

## Vertaling van bladzijden 65-72

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Titel: Terug tot Ina Damman. De geschiedenis van een jeugdliefde.

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Ina Damman stood in front of the school entrance, indecisive but not confused. She didn't know anybody here, and she couldn't tell who the other new girls were just by looking. But since Ina Damman was not scared, or shy, and actually felt so indifferent about things that she didn't even act uninterested, she just waited for the bell to ring or for somebody to announce that the building was open. Then it would still be early enough to follow the stream of all those boys that were currently running past her, which also left her indifferent. She was carrying a large book bag between the bend of her arm and her hip. Her light-blue eyes were gazing ahead of her, her dark hair over her pale complexion made for a nice contrast; one could tell that she was graceful. It was barely perceptible that her jawbones stuck out from her round, smooth face, giving her a certain air of coolness and lack of concern that did not predominate, only because her appearance and clothes said: this is a thirteen-year-old girl, giggly and happy-go-lucky... she may well have been carefree. In Ina Damman's head there was only room for one thought at a time, which was considered, keenly, smoothly, and ruthlessly, until it disappeared all by itself, without having effected any change in her. Even the thought of Piet Soer, with his nasty beard, which disgusted her so, did not impact her. Piet Soer commuted with her to and from Driehuizen; he acted like he knew what was what, but Ina Damman would rather bite off her own pinky than ask something of him - or of any other boy, for that matter. The only boys she ever asked anything of from time to time were her little brothers, Frans and Cor. She would ask: "You two, do this for me." It wasn't a command or a wish, but they quickly obliged. Not that they were afraid of her or loved her so much - it just seemed that Ina Damman never thought refusal was an option.

So, in that typical stance of carrying a burden, bag on her hip, right shoulder a bit higher than the left, immobile in her thin, blue-striped dress, that is how Anton saw her. Over the summer he hadn't spent a second thinking about new seventh-grade girls. Also, the only "new girl" he knew was Marie van den Boogaard, and with Marie van den Boogaard things hadn't worked out well. What he did spend time on was his fear of the words, Jelle Mol, the upcoming review of what they had learned last year, and so much other petty stuff. That all vanished as soon as he walked past Ina Damman and set his eyes on her.

He thought that she smiled at him, and he walked back to see what color eyes this girl had. His heart skipped a beat: was something about to happen?... Just like last year, Max Mees extended his hand to greet him, but this time it was even less relevant. If she had in fact smiled at him, that wouldn't mean anything; anybody would have smiled. She was standing up straight, but she was shorter than he. He still did not know the color of her eyes when Max Mees dragged him over to Jan Bredevoort, tan and more athletic than ever. And within seconds he was dominating their conversation, not paying attention to Jelle Mol's whereabouts; the slick boys had been reduced to insignificant dwarves. It felt as though there were no grades above his. There was only a new seventh grade, with a new girl in a blue dress that he could have described in great detail, even though he had forgotten her face. Never before had the school seemed such a gorgeous building, so grand and meaningful.

It was a rough start in Mr. Romijn's class that first morning. Twice, three times, the teacher had to use a sharp tone to bring Anton Wachter, an A student in trigonometry, back from his daydreams. The lesson went right past Anton. What do you mean, parallel lines? What do you mean, congruent triangles? New girls don't just show up at school one day, only to disappear again the next – that was all he could think about.

“Yes, I am Soer!” the boy from Driehuizen said, with a crackling voice. “This place sucks, but I won’t be here for long. If I manage to get Fs in all my classes, my old man will take me out of school, but it won’t be easy to do, especially in art and gym.”

They were on the waterfront. Anton assessed the boy, who now held Anton’s fate in his hands. His high back stood out immediately, and then the thin, blond hair on his cheeks and chin, like the fluff on a kitten’s tummy, but his acne made it more disgusting than that. His strong, protruding jaw made him look somewhat like a court jester. With saliva in the corners of his mouth, he threw in some colorful language.

“Godd... These f...ing dorks! That math geek Romijn, with his trembling hands... he deserves a kick in the balls! ‘Not a single passing grade,’ my old man said, I mean: only then will he take me out of school. And no decent girls here either, at least none that can French kiss well, like we have, back in town, come on!”

He snapped his fingers in the air, as if he were touting especially tasty goods, and kept grinning at Anton. “That guy must be at least seventeen,” Jan Bredevoort had told him. Gerrit Bolhuis had gone out looking for girls with him once, probably for a French-kissing contest. All that did not alter the facts that he was from Driehuizen, a commuter, and the only one who could help him.

Anton listened sympathetically to the revolting words, acting like he knew everything about French kissing, whatever that was. At least the guy was friendly. “Hey, Soer, do you know Ina Damman?”

“Sure I do!” Soer replied, sticking his chin out even more. “Really well. She’s a nice kid, but a *kid*, you know? Those girls in...” Anton quickly interrupted him; his voice sounded shrill. “Would you introduce me to her? I am really attracted to her!”

He was glad the two phrases he had been walking around with for a few days were out. He had not wanted to use the term “in love”; that still belonged too much to Marie van den Boogaard, or rather, to English romance novels. For this girl he had to come up with other words, cautious phrases at first... Don’t let Soer start in on his girls again! But Soer noticed. He laughed bashfully and said: “Oh, sure. I know her really well, you know!” “Yeah, but I mean really *introduce* us, okay? You have to say... we should first...”

The trouble had started. How often in his life had Soer even introduced boys to girls, he with his girls who were so good at French kissing? Everything had to be spelled out for him. Ina Damman left for the station around 4:15. There, he and Soer would be waiting for her. As soon as Ina Damman showed up, Soer was to step forward. Anton would stay in the background first, then slowly approach them, and then Soer would say...

“O, no, Soer. Of course you have to ask her in school first if she is okay with it. Just say: ‘there is a boy in *eighth* grade who wants to meet you, only to *meet* you’; please don’t say anything else, Soer, and if that doesn’t annoy her. You have to...”

Soer chuckled – he had never seen anything like this. But he was impressed with Anton’s earnestness. Yeah, okay, he understood, he would introduce them to each other.

“No, wait, listen, Soer. It is not a matter of simply introducing us... You have to say... Say exactly what I am telling you right now: ‘Ina, let me introduce you to Anton Wachter,’ - and then after a few seconds, you say: ‘Ina Damman.’ - but nothing more, nothing less. Soer, don’t forget! And then you have to...”

The following day at 4, he dragged Soer to the station at breakneck speed. Anton had kept a constant eye on him in school, as though he would manage to fail all his classes in that time frame. Piet Soer had not dropped out, and he had fulfilled his mission: Ina Damman had been informed, and she was okay with everything. It was hard to fathom that she had consented. Although too anxious to speak, he started in, again and again: “ don’t blow it, not first this and then that, and especially not that other thing...” Soer, with his high back, was walking next to him like a partner in crime, pale and quiet. Was he scared? Oh my god, what if he, last minute... The smell of steam and the puff of a locomotive announced the destination site. “What is the exact time the train leaves, Soer?” “4:40,” Soer said, with difficulty, raising his shoulders as though he were cold. The clock showed 4:17. For five minutes, they walked back and forth in silence.

“There she is,” said Soer, the first to turn around. He looked at Anton, half pleading with him. It was one thing to whisper something to Ina Damman in school; it was quite another to really introduce her to a boy who was only focused on Soer’s possible mistakes. “Come on, Soer! ... Do it right. Don’t start by...”

Her book bag on her right hip, her arm and shoulder high above it, her head a bit askew, Ina Damman was slowly coming toward them. Her head bobbed as she passed the dark-brown tarred fence of the rail yard. Behind her, a man shunting the steam tram was honking. Anton’s heart was pounding as if it were going to break. A high back moved forward to five steps ahead of him, between him and the girl. Piet Soer had thus entered the arena. Any communication had now become impossible; Soer, on his own now, could mess up horribly... But Soer did not mess up. With his arms wide, he tried to draw Anton and Ina Damman, who were several feet apart, toward him, as though he wanted to board two ships at the same time. After having looked at

each, blushing from ear to ear, with flickering eyes and quivering voice, he recited the formula that had been ingrained in his mind. He added an explanatory, conciliatory gesture toward the sky, as if to say that he should not be held accountable for this. He looked around one more time, passed his hand through his grubby beard with the zits, and sailed away like a seventeenth-century galleon with a tall stern.

They were standing there facing each other, with Soer having left. Now it was Anton's turn to say something. He had thought up three things he could say. But for the first thirty seconds he could not get beyond the blue eyes in her pale face, which was now so amazingly close to him. *This* is what he had dared himself to do: this audacious transformation of a dream into a reality. He had asked her to come, and here she was. It was as inexplicable as it was joyful. But now, he came to the realization, for the first time, that the reality in which she appeared before him, although more tangible than any dream, would disappear again, too – not slowly and painlessly as dreams do, but abruptly, like a loss...

“Do you take the train from Driehuizen every day?” The locomotive was puffing; the steam stank. Just five minutes until the train left. Clutching her bag tight, she allowed his eyes to study her unreservedly. Every question extracted a quick nod or a few words. The sky was light gray. A pearl-like light from every direction shone on her, making her face so untouchably cool and smooth, that his eyes kept sliding away to a few pebbles in the grass or to the brown fence she had just walked past. Moving his eyes back up at her felt like lifting a heavy burden, everything in their surroundings pushing back against it. Luckily, he still had two questions left, no fewer than two, which irresistibly led him back to her face.

“Where do you drink coffee in the afternoon?”

He forgot to listen to the answer. He had never felt this elated, so light-headed, so tense, yet there was something inside him that longed for the end, so that he would be alone, undisturbed, able to reflect on everything. He knew that he was going to forget her details, but wouldn't the feeling become clearer and warmer once he was alone again? Wasn't there something distantly mocking in Ina Damman's face, though not terrible or intentional? "She is not a *sweet* girl," a voice inside him whispered, and the warm gratefulness that he felt seemed to be geared more toward Piet Soer, who had helped him like a brother, than toward Ina Damman herself, but he didn't want to think about anything else but her. He kept returning to her. Whatever it was, it was stronger than anything.

"Can I walk you to the station again tomorrow?"

Time was up. Ina Damman nodded "yes," said goodbye, looked him straight in the face, and disappeared through the glass entrance door that was almost too heavy for her. Although he understood that he should go help her, he didn't move, alone with his thoughts, calm and content. The last he saw of her was her ponytail swinging from side to side. It was an elegant ponytail, fitting her head like an animal's tail. They had not shaken hands.

"Hey, look there is ..."

"Jack and Jill, do you hear what they're saying?" Anton interrupted immediately, giving Jelle Mol a smack on the shoulder and turning around, only to walk off with Max Mees. When he looked around, he saw Jelle Mol leaning heavily against the wall of the school, gazing in his direction, disappointed his prey had gotten away from him. Anton felt like laughing out loud. Max Mees looked at him approvingly: "What a hotshot!"



“Oh, he’s not that bad,” said Anton, mild-mannered, with a protective grin toward a couple of the slick boys who were scurrying past at that moment. “He is just so damn stupid.”

He felt like he had to say something apologetic, even if it was only because Jelle Mol was also going to the school Ina Damman traveled to daily by train from Driehuizen. Besides, that pat on the heavy shoulder was not at all intended to be unfriendly. He wouldn’t want to put that behemoth in a bad mood: that is why he was Jelle Mol. The main thing was that no insult in the world would make him blush ever again, and whoever found that out wouldn’t try again. That’s what his life had become, in just a few days’ time...

“What did she say?” Soer asked right away, smacking his heavy lips, as though he was going to be rewarded with a dog chew, but Anton simply said that it had gone fine. Soer stuck out his jaw, smiled, looked at him sideways, but didn’t ask for details.

That he accompanied Ina Damman to the train every afternoon, that they were “going steady” or “were talking” – vague terms, but much more charming than “in love” – he had to tell *someone* about it. He also needed to know that he could always talk to someone about Ina Damman, but Soer would be the worst choice to do that with. This felt a bit ungrateful, as Soer had treated him like more than a brother. He couldn’t tell whether it was because of the French kissing or the zits, or maybe the combination of the two... So, he decided to confide in his mom, since everything was okay again between them, and he wanted to prove to her that being in love did not have to turn one quiet and pale at all, like she used to believe. He loved her curiosity, which she could barely hide, much less pass it off as a perfunctory pedagogical interest, but nicest yet was that he could say Ina Damman’s name out loud to her. It was like an uninvited guest in the house for whom he was bending over backwards, with the same stories over and over. And that guest showed up everywhere: Jan Bredevoort and Max Mees were subjected to

these stories, although of course they had known about it for a long time through that certain school telegraphy, which can even precede events. He now measured his friendship by the way Max Mees pronounced “Ina,” and how Jan Breedevoort said “Dammanikin,” with a velvet guttural sound and a loyal nod, but he did not really think of Jan Breedevoort as a *great* guy until a week after Piet Soer’s intervention, when he also started “going steady” or “talking.” This became the second Jan Breedevoort – Marie van den Bogaard era, a kind of Second Anglo-Dutch War, and it was very safe.

Jan Breedevoort always wore handkerchiefs of different colors that flapped up and down in his breast pocket. He would corner Marie during recess, and because Anton knew that Jan’s last name rhymed with something like “drop dead,” he was not even bothered by Jelle Mol, who was looking for a new victim, but those smitten boys were no fun. When he said to Anton, “Hey, Wachter, tell me about that girl Ina Damman,” it went unnoticed, sinking Jelle back into his powerful inertia, from which only something rhyming with “boy” or “jumps” would emanate. He couldn’t know how grateful Anton was to him. Not because he called him “Wachter” instead of “big boy,” but because now Ina Damman’s name had even come from that mouth, regardless of Jelle’s intentions.