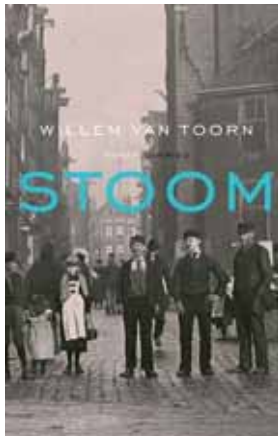


A scintillating novel about a world in motion

Willem van Toorn

Stoom



STEAM IS A CAPTIVATING NOVEL about a turning point in Dutch history: the general strike of 1903. Railroad workers fought for their right to form a union and negotiate their position. Forced to choose between freedom and solidarity, the main character, Maarten Corbelijn, opts for freedom, at least initially.

Corbelijn is the son of a railwayman who is run over and killed by his own shunting locomotive. He flees his home town along the waterways when he discovers that his mother is having an affair with the director of the brickworks factory. He signs on as a boat-hand and, via various twists and turns, becomes a gauger, the man who checks ship's cargoes. Corbelijn is not self-employed, but does work without supervision. Women throw themselves at him: the skipper's wife, Marie, takes him to the strangest locations to make love.

An encounter with an old school friend in Deventer is the impulse to give up this free but lonely life. He falls in love with Klaartje, restores the bond with his mother, and makes plans to study law. Maarten suddenly knows where he belongs: with his mother, his friends, Klaartje, and the socialists.

The novel is a tribute to Dutch poet and socialist Herman Gorter. When the general strike of 1903 takes place, Maarten is allowed to ride on the locomotive. In his excitement, Maarten suddenly understands Gorter 'with his feeling that he would like to do something for everyone, and yet have the whole country for himself and his loved ones alone'. Gorter's two facets, poetry and socialism, are united. Maarten opts for the workers' side. Heralded by steam engines, new times seem to be on their way, with changing social relationships and codes of behaviour.

With *Stoom*, Van Toorn tells a story that fascinates from the first page to the last. He is sober in his articulation and skilful in his stylistic devices – by contrasting Maarten's thoughts with what he says in the confrontation with his mother, for example – and while constructing a credible historical décor. Time is tangible without being obtrusive. The novel covers the general strike but it is also a *bildungsroman* about a boy who grows up without a father and has to find his own way in the world.

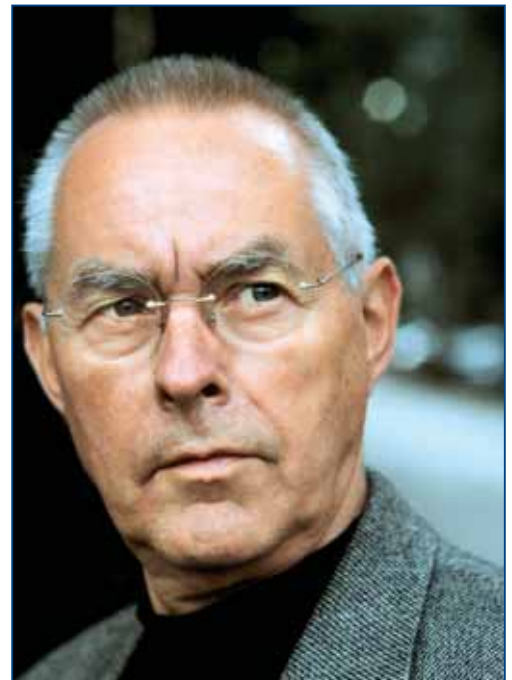


photo Klaas Koppe

Willem van Toorn was born in Amsterdam in 1935. He spent his holidays with family in the Betuwe, a rustic area in the centre of the Netherlands. As a result, he became familiar with the landscape of large rivers which often appears in his work. After a brief career as a chemical analyst and teacher, he devoted himself to literature. He made his debut in 1959, and this was followed by a gradual flow of poetry books, short stories, and novels. Van Toorn also works as a translator of English and German literature and has written a number of children's books. The novel *Een leeg landschap* ('An Empty Landscape', 1988), in which he expresses his anxiety about the corrosion of the river landscape, was nominated for AKO literature prize. Later works such as *Het verhaal van een middag* ('The Story of an Afternoon', 1994) and *De rivier* ('The River', 1999) were also highly praised.

A pleasant, old-fashioned narrative full of atmosphere.

HET PAROOL



PUBLISHING DETAILS

Stoom (2005)
256 pp

RIGHTS

Querido
Singel 262
NL - 1016 AC Amsterdam
The Netherlands
TEL. +31 20 551 12 62
FAX +31 20 639 19 68
WEBSITE www.querido.nl
E-MAIL rights@querido.nl

TITLE IN TRANSLATION

Als würde ich vor Glück ersticken (De rivier).
Zürich; Hamburg: Arche, 2002.

Foundation for
the Production and
Translation of
Dutch Literature
Singel 464
NL - 1017 AW Amsterdam
TEL. 31 20 620 62 61
FAX +31 20 620 71 79
E-MAIL office@nlpvf.nl
WEBSITE www.nlpvf.nl

Sample Translation

Steam

(Stoom)

by Willem van Toorn

(Amsterdam: Querido, 2005)

Translated by Colleen Higgins

pp. 92-106

11

It was December and still cold, even though there had been no more snow. When Maarten got out of the train in Rotterdam that afternoon, a pale light shone onto the envelope with De Bok's map and a cutting wind drove the rain in under the high roof of the Delftse Poort station. He still felt the excitement he had felt when he boarded the train in Amsterdam: he was starting a new life, had become a traveller. He would go to all the harbours, along rivers and canals and even to the coast. He had written back to Henk that they should send cards regularly to let each other know where they were. Once in a while they were sure to be in the same place at the same time. After all, trains ran to all the harbour towns – ships and trains: no matter where you went, they were always connected. His world was no longer limited to that dull little office with Loeff and his stove, which he always stoked far too hot, or to the few hundred metres of wharf at the Entrepotdok where he supervised the loading and unloading. He would travel, everywhere, for days at a time. He had bought a sturdy leather bag from the harness-maker in the Haarlemmer Houttuinen to carry a change of underclothes and his shaving things, the folding ruler he got from De Bok, the draught surveyor, his notebook and the book he had been planning to read on the train. He had never got around to this and instead had gazed eagerly out at the countryside. The book was called *The Adopted Son* and had been written by Jacob van Lennep. He'd found another book of his in the library before, *The Rose of Dekama*, which he had tried to read but hadn't liked. But he loved *Elizabeth Musch*, which he'd bought later on and was still on his bookshelf. The two volumes – he had the first volume with him – came from a market stall and he'd bought them because of their beautiful blue cloth binding with gold letters and because they were small and would fit easily into his new bag. And perhaps also because of the title: even though he was no one's adopted son, you could say he

had had an abundance of adopted fathers, from Henk's father and all of the railway men who came to their home to Mr Lindeman and Loeff. And even Van Duuren, though this had been in a very unusual way, to say the least.

Old De Bok also talked to him as if he were his son. "You're still young, my boy, but you'll learn that you're taking on a great responsibility. If there are differences of opinion, or even court cases, they will use your notes. They can't be meticulous enough. Don't forget, once you're fully qualified you'll be sworn in by the Chamber of Commerce." He said this in the small office at the Entrepotdok, where Mr Meyer had sent him to see what he thought of Maarten as his apprentice. With his broad hand covered in brown age spots, he drew a map for Maarten in pencil on the back of a used envelope to show him which way to walk in Rotterdam, from the train station to the Leuvehaven, where he would be waiting for Maarten. From there they would go to the boarding house together so he could learn his way around right from the start. Because there was a great deal of work, they would have to be in Rotterdam for two days. The bad weather had delayed everything. Loeff watched over their shoulders.

"I don't like it one bit that you're leaving," he said. "I'll have to teach another new boy everything all over again."

"Maybe you'll get someone who chews and doesn't smoke," said Maarten. "You won't have to hack so much. And I'll still call in, Loeff. This will still be my office."

"My office," Loeff said to De Bok. "Listen to him. Our little country cousin has big ideas. One day he'll be the boss and won't give us the time of day."

"There's going to be trouble," De Bok said to Loeff. "Have you heard anything yet?"

"I certainly have," said Loeff. "Those day men want to be paid more because the barge with beet sugar they're unloading has been moved."

"It's quite a way from the warehouse now," De Bok said. "I saw it myself. And unloading sugar is heavy work."

"They also want an extra man," said Loeff.

“How do you know that?” Maarten asked. “Has he been here? Schiltman?”

“He wasn’t, but his talkative lady was,” said Loeff, smirking. “Marie. She always asks for you. ‘Isn’t Corbelijn here?’ ‘Where’s Corbelijn?’”

“Well, I always have to arrange everything with that Gerrit of hers, don’t I?” said Maarten. “Of course she asks for me if she’s got a message from him.” His heart began to pound. How often had Marie come here asking for him, if even Loeff had noticed? “Gerrit will be happy about that,” he said without emotion. “That old man of his will be able to sell plenty of drinks getting cheaper men to do the job.”

“That might not work this time,” said De Bok. “People are angry. I’ve heard the WS is going to get involved. And all they’re asking for is an extra five cents a hundred.”

“You sound like a red,” said Loeff. “I’m surprised at you, De Bok.”

“I’m not a red,” De Bok said. “But I am human.” He looked up angrily from the map he was drawing. “I get around, Loeff, in all the harbours. And I see how wretchedly poor those people are, what kind of shacks they live in. They can’t even scrape a decent meal together. Those bosses who look the other way when they happen to ride past those quarters, they’re in for a nasty surprise.”

“Well, now,” Loeff said. He glanced towards the door, as if expecting to see Mr Meyer or, even worse, one of the directors, even though that happened only on rare occasions. He began coughing violently.

“What do you mean, ‘well now’,” said De Bok. It suddenly struck Maarten that he looked like Hent: he was nearly as bent and weathered, and had the same piercing look when he was angry. For the first time he saw he was actually good-looking, with pale blue eyes and thick grey hair. “I won’t live to see it happen, son – I’m already seventy and my time will soon be over: I’ll either die or be put out to pasture. But you’ll see it come to pass, Corbelijn, they’re going to get what’s coming to them. You can smirk if you like, but wait till you’ve seen the district around the Rotterdam docks.”

“So what should I say if Marie asks for you again then, Corbelijn?” said Loeff.

“Just tell her I’m far away,” he snapped.

One thing’s certain: Rotterdam’s noisier than Amsterdam. Everywhere is the rattle and creak of carts and wagons being pulled over cobblestones, as though they were building a whole new city. Although it is only the middle of the afternoon, it seems like evening, and the coaches and horse tram that pass already have their lamps lit – even so, from the station to the Binnenrotte he passes no fewer than four sites where they are still sinking piles, with clanging blows and the furious hiss of escaping steam. At two of these, a large fire burns in a barrel and men are warming themselves, a crush of dark shapes in front of the red and yellow flames. On the Binnenrotte itself, there is pounding and hissing above his head as well: a heavy locomotive pulls a long line of freight cars over the raised tracks – De Bok told him about the railway as he was drawing him a map of the route. De Bok still remembers when this was water, which they filled in around twenty years ago to build the huge viaduct. Sparks fly like fireworks from the wheels of the locomotive when it brakes and wisps of steam come down with the rain. All at once, Maarten thinks of Mr Lindeman – how, during the lesson on the steam engine he had said, “This is the future.” That future has become reality, here, where he is walking in the rain with his satchel, one hand on his sodden hat and his boots already covered with mud, with the trains thundering through the air above his head.

There is also a group of men around a fire barrel at the docks in the Leuvehaven. He recognizes De Bok at a distance from his stoop. Just like the men he is talking with, he is wearing a soaked oilskin coat that reflects the light of the flames.

“So, my boy, you’re right on time,” he says. “We were expecting you.” And to the men, “This is Corbelijn”.’ The men are the captains of a row of ships waiting to be checked, the barges moored alongside and behind each other. Maarten shakes their hands. They call De Bok “sir,” which seems fitting to Maarten, because after all, the old man represents the company.

“There’s an oilskin for you in the shed,” De Bok says. “Leave your bag there too, why don’t you. But don’t forget your ruler and notebook. The rain will stop soon – look.” He points out over the harbour to the west, where sure enough, large patches of light have appeared between the clouds above the vast expanse of water that is the river Maas.

In the hours that follow, Maarten learns the fundamentals of draught surveying. That each ship has draught marks, usually three port and three starboard, was nothing new to him – he had, after all, sailed on the *Gelria*. And although he had sometimes seen the surveyors at work, he had never asked exactly what they were up to. Udo had spoken with them – you could say Maarten had other things on his mind. As a result, he didn’t know you could determine the null point of an empty ship by measuring the distance between the draught marks and smooth water. And, he has to admit, the water is anything but smooth as he leans over the railing of the first boat in the stiff and cumbersome oilskin coat, almost dropping his ruler into the icy depths. De Bok, though, patiently shows him there is always a moment when the water is smooth, no matter how restless the waves might be, often after three or four waves. And that the weight of the cargo is directly related to the distance from draught mark to water surface, something that can be found on the survey certificate every ship is required to carry. The ship is surveyed empty and again when it is loaded, and everywhere the ship unloads part of its cargo, a new survey is done, so it is always clear just how much it still contains. Watched by the bargees, they now survey four empty ships, three barges and a clipper that have to be loaded tonight with rice from a warehouse in the harbour. While Maarten is carefully recording his measurements by the oil lamp in the deckhouse of the last ship, the *Anna Maria*, De Bok says it’s time to call it a day. Although the rain has stopped, it’s still wet and raw, and anyway, it’s getting too dark.

The bargee is a small, stocky man of around forty, with spiky blond hair, a beard and a gold ring in his ear. Together with De Bok, he watches carefully

while Maarten writes, and when he is finished says, “I keep getting the feeling I know you. Didn’t you work on the Gelria, for Udo?”

“Yes, I did,” Maarten says. “But that was almost a year and a half ago. So you know Udo?”

“Knew,” he says. “He’s dead – didn’t you hear?”

“No,” says Maarten. “I never saw him again. I got a job at the co-op warehouse and the Gelria has never been there. Dead? Was he sick?”

He sees that the bargee’s wife is watching the men from the small doorway in the deckhouse. She recognizes me too, he thinks. Had she known Udo and his wife? Of course she had. The woman disappeared down the steps into the forecabin, where a lamp was also lit. It’s a beautiful sight to see a woman descend from out of the dark into the soft golden light.

“He drowned,” says the bargee. “He was pissed again and fell overboard. Somewhere on the lakes in Friesland, in the middle of the night. His wife didn’t even know where. She was down below, stoking the fire. When she came up with coffee, she couldn’t find him.”

“What’s she doing now?” Maarten asks. Although the expression on his face was one of polite interest, he felt a strange, dull ache in his belly, rising slowly into his throat. She pushed him overboard, he thinks. Just as she had planned. How often had I heard her say that? “One day he’ll go too far and then I’ll pitch him overboard.” She was strong, like all bargee’s wives.

“No idea. I know she kept the ship, but I never heard what she did after that. They kept to themselves. No one knew them very well. It was a bit of a strange ship, the Gelria. An old service barge, with steam. But he knew what he was doing.”

“When he was sober,” Maarten says.

“How long did you work for him?”

“Almost three years,” says Maarten. “But it seemed like ten.”

There weren't many inland waterways in the Netherlands he hadn't sailed on during those three years on the *Gelria*, and then there was Belgium and Germany, to Liège and Namur, Cologne and Bonn and Basel.

"Can I offer you a drop?" the bargee asks. "After all, there'll be no more work today." He reaches his hand towards the copper knob on the cupboard door behind him, but De Bok shakes his head.

"No, thank you," he says. "We have to move on."

"Maybe next time then," the bargee says.

They walk over the gangway onto the quay. There is the pervasive smell of chocolate: A little way along, where the fire in the barrel was once again burning furiously, sacks of cocoa beans were being transferred from a small seagoing vessel into a barge. The ship looked dilapidated, with no paint and large patches of rust around the hawseholes. Small brown men lean over the railing. Bent beneath sacks, the men crossing the quay throw long, crazy shadows. At the beginning of the quay, a man uses a long pole to light the gaslights, soft yellow circles shining in the dark sky. Maarten fetches his hat and bag from the shed and returns the oilskins to their pegs. When he rejoins De Bok, the old man says, "Don't ever do that."

"Don't ever do what, De Bok?" asks Maarten.

"Don't ever take anything from them," De Bok says. "Not a drink, not cigars, nothing at all. You have to know them, but never become familiar with them. No one should ever be able to say that you favour someone because he gives you gifts."

"Does that happen much?"

"Of course it does. I hope you're not that naive, Corbelijn. You may be young, but you worked on a ship for a few years. And you've been at the Entrepotdok for a year. You do keep your eyes open, I hope. Something falls out of the wheelbarrow here, a few sacks are left behind in a corner of the warehouse there. I don't think I need to tell *you* that. And it starts with a drink, a cigar. People are bad. That's just the way it is."

They leave the Leuvehaven and walk back into the city, with De Bok in the lead. Maarten has to walk fast to keep up with him: he might be stooped, but there was plenty of life left in that old body.

“We’ll spend the night in the Nieuwsteeg,” De Bok says. “I’ve been going there for years. At Mrs Andriessen’s. She’s a widow, she rents out a couple of rooms. Small, but always clean and bright. You can leave your bag there and we’ll go and have something to eat. We can eat at a place around the corner. She used to cook, too, but she says she’s too old for that now. Not that she’s that old. She also does washing for all sorts of people to make ends meet. Husband worked himself to death in the docks, no pension, you know the story.”

“I know all about it,” says Maarten. “So you think people are bad, De Bok.”

“If they get the chance, they’re bad. I’ve never seen otherwise. Everyone is for sale. People act like jackals towards each other. Just look at how the rich exploit the people who have to do the work – it’s beyond belief. Women in factories who have to work twelve hours a day for next to nothing, while the director’s wife takes tea with her lady friends. Children who should be at school but instead go to the factory in the cold and dark at five in the morning. We’ve got the law against child labour now, but that doesn’t mean children don’t work anymore. I’ve seen it all, son. But don’t think it would be any better if the socialists were running things. If they ever get into power, they’ll become the same bastards the bosses were. That’s how people are. They automatically become oppressors when they have power. It must be a law of nature.”

“I’ll tell my friend Henk,” says Maarten. “He works for the railway and he’s completely obsessed with Troelstra and Gorter. He says it’s the system that makes people bad.”

“That could be,” says De Bok. “Sure, Gorter, I heard him speak once. Last year, in Enschede. I’d gone along with someone I know, a red just like your friend. He just had to hear Gorter. Troelstra was there, too. Gorter talked the whole time about the Eighty Years’ War – I didn’t have the slightest idea what that had to do with socialism. About the economic order of revolution. He did

seem to me to be a good man. But a gentleman. He knows nothing about working people.”

“He writes beautiful poems,” Maarten says.

“Poems?” De Bok laughs through his nose. “Poems? I don’t like poems. Poems are for preachers and schoolmasters, man. They won’t put food on the table. I don’t understand what the socialists see in all those poets. That Mrs Roland Holst, she’s writing poems now too.”

“I love reading them,” Maarten says, but the way De Bok shakes his head in sympathy shuts him up. Anyway he has to watch where he’s walking, because the path is made up half of cobblestones and half of holes. The streets they walk through are shabby and narrow. It’s very dark now, and there are lamps only at the occasional crossing. In the streets themselves, the only patches of light are the few windows where a lamp is lit. He hears a dog barking incessantly, men quarrelling loudly and a child crying down a side alleyway. Once in a while they cross a high bridge over a smelly ditch, from where he can see the dark backs of the crooked old houses. Laundry hangs in the strangest places, on washing lines strung over the streets and water, with trousers and shirts puffed out with wind and doing their bizarre dance, sometimes right above his head. It was no poorer than many of the streets and alleyways he was familiar with in Amsterdam, or the ones he had seen in the small towns along the river, but it smelled differently: of the sea, close at hand, of rotting fish and soot.

“Where do you yourself live, Corbelijn?” De Bok asks.

“Nothing special. A ground-floor apartment on Vinkenstraat. I rent it from a fat widow. It includes meals and laundry. The walls are thin, but it’s clean. How about you, De Bok?”

“I was lucky,” De Bok says. “My wife inherited a building with a shop and an apartment from her aunt, on Sloterdijk. Years ago. That’s where we live. My wife runs the shop, threads and ribbon. We get by that way, and we will even when I quit working.”

He stopped in front of a low door in the Nieuwsteeg. De Bok knocked and pushed the door open. They were standing in a narrow, dark hallway with a bare wooden floor. At one end was the brownish-gold light of a lamp hanging above a table covered with blue canvas. That would be the kitchen. It smelled like warm soapy water. The widow put her head around the corner and came out into the hall.

“So, this must be your helper, De Bok,” she says. She is taller than De Bok and not as old as Maarten had imagined. Although her hair has some grey and there are deep creases alongside her mouth, she has lively grey-blue eyes – he can see that even in this half-light. She dries her hands on her apron and shakes Maarten’s hand.

“I don’t have a helper,” De Bok said. “I don’t like helpers. Corbelijn has come along to learn the profession, but I don’t think he’s cut out to be a helper. He’s his own man.”

“Well, he looks more like a ladies’ man to me,” the widow says. “But not here in the house. This is your room, Corbelijn. Wait just a moment – I’ll light the lamp.” Maarten notices that when she walks past De Bok she brushes his arm with her hand. When he goes in, she has already lit an oil lamp on the bedside table. Next to it are matches. It is a tiny room with just enough space for a narrow wooden bed, the bedside table, a chair and a washstand with a jug and basin. The curtains of the window facing the street are closed. Above the washstand hangs a tarnished mirror, and above the bed is a framed engraving of a city with many church towers, on a river. It reminds Maarten of Germany – Cologne or perhaps Trier, because of the high hills in the background.

“Please put out the lamp when you leave, Corbelijn,” says the woman, standing behind him. “We don’t want a fire.” She goes into the hallway and he hears her talking and laughing softly with De Bok. They really have known each for quite some time, he thinks. He takes the flat case with his shaving things out of the bag and sets it on the washstand, puts Van Lennep on the bed and goes out into the hallway. He hears the widow singing in the kitchen and feels a kind of

jolt in his stomach, as if someone has jabbed him gently: It was the song his mother sometimes sang if she was in a good mood and thought no one was listening:

When it rains in days of winter
And the pathways run so deep.
Then comes that crafty fisher
Fishing out among the reeds.

“Are you coming, Corbelijn?” says De Bok. “I’m hungry.”

The eating-house is just around the corner. It is a long, high room with sand on the wooden floor and long tables where men are eating. The lamps hang in a bluish-grey fug of smoke and steam and they are met at the door by the heavy smell of beer, tobacco and boiled cabbage. Women in long, grey aprons are bringing round plates of hotchpotch, which seems to be mostly potato, Maarten thinks, but in any case with sausage and a slab of bacon. Most of the men have mugs of beer next to their plates. Without being asked, the women also place these next to De Bok and Maarten’s plates when they find two seats beside each other on a wooden bench in a corner. Across from Maarten, a man with a pockmarked face and a crumpled cap is sleeping; next to him sits a fat old man with a sun-baked bald head, who every once in a while fishes scraps of cabbage from his long grey beard.

Eating-house. Maarten sees the building next to the old lock in Friesland. He stands with the bargee’s wife on the Gelria’s deck and watches Udo grow smaller and smaller in the distance beneath the immense sky filled with black cumulus clouds, a dot on the tow path next to the narrow canal, which is straight as an arrow all the way to the horizon. Somewhere beyond is a drinking-house.

“What are you thinking about, Corbelijn?” says De Bok. “Don’t forget to eat – it’s paid for.”

“I was thinking of those socialists of yours,” says Maarten. All at once he realized he was hungry and began to eat with relish. The man with the beard looked up when he heard the word socialist.

“They’re not my socialists,” says De Bok. “I’ve never been able to be part of anything and I don’t want to be a member of any organization. But I did hear that Mrs Roland Holst once. It was here in Rotterdam actually, in March. She seemed like a good person. She could talk. Her I could understand, about the revolution. But still – a lady. What does she know about working people? I’m too old for that, son. It’s fine by me if the bosses get a good dressing-down, but leave that to the young folks.”

“Now what does that have to do with being old?” says the man with the beard, slamming down his empty beer mug. He has a deep voice and his black eyes challenge De Bok. “I’m just as old as you are, but I’m a member of the union.” His name is Tabak and he works as a printer at a large lithographer’s nearby. He says he had been eating here since his wife died two years ago because he doesn’t want to trouble his children.

“We have a strong union,” he says. “And the bosses know it too. We’re part of the WS – they give us a lot of support.

“You want to have a general strike,” De Bok says. “And the WS is anti-military as well. And you want to take production out of the hands of the capitalists. I heard that Van Emmenes say it myself. I don’t understand how he manages to pull all that together. If you want a revolution you’ll have to use force, because, don’t forget, the rich folks will immediately send in the army and police against you. And if you finally have control of the means of production, you’ve either become a boss yourself or you’re the state. And that Van Emmenes doesn’t want that either. He’s always going on about the state and its constraints and discipline.”

“For someone who wants to keep completely clear of it, you sure know a lot, De Bok,” says Maarten.

“Well, I do want to know what it’s all about,” De Bok says. “But I won’t let anyone lead me like a lamb to the slaughter.”

“Are you a member of the union?” Tabak asks Maarten.

“The Association for Trade and Industry,” Maarten says.

Tabak howls with laughter, so much so that the man sleeping next to him jerks awake with a start – he gives Maarten and De Bok a look of disgust, as if they had leprosy, growls and pulls his cap back down over his eyes. “That’s no union,” says Tabak. “That’s a kind of public service association of the conservatives. A sewing circle. You must want your boss to put a feather in your cap. By the way, your Mrs Roland Holst – did you know she travels third class like everyone else? And that she doesn’t want a travel allowance from the Party?”

Once again, Maarten feels the strange emptiness arise he always used to feel during the spirited discussions at Henk’s house when they were boys. He doesn’t know where this comes from. If anyone has reason to hate the bosses and directors he does, with a mother who has no pension because, according to the powers that be, her dead husband’s accident was his own fault. But he has no interest in the kind of language those people always used, as if “capitalists” were not human but a kind of vermin and as if workers were some kind of saints who would do it all so differently if they were in power. No, he understands well what De Bok said – that people were bad if you gave them the chance and that there was no reason whatsoever to believe that because of some miracle of creation, socialists would act better than others if they ever came to power. At the same time, he feels something like jealousy. You can see that a man like Tabak is part of something. He always uses “we” when talking about the union. Henk talks like that too, just like his father and his brother and the men from the Association for Train and Tram Personnel. And Maarten does not feel he is part of anything, not in the slightest – nor would he know where to start.