Christiano's Friend

PART 2

Chapter 8

Death. Steven had not thought of it for a long time, since he had been absorbed in life. After all, the growing and blooming of boys has nothing to do with deterioration and with dying. As a forty-year-old he had the feeling that he was in the middle of the balance beam of life and that it would bend over to the other side in a while. But this would not happen so fast. He still had oceans of time. The idea that God needed him to carry out certain tasks, made his fear of death disappear. Steven had recognized that non-believers are being protected by the devil to bring about as many calamaties as possible on earth and to ruin people. That was happening on a large scale, on the world level (so you could call Hitler a world champion in this respect), or on a small scale, in everyday contact between people.
It was Sunday morning. Steven was surveying his life. He was a born boy slave. Sometimes he had the impression that boys he knew figured him out, maybe because they had that same spiritualized thing which he had.
'Steven is our friend,' a second class boy once said, when some of his class-mates wanted to revolt against Steven.
By that, he seemed to have expressed feelings of which they suddenly became aware, because they calmed down immediately.
The spiritual thing in boys manifests itself by their build, Steven thought, looking at a photograph of a boy who had the spitting image of one of his students.
The sight of him was comforting. A perfect, physical composition not only proves God's existence, but makes you sing, as it were. That morning Steven went on a journey to Boys Land. In his mind all kinds of holiday destinations, or rather, day trip destinations, had found their places. There was, for example, also the Land of the Sixties, which was visited when he was playing records from this period or reading magazines, edited in those days. When he was in the Land of Boys, he looked through his collection of boy photos, he read stories or book passages about boys or he watched video movies in which boys were playing parts. He wanted to have a photograph of Christiano as soon as possible, but did not know how to ask for it without rousing the suspicion of having more than a normal interest in the boy. Suddenly he came upon the idea that Chris would need a biography soon, which described his career as a musician and his musical achievements. A nice photo needed to be included. Steven was sure that Christiano would give him one without problems.
Innumerable boys had been reviewed by Steven through the years. Both Chris and Koen were highlights. The subdued sensuality that was already there between Steven and Chris, rather seemed to be an incidental circumstance than something which pushed itself forward prominently. Steven also had a photograph of a boy who looked like Tarik. It was a nude picture, but without any erotic ulterior motive. The boy was laughing into the lens, evidently proud of his body and of his well-hungness. He was a beautiful piece of nature, carved out by God Himself.

Time after time Tristan's thoughts wandered off to the same person, whatever he was doing. He was obsessed by Steven. It was useless to resist. He was looking forward to the next Saturday. During a

football game with the other boys and while doing his homework he was intent on a way to be able to get in touch with Steven alone. Christiano's friend was someone who would help any boy in distress, like the hero from a comic book who was far ahead of his time. For, did it ever occur to

someone nowadays that a boy could be in distress? Tristan himself had been in distress and had not dared tell anyone about that, from fear that they would not believe him or even laugh at him. Steven would never do something like that.
At this moment Tristan did not feel safe anywhere. He could only feel safe if he were sure that the madman was dead or behind bars. Over and over again his nightmares came down to the same thing: the madman had tracked him down and was on the verge of strangling him, shooting him dead, blowing him up or stabbing him. Then his awakening was a narrow escape from death. His fellow residents heard him yell in his sleep every now and then, but did not ask any questions.
Finally, Tristan had dared take Romano in his confidence about his muscial plans.
'What do you think about those boy bands?' he had carefully asked first.
'Oh, they're not bad,' Romano's reply had been.
After that Tristan, sometimes stumbling over his words, had told him a few things about his visit to Steven.
'He played some great music to me,' he said. 'The boy who had made it, was there too.'
'And what should yóu do then?'
'Sing.'
'Can you sing?'
'Yeah,' Tristan laughed, for the first time in months.
His heart seemed to begin to thaw a bit, just like the winter snow. That's why he liked to sing some lines from a well-known song, at Romano's request.
'I love you,' were the last words and Tristan made *you* sound long-drawn-out, his voice rising higher and higher.
Slightly shocked, he realized that he was looking Romano straight in the eye while doing that, but the boy only laughed about it.
'From which country are you, actually?' Tristan asked, blushing.
'Romania.'
'You speak Dutch very well.'
'Thank you.'
'Are there any boy bands in Romania?'
'No, not at all.'
They were sitting in the living room of their department. The other boys were either out playing football, doing their tasks or busy doing their homework. Romano had an injured foot which was resting high on a chair. When Tristan did not ask him anymore questions, he focused his attention on the textbook that was on his lap.
Wish I could be that quiet and self-assured, Tristan thought.
He imagined how Romano would have called all the boys in the cellar to order to prevent them from playing filth. Now Tristan felt like a thing, like an appliance having been thrown aside. Maybe Steven was the first person in his life who had treated him with respect. Now he was thinking of Steven again! Smiling, Tristan turned on the television to watch a soap series. Soap. That made you clean.

Tristan was the only person who had responded to Christiano's ad. It was hard to come by boys. Besides that, they had to sing properly and get on well with each other. Though it did hit off well between Chris and Tristan, Steven wondered whether this duo would ever be extended.
He and grandpa Woudvis were eating pea soup. The 11-city race had been cancelled.

'I used to sing in a group too,' the old man told. 'In the church choir. I was about twenty at the time.'
'Singing is a relief. Listening to singing voices has the same effect.'
'Yes, especially when they sing about the Lord.'
'Tonight I'll be meeting a boy who has a beautiful voice. He called me, because he wanted to talk with me in private. I know him via Chris.'

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'Does this boy make a lonesome impression?'
'Yes, he does. It seemed that he had finally found understanding when he was with us.'
'I can imagine. There are only few adults who really understand young people.'
'It's a challenge to me to keep my thinking up with the boys. They are often very quickwitted and brightminded. At school they are always trying to pull my leg.'
Steven's grandpa laughed.
'Fortunately you have a good sense of humour,' he said.
'That boy's name is Tristan.'
'That's a beautiful name. "Tristan and Isolde" is one of Shakespeare's best plays. In the end Isolde proves to have taken a temporarily working poison, but when she regains consciousness Tristan has already administered himself a deadly liquid. Extremely sad.'
'Yes, I saw the movie.'
Steven could imagine that his grandpa was becoming a little bit tired from all the boys he turned up with, and for that reason tried to give the conversation another twist. Steven decided to respect this attitude and brought up a current topic which they discussed until far after dinner, because grandpa had a lot to say about it.
That same evening Steven resolved to drop by at Koen's house. He showed interest in the developments around Chris' boy band, but had little faith that the project would ever become a success.
'Did he invent a name yet?' Koen asked.
'Yes. The Ranch Boys.'
'Sounds tough.'
'Chris is fond of westerns. That's why. I only hope that certain people won't turn it into "Randy Boys".'
'What does that mean then?'
'Horny, sexy boys or something like that.'
'Oh, nobody knows that.'
'Chris is a phenomenon. He has managed to maintain this innocent-childlike thing, this honest thing. Someone like him has to be really protected these days, or else he will be abused. In fact that's the case with all children.'
'Nobody is honest. Who is honest, actually? We are all playing some small part, some small game.'
'It depends on the situation you're in. It's easier to be yourself among people you trust than when you're in public. Everybody puts up a mask in front of strangers. Chris doesn't. He is very uninhibited and he addresses people he does not know easily. I myself don't see the point of that and I would never enter into a chat with unknown people, unless they invite me to.'
'Oh, I would. I always talk to girls I meet somewhere on the street. But I just don't have the nerves to invite them. Isn't that funny?'
'No, it isn't. A lot of boys haven't. And men neither.'
The conversation got on to Koen's ex-girlfriend from whom he had not heard anything for a very long time. But when Koen kept on about it, Steven said that it was enough and that they'd better do something about his Dutch vocabulary.

During the night before his encounter with Steven, Tristan had hardly been able to sleep. He kept wondering whether Chris' manager would believe him. Had it all really happened, though? Hadn't

he had a terrible nightmare, by which he had lost sight of reality?
Steven had put on some floor lamps. It was pleasant in his living room, maybe even a bit too warm. Tristan was feeling anxious. Probably he had cycled too hard once again. He pulled the white boarding school sweater with the hood and the cords over his head and put it onto another chair. It was better like that, in his T-shirt. He accepted the glass of coke which Steven had poured for him in the kitchen and looked for a start. There came a blockade that silenced him and he felt tears welling up. He cleared his throat.

'I...,' he squeaked, and laughed nervously. 'What I would like to tell you..., I've been through a lot..., through rotten things. I have been locked up in a cellar, together with other boys.'
He faltered. Steven listened, his face unmoved and, when Tristan looked at him, he just nodded. The more revelations Tristan made, the more conscious he became of the proportion of reality of what he had been through, which made him more sure of what he was doing. He became more confident too by the fact that Steven did not laugh at him and even interrupted him every now and then to ask something that was not clear to him. Tristan noticed that he had forgotten certain names of boys; he confused others with those of the boys from his group.
'Did you say Tarik?' Steven asked. 'Do you remember how he looked like?'
Tristan tried to describe Tarik as best as he could.
'That boy was a student at our school,' Steven said. 'But do go on.'
Tristan told what had happened during the last week of the past year.
'He went madder and madder,' he said at the end of his account. 'I still don't know if they have executed him or if he is still alive.'
'So, in order to save your life you tried to seduce him?'
'Yes, I thought we were all going to die, just like those Dutroux girls. It's not that I'm gay or something.'
'When I hear all this, it seems to me that this man was quite suicidal and confused. I doubt if he is still clear-headed enough to track you down.'
'So, I don't have to be afraid?'
'Not really.'
Though, during Tristan's story, Steven had reacted incredulously, he seemed to have drawn the conclusion that it all really had happened.
'I know Tarik a little,' he said. 'Sexually, he's got a rather short fuse, so somehow he must have felt like a fish in the water.'
'Indeed, we were like animals. I don't want to go through this ever again.'
'I really feel like finding out where that man's house is. Do you remember how that neighbourhood looked like?'
Tristan tried to call to mind the place where it all had happened. He saw pinetrees in the night, a wide, asphalted road, the fence around the villa, a small sign with a name (something with a Z), the white garage, the yellow lamp over the frontdoor. In the New Year's night he had run away from the scene of the crime so fast that he had not been able to observe his surroundings.
'What kind of car did he have?'
'A black whatsit, er... I am very bad in makes of cars. Tarik would surely know.'
'Maybe we could walk through the town's residential areas together one time, just to take a look.'
'That would be great. Once we know where he lives...'
All nervousness had fallen off Tristan. And he was reassured completely, when Steven said, 'We'll not go to the police before we can show them something. Apart from them, nobody needs to know yet.'
'Thanks.'
'I did not expect you to sing so beautifully in spite of everything.'
'Yes. Fortunately, my voice has remained allright. I sang for the boys in the basement too. Not often,

but somehow it gave some comfort.'
'Music is important.'
Tristan put on his sweater again.
'I've been through quite some things at just fifteen,' he said, smiling. 'Next month I'll be sixteen. I'll have a whole life behind me than.'
'You can say that.'
Looking at his watch, Tristan saw that he should have been in the boarding school already.
'I'll be going in a hurry,' he said, putting on his coat.

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They said good-bye with a handshake.
For the first time Tristan went to bed without looking under it.

Listening to Tristan's account, Steven had tried to stay as rational as he could. The image of seven frightened boys who were locked up in a basement filled him with utter disgust. The fearfullness that the boy had shown in trying to bring to life again the most humiliating scenes, made Steven decide to help him to solve the case.
Tristan had also told him things which he had preferred not to hear, like his intimate relations with Harry. But the boy told about them as if someone else had gone through them and if all these things had happened without him. By that, he seemed to create a safe distance between him and what had happened. The story had become more and more insane. Someone else might have become irritated and would have sent Tristan away, but Steven had been glued to his chair. He saw Tristan and Tarik before him, both without clothes, with more naked boys around them. The animal perversion that had controlled the cellar and had incited to the living up of slumbering passions, had come to life by Tristan's words. Steven had a great imagination. He had no problem seeing a man before him who felt obstructed in his manipulations and chose Tristan, the rebel, as his scapegoat. He even identified himself with this man and then immediately got an erection which did not want to disappear until Tristan's departure. And after that too, it went through his mind: what would it be like to have such power over boys? What would I have done if I would have been there and Tarik had looked at me defiantly? But more important were the questions: what should be happening now in the villa? Was Tarik still there? Were the other boys still there? Had there been a change of power? If so, what were they doing than?
Especially the last question stimulated Steven's fantasy. The series of images springing from this began with the one of the piece of bare skin which had appeared, when Tristan had pulled out his sweater. After that, during the sounds of the house music he heard again, Steven saw himself fetching a brush to have his naked body painted by Tarik, the Indian who was only wrapped up in war colours and had a totem pole that was sticking forward.

Chapter 9

If someone's death is being dealt with at too great length, Steven thought, the consequence will be that a child receives too little attention. And thus the circle of life will be upset. In his opinion, too much time and money were being spent on commemorations of the dead and on funerals, whereas, comparitively speaking, there were only few services where young people could entertain themselves at a reasonable price. And not only entertain themselves, but also learn while playing and meet each other at an international level. Exchange thoughts with each other, without interference from older people.

He expressed these thoughts to Christiano, who immediately became enthusiastic about them.

'Yes,' he said, 'And make music together! That would be great.'

'Once we're earning a lot of money with the boy band, we can organize something like that. Rent a building where concerts are being given constantly. All day long.'

They had become more and more intimite with each other. Christiano to Steven was the embodiment of innocence. This boy was neither crafty nor mean. Steven was not able to harm him with the best will in the world. Actually, being near to Christiano, the same thing happened as when Steven was near the boys of his school: he was disarmed and became soft and almost without worry. But he did not have personal relations with these students. Though, whatever is *personal*? Steven was sure that his most favourite students were thinking as often of him as he was thinking of them, when not in each other's nearness. Being real boys, they knew how to hide their love and to camouflage it and to let it be implied by small jokes, remarks and careless touches. Whereas the direct presence of a beautiful, provocative woman agitated these boys and even disgusted them, if she treated them high-handedly, Steven's appearance was calming and inspiring confidence. It made them grateful for his presence. Yes, that was how boys did work and not in any other way. This innocence simply existed, and it was Steven's task to protect it and maybe even to promote it.

Despite the negative, sexual experiences which both Chris and Tristan had had, each of them had

remained pure, without malice or cynicism. Of course, they both demanded satisfaction, but that did not have the upper hand in their lives. Steven was happy to let these boys have positive experiences.
He and Chris were on their way to a copy centre. It was early February and Steven just had his "period" behind him. He was listening to the theories which Chris was unfolding about public transport - according to him it should be as cheap as possible - and about the raising of children, who, in his opinion, were either spoiled or neglected.
'Children should be raised in boarding schools,' Chris argued, 'so that they learn to observe the rules and to go about with each other.'
Steven thought of the students of his school, who were not spoiled, cóuld not be spoiled, because their parents did not have the resources for that. When, one given moment, he and Chris wanted to cross a street, Steven saw a car coming from the left at full speed. Chris was talking so animatedly that he did not notice the car. Steven stopped him with his arm.
'You have saved my life,' Chris said.
He told that he did not have a job, but attended adult education a couple of days a week, because in

the past he had often had to skip school as a result of his psychological problems. They arrived at the tram stop, where two old ladies were sitting and waiting on the bench of the tram shelter. Chris studied the timetable sign.
'My house has been broken into last night,' Steven heard one of the women say. 'That never happened to me before.'
'No!' the other woman said quite loud. 'It ain't true.'
'I woke up last night and went to the toilet. When I passed by the living room, I saw the drawers of the sideboard standing on the ground.'
'No!'
'All my money was gone. Of course I've still something on my account...'
'Oh, yeah...'
'But you are scared anyhow.'
'You certainly are. You live on the first floor, don't you?'
'Yes, downstairs.'
'All the way down?'
'No, that's the ground floor. I live on the first floor.'
'Did you leave something open?'
'Yes, a small window in the kitchen. I had fried something. But I'll just keep everything closed in future.'
'I understand.'
'They had put the drawers onto the ground. That's the first time in my life.'
'This week there has been a burglary on the other side of the street too.'
'Oh yeah?'
The tram arrived and stopped in front of the waiting people, who all got on. Nobody in the public vehicle had eyes for Christiano's beauty and for his sweetness. He only attracted attention, when he joined the ladies' conversation with his rather powerful voice and advised the robbed woman to have a security system installed.
'There are really very good ones,' he said, 'With video cameras.'
The lady in question said that she would ask a firm about it.
'We must get off,' Steven said.
He had a music magazine from years ago with him, out of which Chris was allowed to copy an article about one of his favourite boy bands. The first rehearsal of the Ranch Boys had gone smoothly. Tristan knew almost all of Christiano's lyrics by heart.
'If the two of you record a demotape which will be played on the radio,' Steven had said, 'more boys

may want to join you.'
He had already gone to a residential area one night, together with Tristan, but the boy had not recognized anything, though they had been walking around there for certainly one hour. They had agreed to try again a week later, but than in another residential area.
Back in Steven's house he showed Chris some books with images of paintings which had, among others, the suffering of Jesus Christ as a subject. They had never talked about God before.
'I don't think there is a God,' Chris said, 'for else there would not be so many wars and disasters.'
'People cause a lot of trouble themselves. Only good things come from God. If you believe in Jesus, you can hold your own against the whole world, if necessary.'
They were sitting very close to each other. Every now and then, Steven pointed at a certain detail of a painting, which they discussed for a moment.
'We should go the Rijksmuseum one day,' Steven said, 'There are other paintings of Rembrandt in it.'
'Yes, I have never been there before.'
Steven was constantly aware of the fact that his lips were very close to Chris' smooth cheek. The relation between them had already progressed in such a way that a simple kiss would not do any harm, Steven thought.

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'We still have to sign the contract,' Chris said, after snapping the book shut.
'Oh, yeah, you're right.'
Chris took the sheets of paper, on which only two signatures were lacking, from Steven's desk.
'Now we have more certainty,' Chris said, after they had signed the contract and the copy of it.
'But you do trust me, don't you?' Steven smiled.
'Yeah, I...d...do, but, er..., well, you'll never know. Anything might happen. And I don't like someone making off with my songs. In the U.S.A. all kinds of lawsuits are running between managers and boy bands.'
'There is a great difference between the Netherlands and America. In the States they think on a large scale, while in Holland everything happens on a small scale. I mean, it won't be easy to play the corrupt multimillionaire, who's making money on the masses. Holland is only a small country. It's very crowded here, so it is easier to check upon everything.'
'Yes, that's true.'
'Are you staying for dinner?'
'I don't know. What have you got? I'm a vegetarian.'
'I could make macaroni, with eggs and cheese.'
'Cheese. Yeah, I'd like that.'
Together they prepared dinner in the kitchen. Chris's movements were as relaxed as a little boy's and his slender and elegant body was very attractive.
After Christiano's departure Steven stayed behind in a cloud of happiness.

With the help of a city map Tristan had carefully mapped all residential areas in the city, complete with names of streets and parks. A big cross had been put across the area which he and Steven had already investigated.
He was sitting on his bed in the dormitory, which was empty except for him. The other boys were either watching a football match on TV, or had gone into the city, "looking for chickens". At school Tristan could get on well with most female students of his class and he secretly cherished his being in love with one of them. But he did not think that they were really interested in him, because he found himself silent, shy and clumsy. His male class mates accepted him because of his humour and his intelligence, so at least he was not an outsider. The class did not have any outsiders anyway, because everyone hated discrimination and pestering. Of course there were small mutual quarrels every now and then, but they were soon solved by talking. During the breaks Tristan tried to get in

touch with the other boys from the boarding school, but they proved to be busy talking to their class mates. Tristan did not want to disturb this atmosphere. Romano was the only one he went for a walk with in the neighbourhood of the school from time to time. Nobody knew how happy Tristan felt then. With Romano he could talk about music and other things than football, money and cars. Romano never made silly jokes at someone else's expense. He was not selfish, but had a community spirit, just like Steven, just like Tristan himself. It was lovely, though, to make other people a little bit happy.
'It's a pity you cannot sing,' Tristan had once said to Romano. 'Else you might have joined us.'
'Yeah,' Romano had reacted, 'I am not creative at all. But I do love good music and good movies.'
Then he had started to tell about a movie he probably had seen at least five times. Tristan had listened to the boy's voice. He failed to notice the contents of the movie, the more because he did not hear all Romano was saying.
Tristan blushed, when the person he was thinking of entered the dormitory.
'Are you going to sleep already?' Romano asked, fetching a book from his bedside table.
'No, I just have to check something. Look up a street.'
'Oh,' Romano said, looking at the cross on the map. 'But that's not a common map, is it?'
Curious, he came and sat next to Tristan.
'No, I made this one myself,' he said, 'It's only certain areas I need.'
'You're looking for something.'

Yes, Tristan thought, looking for love, looking for someone who loves me.
He smelt Romano's body odour, felt the slight touch of his shoulder against his own. Would he confide his secret to Romano? Maybe Romano would really love him than.
'Yes,' Tristan smiled, 'I'm looking for a treasure. But don't tell anyone.'
'No, of course not. Is it something you lost?'
'In fact it comes down to that.'
He had lost his virginity there, but it would never be given back to him. All what he hoped to find there was justice.
'You àre secretive,' Romano said.
'Oh, it's nothing special, really. A watch I lost some time ago. I was running and then it slipped from my arm.'
These were all white lies. Romano did not need to be saddled up with someone else's problems.
'So you have been running around through all those areas and then you noticed you lost your watch?'
Romano laughed.
Tristan couldn't help laughing as well.
'I'm very bad at lying,' he said. 'But I do that, because I don't want to involve you in my problems.'
'What does it matter? We're friends, aren't we?'
Tristan saw the eyes of the boy next to him, looking at him seriously.
'Er..., yeah,' he said, taken completely by surprise, but he recoverd himself quickly. 'That's true. We're friends... Well, allright, I'll tell you what happened.'
Romano had put into words what they both had been feeling for each other for a long time. Maybe "friendship" was a big word, but as a description it came quite near. Anyway, they trusted each other so much, that they could share everything. So, Tristan did. And, while listening, Romano lied down on top of his own bed which was next to the narrator's. Tristan was almost whispering and Romano asked him a question every now and then in a whispering voice. But he did not whisper any longer when Tristan came at the end of his account.
'What a bastard!,' he said. 'What a filthy asshole.'
At that moment Niels and Iwan came in. They began to undress. Tristan saw on the clock that it was already bedtime. He and Romano exchanged a meaningful look and kept silent. They shared a

secret.

It was a rainy Saturday evening. There were three of them now. Two areas had been done by Steven and Tristan. Without any result. Maybe tonight they would find something. Steven had prayed for that. And suddenly, a rational, Romanian angel had appeared.
'This is my friend,' Tristan had said. 'He wants to help us.'
'Good.'
They were walking through a wide street which you could call the high street of the area, just like the high street of a small Wild West town. The villas were about a hundred yards apart from each other. Only a few cars were passing by, but every time one did, Tristan watched carefully who was inside.
'Shall we have a look at this villa?' Steven asked and released his gaze from the stunning profile of Romano's face, whose eyes were shining softly in the moonlight. They were just about to walk to the entrance of the villa, when Tristan pointed at a car which was passing by.
'That's him!' he shouted. 'I saw him sitting behind the steering wheel.'
Tristan pressed his trembling body against Steven's, who automatically embraced him.
'Take it easy,' he said.
He was used to calm down students who had become emotional by a fight or by a disappoining experience.
God,he prayed by himself, all that I wanted to become, was the manager of a band that would make people happy by its music. Nothing more. But Thy will be done.

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Tristan was crying softly.
'I could not see the registration number,' Romano said.
'Does not matter,' Steven said. 'We're in the right area.'
'Do you want to go home now?' he asked Tristan, who released himself from him.
The boy shook his head.
'He turned to the right at the end of the street,' Romano said. 'At the traffic lights.'
They walked in the direction of the crossroads, where they turned into a narrow side-road.
'Is this place familiar to you?' Steven asked Tristan.
'Yes, it is,' he said, 'I remember the postbox at the corner.'
'Than we'll just have to search the surroundings,' Steven said.
It was deathly quiet. Only their footsteps could be heard. They passed villa after villa, but not the right one. The Nissan had been swallowed by thin air and probably was in a garage now. Finally, at the end of the street, they found the villa of "the madman" as Tristan called him.
'Oh yeah, Zodiac,' Tristan said, when he saw the wooden sign with the name.
Steven wrote down the address in his diary. On the other side of the L-shaped villa Tristan showed him and Romano where he had climbed over the fence.
'There is a light on,' Romano said, when they had walked back to the drive way. 'But the curtains are closed.'
All three of them were excited, moved up and down, looking for possible clues.
'It's 9.30 now,' Steven said, 'I don't think it will make sense to ring at the door.'
Romano had ventured to walk close to the window, and tried to look inside through a chink in the curtains. After a while, he beckoned the other two to come closer, with a quick move of his hand.
'There is someone walking around in the nude,' he whispered. 'A boy.'
Steven looked through the narrow opening, but only saw the back of a couch. Suddenly, a shape flashed by, a light brown boy's body with black hair and without any clothes on. Was that Tarik?
Steven made room for Tristan, who was pushing against him impatiently.
'I don't see anything,' he whispered.

Then, there was the sound of a door being shut down. Super-fast, the man and the two boys hurried off the window and ran as silently as they could to the street. There, they hid behind a big car, giggling a bit nervously. Nobody came outside.
'I think it's Tarik that we saw,' Steven said, when they were walking out the street. 'What a splendid night, boys!'
'Yeah,' Tristan said.
To Steven the entourage in which the discovery of the villa had happened, was as erotic as a visit to a boy's brothel would have been. The wriggling in front of the window had given him a swollen member. From time to time his eyes wandered off to the boys' buttocks; both of them were wearing tight jeans.
'There are a lot of boys walking about freely,' he told, 'who end up in the wrong hands. It's difficult for the police to trace them down, if there are no photographs available.'
'And if they have photos, these are often antiquated,' Romano said. 'These boys may have got their hair all different or they have moustaches.'
'Indeed,' Steven said, 'The first thing that criminals who exercise power over this kind of boys do, is change their looks so they won't be recognized any longer. They receive a new identity, as it is called, and sometimes a new name, or, in Tristan's case, a number.'
'What are we going to do next?' the former number 7 asked.
'To me it seems best that you keep in the background from now on,' Steven said. 'They don't know Romano and me. Maybe he could ring at the villa door one time and go inside with an excuse. Would you dare, Romano?'
The boy nodded.
'On a weekday,' Steven said, 'For instance next week, during spring term.'
'That would suit me,' Romano said. 'Than I'll pretend to be a refugee from the Balkans.'

'Very good,' Steven said. 'Somebody's got to infiltrate there. Otherwise we'll never know what's going on in that villa.'
He wanted to live a sacred life. All his acts had to be in the service of God and his fellow men. Tarik would be saved.

Chapter 10

I've got stay of execution. The boys won't tell me if they already have a specified date for the execution and if so, what it will be. Probably, they have not agreed yet among themselves. I have escaped the self-determined fate, because the blowjob I gave Tarik was too good. Now I have to do it everyday.

He, Jamal and Daan have grabbed the bedrooms. The little brothers sleep in the guestroom and Harry sleeps in the attic room. I've got the box in the cellar which once was Tarik's at my disposal. The boys are like a small army unit having claimed Zodiac, on the understanding that I am their prisoner. They need me to sign pre-printed giro credit slips and that sort of things, because my money has not run out yet. They give me just enough to eat to stay alive. I'm allowed to go out shopping with the car, but I do have to be back in the villa at a specific time. Regularly, girls are coming for Jamal, who does not seem to become satisfied. Sometimes all the boys play football in the garden together; now they net balls and then they play a match: three against three.

As a scientist I can't help making a psychological analysis of the situation. After the events at the end of last year, I must revoke my theory about the hierarchical relations between the boys. Daan is not the informal leader I took him for. At least, not any longer; Tarik has slowly but surely taken over his position. Harry has become the new rebel, though a silent one, and in that capacity he is a very weak version of Tristan. The only thing he does, is struggle a bit when work has to be done. As for the two youngest ones, it's no use escaping to them since they are being watched day and night.

The work. Equipment has been purchased for it. The boys themselves make the preparations. I have to help often. They can earn money with it. A whole lot of money. Jamal has his

connections.
I want to be buried in the garden. In a few days I'll be allowed to dig my own grave. Jamal has promised me that.

'I don't feel attracted to men,' Chris said, 'But I wouldn't mind to be kissed on my cheek by a man.'
He and Steven were taking a walk through the city; Chris liked being outside, being about. They had known each other for two months now. Steven had noticed that Chris was much concerned with love. That he wanted to have a girlfriend, but that again and again his relationships with girls had broken down, because they had chosen to go on with other boys.
'People are not capable of loving each other,' Steven said. 'Only if God is involved, you can call it a loving relationship. You need to pray for each other to prevent you from hating your partner or becoming untrue to him or her.'
'All my relations did not last longer than four months. I have not been to bed with a girl yet. One time nearly.'
Steven tried to steer Chris' thoughts in another direction.
'Friendship is important too,' he said. 'We don't just have a businesslike relation, you and me, do we?'
'No. But everybody always lets me down. Nobody wants to have me.'
'I won't let somebody down so fast.'

Chris seemed to have a fundamental feeling of desolation, as a result of which he was happy with every bit of attention he received from others. As for Steven, he had the impression that Chris tried to test him every now and then by making insulting remarks.
'I showed the photograph that you gave me in exchange for this photo of mine, to my uncle,' Chris said, when they had taken the tram after their walk. 'He said that you have an unreliable head and look like a homo.'
It sounded as if Chris himself totally agreed with that. He did not sit next to Steven in the tram, but kept on standing. Steven adopted a completely indifferent attitude, when Chris went on about homosexuality for a moment. He proved to have only heard prejudices about it. But when they had got off the tram, Steven said in a strict voice, 'Let's agree that we will never talk about homos and sex again, 'cause they have nothing to do with us.'
'No,' Chris said, maybe a bit shocked by Steven's fervour, 'They have nothing to do with us.'
It was the tenderness between them that arose Steven's sexual desire: when Chris, feeling completely secure, came stand next to Steven to show the lyrics of a song, or when they were sitting in front of Chris' pc and their knees touched. For the time being, Steven did not dare go any further than lying an arm on the back of the chair Chris was sitting on, a gesture which slightly looked like embracing Chris himself.
Would not those kisses leave a a nasty taste? Steven wondered, when he considered kissing Chris on the cheek when saying goodbye.
He decided not to start with it until Chris would feel a bit more relaxed in his company and had got rid of the homophobia which, according to Steven, had been impressed upon him by his relatives.
Steven had told Chris nothing about the searches he had undertaken with Tristan and Romano. Chris was not at all interested in the private life of his fellow-musician. He did not know that Tristan did not have a girlfriend and that he was not really worried about that.

The soft springtime weather was arising expectations. Winter had been conquered; good would conquer evil. Tristan felt a new strenth growing inside him.
He was walking with Romano through the garden of the boarding school, he saw the buds on the bushes, the daffodils and the crocuses, and realized that this was what he had been dreaming about

when he was locked up in the basement.
'I rang at the door,' Romano told, 'And somebody asked who was there through the intercom. I mumbled something in broken English, after which the door was opened by a lean man with a skull-like head. He wore a dark blue dressing gown. His eyes stared past me as in a trance and then focused onto mine. He seemed to be drugged all over. "Could you help me, please?" I asked in English, and delivered a story about the misery in the Balkans. He said that I should go the police. I said I was hungry and very tired. The man shrugged his shoulders. When he wanted to close the door, I let myself fall onto the ground, as if I was fainting. He was too weak to push me away and went for help. A moment later I heard a boy's voice say that I should be taken to the kitchen. I was lifted and moved. "You gotta press his head downwards," I heard someone say. "No, fool, ùpwards," someone else said. They started giving me a small shaking. I pretended to come round again. The man had disappeared. Now three boys were standing around me: two foreigners and a Dutchman. The biggest of them gave me a cheese sandwich and a glass of milk. I thanked them and looked at them friendly. The Turkish boy grinned at me.'
'Tarik.'
'Oh, was it? I did not hear them calling each other by their names. This Tarik only wore underpants and I noticed that he had a half hard-on or maybe he has a big one by nature.'
'The second.'
'He made some international gestures: those of money, fucking and making a movie, and then gave me a questioning look. I asked what he meant. Then he just said, "Gay porno". I laughed and shook my head. This Moroccon boy and this Dutch boy started to work on me. "Fun, man," Jamal said, but

I knew enough and I said that I had to go to look for accommodation. They let me go. When I walked through the hall, I saw that the door of the cellar was open. I looked down quickly and saw the skull sitting at the bottom of the stairs. Behind him, on both sides, were the boxes you told me about. I could not see more, for this Jamal pushed me softly outside. "Good luck," he said.'
'Weren't you afraid?'
'No, why? They did not have any weapons with them and they weren't agressive or something like that.'
'So they're making porn now. Maybe with the little boys as well.'
'Yeah. Something's got to happen.'
'We'll ask Steven what he thinks about it. I'll be seeing him tomorrow.'
'As for me, those customers are completely in charge now. That man is in their power. You think they blackmail him?'
'No, for he does not care about that. He does not care for his life at all. Jamal, Tarik and these two oldest Dutch boys are criminals. The other boys are their victims. They need to be released.'
'Oh, and I heard a child weep somewhere in the house.'
'That must have been Olaf. The small one.'
Tristan suddenly felt the urgent need to be alone. He had to think.
'I go inside,' he said. 'I see you later.'
'Okay.'
Romano walked to the gardener, who was busy with something in the back of the garden. The dormitory was deserted. Tristan sat down on the edge of his bed.
How can people be that bad? he asked himself. Why are these boys as bad as they are?
He trusted that Steven would think about a solution for the situation, which looked completely desperate now.

Steven had read some books about psychology and once there had been someone among his relatives with a psychosis, who had been admitted to a mental clinic, but furtherwise he had never

had any real close contact with psychiatric patients. That means: there were people of course, whom he met on the street and who were behaving in a rather strange way, but what, these days, could you still call "strange"? Everybody had something, hidden or not for the outside world. He knew that there were certainly half a million psychiatric patients in the Netherlands. Hadn't he himself been saved at the last moment by the acceptance of God's existence? If this had not happened, he might have become the victim of his own depressive nature or of his sense of pleasure.
That holiday in March, when he was at Chris' place, the boy told him that he could hold his own with his psychosis in society, if he just kept taking his medicines.
'I don't see you as a patient,' Steven said. 'I see you as a person, as Chris.'
Steven's opinion about psychoses was that people with a very great imagination could easily develop a delusion. Their imagination ran riot in a negative way, as it were. That's why he encouraged Chris to keep on writing as much as possible and not only porn stories.
'Then you can work off your emotions,' Steven said.
Tristan rang at the door, and Steven experienced some nice hours in the company of the rehearsing musicians. After that, he accompanied Tristan, who was holding his bike when they were walking through the streets.
'The early evenings have been bright for a long time,' Steven remarked.
'Yeah, they have.'
'Got any news?'
'Yes, Romano has been in the villa.'
Steven listened to what Romano had told Tristan.
'I'll be going there myself,' he said, when the boy had finished.
'Whàt?'
Steven did not need to be afraid of the madman and these brats would do whatever Steven told them

to do, whether they were willing or not. Steven's mind was made up.
'This situation gotta be stopped,' he said. 'I'll go there myself.'
'Couldn't we better call the police?'
'What should we say then? That minor boys are living in a premises, while they have not even been reported as missing? Or who don't want to have to do anything with the police? I can't possibly betray them, can I?'
'No, you cannot, actually. But what about these little boys?'
'I suspect that they cannot use them when they are making gay porn. By the way, did Tarik say "gay porno"?'
'Yes, he did.'
'That should be gay *porn*. That's the correct, English.'
'You know it, master.'
'Allright, you must turn to the right now. Don't worry, I'll just go and have a talk with these boys.'
'Good luck. I see you.'
Tristan mounted his bike and waved at Steven. The latter wanted a confrontation with Tarik. The boy would not slip out of his hands once again.
'What on earth is keeping you busy all the time?' asked Koen, who came to him that evening.
'Why?'
'Those kids only want to take advantage of you. Don't you see? When they don't need you anymore, you can piss off.'
'It's a process of cooperation. We're aiming for the same goal: the creation of lovely music. I help them with that.'
'By giving them money?'
'That as well. And I give them advice.'
'They won't accept it anyway. They're as cocky as hell. You can see that everywhere. You work in a

school, don't you?'
'You aren't jealous of Christiano by accident, are you?'
'No, not at all. I really like the things you do with him. But it's just that I would not give my own money away.'
'It's an investment.'
During his conversation with Koen - whom Steven kept out of the "Zodiac-affaire", just like he did with grandpa Woudvis - he thought about the moment that he would be face to face with the madman. What would he say to him? 'It's enough now'? Or would he push the man over silently and go and look for the boys? This Jamal might take out the madman's pistol and point it at him. In that case Tarik would put in a word for Steven. But how big was his former student's influence? Would he, Steven, escape with his life? He needed to make clear to these boys that he was one of them.
Steven helped Koen with learning Dutch vocabulary, after which they watched TV for some time. I'll need to appeal to their reasonableness, Steven thought on his way back home. They'll have to realize that those little ones cannot stay there.
In the darkness of the night he wept over Chris', Tristan's, Olaf's, Igor's ànd Koen's lost innocence.

Since last week I have been on hunger strike. If the boys tell me when I will be executed, I'll give it up. Jamal does not keep his promise.
It is Wednesday morning. It is raining outside. Upstairs there's a lot of noise. Music. Oriental droning. Stamping on the ground. They are dancing. I have to stock condoms in a while. A story has been invented. Daan is a rich man's son, left behind in the villa by his mother. The house is broken into by a Moroccan boy, played by Jamal. Daan catches him and overpowers him. He forces the burglar to undress at gun-point, to be able to penetrate him from behind. They need a condom for that. Later Daan's Turkish friend (Tarik) joins them and gets his cock sucked by both Daan and Jamal. Then they dress up like Indians and dance in the nude in the living room. A boy next door

(Harry) peeps through the window, but gets caught and is overpowered. He is tied up naked to a totem pole and then abused by all other boys. Fortunately, I won't have to join in, for I'm already sick when I think of the script. Besides, I don't think that the camera "loves me", as they call it in cinema terms.
Upstairs they are probably trying to turn each other on by dancing. I'll have to act as a cameraman, but I doubt if I'm fit for that, having these shaking hands. Igor and Olaf will have to be on the watch during the shootings, for all of us have a constant fear of the police ringing at the door any moment. Is it our bad conscience? Anyway, we have a plausible story ready. The boys are "my guests". I gave them shelter, because "society loaths them" and I'm busy accommodating them with various institutions.
There is a ring at the door. Ready for anything, I walk upstairs and keep my eye against the small spyhole in the door.
'Who's there?' I ask through the intercom.
'An acquaintance of Tarik's. Steven, from school. Can I talk to him for a sec?'
A man with glasses on. My age. Carelessly dressed, careless haircut. Living on the edge of decency? I open the door.
'Why should one Tarik live here?' I ask.
'Tristan told me everything,' the man says.
He pushes the door more open and enters. My resistance has nearly been eliminated. I have been weakened by lack of sleep and must let the intruder pass by. Upstairs they have fallen silent after the ringing of the bell. Apparently, the boys are holding their breath.
'Tarik!' the man shouts at the bottom of the stairs.
Quick footsteps. Tarik, dressed in a loincloth and a turban on his head, comes down first.He is being

followed by Jamal and Daan wearing, respectively, a burnous and an overall over their naked bodies. I have clearly given them ideas by my dress up parties.
It has been a long time since the former number 3 looked into the eyes of decency, or at least of one of its representatives. It happens in a solemn silence. I assume that this man is a teacher, first Tarik's and now Tristan's. The former student laughs.
'Hey,' he says, 'I kn...know this man.'
'Are you allright?' Steven asks him.
The boy has put on the cloth, probably in his hurry, in a careless way, for a part of his genitals and some pubic hair are visible.
'Yeah, and you?' he asks.
'I'm fine too. I have spoken to Tristan.'
'Tristan? So it's from hìm that you know I'm living here?'
Tarik holds out his hand, which is shaken by Steven.
'Hey, man,' the boy says, 'Don't worry, okay? I'm doing fine here. I'll have to work in a while, so I ain't got much time. See you later, allright?'
'We need a cameraman,' Jamal says.

The slightly lengthened Tarik had lost the childlike round shape of his face and now had the more pronounced jaws of a young man. But the thing that struck Steven most, was that the boy had become completely aware of his sexuality. He was standing there, his hips provocatively forward, a horny grin on his face, indifferent to what was being exposed.
Is this still my Tarik? Steven immediately thought at the first glance, but when he heard the boy stutter, he realized that nothing between them had changed.
It was possible that Tarik had told the other boys something about Steven, for they did not see him as an intruder, nor as an otherwise threatening factor. When Jamal invited him more or less to become their cameraman, Steven regarded this as a chance to infiltrate into the villa to save the little boys. With all his strength he resisted to the titillating atmosphere, which, after the boys' appearance on the stairs, had gone for his throat. And not only for his throat.

'Do you boys use a videocamera?' he asked.
'Yes, we do,' the Dutch boy said.
It's almost every boy's dream to become a famous moviestar. Steven saw this same ambition from the boys' eyes around him. Meanwhile, the man with the skull had withdrawn into the basement. It was an almost symbolic act, but Steven still doubted the symbolism of Tarik's words: 'Just come upstairs with me.'
In a way, Steven would enter heaven with the angels that go together with it, but he would not be able to lose himself in that bliss.
'Do you love sex?' Jamal asked him straight, in an enthusiastic voice.
'Er..., oh yes.'
'I've got a huge one,' Jamal said, opening the door of the hobby room and staring at Steven.
'Hey,' Tarik said. 'Leave this man alone, will you?'
There was a billiard table inside and half of the room had been equiped as a film set. Steven's eye fell on a painting which was on a chair. It radiated darkness because of the black background, against which a kind of red rocket had been depicted. A rocket to heaven? On one side, seven little green lines were to be discerned. The canvas had been signed with an H.
'This first movie is very important to us,' Jamal said. 'We can prove ourselves with it. This acquaintance of mine said, "First show what you're capable of. Than we can do business."'
'I'll join on one condition,' Steven said. 'Release these little boys. You can blindfold them, but let me take them to a police station. The police will hear nothing from me.'
Jamal reflected on that.

'They are of no use to us anyhow,' Tarik said.
'Allright,' Jamal said. 'It's a deal. You will have Igor, if you become a cameraman, and I mean: as long as we are making the movie, and you will have Olaf, if you join us as an actor.'
'Yeah,' Tarik said, 'You're still looking good.'
The boys dared go very far, but wasn't that one of the symptoms of criminals? Steven felt more overpowered than when they would have threatened him with a gun. What was more important: the two boys' well-being or his own virtuousness? Tarik might be right with his remark; people always took Steven to be ten years younger than he was, because of his youthful looks and his smooth, lithe body.
'You won't be recognized,' Tarik said. 'We're dressed up.'
Everything would happen in total anonymity. Maybe hundreds of porn movies a week were being made. His movie would certainly not attract attention among those.
'How long will it take?' Steven asked, still wavering.
'We work everyday,' Jamal said, 'So let's say three afternoons, altogether. Why? Do you need to call your wife?'
He laughed.
'He doesn't have a wife,' Tarik said with his familiar sweet smile.
'No?' Daan laughed too.
Their laughter seemed meaningful. As if they knew everything about him. By a kind of criminal intuition?
'There is something more,' Steven said.
Nothing could daunt him.
'This sixth boy who's still here...'
'What about him?' Jamal asked.
He was becoming a bit impatient.
'Does he want to leave too?'
'No,' Tarik said.
He walked into the hall.
'Harry!' he called.

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'We need him,' Jamal said, 'to do chores, when the madman will be dead.'
Together with Tarik a boy, who made a rather depressive impression, entered the room.
'Hello, I'm Steven, a former teacher of Tarik's. I'm negotiating, for that seems to be necessary here. I just want to know if you want to leave here too.'
Harry lowered his eyes.
'Why?' he said. 'And then go to one of those boarding schools again? I rather stay here.'
'Enough bullshit,' Jamal said. 'What are you gonna do?'
'Allright,' Steven said, 'I accept your conditions.'
In fact, it wasn't such a big deal. He would lend his material covering to something with which he would never be associated with all his heart. While Harry was trudging upstairs again, Steven smoothly joined a sort of conspiracy of the boys in the room. They showed him the scenes they had already shot and which served as a kind of dressed introduction to the nude scenes they would do now. Steven took the camera from Jamal who put off his burnous and laid himself down on a mattress which was on the ground. It was the fuck-scene between him and the rich man's son. Steven knew that in a porn movie everything was going straightforward. Jamal, who turned out to be the director of the movie, requested Steven to make close-ups of his face and his genitals. Then Daan came on the screen. Jamal felt him through the overall. Daan went down on his knees and produced his own thing. Slowly he unbuttoned the overall.
The takes were going well. Not many shots needed to be done again. Steven could concentrate

excellently on his work, for Jamal did not interest him in the least and he found Daan too plump to be attractive.
After a short break they talked about Steven's contribution as an actor. He was to play an artist who would wrap up the boys' bodies in war colours, so that at the end of the movie they would let go at each other as Indians.
'We can use that painting too,' Tarik said enthusiastically, 'As if you made it.'
Without noticing it, Steven imagined himself in the story and wanted to cooperate in the making of a product which was as good as possible. After all, there were many disabled people who found sexual satisfaction by watching porn movies. All Steven's ethical objections vanished into thin air.
'I must think strongly of women,' Jamal said, 'Else I won't be able to play such a sex scene.'
'Yeah, me too,' Daan said.
'I'm horny by nature most of the time,' Tarik said.
He came and stood close to Steven.
'And you?' he asked, with his well-known grin. 'Aren't you hot already?'
'I hope it's all gonna work,' Steven said in a sensible voice, 'Just think of beautiful women, huh? That's the best thing to do indeed. By the way, is this movie gonna be Dutch-spoken or English-spoken?'
The boys started to laugh.
'We groan in English and come in Dutch,' Jamal said.
'Oh,' Steven said, 'So I don't need to help you with the English text?'
'No,' said Daan, 'The pictures will speak for themselves.'
'Now I'll come on the screen,' Tarik said, when they got to work again.
Steven filmed how the burglar was forced to take Tarik's penis into his mouth and than Daan's. Close-ups were alternated with medium-shots.
I should not have agreed, thought Steven, who seemed to lose control of his physical desires. Hadn't he lived too long in a celibate state? Everywhere there were boys and men who did not need women, because they complemented each other sufficiently. Nobody knew about their secret, because they would never betray each other. And, above all: they did not harm anybody with it, so why not give in to something which was enclosed in nature? Steven's stave of flesh pressed against the material of his trousers. Tarik had undoubtedly noticed it, because the boy observed him all the time.
My snake betrays me, Steven thought.

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To back out of the absorbing, sucking effect of desire on his spirit, he thought of the madman, who might enter suddenly to disturb the scene; he thought of the students of his school, of Koen, of Chris, of Tristan and of the little ones. But Tarik was too lively. Despite his age, his body was shining with a potency which Steven could not resist. And still did he manage to play the indifferent one, to pretend that filming nude boys was his daily job.
That same afternoon, when the boys had regained their sexual energy, they wanted to know what Steven was worth as an actor. They organized a studio and invited him to dress up as an artist. Jamal took his place behind the camera. In the next scene the artist would make a nude painting of his Turkish boyfriend and would no longer be able to control himself. He had to tear the clothes from his own body. And thus it happened. The cap on his head and his wearing no spectacles made Steven unrecognizable. He removed the painter's coat with wild gestures. It all happened voluntary. The boys wanted this. Jamal made a close-up of Steven's hard-on, of Tarik's reaction to it (his face was beaming), the kneeling of the boy in front of the man and the licking of the wet glans with his tongue. Steven closed his eyes and saw Tarik's round, firm buttocks before him, and the small black hair under his nose from which little drops of sweat were hanging now. Tarik swallowed everything, after which Steven too went down to his knees, despite the embarrassment of the situation. They embraced each other and losing themselves in each other, stretched on the ground.

Is this true? thought Steven.
'Cut!' Jamal shouted.
No, Steven thought, it's only a movie.
But, what he felt in his hand, were the real balls and the real, honest pole of a boy. Tarik's, too!
Steven opened his eyes and looked straight into Harry's, who was standing in the doorway.

Chapter 11

'Fien de la Mar was a real diva,' grandpa Woudvis told. 'Difficult to get on with, but a very good actress.'
He and Steven, who felt "his period" coming, were sitting in his small garden, enjoying the

springtime sun. They were talking about the cinema.
'In her days, movies were still strictly moralistic,' Steven said. 'Actually, it was rather filmed theatre that people saw. After the war, the filmmakers had more freedom, but, because of the more daring scenes, film censorships were established. I remember that when I was only thirteen, my parents allowed me to watch a movie on television that was rated 14 plus. That was very thrilling. But the only daring thing that I saw was a man and a woman lying in bed, under the blankets.'
'Just imagine how prudish they were in those days. They'd better established a censorship for violence. Then the world might have looked quite different.'
'There are movies and movies. Nobody can take away the masterpieces from us anymore, so let the young enjoy all this commercial nonsense from America. I think that boys will always play cowboys and Indians anyway. There's no getting away from that.'
'John Wayne was a clever actor. He always played in westerns. Later he became president of the United States. That's a profession which needs good acting too.'
Steven's grandpa chuckled. He started telling about the time that he watched continuous performances by Laurel and Hardy. But Steven's thoughts were at quite a different kind of movies. It was a genre which had always (since the sixties, he thought) led an underground existence, but from the seventies on was permitted to be sold openly. Now he himself belonged to the thousands of anonymous actors who had lent their bodies to this business through the years. Could he, in a later stage, have ordered that the movie be taken out of circulation? After all, the takes had been made under pressure. Steven understood that he had no leg to stand on because of his unrecognizability. The criminal investigation department would need to search the tape for special physical marks he had. And how should he explain his erection? It should have been more acceptable that his member had shrunk under pressure. Would the boys succeed to bring the movie on the market anyway?
Steven thought of Harry and of the two little brothers, who had entered the room soon after him. He had not been able to explain why he was standing before them stark naked, with a dripping, relaxing trunk. They looked at him as if he was an animal in the zoo. And rightly so. Steven had put the artist's coat around him and had said, 'Shall we go on tomorrow?'
'Allright,' said Jamal.
In the bathroom Steven put on his clothes. He saw his heated face in the mirror and felt the same vital rebelliousness coming up as on the day that Koen had come to get his ball.
I wanted this myself, he admitted himself loudly.
After that he had gone home.
'There have been a lot of comic duos,' he heard grandpa Woudvis say. 'But Laurel and Hardy were the funniest.'
'Yes, I agree with you, grandpa.'

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It was late in the morning and Steven remembered that he needed to buy some lamps. He said goodbye to the old man, who said he was going to potter about in his garden a bit.
In the lamp shop Steven was the only customer. He went to the rack where the boxes with the bulbs were, and compared their packings with the empty box he had taken with him. A young man who was filling the shelves asked if he could be of any service to Steven. Just like Tristan he had pimples on his face, which made him, in Steven's eyes, only the more attractive. He showed the young man the empty box and immediately, at Steven's request, he gave him two samples of the desired article. When Steven went to the centre of the shop with them, looking for the cash desk, he was addressed by another helpful boy.
'I'll take you to the cash desk, sir.' he said. 'There my colleague will help you further. Have a nice day.'
At the cash desk a third boy was ready to help Steven. He greeted him friendly and settled his due. Steven felt old, but respected. Almost floating, he left the shop.

Outside, the sight of the grey city started to bore the pants off him. He found that the Dutch winters lasted much too long. It was as if the contact with the positive part in himself, which certainly was there, had come to hang by a single thread. He knew allright that he should not complain because of his exceptional gift with regard to boys, but hadn't he taken advantage of it?
'Listen boys,' he should have said, 'porn runs down man. It is not good. Take care to develop your self-respect. You will surely understand that I cannot cooperate with your project.'
'Fine,' Jamal might have answered to that. 'Then you can kiss the littles ones goodbye. Piss off.'
He was a boy who was not susceptible to Steven's gift, because the devil had taken possession of him. That's how it was. And the other boys in the house were in his power.
If they won't give me Igor and Olaf to take with me, I'll go straight to the police, Steven thought.
He had told Tristan through the telephone that the smallest boys would be released on certain conditions.
'I have to do some chores in the villa,' Steven had said, 'Fix some things here and there and clean, and cook a meal. Then I can take them with me the next weekend.'
Thus, by a white lie, he had reassured Tristan, who had had to go through such a lot of things already.
Steven could hardly hide his aversion, when he turned up "for work" with a frozen heart that afternoon. He hoped that they would let him stand behind the camera, but the boys, who had put the paint pots ready, gave him a brush. Jamal and Daan took turns filming how the artist, who was naked himself except for his beret, painted the naked bodies. He did not need to do the genitals of the persons concerned, as they would wear loin cloths.
According to the script, the boys would go to the rich man's son's house to perform a wild Indian dance there. But Tarik said that the artist could be used for another thing. During the painting the boy had become visibly excited, which had not impressed Steven. He saw Tarik's hard willie as a biological phenomenon, created by the Creator to beget offspring. From one day to the next he was remote from the boy's sexual needs, just like this happened with Koen.
'Yeah!' Jamal said. 'This artist's gonna give us blow jobs.'
'No,' Steven smiled. 'That's not in the script.'
'Oh,' said Jamal. 'But it can always be changed.'
He looked at Steven seriously. Not only was it a threatening look, but a silent request for help, for his help as an adult. Steven nodded.
'Just start with Tarik,' said Jamal.
Steven knelt down before Tarik. His hands felt his former student's smooth body, which was firm now, but boyish.
'Ah, that's nice,' said Tarik, who was cuddling through Steven's hair and started to pinch his skin a bit. 'Something's pointing forward down there, master,' he laughed, just before he squirted his come into Steven's mouth.

'Yeah,' he said, 'I had to think of a beautiful woman.'
'You wanna fuck me?' asked Tarik, turning round and putting his buttocks apart.
'No,' Jamal interfered. 'That's not possible. The movie will last too long then.'
He handed the camera over to Daan and began to pull his spear. For one moment Steven had to retch, when taking the organ in orally, but at the second take he managed to do what he had been charged to. His own stalk shriveled into a small shrimp and remained in this condition while blowing Daan. Both boys shouted out girls' names, when reaching their orgasms.
After this last scene Steven would not have to cooperate as an actor anymore. Exhausted, he left the villa, while the boys were practising their dance. On his way home Steven thought of the all too true saying "Where the brightest light is shining, the blackest darkness is not far away". He wondered whom these words were from. From Jesus, perhaps? From Fien de la Mar? From John Wayne? He

did not find out.

The boys have got a new little toy. Each child wants to force the adults to his will and his deepest desire is to have an adult in his power. "My" boys have achieved that. They are executing me by ignoring my hunger strike. It is night. My last night. I have left Zodiac. There is a park in the neighbourhood. I want to die there. But I don't know if I'll ever reach my destination. I am exhausted.
I'm of no use to Tarik anymore, but he told me that my job has been taken over by someone else. 'Someone who does it with love,' he smiled.
After that I have not spoken to any of the boys. I did not leave a note. The painting with the big red penis is my last will. This penis is the symbol of my intellect, which is obviously superior to the boys'. They are ignorant and follow their instincts. Under my leadership they had almost proceeded to the extreme: the killing of a human being. I have stirred up their hate, provoked and challenged them, and surrendered to them like a spineless lamb. But I have underestimated one vital need they have, and then especially Tarik, a need I don't have myself and which has ruined me. Anyway, the boys will be the heirs of evil.
I am lying in front of the entrance of the park now, out for the count (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7). The park can be entered through a stone gate. To me it is like the gate of heaven, through which I did not go either. It's cold. I hear footsteps. Through the haze before my eyes I see Tristan coming to me. He has wings, just like an angel's.
'You have killed my innocence,' he says, 'But I'm still alive.'
There is still so much to research! Only now I understand that the things the average scientist is engaged in, are not nearly as interesting as the question where we will go after our death. And what goes on in the soul of a boy like Tristan? I never understood and it is too late now to find out.
'Just go with me,' he says in a reassuring voice.
He reaches his hand to me and helps me to my feet. I see my dead body lying on the pavement. Together we enter the park. Would Tristan explain everything to me?

I've got to get it out of my system by writing about it, Steven thought at the end of the third shooting day. Write a story about everything that I'm going through. About death, about the loss of innocence, about the role of sex in a man's life, and about the relation between a man and a boy.
He had already put on paper a poem which he had named "Porn boys".

There we are
with our hard-ons
my friend and I
beautifully white
with bodies
without defects

he right behind me
I've got his in my hand
his hands are holding me
I feel his against my buttocks
the front photograph
is being made
unanimity
companionship
fun about the stupidness

of a moment
of desire.

The boys had told Steven that the madman had disappeared that night and that he had probably died miserably somewhere near the villa. He had not taken his identity papers with him.
Completely unmoved, they had played their parts. To give the movie an artistic touch, Steven had shot their dance around the empty totem pole in slow motion. After the dance the "white dog", played by Harry, was undressed and tied to the pole. The feeling of his manhood by Tarik created a second, smaller totem pole, which was tasted and milked by him.
This is a mischievous movie for adult men, thought Steven, who alternately took close-ups of Tarik's activities and of Harry's face with his eyes full of horror. To a lot of men it is fun to watch boys who are busy with all sorts of things, whether it is football, or the assembling of cars, or the love sport of boys all together.
The last shot of the movie was a dance, performed by Jamal, Daan and Tarik around the totem pole, during which the loin cloths fell onto the ground one by one. After Harry had been released and the boys had completely or partially dressed, the shots were being looked at.
'Looks good,' said Jamal.
'Yeah, great movie,' said Tarik. 'Nice and horny for homos.'
'But I'm really due for making a hetero movie,' Jamal said. 'I'm sick of those cocks.'
'Yeah, me too,' Tarik said.
'I cannot see any more hot dogs,' Daan said.
'We should just break off with this sex thing altogether,' said Harry.
But nobody listened to him. The other boys all started talking at the same time.
'Shall we go and blindfold the little brothers?' Steven suggested, coming to the point.
Jamal nodded.
'You can take them with you,' he said. 'Daan, go fetch them.'
While waiting, Steven wanted to say something. For instance, that spiritual life was very important to man and that God really existed. He wondered whether Jamal and Tarik believed in Allah or were atheists.
Tarik, who had buttoned up his loin cloth round his waist again, smiled at him.
Sex doesn't leave a memory, Steven thought, and smiled back.
'Here they are.'
Igor and Olaf were pushed inside by Daan.
'You may go from here, boys,' Steven said to them. 'It's over. First we'll go to the police station and from there you'll be brought to a place where there will be taken care of you.'
Jamal picked the two remaining loin cloths up from the ground.
'These will do to put around them,' he said.
Steven explained to the unwilling little catamites why they were being blindfolded. Then he walked downstairs with them.
'It's only for a while,' he said, buttoning the pieces around the small heads.
They've already seen too much, he thought.
Jamal and Tarik had followed Steven and the boys.

'If you take part in our next movie, you'll get a share in the profits,' Jamal said.
'I'll think about it.'
'See you,' Tarik said.
'Bye,' said Steven.
Outside, it was growing dark. The streets were deserted. Steven had looked up beforehand where the nearest police station was. Like a nanny he led the little brothers by the hand to a place where they would see the police station after he had taken off the pieces.

'That's where you'll go inside, you see?' he pointed, after having done so. 'And then you will tell that your parents have left you behind.'
'Nothing else?' Igor asked.
'No.'
From the other side of the street Steven had seen the boys go inside and had left then.
The story I'll write must be about a dying man, he thought. About me, that is. And about a boy he's in love with. His angel of death (Chris? Tarik?).
For the time being he was too tired and too depressed to work out this theme any further.

'The paper said that at the entrance of the park near Zodiac the body of a man of about forty years old has been found,' Tristan told Romano. 'So, that may be the madman.'
'Yes, maybe. Strange, that he left the villa.'
'Maybe he rather did not want to die in a place where he caused so much misery.'
'That's possible. Everybody wants to die in peace, isn't it? At least I do. If only it won't be by an accident or by a scary disease. I just want to die of old age.'
'Actually, I don't want to die at all.'
They were walking through the nearby small streets during the school break, like many other students of secondary schools did at the same time. The day before, Steven had informed Tristan by phone about Igor's and Olaf's release, and had told him that the madman had disappeared without a trace.
'You should write a book about what you have been through,' Romano said.
'A book? Yes. In some time. When I'll have dealt with it all.'
A couple of times a week Tristan had a bright dream in which he escaped, at the very last moment, from the madman, who tried to kill him. His wet dreams were about Harry, but he did not draw any conclusions from that. There was a girl who was in a form senior to his, and who interested him much more.
'I think I'm in love,' he said.
'Oh, really? With whom?'
'I won't tell what her name is. To no one.'
They heard the bell ring and needed to run to be in class in time.

Chapter 12

Chris had a housemate who was twelve years older than he and who had been a musician in the past. The man, called Simon, played sixties records in his room and watched porn videos every now and then in the living room. Chris regularly talked to Simon about his sexual frustrations, but it did not really help. The only thing that had resulted from these conversations was an inflatable doll which Simon had given Chris as a present, and which represented a naked woman.
'At least I've got something to hold in bed now,' Chris told Steven, when the latter had made a remark about the doll.
'It's disgusting,' Steven said. 'Who on earth would ever give a thing like that as a present?'
'I've stopped taking my medicines,' said Chris, who made a confused and desperate impression. 'They're only there to make you dull. I've got a lot more sexual energy now. Maybe I should be taken to a whore-district one time, for there's not a single girl who wants me. I've already called a sexologist, but he said that he could not help me.'
'You gotta get out of there. Simon is constantly working you up. Why don't you move into lodgings?'
'I won't manage to live alone yet.'
It weighed down heavily on Steven that his darling had to live in this atmosphere. He considered the possibility to let Chris live in his own house, until he could go and live on his own somewhere. To Steven, it would be new sacrifice he had to make, but didn't Jesus sacrifice His own life?
'For the time being you can move in with me,' he heard himself say.
So far, only Koen had stayed for the night with him once in a while, but apart from that, Steven had never lived in the same house with someone for a longer period.
'If you want, you can come and sleep in my house during the weekend after the next weekend. Then we'll see how it goes.'
'Oh, I'm sure everything will be allright. I just cannot stand it any longer here.'
That rainy April evening they were sitting in Chris' room. They had discussed when they would record the demotape in a recording studio.
'Tristan must not think that he can use my songs for a solo career,' Chris said.
Trusting other people was still one of his weak points.
'I should not worry about that, if I were you. He didn't really bring that up, did he? I'll just make an appointment with someone from the studio.'
Tristan and Chris were quite ready for it. The two of them and Steven had already been joking about the hysteria which the boys would provoke among the girls, like many boy bands had done before them.
'But first we gotta find more boys,' Chris said.
'I'll send the tape to a local radiostation,' said Steven. 'You may get an interview and then you can ask if you can make an appeal for more singers.'
At home Steven read the lines of the short story he had started to write. It was to become a religious story. He had not found it hard to write, as if most words had been stored in his head and he just had to write them down. He had tried to write stories at times earlier in his life, but had never produced more than a few sentences. Now, he finally seemed to have the maturity to put something valuable on paper.

Tristan, who had never been in a recording studio before, was impressed by everything he saw that Saturday. With Steven and Chris he consulted with the studio owner, who would produce the demotape, how many numbers they would record. They decided to do three songs at least and to

add a fourth one if there would be any time (and money) left.
During the making of the tape, Tristan had a growing feeling that he belonged to the music business. He was in good voice, Chris was playing in his well-known, virtuoso way and the producer and Steven were happy with the results. The afternoon flew by and when, after recording a fourth song, they were in the spring sun again, they seemed to emerge from another world, the world of fantasy and creativity. Besides, the purity of the musical creative process had a refreshing effect on Tristan's spirit. He felt purified, as it were. Was not creativity the greatest opponent to every urge to destroy?
Chris, still doubting the quality of the tape a little, said goodbye to the other two and got on the tram.
'How is it going?' Steven asked, when Tristan and he were walking together.
'Fine. Very fine indeed.'
'No more nightmares?'
'No, they are decreasing, fortunately.'
'Fine.'
They smiled at each other. Steven always needed only a few words to make things clear. He was so different from Tristan's father.
'I'll let you know if I have managed to fix an interview for you both,' Steven said.
'That would be great.'
'Just put Zodiac out of your head. One given moment the money will run out and the local residents and the suppliers will find out what's going on in there.'
'Yeah. Maybe I'm going to write a bit about what I've been through. Romano gave me that advice.'
'Good idea.'
'I think I'm gonna start a diary. Just like Anne Frank. She went through a lot of misery too.'
'You could say thàt.'
In the distance Steven's tram turned around the bend.
'I hurry to the stop,' he said. 'I see you soon.'
'Bye.'
Tristan found it too early to return to the boarding school. First he took a long walk through the city. Actually, he had not been supposed to *live* this spring. He had not been supposed to hear the barrel organ, which passed him by, either, nor the singing birds and the cheerfully barking dogs. Would God have saved him? But if so, why hadn't He saved Anne Frank? Tristan's eyes filled with tears, when he thought of her fate. If she had only known that her father was still alive, maybe would she have pulled through.
Tristan turned in the direction of the boarding school and decided to dedicate the first lines of his diary to Anne.

Writing his story had exorcized the demons somewhat, and Steven was able to put things into perspective again. A lot of things had happened in his life during the past half year. His father had died, but a son had been given to him instead. That had been the greatest miracle. He had not managed to help Tarik, but, by the agency of the boy's partner, he temporarily had had to give up his process of deroticiation to be able to rescue two other boys. Then there were Chris' and Tristan's musical careers. Soon he would receive the former in his house. Steven had made sacrifices and you could say that evil had been conquered. Writing the story, in which he incorporated autobiographical elements, learned him to accept that boys were as they were, and had natural urges which were not so much in defiance of Steven's ideal of purity.
How can it be that I still regard Tarik as an innocent creature? he wondered. Will I ever succeed in saving him?

Before he fell asleep, he made up his mind to visit Zodiac again, as soon as he would have the opportunity.

The room, which Steven had at Chris' disposal, was two by three metres. On the Saturday night that Chris would sleep at Steven's place for the first time, he had inflated an airbed and put a sleeping bag on it. Before he met Chris, and a long time after the night which Koen had last spent in his house, Steven had toyed with the idea of letting the room. He had heard that there was a great lack of rooms among prospective students, and had even put an ad in the paper:

> Older gay youngster is looking for
> a relation with first-year student.
> If it hits off, you can come and live
> with me. Have 2 x 3 m room.

He had received one reaction to this: from a boy from Brabant[1], who later informed him by phone that, on further consideration, he found the room too small.
Now, the small room would be put into use by a boy who was happy with its dimensions, and who demanded nothing from Steven. He arrived at 9.30 in the evening in an overstrained condition, with a travel bag full of toilet things and clothes. Simon had been badgering Chris about the demotape he had played to him. He had told Chris that "it did not do a fucking thing" for him.
'He is jealous,' Steven said, 'Because he does not get the chance anymore to work together with other musicians. Just let him bullshit.'
Chris relaxed somewhat.
'Wouldn't you better take your medicines again?' said Steven. 'Then maybe it wouldn't all worry you so much.'
'No! I won't. I don't want to become a robot like so many other psychiatric patients.'
It was completely impossible to make Chris change his mind. That's why Steven gave up his attempts and suggested they'd go to a pub in the neighbourhood for just a while. Chris immediately cheered up at the thought. They put on their coats and not long after that they were playing chess together, while drinking beer.
Once he lives with me - a person, who understands him - , Steven thought, he will be better. Now he is in an environment which is suffocating to him. Chris is someone who needs a baffle-board. He still has childlike needs which nobody can recognize, because nowadays they want to make a child a grown-up as soon as possible. Chris does not seem to want to grow up.
Steven was fighting his tears, when his opponent could laugh again, because he had won the game.

That night Steven had trouble getting to sleep. His body was glowing. Over and over again, he saw Chris before him, undressing to his briefs and creeping into the sleeping bag. Steven had hoped that the boy, in a strong desire for security, would creep into his bed. But that did not happen. Not until four o'clock Steven fell asleep.
He woke up first and saw that it was a quarter to ten. There was not a sound in the house, so he assumed that Chris was still asleep. Steven went to the bathroom and, while passing by, he noticed that the door of the guestroom was open. He looked inside. While sleeping Chris was even more beautiful than being awake. All the more so, in complete rest, the handsome little face made the impression of having had God's special attention. The Lord's Day had been blessed by Chris' presence. Slowly, he woke up when Steven mentioned his name and, after that, made their breakfast in the kitchen.
'Did you sleep well?' Steven asked Chris, when he left the bathroom, dressed and his hair wet.
'Yeah, quite reasonably.'

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[1] A Dutch province.

They both experienced the intimicy of rising together and awaking slowly, while the miracle of the new day took place once again. Sunlight penetrated the room.
'It's fine weather,' Steven said. 'Maybe we could go out for a small walk in a while.'
'Okay.'
It is a nourishing love that I feel for him, Steven thought. The love he needs to grow up, to become stronger.
After breakfast they had coffee, while having a second look at some of Steven's art books. He had put an arm around Chris' waist and answered his questions.
This is harmony, thought Steven. Two people, united spiritually. Age does not matter.
But yet he was on his guard. Chris would be wrong to think that he could take advantage of Steven. It was horrible enough that Jamal and Tarik had used him for their purposes.
'I do ask a small contribution towards the household costs, if you come and live with me,' he said during their walk through the city. 'And each of us will have certain chores in the house.'
'Yeah, that makes sense to me.'
That afternoon they watched a rerun of an episode from the TV series 'Columbo'. Chris did not know this series and enjoyed the intendant's special approach thoroughly.
'When I'm with you', Chris said during dinner, 'I calm down completely.'
Around seven Steven took him to the tram. They agreed that Chris would come and sleep again at Steven's place the next Saturday.
After a short visit to Koen, who was surprised to hear that Steven was going to share his house with Chris, Steven went home to finish his story.

Chapter 13

One night, when Tristan was writing in his diary, Steven rang him up. He told him that he and Chris were invited for the interview at the local radiostation, which had a special evening programme with popmusicicans who made their debut.
'Is the date allright with you?'
'It sure is!' Tristan said enthusiastically.
They arranged that he and Chris would come to Steven first and that the two of them would go to the radiostudio then.
'I don't need to be there during the interview,' Steven said. 'It must be a programme fór young people, made bý young people.'
Tristan wrote down the good news in his diary at once.
It was almost the end of April. The days were warm and sunny. Here and there, people were walking in summery clothes. The boys were received by the radio people in a friendly way and were asked questions about their music and their private lives. (Chris: 'I don't have a girlfriend at the moment, but I do fancy women.' Host: 'It wouldn't be a problem if you didn't'). Then they played a song from the demotape. Tristan and Chris were making jokes with the hosts as soon as they were off the air and music from other artists was heard. Chris had told Tristan that he had not slept a wink that night. He was allowed to mention Steven's phone number, so that boys who were interested in becoming a member of the Ranch Boys could contact him.
On their way home the boys rang up Steven, who said that they had done a wonderful job, but that he had not received any reactions yet. At his return in the boarding school, Tristan heard that only Romano had listened in to the interview, but this rather reassured than disappointed him.
'I was not able to express myself properly every now and then,' he said.
'Oh, that does not matter,' said Romano. 'I would have been nervous too, if I had been there. It was a good show.'
Tristan fell asleep, satisfied. He had had a first experience of the world of show business, just for a moment, and that had pleased him well.
Anyone who had heard this programme, Steven thought, has been through something unique. You must have a heart of stone, if you are not affected by these two boys' youthful enthusiasm. Chris is my hero. Bravely, he gets through all trouble somehow or other.
He had put the windows open. It was more than intoxicating to listen to Chris' music with this beautiful spring weather. The house music seemed to have been silenced forever, allthough Steven knew better. He was thinking of Chris' good qualities, like caring about the environment, being economical and tactful, having artistic talent, which he used in the right way, and also being capable of tenderness.
I'm here to serve youth, to serve the boys, Steven thought. Nobody will remember the manager's name, which has been mentioned. I'm in God's secret service, like James Bond is in Her Majesty's. Chris is crazy about this kind of escapist movies.
During the rest of the day, he stayed near the telephone as often as he could, but the only one who called him was Koen.

'It came across rather nicely,' Koen said about the radio broadcast with Chris and Tristan.

That evening Steven went on his way to Zodiac. He hoped that the boys, or at least Tarik, would have become blasé from the extravagant sex. In the residential area he sniffed in the aroma, which was ascending from the gardens and which made him high in a special way.
Tarik answered the door. He was dressed in a three-piece suit, complete with a tie.
'Hi, pale face,' he greeted Steven.
Inside, Steven saw that the other boys were all dressed up as well.
'We're just coming from a porn video fair,' Jamal explained. 'Our video will be sold for one hundred and twenty-five euro, home and abroad. We're gonna be rich!'
'Do you remember this one?' Tarik asked and gave Steven a videotape with a colour photograph on the cover.
Steven recognized the four young actors in their birthday suits, all ready for action. On the cover they were mentioned by pseudonyms.
'Yeah,' Steven said. 'How nice, you all being so succesful.'
'You can keep this tape,' Tarik said.
'Thank you.'
At last Steven had a photograph of Tarik.
A lot of 'my' boys become famouse somehow, he thought. What's come over me?
He couldn't summon the courage to point out to Tarik that he should mend his ways.
What should I say? he asked himself in silence. "Leave that world"? But what about those disabled gays? Imagine that Tarik will become a well-known name in this circuit, at least his pseudonym, and that he will play in other movies over and over again. Then he may be adored by fans who will buy his latest movie and will become attached to him.
'We've just arrived,' Tarik said, 'And we're sweating in these monkey suits.'
He started to undress. The other boys only put of their ties and their jackets.
'It's a pity that we don't have a swimming-pool in the garden,' Jamal said. 'I could use a fresh dive.'
'What will be your next project?' asked Steven.
'A story which will take place in wild nature,' Jamal replied. 'At a farm, in the summer. We have found an old little farm that is completely empty. There's this young farmer in the movie, who's being paid a visit by two tourists from the town and later on the farm hand returns from his holidays. We still need to write the script.'
'Do you join us?' Tarik asked Steven.
The boy was standing in his briefs.
'We're gonna start the preparations tonight,' he said.
'No, I must visit my granddad.'
'He must visit his granddad,' Tarik laughed. 'Can I go with you?'
'If you'll behave properly.'
'I always do, don't I? Wait a minute, so I can put on something more comfy.'
While Tarik went to his room and his colleagues were fetching something cold to drink in the kitchen, Steven was thinking. Finally, he had the chance to rescue Tarik. But he could not take the boy home with him. There were too many risks. The boy would let his tongue run away with him, if he would talk to Chris, to Koen, to Tristan or to anyone who was visiting Steven, when Tarik would drop in on him just like that. No, better keep his private address a secret, so that certain facets of Steven's personality would remain secret too.
It was a full moon. In contrast with "his period", this period was one of enthusiasm for life, of his reconciliation with everything that life involved. Then he used to wake up too early at night, because, unconsciously, he probably wanted to start the new day full energy. Furthermore, he tended to a rosy view of life then, so that, through the years, he had begun to pass through the

period of the full moon with some scepticism.
'Hey, fag!' he heard Jamal say suddenly.

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The boy entered the room, a tin of beer at his lips, his body bare and wet. His grin had made room for a furious look and the sausage between his legs was standing forward threatening out of a black bush of hair.
'I'm gonna rape you, if Tarik doesn't return here. Got it? I'll fuck you to death, then. I know where I can find you.'
'Yes, Tarik will return.'
I should never have gone to this place, thought Steven. This is the night, the darkness.'
'Jamal is thinking of Pamela Anderson again,' Tarik laughed, after having come downstairs in a cheerfully coloured boxer short.
Or of me, Steven thought. Black suits Tarik. It makes his beauty show up well.
'I'll be here again in a while,' the boy said to Jamal. 'You can start without me.'
While leaving Zodiac, Steven made up his mind never to set foot in the villa again.

Grandpa Woudvis' eyes had become small, and seemed, just like Steven's, to concentrate rather on the inside than on the outside. Outside yourself there was evil; inside yourself it could be full of goodness, if God was living there. Tarik's eyes were big and examining, and maybe that's why they had long lashes. They became even bigger, when he was surprised or impressed, and were often shooting back and forth to not have to miss anything.
Never before had Steven taken a boy he knew to his granddad. On their way to him, Steven did not only have a vision of Jamal coming to the school where he worked, but he also had the shivers that Tarik would say impudent things to the old man.
To his relief, the two got on well with each other at once, allthough Steven still feared that Tarik would become a bit too outspoken. It was a relief to see the boy in an environment which was not perverted. Tarik listened to grandpa Woudvis, who told him about the origin of Liberation Day.
'They did not give us a holiday for that in the early days,' the old man said. 'But I'm sure you have, haven't you?'
'I don't go to school anymore.'
'Are you sixteen then?'
'Al..., almost. I work.'
'Do you? What kind of work?'
'I'm in the movies.'
'Like Danny de Munk?'
'Who?'
'He was a young boy too, who played Bartje[2] in the series of the same name. I think Steven will know him.'
'Yes, granddad,' said Steven.
How to bring the conversation round to something else?
'I never saw *Bartje*,' said Tarik, 'But that won't have been a porn movie anyway. I myself am a porn actor.'
The boy said this with some pride and surely without shame. Steven did not dare look at his grandpa's face. It was quiet for a moment, but then he burst out laughing.
'Really?' he asked.
Tarik nodded.
'Yes,' he said. 'Together with three other boys. Our firm is called 'Four Cannons' and we will have our own website on the internet soon.'

[2]Woudvis is mixing up *Bartje* and *Ciske de Rat* (a Ducht movie) here.

'Internet? The latest thing, you mean?' asked grandpa Woudvis.
'Yeah.'
Steven had not seen his grandpa laugh like that for a long time, and he almost regretted not having brought Tarik earlier. It took a while, before the old man calmed down.

'As boys we saw these pictures which only showed a dressed woman, baring her leg,' he told, wiping the tears out of his eyes, 'But that could be terribly exciting.'
'Really?' asked Tarik, surprised.
He and Steven listened to Woudvis' stories for a while, until he dozed off.
'You've got a funny granddad,' Tarik said, when they were walking outside.
'Yes, I have. He is someone who keeps up with the times, without releasing the past.'
'Steven.'
'Yeah?'
'I've got to tell you something that is none of your grandpa's or anyone else's business.'
'What is it?'
'I am a ho..., homo.'
'Oh.'
'I have been certain for only a short time, but actually I've always known.'
'Well, in itself it's no big deal, is it?'
'N..., no, but there is something more.'
'Tell me.'
Tarik fell silent. They had arrived at the tram stop. A boy and a girl joined them. In the distance the tram was coming in their direction.
This is our goodbye, thought Steven. In a while we'll each go our own way. It would do no good to anyone, if I'd have to go through life with a constant threat: neither to my students, nor to Chris and to myself. Tarik belongs to Jamal and Jamal belongs to Tarik. I don't know. They have to sort out that for themselves.
In the tram he and Tarik immediately went to the rear seats, where nobody was sitting.
'Well?' Steven said. 'What did you want to say to me?'
He looked into the eyes of the boy beside him; they had become small, tired of looking so much.
'I..., I'm..., i...in love,' said Tarik, after putting down his eyelashes. 'With you.'

Chapter 14

26 May, 02.00 a. m. It has been more than a month now, since we recorded the demotape. Unfortunately, we have not been invited for an audition at a record company and neither did we receive any bookings for gigs. Chris' musical career and mine are on their last legs. Chris was too busy with his removal to Steven anyway, and I myself had to do my best to move up.
My heart wants to make a pass at Saskia's. Is that passion? I think "passion" is a funny word. If she's not with me, I miss her very much. She has already laughed at me a couple of times, just like that, when we met in the bike shed of the school. But I dare not talk to her. I don't know what to say. Other boys are much bolder and step up to the girl they like at once. At the next school party, I'll just ask her if she wants to dance with me.
Last night I had a wet dream about a girl looking exactly like Tarik when he was dressed up as a girl. She was vigorous and felt my body with her hand, slipped into my clothes and slipped down there, and I exploded at her first touch. I never dream erotically about Saskia like that. The love between us has to be pure. We can always go further in a later stage.
Today, or in fact yesterday, I heard someone say on the radio that pop music belongs to the past. The songs that are still being made, are all derived from what there is. They are bloodless most of the time. The charts are full of songs for young adolescents who can still go crazy from simple tunes. According to Steven, three or four times a year a good song is released, but that is all. He told that classical music existed for 200 years and pop music for 40 years. Just like classical composers in the period after 1900, there are, here and there, pop composers who stay active and give concerts. Besides that, pop musicians mainly perform their own old works or those of others, because the public fully appreciates that. Now it is still called nostalgia, but shortly, pop classics will be performed by schooled musicians, to new generations. The teenagers who have grown older, will appreciate this music better than the commercial shit they hear, as a result of their critical attitude.
I think Steven is right. Some boys at boarding school really go out of their minds from Led Zeppelin and Deep Purple. But who will be able to sing Queen songs like Freddie Mercury did? It won't be me anyway.
Christiano is not writing new songs anymore for a long time. Recently, he told me that he used to write his repertoire together with somebody else. Something Chris is really good at, is playing his keyboard. That's why he might become a fantastic musician who will perform pop classics someday. Provided that he wants to play in a cover band.
I hear Iwan's breathing. Would he have a purpose in life? Romano wants to be a surgeon. In my opinion Iwan will become a construction worker. But both of them will want to hear music.
The night gives me clear thoughts, though, actually, it belongs to people who want evil and who cannot tolerate daylight. But I go to sleep now. Tomorrow, I'll go through all kinds of things again, that's for sure.

Chris' keyboard was in Steven's living room and so was his pc. Together they had spread Chris'

things about the house. The first night they went to sleep, Chris locked up the frontdoor with the key Steven had given to him.
'My psychiatrist wants me back in the institution where I used to be,' Chris explained. 'That's why I haven't told my parents where I live now. No one is allowed to know.'
'But why would they want to have you back?'
'Because each patient yields money to them. That's why they administer them medicine to turn them into spineless zombies.'

'But still, the medicines are there to help you, aren't they? Medical science is an invention from God. God wants people to be healthy. Diseases come from the devil.'
'I can do without medicines. You just have to take into account that I will be angry every now and then.'
'I think you're bothered a bit by a persecution complex.'
'No, that ain't so. You just don't know all the ins and outs of psychiatry.'
Chris closed the door of his room. According to the house rules which they had made together, he was allowed to read in bed until 10.30 p.m. It was 9.30, the time that Steven usually went to bed. His darling felt secure with him, at last. Steven could go to sleep with confidence.
He had interpreted Tarik's confession in the tram as originating from a young, confused mind. He had put an arm around the boy's shoulder and had said honestly, 'I'm in love with you too.'
'I thought so,' Tarik said.
'I'll give you my phone number. Call me, when you're making this new movie. Then I'll come and have a look at the farm.'
So, no goodbye. Steven had written his phone number on a piece of paper and had given it to Tarik. After that, he had got off at the next stop.
On his way home, he lost himself in the emotion about the sweetness of boys. God had acted in a refined way while creating His world. The most beautiful things were abstract, like love and the powers of the spirit. Tarik and Steven could save their secret in their hearts, and nobody would need to know about it.
During the first week of Chris' stay in Steven's house, there had been enjoyable moments, but also points of irritation. Chris had a habit of droning on about certain experiences from the past, and he for his part was annoyed by the fact that Steven turned the music down he wanted to listen to.
'The upstairs neighbour might turn his music too loud too,' Steven explained.
Chris did their shopping in the cheapest supermarket in town, which was quite a distance away, and together they bought the things he had forgotten in a nearby supermarket. When Chris went to school, he put on sunglasses to mislead "his pursuers". Some time earlier, he had given his hair a colour rinse, so that it was almost blond now.
At the end of this week, their relationship seemed to have never become so intimate, as if they were father and son. Steven was constantly aware of the fact that Chris' tough boy's legs (he wore short pyama trousers) were not prepared for the caresses from an older man. But all Steven was longing for was Chris' presence near his.
When, during the first Saturday evening of Chris' stay, Steven heard him blubber while going to bed, he could not help himself taking the boy in his arms. Chris was in distress over a girl he once knew and whom he wanted to see again at all costs. However, he did not know her address.
'She's in big trouble,' said Chris. 'I feel it.'
'Don't worry,' Steven comforted him. 'I'm sure there are people with her who can help her.'
He kissed Chris on the cheek and tucked him in.
'Goodnight,' he said.
The next morning Chris remarked that a night kiss to most children was something they were used to.

Thus, the weeks passed by, but instead of feeling more and more at home with Steven, Chris was becoming more and more rebellious.
This is normal, Steven thought, Chris needs someone to react against.
It was in the middle of June. One afternoon, Steven returned from work.. He found Christiano behind his pc, playing a new computer game he had bought lately. When Steven had poured out some tea for them both, somebody rang at the door. It was Koen.
This is a historic day in my personal life, thought Steven, when Christiano and Koen introduced themselves to each other.
'His' boys got on well together at once.
'Steven gives me a lot of love,' Chris said one given moment, when the conversation was about

psychiatry. 'They never gave me a chance to develop, when I was younger. I am learning now to stand on my own feet, because I want to live on my own soon.'
'If Steven helps you with that,' Koen said, 'I think it will work.'
'Yes,' Chris said, 'Every week we discuss how it has been going and make a report of that for my parents.'
'So it's going better now?'
Chris nodded.
'The situation is not optimal,' he said, 'But Steven and I are going to work on it. Maybe some third person should join, someone who gives objective advice every now and then. A volunteer or something like that, but it's very hard to find such a person.'
Indeed, Steven and Chris had talked about that once. It had been Chris, who had come up with the idea, but Steven thought that talking about the problems which occured, was enough. Every Sunday morning, before their weekly evaluation, Steven read a small passage from the bible. Chris had suggested once to go to church together. Steven's reaction to that was, that as a Christian, you should not only honour God on Sunday mornings, but all through the week.
'My faith must be expressed by my deeds,' he said.
Of course, Koen did not need to know about Chris' carelessness, neither about his frequent gross insults towards Steven. At these moments Chris seemed to be possessed by the devil, who wanted to provoke Steven to extremes. Then he controlled his anger, but he demanded apologies from Chris, who therefore offered them very reluctantly.
He has never learnt to show respect to his parents, was Steven's explanation of this behaviour. And he wants to see how far he can go. He would really like to be the boss in my house.
After some talk about the radio programme in which Chris had been interviewed, Koen left.
'Oh, I almost forgot,' said Chris during dinner, 'Someone called for you.'
'Who?'
'A boy. Er..., Turik, I think.'
'Tarik?'
'Yeah, something like that.'
'What did he say?'
'He asked if you would like to come to the farm. This is the address.'
Chris produced a written sheet of paper and gave it to Steven.
'Is this some school project?' Chris asked, when Steven ate on in silence.
'No, some musicians of whom I was the manager, are going to make a videoclip in wild nature. They want my advice.'
It was a white lie for the sake of Chris, who could only feel at ease in a deroticized atmosphere. The boy had informed after Steven's non-existing girlfriend once, and had been told that Steven wanted to keep his private life separated from his work and from his relation with Chris. The psychic confusion the boy was in, might make him loose-lipped, so it seemed better to postpone the telling of the truth.

After they had done the dishes together, they drank coffee. Chris was restless and talkative. He looked heated.
'Since I stopped taking medicines,' he said, 'I have all this pent-up energy. I can't get rid of it. Sexually, too. I wank myself silly.'
'That's the best thing you can do in a situation like that.'
'But it comes back everytime. Sometimes three times a day.'
'Try to focus your attention to things on a higher level.'
'I even think of French kissing with friends, 'cause I have no girl. Then I have at least something. When I'm with you, I miss amicability. I want a pat on the back, literally, I mean. I want you to touch me. Not in my private regions, for that's sexual harassment. Wait till I'm ready for that.'
Chris' attention was somehow distracted by the comical videomovie Steven put on, and which they were watching together, sitting next to each other on the couch. Steven's arm was behind Chris, who

permitted him to touch his ear and to stroke through his hair.
As a result of all his worries, Steven had not seen grandpa Woudvis for a long time and he wondered whether it would be a good idea to take Chris to the old man one time.
'We could drop by at my granddad's next Saturday,' he suggested after the movie. 'He is a very wise man, with whom you can have a good laugh too.'
'That's okay.'
Suddenly, Chris released himself from Steven's embrace and sat down behind his pc to play his new computer game.

As it was a warm, sunny day, Steven expected the film crew to be at work near the farm. This appeared to be a crumbling accomodation, with next to it a wooden shed, situated at quite a distance from civilization. There was no wind and it was muggy. Probably, there was a storm brewing. Having come closer to the farm yard, Steven heard the boys' voices. Jamal was giving orders, Harry was protesting, Daan was cursing and Tarik was laughing. There wasn't a living soul to be seen.
They were doing a scene behind the shed. Daan was dressed in a blue overall and was carrying two buckets full of milk. Harry was filming. Two boys walked to the farmer. They were wearing summerclothes and sunglasses.
'Could we stay for the night with you, please?' Tarik asked the young farmer. 'We're travelling through Europe and we want to hitchhike on tomorrow. We're too tired now.'
'That's allright with me,' the farmer answered. 'I think I have some room left for you in my shed. Come along.'
He put down his buckets and went to the shed.
'Hold it for a while,' Jamal said to Harry.
Tarik took off his sunglasses.
'There's my friend!' he shouted, laughing at Steven, who released himself from the shadow of a tree.
'How is it going?' he asked.
'Nicely,' said Tarik. 'I'll be going to Germany soon. To play in a movie. If it catches on, I'll stay there.'
'Tarik's gonna be a world star,' Jamal grinned.
'Will you be dubbed?' Steven asked Tarik.
'Yes. I'll have the voice of some German bloke.'
Everything is falling apart, thought Steven. Now I really have to say goodbye to him. Right at the moment that I need his cheerfullness so much.'
Before his trip to the farm he had resolved to be resigned, and let everything just happen to him. That's why he was able to react in such a halfhearted way to Tristan's news. And then there still was Jamal's threatening presence, which seemed to squeeze off any expression of spontaneity.

'Did you make a contract which includes all your rights?' Steven asked. 'Or else they can do with you whatever they...'
'Yes,' Jamal interrupted him, 'He has one. Everything is allright.'
'I'll have my own appartment,' Tarik told. 'And a car with a driver.'
'So-so,' said Steven. 'There must be a lot of money going on in that world, isn't it?'
Jamal nodded in silence.
'Impossible to have an overall view of it,' he said.
He went to the shed, with Daan and Harry in his wake.
'Are you coming too?' he asked Tarik.
'Yeah.'
'So, you're sure?' asked Steven.
'I am.'
'I'll miss you.'
Tarik shrugged his shoulders.

'That's life,' he said.
'I know,' Steven sighed.
He wondered whether they had talked Tarik into it. In Steven's life there had always been smooth windbags: they recommended products, talked someone into a religious movement, gossiped about others, proclaimed political ideas, or tried to disguise the real facts, all that with friendly smiles on their faces, and with the thought behind it of benefiting from it financially. Steven himself did not have the knack of speaking. He thought himself a reasonable writer, but the things he said did not impress many people. Talking bullshit with them, that was all what he had to bring forward verbally. He was no teller; he succeeded in holding other people's attention only for a short period. They often did not understand him either. That's why he often needed to repeat the few things he wanted to say. He would never manage to palm off something on someone.
It was different with his profession. As a teacher he was passionate. During teaching he achieved things, that he otherwise did not regard himself capable of. He reached unprecedented spiritual heights and was filled with awe of the human mind in being and of God's contribution to that.
'Tarik!'
It was Jamal's voice; he interrupted the search for words by both of them.
'You've got to milk the cow!' Jamal shouted.
He always knew exactly how to express himself. He was charismatic.
'I'll be going now,' said Steven and shook hands with Tarik. 'If you have problems, you can call me anytime.'
'Allright. I see you.'
Before entering the barn, Tarik waved at Steven and pretended to wipe away a tear. Then he laughed his laugh again and put down the zip of his fly, while being pulled inside by the other boys. When Steven walked down the yard, he thought of the expression "calf love".

Chapter 15

Inspired by the eclipse of the sun that was at hand, and by the events in his life, Steven had started writing a new story.
In the tram to grandpa Woudvis, Steven and Chris were sitting next to each other. The boy still had in mind that he was pursued and that he had to save Annemiek, the girl he had known.
'I've called the supermarket where she used to work,' he told, 'But they don't know her address. So, I'll never find out what her phone number is.'
'No,' said Steven. 'But maybe there is another way.'
Further, there was the little book of dreams which Chris had bought a week earlier and which gave explanations of dreams people can have. Chris himself had dreamt once that he was making love to an ex-girlfriend, someone different to Annemiek, and that she had suddenly changed into a man. The dreambook did not say what the deeper meaning of this dream was.
That night Steven had dreamt about a little cat that was jumping into a bag and out of it again. He himself associated the little animal with the first-formers of his school. When he told Chris about this dream the next morning, he looked up the meaning in the book.
'This dream has a sexual meaning,' Chris said. 'The cat, going into something and out of it again all the time, is me. It must be that. It's got to do with the time of the year.'
So Chris identified himself with his own penis and assumed that Steven wanted to satisfy him orally.
'I don't think so,' said Steven and thought, Would his intuition be so good that he senses that I desire him?
Now that they were living together everyday, there were moments that Chris was standing, lying or sitting dangerously close to him, but never had the boy dropped a hint, by word nor by gesture,

about the intimate things that could happen between him.
I don't want them either, Steven thought. Chris is my son.
Grandpa Woudvis welcomed them in his small garden, which was shone upon by the setting sun.
'This is gonna be a beautiful summer, boys,' he said, after Steven had introduced him to Chris.
'Really?' said Chris. 'And you're sure about that already?'
'I am, I am. It's in the almanac.'
'Chris has a little dreambook,' said Steven. 'It says what dreams can mean.'
'Dreams are lies,' his granddad laughed.
And he told about a man who used to be at the fair, telling people what meaning they should attach to their dreams.
'He was an astrologer as well,' Woudvis said. 'He predicted one's future for a dime.'
'According to the Bible that is forbidden,' said Chris, who read small passages from the bible Steven had given to him, every night before sleeping.
'That is true,' grandpa Woudvis said, 'But according to the law it is not. Astrology can be very educational. It tells something about our characters. The zodiac is divided into twelve signs...'
Steven's thoughts wandered off to the villa. At some of the signs his grandpa mentioned, he saw

himself walk through the rooms in question again.

The boys have come home and have gone to bed tired, but satisfied. My spirit is wandering through my former house. In Aquarius it is pitch-dark, but I know that the boxes are empty. There are leftovers getting mouldy here. The objects in the lab - the whip, the knifes, the schoolboard, the furniture - are covered with a thick layer of dust. Nobody comes to this place anymore. In this room the boys' minds have been moulded for good, just like it would have happened in a class room. I was their catalyst.
After having gone straight across some doors, I arrive in Cancer, where I have played with the boys until they were on the verge of despair. In Taurus there are three days' dishes. I let one of the plates crash to the floor and go upstairs. Tarik is sitting upright in his bed in Leo. He pulls the light rope, listens and throws the sheet off. Next to him, in Libra, Jamal is just sleeping on, but Daan, lying in Scorpio, pricks his ears and comes out of the bed. He turns on the light. In the corridor he runs into the nude Tarik. The boys look at each other, frightened. I shoot into Virgo and shake the wastepaper basket back and forth.
Tarik whispers, 'A burglar. In the bathroom.'
Daan opens the door of Virgo and presses the light switch.
'There ìs no burglar,' he says, 'We're just being haunted.'
'But how can that be?'
'What's that rotten noise?' asks Jamal, who has come out of his bedroom, in his white pyama trousers.
'We heard a ghost,' Tarik says. 'He has smashed a plate in the kitchen. I'm sure I haven't dreamt that.'
'There are no ghosts,' says Jamal.
In Pisces I see Harry, who's putting on his dressing gown, and opens the door of his room.
At the top of the stairs he shouts, 'Hey, what's up?!'
'Tarik has heard a ghost!' Jamal shouts back in a mocking voice.
Harry descends the stairs on bare feet and the four of them go to Taurus, where they turn on the light.
'A plate has fallen from the kitchen unit,' says Jamal. 'That's all.'
In Aries I throw the videocamera onto the ground.
'Huub is haunting,' says Tarik, after which they hurry upstairs and establish that the camera needs to

be repaired.
They'd better all go to Germany. Zodiac is still mine.

Grandpa Woudvis had managed to interest Chris in astrology. The boy had asked the old man a lot of questions, and had been given extensive answers. Besides that, they had talked about the difficult period in Chris' life, a period which seemed to be over now.
'I'm glad I've survived it all,' he said.
In the period after their visit to Woudvis, Chris bought a couple of books about Western and Chinese astrology.
On a Monday night in the beginning of July, when Steven was already in bed, Christiano, fully dressed, came to him in his bedroom.
'I have to go,' the boy said. 'Annemiek needs me. I gotta find her.'
Steven knew that it was no sense stopping Chris. He was not capable of that either, in view of the state of mind he was in, and which returned every month.
I have done everything I could to help him, Steven thought. I have insistently advised him to take his medicines, I have given him a bible, we've talked about faith, we prayed together. I leave it to God now.
Chris kneeled on one knee, next to Steven's bed.
'Steven,' he said, putting a hand on his bare shoulder, 'I love you.'
'I love you too.'

'You're my only love friend at the moment. Trust in God. Keep on thinking positively. If you believe in yourself, you can believe in others too.'
'I know.'
Chris rose to his feet and left the room in silence. Undoubtedly, his thoughts were at the girl in need.
That night, Steven slept alone in the house for the first time in months. Everytime when he woke up and went to the toilet, he saw Chris' deserted room.
It was not until the next evening that he came home. He was in the company of some police officers, who told Steven that Chris had talked to people in the street, and had bothered them. The boy looked tired, but did not want to sleep or eat.
'I don't know what you're putting in my food,' he said.
'Don't be silly,' Steven smiled. 'You don't think I want to poison you, do you?'
'If I am dead, you'll be able to sell my songs.'
'Ridiculous.'
'Could you be quiet for a moment, please?'
Chris listened attentively to a sound only he seemed to hear.
'She's here,' he said. 'I hear her. They're beating her. Annemiek!'
He rose to his feet and hurried to the frontdoor.
'She's not here,' Steven said, but Chris opened the frontdoor and started calling through the stairwell, 'Annemiek!'
Steven heard him go downstairs, to the basement, and then, up to the topfloor, shouting on and on, 'Annemiek! I'm coming to help you!'
Steven seized the opportunity of Chris' absence to call a doctor, who promised to be there as soon as he could. On the landing which was on top of Steven's, Chris was talking to the neighbour who always played house music, and to the woman nextdoor.
'Chris!' Steven called.
The boy came downstairs, followed by the neighbours. To reassure them, Steven put a finger to his closed lips, nodding friendly, as a sign that Chris better not be argued with and that everything would be solved. (Later he thought that the gesture had a double meaning with regard to the houselover). He could not tell the neighbours in Chris' presence that the doctor was on his

way.
To Steven's relief the boy did not leave and the doctor found him, talking animatedly and full of criticism of Steven, who, according to Chris, cooperated with the people who "imprisoned" Annemiek. The doctor did not need much time to make a diagnosis, and promised Steven that help would come.
'Nobody can go on like this,' he said, before he left.
What are they going to do with him? Steven wondered.
He loathed the idea that two sturdily built ambulancemen would take the slender Chris with them, after giving him an injection. In the meantime he was listening to Chris' hostile comments; he had often told Steven that he never, ever wanted to have to do with psychiatry again, and he seemed to sense what would happen.
'I told you: "No doctor"', he said and one moment later, 'Allright, Steven, you may go to bed with me for one time, but after that never again.'
Was he trying to seduce Steven, so that he would change his mind and cancel the crisis team?
Or were Chris' deepest desires coming up in his confusion?
Somebody rang at the door. Steven opened it for two youthful, female members of the crisis team, who introduced themselves friendly and, after that, went straight to the point. They let Chris tell his story and, after that, Steven was allowed to speak. The ladies succeeded in persuading Chris to take a sleeping pill. He did not need to go with them. They promised that a psychiatrist from the mental health institute would call the next day to ask how Chris was doing. Anyhow, he ate a small apple which Steven had peeled for him after the ladies' departure, after which they went to sleep.
When Chris got up at 9.30 a.m., he was still completely stunned. Bit by bit, he came to his senses

again.
'Steven,' he said, while they were drinking coffee, 'I love you so much that I would do anything for you'.
'That's nice.'
Later in the morning Steven passed Chris in the corridor and touched him by accident for a moment. Immediately, Chris' fist flew to Steven's chin.
'I said: "Don't touch me",' Chris said.
Steven decided to stay near the telephone to be able to report the incident to the psychiatrist, but someone called right at the moment, when he had to go to the w.c. Chris answered the phone.
'Yes, I'm allright,' Steven heard him say. 'Bye.'
It was the summer holidays. Steven did not have to go to work. Chris left, without leaving a forwarding address, after which Steven tried to reach the psychiatrist from the institution. But he was not there.
In the afternoon Steven received a call from someone from a police station on the edge of town. Chris would have addressed a little girl, and that's why the residents of the district where he was, had called the police. They had locked him up in a cell. He would be brought home that same evening. Besides that, Steven had contact by phone with Chris' father, who enquired where his son was. Steven acquainted him with that.
'We must prevent that he will be admitted to the clinic where he has been before,' Steven said, 'Because he absolutely does not want that.'
'I agree with you on that,' Christian's father said.
Again the police was at Steven's door that evening. Apparently, Chris had talked away at them nineteen to the dozen, because somewhat relieved they said goodbye.
He is talkative, Steven thought. Who knows what he has been telling about me.
Chris had brought a small pamphlet with him, called *Your Stay as an Arrested Person.* He did not seem to be ashamed of his conduct. Yet Steven hoped that the boy had learnt the hard way. They had dinner together, but the solidarity between them was far away.

'In a while, I'll be going to a neutral place with my father,' Chris said. 'To have a talk.'
'So you've told him where you live.'
'Yes. That won't do any harm. But I don't allow my mother to come here yet.'
Not much later Chris' father arrived. Steven was the witness of a family scene which failed to move him.
'You're the best father I have,' Chris said, his voice full of sentiment, putting an arm round his father's shoulders.
'You've only got one,' the man smiled.
They left, united.
'Leave Chris alone,' his father said, after having turned around to Steven.
Steven felt defeated by insanity.

Immediately after having received the message from Chris' father that the boy had been admitted to a psychomedical centre the same evening (a different one from the one he had been before), and that he needed his keys, Steven called the department concerned, to make an appointment. He was told that Chris had been in the shower with his clothes on and that other clothes were urgently desired. Steven removed the keys of his house from Chris' key ring to prevent that his parents would come and nose about during his absence.
Outside, summer had reached its peak. On his way to the psychomedical centre, which was within walking distance from his house, Steven went straight across a green local park, where some boys were playing football on a small field.
Chris was lying on his bed with his shoes on, in a small ward which belonged to the closed department and which he shared with two other men. He seemed to be almost completely stunned by the medicines they had apparently administered him. Steven sat down on the chair next to Chris'

bed.
'How are you?' he asked.
Chris did not answer.
'I brought your keys. And clean clothes.'
'So you've finally got your way, don't you?'
'How do you mean? That you're here? But that's for your own good. You were in policestations a couple of times. If you just continue taking your medicines, you'll be out of here very soon.'
Thinking seemed to bother Chris. He reacted slowly to the things Steven said, or he said nothing at all. That's why Steven decided to keep it short.
'These are your clothes,' he said, emptying the bag.
Chris came from the bed. The trousers he wore almost slipped from his waist. A nurse who entered took pleasure in the arrival of the clothes, but insisted on Steven's departure. Chris thanked him for what he had brought, and asked if they could pray together. They did, and in the nurse's presence Steven asked God to cure Christiano as soon as possible.
He is still hostile, Steven thought, walking across the leafy ground of the centre. And he's got the nursing staff on his side. A man taking a boy into his house just like that, is not to be trusted of course.
When he was walking through the local park, he heard one of the boys who were playing football whistle. Steven was the only passer-by.
'Hey, it's a man, you know,' he heard one of the other boys say.
'Oh,' the whistler reacted, without a worry in the world, and got wrapped up again in the game.
Steven expected Chris to be his old self again within a couple of weeks, so he decided to state as a condition for Chris' return into his house, that he would take his medicines everyday, to prevent a recurrence of the tragedy.
At home he continued working on the story he was writing.

A few days later Steven brought Chris some other gear, among which his bible, and this time they had tea in the conversation room. Steven got acquainted with one of Chris' roommates. He was Chris' age and seemed to be good at dancing. The boy, called Alvin, sauntered up and down the department, while Steven was talking to Chris. Steven was aware of Alvin's interest in his person.
'I've danced in the garden this afternoon,' Chris told. 'The nursing staff did not like that.'
He was laughing again, though only a bit.
When Steven was about to leave, Alvin asked, 'Can I go with you?'
'Yeah, allright,' said Steven, who was under the impression that the boy was allowed to go to the grounds.
But a nurse said to Alvin, 'You are pleasantly staying with us, aren't you?'
During Steven's next visit, Chris was suspicion all over. He even began to shout at Steven and accused him of tampering with his pc in order to change his files.
Therefore, Steven was sceptically disposed, when Chris' father called him a few weeks later with the announcement that his son was better, and would drop by that Saturday.
That day Chris entered in silence, and went to his computer right away. He put it on, after which he checked the files.
'You've been tampering with them,' he said.
'That is not true. Apologize.'
'Why should I? To an unreliable asshole like you?'
'Clear off now! I won't let anyone insult me in my own house.'
Chris put off his pc. He came up to Steven, wo was in the centre of the room. Steven's glasses fell to the ground, the moment the contact between his left eye and Chris' fist took place. In a fraction of a second, the eye turned black. There was pain, but mainly in Steven's heart. Chris' pain only meant the increasing of his own pain.
Steven decided to call the police to say that a psychiatric patient had been released too early, but this

was impossible in the presence of Chris, who refused to go away.
'I just go to make a call,' he said, opened the frontdoor and walked down the stairs.
He rang up in a cell. When he came back, he saw Chris walk away in the distance. Steven went upstairs to cancel the police. Chris' mental confusion caused the dying off of a part of himself.

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Chapter 16

While Steven was writing a forgiving letter to Chris, he wondered whether his aversion to being touched by unknown persons (for he clearly saw Steven as a stranger) originated from the fact that he had been the victim of futile sex. Anyway, it had not been Chris who had touched Steven's eye. At that moment the devil had taken possession of him.
What God has joined together, man cannot separate, Steven thought, and neither can Satan.

Some days after posting his letter to Chris, Steven received a call from him.
'I have forgiven you too,' he said to Steven's astonishment, but he decided not to make it a subject of discussion.
He went to the psychomedical centre in the rain and played a game of chess with Chris there. They

had known each other for seven months now. Emotions had been running high, but eventually, they appeared to have been cast in the same mould.
There is nobody who looks like me so much as Chris does, Steven thought.
'From here, I'm going to live on my own,' Chris said. 'My psychiatrist thinks that's better and my parents do too. They never liked my staying with you. And now that it has gone wrong they blame you.'
'It went wrong, because you did not take your medicines.'
'Yes, but anyhow, it's better that we're going to live apart from each other. I don't like to have to apologize all the time.'
'You don't need to.'
'I'll be going to the open department soon. So I'm doing fine.'
'Great.'
'There is a chapel here, which I visit every Sunday. Do you still pray for me everyday?'
'I do.'
Chris won the game of chess. Steven was so well acquainted with the boy that he knew that he was a bad loser.
Some weeks passed, and Steven hoped that Chris would tell him that he was allowed to come on leave for one day. But instead of that, the policeman on the beat called Steven. Chris wanted his things back. Steven told the man that Chris was still confused, and that it was no use transporting his gear to an expensive depot, while the boy was still in the centre.
'I'll talk about it to him myself,' he said to the policeman, who agreed with that.
That Friday evening, Steven called Chris, who said in an indignant voice, 'You must have sold my songs a long time ago, and I guess you've been tampering with my computer.'
'Oh, no, I haven't. Why don't you come and have a look yourself? You're allowed now to do that, aren't you?'
'Yes, I'm completely open now, so I may go whenever I want to.'
'Allright, I see you later then.'
Steven was ready for anything. Would there be a violent scene again? It was almost seven o'clock, when somebody rang at the door. He heard Christiano come up the stairs.
This time he said something, 'So, here I am.'
He looked considerably tanned in his T-shirt with short sleeves. The inspection of his computer worked out well.

'I'm going in for sports nowadays,' he told. 'I can do twenty push-ups in a row.'
Now he's talking like a man, Steven smiled to himself.
He remembered what Tarik had once said to another boy at school, 'Better to push up than to wank off.'
Koen dropped by too that evening.
'Well,' he said to Chris, 'You're lookig muscular.'
'Yes,' the boy said. 'So I can defend Steven, if necessary.'
Sometimes this world drives me mad, Steven thought, but moments like this are priceless.

'Is there no one with you?' grandpa Woudvis joked, when Steven visited the old man some weeks later.
'No, granddad. Tarik is in Germany and Chris is still in the centre.'
It was a sizzling hot Wednesday afternoon. Woudvis had turned on a fan, to enable them to stick it out in his small living room. The inner court of the almshouses, which was sunlit in abundance, was deserted.
'I had a talk with Chris and his psychiatrist lately,' Steven told. 'Actually, he is still training to be a psychiatrist. He is quite young. Around thirty, I think. We've discussed the contract which Chris and

I have drawn up together and which says how we will treat each other in the future. He calls me "his master" in that.'
'A learning process is fascinating. Every winter I like to watch these young figure-skaters on the ice and their trainers who come on the screen as well. They are often former European and World Champions figure-skating. In the Netherlands, in the early days, there were Pia Dijkstra and Joan Haanappel. I think that as a trainer you gotta have a lot of patience.'
'Yes, especially when you are a "life trainer": when you have to teach children how they should live.'
'That's education. A good education is the basis of a life which is satisfactory.'
'Chris and I will be going on a day trip to Amsterdam soon. Then he will stay with me for one night. He has always wished to go to Madame Tussaud's and to Anne Frank's house. Maybe we'll make a tour of the canals.'
'Amsterdam is a beautiful city in the summertime. I've been there often in the early days. It is and it remains a pandemonium, with all those people.'
'Maybe Amsterdam is the only city in the world where you can still act silly, where there is real freedom.'
'Possibly. It's a fact that there are people who want to be watched and people who want to look.'
'But who don't look further.'
'No, they don't know the fourth dimension.'
Steven had discussed his theory about the four dimensions with his grandpa before, and the old man had found it very credible.
Because the heath made his granddad sleepy, Steven said goodbye soon to work on his story.

At the end of the summer, Christiano started to work part-time in a training and learning centre, and he was pleased with that. At his leisure, he listened to music a lot. The manager of the centre, who had his own recording studio, proved to be enthusiastic about Chris' songs and promised to help him with his career as a musician.
Because he had a better relation with his relatives now, Chris did not seem to have a great need of seeing Steven anymore. His psychiatrist had advised against this too. When he had moved into rooms in the autumn, Chris dropped by with his father for one more time to collect his things. To prevent scenes, Steven adopted an attitude which was as businesslike as possible, chatted about this, that and the other with father and son, and never did a stroke of work to help with the removal.
Chris gave him some furniture.
'As a keepsake,' said Chris, who refused to leave his new address.

But Steven trusted that he would endure this ordeal too.
For, everytime that Chris gave a sign of life, if it was only by a simple and cheerful email (they both had internet now), Steven realized that Christiano's existence was the greatest reward he had ever received.

THE END