

Sample translation from

*Waar ik liever niet aan denk*

by Jente Posthuma

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and he knew then that Roy had loved him and that that should have been enough. He just hadn't understood anything in time.

–David Vann, *Legend of a Suicide*, 2008

Waterboarding, I told my mother. That's when someone places a cloth over your face then pours water over it continuously. It feels like drowning. It is drowning.

And you're going to do that? she asked.

Yes.

My mother sighed. This has to be one of your brother's ideas.

We just saw a film about Guantanamo Bay, I said. Afterwards, he asked if I wanted to waterboard him. He wanted to know how it felt, and I said I'd only do it if he did it to me too. So, that's the story.

And how was it? My mother asked.

We haven't done it yet!

Since my mother had gotten old, her ability to listen had gotten even worse.

Oh yes, she said. I was watching a series on television yesterday, and the character I'd grown very fond of was blown up. That's why I slept so badly.

We felt we should be able to lie in a reasonably comfortable position, so we decided to do it on my couch. My brother went first. He lay on his back with a red-checked dishcloth over his face and I stood next to him with a jug of water.

Here we go, I said, pouring water over the cloth. After a few seconds, my brother pulled the cloth off his face and sat up straight.

Maybe we should tie you up, I said.

I tied his wrists together with one of my stockings and started over. We agreed that I would remove the cloth after thirty seconds. The timer on my phone was set. My brother gasped and tried to move his arms. He's drowning now, I thought. It took a long time for thirty seconds to pass, and when I lifted the cloth away from his face, and he'd finished coughing, he said: That'll do.

I didn't want anything around my wrists. I wanted to be able to pull the cloth off my face whenever I saw fit. That's not how this works, my brother said. He tied the stocking around my wrists and placed the cloth over my face. The water ran into my nose, and I couldn't breathe. I tried to get up and knocked something over with my legs. Once I was finally sitting upright, I shook the wet cloth off my face and wrenched my hands free.

My brother handed me a tissue to wipe my face, but I shook my head, breathing in and out again and again. Church bells rang, the alarm on my phone went off.

Why didn't you help me?

Sorry, he said.

I felt like I was going to throw up. Hanging my head over the toilet, I waited for something to come out but nothing did and I thought about the time I'd taken a guy home and how he'd pushed my head down. His hands were over my ears, and he kept pushing my head lower and maybe he

thought it was turning me on because when I pressed against his knees and tried to break free, he gripped me even tighter, and all I could hear was the thumping of my heart. And then I thought about the first time I'd ever heard someone say their heart was in their throat. It was my mother, and she had told someone that her heart was in her throat whenever she thought about what the future held for her daughter because I was no great beauty. She didn't seem to worry about my brother, the way he kept plucking at his scalp and the bald patch it caused. I can't remember when he stopped plucking, but after a while it was over, and his hair grew back.

My son is capable of anything, my mother often said. One day, he's going to do something extraordinary.

After my brother was born again during a workshop, he said: Life isn't a straight line, it's a circle. You can die and start over again.

It was a workshop organized by the followers of Osho, who, twenty years after his death, still viewed him as a spiritual master, which was also the meaning of his name.

Osho, said my brother. You know him, right? The man who used to call himself Bhagwan, which means God.

Of course, I knew exactly who he meant. He was talking about the man who had been born Chandra Mohan, a common name in India, but as a child his grandparents had called him Rajneesh, which means King of the Night. Rajneesh would often go to the river close to his hometown and dunk other children until they were on the verge of drowning, then ask them how it had felt. As the Bhagwan, he said: Hope is a drug. Only those who are ready to die will know a life full of love. Those who are afraid of death will never enter the mystery of love. He told the people who came to his Ashram in Poona that they needed to surrender themselves. If you walk away now, he said, you might as well end your life. According to him, the urge to kill yourself was a sign of true intelligence and sensitivity, a desire to escape the suffocation of the ego. For those who recognized the pointlessness of everything, suicide—or total surrender—was the only alternative. This is basically what was written on one of my brother's favorite websites in short, oddly fragmented sentences, all lined up like a bad poem.

The cause of Osho's death in 1990 is unknown, his body was cremated just a couple of hours after he died. Shortly before passing away, he claimed he had been poisoned in an American prison in 1985. There are also those who believe that he'd simply grown tired of living and asked his personal physician to administer a lethal injection.

Incidentally, my brother later stopped believing that life was circular. We're at the beginning of an extreme weather episode, he said. From here on out, it will only get worse.

In a national study on happiness, our hometown scored just above average. Or just below average, I don't exactly remember anymore. In any case, I have fond memories of our town, but my brother did not. Right until the very end, he'd get annoyed if I mentioned the fountain in the town square and the children who played there, the smaller ones naked and the older ones in bathing suits, or if I brought up the pink glitter bikini that my aunt had brought me from New York.

In 1990, the year my brother and I turned ten, the year of my glitter bikini, there were 2,245 murders in New York. And 596 suicides. It was also the year that a couple of boys at the fountain made a habit of pulling off my brother's swimming trunks so he'd have to walk home naked.

New York does have suicide-free days. These aren't holidays, it isn't as if they're announced in advance. July 12, 1993 was a suicide-free day in New York. My brother and I read about it the following afternoon on the Teletext news. We'd just returned from the lot behind the supermarket, where there was an enormous crane. It was probably fifty meters high, my brother said. How would it feel to climb all the way to the top? I asked. How far would you be able to see? A motorbike revved noisily behind me and I turned to see one of the employees from the meat section tearing out of the lot. The racket that motorbikes make, my brother used to say, isn't necessary, it's all for show. When I turned back, my brother was already halfway up the crane. I quickly looked at the ground, staring at the clumps of grass in front of my feet until my neck began to hurt and my brother plopped back down beside me with a little hop. You can see the city, he said, and all the bends the river makes on its way there.

Was it beautiful? I asked

It was mostly just far, he said.

And before we fell asleep that night, he said, Today was another day without suicides.

Between 2000 and 2015, the number of murders in New York decreased significantly, but the number of suicides rose. The most popular ways of committing suicide in New York are hanging, strangulation and asphyxiation, or jumping from a great height. While the number of jumpers is declining, New York still has more jumpers than the rest of the United States. Eight times more, to be exact.

Perhaps New York owes its high number of jumpers to Wall St. There, in times of recession, the occasional hedge fund manager will jump out of a window. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, people who work on Wall Street are forty percent more likely to take their own life than the average person. Wall Street professionals are by nature competitive perfectionists. Their work is their identity and they constantly compare themselves to their colleagues.

My brother named himself One and called me Two because he had been born forty-five minutes earlier than I was on a sweltering August day. He treated me like his little sister, was larger and heavier than me at birth, and had taken up almost all of the space in my mother's belly. The story goes that I'd lain behind him with my left leg thrown over my shoulder. Which is why it had taken a little extra time for me to emerge. We were actually due a month later, but my brother had gone ahead, and I couldn't stay behind.

The fact that we weren't identical was something I'd long considered a handicap, a consequence of our premature birth, even after I came to understand the difference between identical and fraternal twins. In that ninth month, we might have grown even closer.

My brother was more active, spoke louder, and threw bigger tantrums than I did. He hurled things, slammed doors and kicked holes in them. After these fits, he would lock himself in his room, and when he eventually came back downstairs, he would act as though nothing had happened. All my parents needed to do was observe him, and occasionally repair something. They *had* to pay attention to me. I insisted they comfort me whenever I was upset and wouldn't let their gaze drift to the newspaper or television. This was back when I still wore my feelings on the outside, like clothes, and didn't understand you weren't supposed to do that.

Demanding was the word they used to describe me. They called my brother headstrong. He always knew everything better than I did. I don't think I ever heard him respond with Oh, yeah? or Wow, I didn't know that, when I told him something. He usually said, I know, and if there was something he didn't know, then he would say nothing at all.

The North Tower was called 1 WTC, so the South Tower was called 2 WTC. 1 WTC was 417 meters high, and 2 WTC was two meters shorter. 1 WTC had an antenna on the roof and was completed in 1972, a year earlier than 2 WTC, which did not have an antenna. For a short time, 1 WTC was the tallest building in the world, until Chicago's 442-meter high Sears Tower surpassed it in 1973. This was a bitter pill for 1 WTC to swallow, but what is worse? To have briefly been the tallest building in the world or to have never been the tallest, because the building next to you was always slightly taller?

I used to sleep with a Continental Airlines poster above my bed. It was an image of the Twin Towers against the pink evening light. Compared to the towers, the Statue of Liberty appeared minuscule in the foreground. Liberty looked as if she was trying to use her torch to set the towers on fire. I had bought the poster at the flea market I went to every Saturday with my father. When I came home with it, my brother said, That photo isn't accurate. In reality, the towers aren't the same height.

I dreamed of seeing the towers up close. I didn't need to go inside them and certainly didn't want to go to the top, though standing beneath the towers could also be risky. Ever since a famous pop star had jumped out of a hotel window in the city closest to our hometown, and we had learned from our mother that the self-inflicted death of a celebrity was often followed by a wave of copycat suicides, we would look up at every tall building we passed to see if jumpers were standing on top.

My brother collected comic books, and my father collected old cookie tins. One of the walls in the shed was covered entirely with tins that held my father's screws and nails. He didn't organize the tins by their contents, but by color, just like the layers of soil on the geological chart on the opposite wall: every layer was a different earth tone. I enjoyed being in the shed, looking at the colors and my father's back as he opened tin after tin, searching for the right nail. My father also liked hanging out in the shed, but that was probably also due to the colors, because he was no handyman. He acted as though he was, the same way he pretended to be a fun dad.

We discovered that we were attracted to boys when we were eight, and both fell in love with Hans. He had dark blond highlighted hair and a perfect face. I was most attracted to the way his hair fell over his green eyes, and his warm voice. My brother loved his eyes and white teeth. Hans was a presenter, he introduced television programs. Every evening after dinner, we were allowed to turn on the television, and we could watch him. When I looked at Hans, and he looked at me, I no longer felt like a girl. I felt like a woman.

Hans isn't into women, said my brother one day. We were lying on our stomachs on the carpet, watching him. Hans is gay, he said, just a little too loudly. Our mother had told him so. I called out to her, but she didn't come. I went to the kitchen, where she was doing the dishes, and asked her about Hans.

Gay, she said. He has a boyfriend.

I ran back to the living room.

He's seeing someone, I told my brother, casually as I could.

It took another eight years for my brother to tell our mother that he was into boys, a fact so obvious to me that his solemn tone seemed absurd. My brother was the norm, and I was the anomaly, which is why I didn't understand my mother's strange reaction, it was as though something had been taken from her. It's not a big deal, she said and nothing more. Just like the time he'd accidentally broken a fossilized turd from her collection, and she'd spent the entire weekend bent over her desk in the study, sticking the pieces back together with special glue.

Maybe it was because he'd been a relentless know-it-all, or perhaps it was his disinterest in the only girl in our class who had breasts, but in the fifth grade, just after the Christmas holidays, my brother's friends all turned against him. They called him names and scooped up frozen dog shit from the bushes to put on his chair at school. When we were walking home, they would kick him and try to trip him. Why don't you hit back? I often asked him, and in response, he would just shrug.

In December, almost a year later, the bullying suddenly stopped. We didn't know why, even my brother had no idea. My mother said we should see it as a natural phenomenon, like a storm that surges but then dies down again. This would make it easier for us to accept it, along with the devastation left in its wake.

The day the Twin Towers fell, I was watching a rerun of a talk show when the program was suddenly interrupted by a news bulletin. A plane plowed into one of the towers, and I immediately thought of my brother because I think of my brother whenever something important happens.

When we turned eighteen, we moved to Amsterdam together. Both of us got apartments on the park. He lived on the east side, and I was on the west, three hundred meters away, close to the main entrance. According to my brother, all of the park entrances were equally important.

It was the first time either of us had lived alone. Although, I did eat dinner at my brother's place five times a week because I really didn't like cooking. In return, he was always welcome to knock on my door with his dirty laundry. I studied English and had a part-time job in a vintage clothing store. My brother also studied English and worked at a gay bar. He enjoyed it so much that after a couple of months he quit his studies and went to work at the bar full-time.

By the time I called him, he'd already heard the news.

The tower, I said. Have you seen it?

As we spoke, a plane flew into the second tower. For the rest of the day, we watched TV with our phones glued to our ears, surfing from channel to channel.

This is bad, my brother kept saying. People are jumping out of windows. They're jumping.

He was crying, and it shocked me into silence because my brother never cried.