hitting: this was so generous of him!

During dinner, their conversation was more profound than Cor Figee had thought possible and thereby was exactly as she had intended it to happen from the very beginning. From that moment on he told her everything but everything which bothering him in life: his boss' current official lawsuit, how parents of those boys, forced by their eldest son, had reported threats and racism, the difficulty of closing that deal with the Russians, and of course, how his wife had chased him, sickly jealous, all day, causing his difficult relationship with his children. Finally, he told her how he, in response to the newspaper article 'the common man of Rotterdam,' was approached by his boss' father in order to find out whether Cor Figee would blow the whistle. Only then could the business where he had toiled for twenty-five years be rescued from the destructive hands of his sadly confused and deeply troubled son, said the father of their lifesaver. Henk's
wife and nearly his entire family seemed to be in this pitch-black conspiracy, although she was living in Brazil.

Lavinia had read the article, this in-depth reporting about the noble man whom she adored. She had read it more than a hundred times. Especially the part about how he so gently insisted in maintaining, as good as it gets, this difficult family situation, living with a woman who did not understand how working from nine to five does not apply to business... this part had caught her utmost attention. She let him hint about how she rated the newspaper article. But this request; this question of help from Henk's father, was not at all to her liking. Lavinia advised Cor to rely on his intuition.

She demonstrated a much better understanding of Cor and his family life: he had never read the Kreutzer Sonata because he lacked the time for reading novels. On his business trips, reading files was of vital importance: the negotiating table was not child's play! To be well prepared and a step ahead of the competition, he had read every book about underwater technology to the minutest detail. So he was aware of all specifics; of how the Chinese had built a supersonic submarine, nowadays; one that was faster than the speed of sound. Haste was necessary, and yet he felt that Lavinia was telling the truth. And so in their amorous eyes arose much more than superficial sensuality and grew an ever-increasing understanding of each other's problems and the steadily desire to spend the future together. But how could he be relieved of his Fate?
The Native American's naked body was covered in blood; artistic decorative stripes of varying thickness and bending shape. It was her own blood that was spread, a sign of being one with mother nature. On the floor lay a virgin piece of quality paper of the material professional painters use. 'The cycle of creation and destruction, birth and death, and the union of man with nature in harmony with ourselves,' echoed Julia's voice through space, 'will be symbolized by our triptych.'

The Pueblo Indian stood alone in the desert, calm and abandoned. She took her hand to where the natural paint came from, smeared it on the high-quality recycled paper, and started painting, artistically esthetic. Surprisingly, I did not find it offensive; not at all. Something in me wanted to ward it off and something in me wanted to find it offensive, but if I'm totally honest, I must confess that it was pure and beautiful. Without opening my eyes, I saw Julia's painting hanging in the middle of the room: a traditional Dutch scene, painted in Renaissance style. It bore the title 'Tribute to Orange' and contained images of half-naked black men and women who slavishly offered their wealth to the royal family. Behind and to the left of the painting of the triptych, a film of the American desert of the Pueblo Indian was being shown. And at its right side was a blank canvas, filled with a question mark.

'This third one,' as Julia's voice echoed through the dome of the wet ball with the intonation and the confidence of a professional news anchor, 'has to, as you can see, still be fulfilled. This will be done through a live performance. The richest person - the one with the highest bid - will get to see this show in a
homely atmosphere at a place of choice. Yes, this third work of art will thus be created by me, live. This will enable us Europeans to enter into more than a symbolic link with indigenous peoples, breaking the destructive cycle of our conquerors. Hopefully, it's not too late!’

I squeezed my eyes shut. Frightening images appeared on my retina. Julia with a fabulously wealthy Arab in a palace built of black gold in Oman or Dubai, where she completes her trilogy? If only she does not enter the side of Slave City by Atelier van Lieshout, then I will unplug the S.A.F. at once! I opened my eyes, chanting her name spontaneously, with a vague image of hanging Persian rugs: Julia!

Startled, I inhaled deeply and blew the smoke towards the colored totem pole. Wavering, I did what I had always done in difficult conditions: regroup myself. The promise to respect Julia’s wishes gently won over my paternal, childish need to protect her at all costs. I told the guys honestly of how we’d received a spirited bid on this private live entertainment art show.

‘Woah... more than a ton! Hey!’ called Eddy, high as a kite. ‘If safety is guaranteed, I say, accept that trade!’

‘Exclusive live’ is a booming trend in international art,’ muttered Quinten with his gaze fixed on distant places way too obscure to imagine.

Would I immediately explain to them about these claims? One of the most beautiful parts, as captain, is to surprise the working-class with positive news. Even if doing so leads to personal destruction, it remains magnificent.

‘This is going in the right direction, guys. Keep it up.’

‘It's S.A.F. coming to life; and how!’ called Eddy.

‘Do you know the Indian in this artwork?’

‘I know her,’ said Quinten. ‘She has been explaining for decades how we unwisely deal with Mother Nature, and therefore
nature will retaliate in a way that cannot be undone by us humans. They never listened to her until a few years back. After environmental movements emerged, people now listen to her stories with great interest.

‘How wonderful!’ I exclaimed spontaneously, when Quinten vanished in hazy smoke, some vague misty air recovering memories in a peculiar way, mingled with sensory perception, with smell of incense, and the gibberish of Eddy and the delicate sounds of the raw piano music from that illustrious album Berlin (hardly my favorite). Still, this was the moment I had my first vision of the essence of modern business life. So, in our future time, the naive cosmopolitanism was broken shortly after the S.A.F. had tilted things. Next time, I'll treat these guys with music of Frank Sinatra, I thought. It was the last thought of the night I that can recollect.

The next day, I had set the alarm clock: when I started to drink my first coffee, the sun stood high enough to light up the bonsai trees. It was a priority to utilize those millions for the S.A.F. as quickly as possible, so I called Wesseling. It didn’t take much time; just half an hour, though he came up with a comic story about how he’d tonight chased some tall blonde nurse through the hallway into the broom closet, where he was able to finally grab her stilts legs. Dementia has some advantages, folks.

By not taking his prescribed medication, he could get away with it; but for now he had to wear a Swedish band during the night hours. That sounded exciting, haha - let Wesseling push it!

Anyway, I called Levi. He was sitting on one hundred million touted claims, so without hesitation I bought in some investment bank experts, randomly selected. If they have heart for greenery and animal welfare, it all will fall into place. I was convinced that Julia reasoned this way, too. Yes, without startup problems, my girl...
immediately will take over the helm, then Papa will ensure it will works out smoothly, darling! This will be my last feat and trick. When they pick me up to lock me away, *The Tilt* will have already begun, and the project will roll out like an unstoppable snowball! It is important to operate in secret. When I dive into jail, my girl will be more than ready to transform the port into a world leader in sustainability transportation and the assembly of energy-generating devices. Mission accomplished! *Yes, Wesselinge, this we do for you and your old comrades of the Navy, too,* it came to me as tears ran down my cheeks. *Work had to be done. Get on it, Henkie!* The initiated process of transition must be discharged at a later stage by weakening the competition until that unstoppable snowball will hurtle down.

Again, I consulted our transition professor's book. Was something vital missing? Of course, it was my intention to get away with it unscathed, without such an endlessly long free vacation close to home. The Schie prison is situated near our villa, but it is not my preference! I figured out the business risk. If Pussy Riot can bear to growl... for my girl, I'll do anything! Bring it on!

Would Monique be proud of me, too?

Pleasantly, I fantasized how her lawyer would report: *'Your husband has, with all the risk of the world, even risking a lengthy prison sentence, brought about the reversal of everything you stand for in the field of environment and nature; yes, absolutely everything you, madam, believe in strongly, he has organized for you and for your lovely daughter, Julia. Are you one hundred percent sure that you want to hand in divorce papers; are you sure you want to continue? Ma'am, this I would personally never brush off! You will regret it. I must be honest as your professional advisor. If I may give you a tip: do not sign these papers. Shred them and go and look him up in the Schie prison! Bring love into the relationship, fiercer than in the past,*
and kiss while the camera zooms in with its slowly-closing diaphragm.’ Like a romantic movie, this happy event took place: a wonderful, breathtaking spectacle.

‘That was strong stuff yesterday,’ he coughed in the webcam on my screen. 'Good, man, woah!’

‘Eddy?!?’ What are you doing on my screen! Go away!’

‘Uh... you called me, Henk... I thought you wanted to personalize something for my departure. You were mumbling to yourself - something about a beautiful movie?’

‘Okay, then! Now that you're here, listen up! I have a good story for you; a grand narrative about the financial crisis. Can you at once...’ I started to ask; but before I could finish my sentence, he interrupted me in a way a bold journalist, friendly or not, would have to do to take action.

Eddy cleared his throat and said: ‘Tonight you are instructed to interview me with an Indian lady, and so I'm flying to Los Angeles. My suitcase is already checked in!’

‘Well, well, sir; the Reporter just does it as you please, right? An expensive joke, it seems!’

‘It was fine, you told me, since the S.A.F. will soon have enough money for anything?’

An unpleasant feeling of too many things on my mind crept over me like a dastardly pirate; like as a Somali assassin secretly climbing aboard the ship; but I will not shirk my duty. When the crew starts to panic, the captain may show his true heroism.

‘Yeah, yeah, I know that, Eddy. Anyway, go get them! Bring a brilliant report home, and remember this: it is good for Julia's self-confidence.’

‘But what about secrecy? We cannot break that, can we?’

'Of course not! I mean, a report is always welcome, Eddy! We show it as a bonus after the auction - I mean, aftersales is never a waste of time.’

‘Huh?... Okay. Thank you for trusting me, boss.’
He was out of sight. What a relief; I had something else on my mind than this posturing. Those finance guys were not easy to convince! Without a sack of money for their Armani suits and fat Rolexs on their wrists, it might never succeed, so I decided to let them become partners in another firm; some new Ltd that I wanted to clap after the money was piped untraceably to the S.A.F. But no, I had better retain thirty percent or so: with that they can squabble; that might channel all that pent-up greed in the right direction - namely, towards each other instead against us, haha! Our goal covered no less than developing a new product line; a line with which we could reeducate the financial market from which they had emerged. *Educating the market back,* I called it internally. How appropriate, if I do say so myself! Then it is immediately obvious, folks. Everyone knows where he stands: they learned to ‘Regulatory arbitrage’ - a genteel term for setting up countries against each other in search of weakest control - but we will use this phenomenon on investment banks by convincing non-citizens (bankers) to invest in our product.

We'll offer proposals they cannot refuse - not without getting into trouble with their competitors, given the bank interest rate position – just as they themselves fabricate pitches all day to recruit companies since the financial market's capitalization so urgently request it, and since their position simply 'requires' doing so. All this proved to be no easy task. These days, even the whole week, I was trying to get these financial guys on track. In fact, I felt with my blood-skipper insight that in the coming weeks this would take all my energy, so I instructed my lawyer Levi to stall all ongoing lawsuits, or handle as much as possible without me.

Suddenly, from nowhere, it seemed, I found myself in the Euromast with that actress and two ladies. Xuxa looked appetizing. Involuntarily, I wondered if she, too, was bisexual. (I mean, you
never know.) My wife seemed happier than ever! Now Henkie obviously would not fall for simple manipulation, haha! Abruptly upsetting the rudder can do wonders. I had given the actress clear instructions beforehand, when we were tongue kissing for minutes while the waiter and ladies were waiting. The atmosphere was set, but did Monique stare at me, outraged, as anticipated? Thrice, no! She frantically ignored easily how we publicly, as a couple really, tried to absorb everyone's attention in a radius of hundred meters.

Nonetheless, I thought I saw something after all: a vibration of her cheek and a slightly puzzled frown! In any case, I was leading the battle, allright. On advice of the waiter we enjoyed an aperitif: a sparkling Sancerre. Xuxa spoke incessantly, in excellent English, about how she had met Monique at the dance school in Rio (I knew it!), and about her childhood: how the climate had changed in her homeland, how climatic acceleration will, over decades, soon become an unstoppable snowball; but mostly she elaborated on my wife!

Meantime, I thought about how this cascade of a lover who sees no bump on her way and freely blurts out whatever comes to her idiotic mind could be used to scratch some cement from their shared wall, just so it would become fragile enough to soon be wiped out by the towering water of that ever-floating river called life. And yet, something in me fought against this idea to take action: it was the influence of my psychiatrist! Was I becoming milder in my judgment?

Anyway, I decided, lyrically and with a sense of drama, to tell her how I'd met Monique over there in Zeist, where I was at the Nyenrode business school while she studied law. Or was it psychology? Ah, what does that matter! She'd accomplished both studies, as far as I can recall. Anyways, I told them how we as students infested the nightlife and worked as dockers, and how we brought Julia into this world. I continued my personal ac-
count until the dessert arrived. Finally, when the waiter brought coffee, I shut my mouth.

An unpleasant silence printed the ballot, leaving them senseless. Xuxa opened her dark purple shiny package of chocolate – the inside silver. The actress comforted her by stroking her Brazilian thighs with her feet under the table.

‘Ladies, I have not forgotten,’ I began, and gave Xuxa a nod of friendly understanding to proceed in Dutch to Monique with: ‘Can we get a step-fifteen in private and discuss how we match this final paper?’

‘You can ride with me; I do not want to be too late. Tomorrow I have to get up early,’ suggested the actress casually. We had staged it all. ‘I'll pass the Puntzak, which is located opposite your hotel...’

‘That is a good idea,’ Xuxa said eagerly. Startled, she looked at Monique, but she had not noticed anything strange and had only the finishing of those divorce papers in mind; that final document which she prayed for as much as a long soak in a sheltered sailing vessel floating on a breath of propulsive wind, causing no gain whatsoever. And so we took our places in the launch, which was vacant, while the actress disappeared with her fiancé.

‘Julia has made quite a name as an artist,’ I said. ‘It goes beyond expectations.’

She pulled something out and slid the device in my direction; that piece of technical ingenuity. Her fingers pushed the block across the table but she let her hand rest there, doubting its release.

‘The signed papers, Henk.’

A lack of participation; a complete lack of cooperation! A purely unilateral act! Towering trees collect the storm. In business, I realize that this can happen and that tactical switching and strategically determining how to handle things are part of
the process. I could turn a life-sized rabbit out of my business hat, then; but now, however, it seemed a confrontation - approaching a private matter so sensitive brutally and coldly – so unexpectedly as if an uppercut had hit me, of being diffuse - practically knockout, for that matter! Normally, Henk's shares unfold! I stared at her fingers on the USB stick as this shame gradually changed into anger and frustration.

‘It's a push. This is a draft agreement prepared by my...’

'Lawyer!' I snorted, complementary.

‘I cannot do this myself. Surely you understand, Henk.’

Controlling myself – I wanted to win time – I said as calmly as possible while I called the waiter: 'I agree, then! We will return. Let's order something. What do you drink? Do you want another coffee?’

‘There's more on the device, Henk.’ As a form of incantation, she spoke my name imploringly.

My confidence returned. ‘And what might that be?’ I asked quietly while I looked at the fireplace.

Staring into the fickle flames, I remembered how my parents were for years in an icy relationship, embroiled in living together but never had forsook to admit the inevitable that seemed unmentionable. Divorce was not even considered to be an option. My brother and I felt the painful moments; the coldness of action (the appearance which was held up to the outside world) and the secret escapades. First my father; later, just as well, by my mother. Did I at the time plan never to let such a thing happen whichever solution I had chosen? How had I thought to prevent it? I had no idea about that, anymore!

An intention, in general, is meaningless if it is not accompanied by concrete action. Then it gets bogged down in nothingness. Was I convinced, or did I still believe in love like a naive adolescent, or worse, as some hopeless romantic?!
At the time, I resolved my problems through better manipulation, by imitating the techniques of my father and refining them. I had implicitly assumed that it was the way to go, so I took this living separate while together as something inevitable. My parents had stayed together for practical reasons and without pessimism or optimism; yes, even without any form of opportunism - something that I'd hated at the time, believe it or not. Each of the two options would have been fine.

I hated to stop the hypocrisy, cursed that my parents had done nothing, and immersed in our daily lives this successfully-played fake atmosphere of conviviality. My brother, Jeroen, like a neat and obedient lap dog, continued pleasing his owners, and even today he still runs, ever panting and yelping, from one to the other. Anyway, he does not have talent; it’s simply his survival strategy, that poor fellow. In my logbook ‘disrespectful statements by Monique,’ however, I did not come across one sentence of encounter!

What she blamed me for had nothing to do with my business practices, but with my laconic, not to say peculiar, attitude towards Julia! Monique had labeled it as 'suspicious'. It was suffocating her, this and that. Loveless, feigned love, possessiveness, and other such oddities - all things women mention these when they do not want to admit that they themselves need some time alone. Anyway, she reproached me, as neatly noted in my logbook with the exact date, the unnecessary but convenient day of the week with it, and of course, the time of the ruling, at the exact second it was stated.

Above all, she blamed me for being generous towards Julia! As if it's wrong when the father of his own daughter adores her and wants to provide for her; as if it's wrong when you want to give your daughter space enough to develop into a modern woman of the world; a neo-cosmopolitist.

‘I'm not sure this is a good time, Henk, but...’
'Why not? Go on!'

‘Come on,’ she said, inspecting the matter as if she wanted to be sure nobody listened. ‘It's no offense. I have learned from your business and kept some things like letters, documents - well, basically everything - I mean, REALLY everything, actually. I think it's only fair to let you understand this before we accidentally, purely hypothetically, though, end up in a conflict situation, Henk. The USB contains copies of this material.’

Now my name sounded no more in this begging; no, it sounded rather reproachful or sarcastic! Or no, worse: pitiful! Yet, in retrospect I believe that even at that time it did not fully dawn me what Monique was up to. As a seasoned businessman, how could I not see this?

‘Okay,’ I muttered, defeated, staring into flames, my memory blank. I thought no harm and was moreover a bit apathetic; but was not even unhappy. Actually, it felt as if I was floating in an infinite void, where it was peaceful. Studying those volatile flames as they emerged, I said: 'I will magnify Julia’s art business. I want her to follow me in her own way.' It popped out, and although a critical voice inside me felt this was unwise, another intuition seemed to deem it necessary to pronounce precisely these words.

‘But Henk! How do you think she can handle it, already... it will damage her forever! I do not agree with this,’ she said, inspite of everything, in a soft, although clearly agitated, tone. When she tried to sound severe, it always failed miserably. Yes, when she started talking about our daughter, she mostly sounded like a helpless, pitiful birdie!

‘You feign as though you take it at heart.’ I made a low remark under the belt of which I still have regrets, nowadays.

‘Since we only have contact through the internet, our relationship is better than before, Henk.’
Damn: again, the pitiful tone! You can call me a fool, but I'm not pitiful: everyone knows that!

‘Since you do what?!’

‘Did Julia not tell you we're communicate again fully by th…’

‘Nothing, not a word!’ I stammered, aghast.

The activity of the flames had dried up; they became a charcoal gray. It would not take long before the final, heroic flame extinguished and nothing but charcoal residue remained. For minutes we stared into the smoldering fire, pitifully pondering the incompetent awkwardness of our parenting. Could this perhaps fraternize us? I thought jokingly, to bring some airiness to this stuffy state of mind and laughed silly, much like a baby would. Tension unbearable, electrically charged particles remained suspended in the air like a heavy thunderstorm that was about to erupt.

‘That poor girl,’ said Monique. ‘Julia made it occur as if you knew. She wants to protect me, I guess, Henk.’

‘Yes, the cherry has been lying just beneath the cherry tree.’

Her eyebrows bounced up equally with surprise, only to return quickly back to their position. There was a long silence as we listened to music and sounds of dining tables; the conversations at the bar.

‘Nice girlfriend.’

‘Thanks; you as well,’ I uttered with utmost difficulty.

Again there was a pause of contemplation and resignation for our fate of shared parenting. I did not bother explaining how the actress was so much more than just my girlfriend.

‘Did your girlfriend replace me? I mean, will you engage?’

‘Who? Oh! Hell, no... she is busy with her job, you know.’

‘Are you taking your pills on time?’

‘That's none of your business, Monique!’
It was late, but not late enough. The longer it took, the better. I admonished myself to stay in line and to not do anything stupid.

‘Never mind,’ she snorted, exceptionally fierce.

It caught me by surprise. ‘Why did you leave me!?’ I asked, louder than intended. ‘Tell me the exact reason right now !’

A few heads turned in our direction. Annoyed, I nodded, my chin up defiantly, like: *to hell, you do not interfere with it or you'll get a beating with my fists!* They're tied in, those cowards!

‘You finally started to follow the recommended consults with Prof. Dr. Von Stührer, Julíia said?’ she lied (I mean, that must have been a straightforward lie, folks).

‘Yes,’ I stammered, and did not know what to say anymore.

‘It is of the utmost importance that Julíia does, too, and you know it,’ she muttered, again so painfully meek.

We had another drink. Monique enjoyed a long Malibu. Myself, I tasted a last drink of Nolet: Ketel One, this time. To my surprise the impending thunderstorm in sight vanished into nothing. Gradually, it became brighter in my head, as well; perhaps because of fatigue or through the positive sense of this conversation. Although many things were not discussed, our talk gave me a peculiar feeling of relief.
Happiness radiated from El Bachir's slightly pockmarked face. A message from Julia had reassured him. Her art, it seemed, took all her attention and concentration. Her father had not lied or sent him off into the bushes; no, it was not Mr. van Wijnen-Swarttouw who had deliberately blocked or stalked their social media contacts. El Bachir knew the unbridled possibilities. Through a fellow named Victor, a member of the Anonymous hackers, he had seen all options for the state of the art spy software which simultaneously flashed by on several screens.

He himself refused. It seemed unethical to put in these funds, but he had feared the worst for Julia's father who, let's face it, had some mental issues, to say the least. The family had not joined hands for nothing in urging him to undergo psychiatric treatment. In the hands of Julia's father, this advanced software could turn out wrong, or so Victor had confirmed. That applied not only to every layman in technical fields, but also for entrepreneurs who identified themselves with Jan Pieterszoon-Coen (our graffiti artist began to make a name in underground art). Mother, however, gifted and blessed with common sense, had warned him of easy judgement slogans like 'where there's smoke, there's fire'. That is, she had doggedly let him know it was a quicksand difficult to escape from; a human, an oh-so-human, pitfall.

This lesson El Bachir had unfortunately smoothly forgotten: it had entered one ear and without any significant processing, left his other while he dreamed about numbers left and right of the accounting balance sheet or Julia's delicate touch, now unfortunately weeks ago; touches he could still feel and imagine as
if they happened yesterday. Palpable they were: the tingles when he cherished memories of their first night together in hers dad's luxury villa. He also knew that a cat can cause strange antics in the dark... at least, that might be it. The exact Dutch saying he had, as he often did, forgotten. As an accountant, he was aware of that everlasting financial crisis. No, he and his colleagues, all graduate MBAs, were confident about doing things differently, better, and more ethically. Yes, they were determined to restore ethics in the financial world. Could he talk about this with Julia’s dad? That might help; maybe it would bring us closer. And so vain hopes flourished by this joyful news: fighting off social contact did not come from Mr. van Wijnen-Swarttouw after all. Today he was an outsider in this crucial family gathering where the uncertain future of the company was discussed. This could only mean one thing: he was still her friend with benefits. Yes, he was her lover. Maybe he could ask for her hand? Mother had insisted, but Fatima admonished him to take it easy. If he acted to combat Mother, they suddenly seemed two peas in a pod. Nizam Ali paused effortlessly: after the fraternal disapproval of her children, she'd dropped out, knowing she was wrong and realizing she had interfered too much in her offspring's lives.

El Bachir strolled along the modern colossus called Koolhaas, his Rotterdam three connected jugs with capacities that covered ten percent of all office space in the Netherlands which towered above the city center as the crow flies. With a tight, energetic swing he crossed the traffic light, his leather satchel tightly clutched in his slender, athletic right hand. In passing, he admired the placard, that flashy poster, but he wanted to give up kickboxing.

For Julia, I will do it. If there is a positive response to my engagement proposal, I will not hesitate to quit, he told himself boldly... then I will kiss her toes, I will worship her. Across the wet balls and behind bul-
letproof glass, two police uniforms watched him closely. To get to this court commissioner, El Bachir passed the guarded gate. He was subjected to a body search.

If they do not restrain Mr. van Wijnen-Swarttouw, Julia will be here soon enough, her entire family in line, he thought, noting, ashamed, that this idea brightened him. Why the man had invited him was a mystery, but a specific request of the magistrate you do not miss on high trees full of flatulence, Mother had mistakenly said, outspoken. She still did not control the Dutch proverbs, and to the amusement of her children, she often mixed them with Arabic expressions. The laughter of Fatima at dinner studded the happiest moments of their missing family member and called up nostalgic memories of El Bashir’s youth in Marrakech.

In those moments, he missed Father, afterwards, when the laughter died down, extinguished by abdominal cramping. Unfortunately, he linked the absence of Father today to strange language mistakes, but was not too naive to recognize that Mother’s new economics and the psychosocial world, the various institutes in the Netherlands, hospitals as well as both judicial and administrative power and how they all hold together and how these worlds were balanced, she knew better than her recently-graduated son, this former business student of financial planning and econometrics. He had studied numbers and it had taken all his energy. Mother was gifted, although not infallible.

Now it was time to harvest. He had grabbed with both hands the offers for temporary work with no clear employment. His father, indirectly murdered by the religious orthodox regime that had seized power and directly by his uncle, who had taken honor after distributing the atheistic pamphlet in the surrounding villages, would have been so proud. No doubt about that!

Mother had left with her two kids, fleeing the region with those two, who both just hopped around on their own. El Bachir had nurtured revenge for years. This promise to one day
take revenge in a horrible act was only slightly tempered after receiving the news that his uncle had died of a long and painful disease. Mother had not gotten a grip on him, nonetheless. Her lesson – that answering vengeance with vengeance means that you reduce yourself to the level of your opponent, so you'd better follow the peaceful path of Nelson Mandela – not enter his stubborn, deaf ears, but his uncle, or rather this providence, ironically succeeded. Routinely, he was scanned by the two security officials. After the spiral staircase, he did not know what to do anymore. His accounting skills were not useful and his kickboxing experience wasn't either, and so he looked around in a rather helpless manner.

‘Do you want one, as well?’ asked Cor Figee, who was messing around with the machine.

As he pressed the wrong button without positioning a cup, he spilled liquid on his three-piece suit. ‘Goddamn! What a stupid machine this is!’ he snorted. He, rather, made no mistakes! He was ashamed of this accident, but soon his shame became anger, and this anger he projected onto the absurd design of this not-too-user-friendly absurdity.

‘Maybe we should deal with the matter of coffee machines instead of submarines? What a shambles this device indicates if you do not pay attention; how easy it is to build! There is money to earn, guys!’

‘Who?’

‘Huh? No, the technical guys know how to handle this. We can go into the Cabinet,’ Cor answered when the light turned green.

The clerk escorted them to their seats directly opposite this experienced magistrate. El Bachir thought that unless he had lived for decades on welfare and, in the twilight of his ‘career’, just before he could ‘retire’, he'd obtained this job through a reintegration process promoting positive discrimination. With
imaginary examples of unruly reality, Mother had regularly chal-
lenged them to continue thinking critically; to use imagination
and uncover the truth. Behind every truth hides a following, she
had suggested. Casually, she wanted to teach her children work-
ethics like the Chinese did.

'Gentlemen,' he grazed the bush, clearing his throat. ‘Take a
seat. Would you like coffee, tea, or maybe a glass of water will
do?’

‘I prefer tea.’

‘I'm in,’ El Bashir responded, while serious thoughts turned
to his sister. ‘Actually, it all started with her noble work on the
Binnenweg, and that assault.’

‘Did you catch the culprit, or do you suspect who might have
stabbed me?’ asked Cor Figee. He wanted to keep all options
open. Pleased with his composure, he sipped his tea.

‘The point is, gentlemen,’ began the magistrate with a sense
of drama, ‘the doings of our chief suspect are meticulously veri-
fied. From this study, some startling facts have been drawn; an
entry for the incitement of hatred, racism and trespassing, and
all on the same fateful day when you, Mister Cor Figee, visited
this family. Rightly or wrongly, I will leave that, for convenience,
in the middle, just for the time being. Do you understand, both
of you? We have written down these serious allegations at your
address in a powerful claim. In short: you, Mister Cor Figee, are
accused by this family of all three offenses, and all were argued
strongly, gentlemen!’

The cold shower clattered on the militia participants, right
through their clothing. ‘The wound was examined by a second
doctor; a surgeon. Fortunately, it is only a deep, fleshy wound.
No VITAL ORGANS WERE HIT!’

'EASY,’ said El Bachir, worried, and got up to calm down his
partner ‘in crime’ and to let him take back his favored seating
position.
But Cor, furious, sprung up. His chair toppled backwards and his fists clenched together, ready for action; ready to grind the magistrate.

‘Let Mr. please express himself, Cor!’ stammered El Bachir, and pushed him back in his chair. Something called irritation he could not impose what had happened, nor why he disliked this dear, good man of law and order this much, as well; but something felt wrong.

‘Thanks, gentlemen,’ said the magistrate, looking meaningfully at El Bachir. Did he expect to exchange some kind of cultural look of recognition?! El Bachir’s eyebrows automatically jumped to the sky.

‘Before we process an official report, proper research must be done in advance. Do you gentlemen understand?’

‘Understand? We understand NOTHING!’ snorted Cor Figee, boiling with anger from the injustice.

‘There are indications in this direction: several witnesses confirm that you went for a talk with the family after suspecting a robbery by two children of less than fourteen years old. That’s very young, showcased work, gentlemen: we are talking about children.’

‘The raid on the Binnenweg, at my sister’s place.’

‘That’s right. Thanks for supplementing my argument. El Bachir, is it? Yes, Fatima, your sister! It’s good that you mention her. Is it true that she dresses, exposed, in the vicinity of the disabled? We have photos in our dossier,’ said the magistrate, looking meaningfully at Cor Figee, who wondered why the magistrate seemed to think that he, of all people, would understand this nuance or reasoning.

Why does he look at my colleague less penetratingly? Cor thought wrongly just before the best man turned to El Bachir and said: ‘You should know that this ... surely you will; yes, you should indeed, as men with your education and cultural back-
ground. In the habitat of these boys, this is inappropriate behavior. They will oppose this tooth and nail. Protecting the *family honor* is unfortunately not common in the Netherlands in recent decades, after those terrible sixties and the rise of those hideous hippies, we worked hard to rebuild this country. It was, unfortunately, followed by the, back then, still principled D66, but there has been a healthy turnaround going on since the SGP can cooperate with the VVD and our newfound *Islamic political party of Unity*. And completely for the better, if I may be so bold as to say. And yes, I may, in this situation, as I am the man who leads this research. You understand, gentlemen?'

El Bachir’s mouth opened wide, his glance calm, his eyes streaming until only the white remained.

Wobbling on his chair, he jabbed his obsessively tormented pupils at that man opposite him. Some Turk of the old school, migrated around the Seventies and then working as guest worker in the port of Rotterdam, had now risen to magistrate; a man with movements El Bachir deemed familiar: utterly misplaced dominant mimicry that kept the long arm of Ankara intact!

Gradually, it happened: gradually this man changed to the silhouette of his deceased uncle; the same facial features, the certainty in his moves, the eternal righteousness of the Book at his side, the legal system, and the higher Truth he guarded as if it was his duty; as if he suffered under this responsibility and therefore deserved a reward. Only appreciation and praise should have been given! Cor Figee reacted alertly, but could not prevent the first blow which was was spot on and worth the renowned thaler. The commissioner nodded his head and slumped, oblique, in slow motion, simultaneously downward and backward, his body shoved, soulless, from the rocking chair like a rag doll until he lay motionless on the ground. El Bachir actually looked, above all, surprised; as if an invisible man from
nowhere had struck. His chair was on the floor and his athletic torso bent over the table stalled, petrified and in shock.

‘Keep the focus; then you know how you can sell vanilla ice cream to Eskimos,’ intoned Herman Blijker with aplomb, full of bravado without being arrogant, like a man who does what he stands for. These were words close to Henk's businessman heart. He immediately called his manager and booked him for the office party, but had his doubts about the S.A.F. *He is less in tune with those artists - how shall I express it?* he mumbled as he, as if by magic, let the TV screen disappear. Precisely at midnight, you might encounter something unexpected - yes, at times when you're tired, it might you suit well. Innovation means seeing opportunities and then using perseverance.

With simple thoughts in mind, Henk read this new idea of the Fair-Trade Phone. He printed it out and fell back in his revolving chair with a magnificent view of the dimly-lit bonsai trees, placed the document on the coffee table, lit a pre-rolled cigarette, took a few strokes, blew it out into his office, and consciously sniffed the cloyingly sweet scent of the plant.

How delicious! This divine stuff's smell would, for a long time, fill this room. Thereby satisfied, he placed the cigarette in the ashtray and poured himself a heavy drink, pulling out one of those fist-sized crystal glasses and emerging from the antique mahogany cabinet. At the urging of Jan des Bouvrie, he had let everything be painted snowy white by Willem the gardener/boxer/painter/barfly. That guy was an all-rounder, all right! The crystal glasses stood, waiting, in a neat row, engraved by Siebel himself.

And so Henk filled the diamond crystal with twelve-year old whiskey and shuffled over to his chair, where he carefully studied the documents until the garden was gently shrouded in the morning light of the sun's rays, as bright orange flooded the Jap-
anese bonsai with pathetic wistfulness. He looked to the left and sent a copy to Cor Figee with the express request to delve into this all-decisive matter. It needed a technologist. That Russian deal he could better finish himself. It had taken far too long already!

*Never mind, it will be fine*, he muttered, a bit angry, and grabbed the phone. Cor Figee did not answer his call; a fatal mistake.

Henk reported to Annegreet, who called back within five minutes with the message ‘Our account manager is in custody at the police station opposite those wet balls!’

‘What does that… what is he up to?! Thanks!’

Henk clicked the red icon. This, he could not use. This Fairtrade phone project needed a techie like Cor Figee. Stumped, he sprinted through the house like a madman, looking for Lavinia. His firm steps accidentally caused him to pass the room where she was busy ironing his shirts. He braked, turned halfway, and spun around. His torso diagonally crossed over to her laundry while he held the half-open door with both hands and, beaten, delegated: ‘Yes! I need help urgently! You know Cor, right?! Go to court and ensure that he is released on bail. You can do this, my topper of a household worker!’

Twice, he tapped with the flat of his hand before he disappeared, knowing that this was arranged. Lavinia put her iron on the bar, the blunt tip in the air, pulled the plug from the socket, disguised herself appropriately – a neat suit, sober, not too conspicuous a color and line (if possible) – and walked, counting outward, to court, then thought better of it and decided to take the tram after all.

This way she might be faster! Nerves shrieked through her throat when the tram chirped over the Harp, and as she watched the Rotterdam building, the marketing platform of Unilever and the striking tilting KPN building soon appeared. She saw her beloved, in her fantasy: he was tied with heavy chains in the grim
basement of the police station where, in reality, Cor Figee now (for convenience) played a game of Belote and responded petulantly after the express request came up - damn, he was almost on the winning side! Running along the cold corridor to the counter, he quickly pasted a brilliant smile on his face when he saw her nervously fiddling, her knees together, with her bracelet from Bucharest.

Not realizing who had done it all, he hugged his love, Lavinia. His colleague and partner in ‘crime’ could remain tentative and growl, but unfortunately, what Lavinia tried was not enough: she did not bail El Bachir out, as well. Defeated and yet delighted with whom he was able to embrace (though he was on his guard, afraid that his fate would pass by and embarrassingly, publicly, would give him a slapping with her handbag or with her pancake tennis racket; in both cases accompanied by hysterical screaming), they hurriedly walked like a couple in love, in a deadlock grip, across and downstairs, straight to the quay wall in front of the theater. This gave him oxygen - there they could at least be unnoticed for a while.

Simultaneously, they deeply inhaled the smell of the not-too-healthy Maas River, the port and the city Centre, and the Netherlands, for that matter, when they stopped at a whopper of a cast iron bollard with its oval, rounded head. Lavinia sat down on it, peering over the waves right into the heart of the harbor. Sighing, she gave herself over to melancholy reflections about life in general; about how people treated each other and how everyone, in their struggle for existence, either literally hurt others or crawled so distastefully, it was sickening.

Cor Figee sat down beside her on the clinkers, overlooking the river as far as he could see. She patted him on the head attentively, playing with his hair, while in another part of the city, Elenoor remained home today because cuts in healthcare had almost entirely stopped her daily activities. She was tired of be-
ing stuck with her mother, had plenty of tea, and wanted to go out, experience, or see something - anything, really.

Her mother blocked the door. A voice whispered, hurtling by on penalty of a sound thrashing. Elenoor pushed her mother roughly aside, spontaneously as she stumbled and fell against the gorgeous display case in the hallway: a closet with a sharp point.

The broken crockery clattered on the floor made of colored stone. Elenoor pushed both hands firmly against her ears, squeezed her eyes convulsively, and turned her head away. By turning away, she thought she could undo it, and so it just seemed as if the accident had not occurred. However, when she dared to open her eyes, she saw her mother again, lying motionless against the display, her headcloth soaked with blood.

Screaming, incoherent, and practically beside herself, Elenoor went for the help of Daan, who was at school. His mother was out playing tennis, so nobody answered the door. The street was spinning and melted into dark shadows until two boys vaguely rolled into her image, stopped, and started laughing, running around on skateboards which sounded shrill on that paving, their wheels seeming to crack and put groove tracks into the asphalt.

The beeping grew louder and louder, as if the wagon of a freight train was disconnected and now running her way. Hearing her call for help pleased the boys, whom she recognized from that cowardly attack at the Binnenweg. In a deafening manner, Elenoor screamed in panic that they had to leave, scolded them, and yelled: ‘Police, help!’

A single balcony door opened as sensible people watched this spectacle from safe distance. Intervention would imply complicity, upon which you could spend years in jail or, more likely and completely unexpectedly, receive a knife between your ribs. The boys told her the police would not come to her rescue; told her she could forget this, pushed her, and gave her a shove
which brought her further off balance and more out of the world already spinning and turning in her confusing mind. She cried for her mother. Images appeared at that moment, of the bloody scarf motionlessness in the hallway. Sad and desperate, she cried out in an ultimate attempt to gain Daan's help. This is what these toddlers really enjoyed. Now they had her where they wanted her.

‘Daan’s dead!’ parried the largest of the two, much to the amusement of the smallest, who jumped from his skateboard and pulled out his sharp knife. Someone warned them from the balcony, but they withdrew none of these things. 'T now had something else in mind! The victim writhed, powerless, when cornered. Now ‘t could fully enjoy teasing her, since Elenoor became outraged, hysterical, and frantic. Give it another push, and she will go defenseless; will fall over to the ground and may squirm and crawl. That would be great! And while Elenoor was shaking and shocked and, collapsed and powerless, tried to get underneath the pavement, a daredevil – a psychologist without a job – sprinted from his porch.

The smallest boy clicked in his razor-sharp stiletto and locked it away. They picked up their skateboards on the fly, clutched them under their arms, and took off running. Faster and faster they ran, into the narrow streets, until they were free as a bird. They looked back: there was no one to see them anymore. Satisfied, they threw their boards on the pavement, jumped on them, and rode off: super cool. A few blocks later, they arrived at their destination.

Mohammed was tinkering under his pimp car. They tried to score an energetic can from the dispenser when they were startled by a simultaneous, firm tap on their scruffs, after which they greeted him dutifully through strange sign language; the usual way of greeting within their subculture. Aggressive rap filled the
lounge area. Mohammed pulled a Red Bull out of the closet in front of their faces and put the money on the table: the monthly contribution of a youth congregation, desperately needed to get his brothers on the right path, had arrived neatly, on time.

‘Yo, say, like every one half,’ he said, but held the money, to frustration of his brothers, tightly pinched between his fingers.

They did not dare pull it away.

‘When you toddlers perform one more task, you'll get your fokking share,’ he sang, and deposited the money followed by the same hand movements; this time stunning, rhythmically performed at the sound of the beat, in a mesmerizing cadence.

An hour later, just rounding the Southbank, Cor Fige was startled surprised by his own phone. That thing never went off! Had a bug been fixed? Maybe someone had made a mistake? It turned out to be Daan, who spoke incoherently and much faster than usual. There was something about the neighbor and her daughter. It sounded urgent; something to do with an ambulance and a straightjacket! Cor Fige and Lavinia took the tram. He did not quite understand, but felt he was needed. Somebody had to help the neighbors; so why should Cor Fige not sacrifice himself for the noble task? The Russian matter could wait - this seemed more urgent. Climbing back up the stone stairs, they called a taxi in front of the entrance of the Luxor theater; one that overcame them within seconds by taking Parkinson Bridge. Waiting for the traffic light, that damn phone rang again... Never a call, before; and now this absurdity!

‘Henk! Come tomorrow to the Kuip and take Daan with you. Enter your name, and then you will be guided into my VIP box accompanied by a delicious lady or Mister Feyenoord. Peter Houtman!

A beep sounded for a fraction of a second, then was gone. Cor Fige's surprise gave Lavinia unbridled curiosity. She had
recognized Henk's voice, but without hearing what he had to say. She did not consider asking however. The wipers expelled raindrops. Lavinia listened to their shuffling, in which black and white images of her mother loomed in the torrential rains that put the firm hills of Cluj Napoca to the test, sheltering their vegetable garden under the gazebo in where she, as a child, had a momentary illusion of being happy, though they'd had barely enough to dress up in.

Suddenly it was pitch black. A monsoon-like downpour took away the driver's view. They dove into the Maastunnel, which offered peace through its lighting and monotone hum. Lavinia grabbed Cor's hand. She wanted to assist him in these confusing times. Or did she herself seek support? There was something ominous in the air.

The flashing of the hospital car double-parked in combination with soaking wet windows revealed the distorted image of three ghosts who quickened their pace, bowing their heads as if they could evade this apocalyptic waterfall as they shuffled to the police car. The middle ghost could not move her upper body and arms, or so it seemed. Only now did he see what was going on, but before he could intervene, Elenoor, accompanied by a psychiatric nurse and a plump officer, was discharged, soaking wet, into a straitjacket. The ambulance remained in place, highlighted by that orange beam under pouring rain, waiting.

A second officer was sitting at the dinner table, nursing Cor Figuee's neighbor. Her injuries appeared to be not too bad, all circumstances considered, as Lavinia understood the situation. She herself was called upon and looked for a room where she could talk undisturbed. Cor Figuee did not trust it, but let her go and sat beside Daan, who nervously fiddled on the strings of his Feyenoord's sweater, worrying about Elenoor. This time, they pondered the same thing. A scream from the kitchen echoed through the house. Everyone turned their heads to the side, in-
cluding the injured mother, who hurt herself in doing so.

Trembling, Lavinia stood in the doorway with an expression on her face between total despair and disbelief. The desperate look of Cor Figee's coveted Romanian young lady gave him an icy shiver down his back muscles. She stammered something in an unfamiliar language – it sounded a bit crazy – and looked at him quizzically, desperate. *What on earth does she want me to do, Cor Figee wondered?* Only after a while, as she peered into his desperate eyes and sort of blushed, did she switch to Dutch, though she could not manage without stuttering: 'My mother... I must go to her... they say she is... deceased....'

The gravel turned into a dirt road. And while Jules Didden, together with Miss van Zanten, provided language lessons to refugees - volunteer work which they put their heart and souls into - Henk parked his dark green Maserati in the loose sand. He got out and placed his feet firmly on the sacred ground, then turned around. The coarse sand crunched between his slippery soles. Why the image only just now came up was a mystery, but suddenly he saw Wesseling, busy with his greatest passion. *Let's see, I'm out of practice?* His fists relaxed, upon which he formed a bowl with his fingers and blew. The lure rang out over the undeveloped terrain. As if fate was well disposed, pigeons rushed out from the half-rotted stands. *Let's hope that the number of positive councilors in those all-decisive ballots match the number of obedient pigeons,* he thought, amused, and jumped with the tip out of his shoe, one foot after the other, spontaneously pulling a sprint through the wild-growing, sand-sprinkled lawn. Panting, he arrived at the peeling goalpost and made a free movement, one shot without the ball, called out loud 'goal!' and walked on until he leaned against the post. 'How proud Wesseling will be,' he muttered. *When he finished his Swedish experiment, I will tell him,* he thought. A torrent of tears moistened his experienced face while his facial
muscles finally completely relaxed. *High time for a cigar out of my own box*, he joked to himself. Wiping the tears away with the sleeve of his three-piece suit and grabbing his pocket, he lit the Havana and blew, while walking along the riverbank, the pungent scent into the swirling, not-so-clean air. With a subsequent inhalation, a pungent irritant filled his nostrils. The wind from the east, a rarity, and the vapor of illegally discharged poison penetrated deep into his pores.

An unpleasant surprise? A skeleton in the cupboard? Without hesitation, he pulled out his smartphone, piqued.

‘Eddy, you must do something for me!’

'How did it go?

‘Come to the construction site of the new Kuip terrain!’

The wind rose; and with a trembling finger he tapped the bell icon. It took him too long. He kicked hard against the wooden fence. His thoughts ran like arrows through his head and fired salvos of inimitable solutions; but which one to choose? How could he keep this quiet? *Time is stretching, we needed respite,* conceived Henk as, at the same time, Cor Figee parked his Opel Astra in front of the picturesque airport of Rotterdam. He got out, took Lavinia's stylish suitcase from the boot, and kissed her awkwardly on the cheek, which was moistened by an unstoppable tear or two. She hugged Daan spontaneously and in a daze; last night she had gotten no sleep. The boy took the front seat, next to his father. Sadly, she hesitantly raised her hand once more while walking through the revolving door.

Within fifteen minutes, they arrived at the soccer stadium. Daan peered to the right and heard his heart pounding and roaring, and looked at those strings from the track's entrance and beyond. It looked like an uprising through the sides of the imposing and (according to Henk) antiquated edifice where the crowd, the human mass, overran the building like weeds, taking
possession of it and swallowing it like a giant octopus. As Mr. Van Wijnen-Swarttouw's instructions had stated, they were picked up by Peter Houtman and brought towards the VIP box that accommodated the name of one of Henk's subsidiaries.

Other guests had apparently not yet arrived? This puzzled Cor Figee, as they entered the Kuip themselves due to Lavinia's dawdling, until he realized how businessmen might come to the match in progress because they want to show that they hardly had time for entertainment. *Like it's nothing special for them*, he thought without irony, and went to the buffet where he looked at the glasses of wine.

‘A Pilgrim bottle of a beer from the brewery it will be,’ Henk commanded, and pulled open the refrigerator, took out two, and snatched up the opener. ‘What do you drink, Daan? Come and see; feel free to speak up! During the game, I'm not going to pour anybody anything!’

Under applause and cheers, their teams began to warm up. Cor Figee did not dare ask if other guests would come, but then a wheelchair bumped over the threshold, pushed by an appetizing lady.

‘Wesseling!’ Henk shouted and cried as he pulled the refrigerator door open once more. The crowd silenced. The referee whistled and the game started. It took about ten minutes before Cor Figee mustered enough courage to say: ‘Well, those Russians are stiff, but I've finally almost come to some agreement. It was a difficult task. I do not know why... possibly through that incident with the Royal Family during our Russia Year? Cultural exchanges for kings and debates on gay rights obviously do not mix very well. But, I'm feeling positive. They're on the verge of signing, finally. Everything seems in the bag... ao you might consider making a last appoi...’

‘Ok, then!’ Henk interrupted. ‘Two things for you to do personally, Cor! I will handle that Russian deal from now on. And
second: I will put you on a new project of the utmost importance! We are entering a Fairtrade phone project as soon as possible! It will be assembled in the port of Rotterdam. Where else?! Is it not wonderful? The idea comes from me, this time, so this cannot go wrong. Did you get my last email on this matter?!

‘Yes, I think so, it...’

Henk, without realizing it, incited by that riveting sound of a fifty thousand-strong crowd, responded more strongly than usual. ‘Fine! Study the deal and forget those damn Russians with their suspicious mug faces and stuff! I will act upon that case soon enough!’

Cor Figee took a swig from the Pilgrim and curiously turned his head to Henk, back to the field, and almost choked when Graziano Pelle’s penalty hit the post, hard as nails.

‘I'm researching changes in atmosphere in the city to investigate consequences for the Port. What are your experiences with multicultural Rotterdam of the last five to ten years?!

‘Uhm, that is complicated,' Cor Figee began vaguely, to win time. Would he inform Henk about their vigilante organization? Maybe he would disapprove! El Bachir would certainly have preferred not to be within it! *It might cost me my job*, he thought anxiously, and tactfully switched to an anecdote; something innocent. ‘Well, I do not know what it's worth, but our cleaner told me recently that he run into a Somali family with some expensive equipment. He looked inside, and guess what?

'State-of-the-art smartphones!

'Screens of two meters on the wall, multiple tablets for their nine kids at the table - yes, say that all - I mean, really all - you can think of was installed! And what became apparent when our cleaner checked it out as he asked for his earned payment of the day? Had they worked for it? It did not occur to them! However, they did go for a holiday on a regular basis (and without joking)... to Somalia! The country from which they'd fled! So he
asked. It turns out that for years it's no longer been dangerous to go! They can happily go on vacation every six months for a month or so. That kind of thing, you know... it depends on the person, how it draws up. The mother of a Moroccan friend of mine is a doctor, for example!’

‘One moment,’ Henk said. ‘Write it all down on this, immediately! Here, you have one. I want to collect this wisdom: this was supposed to be on a beer mat!’

‘Do you have two or three for me?’

‘Sure, there are plenty! Take this,’ exclaimed Henk, and handed over two stacks, enough for hundred anecdotes, while Wesseling's arms outstretched imploringly to the dark rainy sky. Daan had pushed the wheelchair over the threshold. Together they watched the game from the balcony. He let the door open. From that position you could almost taste the atmosphere and enjoy a brilliant view. In his mind, he saw himself scoring in the championship game against Quick Boys.

‘Thank you,’ said Cor Figee, today remarkably docile.

‘Well, so, for example, we have Pakistani women who are not allowed to go outside; who are detained in our very own Dutch cities, abused and regularly raped in marriage by their husbands, even in Rotterdam! According to their subculture, they must take care of their husbands without having any human rights whatsoever. We sometimes make jokes about it... you know, how well these guys have done. Think about it! What are we worried about, then, right?! Oh, and then there is the phenomenon of...’ lectured Cor Figee. The beer he drunk and the crowded Kuip behind him all popped out spontaneously in a stream of words partially new to himself, as if he were listening to something greater than himself, supported by the fans; by massive supporters who sounded coherent like one person all together, body against body, shoulder against shoulder, rolling
into the rhythm of the masses with one common goal: to defeat an opponent.

Thus the fear of touching another fell away, encouraged by the screaming, shouting, and cheering at their home team as one big massive body. Under this atmosphere of fraternization, Cor Figeé became more candid and looser in his word choices and stories by the minute. As he spoke, he scored his temperate wisdom in clear block letters, easily read by any child and accurate. He wrote them on the coasters.

Just before the break, and completely detached, he told Henk frankly about the incident with his neighbor and concluded: ‘Elenoor has been discharged into a straitjacket. We do worry about her wellbe...’

Henk made up his mind on the spot. He wanted to call a cab for Wesseling and Daan so that Cor and he could try to go and liberate Elenoor, but Daan protested. To everyone's surprise, he jumped up from the deeps of the white sofa designed by Jan and spoke the legendary words: ‘Feyenoord wins, that’s no lie. I will help you guys!’

Only after Cor Figeé saw Henk's enthusiastic visage did he reluctantly nod in agreement. Through altercation, Wesseling conceived the idea that his help was urgently needed. Henk hesitated, but after observing the same enthusiasm in the teary eyes of his uncle, he had no choice but to admit defeat. 'We cannot get him off this thought with ten horses', he explained to Daan superfluously.

And so they ran into the catacombs; Cor pushing Wesseling forward in speed. While running, Henk made a call. They filled the trunk of the Maserati with the folded wheelchair attributes, parked in the VIP area, hoisted Wesseling into place, clicked his strap, and left. Four men (well, a boy and three men, one of which was demented) had one single mission: to rescue Elenoor
from the hands of psychiatry and get her out of that oppressive, dehumanizing straitjacket!

That turned out a lot tougher than expected.

The t&t application gave no signal; no trace of Elenoor. Henk immediately switched ideas and, using his helicopter view, dropped his radar to look into another direction and soon came up with his only connection in psychiatry. And so he rang, through the cloud, the office of his shrink at the Heemraadsingel. Fraulein van Zanten repelled the client exactly according to her rigorous protocol: skillfully she answered without letting him pass through, but in the course of the conversation, she detected the necessity of the situation.

Yes, suddenly she understood what a noble purpose this search of our four football fanatics entailed. As an avid fan of Dortmund, she understood how their hearts were in the right place. A football coach sees those guys every day, while we have to work with sporadic sessions. Part of psychiatry has become obsolete, and is working under false or outdated methods. This neighbor of our client's employee may be at risk!

Had Otto Adolf Eichmann embraced the Sapere Aude idea – dare to think, ask questions, and embrace your wisdom – then there would possibly have been nothing to worry about! Evil is sometimes too banal for words! I am currently just one radar in the psychiatric network. I may have won a lucrative internship in training psychiatrists, but I cannot and will not submit to everything without a fight!

She sensed how this was her heroic moment, though it would almost certainly take away her hard-won position in the labor market. In her head she heard David Bowie's singing, and it seemed as if the song was playing on the radio: dann sind wir heroes, just for one day... you, you will be queen... and nothing... will keep us together... we will beat them, just for one day.
‘Hold on,’ she said, looking at the system numbers and calling her friend (the mayor of Rotterdam she knew from her part-time job giving a language course for immigrants). She made a few other phone calls.

‘Got it!’ she exclaimed enthusiastically through the speaker, after which Daan’s smile lit up the Maserati.

Professor van Splunteren’s software scored the phone number of Mohammed Abdul in the hermetically sealed database and automatically sent a signal to Henk’s cellphone. Something finally snapped! In his mind, he thanked Miss van Zanten for this amazing coincidence.

‘She's staying in the psychiatric hospital The Pater, in a closed ward on the third floor in room 33,’ she told him.

‘We are on our way; great job!’ Henk exclaimed.

The instruction was indeed for a full spray load. Far too much of a good thing for a mentally retarded person like this, if you ask me - but they never ask me. Psychiatric problems in combination with intellectual disabilities - that's what the big-wigs do not want to burn their hands on: it's too difficult for psychiatrists. For security reasons, the psychiatric nurse verified her assignment. What can I do? Who am I, anyway (though I successfully passed a few university studies in psychology). Only a postmaster gains piecemeal work. As lower Mbo training counts nowadays, too, then yes, you become wagered, at least, although they look down on you. That expensive education after your degree is only for rich people – assignments are controlled through a network. As mere mortal, I cannot participate. And then those specialist doctors know all about psychotropic drugs, right! 'God bless the grip,' she swore, and put the needle in Elenoor's right buttock. That seemed to help for a moment; she calmed down immediately, but then foam came out of her mouth as her breathing stopped.
The Maserati parked itself neatly. by agreement. between a van and an ambulance. Daan sprinted through the building, followed by two middle-aged men. The psychiatric nurse was assisted in the resuscitation attempt by two ambulance employees. Since there was no working elevator in the building, one of them called the fire department: according to Health and Safety legislations, they could not walk a patient three floors down stairs: the risk of back pain was plausible, and was simply too high.

Thus, he ordered a platform with a sliding ladder. That would take about half an hour to get on spot, or so he told him, confused. Elenoor's survival was thereby reduced to zero. They wanted to keep trying to save her, to perform all necessary operations, even though they had limited equipment available, as if they were in a country at war.

Health authorities guaranteed perfect protection. They did not have vital medical information - they were not allowed to look at any medical record without the consent of a close family member, especially those of psychiatric patients, who were already such a vulnerable group. Cor and Henk's tirades were drowned out by those of Wesseling, who hung out of the side window of the Maserati; after which Henk and Cor simultaneously, without hesitating a split-second, lifted the stretcher down the stairs to the ambulance which then rushed straight to the trauma helicopter which was waiting at the children's playground. Henk consulted the spy software database so that Daan could present the medical details to the healthcare providers in action just before their helicopter lifted into the air.

Without feeling the pain in his back Henk, walked to Wesseling, who was cheering out of the window of the Maserati. Although this noble goal was not been easy to achieve, it was mission accomplished! They waved to the trauma helicopter as it flew away. Half an hour later, Henk dropped his account at the Opel
Astra parked near the stadium; his highly polished company car which first Henk and then Cor himself worriedly inspected for possible damage from passing vandalists. Daan helped, though he had no idea how or what exactly he was looking for, and Wesseling, in a deep sleep, was snoring heavily in a comfortable armchair. Henk struggled to rouse the old man: only after a number of shakes did poor Wesseling understand the hint. He put his uncle in the wheelchair while routinely ignoring his tirade (you might even say diatribe) of being a traitor and a profiteer who should take his filthy, greedy claws off him.

Upon entering the building, he was professionally pushed further down the cold corridor by the attending nurse (an extremely friendly Iraqi lady wearing a headscarf). Wesseling cursed and raged, now unintelligible. In the cafeteria downstairs, Henk watched, along with some elderly colleagues of Wesseling's; some football fanatics who were still awake, how Feyenoord gave the advantage away after the break. They lost by a miserable blunder in the last minute of injury time. This explained the sirens in the city, the noise in the streets, and the buzzing crowd that stirred as one massive and vicious body, unfortunately innumerably stronger than the sum of the individuals of which it existed.

Afterwards, Henk drove back home and maneuvered handily in between vehicles, parking the roaring car behind his fence. Meanwhile, he had foreseen all kinds of electronic gadgets: the villa now had CCTV, which matched the White House. Tired but satisfied – Rotterdam's well-known phrase ‘deeds, not words’ having been implemented – he ducked into his perfectly temperate Jensen supreme bed.
Timing

At breakfast, I decided to get rid of my pills indefinitely, which was also the right decision, according to Miss van Zanten. I felt supported by her. And so I prepared two sandwiches: healthy ones; those delicious whoppers with light yellow poppy seed dumplings, stuffed with grilled tomato and traditional Dutch cheese and finished off with a poached egg and a glass of grapefruit juice which, according to my clever housekeeper, is the only natural product that lowers cholesterol. Her source of knowledge is inexhaustible! Tatiana had reported in sick, but fortunately it turned out that this pathetic scaremongering to my chaos-accrued mastermind was unfounded. I appear to function just fine without pills. They actually inhibit my work, chemical junk that they are! Along the way, I called our mayor. He kindly allowed me to speak. He appreciated my diligence and seemed less concerned with public opinion than I'd expected. I mean, everybody knew that the lawsuit had been filed against me. Everyone – and he himself certainly – was aware of my illustrious reputation as a company doctor in a bitter fight with the judiciary as well as the port authority (once my dearest friends). But no, he seemed reassured: great news! Or was there some kink in the steal cable that I did not know about?

Stay alert, Henk! Without mutual interest, no business will succeed. Fairy tales do not exist.

Arriving, I double parked in front of that pharmacy where I actually had to draw a number from an old-fashioned number-dispensing pole. The Netherlands-Turkish collaborator with his traditional Islamic headscarf stood alone. Just when it finally was
my turn – I was the only visitor – and I thought she would speak to me helpfully, the pharmacist was distracted by a ringing sound, answered her phone without apologizing, and spent twenty-five minutes babbling, presumably in Turkish (or Kurdish, for that matter)! When she hung up (I studied during this precious time the actual point cloud of Julia's Facebook analysis, which showed some interesting developments), she shuffled backwards, organized some things without using a ruler or any other measuring device, and finally shuffled slowly back to the front desk. And so I sighed with relief; but just when I wanted to tell my short story, a great noisy crash occurred behind me. A boy of about five years ducked under the swinging doors behind the counter and pulled at her arm. They played, unrestrained, and she picked him up and hugged him cheerfully – as if we had all the time in the world! She walked with the boy clamped in her arms to the swinging lower doors, where she presented him like a priceless gift to two charming ladies, both wearing head-gear like hers. There they stayed, chatting in that weird lingo for about fifteen minutes.

That diaspora after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire proved unnecessary. Or had it paid off; like, right now?!

I vaguely recognized the language, since we'd invested in their booming business and had installed half a dozen Turkish workers in aftersales.

‘Have you taken a prescription?’ she asked in a tone that implied that I was being too slow with my registration.

‘No, I am delivering something, stupid bitch!’

She stared at me as if she saw purgatory lit up (or is that called something different in their idiotic religion?). With a chillly, subcutaneous aggression, she asked: ‘Your name, please?’ in that overly friendly Moroccan-Turkish way, relentlessly and clearly indicative of disrespect.
‘Everything has been put into writing, and is written down on the envelope!’

She studied the information.

‘Are you going to start in that manner? Well, dude, your wish is my command,’ she threatened, pretending to have been born and raised in Rotterdam. Now her true nature emerged. That thin film of politeness and friendliness disappeared like snow in bright sunshine! In vain, she sought another customer.

I began to perspire, nodded hesitantly, and saw, to my horror, my envelope with my latest stock of pills disappear into a minor drawer of an extremely vague closet, of all closets of the world! Goddamn! Something in me wanted to reach out; something in me wanted to jump over the counter and reclaim my envelope - but in practice, I froze as if transfixed. Defeated, I walked out and breathed in and out, in and out. The (admittedly, not one hundred percent) fresh air did me good.

The Veerhaven wrapped herself in a threatening thunderstorm; a tropical one. Decelerating activity, evident in the vacancies at the terminals, was becoming more acute by the week. This could not go on. Pills or no pills, action was needed, so I ran in haste to my office where I worked for the next ten days in a row, day and night, on the newest, most innovative ideas we at the S.A.F. had figured out to re-utilize a main part of the first Maasvlakte.

Every now and then, I closed my eyes and called forth my vision; that image out of my dreams in which the port of Rotterdam (there was a lot to consider after that terrible Bombing, back then) was restored - yes, fully rebuilt towards a time when we could play a leading role in the world of technology with innovative, sustainable products. We can start with mobile telephony: that Fairtrade phone can act as a spearhead!

Making the circular economy a replacement for the linear one, an economy in which raw materials are reused without be-
ing unnecessarily transported, can be achieved in practice in our harbor on a project that will shake up the foundations of the business world. Honestly: just steer in the raw materials for the Fairtrade phone, discharge it in the Waalhaven 24/7, and pass it to the assembly line where we, as true Rotterdammers (white and black, indigenous or foreign-looking – what does it matter?) will work on production of those CO2-neutral devices. Through smart entrepreneurship we'll build these modern and green editions which will contrast well with those produced in China; those polluting old-fashioned phones from competitors which are put together by underpaid Chinese and imported modern slaves from neighboring impoverished countries - those who do not even have the right to go to the toilet during fourteen-hour working periods! Yes, we locals can prove it with our feet firmly standing within the delta works and on the edge of the riverbank, as we have done before, during the reconstruction after the terrible Bombing and the cowardly action of the Jerries!

Germans, I have no problems with; but with those Krauts! In short, this phone will be golden, honest, and sustainable; and also, workers from Eastern Europe will get decent wages because we'll sell them for a competitive wholesale price. The latter goal was not the easiest. I worked for as long as necessary until the first contours of this setup loomed, and until my vision took shape. With Herman the Blijker's slogan in mind, I was able to move ahead. Jan actively helped; that old warhorse and born entrepreneur.

At exactly six o'clock, with the sun just coming up, we inspected together, satisfied, the new-fangled factory.

A troublesome (safe to say), thorny issue was the supply chain... it became clear that we needed to implement this project in phases, with each step an improvement in durability, because not all of the raw materials were available. And I'm putting it out carefully, haha. If you unraveled the commodity chain, a lot of
dirt would bedredged up; all insights you would rather not obtain, but from which you, as a born leader, could not close your eyes. It's your job: the skipper defies the worst storm and the highest waves so his ignorant sailors can enjoy the world.

Meanwhile, the text messages from Monique piled up: she had already sent five of them. Curious to know if I had studied the documents, she asked if I had signed these bitches already. HAHA! This I did not begrudge her: I had better things on mind! Boy, oh boy, Monique - haha. Every now and then I considered using the image of the actress Xuxa as an antidote. She looked hot, I could not resist enjoying it as a distraction from the fighting spirit, and it was ideal for getting some sleep.

Had my conscience turned around? The question about my conscience kept me busy and distracted me. I decided to ignore Quinten. According to Eddy, he was overcome by terror; by an ink black picture of the future in which his independence as an artist ended in the danger zone nearby. It could not get any crazier, those ideological principles of the S.A.F. itself! Boy!

Again, I had no time for that as well, folks; needless to say! You prepare yourself (which means radically condemning the groups of outsider art, the acclaimed art brut, the only ‘real artists’ out there), perforce not being seen or heard is your very own choice. No, here I had not a millisecond of time, Quinten!

We need to tackle it, guys: doing business takes precedence. As a catalyst for all the good in the world, The Tilt will drag all in her wake. Leave it all to Henkie!
Helpfulness Without Pride

Since when major Abdul had internalized the idea, he did not remember; it was an impossibility by nature. On a warm summer evening, somewhere in July, he drove to the Coolsingel on his bike when he suddenly, as though directed by a higher hand, halted, bought a newspaper, and read the article about his colleague, the mayor of New York; about the immense popularity among his people over there across the Atlantic, and he developed messianic traits. "This is my vocation" flashed, inspired, through his well-educated brain.

Could I organize the same? Rotterdam is a metropolis.

Polish, not talk, is compatible with the elevated word. Nobody needs to know my motive. 'Championing humanity is universal and transcends religions,' he mumbled, and stepped back onto his bicycle, smiling with a rustic air of serenity.

Elenoor's mother nervously sipped her morning tea. She brought the cup to her mouth, trembling, and placed it back on the porcelain saucer. Unforeseen was the accompanying camera crew that left her battered under bright lights, functioning on heavy medication only while welcoming her daughter out of the hands of her benefactor, her very own mayor! According to protocol, she had invited some neighbors, making it look like a cozy chat. The people she knew – she had understood that the protocol meant Rotterdammers of the old school – were the mother of neighbor Daan and the father of Quinten, now a mature neighbor of yesteryear (about whom she, many years ago, had already known he was a born artist by heart). When he was a
boy, she had coddled him regularly with well-earned refreshments. And so it came to pass that Daddy, a nickname for this mayor among the rabble and the commons, was sitting at that (for him) well-known saccharine table, being filmed live by Tv-Rijnmond in a relaxed neighborhood conversation, engaged with a paver and two housewives from the old school, while Elenoor, located one floor above her bedroom, reconciled herself with a careful examination of her relics. After a few suspicious looks in the mirror, she heard a voice that whispered commands. Straining, she put the stuff back to their only possible positions down to the millimeter, since she did not want to blow the place up.

‘Now we cozily sit together, Daddy Abdul,’ Quinten's father compulsory stated in the direction he intended. ‘In recent years, the quality of education has dropped dramatically! When will you finally act and do something about it?!?’

Admiringly, Daan’s mother's crows-eyes glistened; the eyes of Cor Fige's fate. What a guy, a real man! He works hard with his hands and comes home in time for dinner, where he first corrects his children upon entry, puts the ringleaders in their places, and then eats whatever you throw at him, talks with the mayor, and sleeps without careful hassling!

‘Mayor, can I ask you something?’

‘Of course, ma'am,’ Mohammed replied eagerly while he consciously tried with all his might to forget the camera so that this scene, and especially his part in it, looked relaxed and pleasant.

‘Do you find it normal that my husband is late for dinner every night?!’

‘Formerly,’ replied the father of Quinten, unsolicited, ‘I brought my kids up with a knowledge of the world: discipline! The woman cooks on time when her husband comes home. The prospect of their gratitude, knowing that they will always re-
member these lessons as the best in their lives, kept me going and made sure I did not cowardly hold back. Yes, it helped me to use the belt thoroughly! All the crap I hit out of these little devils! Anything lower than a ten, I slapped from of their stupid little faces! In a moderate performance, you can follow your father. With every blow I gave, I was deeply moved, imagining their gratitude when they finally were mature and decisively proud of their father. At every stripe of blood spatter, I knew for certain how, when they themselves have children, they will know why this was necessary. Honorable gratitude will be my part. I imagined a bright future. Easy? It surely wasn’t, but a father must do what he must do. Life is hard. The life of a working family is tough, but fair. They have turned out well: none of them has become a bricklayer!

Mohammed alternately looked at the grim faces of the woman and man in front of him, eagerly waiting for his redeeming answer to their pressing questions, and theatrically took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. Was bringing a camera crew such brilliant idea, after all? Elections are approaching; let’s hope this ends well. Sway on the waves of life as taught by religion, will give relief.

‘Ahem, well… how shall I put this into words? Without work and the belt...’ (he considered faking the flat Rotterdam accent, but left it at the last minute, realizing that Rotterdammers sting through it. They have, he had previously discovered, a seventh sense for hypocrisy). 'A man cannot take care of family without the righteousness of the father's belt, and the education comes down to the lady. She should be helped by her husband. Without the work of the man, a woman cannot cook dinner for the family. The family is the basis of human life. Your tasks are both of paramount importance. Appreciation is what you often lack, but luckily, the hand of God is always there for you.’

Mercifully, and by now routinely, he used the G-word.
For himself it made no difference: in his mind he heard himself speak the A-word. *Their sins are our sins.* He did not get along with unbelievers. He had tried with all his might, but showing them respect simply seemed impossible. Beads of sweat dripped from his forehead.

‘Faith is for suckers,’ laughed Quinten's father.

‘My brother has been wrongly accused of abuse,’ stammered Elenoor's mother, dazed.

‘That's a serious charge, ma'am!’ replied Mohammed. He was delighted with this turn of events; he experienced it as a liberation.

‘What, exactly, happened?’

She did not dare tell the story, but could not back down now that Daddy had asked her to do so.

‘We, my elder brother and I liked to go and swim with Elenoor at the Kralingen Lake. My husband has a job; my brother is looking for a job as a cleaner. Polishing is needed everywhere, so I pressed him at heart. He finished university courses in Youth Psychology, Masters and Postmaster, but cannot find a job, since undergraduate education is demanded. Higher education is considered dangerous, in those areas. The sun was bright and warm, and cooling off seemed an excellent idea. Delighted, we flattered our Feyenoord towels down into the grass.

'There was nothing to worry about until there was a vulgar brawl in the water! Five youngsters from twelve years or so took the inflatable boat of a little boy of about eight and kept tormenting and taunting him... they just did not stop! My brother wanted to help the boy, but I beat him to it. He stayed with Elenoor. A mother knows how to deal with such a thing, right? I thought so, too: I have experience with children. But before I knew it, I was above my knees in the water, pushed from different angles. The only thing the boy could do was growl, 'and
what do you think you're gonna do about it?' A brutal counter-question!

'It went on and on and on until he wanted to push me down and began squeezing, beating, and kicking! I braced myself and did not become immersed; I was lost in the fight! The group of boys circled around me. The audience did nothing, but my brother saw it, rushed into the water, and gave the boy who pushed me (after he did not listen to him) a corrective smacking against his cheek, out of purely self-defense and as a last resort, you see! Then the kid suddenly starts crying like a pathetic baby, calling his mother. This gave me space to help the little boy with the inflatable boat.'

‘What a sissy! An educational corrective tap,’ Quinten's father laughed scornfully, coughing unhealthily from excitement. ‘Beat them to pulp; be a man!’

Daan's mother's eager eyes sparkled with adoration.

This man would have hit hard, all right! He had given those brats a thrashing they would remember for many years! Who doubts it? No one, I tell you! A guy with spunk. Suppose his relationship explodes! I should hasten to him myself: opportunities are scarce for women and looking good is not everything. My neighbor has been looking for a man for years now. I want a good man. I want him! I will invite him and put on my summer skirt, blowing in the wind. There he will be stunned; he will want to reach under it with his solid worker's hands!

‘Go on, lady,’ ordered Mayor Mohammed Abdul kindly, knowing the TV crew was filming in close-up as he frowned thoughtfully into the lens.

‘Ok. Well, then some middle-aged woman with medium length hair and a lanky man with delicate curls rushed to me. They started to insult me loudly and rudely. 'You cannot hit a child!’ They both shouted in unison in broken Dutch. It did not
suit anybody! The woman did not stop. Whatever I argued, she repeated her accusation, maliciously threatening to call the police: 'You cannot beat a child, you cannot beat child! Do you want to fight me?! I'll call the police!' This went on and on, Daddy, right in front of me; screaming and screaming, really hysterical and very aggressive!'

‘And then?’ the camera man asked.

‘Haunted by her accomplices, we returned home, since the fun of swimming in the lake had disappeared. The little boy, that poor child, was safe and Elenoor wanted to go, as well. However, we were not home for a second and I had just put my bathing suit in the wardrobe when the police stood on the sidewalk. I let them in, glad and happy - yes, relieved to finally be able to tell my story to an authority figure; someone with the ability to take legal action. I have rarely been so upset. I have never experienced anything intimidating like this, you see!’

‘Phew, the police,’ grumbled the paver.

‘The officers did not want coffee and, even worse, threatened immediately, upon entering, to arrest my brother for child abuse! I told them our side of the story as much as possible, all in specific details and nuances, about how I long tried to talk with the boys, trying to induce them not to take away that little boy's inflatable boat, and how I asked where their mother was so I could speak to her about their behavior.

'I told how that cheeky rascal never answered and spoke only threatening words in strange slang, then pushed and kicked me, helped by his friends. The officers hardly listened and asked if my brother felt himself to be better than ordinary people who go swimming. Well, say: I could not believe it. Irritated, my brother replied affirmatively. I was not happy with that, as you can imagine. Then the police labeled him as coolly arrogant and uninterested, while I kept talking as crazy as possible to try and cancel our indictment.'
'When I tried to show them how I had been abused, showing them my bruises, no understanding or sympathy occurred! They pretended not to hear! A core function of their police work, investigate objectivity, seemed an illusion! Eventually, I told them they had better leave; that this all seemed pointless. I was desperate! During the night, I did not feel any better: no, I felt many times worse. You cannot get rid of injustice or the threat that unjustly hangs over your head! An official report, child abuse - unbelievable! And so I told my yoga teacher. She noticed how upset I felt, how threatened, and advised me to immediately make an official claim. Well, so I did.’

The mayor did not hesitate: this called for a clear statement. He winked at the lens.

‘The Rotterdam police is extremely experienced and instructed by me, ma'am. I'm sorry for you and your brother, but excessive violence like this is called child abuse. That is not allowed in the Netherlands,’ he added redundantly, remembering his childhood in Marrakech, where the hand of his father regularly had forced him into silence. ‘Audiences cannot execute their own right. We don't have a rule of law for nothing. Education is not the task of the police or school, but lies in the hands of the father of the family, a cornerstone of society,’ he said. His cheeks glowed with pride and his eyes sparkled in the camera lens.

‘But, uh…’ stammered Elenoor's mother. ‘This was not a disproportionate use of force! It was a tap on the cheek; even one of supreme necessity! My brother never hurt a fly, let alone a child!’ she sobbed, violently emotional. ‘He summoned the boy simply to stop him from beating and kicking me, but got nothing than a brutal response! They indeed molested me; look at this bruise! Do you see?! The police should help educate them: in a few years, those boys will be lost! A corrective tap was the only means remaining, in this given situation!’
‘No, no, ma'am...’ said the mayor.

‘Damn, Daddy Abdul! Take that back or I'll punch you in the face in front of TV-Rijnmond, right on your smug smile!’ shouted Quinten’s father as he slid to the edge of his chair as if, if necessary, to convert his words into action.

‘Calm down, sir, uh... quiet but... eh,’ Mohammed crawled back and held his forearm high to protect his face.

‘Daddy!?’ stammered Elenoor, who ran down stairs looking for The Spy. A voice had whispered to her that the house was being watched (which actually was for real, though no one present knew this). Only Mohammed Abdul suspected something, knowing that mayors of world cities were monitored by various intelligence agencies like the NSA and the BfV, and also by M16 and a few others. The conflict between mayors and states raged on, as everybody knew. A lot can be achieved by winning the mass media; if not everything.

Henk was looking forward to his first meeting with the mayor: he’d had only one night of sleep! He did not manage to sleep until the early morning. Then he dressed himself deliberately after enjoying a lukewarm shower. A brunch in the Euromast with Daddy Mohammed himself; wonderful! The weather also helped him: it was a bright clear blue skyline with only a few white clouds gliding past like cotton candy. Everything seemed to fall on the good side for now addressing those trade options!

Mister Abdul, as he did every day, rose before dawn, prayed, and then ritually drank fresh mint tea, showered, and dressed himself in a sober three-piece suit with a tie to look as unobtrusive as possible. It was a hard to find a tie. Everything he tied around his thick neck stood out and brightly illuminated his charisma. Reluctantly, he took his sunglasses, the prescription of which his spin-doctor was really pleased with. A tough image is what we
need, since elections were close; overcoming partisan bias was
decisive. A black eye indicated, wrongly or not, a certain bias.
Where there's smoke, there's fire, as every Dutchman knows.
This man was notorious, but his support is substantial, as ex-
pressed by his spin-doctor.

With the sun inevitably flickering through the panoramic win-
dow, Henk was still able to observe the different shades of
Mohammed's damaged eye. Information is power. Henk had
understood everything. But let me focus on my goal, he thought.

And so he energetically spoke a waterfall of words; a speech
that knew no end in the history of speeches, streaming during a
brunch and starting with small talk such as the anecdote about
Slatan, the famous footballer, and his stunning and much older
girlfriend. 'Yeah, haha, let the guy slide,' joked Henk, as jolly as
in his most charming days of business deals and top entertain-
ment. 'That guy does what he pleases, all right! A true bohemian!
That brings me to artists; creative people and those who make
the world easier to live in. A better place. You think so too, do
you, Daddy Abdul?! Julia, my lovely daughter who is eighteen
years young, is doing very well. The interest in her art is increa-
sing. You're going to realize this soon. I explained to her how
handling the press goes with the job.

'You should do it yourself,' I told my girl. But a father and
businessman is always thinking through such matters; he thinks
way beyond the people on the workforce. Nothing against them,
though. They blame me for everything – my skin is thick like a
hippopotamus – but never mind that I do not have an exce-
tional helicopter view. Even my enemies freely admit this. That's
how it works, and it only gets worse. Meanwhile, I have devel-
oped such broad understanding that I am able to help you.

Let's walk a bit, around the dome, say, just for convenience.
This view is worth gold! Three hundred sixty degrees of our
beautiful port city; the most beautiful on the globe! What else do you want? Meanwhile, however, rack renters thrive and run rampant, our demented elderly are being treated like dirt, and our youth fight, as in the survival of the fittest animals, for a simple internship.'

Mohammed Abdul wanted to grab his sore eye and scratch it to expel the itch, but kept focused. Itching means healing and that everything will work out fine, but the direction of this conversation, turned one hundred eighty degrees, pleased him to no end! He had expected action, something concrete, from this businessman. Is this the decisive, opportunistic entrepreneur with which we persuade the Russians, through the familiar devious political detour, to invest in our harbor? There is no progress in this matter! Who has not been touched for prayer, commits a sin.

Just in time – the mayor wanted to make an abrupt, unsatisfying end to things – Henk started to talk in the right direction. 'Just imagine,' he spoke enthusiastically, pointing out the districts, 'our harbor areas and the steady Maas River, all working again like in the old days, using teams of substantial size and workloads! No faint projects, but the real thing! All this can come onto your account, Mohammed Abdul. So, let us immediately start with a number of teams. This transformation in the far too bureaucratic healthcare business comes first, for example, followed by the assembly and logistics of a Fairtrade phone. Forget the state: they are doomed and we all know it. The cities have to do it! All those drivers on a square millimeter just implies friction and loss of energy. No, together we will create a city-state: a city republic, independent of the Royal Family! Henkie will take care of it; no worries mate!'
The ultimate time to go through and properly address it all had been revealed in the form of a windfall: my appointment with a charlatan like Mohammed Abdul. The life of an accomplished businessman does not only consist of bluff. We are not poker players, folks.

A true businessman masters all noble mind sports.

To put decisive marks on the chessboard, I first had to know how the spying of my father's empire was going.

‘We can go through the status!’ I commanded.

‘My agenda is unfortunately booked full - Mr. van Wijnen-Swarttouw, it is; am I right?’ she replied in her fragile voice, which J. F. Kennedy would have transformed into a lapdog. 'Pom-di-pom; Oh... let's see, yes, next Saturday it can happen,’ she said casually, and hung up after saying: ‘We will meet there, and then... Arrivederci.’

The tablet stood neatly angled into its container. After a few laps, I touched the screensaver and read the amount stated.

'Holy ships,” I cried, upset. 'Halloooo! This is not normal, dude! Do you think this fair?!”

‘Shall I come to rebuild your face?’ said the lady spokesman.

Presumably, she's the executive secretary of the leader of Edwin's motorcycle gang: that Jerommeke with bandages, a gay-like leather jacket, and childish tattoos. On a women, all tattoos look gorgeous, though. The bill that the motorcycle gang had dared to send was unprecedented: really ridiculously high. Stay calm, I instructed myself, but it did not help me. I grabbed my pill box in vain. ‘Damn! What now?’ Metaphorically, I ended
that red image. However, I did not stop there and scolded, completely loose, as if I heard my father holding forth with his firm, malicious-sounding voice of yesteryear. Yes, it seemed that exactly the same intonation and word-structure had left my mouth, touched and compelled to emit waves full of pent-up frustration, anger, and, in retrospect, often unjustified feelings of injustice. The strange thing was that I heard myself scolding like a second personality; as a body outside me. The deluge continued. I could not let it go or stop, but meanwhile the frustration grew on me that this had happened; that this form of verbal aggression was apparently engraved in my brain. However, this strengthened my diatribe and my evil waterfall of words rather than destroying it, probably because it loosened another form of irritation: namely, the knowledge that I could not change my past environment and the influence it still had. Powerlessness generally leads to aggression, followed by depression or remorse, and turns, in the final stage (if all goes well), into acceptance. Then absolute silence follows. All this happened rather rapidly, noticed by my highly trained mentality. I slumped back against the wall. The surprise caught me. I mean, I had not expected anything like this low level scam kind of stuff from that motorcycle gang! Are they still into 'a man's word is a man's word and no further crap,' or not? The gang leader, still hanging on the line, nicely offered his apologies. Apparently, I had inadequately moved the red icon with my index finger. Suddenly, he mastered the neat Dutch language like no other! His mistress had made an unfortunate mistake in their administration. Yeah, right!

Full of disbelief, I walked into our garden where I blithely inspected Willem's bonsai trees. They looked good, all right. The influence of a father on his son or daughter is great, but how about the influence of a child on a father? Where I had put this newspaper article? Walking fast, I dashed inside, into my office.
Ah, here it is! The apple of Ratko Mladic's eye, his lovely daughter Ana, had committed suicide during a study after which she realized how her father truly acted. After she understood how the outside world assessed her father, she could not continue living. When he lost his daughter tragically (he condemned it as being staged by his opponent’s suicide), an unstoppable aggression took possession of Ratko Mladic. Why did I think of my father? Was I prompted by the similarity of his laughter and profound glance? How far could I involve myself in this situation? What distorted image did this beautiful Ana, 22 years, have about her father, which was built up in early childhood! Did I affect my father, and did he then slip into dubious moral levels much like Ana's suicide had caused her father's aggression?

Had Julia, without wanting or even knowing it, done the same towards me? No way: I do not need to feel responsible for the behavior of my father and Julia does not need to feel responsible for mine. In breaking the circle of eternal recurrence, give the centrifugal movement a push so that repetition will manifest itself differently. Leverage the will to seize power! Soon Julia will be so proud.

I heard shuffling and tinkering with glasses and Tatjana wished me a nice weekend. I listened until I fell asleep and dreamed, satisfied, in a pearlescent designer chair situated in the center of the living room. At the beginning of the night, I woke up. After showering, I started the t&t application purely and simply to zoom onto Julia’s whereabouts. With a satisfied smile, I stared at the pale green dot in the anthracite plane. It was as if my lovely daughter looked me deep in the eyes, and although I fully realized that lost memories which are forcefully retrieved do not have the same intention and do not have the same essence as reminders that spontaneously emerge through involuntary asso-
ciation, I could not fail to follow her, when suddenly a flashing
don came close to my girl.

'Get out,' I cried in vain! Nervous, I zoomed in with a thumb
and forefinger's migratory movement so that this space around
the icon became big enough to click it without touching another
image. Dexterity is required; it is a matter of not losing details. I
consciously clicked on the thumbnail image and the identity of
the devil revealed itself. Yes, the spy software flawlessly showed
his name: it was... my father! What was Grandpa doing this close
to Julia?!

With intolerable thoughts, I paced the living room along
Jan’s red and white mushroom sofa and bumped clumsily into
our republic blue one. Flashbacks shot in and out of my mind
about how he, just ten years ago, had so lovingly touched Julia.
Lightly and discreetly he'd touched her shoulder, his greedy fin-
gers sliding down her back while he broadly sat, smiling, telling
one of his nonsensical anecdotes for young girls and boys (yes
folks, I knew all about it). Julia had just, naive as a lovable young
child is, jumped next to him on the sofa, overjoyed to be al-
lowed to stay up late.

Nobody seemed to notice anything when she pushed back
and placed her innocent little head upon his insatiable bosom!
During our conversation, as Monique and my mother listened
intently to his bland talk, he began coolly caressing her beautiful
golden blond hair using prudent and reckless movements, cas-
ually and naturally as if it was HIS daughter instead of mine! This
he tried to hold on to until my patience dried out; until I saw no
choice but to lift Julia against her will and wishes and bring her
upstairs.

Despite firm opposition, I put her in bed. Her willpower was
unprecedented. In this nightmare, I can see her deep, golden
blond hair fluttering wildly, her frail body ferociously resisting,
so what could I do but tighten my grip on her thin arms and ex-

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hort her to remain calm? It was something that succeeded only after forty minutes of humming a song and doing some little girl reading out of her favorite book. I sang her to sleep, and though it took a while, I managed, thank God!

Downstairs, I was ignored by Monique, who fixed her gaze on me anxiously, yes, but forced by my mother, she turned to small talk, some trifle about an anecdote about her tennis-playing girlfriend. Delicately, I acted like I did not realize how my necessary intervention was unanimously disapproved of. Monique and my mother worried about Julia's welfare for absolutely the wrong reasons! It was a nonsensical discussion better avoided. Should I confront him and be adamant in front of my mother; order him to take his claws off my daughter?! I did not want to drive things this far. I wanted to keep the peace and conceded everything, like I had done my entire childhood, the classic mistake of softness! Quinten is right: without corrective smacking by parents, we are lost!

With trembling fingers, my forearm moving uncontrollably, I managed to touch the slider to the point where the drawing of the map of Rotterdam clearly indicated, in a two-dimensional plane, that their position was still somewhere on the Maas River. Had he lured her with his gaudy speedboat, that excessive colossus of more than seven tons of euros, popular among Royal Families and the Russian jetset? My arm began to tremble. There I stood, rooted to the ground and helpless like a sailor without a work assignment - as a captain, yes; but mostly as a human desperately trying to pull himself together. The thought that maybe it was ok; maybe it's all explainable, hardly soothed my nerves but helped just enough to so I could click on the information button. They floated around in the wet ball!

Did the old fellow visit her exhibition?! Did he abuse this opportunity to hear from her about the precarious relationship
with her father, a pressurized relationship, thereby profiling himself as an alternative? What did he want to get out of her no longer naive mouth with which she began to conquer the world? Put him in his place, Julia! How wonderful that would be! She knows the ropes.

Suddenly, a scientific magazine springs to mind: attraction within an identical gene pool is called incest only if forward handled: a new area to investigate. Surprising evidence was found in cases resulting from unruly practices, providing insight about this phenomenon. A meta-analysis from the spy software database might help - yes, Professor van Splunteren might soon confirm this hypothesis. Julia could not help it; it was completely understandable how she fell for her daddy’s charms. It explains our shared shower, too!

Tense, I jumped into the Maserati and drove off, using the Formula One button, into the Witte de Withstreet where I could barely dodge a lady wildly overhanging on a touring bike before stumbling upon the main dike and turning right, parallel along the Leuvehaven and Harbor Museum (which Rotterdam may finance themselves, said the latest, upstart Amsterdam minister of culture). With difficulty and with trembling hands, I put my phone in the holder, the t&t screen in sight. At the crossroads, next to the hotel Inntel, I braked in front of the traffic light. I squeezed my steering wheel hard, and its soft kangaroo leather collapsed. I looked again at the dashboard: they moved, and the wet ball drifted away! Instead of going via the Golden Cock of former mayor Pepper, I could not help but ride over the Willemsbridge. I did not want to arrive too late! Blazing my gaze into my rearview mirror, I crashed along with a roaring engine, backwards, and veered on the left track, where I glanced at the monitor on the dashboard and saw them heading slowly under the Nassau bridge, sliding into Nassau Harbor.
Grimly, I drove at top speed across the Willem Bridge, close to the high-level concrete edges and at the same breakneck speed (I got a red traffic light wave and was forced to make some violation) onto the North Island. I waited in Jalonstraat. The semi-transparent hulk floated, inert, in the narrow harbor. Suddenly, the question hit me: Was it wise to expose myself like this? I would do better to restrain myself, because right now, we worked together (although indirectly) on improving the port activities through these S.A.F. projects, and I risked letting her drift away from me again like a loose piece of wood into that cobalt blue ocean distance, where waves might drag her into an endless void; an infinite vortex! My little girl will feel abandoned! If I snatched them, she might feel betrayed by her dad.

And so I parked my car deliberately far away, at the Eco where the children play, and sprinted back to the scene of the crime. As I staged this pursuit, I was thinking, while lying on my stomach and peering between the rhododendrons, not to let the wet ball out of my sight. Every fiber in my body cried to call Julia and stop this encounter! I ground one row of teeth onto the other, put my fingers in the grass, squeezed myself into the ground and banged my forehead against the clay soil, doing everything so as not to interfere! Just when I no longer resisted, I heard splashing water on the Maas River. At a wide bend the taxi sprayed under the Nassau Bridge, no doubt returning to the old man.

Thank God I had maintained my coolness!

He helped her in a charming way over the railing of the taxi. One hand held her youthful hip supportively and quite naturally, all this done by someone from the same gene pool! Cautiously, they left the inner harbor and accelerated after passing the bridge.

Had she lured him into a trap? Taking this possibility seriously after some consideration was not that crazy: she had become
strong and free. 'Give her credit,' Johanna had advised. 'Keep your distance and keep quiet,' suggested Stürmer. But one subdued voice managed to better articulate and talked without raising his voice: 'You want to know what they do together, if it is the last thing you ever do!'

Studying the dot on the dashboard for a while as I drove into the evening light onto that furiously-looking Willemsbridge, I gambled they had sailed further than Hotel New York. I skipped the Harp Bridge. Through this focused attention in which the will is at its strongest, you can see everything intensively: the ambient sounds and smell of the deep golden dashboard I felt strongly, while I was busy with driving, and meanwhile followed the fiercely sailing taxi on the Maas, all sensory perceptions merged into the present as surviving entities. They acted as the essence of life where death was insignificant: that one moment in which truth was known. In ultimate focus, vital memories came forward as if available even when the future was not a logical consequence but merely an impression or an image that unfolded as a magnificent spectacle on which I was both the central point in space and the infinitely tiny, insignificant speck too small to observe.

This crucial moment makes you feel totally hopeless, since you realize that your life and all the efforts you made earlier were pointless. Plenty of space and light might free you from this endless tunnel. It all seemed rather unlikely, though. Although I was thrown by something that felt like hope for better times, back into the middle of the tunnel tube, at the very last moment, a new possibility showed itself. The dashboard was flashing and on the handset's digital phone appeared her name in bright green letters: Julia!

‘How is this possible?’ I stammered. ‘What excellent timing!’

‘Hi, Dad, how are you?’

‘Hahaha - good, girl! And you, our little rascal?’
‘Dad, act normal, will you! I'm not a kid anymore. Are you coming to this Deltahotel? We have a meeting about our family business. It is no longer ok this way, Dad!’

‘Oh... if you want... if you want me to come, then I'll do it, Julia!’ was all I could utter.

She ended with something sweet, but I heard its impact; that worrisome intonation of her mother zooming in the background like a sad Sunday morning in February, when strong wind gusts were not accompanied by frozen bright blue but by dreary, unimaginative gray rain. The music replaced her frail voice, lost in the air where, as I saw in my rearview mirror, greenish clouds packed together. Soon the rain would clatter literally harder than it had done in ages. But how I could I have ever foreseen what to do about it?
Child's Play

_Without support from Lavinia, I would have never, ever made it, _Julia thought dramatically when she left the water taxi and strolled along the quay towards the Deltahotel. She inhaled the fresh air and turned around, waving to the driver: a bold man with heart; a man who, though he traveled by water, stood with both feet firmly on the ground, in reality of life.

A tear crept down her cheek: outwardly he looked much like her father. The taxi driver squirted away through the waves of the Maas River with a brief nod of his chin and a smile, indicating that he had seen her, lacking the opportunity to exuberantly wave back. There was work to be done.

_Luckily, we managed to bring everyone together at a gathering about the uncertain future of our family business,_ her thoughts went on. Will El Bachir ask for my hand? If something is a great opportunity, this is the time! Tonight is his chance - after the meeting, or tomorrow, in the early morning light. After our second night. Lavinia hopes with me. After tonight, I can finally step out of the maelstrom of that swirling river; the unsustainable influence of Papa! _That would be great!_ I cannot rejoice in anything. Secretly, though, I do it anyway. This is not crazy: according to my psychiatrist, I made more than sufficient attempts to restore our relationship. I did my best, but unfortunately, I only succeeded in life by keeping him away much like when you remove a classmate from your social connections - the one you once loved, but who has become your stalker; a boy you had to clear from your daily life just to survive. I am afraid it hurts too much. In spite of everything, it’s tough to bring the bad news. The loneliness and suffering I will deal with will be reflected in my art work; they
will have significant impact and influence on society. Or not, or the opposite, depending on how it is written in the stars.

Artists must separate themselves from the masses like a Buddhist monk must concentrate on work and investigate the deeper feelings of inner life, diving into the depths... who suggested this, earlier on? I discussed all profound insights with Lavinia. They help me perfectly; they have prepared me... and now I own it; I can smash my own way. There is a thin line between whistleblowing, tattling and doing my best for all. Countless nights, I lay awake, worrying about how to achieve all this. Eventually you stand alone. As much as we turn away from all power, away from our destiny by massively uniting ourselves, by immersing ourselves in the heat, by losing ourselves in the convenience of the masses – a mass is stronger than the individual – we cannot escape it. And that's just fine. We artists realize it belongs to our core fate: confront us with impermanence and let people needlessly hide behind false security of the crowds in their vain hopes that this will make them immortal. Stop this self-denial and embrace your character: that's what we all should do! Julia wanted to forgive her father. She hoped he would accept his fate as a volitional act; as an option to his fate, as if it were his free will. Meanwhile, she was seated on the elongated bar overlooking the many lights across the river, happy and proud that her father could muster the courage to be present (although it would surely become a painful exercise). El Bachir approached quietly from behind the polished, glossy teak oil ship rudder which was flaunted as entertainment and an appropriate hotel decoration. She had not heard him, but only spotted his silhouette in the reflection of that huge windowpane and spontaneously yelled with joy. She closed her eyes, put her slender arms around El Bachir's neck, and kissed his mouth. At least, she did so in the rich fantasy that she inherited. In reality, it proved to be no less than Cor Figee!
‘Hi,’ he shouted in a playful, jolly tone with which he vainly tried to conceal his embarrassment and shyness.

Yet another unsuccessful joke, it was all too much for him. *Why does everything I undertake end up like this?* he moaned dejectedly. In her eyes, he could almost touch the horror. ‘Sorry, I tried to bring some relaxation now that your friend is safe and sound, locked up by the police, so to speak. It makes me mad... If I get that officer in my hands, I will crush...’

‘What! How did that happen?’ exclaimed Julia as she tumbled from the stool, scrambled to her feet, and, shocked, swept her mouth clean with her forearm. ‘Why, he's stuck on what grounds?!’

‘Vendetta; honor killings! At least indirectly. I mean... how should I explain this?’

'Give it your best shot!'

'I am trying,’ he sighed.

'Oh, okay. All right, go on then!

‘Yeah, uhm... well, we were called for an investigation into an attack. I'd been stabbed. Nothing to worry about,’ he said, to reassure his boss' eighteen-year-old daughter. ‘The magistrate was originally a guest worker. How do I tell the... uhm... ah, wait... you can talk to El Bachir, his mother: she knows! How are you doing yourself, by the way?’ asked Cor Figee casually, in the vain hope that this would bring some relaxation. Cor suddenly felt appallingly thirsty. ‘A drink would help! Those Russians made the boldest demands so suddenly!’ he explained to nobody but himself. ‘I must dissolve it; prevent Mister van Wijnen-Swarttouw from signing and agreeing! The biggest mistakes are the easiest to make!’

His fate had heard, through the grapevine, that he'd conducted in-depth interviews with a world-class lady of foreign origin. He faced the most difficult decision in the private sphere ever:
yes, he was standing at some crossroads, all right, as Englishmen put it so aptly, and Cor Figue was not alone in this.

Multiple affairs were nearing their ends and dropped to a necessary, inevitable climax.

Henk's father was still having a discussion with a bald man Cor Figue saw them sitting at the Patrijsbar. He knew that bald businessman from before, but from where, and when? A cigar box on the table slid in his direction. Eagerly, Henk's father shrugged one out of the box, sniffed it properly, mastering the cigar along steadily under his nose before crossing out, and lit it, laughing aloud. Had he just presented the old Van Wijnen-Swarttouw with one of our cigars?! Those guys will stay busy for a while! Where is Lavinia, and why did she leave? Cor Figue nervously ordered himself a gin.

Meanwhile, after passing the dilapidated office of Unilever, according to Henk, no other option remained than to cross the open lawn, with the real danger to be seen by both the inhabitants of the glass façades' gracious apartments and, a bit more dangerous even, from the hotel rooms or through the windows of the office-like rooms for meetings and parties on the west side of the Deltahotel. From the bushes adjacent to the parking lot where indeed some well-known cars stopped, his opportunistic bold look dropped. How could it be otherwise, as a born businessman standing at the open door of the catering guys?

As it might very well be his best option for slipping inside without being detected, Henk decided not to let himself be distracted by a pair of cute bunnies who, skittish, dived into their underground holes at his feet, but rather determined to keep focusing on this employee entrance, waiting for the right moment to enter the hotel building unnoticed. Through bad timing, unknowingly already having made an assessment of the position observed when the cyclist who, from the corner of his eye, ap-
proached when he'd decided earlier to cross this unusual road, Henk assessed the man.

He was a man in his late thirties, tall and strong and relaxed - yes, really a laid-back guy. He had misinterpreted his speed, causing a hassle to reach his goal without a collision until he, still in this fraction of a second, realized that he subsequently was driving faster than expected. He appeared seemingly from nowhere! Henk began to seek a reason for its incredible speed, spotting the battery built into its carrier. Ah; a cheater, this cyclist! He then slipped handily along the stacked laundry inside the basement stairs and straight into the elevator which, diagonally situated behind the beautiful wooden hull's gleaming counter, opened before him as if it was destined to maneuver, unseen, into the suite of the actress.

Yet, three options remained: go to her suite, meet her in room 33 as usual, or meet her in another room.

Previously never fearful of making a choice, Henk had to overcome reasonable doubt. Room 33 would mean that the lady behind the reception desk would be aware of them, a real danger this time, and any other area would be difficult or even impossible to shut down unseen. This left him with basically no other option than to enter her suite. What was he afraid of? Her silk shirt of shiny black diamonds, pulled smoothly over her fragile head and covering her naked body like a glove barely registered. Nervously, he poured her a glass of water. During the next seconds, possibly an even smoother fabric slid over the silk slip dress, cream this time; after which she took her place opposite him.

‘Have you watched the movie?’
'No, not yet.'
‘Oh, well, it succeeded. Xuxa is...’
‘Something urgent came up! There is no time to lose! Julia has invited me for a family gathering. It will be held downstairs
in the dining room. It's been arranged to address my future and that of the entire family business, which are actually the same thing! I want you to go and listen to what they discuss. Wait. I'll text Julia that I will have to be excused, this time around.’

‘Do you want recordings, or shall I try to remember?’

‘The latter is sufficient.’

‘Will you wait here for me?’

A macabre smile from ear-to-ear marked his twisted clown face.

‘That is a magnificent idea; great!’

After the actress left the room, Henk turned on the TV simply by using an old-fashioned remote control device. There was not much to be seen. He viewed the 24-hour race of Le Mans. On the other channel they played ladies' tennis. There he sat, Henk van Wijnen-Swarttouw, without a tablet, a notebook, a desktop computer, and without a stack of files to work on; with no possibility of picking up something meaningful. At best, he would be able to use his advanced phone or search her suite for pen and paper. Both options he decided to ignore. Falling back on the spacious double bed, his hands folded under his neck, he let his shoes clatter onto the floor, one after the other. The quietness suited him. She had decorated the simple room cozier than anticipated. Where it came from was a mystery, but he felt at home: it was their very own hideaway, friendlier, less grand and stately, and even less stormproof, but warmer because of that famous women’s touch.

When he awoke from a dry throat, it was dark; the lighting of the TV helped to orient him. Dazed, he stared at the digital clock while taking a sip of water. It was 22:35 am. When would she come back and report on it all? On the side table wobbled his phone. He opened his agenda item and read the flickering message aloud: ‘ten minutes till the meeting in Hotel in New York!’

‘Damn, forgot it all along,’ he exclaimed aloud.
Flying, he pulled his shoes on and clapped his hands, but nothing happened, leaving him no choice but to click off the TV using the remote. He pulled the door shut behind him, ran into the hall, slid his phone in his pocket, and took the stairs – it seemed safer to avoid the elevator – towards the catering outlet. He slipped between the same bushes and ran across Unilever building’s lawn where his car was flashing, impatiently waiting for a sign. The phone he placed in the container, after which he drove to his destination: Manhattan at the Maas River; that place where the vertical city of Rem Koolhaas was baptized to draw world architectural attention.

Haha; of course it was in vain. To be sure, that bold architect had built a glass of Cheese in the city center, as well, but winning from the Puntzak was impossible. The departing visitors were at this time a majority, so Henk did not have to search: there she was, amused, conversing with some young handsome waiter gifted with a mischievous red-haired head and cheeks.

‘How did it go?’ Henk asked cheekily without interrupting. ‘What is the family up to? Tell me!’

‘Oh... that ... it went very well,’ she replied rather indifferently, after which she turned her full attention and greedy lips back to the young man, pulling his gaudy bow tie.

The shining black ends dangled loosely in front of his milk-white shirt. She ran her fingers along it, sliding them down, and looked deep into his dazzling eyes. Did she sometimes drink too much?!

The young man seemed uneasy and felt burdened by Henk's struggle. Yet, he tried to estimate what his chances were of winning the chess game and bringing home the jackpot. What does this toddler think?!

Henk never left her side, and moved closer. She would not let go of the waiter without a fight, and continued to hang onto his bow tie. He tried to get her fingers away without hurting her;
oh, that poor boy! He kept trying gently, smiling sheepishly, his brow furrowed clumsy and his faithful dog eyes asking desperately for help, panicking: she did not let go! The clamor of people around him pointed to his awkwardness in this difficult situation. Henk freed him by poking the actress in her appetizing side, after which she deliberately whipped her long blonde hair in his face by rotating around fast, jumping from her barstool. 'Shall we go?' she asked.

Henk felt alive again when, moments later, high waves splashed along the bow; splashes which caused dark spots on her cream-colored dress which blew tirelessly elegant in the changing winds. The view over the Maas River revived into an exciting spectacle with loading and unloading activities on the cargo ships and around the docks and with concrete slabs of modern metal and cast iron or fabricated cranes, efficiently prepared in all shapes and sizes, squeaking with sounds of the heavy material pulling and pushing.

'Aren’t you curious about my findings?' she stated loud enough to drown out the sound of the engine.

‘Huh? Of that family reunion... Yes! Tell me now!’

‘Tomorrow morning at breakfast, provided you come over and sleep with me tonight.’

This was music to Henk's ears, although he felt physical pain for containing his curiosity. Pleased, he spied the port nearby, hiding his spontaneous laughter without success. He was convinced that she had noticed when she mischievously turned her head the other way, surrounded by crashing waves that lept wildly, splashing. The offshoot of a tropical hurricane caused the spectacle. Just like Henk, she enjoyed the view, while their lovemaking intensified to become much more than room 33 assignments. That was just child's play; almost a thing of the past! That Lilliputian psychiatrist was not always wrong: self-mockery can indeed be healthy, sometimes!
Considering the circumstances, it was difficult to talk. There was nothing for him to do but to wait patiently. She had made her suite cozy, all right; like a woman who wants more than a temporary stay in luxury hotels. What was she up to? Had those stolen paintings hung in her suite, the picture would have been complete: he would have liked to live with her, then.

Silver Maas waves blew over the railing of the water taxi.

The actress was soaking wet by now, but what did it matter?

Just when Henk completely relaxed, he felt a well-known vibration in his pocket as Jules Didden, unnoticed, took a series of photos from the other side of the river. He'd tried to catch this greasy melted silver; this particular substance, for so long. Maybe he finally would do so, today? By the next wave, he tumbled over the oar. A miracle saved his rolleiflex, protected by the brown leather case which was lying on the seat plate. He rowed steadily, optimistically humming and enjoying the elements, intensely enjoying the streaming water splashing in his face until he, with more luck then wisdom, reached his abandoned shed where, after unloading the plastic-wrapped waste wood, he wanted to test his new burner tonight.
Taking the Matter Into Your Own Hands

The vibration undeniably indicated ‘a message’, so I raised my hand flat towards her like a stop sign. Her chin flew in the air. In a brave, pathetic attempt to pretend she was looking down on me, she turned further away and shuffled haughtily to the rear deck, where she leaned on the railing with both hands, her hair wildly blowing. I opened Jan's message. What did he say? Without reading glasses, I could not read his message. He apparently used a small font, I remembered jokingly when I accidentally zoomed in, as I had done with the t&x application, with a thumb and forefinger's sliding movement. There it stood: clearly a message about the essence of the actress. Apparently, he had considered it necessary to subject her to further investigation, and as it turned out, she was not only a top actress; no, she turned out to be an ordinary call girl! One of Romanian origins, in reality answering to the name Lavinia!

Everything we had experienced passed by me in a flash. I was not sure whether I was mad at her or at myself. Wait a minute; it was she who had lied to me, not the other way around! How could I ever take her into my confidence after something low like this?! It's all about confidence: in business as well as in private, we must trust each other; otherwise we will not get anywhere. How can you easily find out whether you can trust someone? By trusting - everybody knows that!

Just as I thought there was more going on between us, this trust, however, was brutally embarrassed. Suddenly it dawned on me. Aha, a vulgar call girl instead of a top actress! These gullible men had seen her all this time as some Russian James Bond girl with Dutch roots, strong and proud of her acting, while she, in
reality, proved to be a low-level hooker! Was it all only game
play after all? Had she taken our agreements literally like sand-
wiches; as her icing on the cake or, maybe better understood, as
her only way of getting some decent food?

I began to feel guilty: I had no appetite for her! I could barely
ignore a spontaneous impulse to throw her overboard, after
which I waited to denounce this unmasking until the right time
occurred to unravel it all. Not to react means abeyance. Without
going into details, I was not welcome in her personal suite any-
more, which caused me to take take my place a little later than
usual at my position in room 33, wobbling impatiently.

And more remarkably: I was blindfolded!

Apparently, Julia had conceived something in her latest per-
formance act; something I did not know about. Maybe she
wanted to deal with the blindness of the crowd or the man in
the masses? Did women seize another kind of power? Does
Julia want a different kind of tilt?! Was this a revolution that
went beyond what I had sensed in my naivety - that is, on which
I had placed my hopes at an earlier stage; but by the time it actu-
ally took place, had frightened the hell out of me!?

Everything, and I mean, really, everything, I wanted to give
away to my lovely daughter! Did she shamed my trust as this top
actress had done? The first thing that came to mind was to send
Professor van Splunteren a detailed letter; an epistle in which I
proposed to him to introduce, as soon as possible, a decent up-
date of his app, version 2.0, in which I, unnoticed, could trigger
an alarm from any blindfolded position. I mean, something like
that should be possible right? What else?

Yes, and of course there would be an optional mechanism by
which women could be checked for their work as call girl, both
now and in the past: two essential features lacking from his tun-
nel vision software's full package deal! These useful thoughts
went through my master mind, when I heard music that sound-
What was this a Beethoven symphony? That song from a movie about slave drivers forced the former dentist and bounty hunter to contemplation, but he could not control himself and he could not reconcile with the situation afterwards, fueled by this emotional music, a chord activated.

As crazy as that might sound, I felt exactly like this, wiggling helplessly on my seat in room 33. Timeless tones were full of dark draft, implying profound thoughts - so much I felt - but unfortunately, nothing else came to my mind... the only thing I could think of was my faithful BMW5i and its wonderful handling while driving fast around a corner; a sophisticated piece of technical ingenuity moments later followed by my thunder-green Maserati with squealing tires tearing into turn, and my Ferrari Red Aston Martin, which I usually left in the garage.

Wait: could I possibly do something with this knowledge? I had tried it before; if anyone in the harbor made an effort towards improved technology and innovative ideas, it was me, folks. What had I missed?

While Beethoven's melodic and profound harp tones put me into trance, a strange kind of vaguely known drunkenness bubbled up; but still the nagging question haunted me: will women take over?!

Julia apparently colluded with this tacky yet gorgeous working girl from Cluj-Napoca! What did I miss? I was like a skipper on one of the largest tankers in the world who does not notice the little row boat that blows a gaping hole in the hull with a stick of dynamite! Our cruise along the South American coastline with the Blue Magical had been how long ago? Had Xuxa hired this call girl and persuaded Julia to cooperate, or the other way around? Was this the reason my lovely daughter exhibited that rigorous attitude, similar to that of a freedom fighter like Tanja Niemeijer? The braided rope was tied around my wrists. I
should have intervened when the opportunity arose. I should have intervened when it was still possible!

The fear of domination of women over men's affairs, one of the main themes within the S.A.F. roadmap, was the reason I had hesitated to give her carte blanche as the charismatic new leader of the tilt we wanted to achieve; but because it is your daughter, you do it - you let things loose and wait to see what is going to happen. Well, here I sit, the silly caretaker and benefactor, the saint, beaten and weak, slumped in front of our gallery window waiting to see it. Somehow, they felt the need to do a live performance. Somehow, I wanted this to happen - somewhere deep down, this was my fervent wish, I guess.

Unforeseen, however, and downright painful, was that I was forced to disclose and confirm something Julia had discovered: my double accounting in the curved Banana Ltd., held parallel to the squeezed Lemon Ltd. as a staff position in the tree of my holding. Safely high and dry it had hung; at least until this miserable moment of exposure! How did she find out? How could I have foreseen that her Moroccan boyfriend had an MBA degree and was working for an accounting firm hired by us in the Caribbean, but who in reality served as some kind of double agent for Julia's grandfather?! You can hardly examine everyone with spy software: I do not want to live in a world like that!

No, I had nobly and with integrity confined the main suspects only. Confidence: that's what counts. Trust in your fellow man. Meanwhile, I watched that art film, defeated and dressed in avant-garde style, where the protagonist, a blindfolded actor who looked suspiciously like me, was forced by Julia to admit that he had stolen paintings from his own living room, thereby covering up the stolen content of his hermitage. Suddenly, a familiar voice spoke.
‘Your daughter has got you. This is beyond redemption, Henk.’

‘You'll be content with it?’

'I can help you. Let's talk,' he stated coolly. This haughty tone shot straight to my marrow. We drove after each other and climbed the Euromast. That is to say, we took the elevator on which my father talked about how he had gained everything, how he had seen it grow, how the laws of economics, government relations, and doing business mingled together (as if I did not know!), and how he and his accomplices had far more than half of the port of Rotterdam in possession. They thought seriously of expanding.

‘Come and join us! We will take your holding, though it's not worth much. I can help with a friendly price - let's arrange a price you can get away with. That is, after your release from prison.’

‘You're assuming I'm going on a long, free vacation?’

‘That seems inevitable.’

‘Is that what you mean by helping? Me, living miserably as rentier while you work on?! Never!’

'The Justice department has a strong case,’ intoned my father, surprisingly cool-headed and sensible. ‘If all goes well, you will come out soon enough, and we can celebrate with a family gathering. Just try to imagine! I will then introduce you to our port business as my lost son. Think of your family; of Julia! Let’s see, maybe you can run a branch later on. I have discussed this with Monique and the other members. Why do you think I'm proposing such a great offer? Your case is worth nothing! Everyone in the family is happy that I am willing to do this, despite everything; despite your attempt to destroy me. You remain my son. Do it for them, and do it for your daughter, Julia! I'm sure you'll forgive her in your heart. She means well. Take my offer!’
‘Help?! You call this help? You want to take over my empire for nothing!’

‘Be glad I have something to give. You wanted to fight. That’s your right. Somehow, I’m proud of your perseverance; do you know that? Do you realize it? The only thing is, I have won. That’s how it goes. Sell your business to your father while you can; soon everything will be in the hands of those trustee jackals. We will talk about taking your business after that, too; but for a fraction of its value. And it is risky; you know this like no other. Think of Julia!’

The guts he obtained speaking this way: unbelievable! 'Think of your daughter,' he’d said coolly!

Brooding, I stared like a lost wanderer. Practice makes perfect.

And so it happened: I played the defeated, ultimate loser like the best role in my life until we signed the deal of a lousy three million for my collapsed empire on a piece of paper borrowed from the bartender and written with a 95-cent ballpoint pen. Henk does not let himself be trifled with.

*

I will not reveal to you immediately, dear reader, how all this has only been intended, on my part, to get out of malaise; but you will have to understand that I did not let myself be fooled by my father, since I inherited his cunning. It is ingrained in my brain structure like an old-fashioned ship’s banquet, so to speak. The relief; the euphoria when such an intensely prepared case leads to anticipated success, I can describe with no pen, digital nor ink. How great that is! Party, party and another party - I couldn’t think of anything else and organized a spontaneous one with Julia and her accountant boyfriend. I’d recognized their morbid amorousness reluctantly, for a long time already, and invited
them to my unhaughty sailboat, where we transited spontaneously through the harbor, opening the cold three-liter champagne bottle – hard to pop open - while the sun settled behind the refineries to be replaced by thousands of professional light balls that light up along our not-too-bustling Maas shores.

A copy of the contract was lying in my safe and had been faxed to the office of Levi & Levi, my lawyers from the first hour. The supreme moment had arisen: my father had taken the bait and accepted El Bachir's audit report - El Bachir, Julia's boyfriend and our double agent in this extraordinary project. Julia had given him the final push during the wet ball exhibition, leading him to believe that the family wanted me out of the way before nothing was left. He had no idea what a terrible hangover he'd just bought, haha! It was a debt so large, it outshone Italy's debt, so to speak! A bear trap, a snake pit, a water vortex tens of meters in diameter and infinitely deep, from which the largest tanker in the world still could not escape - that’s how I would describe my just-sold holding which was topped by a deadly deal with the Russians.

Haha, yes: I had just signed their proposal after all - sorry, Cor! I had already transferred the company's major healthy components to the holding pyramid with the SAF at its helm. And so, I finally got him: I finally caught that criminal charlatan jackal and hypocrite; that overfed egoist without scruples or conscience who could not manage to take his hands off my little girl! Julia wanted revenge, as well. It was all behind us now. I could not wait till I received the report from our on-call helper (or should I say, from our tophooker of five bunnies - sorry, Cor); until she finally told me how he'd bragged about this acquisition with his old-boys friends.
Sometimes a businessman can do nothing but provide a fellow businessman, family or not, a delicious taste of their own baked dough. Cor had done a fine job, although he hardly realized it himself.

That newspaper article Eddy had used as bait was perfect. If anyone would never ever leave the matter until they were towing him away via a platoon of riot police, it would naturally be Cor Figee! My father did not realize that, no, he had not surveyed the crowd, and he did not know what was going on among the employees! What were Cor's exact words when he informed me about my father; when he told me how he had been approached to work with the enemy? Haha; I remember:

‘He asked me to serve as a whistleblower. He came to win me over, so I showed him the door. Get lost! I prefer to jump into the icy river with a lead cannonball around my neck, than to betray anybody! But then I remembered that meeting in your villa where a voice said, call your boss. Here, we can do something. Intuition! That was it; pure intuition, Mr. van Wijnen-Swarttouw!’

‘And a good one,’ I had replied. 'It's tops! Julia will undoubtedly provide you with an important function within the new structure of the company later on.'

Tired but satisfied and awaken – I'd slept on the boat for the first few hours – I decided on a whim to once again watch the replay of the TV program 'Books'. Maybe there was something to laugh about? Sadly enough, I had to conclude they had invited my biographer - that Vlaardingen writer whom I had handed over those walking papers after revealing how he, of all people, had written that touching speech for Julia's story of her presentation. It was just a bit too emotional for my taste. They'd made some progress at these broadcastings, I mumbled as I poured coffee while listening to his, I have to admit, exciting speech
about the essence of *literary authorship*: the sacrifice and dedication achieved during the service of ultimate artistry.

Although I no longer needed him after the sale, something that came unexpectedly for him, too - you might even call it a *radical turn* - I considered taking him back. Additional publicity and fame is never a bad idea. And furthermore, at this point, continuing with such a *Follow the Money* journalist of the Financial Times seemed a bad idea.

And so I called Eddy and instructed him to hire this literary writer again; this artist who was pursing and toiling without even the most insignificant compensation to generate a lousy few readers, for an ancillary position in one of these independent investigative journalist teams. Well, that was noble of me, not? We'll see what he further makes of it. A deal is a deal.

Time to go to my shrink, von Stürmer. I greeted Fraulein van Zanten, who complimented me in such terms about the flowers sent and my revamped visage, after which I completely relaxed and slumped myself onto that familiar couch… where I told him everything. A waterfall of words shot out of my mouth; a waterfall which, summarized, sounded like: ‘my father: finally I got him.’ The psychiatrist walked with rather short steps back and forth between his tidy desk and sofa and seemed to think deeply, alternately staring at the wooden floor and the plaster ceiling ornament from Greek mythology.

‘Oh, so dass ist!’ he squealed as if he revealed to himself a pioneering scientific breakthrough in his Lilliputtian brain. ‘In defense of my professional honor, I will say wass caused your megalomaniacal denkbildungen. Dass wanting überschreiten ihr Vater ist ein known psychiatric Phänomen, dass coming through…’

A cheerful whistle drowned his just-begun, somewhat hackneyed argument, so I jumped, relieved, off of the divan, ran out
of the room, and pulled out my phone. This could very well be important stuff!

'Henk, I'm with Levi! The final session has been announced. They require you to appear in court tomorrow. As your staunchest advocate from the beginning, I advise you to be present, and not the least because otherwise you will be identified as a *flight risk*. Do you have time? It is set at ten o'clock in the morning.

'That's too soon!'

'Yes, I know. Sorry, Henk. We wanted to warn you before, but it was delayed by work for the S.A.F.'

'Never mind, I'll be there,' I said, more understanding than usual.

I grabbed my jacket - lately I had been working in my neat three-piece suit again - and excused myself politely.

The psychiatrist stared at me, dumbfounded, in the doorway at the moment I hurriedly advised his secretary to send the bill to a different company name so that the money would actually be transferred, this time. I could not find it in my heart anymore to deceive her, that darling! Then I left this historic building at the Heemraadsingel and returned home, using my dark green Maserati for a change.

On the sidewalk, leaning against our iron fence, Quinten nervously smoked a pleasant cigarette. I parked in front of his feet and beckoned him inside. My genius mastermind functioned in top gear. The time needed to prepare my case was lacking. Still, Quinten was here, and he needed my help.

'We need to talk,' he said, confused.

As I listened to him only halfway, it suddenly came over me, motivated by a healthy bit of fear, and I started to question the judgment of that unpredictable man dressed in that toga dress.
Yes, a bad feeling that I had missed something began to torture me!

‘I am quite busy, Quinten. How urgent is it?’

‘It's... it's hard to say... if I... let me start... no, wait, it will...’

‘Tell me, man! Quinten, get yourself together!’

‘My... it's... my independence as an artist is at stake... I doubt our project... that is... I mean... the political and ideological impact of the SAF stresses me... Can we... how shall I say this... act autonomously? What do you think, Henk?’

‘Come on, let’s have a drink!’

Before you know it, time evaporates - this happens especially when you are in a hurry. As a captain in a storm in which I put all sails high up, I headed into a misty vortex of sea foam and extremely high waves while we lost ourselves in the discussion, but during that time I knew that behind these waves, a many-times higher one would come and sweep me away with its de-structive power.

‘I... it... maybe I should become our whistleblower and set the alarm clock,’ floundered Quinten. ‘We are... a... well, yes, we have unilaterally engaged... It's not a...’

‘Our whistleblower does not exist!’ I dictated as clearly as possible. I had a lot to explain to this artist. ‘A whistleblower withdraws from the game, Quinten; he withdraws from the informal rules which apply as we all act, as in battle with each other. As a participant, you respect your opponent, while a whistleblower will be excluded by all parties involved. You will continue to feel encumbered across both groups, guiltily ruining the game itself! Do you still want to be whistleblower? Think about it!’

He inhaled deeply and blew the smoke out, prejudiced. This seemed to calm him. But Quinten argued, bolder by the second:

'But I can... also... factoring these analyses, I can also.... uhm... suggest that conscienteness experiences the current situa-
tion... like a prison... in such a way that the game situation requires your conscience to break out of this, after which whistleblowing might be a relief. As a result, it might even feel as a liberation! Exclusion and isolation is, then, rather an insurmountable inference... I mean... an undesirable situation; but still, the opposite is conceivable as well. It might even be a wonderf...’

‘Oh! Come on with that goat!’ I cried. ‘Blow that whistle into remorse or make an appealing work of art. How does the Splunteren professor call it... by sublimation; yeah, that's it! Sublimate your energy into something constructive, then!’

‘Do I have that freedom?’

‘Of course you have the freedom! As an artist, you will need to tackle freedom by the throat and exploit it! That's all, really: c'est tout. I have also provided that Vlaardingen fine writer with complete freedom. And what does that fiddler do with it? Nothing - absolutely nothing, that is! Those journalists, everyone - Goddamn! Now I have no time for you anymore. Get out! Come on, Quinten. 'Sofort Raush', as my psychiatrist would say!’

‘You put me under pressure... it... or I'm alone and isolated if I... Well, okay then, I'll be freely perfecting my artwork and present it. We will see if your words are noth... are empty words or if you'll put your money where your mouth is!’

‘Do not worry about it. Fabricate your work and show it to the world. I promise you that I will accept it, but you'll know only afterwards whether it will be a relief or if you carry a heavy burden on your shoulders. Whistleblowing is no small matter; nor is engaged art.’

That was an understatement, all right!

‘It is... we'll uhh...’ he stammered awkwardly, 'some sacrifice should be comforting... it's...’

His stuttering prevailed.
Those verbal hints and that reference to his own painting had hit him hard, so I gave in and let him calmly, sutteringly explain his story. Well, the guy had lost it all" what else could I do? And so we chatted for hours about the political situation and about art, and how objectively he needed to work - yes, how art is the most objective authority that exists and therefore must be able to judge culture and society, as such. Or, rather, how the artist in all freedom must descend into the human psyche in the caverns of the human body and mind and the senses and experiences, with thoughts and impressions, attitudes and actions banal as well as extreme; and when what comes as fantasy collides with reality, the artist's borders will be able to look up both collectively and individually in (un)consciousness...

We spoke of how the artist there, acting as a probe in that deep virgin territory, determines what is actually happening, acting, in the pre-moral phase, as a ray of hope and a source of inspiration from which the social order can be drawn upon, allowing everyone to have some kind of shared morality from the bottom up rather than imposed than from above - how it can be built from the clay, from mud, and from the fickleness of all the beauty life has to offer. Who had suggested this before?

We remained silent, long and patiently. Then I told him how I had come to my decision. It had happened during one of our nightly discussions.

‘I thought, Quinten,’ I told him honestly - yes, almost like a confession - ‘that it should not be crazier than when you put the card of the controversial issue of sovereignty on the table, as this term will not be important anymore when The Tilt leads to empowering people from the ground up. When the crowd finally is able to govern, there will be an ultimate form of democracy in which politics without sovereignty will be possible, but it will also have to adjust itself again and again.'
And so, I naturally went to my ultimate sacrifice: 'I will take the blame of the stolen paintings and the empire collapsing, while Julia is the heroine; a heroine who unmasked her father with help from her accountant boyfriend. With this revelation, she will definitely win the crowd. A few months before, I got the feeling, supported by acquired information through the tunnel vision unmasking tool, that our social elite wanted me in jail; that they located everything in order for Henkie to leave for a while and enjoy a prolonged free holiday in ascetic shape - let’s say, for convenience!

And so I considered playing this political asset.

No judge will approve a deliberately added scene of political process. The risk, my burden of proof, was on the lean side, however, and could lead to an aggravation of the sentence, since also there is not a judge to be found who accepts wrongly referring to a political agenda of the OM or, worse, of the court itself! No, being a killjoy could surely backfire on me. And then it came to me! This senseless debate over sovereignty put me on the right track!

My father and his friends in the government wanted to take control of me; so what idea could be better than to keep a sausage in front of their nose and lure them into a trap, much like you let a Somali gang rob an abandoned ship which they think will be loaded with oil until they find out that the cargo is made of Marines armed with flamethrowers, grenades, and sticks of dynamite!'

‘So, uhh...’ began Quinten, slumped, lying down in a misty haze of smoke plumes with that delicious sweet smell (he finally inhaled them, as well), ‘you let them steal some stuff deliberately?’

‘I let them suspect that my holding is worth gold. The opposite is true,’ I replied patiently, though some sadness in my voice appeared uncontrollable. ‘Julia and her accountant will be heroes
in the sad story of her bad father, the notorious corporate doctor who turns out to be an ordinary criminal. After my rightful condemnation, they will able to pack up and win over the crowd. The end justifies the means, as it always does.’

Quinten unexpectedly pulled himself upright.

He suddenly stared at me through those attentive, brownish-green pupils, and asked sympathetically: ‘How long do you have to go to prison for the good cause?’

‘We will hear tomorrow, man.’

The difference between a Good Samaritan and a self-sacrificing van Wijnen-Swarttouw had rarely been this small. I became nauseous. Could I not think of a ruse; a third variant? That question haunted me when I was bathed in sweat, squirming in my soaking wet sheets, which my housekeeper only yesterday had made spotless.

I might take the blame and claim I still did not know who had pilfered my most beloved paintings!

Suddenly this idea frightened me; especially since I could undertake little from within prison. I mean, you're limited in options when you're enjoying those free facilities, unless you’re the Godfather himself. I could forget doing independent research, no more than tattooing it on my belly! In short, a host of complications and limitations in my future anticipated lebensraum past my lost vision until kilos of lead sunk my shoes. Henkie (so I said to myself while brushing my teeth) – I like to talk to someone, but want to see a face – what about the most obvious third variant: fly away?

White splashes bombed the mirrored wall.

‘Coward!’ I shouted to that enthusiastic man in the mirror while the speckles spread. I flinched backwards and stumbled. Moments later, I was ready.
Obviously, I dressed up in my noblest suit. As if I had a business lunch to attend, I seemingly calmly drove to court in my Ferrari-red Aston Martin. There they stood, watching. Meanwhile the question of how those Serbian Pink Panther Boys had staged their spectacular escape went through my brilliant mastermind. A screeching sound of rubber racked my eardrums, so I reflexively took off right, peered into the rearview mirror, and saw the strange guy again, calling me 'Coward!' Going down in style and perishing for charity: my intention was nothing less. I parked in front of the wet balls without paying (usually this works fine), got my whopper of a double-thick briefcase from the passenger seat, and gambled that those guys from the parking police were playing cards, or doing something similar and infinitely more useful than executing their community-funded jobs.

The officer smiled before using his scanning equipment.

Was this because he imagined he had a chance to woo my lovely daughter soon, now? Or was I allowed to keep my popularity? Did the audience realize that her 'father' was, in his core, not a bad guy after all? On the contrary! A well-intentioned and hard-fighting guy against the elite of silent power with their triple agendas - this might be the case! Never underestimate the crowd; ever! And besides, I wanted to believe it. Julia should come over and tell me it all when she, hopefully with her mother, visits me in De Schie prison.
And now, dear reader, I myself, Henk van Wijnen-Swarttouw, have finally kicked out that Vlaardingen fine writer and fake biographer! It was so funny, how he publicly claimed to have disembarked all by himself. Haha! They always do this: do not pay attention.

An entrepreneur fights back and never lets himself be fooled or shackled: it is that simple! Me, a coward?!? How dare he!

What guts! I need to hand him that much.

And I would be a megalomaniac, haha! Wanting to write a literary classic; now that's what I call being a megalomaniac! What an idiot! At this point, I will write this story myself. It took a long time before I received a follow up piece of work. And what was it? Nothing, really: a few pages a week, excuses for so and so, possibly I'd better rearrange it furthermore, endlessly searching for beautiful words and sentence structures - get lost!

And then those stupid comments in between, such as: ‘Every sentence is marked by two spaces.’

Everybody knows that, man!

Clarity: that's all you will get from now on. We can be clear and to the point. At this part of the story, I'm not too proud. I again pressed that special AICATRAZ button on my smartphone. The alarm went off; and this time not only in court, but in several strategic locations in the center of the city, as well. Then I drove off to Manhattan at the Maas River, racing in a way that would have won any beauty contest, if a contest existed for driving to the Southbank in a Ferrari-red Aston Martin. There, I calmly took a breeze across the Sea using the taxi to the Deltahotel,
where my speedboat lay fully prepared by Arthur and with my dearest possessions: the magnificent Henry Matisse, a dazzling Paul Gauguin, the delicate Kees Verburg, a sensuous human Charlotte Dumas, and (let’s not forget) two Lucian Freuds.

That posturing in the hollow space ship! All those customers, always playing sunshine and energetic and jolly, charming everyone; customers from Russia and so on. Every country of the globe simply passes through Rotterdam. Johanna's in the pub, with family from Willemstad. I have achieved a lot. I destroyed a lot. So be it. Henkie does not grumble! Henkie will enjoy his hard-earned freedom from a sloppy 40,000 km from here. I docked the speedboat in the Harbor Front and switched to my trusty BMW stationwagon 5i ('do not stand out' is my motto, as a mantra. That's me, calmly loading all the gear before driving to the Rotterdam Airport. Then, long-stay parking and now, I just got up to my private jet, fitting into my self-enforced freedom as befits a self-made man and manifesting all with my head held high. I have no appetite anymore for that harbor work. Even I have my limits, folks.

If everything goes according to plan, I will closely follow my daughter from a proper distance while she will finally tilt the crowd into a new era. The first stop is scheduled for Geneva. I use all available time to take off my jacket and to free myself from my tie, read the daily financials, then put them back and grab the New York Times. I try to read, but it fails. There is no man overboard. We pour a glass of whiskey with ice. A tune sometimes helps, yet now holds little result. The letters are as vague as a misty haze hanging over the North Sea. I will return when the time is ripe. Fleeing is simple and is not the right word for this! A temporary retreat; that's all: I'm regrouping for tactical reasons and to celebrate. I'll hand over the rudder to a skillful pilot until the ship is allowed to leave the harbor. Julia and her
boyfriend may inhabit our villa. I put it in her name. My number combinations on the vault I'll gave away as well. I even gave to her the key to my treasure containing the carefully crafted collection of logbooks and all wisdom on the framed and behind-glass displayed beermats. The villa will protect my daughter. Julia will need her haughty, almost indifferent armor; it will not immediately go smoothly. There will be resistance. Monique, Johanna, and Willem will be able to assist Quinten, Eddy, and, no less, Cor, and the twin brothers Levi and, of course, Tatjana. All these people will be able to help her... but how she will miss her father!
Afterword: Anecdotes & Gigs

Through the intervention of Julia and with money from the SAF organization, El Bachir got out on bail. Levi, the brother of the famous lawyer Levi and also a gifted trial lawyer, took the case very seriously. With full dedication he threw himself on the dossier and the loopholes in legislation on honor killings based on (how could it be otherwise) sectarian faith. After some time, he was forced to enlist the help of his brother, after which they managed to keep El Bachir out of prison by joining forces and after a brilliant argument. In passing, they ensured that the Assembly decided to amend the law in such a way that in the future, all religions will fall under the qualification ‘sectarian’ regarding the topic honor killings or proud retribution. Heroic fury elimination always shows, however impossible, as we shall see, since it is anchored deeply in the interdependence and, in addition to Eros, can be seen as the core of human existence. Anyway, what remains is a mild sanction for El Bachir. He was the happiest man in the world when the judge required him to spend hundred hours telling jokes to the elderly without being able to send them a bill. Totally unexpectedly, it turns out to have hardly been a punishment. Moreover, he clearly demonstrates to have shown, through the anthroposophical study of the Benidorm Bastards' behavior of his audience, an exceptional talent for this booming entertainment industry. At the same time, Quinten expedited his decision, after deliberation, to leave the SAF as it is. He does what every artist and literary writer should do: like every bohemian, he goes his own way. With his last pennies, he buys from the SAF (and just at the bottom of its pricing) the entire collection of Kees Verburg, paintings as well as drawings.
After auction, only a few months later, these works already turned out to be worth a fortune: there's no holding back anymore, it is all or nothing in fifteen minutes, now. He decided to donate money to Jules Didden. Together they improved the heart boat, working in the abandoned shed in the harbor. Their next work is undisputedly qualified as brilliant in just about all sectors of the virtually tilted society. In essence, it is an outright indictment poured into a whistleblower-like dystopia about the Sustainable Artist Foundation and their impending decadence; a decadence that art is becoming a means to an end or fun as opium for the people, but with a hidden political message. In other words, the crowd is deceived. Julia handed over the first prize on behalf of the SAF, the organizer of the competition. Meanwhile, Von Stürmer let himself be treated by Fraulein van Zanten. Despite his satisfaction about how it ended with Henk and Julia, it strikes him that he doesn’t have as much fun as expected, nowadays. Her talent he no longer denies, but how can he brashly enjoy the life that is left for him? Always giving, giving and giving away to his clients. He is satisfied with the results obtained by Miss van Zanten and decides from now on to help clients through the Cloud, making contact with the APA (the American Psychiatric Association) and suggesting he will serve as a prototype. It is his way of getting an ultimate high degree of karma. He wants to develop an application; an app that can at any time demand some hacking into an individual's life, if needed, for a psychiatric session. Stürmer thinks it is necessary, so he started a psychological intervention online. Would you like to keep your phone? Then you will have to complete his session successfully. The NSA database can be used to signal when a psychosocial adjustment is necessary. Secretly, Stürmer hopes to become immortal (the danger people wanting to become immortal is around every corner, as it always has been). Months after his flight, Henk struggles with his regained freedom. He
discovers that his flight from the Netherlands is not much more than freedom yields in bondage. This kind of freedom he experiences as a burden on his shoulders, not in the least since no opportunity remains to restore contact with Julia, Monique, Tatjana, Quinten, or anyone else without the risk of exposing his hiding places - the Caribbean and sometimes Indian Ocean, with its beautiful coastlines of the Indonesian archipelago. This fear, however, will soon disappear, because Julia manages to register the cowardly flight from her father through a thirty-three, by Edwin in his majestic Blue Magical yacht with its built-in cameras. An arthouse film is made with the captured material. This movie seems to do a great job of entertaining the public and it makes Henk a cult figure; a hero of the common man - of the average Joe or 'Henk and Ingrid,' if you will. And so it may happen that Henk is situated, just over a year after his unorthodox and headlong organized departure, openmouthed, in a chaotic cafe in Batu Ferringhi and not far from the ShangriLa's Rasa Sayang Resort & Spa complex. Full of disbelief and amazement, he stares at his own reality show, primetime broadcasted on the national channel of Malaysia. In shock, he looks back at the broadcast on his yacht and puts the movie on hold. His eye falls upon one detail. He zooms in on the image, which shows the newspaper he holds in his hands on 18 March. He rereads the Financial Times, and more specifically, the heading of the small but vital message stating that Julia will perform in Shanghai, New York, Rotterdam and Paris. It is her latest performance. Henk thoughtfully measures all pros and cons. Eventually he decides to go, even though he knows that this is a veiled declaration: the police will arrest him. His position in the Fortune 500 has fallen dramatically and his position on the list of Interpol has proportionally shot upwards, a rare exception to the rule (nine out of ten times, these two markings run parallel). He sails back to the port of Rotterdam in time. It is a cathartic trip. On
the way, he thinks a lot. And so he wonders if it's a good idea to transfer all assets to the Tridios bank. He wants to make a good impression with Julia and his wife (he has not signed the divorce papers, not yet). Unfortunately, he gets a refusal. Following the screening, this sustainable bank with its high ethics does not take on any of his possessions. Henk is disappointed and feels hunted like an outcast or a war criminal or Russian head of state, depending on how the wind blows. When he learns, as icing on the cake, that the SAF wants to attack the *Holy Cow*, and that people will turn away *en masse* from the impractical idea of an individual owning a car, it is too much for him. After seeing a broadcast of *Backlight*, Henk considers over the following days not going to Julia's performance, but being represented by a robotic body. He wants a word with her about this ridiculous attack on the sacred holy cow: this idea should be abandoned immediately. Henk options and proposals, but cannot imagine finding gratification in this. He takes the plunge and decides to return after all. Now he knows everyone is watching through the cameras soap series and he feels less lonely, but all the more embarrassed. A few days later, however, this inconvenience is more than offset. When he crosses the barrier, he bursts into tears. All those waving people who want a signature, taking selfies and chanting his name, that he may see this day! He will dock alongside a container ship, which is just unloading some cargo. As he beams with happiness and gets ready to visit Julia, a cable gets caught in his rigging, turning a hanging container into a pendulum that automatically shoots loose (Edwin's too late, he cannot intervene manually) and falls on top of Henk. No doubt about it: Henk is killed instantly. Perhaps, as whispers of the crowd along the riverbank shamelessly state while taking all sorts of photos of his lifeless body, it's better this way: doing time is nothing for him. Moreover, there is the wonderful possibility of organizing a collective mourning ceremony. Everyone is
ecstatic with joy; nothing can compete with this euphoric feeling of being together except an FIFA World Cup. Julia breaks the stereotypical behavior of the visitors by appearing at Henk's funeral wearing simple reading glasses and black high heels, her half-length blonde hair neatly pinned up... and no clothing. On her naked body, in body paint letters, the names of all kinds of missing clothing is stated. Meanwhile, Wesseling wins the lottery. He is reluctantly pushed in his wheelchair towards the organization, by Johanna. He puts his winning ticket in his underwear. Since he is terrified of being attacked on the way by the Jerries, he gives away, just to be sure, an unwanted message. Johanna complains about online gaming taking off. A storm arises, so they blow their change. ‘It has become the number one addiction now; we might as well pack our bags, man,’ she calls out desperately, in vain hopes of convincing Wesseling that her entertaining pub desperately needs funding, these days. He hears her, takes the money from his lottery, and transfers it to that footballer Daan and his father Cor: people who can use a windfall. Cor Figee worries like a madman, meanwhile, about the outdated notion of the sacred cow: that frontal attack on this great initiative and the idea of sharing products, and moves away from property as a basis for belief. This must be an idea from Mr. van Wijnen-Swarttouw - his latest feat. Until his death, he continued to innovate. Just before his tragic end, he instructed Julia to take this up on scale of worldwide deployment. But what about the Russian deal? Cor Figee doesn’t understand it, runs towards Lavinia, and lets her coddle him for comfort.