

Wonder Boy



In the communes where he grows up
he loses all his playgirls, to find his true love

Ewout Storm van Leeuwen

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Translation of *Communekind in de sixties* by Joshua Stiller (a pseudonym of Ewout Storm van Leeuwen).

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Individuals may recognize themselves in the characters described here, or recognize others in them. In any case, the names are fictitious. Specific location descriptions have been adapted (the castle exists, as did the commune; the squatters village still is).

Please remind: this book is translated Dutch.

The illustration on the cover is a fragment from the painting “The Marriage of Cupid and Psyche” by Schiavelli.

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Preface

Reincarnation

This concerns a wisdom that lives in people worldwide; only in the three religions descended from Abraham (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) is it not so explicit.

Characteristic is the notion that humans have a metaphysical soul that periodically descends into a material form in order to learn to deal with matter, oneself, others and nature in the biosphere of planet Earth. Especially dealing with the gift of Free Will, also called the Gift of Creation. For that gift can be used for both creation and destruction.

Although incarnations usually take place at long intervals, most people have experienced dozens, hundreds, if not thousands of incarnations.

Karma

Is the mechanism by which Free Will is exercised.

It begins with a memory (which may be distorted!), followed by a desire for more, something else or especially not that. When that desire is strong enough to serve as a motor force, an action follows. This is readily apparent in creative artists.

Thereby the one who acts establishes a cause, which by physical law will have an effect. A causal relationship between action and reaction is inherent in karmic action. Those consequences may be – intended or unintended – harmful.

Reflection

When a soul returns to the Hereinbetween after the death of the carnal body, the realization of the damage caused during the last (and mostly previous, too) incarnation(s) penetrates.

Note that any damage done to another/nature has its supplement in the perpetrator. Distortion can be the result.

In a subsequent incarnation, the soul will try to rectify this.

This is difficult, because in rebirth an almost complete oblivion usually occurs. The reborn person has nothing but his conscience, dreams, upbringing and intuition to stop making repeated mistakes and to focus his karmic ability on recovery. In this he may be supported by karmic acquaintances, also called soul group, who incarnate in close proximity, often as family.

The author

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Episode One: The Castle

My mother told me that I was just three years old when we moved into the castle. At first I was called Little Buddha by the residents of the commune because I was such a beautiful little boy. That soon became Budi.

In my youth, the castle, park and woods were my complete Lebensraum. I never went outside the boundaries of the estate. The outside world – for me it consisted of the adjacent lands and roads – was hostile territory. I picked that up from the adults' conversations, even when I could barely understand them. I was so heavily intimidated by this that the surrounding world simply remained outside my experience. There was plenty to discover on the estate, though. The conversations, books and experiences at the castle were my window to a world far away, where everything was art, beauty and thrillingly exciting. In the salon, three walls were covered with bookcases, packed with thick volumes about foreign lands, architecture, famous painters, exhibition catalogs, photo books about nature, picture albums and books that were too difficult to read. The library belonged to the lord of the castle, who was obsessed with beauty. I knew more about St. Peter's, the Empire State Building and Le Corbusier than I did about a Dutch row house. I had never been in a café, but I knew the experience through the paintings of Van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec and other Impressionists. Nothing of ugliness, war, abuse and poverty penetrated my microcosm.

My image of the outside world became rather limited and one-sided because of these extremes. Inside the castle, however, enough was happening to feed my eager mind. Not until I was about ten years old did I ever go out on my own. No further than the floodplains, by the way. On the horizon was a village behind the dike. That was the most dangerous enemy, I had been taught. I was terrified that the boys from that village would torture me if they caught me. The fear was so deep that I never really got over it.

Fortunately, the river banks were free territory: no one ever came there, so it became my refuge when I was in knots.... hours I sat there. When I was five, my bed was moved from my mother's room to an attic room in a side wing of the castle. Two girls were already sleeping there, but it was big enough for three children.

The first night I lay softly moaning for my mother. The oldest girl climbed out of the wide bed she shared with her sister and pulled me out from under the blanket. She trotted me along – from surprise I stopped whimpering – and put me between her and her sister.

‘So, now no more crying,’ she ordered, ‘or we won’t be able to sleep.’

‘My name is Dotte,’ the child next to me whispered. ‘I’m four, what about you?’

‘Five and a half,’ I said shakily, with a vague sense of seniority. ‘Almost six.’

‘I’m seven,’ the big girl said sternly. ‘Your name is Budi, right? My name is Melanie. I can already read.’

Demonstratively, she grabbed a booklet.

It was actually too dark to see anything. Adrift, she fumbled under the bed and pulled out a flashlight. One of those flat ones, with a round glass in front.

‘There’s no electricity here,’ she explained. ‘When the battery runs out you have to put in a new one. They’re in the basement, in a box.’

A little later: ‘There is no light in the basement, either. You can go in there with a candle. Not here in the attic, because it’s all wood, it can burn down.’

I shuddered. Burn down. The girl had given me more directions in a few sentences than my mother’s nervous stream of words, which I had listened to meekly but understood nothing of.

The girl turned around with a jerk and hovered with her face above mine. Her long hair hung around my head so that I saw her face as if in a tunnel, lit from the side by the flashlight.

‘You must call me Mee laa nie. Say?’

‘Yes Melanie,’ I whispered. I instantly fell in love. Because of that softly tickling hair, with which she enclosed us in a magical world. She saw it, smiled and gave me a kiss. She lowered herself and laid her head next to mine. Dotte curled up against me on the other side and put her arm around me. She too gave me a kiss. I immediately fell in love with Dotte.

Thus, on that memorable evening, we became lovers, as it were.

More people came to live in the castle. Rooms in the other wing, which had always been empty, were furnished with old things, work tables, lamps on wires, worn-out carpets and vegetable boxes filled with supplies, paint, clothes and books. There were some small children and babies among them. It began to smell of turpentine, smoldering candles, diapers and musty bedding everywhere. Children dribbled and booed through the hallways. When one had fallen down a flight of stairs, makeshift railings appeared in front of the stairwells.

The girls and I retreated to our part of the castle. We did not like the new residents and their noisy kids. Especially since there were no children of our age. The three of us were fine.

Their father and mother did something with theater and were both with someone else. They were often on tour and only interfered with the girls when they were at the castle. We didn't know other than that we were a big family, where the adults and children lived separately. Mom and Hanny, the gardener, were actually our mothers. Hanny was always there during the day when we needed her, working in the garden or in the kitchen. Mom came into the kitchen in the late afternoon, where she cooked our food. In those days, my mother looked happy and a little disheveled in the morning. Sometimes she didn't even see me, other times when I ran into her she would pick me up, just about squeeze me, spin me around and put me down again. She sang almost all the time.

Because Hanny and Mom were always there at set times, we didn't call on them very often. In fact, we rarely needed them. Melanie was very caring, telling us when to brush our teeth, fishing our clean laundry out of the baskets and occasionally taking us to the bathroom, where she washed Dotte and me.

I was eager to learn to read. Dotte didn't want to be left behind and asked for it too. We didn't have to urge Melanie for long, because she loved nothing more than to mother us and teach us all the things she knew.

For a time Melanie was our absolute mistress. We had to obey her in everything. In return, she taught us. For a time we were no longer drawing in the knights' hall, where we were taught by her. She did everything mixed

up: letters, familiar words, even different languages. Their mother was with an American who barely spoke Dutch, so she already knew some English.

The first word I could read and endlessly rewrote was MAMA. The second MELANIE. Sheets full. Paper and drawing materials were abundant. We copied things from books and drew the letters we saw under the pictures. That they were sometimes French, German or English or even bilingual books did not bother us. Only later did we learn to distinguish between different languages.

The house was always crowded and noisy from noon on. There were many lodgers, the driveway was sometimes full of cars. Music sounded late into the night, to which we slept comfortably. At least when music sounded there was no arguing or violent meeting, which we feared. If the rest of the castle was quiet and loud voices sounded downstairs, we almost wet our pants.

It became summer and we played outside all day. Writing lessons continued outside using flower pot scraps on the tiled patio. As summer drew to a close and all the residents were busy harvesting from the gardens and orchard, we were suddenly noticed.

‘Shouldn’t those kids be in school?’ we heard someone ask. ‘It’s already early September.’

We looked at each other startled. School, that didn’t sound good.

‘To that village school for sure. You can’t do that to these children, can you? They’ll be bullied out of there,’ said the lord of the manor, who simply helped to dig potatoes.

‘What is school?’ asked Dotte anxiously.

‘That’s an ugly building where children are locked in and have to memorize rows,’ Melanie replied. ‘That’s in a book I read.’

‘So, can you read yet?’ asked a hoarse male voice. ‘Where did you learn that?’ We looked up at the man, alarmed.

‘It’s Dries,’ Melanie reassured us. ‘He writes books.’ To the man: ‘You’re Dries, aren’t you? I learned to read from my mother. Before we moved here.’

‘Do you also want to learn to read?’

I looked at Dotte and she looked at me. We already could.

‘And arithmetic? And how the plants grow and the animals? And how it used to be?’

We were sold. We looked at Dries wistfully. He smiled.

‘I see, starting tomorrow I will teach you every morning. Until one o’clock, then I’ll eat and work on my book.’

From that day on, we were taught in the old grape greenhouse against the garden wall. The grape vines were as thick as my arm. The grapes brought in quite a bit. We knew that because we helped with the picking and the full crates were paid for in cash by the greengrocer. We stood around it, eyeing with suspicion whether he was paying enough.

In the spring and summer, it got too hot in the wall greenhouse when the sun shone. We then moved to the orchard. In strong winds and rain, classes were moved to the knights’ hall. Only there was little light there: the wiring was down. All three of us thought this was a very important fact, which we told new children and guests with great seriousness. Only later did I understand what it meant. However, we did not mind drawing and reading by the light of storm lanterns. When Dries started telling stories, even those could be extinguished.

Our little school started with three students, that is, us. By the time I turned twelve, the four eldest went to other schools and eight children remained, so many had joined us over the years.

The girls and I hung out together every day, from morning to night. Except very early. When I woke up in the summer, I would first wander the gardens, the park and the forest by myself for a while. The park was a greater wilderness than the forest, for that was still regularly thinned for timber. I learned on those early explorations about the wild animals that lived on the premises. I knew how to find all the rabbit burrows. I had even discovered a fox hole and a badger’s burrow. I followed the growth of young birds in their nests. I had tame pigeons, jackdaws and even a tame barn owl. At least: they accepted the food I brought them in the attics.

When winter approached and it was still dark this early, I would sneak through the castle with a flashlight, examine the studios, see what had been painted in the meantime and then soon found myself in the kitchen

in the basement.

As soon as I started frying eggs, the girls came downstairs in their nightgowns. Whether I wanted to fry an egg for them too. They smelled it: the chimney of the fireplace above the stove ran through our room and leaked a little. Eggs were plentiful: the commune kept dozens of chickens.

Until mid-morning, the castle remained all ours.

Only Bart, the blacksmith and iron artist, started work early in the gatehouse, which we could see from a window in the knights' hall by the blue flickering light of his welding.

When it rained, we would sneak into our attic room with our plates and teapot and crawl into the girls' big bed. With a belly full of bread and egg and hot tea, we then slept for another while. Then came the ritual of washing. In our bathroom, full of copper pipes, a white bathtub on lion feet and a floor of loosened tiles, we played in the tub with the hot water from the geyser. At first, Melanie washed Dotte and me; later we took turns washing each other. When the bathroom was full of steam and it was nice and warm we played games. Using a finger to draw letters on your back, which you had to guess. We shivered with delight under the caresses of a shaving brush. Soon we discovered that it was not only nice on your back. With concentrated attention, we lathered each other with the shaving brush between our legs. Dotte and Melanie couldn't get enough of it. Once, on a birthday, I was given a red, plastic water pistol. After Melanie slapped me for spraying her wet, we only used it in the bathroom. Washing with hands and shaving brush was extended to the hard squirt from the gun.

In the summer we didn't shower when the weather was nice, then we went swimming in the moat. There was a deep part without water lilies and algae, with a jetty and a rowboat, from which we jumped. We had no towels and let ourselves dry in the sun. Melanie and Dotte put their dresses on over their wet bodies when they got cold. Only in winter did they wear tights and camisoles under their dresses. Just like me, by way of long underpants. When it froze in our room, all three of us slept close together. We kept our tights on under our pajamas and piled my blankets on top of theirs. Actually, we were almost always cold in winter. Only the kitchen and parlor were heated. In the bathroom there was an electric radiant

heater, but it didn't get properly warm until we had showered for a long time. In the fall and winter, we often took a blanket to school wherever it was kept. All three of us huddled close together and wrapped the blanket around ourselves. If we wanted to read quietly in the afternoon, we would slide my bed under the skylight and wrap ourselves in my blanket. We peed in a bucket when we really couldn't hold it in any longer and crawled back together as quickly as possible.

This sometimes led to arguments. Especially Melanie could get incredibly angry if she was disturbed while reading. One day, when Dotte had to pee very often, she was not allowed back under Melanie's blanket. She started whining and pulling at it because she was cold. Melanie pulled back furiously. Dotte fell, with her head on the edge of the bed and began to scream. When I tried to soothe them, Melanie also became angry with me. Dotte started hitting Melanie with a pillow, Melanie tried to kick me, Dotte pulled Melanie's hair, Melanie slapped Dotte, causing her to start screaming even louder.

'Now shut up!' I screamed at Melanie.

'Shut yourself!' she screamed back, with twinkling eyes. We faced each other like two ruffians, with our hands curved into claws, ready to grab the other by the long hair.

'Yes, fight!' urged Dotte.

Surprised, I stood up. 'You were arguing, weren't you?'

'Yes, but you are fighting for me now.'

'That's mean, two against one,' Melanie sputtered.

'I'm hungry,' said Dotte. 'Shall we grab some food?'

We had gotten hot from the argument and ran one after another up the hallway, down the stairs to the kitchen. However, there was nothing we could eat just like that except apples. We actually wanted bread, but it had run out. Disappointed, we went back to our attic room, where we fell asleep close together on my bed.

One rainy evening in late spring, we couldn't sleep from the heat.

'I found a bunch of keys this afternoon,' Melanie said. 'Shall we go and see what they're for?' She dug under the bed and showed them to us: rusty keys hung from a large iron ring. Excited, we slipped out of bed, put on our slippers and walked after Melanie with her flashlight.

She pointed: 'Look, that door is locked. I've tried that one many times. Let's see if these keys fit it.'

She walked determinedly toward a door in a sloppy brick wall and began trying keys. One key fit! With some effort, she was able to turn it. The lock worked then, but the door we had to push through the rusted hinges with combined effort. We got it open just far enough that we could get through. On the other side, to our disappointment, the attic was just running along. The floor was indescribably filthy. Carefully we walked on our slippers through the thick layer of dust and blown-in dirt. We looked right up against the roof tiles. At our place, the roof was made of boards.

'There, a staircase down!' whispered Dotte. We crept toward it. We tried not to make the floor creak, which was reasonably successful thanks to the thick layer of dirt. Like kittens in a strange warehouse, we crept down the wooden stairs. It led to a porch with two doors and a corridor. The doors were locked and our keys wouldn't fit. There was nothing we could do but try the corridor.

Again, everything was covered with a resilient layer of dust, so we made no noise.

'No one has lived here for a long time,' Melanie whispered. 'Just look, no footsteps anywhere in the dust.' Our footsteps were the first in centuries, it seemed.

'Below us are people,' I whispered. 'Very quietly keep walking.'

The corridor opened under an archway into a large hallway. Hesitantly we remained standing. A remnant of daylight came through a small window.

Melanie clipped out the flashlight.

'Where are we somewhere?' asked Dotte coyly.

‘Let’s see.’ Melanie walked to the window and looked out.

She beckoned us excitedly and pointed outside, with her other hand she put a finger to her lips. We crowded next to her to the small window. Just in front of us, just around the inside corner, was a large window in the wall of the castle. The window was illuminated. In front of the window was a bed. On the bed was a man, his head we could not see, but his huge cock was. This was pounding in a wild cadence in the slit of a woman, who was sitting on him.

‘They’re fucking!’ hissed Dotte and grabbed me.

‘Look, they’re getting all wild,’ Melanie whispered breathlessly. She nearly pinched my arm off. ‘What are they doing?’

We could hear through the two closed windows as the couple bellowed at each other, moving so violently that the man’s cock flicked out of the woman.

‘He pees,’ Dotte smirked.

‘No way, that’s sperm,’ Melanie corrected.

‘What’s that?’ asked Dotte and I at the same time.

‘Shh, later. See what they’ll do next.’

It wasn’t much. The woman lay on the man, he stroked her rear and that was all.

‘What is sperm now?’ persisted Dotte.

‘When a man and a woman fuck, sperm comes out of the man’s cock. That’s called cum.’

‘Cum?’ grumbled Dotte. ‘What a weird word.’

‘How do you know all that?’ I wanted to know.

‘That about sperm my mother told me. That it’s called ejaculation, I heard once in the parlor.’ She giggled. ‘I sat behind a chair and heard everything.’

‘Budi, do you also get sperm when you cum?’

I looked at Dotte confused. ‘I don’t know,’ I muttered.

‘Of course he gets sperm.’

‘Yes?’ Dotte looked at me curiously. I almost sank through the floor: I really didn’t know what it was about.

‘Oh, of course not!’ Dotte danced up and down. ‘He has to put his cock in a slitty first and then go back and forth hard. Otherwise it won’t do, will it?’

She grabbed me by a sleeve of my pajamas. 'Come, we'll go back to bed and then you stick your cock in my slitty and you cum. Are you coming, Mel?'

Melanie looked thoughtful. 'Did you notice how big that man's was? Well as thick as ... Like a winter carrot. I've never seen Budi's pecker so thick and stiff.'

'Oh yeah, I forgot about that.' Dotte looked at me disappointed. I could cry.

'Why would that be, Mel?'

'Maybe because we're kids. Look, they're going to do something again!'

Before our eager eyes, the woman crept forward and the man crept back.

'What is he doing? He's licking her slit! Just look, his tongue goes in and out,' Dotte whispered. 'O! He's sticking his finger in her hole. I like that so much, too.' She pushed against me. 'Do you do that to me, too?'

It didn't seem like anything to me, licking a slit that also had pee coming out of it.

Melanie hadn't said anything for a while. She was staring open-mouthed at the couple across when the woman moved wildly up and down, shouting all sorts of things we couldn't understand.

'She speaks French!' said I in surprise. 'Then I know who she is: Ton's girlfriend.'

'Ton?' asked Dotte.

'Yes, Ton, painting all those naked women with their slits open!' said Melanie. 'You're right, Budi.'

'So that's how it goes,' Dotte sighed.

'I've seen it differently, too, you know,' Melanie said prissy. 'Once in the back of the garden. They were on top of each other.'

I was uncomfortable. Dotte and Melanie talked about that stuff like it was the most ordinary thing in the world.

'Come, let's go back!' whispered Dotte. 'Then we'll imitate it, won't we Budi?'

I was glad when Melanie said in a decided tone: 'I'm hungry. Shall we sneak to the kitchen? I think we'll get close if we continue down the stairs.'

'Yes, but what if the door is locked?' Dotte clearly felt more for her own plan.

‘I have more keys.’ Melanie rattled. ‘Come, will you shine the lamp for us, Budi?’

I understood that Melanie was actually a little afraid of the dark, but didn’t want to let it show. I shone on the steps behind me as I walked down the worn stone stairs ahead of the girls. Dotte was right: there was a locked door at the end of the stairs. A corridor went the other way; that part of the castle was not used. The kitchen was somewhere behind that door. Melanie was also right: one of the keys fit. With knocking hard, we pulled open the heavy door. It went very stiffly, fortunately the hinges didn’t squeak.

We came out into a hallway we knew: there was an outside door on one side and a door to the kitchen on the other.

There was no one in the kitchen.

I went on guard while Dotte and Melanie grabbed all sorts of things together. Excited, we took the same way back. Melanie locked the doors behind us again. Back in our room, we were in a jubilant mood. We had a whole piece of the castle all to ourselves, we could peek at sex and we had a shortcut to steal food from the kitchen unseen. Dotte had even grabbed a opened bottle of white wine, nice and sweet. We took turns taking a sip from it. The wine had the effect on me of making me sleepy, it excited the girls. They wanted to do all sorts of things with me. Smiling faintly, I let them take off my pajamas. They sat down on me, but I fell asleep.

We were eight, nine and ten.

We were so focused on sex that we saw it everywhere. The rabbits did it in front of their burrow, the rooster jumped his chickens, the cows climbed each other further down a meadow; they all did it. And people. We had discovered several peeking spots where we could see through windows. We picked up the bird binoculars from the parlor on our explorations. We knew the spots outside where the inhabitants of the castle did it with each other. Late at night, if we heard a party was coming to an end, we’d climb out of bed and sneak through the castle. When it was hot outside, we hid in the spots we knew.

Eventually it began to bore us. It was invariably the same, especially with the couples who did it outside. Even with gays and lesbians, the fun got a

little off. In fact, the performances by Ton and his girlfriend Valerie were the most inventive. They kept trying different ways. Dotte's enthusiasm to reenact the performances gave us, besides the accompanying hotness, a lot of fun and laughter. It was delicious and it was fun.

We secretly made extracts of books about sex or biology with drawings we made of the slittys of Melanie and Dotte en my thingy. The girls laid model with legs up high or bum up high, holding open their slittys en the other drew them meticulously with color pencils. I stood model like the statue of Hermes in the hall. Afterwards we played we were fucking. It wasn't serious yet. My thingy swelled a little, but didn't get stiff enough for the real thing. We became familiar with our bodies and our own and each other's secret desires. It made us feel like we belonged together. Melanie and Dotte missed their parents so little as a result, that if they interfered with them, they let it pass them by. We sometimes didn't even notice when they were on tour.

The most important adult in our lives was and remained Hanny, the gardener. From her we learned to do chores such as setting and washing the table, recognizing and harvesting types of fruits and vegetables. From Mom we learned to wash and cut vegetables. We kept our own bathroom clean. My job throughout the castle was to change the butane gas bottles. Hanny rewarded us with fruit and nuts, but the most important reward was that we felt we belonged. We were not just kids, we were residents of the castle.

Hanny often hugged us. Sometimes the girls missed that with their parents. Fortunately, I could often go to my mother. I was actually even more in love with Mom than with Dotte and Melanie.

3

Bart was an interesting man, but he could have fits of wild temper. For some reason I wasn't afraid of it. There were enough signals to see it coming.

His workshop was a magical place. He had watched me tinker once and

offered to learn from him how to make things out of wood and metal. At eight years old I could weld, at twelve I was strong enough to learn to forge. Once I welded together a bicycle with three wheels back to back and a steering wheel on each side. If you turned one handlebar, the other went in the opposite direction. It was difficult to ride it. After practicing for a while, I could cycle endlessly in a very tight circle. Still, three wheels were less convenient than two: sometimes the middle wheel wouldn't touch the ground and I'd overshoot with the pedals.

Bart also taught me to solder zinc and lead. He had noticed that I loved to roam the castle roofs. I had no trace of fear of heights and was nimble as a cat. Soon he gave me chores to do on the roof. Repairing zinc roofs, soldering up leaky gutters, replacing broken tiles, installing roof lead. The castle dwellers were grateful, because after a few years of my work, nothing leaked anymore. He also taught me to grout chimneys with special cement, because some of those tall things were about to collapse.

The roof was my domain. I often sat there and overheard conversations by the chimneys. Only when people were arguing did they shout loud enough to be understood. It gave a lot of insight into the relationships between the castle dwellers. Many arguments were about someone having had sex with another person. Even that sex was occasionally witnessed.

One day I was confronted with the phenomenon of family. True, Melanie's books were full of fathers, mothers, grandfathers, grandmothers, uncles, aunts and especially nieces and nephews, but it had never occurred to me to apply that to myself. Until that day when I witnessed a car stop on the front lawn. Two older people got out, followed by a young woman and two girls. There were shouts from the steps.

Two small children came running under loud shouts. Slightly more subdued, their parents followed. I was picking walnuts under the trees of the driveway and watched in amazement. The two approaching children shouted 'Grandpa!' and 'Grandma!' and allowed themselves to be kissed and lifted by the two old people. Then it was the woman's turn. The two girls stood a little aloof watching.

When they had all gone inside I looked for Bart and asked.

‘Oh, those are Mickie’s parents. Rosa and Sprite’s grandparents. With Mickie’s sister and nieces.’

I stood silently for a while watching what he was doing.

‘Oh,’ I managed to bring out after a while. ‘Hey, would I have a grandpa and a grandma, too? I mean, mom has a mom and dad too, right?’

‘Yes boy, everyone has parents. But some don’t live anymore or live very far away or...’

‘Or what?’

A deep wrinkle drew between Bart’s eyes, a sign that he had run into a big problem. Now two things could happen; fortunately the second did. He put down his hacksaw, walked to an old refrigerator and grabbed a bottle of beer. Outside, he sat down on a rickety chair, rolled a cigarette and drank the bottle in one gulp.

‘Look,’ he said hoarsely, ‘every child has a father and a mother. Sometimes they die and you’re left alone as a child. Or they don’t want a child and give it away. Or they are so bad to the child that the police take it away and take it to a children’s home.’

‘Were you in a children’s home?’

He nodded sullenly. I understood that he didn’t want to talk about it any further.

‘I see a grandfather and a grandmother for the first time today. Why aren’t more coming?’

‘If the people who live here want to see their families, they go after them,’ Bart said gruffly. ‘We’d rather not have family visiting here.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Look, Budi, we live here as free as a bird. All the residents do something with art. That’s a very special little world, which ordinary people look at a little strangely. We are a commune, which means we don’t live like bourgeois families, but with all of us.’

I nodded. I had also noticed that difference through Melanie’s novels.

‘There’s a rather free-for-all about relationships here,’ Bart added. He sounded increasingly gruff, almost angry.

‘You mean everyone has sex with each other?’

‘Yes, that’s what I mean,’ he growled.