



OLIVIER  
WILLEMSEN  
MORGEN KOMT  
LIESBETH

The talented young Dutch writer Olivier Willemsen has been selected by the Dutch Foundation for Literature for a residency period of two months at *Deltaworkers* in New Orleans, U.S.A. His novel 'Morgen komt Liesbeth' (Liesbeth's Coming Tomorrow; De Harmonie), published in late 2014, was nominated the best first novel of the year by the Dutch daily newspaper Trouw and the European First Novelist Festival in Budapest, Hungary. His second novel is due in October 2016. During his residency in New Orleans Willemsen works on his third novel.

**Deltaworkers is a nomadic artistic production and residence program that investigates the southern states of the U.S. as one of the last mythical places in the West. They host and present European artists from different disciplines in New Orleans, a city that forms the perfect gateway to the south; a region where many of the historical, socio-political and cultural roots of U.S culture can be found.**

**Olivier Willemsen (1980) grew up on an old farm on the outskirts of Haps, a small Dutch village right on the border with Germany. At the age of eighteen he left for Amsterdam, where he studied History at the University of Amsterdam, worked for several newspapers and magazines and became a full-time writer. Willemsen lives alternately in Amsterdam and on an island near Grou, in Friesland.**

#### **SYNOPSIS OF 'LIESBETH'S COMING TOMORROW**

Two boys in postwar Vienna learn about the world through the photographs that their father develops at home every day. They have never been outside. They live in an apartment high above the Gürtel, an avenue encircling the old city. One morning they watch from the window as their father gets into a tram, but that evening he does not return. The telephone rings, and the beautiful Liesbeth promises to look after them. But her arrival keeps getting delayed and it turns out that, apart from care, Liesbeth has quite different plans for the boys.

#### **CHAPTER 1**

Liesbeth's coming tomorrow. We've been waiting for her for a whole two weeks. Sometimes someone gets out of the tram who looks like Liesbeth. Then we press our faces against the glass. As soon as it gets light, we sit there in the window. We watch the first trams emptying out into the Gürtel. And we watch the snow. Fresh snow falling on the roofs opposite, or down below on the Gürtel street. We know for sure that Liesbeth's coming tomorrow, we'd just hoped she'd come sooner. She said so herself. 'Don't count on it,' she said, 'but I might come a bit sooner.'

The window is cold. In the afternoons, when dozens of people spill out of the tram, heading in different directions, we lean up against it for minutes at a time, so we can see the whole Gürtel. Drops of water run down the pane from where our noses touch it. But luckily it's warm inside. When we sit in the window we can feel the warmth on our backs. Just as father feels the warmth on his back when he's taking photographs. Never photograph into the sun, he taught us. Others are taught to strike matches away from them. We were taught to take photographs with the sun behind us. Unless we want to become artists, father says. But

we don't. It's not that he wouldn't let us; we just don't want to.

Every day we record the snow on the roofs of the Gürtel. Except for Liesbeth, we can't imagine a more beautiful sight. That's why we take pictures of it. We develop the films in the evenings. Our room's dark then. Though it's not really dark. We make it red. A lovely red gloom. In the evening the room glows like the chicken grill in front of the hot dog stall down below. We often watch the grill on the pavement of the Gürtel from the window. Inside it, four chickens go round in circles. We can see them better if we go downstairs and peep through the little window in the front door. Always the same four chickens going slowly round and round. Sometimes we can smell them up in our room. It's almost as if they've just flown past. But we know chickens can't fly that high. Especially not dead ones. Yesterday we took two pictures through the little window downstairs. There were three chickens in the grill. One of them had flown away. Today there were four of them going round again.

Tomorrow we're going to take pictures of Liesbeth. In fact, as of tomorrow we only want to take pictures of her. Liesbeth said we could. 'Go ahead – take fifty,' she'd said. We're going to develop them all and print them in the red gloom. Then we're going to paper the walls with them. That would look good, we think. Photos of Liesbeth all over the walls. Portraits of her from the front and from the side, but also pictures of her frying eggs for us and smiling at us from the kitchen.

Tomorrow the great day will finally come. Of course, we'll have to ask Liesbeth first. She thought she might perhaps be tired after her journey. 'It's a bit much, boys,' she'd sighed down the phone. 'It's all a bit much.'

If she was too tired, it would be better not to take any pictures of her, Liesbeth thought. We were taking account of that. You always have to take everything into account, and

never photograph into the sun, that's what father says. But he's not saying it this week. And he didn't say it last week or the week before. Maybe he'll never say it again. Suddenly he was gone. He left his camera behind. We have no idea where he is. That's why Liesbeth's coming tomorrow. Liesbeth's coming at last.

## CHAPTER 2

We've been terribly hungry for days now. There's no food left except for peppermints. In the camera bag that father left behind, we didn't just find his camera, you see – we also found two packets of PEZ peppermints. We're still hungry, but at least our breath smells fresh. When he's taking pictures, father's breath is always fresh. He doesn't like to smell himself when he's behind the camera.

A week after father didn't come back, the telephone rang. The telephone in the hallway rang and rang all day. Father never let us answer the phone. He strictly forbade it. He wasn't strict on the whole, but he forbade us to answer the phone. Later that evening, though, we dragged his armchair from the sitting room into the hallway. The receiver was wobbling on the hook, like a shaky exhaust pipe. We climbed onto the chair and wedged it between us. It stopped wobbling. We listened hard. There was a sort of far-off hum. The line crackled. We hoped that father's voice would come out of the hum. He'd be cross, for sure. Cross at us for answering the phone. But suddenly we heard Liesbeth's voice. It sang through the receiver. The loveliest singing voice we'd ever heard. 'Oh boys,' she kept singing, 'Oh you poor boys.'

Liesbeth explained that she wouldn't be able to come to Vienna for another two weeks.

'Your father has gone,' she said, without us asking, and, 'Don't count on it, but I might come a bit sooner.'

We told Liesbeth that we'd been terribly hungry for several days now. That it felt as if we had nails sticking into us. Our stomachs were beginning to hurt more and more because of the nails. Liesbeth promised to bring food with her.

'Bags full of food,' she said.

We could just picture those bags. That made us even hungrier.

'You need to get your strength up as quickly as possible,' Liesbeth went on. 'Right now you sound weak. And if you're weak, you're no use to me.'

She was right about that. We'd been feeling weak for a while now, and we needed to be of use to Liesbeth – even if we didn't know what she meant by that.

She said she'd start with sauerkraut. The first thing Liesbeth's going to make for us tomorrow is sauerkraut. A great big pan of it. That'll soon build up our strength, she reckons.

'We love sauerkraut,' we cried, and jumped up and down on the armchair in the hallway.

'I know that, boys', Liesbeth answered.

Of course Liesbeth knew that.

Just before her lovely voice vanished from the receiver, she repeated, 'So boys, don't count on it,' she said, 'but I might come a bit sooner.'

Until then we had to be patient. Be patient and eat peppermints.

## REVIEWS

"Willemsen has managed the naivety of his narrators and their thus skewed and limited view of reality to put in a matching style. To this end he makes sophisticated use of quasi-childish repetition and apparent trivialities, thereby creating a pungent contrast between innocence and demonism"

—Daily Newspaper Trouw

"The book tied me. Regardless it claims that is not to trust any man. The hunt for the weakling is open."

—Joyce Roodnat, Daily Newspaper NRC

'Lovingly ominous like Sredni Vashtar of Saki.'

—Jeroen Henneman

## FROM:

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