

A tense and exciting political thriller

Tomas Ross

The Sixth of May

ON 6 MAY 2002, two weeks before a General Election, Volkert van der Graaf assassinated Pim Fortuyn, the populist politician who was set to win and become Prime Minister of the Netherlands. This act of political violence shook pacifist, tolerant Netherlands to its core. The assassin was immediately arrested and was convicted, yet the investigation into the killing left several fundamental questions unresolved. Was he acting alone as the court decided? If so, how come the police were on the scene so quickly? Recordings of telephone conversations show that the security service was aware of the attack beforehand; so why didn't they intervene? From these facts Tomas Ross, three-time winner of the Golden Noose, has woven a tense and exciting political thriller, backed by the thorough research for which he has rightly become famous.

The story opens with the release of Anke Luyten who, three years previously, had been one of a group who freed apes from a research laboratory. During the break-in a guard was shot dead. Anke hadn't shot him but she was the only one to be caught, and was sentenced as an accessory for murder. When she comes out of prison, the security service pressure her to infiltrate the circle of former fellow environmental-activists Peter Heemskerck and Volkert van der Graaf. The latter is suspected of murdering an environmental officer, as well as of preparing a new attack – the target isn't yet known. Meanwhile Anke's Turkish neighbour Erdogan Demir falls in love with her. When she goes undercover, Demir tracks her down, along with press photographer Jim de Booy. All this time Fortuyn's popularity has been rapidly on the rise and he is having an unpredictable impact on the voters, the media and the election campaign, upsetting the Dutch political consensus and breaking taboos, notably in making immigration one of the key points of his campaign. We see the effects of this through De Booy, the press photographer, and Demir the immigrant.

Ross brings Anke, Demir and De Booy together at the scene of the assassination, Demir trying to save Anke from being killed, De Booy hoping to become famous by photographing the assassination. Yet did they actually witness the attack? The assassin may not have been working alone. A defence contract and billions of euros are at stake; there are others who want Fortuyn out of the way.

As maverick politician, Pim Fortuyn shook consensual Netherlands from its torpor, and his assassination sent shock waves through Dutch society. This tersely written thriller by prize-winning Tomas Ross is both exciting and alarming. It has international appeal.

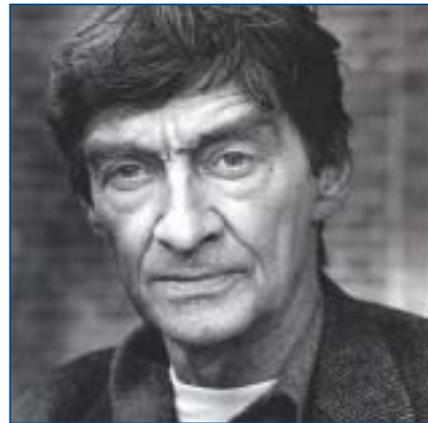


photo Roeland Fossen

Thomas Ross (b. 1944) is a pseudonym of W.P. Hogendoorn. He studied history and trained as a journalist, going on to work as a reporter for various newspapers and television stations. His first novel *Dogs of Treason* (*De honden van het verraad*) was published in 1980 – a political thriller about the Mollucan struggle for independence, a legacy from the Netherlands' colonial past. This highly praised debut is typical of Ross' work: thrillers that are based on thorough research. Since his debut, Ross has published a new novel every year, sometimes two, so far some 30 altogether. Three novels have been awarded the Golden Noose, the prize for best Dutch thriller. He has also published countless articles and several non-fiction books on the Dutch internal security service, the business world and Dutch politics, as well as writing scripts for television dramas, including *In the Interest of the State* (*In het belang van de staat*), which won him the Golden Calf in 1997.

A genuinely exciting novel. A splendid feat.

NRC HANDELSBLAD

Those various angles of approach present a good picture of the enormous antitheses that surfaced during the 2002 electoral campaign in the Netherlands. Thomas Ross is the author of the thriller par excellence about Pim Fortuyn.

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OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

Jaromir und das verborgene Tor (De verborgen poort.). Wien: Ueberreuter, 2002.
Jaromir und die geheimnisvolle Höhle (De stem in de grot.). Wien: Ueberreuter, 2002.
Jaromir und der Talisman (Talisman.). Wien: Ueberreuter, 2002.

An interview with Tomas Ross

“Bullshitting about carrying on in Pim’s spirit when he was the very one who had been dead set against it!”

by Sander Verheijen

translated by Roz Vatter-Buck

It's going to be a busy year for Tomas Ross, commissioned to write the gift book for the Dutch Thriller Month. Last month saw the publication of *The Sixth of May*, his view on the conspiracy around the assassination of Pim Fortuyn, originally intended to be a film by Theo van Gogh.

Just before that, *De mannen van de maandagochtend* (The Monday Morning Men), a book that he wrote with Rinus Ferdinandusse, rolled off the presses. He is currently working on one about the mysterious death of Mathilde Willink, also due to be published this year. I spoke to the author about Pim Fortuyn, the royal family, the Golden Noose and why his books have no fucking in them. It's a sunny Thursday morning in March in the stately Hague home of the faction writer.

“I worked myself to death on the book about Fortuyn,” says Tomas Ross. “I’d actually been planning to write something completely different.” But the publisher insisted, as Ross was already working on a film script with Theo van Gogh about the murder of the upcoming politician. But it had to be out before 6 May. “I think I wrote the book in six weeks”.

Meanwhile, the Committee for the Promotion of Dutch Books (CPNB) had also invited Ross to write the thriller month gift book. “I always have a couple of plots on the shelf that I feel I ought to do something with,” says Ross, “There are two cases I’ve always wanted to write about, and one is Mathilde Willink’s death, which has always been explained away as suicide. It wasn’t though; but the story is far too interesting for the slim volume the CPNB wants. The other idea was the ‘RaRa (Revolutionary Anti-Racist Action) affair’, what caused it and who was behind it. To think that it was such a topical issue in the Netherlands for six years or so and then suddenly was all over. The former head of the Interior Security Service, Doctors van Leeuwen, my neighbour, has said often enough in the press

that the Service knows perfectly well who it was. But nothing ever happens. That seems very odd. So I start investigating...”

Tomas Ross was approached by the CPNB as a writer of ‘true crime’. But that’s misconception, says the author. “What I do is facton, not true crime. True crime is actually a romanticising of the truth, which isn’t what I do at all. I invent loads of extra things, but the point of departure is always a real event, and preferably one with questions still left unanswered. I’m not so interested in ‘true crime’. I’ve done it for television, *Spangen* and *Unit 13*, but it doesn’t grab my full attention. I love doing research, seeing if my theory is correct. It’s only then that I can start writing”.

Tomas Ross had his own theories on the assassination of Pim Fortuyn. He and his friend, the director Theo van Gogh, were already working on a film script about it when he was persuaded to write a book, too. In *The Sixth of May*, Ross describes the conspiracy behind Fortuyn’s murder. I asked Ross where exactly he draws the line between fact and fiction. Ross: “I don’t add a thing to the parts that are true. I just relate them in my own words. But you need a hero or heroine to make a story exciting. In *The Sixth of May* I start off with a young heroine, who comes out of prison on 25 November 2001. She takes a break doing up her flat and sees Fortuyn on television being elected leader of the populist *Leefbaar Nederland* party. That’s where the story begins.”

But Tomas Ross goes further in blending fact and fiction in *The Sixth of May*. He commits Wim Kok’s thoughts to paper word for word and, later, Fortuyn’s. Isn’t that a bit risky? Ross: “It might bother some people. I discussed it all with Theo Van Gogh. I was no fan of Fortuyn. But Van Gogh was. People have often said to me, ‘you shouldn’t do that.’ You can invent a man who makes the story exciting, but you can’t have him meeting Fortuyn, for example. And I don’t.”

All the same, in *The Sixth of May*, Ross ‘breaks’ his golden rule. The imaginary main character does meet Volkert van der Graaf’s girlfriend. Tomas Ross talked about it in the television programme Barend & Van Dorp on 6 May: “I’ve brought a fictional character in contact with an existing figure for the first time here. But in my story Volkert’s girlfriend is simply a nice girl who’s frightened because she notices something, without actually knowing a thing.”

What exactly is the conspiracy surrounding Fortuyn’s murder? Ross thinks it’s pretty obvious. “Fortuyn had said that if he came to power the Joint Strike Fighter would not be purchased. That would have meant cancelling an order worth

thousands of millions of Euros.” Ross goes further: “The strange thing is that three weeks after the election, when the LPF (the political party Fortuyn founded after he was forced to leave Leefbaar Nederland) had 26, 27 seats, the whole LPF party bar one voted for the JSF. And then went on bullshitting about carrying on in Pim’s spirit, when he was the one who’d been dead set against the fighter!”

“As early as 8 January the Internal Security Service taped a conversation between two environmentalists in which one clearly said ‘He has to be silenced’ and the other said, ‘Shut up you arsehole, the phone could be tapped’, to which the other replied, laughing, ‘I mean verbally, of course.’ That was recorded on 8 January 2002. They were talking about Fortuyn and nothing was done about it. Kind of the Security Service, don’t you think, when there are people wanting to kill Fortuyn just to let it happen?”

Even after the murder, a number of issues were unexplained. Ross: “How did the police get there so fast? Could the murderer really have acted alone the whole time? That would have been stupid. Why did he keep silent for six months before the trial? And the man who went after him, Fortuyn’s chauffeur – and the other man with him – they both say that when he came out of the street he stopped and ‘looked wildly around.’ That makes me think ‘then what was he waiting for?’ An accomplice with a car? That gets me talking to people, reading. Then I like to see whether my theories correspond with what actually happened.”

Ross is used to ‘digging’ in the past. He studied history and started his career as a journalist. For twenty years or so he’s been writing full-time. He recalls, “I wrote my first book as a hobby; I threw away sixteen years of my life on the Loch Ness monster, trying to find out if it existed. I went on expeditions and gave lectures. A publisher thought there might be some money in it. So when I had written that book in 1979 I ended up, to my surprise, in Sonja Barend’s television talk show, for seven minutes. All of Holland was watching the programme and the book sold out within a week. That was pure luck. Then the publisher asked me, ‘Have you got any more?’ But I had nothing else at all. I never even read thrillers. All I had was a story I wrote about my father, because he’d been one of the founders of the Internal Security Service. After he died, I had once tried to write down a story he had told me. I gave it to the publisher, and said it wasn’t for publication, because it was about my father. But he could read it if he liked.’ He called me and said, ‘This is really exciting; you ought to be writing thrillers’.”

Ross's books are considered quite difficult, and yet he is one of the top-selling crime authors in the Netherlands. He has now written more than forty books, has been nominated nine times for the Golden Noose and been awarded it twice. Which book does he consider his best? "*Koerier van Sarajevo* (Courier From Sarajevo)," he answers at once, "about Srebrenica in 1996." That won me the Golden Noose. It's definitely the book with the most in it." But no sex. Tomas Ross seldom puts any sex in his books. "My publishers used to ask me the same question: 'Why do you never have fucking in your books?' In this genre it's forced. There was no sex at all in Frederick Forsyth's exciting manuscript of *The Day of the Jackal*, either, which is far thicker than my books. I thought that was really clever. You won't believe it, but six publishers turned it down. Then a French publisher came along – French you note – who was willing to publish it if he added some sex. So Forsyth went off and wangled a sex passage into it. But it wasn't essential to the story."

Greet Hofmans. Pim Fortuyn. Mathilde Willink. The last three in the series of cover-ups that Tomas Ross has brought to light in his books. Who or what will be next? Princess Margarita? Ross: "That's what everyone's asking. 'What are you going to do about Margarita.' I've written already so much about the royal family. I've already given Prince Bernard a good going over, so do I have to go through all that again?" Ross shakes his head. "There has to be a good plot or I won't do it. I don't believe that there's any group behind Margarita and Edwin de Roy van Zuidewijn that wants to bring about the fall of the royal family. I really don't."

Sample translation from

The Sixth of May by Tomas Ross
(Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2003)

Translated by Rosalind Buck

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What is he going to tell his colleagues? They'll all be there, in a minute. He doesn't have to say anything of course, even though they must all know by now that he's left *De Volkskrant*. So what? Every Jack man of them would have done the same. A clear hundred thou in former guilders; no-one's going to pass that up. He never knew those magazines offered so much, though he'd heard the odd rumour. Of course it was because of his name, which made nonsense of his first instinct to only take it on as long as he could do it anonymously or - if need be - under a pseudonym. They wouldn't have accepted that; anyway, he had to admit that it was a good boost to the ego.

'A ton for Pim,' that wanker Bert had laughed, 'and in your pocket, not his, ha, ha!' The pictures won't be published until after the general election on 15 May - at least he's got that much in writing - and on top of that, not that he'll lose financially either way, it all depends on the results of Fortuyn's populist party, *Leefbaar Nederland*. Not that there's much doubt there; they've doubled in the polls over the past few weeks and are already up to sixteen seats.

15 May, which works out at working once a week for five months, so a ton's not bad. Especially nowadays. A reportage on the rise of the Fortuyn phenomenon and he won't even have to hang around the dark rooms and gay

clubs or with all the others in the bushes outside that ridiculous Palazzo di Pietro of Fortuyn's for saucy snaps, which he wouldn't have gone for in any case.

What's more, *Nieuwe Revu* isn't exactly the worst rag in the Netherlands; these days you hear it mentioned in the same breath as news magazines like *Vrij Nederland* and *HP/De Tijd*, even in *De Volkskrant*. But if there's one magazine you associate with scoops that's the one. The funny thing is – and it's typical of them - they've got a journalist working undercover at *Leefbaar Nederland*: the editor of their party paper, no less. You wouldn't want to try any tricks like that at *De Volkskrant*. They'd jump down your throat and start lecturing about professional ethics, which of course is pure crap; they thought it was brilliant when Günter Wallraff went round disguised as a guest worker years ago. Yeah, well, migrant workers, foreigners: they're the chief editors' pet subject, even though he knows Irene moved out of the De Pijp district when she felt the area was getting too black for her and Pieter removed his son from a black school and sent him to the nice, trendy, white Dalton in Apollolaan. And he's got the nerve to start bitching in his column about Fortuyn conducting a witch-hunt against immigrants!

He revs up, singing inside his helmet an old Joop Visser number, 'De Volkskrant, de Volkskrant, de Volkskrant is a fucking rag, de Volkskrant is a fucking rag, it really is a crime...' as the outskirts of Rotterdam loom up in front of him. He was there only yesterday, when the *Leefbaar Rotterdam* list was presented in the city hall. The great Pim Fortuyn show. The local boys and girls couldn't get a word in edgeways! And continually slagging off the Labour Party, saying they'd deliberately let the city go to the dogs all those years they were in the council, and he was afraid they were right. He'd once done a photo-reportage in the Millinx district, which was almost scarier than Beirut in the seventies, where he's also been. Fortuyn might be a rebel-rousing old queen, but he's got a point. There simply are too many foreigners. It's not their fault, nobody's saying that, but it is true and the Labour lot, in particular, are not quite so squeaky clean as they would like to make out, either. Always yacking on about tolerance and

integration, but you won't find someone like Melkert living in Derde Schinkeldwarsstraat. Like he said to Trude, who still keeps her own flat in Churchillaan as a pied-à-terre and is renting it out at the moment for 1,500 Euros to some American: 'Why don't you put a Moroccan family in there for three hundred? You're the one who's so keen on distribution and integration, aren't you?'

Oh no, they've got no end of bullshit excuses. Like it's the government's job. Well, it's been their job for thirty years now, ever since that disastrous Den Uyl cabinet! Anyway, it's true that eighty percent of crime is committed by foreigners, isn't it? But that Chief Superintendent had to resign for saying so, even though everybody knew he was right. Pieter wouldn't even publish his side of the story, of course, big buddies with the Mayor and his cronies. You couldn't mention the word Turk or Moroccan; that was considered discrimination.

'De Volkskrant is a fucking rag, there's less in it all the time.'

Trude will have something to say when he tells her he's left the paper and is going to work for the *Revu*, of all magazines. She doesn't know yet. She didn't ask, either. Why should she? Thank God she doesn't know anybody in that scene - doesn't even want to. Which is exactly what he's thrown in her face so often, that she's not interested in his job. Things are working out pretty well now though, but of course she's bound to find out one way or another. So what? It's nothing to be ashamed of these days.

While he's parking the bike, he sees dozens of people milling around on the steps of the town hall, waiting to get in. A journalist friend from Radio Rijnmond waves to him.

'Hey! Looks like you're turning into Fortuyn's very own court photographer!'

He grins. 'Is he in there yet?'

'What do you think? His Majesty will of course be the last to arrive. He'll be sitting round the corner somewhere in the back of that Daimler, till the masses are installed'. He's right; as Jim walks into the big hall where the council staff are

working at their counters as usual, at least a hundred people are sitting there on the benches. Five minutes later, one cries, ‘There he is!’

The day he comes to formally sign the support list for the local elections, as leader of *Leefbaar Rotterdam*, Fortuyn has gone for the informal look, so no Armani suit or brightly-coloured tie, but an open-necked shirt and a shiny, blue casual jacket. Clever, thinks Jim; that’s how you show you’re one of them; exactly what Kok and Melkert lack.

He photographs the clapping, smiling staff, the *Leefbaar Rotterdam* side-kicks standing on the benches and Fortuyn who, this time, acknowledges the applause with affected modesty, going on, like a statesman, to put his signature to several documents in the Population Affairs department.

Not until he is outside, on the steps in front of a packed Coolsingel, does he say anything. ‘I love Rotterdam,’ and then, with a wicked smile, which Jim instantly captures, ‘I want to see the Labour Party out of the council.’ He says a few more words, shakes a few hands and then, to Jim’s astonishment, strides over to a bicycle, a tall gent’s bike, which he elegantly mounts and pedals away on, bolt upright, in the direction of de Weena.

‘Just like a general on his horse!’ says an older woman standing next to him. As he looks up, he is amazed to see tears in her eyes.

At that moment, he is certain that the dignified figure already halfway up the street by Hofplein, neatly signalling to turn left, will be the new Prime Minister of the Netherlands.

‘Oh, won’t it be fantastic!’ says the woman, ‘if our Pim becomes Prime Minister! I’ve got nothing against foreigners, honest, everybody’s equal as far as I’m concerned, but...’

But Jim’s already stopped listening. At the bottom of the steps he sees a thin young man, a rather bird-like face with fierce eyes and a hooked nose, jet-black shoulder-length hair. Automatically aiming his camera, he’s sure he’s seen the guy before. Not just the other day with his mate in Noordwijk; much longer ago. But where, fuck it? He snaps the shutter just as the man looks round, right in his

lens, a brief startled look in his dark eyes, which makes way for intense fury. Then he's gone, lost in the throng.

Who is that bloke? Jesus, how many people has he had in front of his camera over the years? Lost in thought, he shuts the camera and makes his way through the crowd to the Harley.

He has almost put his finger on the memory, when someone shoves or kicks him with full force in the back and the camera is yanked from his hand, the carrying strap scraping his wrist. He half falls against the bike, but in his panic still manages to grab hold of the handlebars, gasping for breath from the stab of pain in his chest. Fuck, fuck. The Hasselblad!

'Are you all right?' asks a young, bleached-blond woman worriedly. 'Scum of the earth! Are you hurt?'

He's already on the motorbike, starts it and tears off, without his helmet, right through the crowd, off the pavement, on to Coolsingel, in the same direction as Fortuyn. Not far ahead, a red Toyota screams off and immediately turns right. Jim accelerates, leaning as he takes the same bend, swerving out of the way of a taxi, whose driver blasts his horn like a madman, straight on to where the Toyota turns right again, into a side street, then the glinting water of a canal. Now he's only a few metres from the car, he's not sure what to do, overtake it, cut in, make it stop in any case, there are loads of people here. Suddenly, he sees a hand come out of one of the windows, swinging the camera backwards and forwards for a moment and then throwing it back in his direction.

Swearing, he brakes with all his might as he sees the camera come towards him like a projectile. Instinctively he wants to duck, but he doesn't; on the contrary, even though the Harley is still running, he stands up in the saddle and grabs for the Hasselblad. He catches it, losing his balance, feels the bike slide from under him, hears people screaming as he hits the ground.

Jesus Christ, the Hasselblad!

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I'm not going to cry! is all she can think, not now. I'm not going to give that dick-head the pleasure. That's exactly what he wants me to do!

How did he find out? How did he find out, damn it?

Felix stands up and comes round the desk. She doesn't look up, of course not; she knows how triumphant the bastard must be feeling now, just as she knows what he's going to do next. He lays an arm around her shoulder and leans down towards her. She can smell his sickly aftershave.

'Listen, Anke,' he says, 'De Raadt is adamant, he finds it unforgivable, but it just so happens that I've got a friend in Leiden who has started up a practice; he could use someone. We'll work out something to explain why you're not here any more'. His hand massages her shoulder supposedly encouragingly. 'If I give them a ring and we make an appointment one of these days, we could maybe combine it with dinner. I know a damned good restaurant by the canal there.'

What's she got to lose? flashes through her mind as he speaks. She's finished here, anyhow. She nods, looking up.

'Sweet of you,' she says, laying her hand on his, still on her shoulder. She manages to produce a smile, as his little eyes regard her in surprise. 'It's my own fault,' she says, running her index finger over the back of his hand. 'I shouldn't have listened to Cisca. After all, you were the one who turned her down, not the other way round, didn't you?'

God, how does she manage to come up with it? But he grins inanely, nods and says, 'Is that what she said?'

Turning towards him, she raises herself slightly from the chair, still holding his hand. 'Was it Cisca who told De Raadt?'

'I've no idea. Why? What makes you think that?'

'Shall I give you a blow job?'

'What?' His piggy eyes open wide behind the round lenses of his glasses.

'Good gracious!'

But she is already pushing him gently backwards, so his fat buttocks slide onto the desktop. ‘Wouldn’t you like me to?’

‘Jesus, Anke...!’

She laughs, making sure the tip of her tongue appears for a moment, pushing her right leg between his thighs.

‘Nobody will see us... Hang on, stay there.’

She’s already going to the door and locking it, smiling and indicating the drawn blinds with a nod of the head. Now he is smiling, too, but more and more incredulously as she comes back over to him and bends over to unbutton his trousers.

‘Why are you doing this?’

‘Don’t talk,’ she says, struggling with the fastener, a fiddly metal clip, which she pulls open. ‘Lean back a bit’.

Boxer shorts and then she feels his penis inside, swelling up against her. Her stomach rises. But she pulls his trousers down over his thighs and then his underpants. His penis is bigger than she had expected, but that could be because it’s already almost fully erect, a whitish-pink shaft with a purplish head, like a shiny conker. He groans as she accidentally touches it. She has to force herself not to pinch it hard, and pulls his trousers down even further with her other hand, till they are stretched tight around his calves. He leans his torso further backwards. He must be horny as hell, because a bead of semen is already coming out of his glans and he is moving his hand towards her head when she straightens up again.

‘Ssh!’

‘What?’

She is already standing and walking on tiptoe towards the door. ‘I thought I heard something.’ Not looking at him, she presses an ear to the door, as if listening, but at the same time she is turning the key, pulling the door wide open and yelling as she runs out into the reception area. ‘Help! Cisca!’

Cisca is standing with De Raadt and a smartly dressed woman at reception and they all look round, shocked. Anke, too, just for a moment, before grabbing her bag. His face as white as a sheet, Felix is holding his hands in front of his erection, turning half round on his desk, but the image is quite clear and, a few seconds later, as he trips over his trousers and clutches desperately at the desk for support, there is no denying it.

De Raadt looks as if he's having a heart attack. All the woman next to him can do is laugh in astonishment, but Cisca is already running towards the door to Felix's room and slamming it shut as Anke walks into the hall. She takes her jacket from the coat rack, opens the front door and, not looking back, walks, knees trembling, over the gravel to the Volkswagen. Only once she's behind the wheel, starting the engine, does she start breathing again, retching at the same time, so she almost loses control of the wheel and drives onto the pavement, narrowly missing one of the fence posts. How the hell do they know about her record? It's all clear to her now. That redhead; it must have been her! She sneers and puts her foot down. Felix. The bastard. He can forget it now, too, although of course he'll say she was the instigator, but still. Nevertheless, her triumph is ebbing away and she feels drained, exhausted. What should she do? She has to get this off her chest, tell somebody. Thera? No, not Thera. Thera will have a good laugh, sure, but then she'll only say, 'I told you so.' She can hear her already, 'You see? If you'd laid all your cards on the table this never would have happened.'

Maybe not. Fuck it. That bloody redheaded bitch! And to top it all, she's from the very law office that defended her that time, the worst firm in the country!

What's she going to do? Go home first, take a shower and clean her teeth, because she almost gags again remembering that pasty-looking penis right up next to her face. Jesus... gross!

In her confusion she only notices the police van at the last moment; she's already passed it when she sees the flashing lights reflected in her mirror. She doesn't actually realise they're flashing at her till the van overtakes her and the

brake lights come on in front of her. Now she swears out loud. A Beetle with a young, blond woman behind the wheel, that's just the sort of thing those bastards love to check up on. Men. Then she sees Felix Kaak on his desk in her mind's eye again. Two white, hairless thighs, hand cupped between them. What will he have said? She'd like to see De Raadt and Vogel fucking sack him, too, and his 'friend in Leiden'! She pulls into the side of the road and watches the young, rosy-cheeked policeman approach, following an older Surinamese officer, who walks to the other side of the car.

Resentfully, she takes her wallet from her bag and pushes the door open. The rosy-cheeked one leans over towards her.

'Good morning, Miss. Is this your car?'

'Yes.'

'May I see your driving licence and logbook?'

She pulls the plastic holder out of her wallet and thrusts it at him. Let him take the papers out himself. But he doesn't; he keeps the holder in his hand and asks, 'Will you come with me for a moment, please?'

She raises her eyebrows. 'Why?'

'Nothing important, Miss. We just want to check your driving licence.'

She shakes her head despondently, but then she's struck by the horrible idea that they might be arresting her by order of De Raadt, but they can't be, that'd be far too quick and much too much of a coincidence. Why, then? What she did to Felix isn't illegal. She picks up her bag and gets out. The Surinamese officer says, 'Nice car, Miss. What year is it?'

'Sixty-six,' she says, 'one of the last with that small back window.'

She walks between them to the van and the black one slides open the side door. 'Get in, please.'

She steps onto the footboard and smells cigarette smoke as she hears the door slide to behind her and finds herself facing a somewhat older man at a small, folding table. He smiles, but she notices he only does it with his mouth, not the grey-blue eyes that observe her without expression.

‘Please, take a seat Miss Luyten.’ Her throat contracts. She thinks about the detective with the baby face.

‘Suppose I don’t want to?’ Luckily her voice sounds normal.

‘Then you can remain standing.’

‘Why have you brought me here?’

‘Because you need me and I need you.’

Bewildered, she hears the van start up, a rumbling and throbbing and then she pitches forward, forced to grab hold of the metal stool next to the table for support, as they drive away.

‘Perhaps you had better sit down after all,’ says the man.

She takes a deep breath, picks up her handbag and sits down. The cold of the stool through her trousers makes her buttocks clench involuntarily and she shivers.

‘Would you like a cigarette, or do you prefer your own rollups?’ The way he asks and his tone remind her of the interminable police interviews of the past. Always friendly, but with a mocking undertone, too, and always from the position of ‘We know more than you do, so you might as well tell us.’

‘Would you like a cup of coffee?’ He swivels round to a narrow metal cupboard and opens the door not waiting for an answer. ‘Black with sugar, I believe.’

‘Who are you?’

He sets a white thermos on the table and gets out two plastic cups, another cup with plastic stirrers and a box of sugar-lumps.

‘My name is Van Dam. I am a civil servant at the Internal Security Service.’

She is sitting still, but her legs and belly vibrate in sympathy with the vehicle, as the stool and table are anchored to the iron floor of the van, which is now going at some speed. There is no window here in the back; the light comes from a short, double fluorescent tube right above them, but she knows there must be a hatchway behind her that connects with the cabin. She’s been in plenty of these vans before.

Van Dam pushes a cup over to her and proffers an open packet of blue Gauloises. She takes one and leans over for a light. This is crazy! she thinks and, just as when she was released on that early November morning, film images surface in her mind, this time of a man somewhere in East Berlin, being taken off in a car by two men from the Russian Secret Service. Already, an old film. Michael Caine? Not that the man opposite doesn't look anything like a secret agent; he's actually more like a civil servant. And of course his name won't be.

'What's more interesting is who you are,' he says. His voice is as metallic as his steely eyes, and the rather wooden, mechanical movements with which he puts the cigarette to his mouth and picks up a flat attaché case and puts it on the table remind her of her grandmother who had arthritis. Maybe he has it, too; he's got the same yellowish, parchment-like skin, as if he's anaemic. His hair is silver, cut very short; perhaps he shaves it.

'You were arrested in July 1998 for a violent break-in at the Biomedical Primates Research Centre in Rijswijk where a security guard was killed. You were sentenced to four years in prison as an accessory to murder. You have always refused to implicate your fellow activists, but we know that Peter Heemskerk, your boyfriend at that time, was involved.'

She's right. He has got something to do with the baby-faced detective. And it's about Peter. Well, he can forget that, then! For Christ's sake, she's done nothing other than try to forget Peter the past few years!

He pulls a dark green folder from the attaché case and takes his reading glasses from his breast pocket. Nothing's written on the folder and it contains no more than a few sheets of paper stapled together.

'Heemskerk was a member of the Zeeland environmental group calling itself The Zeeland Action Front. You weren't a member, but you were living with him and a certain Bart van der Schaaf in a squat in Middelburg at the time and you had a relationship with him. You had run away from home earlier, while you were still at secondary school.'

She listens to the monotonous voice, like a zombie. Now she notices, too, that he never blinks. She can hear by the sound of the engine that the van is going faster. Where are they headed? Out of town? Peter. What do they want from him? And from her?

‘You obtained a degree in Dutch law while you were in prison. First class’. He considers her over his half-moon glasses. ‘To understand your own case better? You must have known with your record that you could never practice law.’

She stares at the cigarette smoke swirling around the neon light. To forget, you bastard! That’s why! But I’m not going to say it; he’ll never understand. She knows his sort, they never understand what you say; they’re only interested in the sound of their own voice. He takes a folder out from between the sheets and removes a couple of photographs.

‘I’d just like to show you a few pictures. Now, don’t be shocked.’

But she is. Dead people shock everyone.

Not far from the spot shown on the photo, closer to the trees, a barrier bars the way to a woodland path. Next to it stands a sign saying, “National Trust”. She recognises the scene immediately from the pictures, which were taken in December 1996, according to Van Dam. Just over five years ago, in other words. Nothing seems to have changed since, the same cheerless winter landscape.

‘Mr Van der Werke was a provincial environmental officer,’ says Van Dam at her side, ‘forty-three years old, married with three young children. They must have been waiting for him. He was shot down here in cold blood.’

She doesn’t comment. What on earth can she say? She doesn’t know a thing about it, never read about it.

In the photographs, a man in a dark green jacket is lying on the ground next to the barrier. If she squeezes her eyelids together, it’s not difficult to see him lying there now in her mind’s eye.

‘Witnesses that day saw a car we’ve traced as the property of one Johan Vermeer. Vermeer was working for the Environmental Offensive Association, the

EOA in Wageningen. You know them?’ She doesn’t answer. It vaguely rings a bell, a name from the past, from behind the door of the time lock.

‘The EOA is a radical environmental movement concerned with agricultural policy and intensive farming, pigs in particular. Not an action group, but a recognised institute which is even subsidised.’

Van Dam’s voice is as neutral as always, but when she looks at him there’s a cynical twist to his mouth.

‘Quite a lot of people work there, including your former boyfriend Peter Heemskerk. I suppose the name Volkert van der Graaf means nothing to you, either?’

She frowns in surprise. Not only because of Peter’s name, which she’s heard several times now in the past few hours, but because she sees in a flash the slim, silent youth before her. A pale face with a rather effeminate mouth and flaxen, shoulder-length blond hair.

‘He was in the fifth year with Heemskerk at the local comprehensive in Middelburg when you were in the first year. Van der Graaf set up the EOA together with a certain Van de Wouw in 1992. Vermeer was there, too.’

‘He played it cleverly. He reported his car as stolen the day before. If you get my drift.’

Of course she gets his drift. But what she still doesn’t understand is what Peter has to do with this. However much of a bastard she might think he is, she can’t imagine him shooting someone down in cold blood, or getting anyone else to do, either; he wasn’t that kind of person. Even the ghastly business with the apes wasn’t his fault, just a stupid, unfortunate series of events. But the man from the security service is talking about December 1996 which was when Peter was living with her and Bart in the squat. So what did he have to do with it?

‘The car, a Hyundai, was found on a new estate in Arnhem two days later. The fingerprints matched Vermeer’s, but of course that says nothing. We put him in a line-up, but that produced nothing, either.’

Suddenly, he draws a pistol from the pocket of his raincoat, not as if he is going to fire it, the barrel between the thumb and index finger of his glove, but she jumps, all the same.

‘This is the weapon used to liquidate the victim.’

He holds the weapon up and, for the first time, there’s a smile, a bit of a sad one, playing round his lips.

‘Have you ever seen this before?’

The pistol looks like a plastic toy, but she knows full well it’s real. The barrel is short and thick, dark blue. She has, indeed, seen it before.

‘The guard in that animal research centre in Rijswijk was shot with it.’

She starts and glances at his expressionless eyes. Did Peter shoot him? It was never mentioned, she never heard anything like that during her trial or after it. She can’t imagine it. He’s lying! But why? What has he got to do with that dead civil servant?

Quietly, she asks, ‘Why was the man killed?’

‘We’re not sure yet. We think it’s because he issued a permit to some pig farmers to dump ammonia, which the EOA was taking legal action against. You’re wondering what Heemskerk could have had to do with this.’

He holds the pistol up again.

‘This is a Walther PPK. It was Heemskerk’s father’s service pistol when he was chief inspector of the Walcheren police. It was reported missing after his death. It was found in the grounds of that research centre after the break-in you were involved in. No fingerprints, but it has been established as the murder weapon. Both in the murder of the guard in Rijswijk and here in 1996. See what I mean?’

She shakes her head, although she understands very well.

‘Miss Luyten, we’re not saying that Peter Heemskerk was there.’

‘So what are you saying?’ She can hear her voice cracking, but she couldn’t care less. She’s worn out, cold and hungry and she wants to get away from here, go home; this has nothing to do with her.

‘Of course, we questioned Heemskerk about the pistol at the time. He said he knew nothing about it. Well, that’s quite possible, even though it’s rather a coincidence that he had long been friends with members of the EOA and that Mr Van der Werke just happened to be murdered with his father’s missing pistol.’ He smiles, blowing out clouds of smoke. ‘Just as it’s rather a coincidence that Heemskerk went to Wageningen several times round then and later went to work at the EOA.’

He looks down, contemplating the spot where the murdered man lay for a moment, and then says, ‘Okay, let’s go. There’s something I’d like you to hear.’

They’re back in the van now, on the road again, sitting at the folding table. While they were walking in the woods, someone was made fresh coffee. The driver? One of the officers? She doesn’t even know who’s sitting up front; since they left The Hague she’s seen no-one but Van Dam. Could she have run away? But why should she? Well, she will. In a minute.

A crackling sound. Then a click. And then she hears Peter’s voice saying, ‘It’s me. He’s got to be silenced.’

She stiffens. Who’s he talking about? The man in the woods?

Another voice, also a man’s, ‘Sssh! The line could be tapped!’

She doesn’t know the second voice. Rather high and snappy.

She hears Peter laugh and can imagine his eyes. His abrupt, cynical laugh and dark, mocking eyes.

‘I mean verbally, of course.’

Some incomprehensible mumbling, then again some crackling and Van Dam switches off the little cassette recorder.

Silence except for the rumbling of the van.

‘That was recorded last month,’ he says. ‘I expect you recognised Heemskerk’s voice’.

So they’re tapping his line. Sure. Last month. So it has got nothing to do with the dead man in the woods. Now she understands what Van Dam wants with her.

Or is he lying? Is it an old recording and is he only using it to get her involved? Is it a fake, a montage? Could that also be the case with that environmental officer? The pistol is real though, she recognises it.

‘We’re not entirely sure who the other one is, but it might very well be Volkert van der Graaf. Anyway, the call came from Harderwijk, where he lives with his girlfriend. He probably took precautions; you heard him say he thought his phone was being tapped ... Like another coffee?’ She shakes her head. Van Dam pours one for himself. Since they left, he must have drunk at least ten cups.

‘The question, of course, is who are they talking about?’ He leans back, the cup against his lips, as if expecting her to speak, but she doesn’t.

‘Listen. You want to start a new life, Miss Luyten. That’s why you took a degree and moved to The Hague. We’d like to help you.’

This can’t be true! She can’t help laughing, but he seems not to notice.

‘Your ambition is to practise law, but with your record there is no question of that. We can make sure that it causes you no more problems. In other words, that the record no longer exists and never has.’

She laughs again, disbelieving. It all sounds so absurd, like the whole situation. Men in the woods shooting another dead, a man in a van...

‘And in return, I have to spy on Peter?’

‘We would like you to approach Heemskerk. For two reasons. Firstly because of the man who has already been murdered and, secondly, because of the second man this conversation concerns.’

‘Jesus,’ she says, ‘you can’t be serious! If you can’t even manage to find out, what makes you think I can? Even supposing I was to do it?’

‘I’m not saying you can, but the chance is greater.’ He leans forward again, screwing up his eyes. ‘Peter Heemskerk trusts you. You’ve said nothing all these years. You didn’t give him away, though you could easily have done, and you knew that would have got you off with a much lighter sentence. I’m not sure exactly why you didn’t. You admitted there were other people involved; you could hardly deny it, but you said you didn’t know their names. Which was true;

it's how it works in those circles, but you did know Heemskerk. You were his girlfriend, you had a relationship with him, and it was he who roped you into the affair. So why didn't you name him? Because you loved him? Because you thought things wouldn't turn out as bad as all that? Because you thought he might still give himself up? Because he loved you, too? Even if it was only to get off lighter? But that's not what happened. On the contrary. As far as we are aware, you never heard from him again, not even through a third party, which he could easily have arranged. A phone call, a letter. Nothing. Nothing in all that time, all those years. Why, Miss Luyten? I'm sure you must have asked yourself the very same question.'

Okay! She thinks, go on bullshitting, you want me on my knees, you bastard, but I've been there a long time; you don't have to rub my nose in it!

He seems to be reading her thoughts, because he keeps quiet now, and sits drinking his coffee, apparently listening to the throbbing of the engine.

'Where are we going?' she asks.

'We're taking you home. Well, back to your car.'

She slides in behind the wheel and is about to shut the door, when he places a small printed card on the dashboard.

'Just in case,' he says.

She ignores it, starts the engine and as she takes off: 'Shove it up your arse.'

She's not sure if he hears her but, a few seconds later, when she looks in her rear mirror, she sees him still standing in the verge, a small figure that could just as well be a statue in the grass, although she is almost sure he is looking after her with that same vague smile.

4

‘You ought to advise Mr Fortuyn to have extra locks fitted,’ says the policeman, ‘that fence is okay, but no intruder worth his salt would think twice about it and it’s a piece of cake to get in from the back garden.’

‘I know,’ says Herman, ‘I’ve said so many times, as have others, but he won’t listen. He thinks it’s crazy to have to. Then he says, “what do we have a government for?” It’ll only lead to all that American rubbish, ordinary citizens arming themselves. That’s why he doesn’t want bodyguards, either.’

The policeman nods, though he really doesn’t follow the reasoning. ‘But all this stuff, alone,’ he says anyway, ‘I mean these paintings and all the antiques. It’s a wonder it’s all still here.’ Before descending the grand staircase he glances over at the big oil painting opposite where Fortuyn returns his gaze, and thinks: what a prat! He follows the stringy butler down. In the large, richly furnished hall below he sees from an antique grandfather clock that it’s almost midday.

‘You can at least tell him he’s not being bugged,’ he says, ‘not on any of the phones. The crackle is normal with that type of rather old fashioned model, and here you come under Blijdorp where there are still a lot of old cables.’

He glances once more at Fortuyn’s white marble bust before shaking Herman’s limp hand. ‘Don’t worry, Sir. We’ll ask the local officer to extend his evening beat a bit and, well, once Mr Fortuyn is in the official residence, he’ll just have to get used to the boys from the military police standing at the gates’.

A smile sidles over Herman’s narrow face. ‘He doesn’t want that, either. I’m afraid he wants to have the hedges and bushes removed and no police. The people have to be able to see him.’

Jesus Christ, thinks the policeman, would you credit it! It’s not just what the butler says, its the obsequious way he speaks.

‘You know: the White House, but a Dutch version?’ says Herman, pushing open the swing door.

The policeman nods and inhales deeply as the front door opens and a chilly wind blows towards him from G.W. Burgerplein. The fluttering flag is silhouetted sharply against the clear night sky, the steel rope rapping staccato against the mast.

‘Right,’ he says, ‘Well, wish Mr Fortuyn good luck with the election for me, on behalf of my colleagues, too. Finally somebody who’s not afraid to call a spade a spade; it’s just what we need here in Rotterdam!’

‘I will.’ The sound of yapping dogs comes from behind the swing door.

‘We’ll be going out for a piddle in a minute!’ calls Herman.

The policeman goes down the steps grimacing, checking in his pocket that he put the pliers back just now in Fortuyn’s study.

As he slips in beside his colleague in the waiting car, he hears assistance being requested over the police radio for a brawl between a bunch of young Moroccans and some Dutch guys in Nieuwe Binnenweg. He can’t help laughing at the woman on the switchboard who is talking about ‘coloured fellow inhabitants’.

‘Well?’ says his colleague, who is himself of Turkish origin.

The policeman nods and carefully removes the tiny receiver from his breast pocket. It is no bigger than a screw and the silver glints in the light of the bulb above the windscreen.

‘Let’s check it.’

He’s just opening the glove compartment to get out the laptop when he sees, out of the corner of his eye, car headlights turning into the square and, seconds later, recognises the streamlined form of Fortuyn’s Daimler, a brief glimpse of a young chauffeur. The car slows down and stops in front of the garage gates next to the house, illuminating the name in the facade for a few seconds ‘Palazzo di Pietro’. The door at the top of the steps opens and Herman’s fragile figure is framed momentarily in the golden-yellow light of the chandelier, a long lead in his hand, at the end of which two small dogs are already running down the steps to greet their master, who is getting out of the back of the shiny limousine.

‘A pooffer as Prime Minister,’ says the colleague, ‘sometimes I’m glad my parents are no longer around. Can you imagine?’

The policeman has plugged the silver screw into the back of the laptop and switched the laptop on so that the monitor, no bigger than a large cigar box, lights up green, showing a criss-cross of little lines. Contentedly, he is about to dial Fortuyn’s number on the hands-free phone, when a ringing sound issues from the laptop and a Rotterdam telephone number immediately appears at the top of the monitor, followed by a little flashing point of light.

‘Good,’ says the policeman, ‘that’s one thing less for us to do.’

Fortuyn is already inside. Herman is standing outside with the two little dogs on the long lead in the pool of light under the street lamp. The chauffeur has opened the gates and the garage door and the red taillights of the Daimler glide noiselessly into the garage.

‘Hello?’

‘Pim, it’s Albert.’

‘Albert de Booij,’ says the policeman, ‘his manager.’

The colleague is staring at the lighted windows of the dark house opposite, though there is nothing to see.

‘I hear from Langendam that you’re planning something for that *Volkskrant* interview. I’d love to know about it, too.’

Fortuyn giggles. ‘Albert, oh Albert, dear! Don’t you trust me? A bloody shame! God, don’t start whining at me. Why don’t you get hold of a nice young Moroccan boy? Do you know how long it’s been...’

The policeman switches off the laptop and the screen glazes over, a dull black.

‘Drive,’ he says, searching for his cigarettes to get rid of the bitter taste in his mouth.