

MAC

JIBBE WILLEMS – 24 MARCH 2009

TRANSLATION AND NOTES: MADELEINE VAN LEER – FEBRUARY 2011

Somewhere, over the rainbow, way up high.
There's a land that I heard of once in a lullaby.
Somewhere, over the rainbow, skies are blue.
And the dreams that you dare to dream
Really do come true.

DOROTHY

“In 1989 I go to secondary school and a little while later, on November ninth, the wall falls. Behind the bricks lies a horizon and in the east the sun comes up. It is *The End of History* and the whole world gets into *MTV*. From now on everything is possible, *no future* is exchanged for *here we are now, entertain us!* We're promised the moon and unlimited possibilities. To reach the top all I have to do is get into the ski-lift and the rest will happen by itself. Happy go lucky I start college and spread my arms to embrace the future. And then, when I graduate, toward the fall of 2001, the sun sets in the west. With two blows, like a roar, another pile of bricks falls. This time no new horizon, but a dust-cloud that obscures everything. All promises between eleven nine and *nine eleven* are broken in one blow. *Here I am, now entertain me! Entertain me! Entertain me!*”

MAC

Let me lament, let me shout,
let me go naked and barefooted,
let me howl like a jackal,
let me cry like an ostrich.

MICHA (1:08)

Those Americans, they've got it figured out. They don't fuss, they simply go with *can-do-will-do* and it gets done. When an American encounters something he doesn't like, he doesn't freeze. He doesn't take the long way home. He doesn't stare at his bellybutton until it grows an answer. No, an American goes straight ahead; either he blasts through a problem with such speed it doesn't exist anymore, or he collides with it head-on so hard something else happens. But at least something happens. And if not, *then I'll fucking see you in fucking court 'cause I'll sue your motherfucking ass!* When we find a hair in our hamburger, coming from God-knows-what body part, we leave the hamburger for what it is and go home hungry. Or we swallow that hair and pretend nothing happened. If you don't see it, it ain't there and eventually that hair will leave your body when you take a crap. Preferring to spend the rest of the day with an itchy throat rather than taking a stand. Maybe that hair was part of the meal, don't nag, swallow. Make a fool of yourself by complaining about a hair. What's the big deal with a hair. Practically nothing. Nothing. Don't think, swallow. But an American won't hide by closing his eyes. An American finds a hair in his hamburger and instantly resorts to the *declaration of independence* and the *bill of rights*. He has the goddamn right to a goddamn hairless hamburger, or doesn't he dammit? He'll get what he's paid for. And otherwise he stands to gain a couple million. We taste a hair and think; shut up, chew twenty times, swallow. An American tastes a hair and thinks; a condo on the Bahama's, at least, and with a little luck it'll include a private hamburgercook. That American will never again find a hair in his hamburger, while we will keep on eating hairs until we throw up a cat.

I wish I were an American, like one of those on Venice Beach for instance. Who jogs across the boardwalk every day to keep in shape. Or rather, he doesn't jog, but sails by the beach on rollerskates. Yes. I'll be a roller-girl and while I speed along the beach I know all the guys' eyes are fixed on me. And the women's eyes too, in admiration. Because I've got such a tight body, well-cared for as well, fit. Because I skate along the beach each morning. And because I only eat organic food, they're like that, the women of Venice Beach, they'll do anything to fight the decay. To them, discipline is a *way of life*. And they're optimistic, they feel hope, very tangible hope. Not our kind of hope, tht rubs shoulders with fear. That kind of hope nagging in the back of your head with a squeaky voice, saying; don't count on it, then you won't feel disappointed. No. Americans can have it all as long as they go for it! The American doesn't think 'I'm thirty and the world still hasn't done anything for me.' They think GO!GO!GO! They think; I'm coming and *there ain't nothing gonna stop me!* That's how they think, those Americans, everyone knows that so I'm not selling you nonsense here. Nothing is impossible. Failure is not an option. American children don't learn to walk, they instantly learn to run. Not me, I skipped the walking and instantly started to trip. They, they move so fast that a trip is like a headlong dive. They don't fall, they fly. They move so fast they *can't* even stop to think about it. They even think digital, just ones and zeros, in yes and no. They don't know maybe or delaying subtleties or like you know uh, and should I, or like but I could also and maybe it's better to... No, they're like a computer click click click through the many options, they decide and go *on on on*. Life is what you make of it, the world is pliable and the stars are attainable.

If I were an American, I'd grab myself by the nape of my neck and fling myself into the day each morning. I'd be invincible. Like last night. Last night I was invincible. Drank *one* red wine last night. The Empty Spot and I. *One* glass of red wine as an advance on the weekend just to get through the week. *One* glass that never seemed

to empty. At the end of the first bottle my glass was *still* half full. At the end of the second bottle I was invincible. And The Empty Spot started getting hot. He always gets like that when he... The Empty Spot, that's my, yeah, my boyfriend. My... life partner...? Anyway, I wake up each morning next to him, so it must be the love of my life. And he got rather... horny, wine gets to him like juniper berries to an elephant. It takes a while, but once the yeasting within gets going... And I was also rather... I'd had a wine, felt comfortably rosy, could use some filling up as well and I thought, alright, it might be Thursday and I really should go to sleep but, yeehaw, pin me down against that kitchen cupboard, my little cowboy. And he starts fidgeting with me and I was wearing one of those things with buttons from here all the way down to, oh well, too many for drunk fingers anyway, and then he gets all rushed, so he rams me against the counter and I feel something crack, a vertebra or something, so I yell OUCH! And he pulls down my pants and starts riding up against me like, I don't know, probably foreplay, and thrusting his belt buckle up against my, yes, and the vertebra in my back crack with each thrust against the kitchen counter and while he's there... assaulting me and I'm being squished between metal and metal and looking at his contorted face, with which he's trying to exude animal lust but that looks more like a mentally handicapped beaver seeing his gnawed-down tree heading straight for him, I burst, I can't help it, I burst into laughter. And if there's one thing that can turn an erection into a dishcloth it's laughter. First rule with spontaneous sex; never laugh at him.

What's wrong, am I not doing it right?

And I think, jezus, he's not going to talk is he, because that just dries me right up and I feel the gates of heaven closing, so I say, before that beaverlook completely disappears from his eyes, I say, 'no sweetie, you're just being a little rough. 'It's a soft little beast, she might get bruised.'

It's that fucking thing you're weating, you always wear these impossible clothes.

And I know that at this point things could get unpleasant. I know I could take the bait and that for the next few hours we'd have to fight (*No, we're not fighting, we're having a conversation in which we happen to disagree. That's not a fight, that's a discussion*) about those buttons that have nothing to do with this because he's already taken my pants off. I know I shouldn't say I don't like his tone with me (*Tone? What do you mean by tone? I don't have a tone, I'm just saying it aren't I? yeah, now I have a tone.*) I know I shouldn't ask what he means (*I'm telling you what I mean, if I meant something else, I'd say something else? No, this isn't a tone!*) I know I need to inhale calmly, and then exhale calmly, very calmly, what if he heard, he would think I was sighing (*Why are you sighing? Why do you always have to be so difficult? I'm being spontaneous, and you get all difficult. Just let it happen for once.*) So I inhale calmly, I exhale very calmly, I look at him submissively and raise my voice by half an octave. 'Shall I take it off for you sweetie.'

The beaverlook comes back into his eyes.

'See, here's my soft little beast.'¹

¹ 'Beestje' can be translated into 'little animal' as well, depending on the preferred sound of the line

No, there's your hot little beast.

'Yes. Here's my hot little beast and here are my hot little hands and here are my hot little fingers.'

It's a dirty little beast.

Something in his beaverface spells revenge, but revenge turns guys ugly and *this* turns me on somehow. The gates of the temple fling back open, the trumpeters are coming out, ready to sound halleluja.

Very dirty.

'It's a very dirty little beast. You've never seen such a dirty little beast in all of your life. The little beast needs a thorough washing.'

Then you should take a shower.

'Yes.'

Let me shower you. I have a big shower in my pants. With a big showerhead, for your dirty little horny beast. And you should unwrap that showerhead with your dirty little hands.

I tug his belt open, unzip him and drop his pants to his ankles.

Will you look at that he says, nothing's happening.

Like a dog he stands before me, with his tail between his legs, and waits expectantly. Sure, like he'll show initiative. He waits expectantly so often that I think he'd be surprised when life ends. *Oh, had we started already?* He'll cough and hack out his last breath. The cough tickles his throat and he dies. That's how small death can be; an itch in the throat. And he stands before me so stupidly, with that beaverhead and that wagless tail between his legs that I, sorry sorry sorry, start to laugh again.

What's going on?

And I want to grab him. I want to make him big and I want the beaver to tame my beast, hit me with your best shot, hurt me.

I'm not going in there.

'...what?...'

It's filthy there. Your little beast stinks. It stinks like a dying little beast. It stinks like decay, no soap can help you with that. We'll have to wrap it up, to stop the rot, to prevent the rot from lashing out around it. Decay is contagious, you'll decay me. We have to wrap up the little beast, before it's too late.

He grabs a roll of plastic wrap.²

We have to wrap up your little beast, to push your 'best by' date into the future somewhat. To make sure it doesn't spoil the other wares.

'I'm not a sandwich.'

You're rotting. Before you know it little worms will come out of your beast, then it's beyond repair. We have to act fast, before it's too late.

I'm a sandwich. And if I can't find a mouth to fill, I have to preserve myself. He wraps the foil around my... waist, makes a few eights around my legs and satisfied looks at the result.

There, he says, it's not much, but it's the best thing we can do for now. We'll see about later, but for tonight we can safely go to sleep.

And with his pants still around his ankles he waddles toward the bedroom. Barely a minute later I hear him snore. I instantly feel quite a bit less invincible.

That wouldn't happen to an American. She'd fling her perfect body onto the kitchen table and in one fluid movement would let herself be penetrated. She'd smile her big white smile, so wide that it would sparkle, and her heart would beat to the thrusting. Ever harder, ever faster. And she comes before even *thinking* about having an orgasm, and as she goes, *again* and *again*, she stopped counting long ago, the camera turns away and the closing credits start to roll, because for an American each evening culminates in a *happy end*.

I was standing in the kitchen with a roll of plastic wrap around my waist and got a to be continued. I staggered up the stairs and crashed into bed. Only sleep could make an end to this evening.

...

But sleep's a scoundrel. Long for him, and he doesn't come. He leers at you with his black eyes, his claws folded into his paws as he licks himself clean. And once you've almost given up, when you've made peace with staying awake for the rest of your life, tired and awake, sleep jumps you from behind and thrusts his fangs into your neck. Bites you open and injects his dream into your blood, like an overdose of heroin into a junkie.

The dream in which you're Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz* with the *yellow brick road* around your neck like a noose. No matter how you click your heels, you're not going home. You remain at the end of the dead-end road staring at *Emerald City*. And then the cowardly lion plants a rifle between your shoulderblades and pulls the trigger.

The night blasts apart like a gunshot and badly wounded you fall into the day. Because what's ticking in your chest isn't a heart but an alarm clock and the hands refuse to stand still. Because that's the way it goes, getting up, flail yourself through

² I know it as Saran wrap, but it can also be substituted by 'cling film'.

the day. And while you clamp your pillow, the lifebuoy that's supposed to prevent you drowning into morning, your dream pulverizes in your lashes.

...

Americans don't get hangovers. An American can guzzle a full tank of gas and still run the marathon of New York the next day. Run. On bare feet. Not I. I don't even have the strength to crawl to the toilet. I should stay in bed, I should pull the day over me like a blanket. But I have to get up. Three snooze after seven and I have to go to work. Just one more day of smiles and I get to fling myself into the weekend. But first, get up. When I push snooze for the fourth time, The Empty Spot pushes his elbow into my side.

Aren't you supposed to go to work?

Yes, you dick, I know. I want to stab my nails into his chest and scratch him open down to his crotch. I want to start this morning with so much violence that everything that comes after could only be soft in comparison. On my pillow lies a little red puddle, my tongue tastes like stale blood and for a moment I think the bullet in my dream hit my lungs. That between sleeping and waking I've puked out my soul. The puddle smells like sour wine. A belch, that's all, a little puke while I was sleeping.

You're going to be late.

If I were an American, I wouldn't start by sitting on the edge of the bed to counter the gagging by sucking up a cigarette. I'd jump under the shower. Not that an American has to take showers, an American never smells. His sweat is always fresh and merely exists to make muscles shine.

...

I fall asleep on the toilet. I'm still pressing my pillow to me and have fallen asleep peeing. I pee and I sleep and I feel how my warmth gathers between my buttocks, how it creeps along my thighs, to my legs, how in spurts it finds my toes.

I AM A FIREMAN
WITH MY CUNT I EXTINGUISH THE BURNING WORLD
I TAKE THE HEAT BETWEEN MY LEGS
AND SUCK UP THE FLAMES.

I grab sleep by his throat, put my heel on his ribcage and trample him. But for sleep it's never enough, the more you trample him, the more he cares for you. And then I notice I'm still wearing the underpants made of plastic wrap. I've peed my underpants, like a diaper, and there is no one who'll come to change me.

I drip a trail of urine from the toilet to the shower and wash the night off me, the last dirty remains off me, the last lumps of sleep off me. I eat breakfast, coffee, paper and then my eye rests, I wasn't looking for this, on a small article.

A man was somewhere in the wilderness of God-knows-where where his leg got trapped under a tree trunk. He'd waited two days for help and he'd run out of food and

he'd run out of water and he knew he was going to die without ever seeing his loved ones again. So he took his pocket knife and cut his body off his leg. He was a regular guy who for once in his life wanted to tread outside the predictable course of home and work and supermarket. So he went on survival by himself and then that tree fell on him. And that sawing was quite an ordeal, he snagged on his sinews and had to crush the bone with all the strength he had in him before he could chop himself loose. He'd fainted any number of times before he finished the job. He was free. He hopped to the nearest freeway, so he really wasn't that far into the wilderness, and went unconscious.

In the hospital he came to, his wife as sitting next to him. And he was ecstatic, he had survived. And how! He had sawed off his own leg. He wasn't a sappy shmuck anymore, he was a rockhard... well, yeah hero. Proudly he looked at his wife, ready to be showered with praise and love. But his wife looked sour as always. He didn't understand. He'd gone into the wilderness, had met with danger and he'd overcome it! And his wife cleared her throat and asked one question. "*Why didn't you just saw off that branch?*"

We never saw off the branch. We immediately go for our bodies.

I close the paper, gulp down my coffee, suck up my cigarette in one pull and yawn the last attack of sleep from my throat. Time to go out the door, time to hunt down traffic and rush hour. Upstairs The Empty Spot drags himself out of bed. He stumbles into the hall, shleps his snore to the john, splashes his bare feet through my pee and comes to life with a dry fart.

Jezus what happened here?

I mumble 'see you tonight' and rush out the door, into my car, out of the street, into my job.

...

In America they love their work. In America they say *work is the meat in the hamburger of life*, and they love hamburgers, everyone knows that. An American works fifty hours a week and *still* can't get enough of it. Each day he *dances* into his *office building*. *Hi Joe, hey Jane, and a good morning to you too, it's a beautiful day!*

♪ *Oh, say can you see
by the dawn's early light
what so proudly we hailed
at the twilight's last gleaming.*

Not me, *no way*, I'm in the parking lot of the single-story office building I work at. I stare at the door I have to enter. As if the building, if I just look at it long enough, will evaporate, sucked into the clouds. The engine's still running, I'm in a getaway car, I could leave in a heartbeat, all I have to do is put my feet on the gas pedal and I'll fly far from here, no idea where, as long as it's elsewhere, away from here. Drive and keep on driving. Until I get there, where I want to be, and as long as I don't know where I want to go, I'll keep on driving. *Hundred miles an hour* until the tires wear out, until the tires blow out and the car flips over. As my car and I make flip after flip we're

still moving ahead, and *on*. And if the car won't move forward anymore, I'll get out and start walking. I'll keep walking, until I've worn myself out, after my soles my feet, after my feet my ankles, my legs, my crotch. I'll drag my chest and pull my entrails behind me. They wear out too. I wear out my arms, to my shoulders, I wear out my neck, my head, until all I'm dragging along the road is a bit of crown. I'll keep on moving while wearing out, or until I'm completely worn down from soles to crown.

[*Knock knock knock*] On my car window.

The flat building hasn't evaporated. Hasn't been sucked into the clouds. Hasn't changed into a rainbow. There's no pot of gold. A nose presses against the car window. Above it two black eyes, watching me intently. Two button eyes in a face completely made of straw. Straw from his head, straw from his cheeks, straw from his ears.

[*Knock knock knock*]

I put on my smile and roll down the window. A musty scent wafts in.

Nice car you've got there, they don't make 'em like that anymore.

'Good morning?'

I myself have an ugly duck³, see, that red one over there. But this here's a nice little ride too. Don't pay too much taxes on it, surely?

'What can I do for you sir?'

Can you find your way? I mean, is this where you want to be? Because this parking lot is exclusively for employees of Global Logistics, "we know where you're going", that sort of thing. And you don't work for Global Logistics, because I don't know you. And you're not here for a job interview either, because they're not hiring at all right now. Tough times, you know, time for downsizing. So I thought, I saw you sitting here in this little ride and I thought, maybe you're lost.

That must be it, I took the wrong exit. I can click my heels all I want, but I won't get home. I smile at the scarecrow.

'Yes, that must be it. I must be lost.'

Well, you see, that's what I thought. Where are you supposed to be?

'Well, "Yóu know where I'm going", right? So where am I going then?'

Eh, that's not... that's not how it works, eh, ma'am, I don't mean that I literally, I mean I, personally, eh, know waar you eh, go. We're into logistics, you see, not really into what direction, or where someone's going, eh...

³ An old model car by Citroën known commonly as a 'duck', because of its shape.

'Leave me alone then, I'll find my way out.'

The scarecrow skulks off. Not even a minute into my new assignment and I've made friends. Good job. It's a headache assignment today. An American would take an Alka-Seltzer and shake the pain off of him like a woodnymph shakes off the morning dew, but nothing works against the pangs in my head. The one thing to do is get out of the car and get to work. Each step is a step toward the weekend. If I clamp on to that I might be able to drag myself ashore. Almost weekend. I turn off the engine, the getaway car puffs out a slight protest and is quiet. I get out of the car, into the world. And I don't even get out fast, I don't get up too quickly, but still the blood shoots from my brain and all goes dark.

...

There are different kinds of darkness⁴. There's the darkness with a heartbeat and fangs, darkness that bites your throat and waits for you to bleed to death. There's darkness that's so densely packed together you can barely breathe. And there's darkness that strikes you in broad daylight, the kind of darkness that moves so fast, you feel like you're falling. That you're falling and keep on falling.

I fall.

Long ago, when the world wasn't round yet, you at least still had an edge to fall from. You took a wrong step, you fell and landed. Your mom would come to kiss your scrape and put you back on your feet. But now the earth is round. When you fall, you keep on falling, you don't land.

...

When I come to, I see the scarecrow. He's trying to pull me up to my feet.

You were on the ground all of a sudden.

'That's no reason to sexually harass me, is it?'

But I'm not, I don't want to, I'm not...

He lets me go and I bang my head against the ground.

'Ouch.'

Sorry.

'Sure, you're sorry, get the hell out of here, will you?'

He turns red, wants to say something but his words smack against his uvula.

'Rapist!'

⁴ 'Donker' can be translated as an adverb, 'dark', and as a noun, 'darkness'.

With a high, offended yelp he disappears into the office of *Global Logistics*. I should cherish this kind of encounters, one rarely meets kind, helpful people nowadays.

I'm lying in the parking lot of *Global Logistics*. That'll make a bad impression on the staff of the client. So I get up professionally and follow the strawhead into the office. I'm fine, I'm clean, and tidy, and my seconds keep on ticking just the same like anyone else's. Everything's fine. *Smile!*

...

In America a receptionist goes by the title *Chief Executive Officer of First Impressions*. She's supplied with the task of making a first impression for the company, and that first impression has to be good. A *CEO of First Impressions* takes pride in her task and no matter what happens in her private life, it will never get in the way of her obligations toward her job. Even if she's had a mastectomy that morning, she'll still beam and sparkle and be incredibly helpful. The receptionist receiving me obviously doesn't give a crap. She looks at me distrustingly over her cup of coffee. She looks like a wound, a wound that's been gathering crust for years, so I try not to take it personally.

Are you that crazy bitch that scared the hell out of our Fons⁵?

'No, I'm with *EMC* and I'm here...'

Because our Fons is a good guy, I can tell you that much. He'd never stick his fingers in some strange woman, when she's not asking for it. So you calling our Fons a rapist out of the blue, makes no sense whatsoever.

I grab her coffee and take a gulp. Lukewarm, but black, so fine.

'I'm with *Expectancy Management Consultants* and I've been booked here for an niner, ten-thirty and a two-fifteen. That's a long day, and I hope you can help me start the day off right. If you could look into your little system what room I'm expected in, I'd almost be grateful to you. Could you?'

Her little eyes swim around in her wound and then she dives into her computer.

Room 1.08, through this hall and to the left.

...

In room 1.08 there are about twenty employees of *Global Logistics* staring at me. Some of them I see are starting to look scared to death in the corner of their eyes, some others bloodthirsty, but most of them look idle. Labrats, without a clue of what's about to hit them. A group like any other, this'll be a piece of cake.

'Hi!' Good morning, HI! Let me introduce myself, I am Mac. Some of you already know me, right Fons, but most of you here, I can see, don't have a clue as to who I

⁵ Abbreviation presumably of the name Alfons.

am and what I'm doing here. Or of what use I might be to you. Plain, simple, fine. I've also understood there have been some, eh, some changes in the company lately. I saw it in my file and it's not news to you either, right Fons, 'tough times' is what you called it? Well, exactly. So I can't blame you for, well, let's not call it distrust, but I understand that I'm, like, a cat, in the tree, and that you'll wait to see which way the cat jumps.⁶ So, let me tell you something about myself first, or, what I'm doing here.'

The first labrat raises his hand. There's always someone who asks:

Is this compulsory?

He's a sweaty one, this little guy with his raised arm. His skin the color of the dull side of aluminum foil. Had bad acne in the past. He doesn't have a heart but a crevice that fills itself with fear, each night when he goes to bed, and when he opens his mouth, fear gushes from his lips. He doesn't want to be here. He doesn't want to be here at all.

Is this compulsory?

'All of you have received an e-mail explaining what's expected from you, so I'll presume that answers your question. Is it always this warm in here? Is that heater on, or... could you... thank you.'

So it's compulsory?

'That desire to hear a clear-cut yes/no answer is precisely what we'll be working on today. It might be of use to you. What's your name?'

Williams.

His crevice is flooding and fear drips from his pores, he's getting even wetter, nog even grayer. He wishes he'd never opened his mouth.

Why?

'Oh nothing, no particular reason, don't worry.'

I scribble something in the file, to fuck with him a little. To make him shut up. His aluminumhead crumples, he won't be bothering us anymore. I don't write anything down, I make a little drawing. Of a dick to be precise. A limp dick with limp balls.

'Right. Are there anymore questions or can we get started? Great. There can be a kind of gap between expectation and result. Structures, in this case organizations, but also people, can get tied up when that gap, the gap between expectation and result, gets too big. That gap, that hole, is where the consultant jumps in, expectation management. That's me. The external supervisor when a new, sometimes unexpected management is implemented. Like, say, here. It's really quite warm in here, don't you think? Could someone open a window... before I melt? They can't...

⁶ A typical expression to describe the Dutch, who take time to warm up to someone/something new.

oh, ok. So. I communicate methods dealing in part with the side of the demand, the feasibility of the concept of “result”, and on the supply side the methods deal with managing specific expectations. And in between, obviously, expectation management consultancy centers on accountability. That’s no Latin, is it Fons? However, accountability, targets, potato tomato. Here we are on the side of implementation, with you.

Oh, also important to tell you, is that ab-so-lute-ly no-thing is riding on this for you. See it as an opportunity to enrich yourself, take from it what’s useful to you. And use it. Use it here, or, who knows, at your next job.’

A woman with a broad head and a stubnose raises her fake nails into the air.

‘If you hear me out, you’ll find that most of your questions will be answered, thank you. Whoa, I think your technical service ought to take a look at the *climate control* here, this doesn’t seem quite SHW to me⁷. No issues with it? No? Let’s move on.

Briefly: when a process threatens to go awry, is that because the results are too low or the expectations too high? And what bridges can we, you, build to, eh, bridge that gap.’

The woman with the plastic claw coughs. There’s always an instigator. One of those individuals who failed the placenta puncture test and sees life as the re-examination.

What’s the point of all this?

‘Later in the day we’ll have the bilaterals, the one on ones, you know, and there will be enough opportunity to get into things more personally.’

I don’t see the use of it.

Some people need witnesses or else they don’t exist, others need witnesses or else they don’t mean anything. The woman with the plastic claw is of the second kind. Isolate her and the ground caves in, lionesses hunt in groups. I pucker my mouth into the friendliest smile.

‘Would *you* come over here for a minute?’

The lioness growls, trudges forward and I lean over toward her.

‘I don’t think we’re going to be good friends,’ I whisper, ‘but I’d like to finish my course here. If what’s necessary to do so is to remove you, I will.’

Yes, and so what?

‘I’ll add a note to your file. That file goes to your boss. And that’s where my responsibility ends. So let’s try to avoid as many nasty consequences as we can, shall we. Do we understand each other?’

The lioness withdraws her plastic claws, she chokes her growl and is silent.

⁷ ARBO seems best translated into SHW: Social Health and Welfare Policy, laws on conditions in the workplace.

'And have a seat right up front, all cosy and close to me.'

It's best to extinguish a fire before it breaks out.

'Right,' I clap my hands. I hate it when I do that, 'let's proceed.'

'Now. Internal processes have to be streamlined. And that starts with you; employee. You are the wheel in the clockwork, you turn and if you turn the right way your tines grab other tines that in turn grab other tines. From a certain perspective the company centers around you. But sometimes you feel like a rat in that wheel and you run and run, without setting anything into movement. And you know what? Sometimes you don't. Sometimes you don't move anything, the wheel stands still and you can run your rounds all you want, it's no use. The tines catch air, as useless as dentures on a night-table.

No questions right now please.

Think before you lose heart. Before you start complaining at colleagues. Because you know how they talk in the smoke-room, at the coffee machine, or over turkey on a roll in the canteen. You know how a problem gets blown up to the point of now return. Something that seems small and innocent, like a guinea pig, gets teeth, gets claws and goes for your throat when you're not paying attention. When you don't grant yourself a minute to think. But how do you do that? How do you think streamlined. How do you separate the essentials from the nonessentials, the nonessentials from the non-relevantials, the non-relevantials from the emotions?

Hear me out first, if you have questions later you can tug my sleeve Fons.

How do you do that?

KISS and LOVE.

Yes, go ahead and write that down:

KISS and LOVE.

ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE:

Leadership, Overview, Volition, Efficiency: LOVE.

Without LOVE life is a sequence of accidents, a sea that's not a sea, but an unmeasurable amount of individual drops in which you swim without support. That's swimming in quicksand, no land in sight. Without LOVE all you're doing is keeping your head above water.

I know we're moving fast, but everything will become clear and if not you can ask me later.

LOVE: Leadership, Overview, Volition, Efficiency.

Later.

Make sure you know when you take on **Leadership** and when you are **Lead**. Keep the **Overview**, know what you're doing and why you're doing it. Pick your battles, keep score, check where you're at in your targets. **Volition**; Make deals with yourself and stick to them. Create order, make sure the amount of chaos in containable.

I don't want to see anymore hands for a while.

And move **Efficiently**; don't get distracted, don't get lost.

No hands. Yours neither.

And never forget how LOVE always starts; always with a KISS;

Keep It Simple, Stupid.

Put your hand down, now.

If LOVE takes a left, while you want to go straight ahead, think of the KISS first: Keep It Simple, Stupid! Adjust, don't veer off, keep your eyes on the target..

I said; put your hand down.

KISS leads to LOVE

Down!

and LOVE leads to life.

Cut it out now!

...

Americans have very clear rules, everyone knows the *do's* and *don'ts* of the workplace. An absolute *no-go* for instance is physical contact. You can shake someone's hand, but every other kind of touch will get you fired instantly. So I knew I was doing the wrong thing when I burst across the table and grabbed Fons' piercing hand with my fist. I knew that I, according to American standards, misbehaved. But you can only pay attention to someone's behavior so many times, before you have to take measures. Otherwise you lose credibility. Maybe I should have counted to three first. Maybe I should have taken a deep breath. Maybe I... was exaggerated in my reaction. But I did what I thought was right at the moment, I leaped forward, grabbed the scarecrow's hand and broke a finger. I was mostly surprised it happened so easily. I closed my hand, twisted my wrist and heard, no, felt, in my palm, a clear, dry snap. A twig, a thin board, a match.

Snap.

Clearly the scarecrow is as surprised as I am, his mouth and button eyes open wide as he tries to figure out what happened exactly. Thinking is costing him so much of his brain activity that the pain hasn't hit yet.

Now it's important to act fast. I have to contain the *collateral damage*. If the other labrats figure out what's going on, they'll become restless and I can forget about the rest of the day. That means I have to isolate and neutralise.

'You, come with me, now. The rest of you have a cup of coffee, I'll be right back.'

I drag Fons out the door by his finger, run him through the hall, past the receptionist, into the parking lot and before he starts to scream I stifle it with my sleeve. He screams into my clothes but the fabric muffles the sound. When he's finished screaming I let go of his finger. It's got a weird curve and is starting to swell up.

'That does not look good Fons,' I whisper, 'that doesn't look good at all.'

Tears come into his buttons, they're getting bigger, roll past his nose.

'You should go and see the doctor, eh, you should go to the Emergency Room. They'll give you a painkiller, a lolly and a bandaid, and everything will be fine. Did you drive in today?'

He nods at his red duck, I help him get into it.

'And because you don't feel so well it's better to go home after you see the doctor. And that will be that, and I won't make a note in your file about your strange behavior. This will stay between us, do we agree on that?'

He nods.

'Very sensible of you Fons. You'll be alright from here?'

He inhales through his nose, swallows his snot and says:

I just wanted to tell you your nose is bleeding.

'That is thoughtful of you Fons, bye.'

He drives off, mission accomplished. Then I turn around and see the labrats looking out of the windows. They push their little snouts against the glass and sniffle restlessly. I pleat my head back into a smile and wave at them.

'Fons doesn't feel so well!' I shout. 'So I sent him home! Take a seat, I'm coming right up.'

Inside the wound at the reception stops me.

What was the matter with Fons?

'With Fons? Whi is Fons? I don't know a Fons.'

Was it his stomach? When he's tense, his stomach starts bothering him. Fons gets that quite easily, he has a weak stomach.

'Yes, his stomach. He almost passed out, so I sent him to the doctor.'

Aw, poor Fons... And he's one who doesn't enjoy attracting attention to himself.

'No. A jewel to the company.'

Yes, that he is. Your nose is bleeding by the way.

'Thank you, that is very thoughtful of you.'

...

It must be the air in the building. Because the windows won't open and because of the heat and because the air coming from all those bodies keeps getting pumped around. That air is as old as the building itself. An air that gets heavier all the time. Skin cells, sweat, dust, sebum, crumbs of despair piercing ou mucous membrane like bits of asbestos. Air like sandpaper. No wonder my nose is bleeding.

I stand in front of the mirror in the TOILET and can't seem to stop the bleeding. It's as if last night's wine is crawling up my throat looking for a way out through my

nose. I push pieces of TOILET-paper in my nostrils. You can barely see them. You can't see them at all. All I have to do is recover my smile and I can get back to work.

And that smile has to be present. It doesn't have to be real, just big, frightfully big. A grimsmile with bare teeth. A chimpanzee would beat your face for it, but here the friendliness can't be too aggressive. You have to push your smile down people's throats, that's when they'll swallow. I practice in front of the mirror, but I can't get my lips into the right position.

...

[knock knock knock] On the TOILET-door.

Hello?

I push my fingers against the corners of my mouth. They won't stay up.

Is everything alright in there?

'Tiptop, never better, a-okay.'

We're waiting for you upstairs you know. Are we going to continue or can we get back to work?

I pick the bits of TOILET-paper from my nose, but it starts flowing agains so I push them back in. I wipe my mouth and open the door.

'Is that arousing to you, to listen at the door when there's a woman op the TOILET.'

But I wasn't...

'Does your weewee get hard, when you hear a woman pee? Does that turn you on?'

Sorry, I didn't mean to...

'No, but you did. Or didn't you?'

His head crumples.

'Or didn't you?'

I'm sorry.

'You're sorry? You're sorry you got caught. Hm? We'll wait to see if that has consequences. Let's start again shall we.'

...

In 1.08 the mood has changed. While before it was just the usual passivity and despondency of the office, now the mood is downright hostile. The lioness with the plastic claws is the undeniable alfabitch of the ratmob. She's ready to lead her troops

into attack, so I have to play it carefully. A landmine is best disarmed by standing on it.

'Alright, let's get this show on the road. What are your personal experiences in the field, how could KISS and LOVE help you define these experiences? Can someone think of a moment in which things threatened to go awry in the workplace, a tangible example where expectation and result didn't meet each other?'

No one raises his hand. Of course not. The lioness ogles her savannah and if she sees but one ratface pop up over the grass she attacks.

'Do you have an example? Something that didn't go as you expected it to. Than was intended.'

The lioness snorts.

'No? Everything always goes as you expect it to? You're a blessed human being.'

Today is turning out differently than I'd hoped.

'Anyone else have an example, a tangible example?'

That's a very concrete example. Expectation and result don't meet here. That's what you want to talk about right? Well, talk about it.

'Alright, we'll talk about it. How would you apply KISS and LOVE to today, and so build a bridge between expectation and result?'

I'd never do that.

'No, but that's why I'm asking you, so afterward you *can*.'

I think it's nonsense. That whole KISS and LOVE stuff. That wouldn't work here at all anyway. I think it's all so American.

'What did you say?'

I said that I think it's way too American.

...

'You could make an example of those Americans. They don't nag, they *go*, they *do*. Example? They have big plans here. Yes, the Americans have taken over *Global Logistics*, yes. You didn't know? And do you think they'll stay in this gusty little scrapcountry? No, they know what *Global* means, they want to conquer the world. But meanwhile they're stuck to you, weak little employees, protected by weak little laws. So you'll hang like ballast on their growth. In America you'd be fired *instantly*, reorganize and just like that, you're out. If only it was that kind of party, then my day would have amounted to something. But no, you guys get guided dismissal, you get three months' pay to follow courses. Oh how carefully they handle you, slowly slowly

the bad news is eased into your muscles. God forbid you'd experience psychological damage from the whole discharge procedure. Step by step, hold hands. As if it changes anything about the outcome. If in three months you're still working for *Global Logistics*, it'll be for minimum wage. In Calcutta!

...

'Oh, so now you raise your hands?'

Their whiskers tremble with anticipation and the labrats start to squeal. Soon 1.08 is filled with the sound of a big bunch of rubber duckies. Panic creeps like pestilence from their snouts. The lioness catches my eye and looks straight at me.

Do you mean we're getting fired?

'Well now, you're moving a little fast into a downward spiral. Try and think of a way to break out of that pattern. KISS and LOVE. How would you apply them to this situation?'

The Lioness gets up.

I have two for you too. FUCK and YOU!

'Ah, interesting, and what do they stand for?'

She jumps over the table and sticks her plastic claws in my chest. While I fall backward hitting the wall, the pieces of TOILET-paper shoot out of my nose. The blood that has been collecting in my nostrils spurts out in one big burst and through the red fountain I vaguely see the lion's head approaching. Sometimes life is a poor picture. Overexposed, blurry, and you're out of the frame. Then her head hits mine and it gets dark again.

...

When I was 12, my mom to me to McDonalds. We stood in line for a *Happy Meal*. 'Here, she said, 'here is where you were conceived.' I looked at a fat girl with a strawberry milkshake. 'Or rather', she said, 'not here, not in this... restaurant, but in this spot. When there was still a meadow here, and the highway was still a footpath. When this floor, so easy to keep clean, was still grassland.' She's finished the strawberry milkshake and the girl slurps the bottom with her straw. 'In those days,' she said, 'funny, in those days the sky was always blue. People who know these things say it's nonsense, but I'm sure of it. I was there wasn't I?' The little fatty burps and giggles. Her mom giggles with her. 'And there, where the playground starts, is where the water was with which I tried to rinse you out. But you'd already latched on. I could rinse all I wanted, I could've use all the water in that gravel hole to rinse out my youknowwhat you were already on your way. At home I even baked a cake. A detail, but I still remember. A chocolate cake. Oh, it's our turn. What do you want with your *Happy Meal*?

...

When I come to, all I see at first are legs. I'm on my side under a table and my head is pounding and the carkey in the pocket of my skirt is poking into my upper leg and my nose is glowing. The rats are huddled together, squeaking. Only aluminumhead is sitting, in a corner, his arms wrapped around him as he sways back and forth. Once he sees my eyes are open, he gets the hiccups. That one's not helping me up. It looks like no one is planning to help me get up. A good thing too, I'm familiar with that sort of help. They'll trample you into the ground when you're not looking. It seems best to help myself. I crawl off. Aluminumhead starts to whimper and point at me, but the rest of the rats ignore him and I escape.

...

In the RESTROOM⁸ I check out the damage. I look like an African mask. My face is covered with blood and when I touch my nose a pain shoots up between my eyes. I inspect my blouse. You can still see a few whitish areas, but overall it's fairly evenly soaked. Pretty picture. No really. Spotlight on it this is hopeless. You can see my nipples. That too.

I need a cigarette.

I grope about in my purse and it slips out of my hands. As it falls it twists downward and I see everything fall in. Splash. In the TOILET-bowl. Splash. My purse with the rest. Splash.

And it isn't a TOILET-bowl with a raised area. It isn't a TOILET-bowl where you can check your feces to see if everything's alright. That there are no worms or parasites. No. It's a deep bowl with steep sides.

I need a cigarette. First a cigarette.

I close my eyes and fish my cigarettes from the bowl. They're soaked.

I have to smoke.

I take a cigarette and blow it as dry as I can with the blower. Then I put it between my lips and try not to think of the person who used the TOILET before me. I light the cigarette and inhale deeply.

That feels good.

A second later a siren splits through my brain.

...

Fire alarm.

...

You can't take a moment for yourself anywhere. They keep an eye on you everywhere. Take a puff and all hell breaks loose. I'm not fucking hurting anyone am I? I flush, push open the door and head for the reception. The wound is hitting the switchboard in a panic and all these lights are turning on. In America everyone would stay calm. They would compose themselves in a straight line and calmly walk outside, where they would wait for the emergency service to arrive. But at *Global Logistics* everyone runs out of the building in a panic. The rats leave the burning ship. The

⁸ 'WC' can be translated as both toilet or restroom. Americans prefer the word restroom; the word toilet is used when indicating the bowl itself. *MvL*

wound gives up as well and gets out. They're huddled close together in the parking lot, looking for the smoke. They haven't experienced anything this exciting since Tatjana Simic's breasts peeped out of her red top and she herself be taken from behind against a CX 25 GTi with injection motor. But neighbour...⁹ On the desk a phone starts ringing. I pick up. Why not.

'Yes? *Global Logistics*, speaking.'

The fire department.

'Nope, no false alarm this time. The flames are coming out of the roof.'

I throw the receiver on the floor and walk out of the building. I take the rest of the day off, they can figure things out. The rats in the parking lot freeze and follow me with their eyes as I, bleeding, smoking, get into my car. I start the engine, pump the gas and head straight for them. Speciale performance. Fuck you. They flee in all directions and I leave the parking lot. In the rearview mirror I see them yelling at me. Up yours.

When I get on the highway I see a fire engine on the other side pass by in full speed. That is fast. The siren lingers around me for a moment, slows down and then fades away. I'm gone.

...

On the highway I find my smile. This is where it was. Waiting on the asphalt until I'd follow the dotted line. Well, I'm here smile, lay yourself on my lips and and hitch a ride for a while. Where would you like to go? From here every horizon is reachable. The highway becomes one long gray line, an arrow pointing forward. The tires leave the asphalt, I shoot up, toward the sun. The metal around me smoulders when I break through the atmosphere and then I'm weightless, I float through space in my car. The engine sighs softly and without gravity I swing high above the earth, I float further into the vacuum where even sound can't go. It is perfectly quiet.

And then the car rasps, coughs and quits.

...

I fall down a thousand kilometers to earth and hit the asphalt. My dashboard glows red and the needle of the fuel tank hides below zero. With the remaining speed, I slide onto the emergency lane.

Crap.

Crapcrapcrap.

...

⁹ Tatjana Simic: large-breasted actress from Eastern European descent; the car is a model by Citroën. The scene discribed is from the (first) movie *Flodder*: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flodder>

In America gas is so cheap, that you're never stuck with an empty gas tank, You practically get it for free with a pack of gum. You don't even have to leave your car. No, promptly a friendly boy in a dust-coat with oil stains comes over to pump you full of gas. But no boy in a dust-coat comes to me, only a cow meanders over to me. A hamburger on legs that stops about two meters away from me and, chewing the cud, looks at me. If she's not careful I'll get out, grab her head and push her neck into the thorns of the barbed wire so hard, that I'll perforate her neck and with a sigh she'll deflate.

I get out and walk. It can't be long before I hit civilization, this country's too full for no man's land. Behind the next bend there'll be gasoline. Gasoline and food, because my stomach is getting louder and louder proclaiming its rights. And if it's not behind the next bend, it'll be the bend after that. This is a hearty walk, good for the BBL¹⁰. In ten minutes everything will be fine.

Fifteen minutes tops.

...

In the morning I ride the traffic jam to work. I just have to turn on the radio to hear our roads are becoming clogged. That it's just a matter of time before a clot shoots loose causing a stroke. But today traffic problems take a day off. I walk along the emergency lane for an hour and a half and not a single car has passed by. And, worse, not a gas station in sight. Where the fuck is that horny trucker when you need him? I just need to ride a few clicks with him, I'm fine with jacking him off.

If I don't put something in my mouth soon, my stomach'll take action. It'll turn inside out and swallow me up. I'm sweating all over, the blood on my blouse, that was drying just fine, is getting soaked again, starts to smell. And the moment I feel a blister pop on the sole of my foot, the moment I'm prepared to fling myself, head first, into the guard rail, I see, hidden behind a row of trees, two golden arches loom up.

I am saved.

...

The sliding doors open and I enter the red and yellow heaven. As soon as I've regained my strength, I will enter the gas station nextdoor like a princess and convince the doofus behind the bullet proof glass with my nicest smile to give me and a jerrycan of gas a ride to my car. KISS and LOVE and all will be fine. But first we eat. First we eat.

It's calm, there's only one person in front of me. I listen to the music, piano, are they playing classical music? Not until the panpipes do I recognize the cover. Toto. *Hold the line*. I softly hum along. The boy behind the counter looks at me strangely from under his little black curls, I smile at him.

'Good song huh.'

¹⁰ Belly, butt and legs. BBB in Dutch, known as a fitness program targeting those specific areas.

And then I realize I'm standing behind a plastic clown. I giggle, how dumb of me, and the boy smiles back. I like him instantly. This boy will make it in life. With hard work and few complaints you can get there, *the American way!* He could have finished school and wasted years of his life that way, but he thought, no, he thought, I'm going to get to work. I really like him and I think he's entitled to know this, a compliment is free and yet people are so stingy with them! I wink at him. He backs away a bit, I understand, people don't expect friendliness anymore nowadays. I don't blame him.

Can I help you?

'Eh, yeah, I'd like to eat something.'

What would you like?

Jezus, what would I like... I don't care, as long as it's fast. My eyes look at the pictures above the boy's head and I point at something.

A Happy Meal?

'Sounds great.'

He's silent for a moment.

And what would you like with your Happy Meal?

A thorough boy, he doesn't want half an answer. I point at something again.

Chicken nuggets?

I nod.

What would you like to drink with that?

'Don't ask me so many questions. Just put in what you think is good, alright?'

He turns around and starts preparing my *Happy Meal*. Hospitable and service-oriented. You don't find much of that, these days.

Mayo with that?

'Yes. Sure.'

He puts the cup on my tray.

Will that be all? Or would you like a shake with that? Vanilla or strawberry? Or chocolate? And a napkin? Compliment with that? About your hairdo, outfit, your shape or build? Would you like a lick with that? Yes? No? That sounds great, you say? Have a seat, I'll crawl over to you on my knees and I'll give you a lick and a slobber and a kiss on your cunt. If the wind blows, I'll stand next to you, no gut will whip your cheeks, if it rains my body will be your umbrella. Is the sun too bright? I'll catch your

cancer, your body will remain free from disease. Are you lonely, sometimes? I'll bring you into my home. You can sit at the head of my table, eat my food, drink my drink, warm yourself by my fire. And should you be overcome with sleep, nestle yourself in the pillows of my bed.

His accent makes me weak. I stare at the boy and he cocks his head, waiting for me to answer. With his brown eyes he pulls my soul from my chest and I remain flailing in his look. The silence lasts a minute, an hour, thousand and one nights. I just stand there panting, dizzy.

The boy clears his throat.

I said, that'll be three seventyfive.

'You said... what did you say? Oh, you said... yes, of course that's what you said, three seventyfive, yes.'

I grope into my purse for money, only, I don't have a purse with me. I have no purse, because my purse is in the TOILET of *Global Logistics*.

Are you alright?

'Yeah sure, only... I left my purse in the TOILET.'

His face hardens. This boy doesn't like unforeseen circumstances.

By the TOILET?

'No, *in, in* the TOILET, that's what I'm telling you. Because, well, never mind, long story.'

We stand across from each other momentarily. The *Happy Meal* lies on the counter getting cold and my stomach is threatening with a revolution. I really have to eat something now.

'Write it down, I'll come and pay for it another time.'

He lays one hand on the *Happy Meal*.

Sorry, that's not an option here.

'Don't be dull. Take my carkeys as security. Here.'

I put my carkeys in his shirt pocket.

I'm sorry.

He wants to pull the *Happy Meal* away, but I'm faster and grab the box as well. The box tears.

Ma'am, I'm going to have to ask you to leave the restaurant.

I pull the box toward me.

'But I'm hungry!'

He pulls the box toward him.

Ma'am, if I have to I'll throw it out, but you're not getting it.

'You can't throw food out. Do you ever think about the little children in Africa? They'd kill for a *Happy Meal*. They do. They kill for a *Happy Meal*. And you want to throw it out?'

My nose starts bleeding again. Blood spurts on the *Happy Meal*.

'Look what you've done now... Ape! Can you sleep at night? Don't you ever think about your family in Africa, about your poor cousins who kill for a *Happy Meal* and you won't even give food to a hungry woman?'

We both pull at the *Happy Meal* until the cardboard gives and tears in half. The snapple and the fries and the nuggets spray through the air. I dive after them and stuff three nuggets in my mouth and while I run off and chew my nuggets I turn around and say with my mouth full:

'I'm not a racist! Really I'm not! I'm just hungry! I work hard and I'm just hungry and I'm not a racist!'

The the boy grabs the *Happy Meal* gift from the floor, a plastic Munchkin, and throws it at me. The Munchkin hits me smack dab in the left eye, it turns blue, he sure can aim, that ape, and like a blackbird in full flight I smack against the glass sliding door.. I take a nosedive and the door zooms open. Before I can get back on my feet the boy grabs me by the neck.

We're going for a walk.

He pushes me ahead and I stumble along with him. He shoves me into the parking lot, past the parking lot, all the way through the bushes and lets me go. My knees hit the wheel spokes of an old bicycle. Ouch. Plastic bags, cans, a yellowed Donald Duck¹¹. I look up and the boy grins down at me. He unbuckles his belt and unbuttons his fly. I start to laugh.

'You're not going to rape me are you?'

I'd rather stick my dick in a blender than dip it into your scab.

¹¹ Donald Duck the magazine.

He swings his dick out of his pants. I look. Instead of his balls I see a patch of scar tissue. It must have been infected, or something, because something like rough patches of skin overgrows it. All in all it's not a pretty sight.

That is Africa. That's the little children in Africa. What do you think, do you think this happened over a Happy Meal? Well?

In some situations it's better to keep your theories to yourself, this is that kind of situation. I'll keep my theories to myself. He aims his dick at me.

And now you have to say that you've seen Live Aid. Now you have to say you donate money to account 555 and to SOS child villages and to Unicef and that the hunger in the Third World touches you so deeply sometimes it moves you to tears.

I say nothing. I don't donate money. To no one. I don't care. He takes a piss. He pisses on me and I receive it. I receive it as though he could cleanse me, as though he could wash all of today's filth off me. He taps and puts it back in his pants.

Thank for visiting us, see you next time.

He turns around and walks away. I don't think this is the right moment to shout after him that he still has my carkeys in his shirt pocket, so I keep it to myself. They're not much good to me right now anyway, without gas and such. No, I think I'll lie here for a little while, I like it, here behind the bushes. I push off the bike, pluck a condom from my butt, make myself at home and flip open the Donald Duck.

Victor from Nieuwegein and sent in a joke. He is nine years old and running behind with fractions in school. The divider and the denominator keep him awake at night. But now it's saturday morning and the Donald Duck is delivered! A moment to himself, a moment to forget the pressure and the deadlines lose himself in the glossy pages of the cheerful weekly. He leafs straight for the barrel of laughs to see whether they've placed his, and there it reads, in *fullcolour*, his name, his joke! The proof of his existence. All of his problems melt away, he exists! He takes the Donald Duck everywhere, shows it to everyone, it's his proof of identification. Until his father gets a fit of rage one days and flings it from the car. After which it is soaked and yellowed and forgotten. But not anymore, Victor, I've read your joke, I'll remember you, Victor, may you never be forgotten!

A piglet asks its mother: "Mom, do I have to wash my paws with soap before dinner?" "Soap?" the sow yells angrily, "soap? Where did you learn such a dirty word? Go and rinse your mouth with mud this instant!"

I'm not fucking crying here right now am I?

...

And now I'm through. I won't move another inch. It's the weekend, I've done enough. The Empty Spot can just come to get me, make himself useful for a change. There he comes, with his much too shiny car, into the parking lot. Gets out. *Pling pling pling* the headlights still on. Sees me like this, in his brights, at this picnic table with my eyes pinched half-shut.

Jezus, what have you done!

Yes, I did it again. It's my fault. Yes.

Prick.

Wait, I'll put a garbage bag on the seat. You have to make everything hard don't you? Where's your car? Never mind, pick it up tomorrow. We're already running late.

Late, for what?

You've forgotten. I knew you'd forget. Well, that's just great. We have a dinner date. At Edwin and Priscil's.

Oooh... yeaah.... fuck yeah, that's right, with Fuckface and Puspuss.

Don't be like that they're your friends too.

And then he turns the radio on so loud that we don't have to talk anymore until we get home. And at home he wants me to put on a pretty dress, no, a sexy dress. To make Fuckface...

...Edwin...

... jealous. Because he might have been his best friend for years, it's still necessary sometimes to, splat, smack the dick on the table and and lay a ruler alongside. And he wins, with me in a sexy dress, he wins, because Puspuss...

...Priscil!...

... 'doesn't take such good care of herself lately', she 'lets herself go a bit' and that's a shame, for a woman. And that while she 'can look so nice, when she makes an effort.' So he's looking forward to it, The Empty Spot is looking forward to dinner and is bummed out that I'm stranded on some parking lot bloodied and pissed on, while Fuckface and Puspuss have already turned on the oven. So, fine, I put on that sexy dress, it's my fault already we're late, and then there we are in the hallway, the *hallway*, with a bottle of wine from the supermarket...

...taste doesn't matter, above six fifty it always tastes good...

... and then we sit at the table, a designer table, of course, they're long passed the IKEA stage. And she's grinning at me with such a brainmelting smile of tender bliss that I wish she'd get a spontaneous chlamydia infection in the eye, while he, next to her, his hand on her knee, so tenderly that it's hurting his credibility, laughs his smug little whinny and blabs on about mortgage and interest and deferment. That an investment only pays off if one can pick the fruits from it. Right honey? And she pregs on indefatigably, can only speak in weeks and ultrasounds.

And I, I play with a designer fork under the table. I bend a tine and want to fish a vein from my wrist and bite it open. I want to jump on that designer table, kick those designer plates and those designer glasses from the tabletop. I want to pull up my

sexy dress. I want to shit shouting in the ovenish. I want to knee Fuckface, I want to kick Puspuss in the belly. But I grant them a phoney smile and practise the art of numbness. 'It was fun.' 'We should do this again soon.' 'Our palce next time.' 'Kiss kiss, good night.'

And the next morning at eight The Empty Spot stands next to the bed. Washed and ironed and hairs neatly combed. Tugging at my arm.

Come, honey, get up, we have to leave soon.

And I think 'what? What do you mean we have to leave soon? It's saturday, you dick, saturday, it's unnatural to get up before noon. Leave me be, I'm not going anywhere.'

*Come, honey, get up, popmom's got coffee on.*¹²

And fuck, of course, popmom, it's that time again, family visit, we're visiting the monster-in-laws. Drive an hour and a half to the getto of Uithoek, one of those retarded towns where they still cherish values no one understands. Where they speak in tongues, the Uithoeks *dyalect*, that has roots somewhere in Dutch, but has from incest to incest drifted away from meaning, syntax and civilization. Where they laugh as you when you speak in a comprehensible manner. Uithoek, where once a month I practice smiling and secretly beg for a fatal blow to the head in the RESTROOM. Come home exhausted late saturday night and then worship the porcelain bowl for an hour because the authentic Uithoek cuisine is terrorising my guts.

And Sunday is usday. What started once as romantic walks through the woods with a drink afterward in a cosy cafe, is now a quick sprint past some trees to get to the cafe as quickly as possible. Get to the alcohol to drink the weekend away. To pop off to work again on Monday with a hangover.

Oh jezus...

Oh jezus, I SO don't feel like doing this.

It's my weekend damn it. I want to get into my car en gas geven and see where I end up. It is *my* weekend. *My* weekend. I'm going to do what I feel like doing!

...

I need gas. That is tough, without money, but not impossible. I have to count on the goodness in people, and if the goodness of people falls through again, I still have my own resourcefulness. I look around. Gas. Something to put it in. A jerrycan. Outside the gas station, next to the firewood, there's a nice stack of pretty red jerrycans. Perfect.

It's getting busy in the lot. People are coming from work, they're hungry, their cars are thirsty. The truckers pick up a burger or a meatball, the adulterous ones say goodbye, each get into their own car, head home, to their familial bliss. The parking lot is a junction of lives passing through, and as it gets busier my life becomes less

¹² 'Papmam', something of a parody on a regional term for 'the folks'.

prominent. I saunter over the gas station, grab a jerrycan and saunter off. No problem. Nobody saw me.

Finally something is working out today.

How do I get gas into my jerrycan? I can't just stand between the cars and the pumps. It's conspicuous. There are cameras. They'll see. I'll have to steal the gas from the cars in the parking lot.

I'll have to suck the gas from the tanks.

I've seen them do it in a lot of movies, so it can't be that hard.

I'm going to suck the gasoline from the tanks.

I need a jerrycan for that.

Check.

And a piece of rubber hose.

...

Of course!

I grab my jerrycan and crawl through the bushes. There it is, the rusty bike. I push my nails under the outer tire, pull and a second later the inner tire's exposed. I take the tire in my hands and chew on it until I've severed it. My rubber hose. The sun is setting and I move like a gray spot through the evening. In a far off corner of the lot someone parks a rundown car. The driver gets out and trudges over to the gas station in his snakeleather boots.

And that's when I make a move.

I sneak over to the car, fumble open the cap on the tank and push the hose in. I put the spout between my lips and suck. Fuel immediately enters my mouth. I cough, the gasoline overflows my chin and my hands and my clothes and I just manage to get some fuel into my jerrycan before the hose slips out of my hands and disappears into the tank. Shit. I try to spit the flavor from my mouth. I think I may have swallowed some. I burp, an acidic mix of bile and gasoline comes up. I wipe the puke from my mouth with my sleeve and try to pick the hose from the tank, but it's gone, sunk to the deepest depths, disappeared in its own ripples.

A couple of litres. That'll never be enough to get me to America.

...

An American would never have to suck a tank dry, on her knees, with a bloodied face and black eye and a torn fingernail, with puke on her sleeves, smelling like piss and gasoline like she's a Thai boy prostitute trying to nibble a dollar from a German. An

American would stand up and shout; *this is about as much shit as I can take*. An American would claim his inalienable rights, the right to *life, liberty* and the *fucking pursuit of happiness!*

And then I feel a shadow on my shoulder.

...

So, you're thirsty eh?

My heart is climbing my uvula and wants to escape. I swallow it back down and turn around.

*Heavy on the stomach you know. The first swigs are ok, but after a while you burn. Ain't no Roloids gonna help that.*¹³

He leans against his car. Snakeboots and snakegrin. He nips coffee from a plastic cup.

I've got something better, have a seat.

He opens the door and I get in. The car is littered with bottles, cans, cigarette butts, packets of cigarettes. He pulls a bottle without a label from under his seat.

Might not be as fancy as for a lady, but it's good stuff. Brewed it myself.

'Cheers.

I bring the bottle to my lips, drink and cough half of my gulp through his car.

Puts colour on your cheeks, eh?

I nod and take another gulp. good. My stomach flares up and glows. He offers me a cigarette, good. We smoke. We drink. We're good.

I'm not fussed about anything anymore. You can fuss about all sorts of things, and fuss leads to anxiety and anxiety leads to fear. Before you know it all you're doing is being scared. Scared of a spot on your skin, scared of a crack in your home, scared of your shadow because it's behind you. Scared of the world because it goes round, and you don't know where the steering wheel is. Or the breaks. Scared to be carsick, of all that beating around the bush all day. Scared to do it wrong. Scared to do it right, and then to forget yourself, for you have needs too. Scared to be a scaredycat, a slacker, a runner on a tennis court, scared to always bet on black, while the wheel always ends on red and that everyone else *does* know that. Scared of a world so small, that someone who wants to hurt you only has to take a few steps. Scared to choose, because if you don't choose, you can't fail. But here, next to my new friend, while we silently drink to life, here all is good. Here I'm an American. Here I'm not scared of anything. There's nothing here to startle me.

¹³ Roloids or Tums, or, if aimed at British audience, other brand of stomach acid/heartburn relief.

Then The Empty Spot turns into the parking lot.

...

Before he catches me with his headlights, I dive down into my seat. Snakeman chuckles.

Friend of yours?

'Something like that.'

How does he know I'm here? Did he telepathically get a cry for help or something? Does he work as a superhero in his spare time, The Empty Spot as savior in need? Then I see he's not alone. A shadow sits next to him. A woman. She opens the door and the light goes on. Puspuss. It's Puspuss.

What... the... fuck...?

She wants to get out but changes her mind, flings herself against The Empty Spot they start making out so hard the wet sparks fly. And she's pregnant man, gross! Then she gets out, kiss kiss, bleeps open her car, wave wave, gets in and drives off. The Empty Spot stares after her. Horny. In love. Like a hamster with brainmelt. I take a swig and look at Snakeman. Snakeman licks his lips, nods and steps on it. And with force he rams The Empty Spot in the flank. The Empty Spot is startled, curses, grabs an accident report from the glove compartment and gets out. Then he sees me.

Mac? He walks over to me. What are you doing here?

I lock the door and The Empty Spot starts yanking the door. Why is he doing that? He saw me lock it just now? Why doesn't he make a move until it's too late?

Mac? It's not what you think Mac!

'Drive, now.'

Snakeman speeds off. The Empty Spot stays behind stunned. Not until Snakeman gets on to the highway, does he start to run. Too late, prick, too late again. The Empty Spot becomes a Lego doll, a blip, disappears.

So, where do you want to go?

'I don't care. Away. Far away from here.'

Maybe you could be more specific. Away from here is everywhere.

'Yes, let's go there. Let's go everywhere.'

I take another swig.

'No, I know. We'll go to New York! We'll go to the Statue of Liberty and give the bitch a black eye. We'll steal her torch and light Manhattan on fire. We'll steal her crown and let ourselves be proclaimed Queen of America!'

Snakeman nods. He understands. He understands me. He'll take me to New York. He'll take me to America and there I'll become an American. We understand each other.

You smell good, he says, not so... shmancy. Natural, is how you smell. Nice. You don't smell that a lot anymore, nowadays. I like it.

'Thanks.'

It's quiet, on the roads. Usually there are more accidents. But the night is still young. Later on they'll get hammered. Later on they'll crumple their cars and splatter, we have to be patient. But we have all the time in the world. We are patient.

He puts his hand on my knee. His eyes shimmer.

We have all the time in the world.

I could have been on the couch right now. At home. But then my pussy would have gotten out. Would've gone into town by herself, to gulp down the night, swallow it whole. So I have to come along with my pussy. I can't let my pussy do the dirty work by herself. I can't leave it all to my pussy, and that's why I'm with her, with my pussy, my pussy and I.

I put my hand on Snakeman's hand.

Not that she's so special, a hairless beast with surly lips. A tuft of whipped cream without sugar. But, you don't leave your pussy in the lurch. So I join my pussy, into life. I'm not one to cover my face with my arms, to ward off life, I want life to fully hit me in the face.

I put my hand on Snakeman's crotch.

So we move into the night, my pussy and I. We are a trashcan full of snakes, a worn-down distorting mirror, a hospice, where the men of the night lay their heads with the first rays of morning, to breathe their last breath. We are nothing, And that's why we are everything.

I claw in Snakeman's crotch, I rub him up, until he shines.

I look for prey in the harbours where drowning people drag themselves to the wharf. The wharf, that's me. In the truckstops, where the homesick men see their mother in every woman. Their mother, that's me. At the outskirts of the city, where the hookers rent you their skin for a farthing, where the penniless men pray for a miracle. A small miracle. Their small miracle, that's me.

I unbutton Snakeman's pants and grab him tight. He floors the gas. Floors the gas.

Because I'm hungry. And hunger is a cub. If you don't feed it in time, it takes you in its claws and devours you. So from time to time I have to silence my hunger.

I push my head in Snakeman's crotch. I take him in my mouth.

I let me be shoved against walls, until my back's on fire, until I burst into flames. I let me be pushed into doorways, my teeth grate the doorknob. With my head I knock, to the pulse of the thrusting, at unknown people's doors. I let me be dragged along the asphalt on my knees until I chafe. My screams scare off stray cats, I claw and I claw until I taste blood.

It's not fucking until it bleeds.

My shame I left back home. Like a soiled pair of socks kicked under the bed. I gulp Snakeman down, push him into my throat. And then I notice the car's at a standstill. I spit him out.

'Why aren't we moving?'

Don't stop now, not now!

And come up and look out. We're in the harbour. A tanker in front of us is rusting away and the seagulls are laughing at us.

'This is not New York.'

Well, come on, you're almost there!

He grabs me by the hair and pushes me back down. His erection quivers. All I have to do is blow on it and he'll come.

'You promised me New York!'

I'll give you a tenner¹⁴, when you finish.

He pushes harder, yanks at my hair.

'Wait, I can also tell you a joke! It's Victor's, a joke from Victor!'

Jezus, just do your job!

'But it's really good! Two pigs are taking a shower, no, their in the tub...'

He keeps pushing.

'No, they were piglets. There are two piglets in the tub, no...'

¹⁴ Ten euros.

I can't remember it. I don't know Victor's joke anymore. And then Snakeman pushes me down on his cock so hard that I choke and he comes and his semen fills my mouth and I've forgotten Victor's joke and that was the only thing I'd promised Victor and I broke my promise and the Snakeman keeps thrusting into my throat and I can't breathe and my jaws snap together.

Snakeman screams.

He grabs his crotch with his hands and screams. I leap from his lap.

And I feel his glans on my tongue.

His semen and his blood and his glans on my tongue.

I twist the top off jerrycan and spit out the glans. With a small splash the glans lands in the gasoline. I snatch the bottle and take a swig to rinse away his taste. The rest of the booze I pour into the jerrycan. I can use all the fuel I can find. It looks like I'm going to have to find my own way to America.

Snakeman keeps screaming. He keeps pushing his hands into his lap. I take his cigarettes, open the door, get out...

'Thanks for the ride.'

...

My mouth tastes like an illegal hustler's zone. Gasoline and ash, blood and bile, semen and self-brewed booze. I still taste him. Before I get my car, I have to get rid of that taste. I need to rinse my mouth with methylated spirit, I need to disinfect myself. Only if you are healthy, do they let you enter America.

The harbour bar I enter is full of seamen without port or ship. Stranded at the bar, even before the first squall could rip the sail to shreds. I am the first mermaid they see with their own eyes and I'm jubilated in like the first land-ahoy! After years of scurvy and aimless bobbing about in a cardboard tub.

They make room at the bar, a baarstool is my throne and an ashtray my crown. They start a new keg for me and before I know it there's a bottomless glass of disinfectant in front of me. With each swig I burn myself clean inside.

And then I have to dance.

The barkeep puts on a track and turns the volume full-blast, I am lifted up and put on a table. I dance. The men cheer me on and I dance. They stomp on the floor, they beat the table and I dance. The feet in my red shoes twist around each other so fast that I ascend from the table, rise up. I float above the men, above their hands that grab at me, that grip me, grope into me, in everything in me that opens, in everything that I have an entrance to.

Then I fart, shit my guts out and crash.

...

The music is off. The men put their elbows back into the holes they've worn into the. And I'm lying on the ground, in shit that reeks of gasoline.

'It was fun, boys, but I should get going. I have quite the journey ahead of me and I can't get ahead of time by stopping the clock.'

I have to get to my car. I have to get my keys and get into my car. I have to go to America. I take my jerrycan and walk, head high, outside. The diarrhea runs down my knees, onto my shoes. The cold air hits me in the face and I hit back, start to stagger and slant forward.

But I don't fall.

I slant forward.

But I refuse to fall.

I take a step to stop the slanting, but I slant faster than I step and so have to take another to keep ahead of the falling. And another one, because I keep falling, so I keep stepping, faster and faster. Before it even dawns on me, I'm running. Head forward, legs b'hind. And I have to keep running, or else I'll fall.

I run. I start seeing red before my eyes, but I run. My legs know where I have to go. I run past the houses where the sleepless roam, where they fight. They screech out their discord and later, when they throw themselves into the arms of another while in a convulsion of wheezing laughter, they hug no one but themselves. Wish to see nothing but their wideopen mug in the mirror. I run.

I run 'til the stars before my eyes explode. I run until my lungs are filled with acid. I run until my calves cramp like fists and the skin's scorched from my soles. I run until my arteries burst and the blood in my head spurts out of my ears. I run until I can't fall anymore.

And when I'm not running anymore. When my breath has caught up with me and shoots into my windpipe¹⁵. When gravity slowly starts taking possession of my bones and slows me down, brings to a halt¹⁶. When I'm at a halt.

When I'm at a halt.

I keep my eyes closed a little longer.

I keep my eyes closed, because I know I can only open them once. I know I can see only once where I am and can't be anywhere else after that. I keep my eyes shut.

¹⁵ 'Trachea'.

¹⁶ Could also be 'brings to a standstill', etc.

When I'm in front of my house, I ring the doorbell. And when the door opens, let me fall into the arms of The Empty Spot. I let him lift me up. I let him carry me upstairs and I let him undress me and I let him wash me. And then I let him rub me dry, with a rough towel, until my skin is flushed and I'm warm... And then I'll let him take me to our bed, I'll let him tuck me in, I'll let him crawl in beside me. And then I'll give myself to him, unconditionally, eternally.

Ik doe mijn ogen open.

And I see the golden arches of the red-yellow hell.

...

The doors of the McDonald's zoom open and even before I've taken one step the manager is with me. His face looks dead-set but through the creases in his forehead his nerves seep out.

You have to leave this establishment immediately.

I take a step forward and the manager shrinks back. He's afraid to touch me, afraid that I'll contaminate him with my decay. I take another step.

Ma'am, the police is on their way now.

I keep walking toward him until I've trapped him against the counter. The boy with the curls hides in the kitchen, behind the hamburgers.

'I want my keys back. I'll leave this place, but I'm going to need my keys. He has stolen my keys. I want them back.'

The boy grabs a spatula from the hamburger grill and aims it straight at me.

That bitch is crazy, I don't know what she's talking about, she's nuts.

I leap onto the counter.

'I have to go to America. Give me back my keys!'

The boy comes at me swinging his spatula. The manager has run to the entrance and hides behind two police officers approaching me from the other side.

Ma'am, if we all stay calm then everything will be fine.

'Don't come near me!'

I screech at the boy with the spatula.

'Don't come near me!'

I screech it at the police officers.

'Stay where you are! Stay! Stay back!'

If you would come down first please, then we can talk about this calmly.

I lift my jerrycan over my head and keep it there. The boy with the spatula leaps back behind the hamburgers again.

Ma'am, lower that jerrycan.

I freeze. The police officers exchange a look.

Ma'am, lower that jerrycan now.

I keep my jerrycan over my head. I fumble for the cap.

Ma'am, I order you to lower that jerrycan!

The officer reaches for his club, the other officer for his walkie-talkie. I screw the lid off my jerrycan and I let the gasoline and self-brewed booze gush over me. I pour the fuel over me, shake my jerrycan to the last drop. And with the last drop the glans pops on my head as well, bounces on the counter, falls off and rolls across the easy to clean floor to the officers. They look at the piece of flesh, at each other, at me.

'This is *not*, I repeat *not*, a humanitarian mission.'

I grab Snakeman's cigarettes and light one between my lips.

'Americans say; this is not a test. Americans say; we don't come in peace. I repeat, we don't – come – in peace.'

I am an American. This is not a test. I don't come in peace. I grab Snakeman's matches and light the cigarette.

...

The man in the corner who's said nothing all this time, the plastic man, dismounts his pedestal and comes over to me. There's something familiar about him. About his smile. Maybe I want his smile to be familiar so badly, that the familiarity happens. We stand in a whirlwind of fire. I smile at him.

Hij zegt, knoop je bloesje maar wat losser, trek je rokje wat omlaag. Laat me je buikje even zien. Ik knoop mijn bloesje losser, trek mijn rokje wat omlaag. Ik laat hem mijn buikje zien. Hij glimlacht, en er zit treur in zijn glimlach. Door die treur vertrouw ik hem nog meer.

He says, I've put on make-up. I've painted my face white and my lips red. I've put on a wig, a costume and my shoes are quite a few sizes too big for me.

He says, the people don't believe in suffering anymore, suffering repels them, they run away from it. So instead of suffering, I've chosen jest. He says, there isn't much difference between suffering and jest.

And he touches my navel.

He says, if I take off my gloves, it's easier to feel your navel. And he takes off his gloves. And it's easier to feel my navel. He fumbles with my blouse. He says, does this come off? And I take off my blouse. I'm wearing an old BRA, but that's no matter, even in an old BRA my breasts look nice.

He says, they've misunderstood me.

And he touches my breasts.

He says, I gave them my body, and they put it on a bun with a piece of pickle.

He grabs my breasts.

He says, I have given them my blood, and they throw in ice cubes and stick in a straw.

He kneads my breasts.

He says, it doesn't matter what they do. Because they do it, it doesn't matter.

He says, can this come off? And I unhook my BRA, let it slide from my arms.

He says, let me take off this jacket, I'm warm, I'm going to take off this jacket.

He takes off his jacket and rolls up his striped sleeves.

He says, I've removed the cross. The cross is a stop sign, until here, and no further. I have removed the cross and replaced it with golden arches. He says, I have given them a horizon, a horizon toward which they can walk. And if they don't want to walk, the at least I've given them the view. The view of the horizon.

He says, your skirt, unzip it.

I unzip it, I kick it off.

He says, your panties, your panties are in the way.¹⁷

I peel my panties from my legs.

He says, yes, I see it. I see it and I understand it.

¹⁷ Can be substituted with 'knickers' or 'underpants'.

He says, instead of hanging from a cross, I hang out and play the clown. And if you are weary, and the people are so weary, if you are weary, then I will come to you.

And he unclasps his belt, his pants fall to the floor.

He says, you're not in a good position. Turn around and bend over a little. Now you're not in a good position, I can't reach it.

I turn around and bend over a little.

He says, yes, now I can reach it.

He says, my word shall be flesh, and my flesh shall be hard.

He says, I can't take away the suffering.

He says, I can't console you. I can only fill you up briefly. You have to let yourself be filled up from time to time. A human who fills himself, for a brief moment doesn't think of suffering. If a human doesn't fill himself, he becomes empty. And an empty human starts growling.

He says, with my flesh I shall fill your emptiness. So you won't growl briefly.

And he fills me.

He says, if the growling persists, an empty human faints. That is why you have to fill yourself sometimes, so you don't faint. But you shouldn't confuse it with consolation.

And I let him fill me.

He says, I am finished.

He says, I'd like it if you knew now what to do, but I can't tell you. That doesn't matter, I say. He says, do you know? Do you know what you have to do? No, I say, I don't know. But it doesn't matter.

What I do, it doesn't matter.

Because I do it, it doesn't matter.

.....end