

## CATS OF AMSTERDAM



*Cats of*  
**AMSTERDAM**



*Based on a true story*

**LIFECHANGER**

Dirk Oerlemans



I have tried to recreate events, locales and conversations from my memories of them. In order to maintain their anonymity in some instances I have changed the names of individuals and places, I may have changed some identifying characteristics and details such as physical properties, occupations and places of residence. Although the author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information in this book was correct at press time, the author and publisher do not assume and hereby disclaim any liability to any party for any loss, damage, or disruption caused by errors or omissions, whether such errors or omissions result from negligence, accident, or any other cause.

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## Synopsis

*Cats of Amsterdam*, is based on a true story! Set in beautiful Amsterdam, the capitol of The Netherlands, this is a tale of the brutal personal struggles of American real estate man William Primen. Convinced that money and property are more important than true love, William struggles to maintain his sanity in a hurricane of business and personal calamities.

He and his partner, amoral Polish “fast boy” Marek, become successful real estate entrepreneurs through exceptional creativity in evicting non-paying tenants. Their business flourishes until William’s fortune hunter Dutch-born wife, Anneke, declares she wants a divorce.

Financial chaos becomes all-consuming until William meets the beautiful pro bono lawyer Faye. Then everything begins to change.

What is Faye doing in the house of one of renters they must evict? Can William keep his true career concealed while falling for this beautiful American woman who accepts him no matter his faults?

Marek’s solution to any obstacle is to simply get more brutal, but William knows it’s time for a big change. And if he doesn’t pull it off, he might lose his business, his loving teenage daughter Nina, and the transforming devotion of a woman who completely entrances him.

## Preface

We live in special times, when the rat race for money seems to have debased our world. Our planet has been turned upside down by a virus, and predictions are that we are on the eve of an unprecedented financial crisis. The recession of 2008 arose due to providing expensive mortgages to people who could not afford them long-term. Ultimately, this caused major destruction in the real estate industry. Fast guys with big cars, big watches, and smooth talk told us about “building here, building there” and too many people fell prey to the lure of ostentatious wealth.

This story is about those fast boys, and what happens when one of them is suddenly cut off from endless access to financial resources. What is left then? If he can no longer afford to open endless bottles of rosé on the terrace, will he finally understand that there is more to life than what money can buy?

Some people have to learn the hard way about the essential nature of the connection with people who care. It is the most important thing we have, but in fast times, people can be slow to learn. Who matters in your life? Your mate? Your son or daughter? Your business partner?

For William Primen, it takes a smart, beautiful lawyer with her heart in the right place to make his heart function once more. Selflessly committed to helping people she doesn't even know, Faye teaches him the value of truly caring.

It is this contrast that makes this story interesting in times like these. What will happen when we end up in a major crisis? What then is the value of money and material items? Will what we are able to buy or sell make us happy? If we have learned anything during the corona crisis, it is that we humans can-

not do without the affections of other people. We are social animals that need each other. We need warmth, love, and affection, and loneliness is perhaps the greatest punishment of anyone on Earth.

It is easy to say that money does not make you happy. That is an age-old motto and why we remain fascinated by characters who question the pursuit of riches above all. Money is necessary, and abundance is wonderful, but when we go to sleep at night and wake up in the morning, life is about something much warmer and enduring, and that is love.

## About This Novel

Born into a family of business people, I started the Dutch publishing company Film Agenda, then became a successful entrepreneur in real estate development. Later, facing rough times from a divorce and almost going bankrupt, I began to understand there is more to life than what money can buy. I realized that, particularly in a crisis, a connection with people who love and care is essential. In this fresh new mindset, I wrote my first novel, *Cats of Amsterdam*, based on my life. I have tried to recreate events, locales and conversations from my memories of them. In order to maintain their anonymity in some instances I have changed the names of individuals and places, I may have changed some identifying characteristics and details such as physical properties, occupations and places of residence.

Written with warmth, love, and affection, this story about how to have a happier life is meant to provide readers as much fun in reading as I found in writing it. Let me know what you think.

Thanks!

Dirk Oerlemans

## Acknowledgements

I want to thank my editor and co-writer Skip Press, and Michiel Peereboom, both of whom did a great job helping to shape this story. As always, I thank my family and all my friends and business associates for being an important part of my life. Thank you all for caring!



*I can live without money, but I cannot live without love.*

~ Judy Garland



# One

From the air, the half circles of the City Centre streets of Amsterdam resembled the outline of the lower half of a human heart. Known as the Venice of the North, Amsterdam sat at the bottom of a peninsula just below the North Sea. Past the top of the peninsula in the Wadden Sea, five West Frisian Islands between Den Helder in the Netherlands and Esbjerg in Denmark curved to the east like the beginning of a necklace of pearls. There were fifty or so islands, large and small, and sometimes, people who grew up in Amsterdam would tell imported residents about these islands, perhaps to help dispel the idea that the area was only about tulips, cannabis, canals, wooden shoes, beer pubs, coffee houses, and the somewhat reformed world-famous Red Light District.

On one of these streets near that district, a candy apple red 1969 Corvette C3 convertible sped along. The driver was laughing, while the car salesman in the passenger seat was about to have a coronary.

“You like hot performance!” George Muller exclaimed. The test driver was making him crazy, but you had to be flexible to sell cars. In the capital of The Netherlands, you never knew who might walk into the dealership.

William Primen, in his early 40’s and still handsome, glanced at the nervous, balding, thirty-something, slightly overweight, grimacing car salesman. William smiled, then turned his attention back to the road.

George continued. “Okay. You know, here in The Netherlands, they say we have a beach island for every season. Maybe you could explore one after you buy this Corvette! You know, slow and relaxing!”

“I can’t drive to those islands!” William was laughing at George.

“Look out!” George yelled.

William glanced ahead quickly and jammed on the brakes, barely avoiding smashing into an oncoming Citroen. He turned and saw that George was shaking with his eyes squeezed shut.

“Feisty little classic, isn’t it? Nothing wrong with those brakes.”

George opened his eyes slowly.

“I’ll take it!” William declared, and stepped on the gas.

George sighed in relief and slumped in his seat, holding the armrest. He needed the sale badly. The man’s credit had checked out, a bit chancy, but qualified. As they drove onto the dealership lot and parked, George considered a safer profession. Skydiving instructor, maybe.

William climbed out, smoothed down his expensive suit, and rubbed his hand fondly over the hood of the Corvette, savoring the styling. Seeing the salesman waiting expectantly, William pulled out his platinum credit card, gave it a kiss, and handed it over to George Muller.

When the paperwork was done, William emerged from the showroom, stood by his new sports car for a moment, then climbed behind the wheel and grinned gloriously. Somewhere that seemed far off in the distance, the salesman was saying something that sounded like chipmunk chatter. William ignored it, jammed on the accelerator, and peeled out of the parking lot at full throttle.

On the way to his business partner Marek’s office, William drove along Pieter Braaijweg and went by the Nemo Science Museum. He always loved seeing it. The building looked like a sunken green ship. The feel of the car excited him, turned him on. Ah, if he’d only had that car when he was single.

Marek, William's Polish business partner and contractor, was waiting outside the office. Marek was a self-absorbed 35-year-old wearing gold chains over a Hawaiian shirt with heavy chest hair exposed. He was unwrapping a fish sandwich when William squealed to a halt at the curb.

"I got tired of waiting to go for breakfast," Marek said as he climbed into the car. He began admiring the Corvette. "Is this for me, Wils? Love the color!"

"Eat your heart out!" William replied, and jammed on the gas.

Marek barely got his seat belt on as they roared down the street. He was smiling as he looked around the gorgeous vehicle. Then a pang of hunger hit, and he started to unwrap the sandwich.

"No no no no no!" William exclaimed. "You're not eating that in my new car, Marek!"

"Come on, brother! I haven't had breakfast yet!"

William wrinkled his nose at the smell of pickled herring. "You call that fish sandwich breakfast? You have a two-track mind – fish and sex!"

"Because they smell the same," Marek remarked. He quietly unwrapped the sandwich and had a bite. "You can eat a fish sandwich at any time of the day. If you woke me up for a fish sandwich, I would be very happy. Sex, same thing. Bad luck for you, no culinary taste."

"Does anyone ever hand you a fish sandwich in the morning?" William wheeled around a corner at high speed.

Marek just managed to keep his sandwich intact. "Yes, they do, and sometimes I am double-happy when I also get a blow job. So, you are correct about my two tracks."

"I would let you sleep," William replied. "It smells disgusting."

"Which? Fish, or sex?" Marek took another bite.

“You! Do not eat that sandwich! Wrap it up! I don’t want anything leaking out on my new seats!”

Marek nodded and took another bite.

William looked ahead at the road, loving the ride. “Okay, spill. What about the car? Nice, huh?” He turned to Marek, then immediately frowned when he saw the open sandwich, but Marek was wide-eyed, starting straight ahead.

“Look out, William!” He pointed.

William turned just in time to see an old lady, startled and frozen in place in an intersection crosswalk. William braked hard and the Corvette screeched to a halt only a few inches from the terrified old woman. William shook his head as he looked at her, failing to notice that Marek’s sandwich had splattered all over the dash on the passenger side. But William had worse problems. The old woman was cursing in Dutch, which William as a transplanted American still did not fully understand. He managed to understand a few references to the apes he had descended from, and there was something about hoping he crapped in his pants.

She stepped closer. William felt a warm discharge in the front of his underwear, but he didn’t look down until the old woman, displaying the middle finger of each hand, walked backward out of the crosswalk saluting him. Only then did William turn and discover what happened to Marek’s breakfast. He stared angrily at his business partner.

“Good brakes on this car,” Marek said matter-of-factly.

William reached over and angrily wiped grilled onions off of the dash, then noticed that part of the sandwich had ricocheted back onto the leather seat where Marek was sitting.

Marek looked down and noticed. “Don’t worry, I’ll clean it all up and make things perfect again.”

“What do I do about the fish smell?!” William barked.

“That’s what Adam said the first time Eve went into the lake.”

“Not funny.”

“Don’t be mad at me. I saved that nasty old lady’s life. And the hood of your car. Maybe your windshield, too.”

William had to smile. The man could weasel out of anything. Marek grabbed a page from a clipped stack of papers in the back seat and wiped at the windshield where the herring had landed. It only made a greasy smudge. William grabbed the paper from Marek’s hand.

“Smooth move. That’s the writ of execution.”

Marek craned over to look. “It’s okay, still readable.” He cleared his throat. “Sorry. My mom always told me not to eat in the car. I should have listened.”

They reached their destination in the picturesque Ouderkerk aan de Amstel area, near Amstelveen College. William parked across the street from a red brick apartment building with a classic high Dutch front. The place on Sportlaan had a nice view of the Amstel River. When they reached the front door of the building, William was holding the writ of execution. He gave it a sniff.

“Nice. So now the Bakker family is getting a writ of execution that smells like herring.”

William knocked on the door of the building. No answer. He pulled a wad of labeled keys out of his pocket and inserted the one reading SPORTLAAN. Listening but hearing no one, he quietly and slowly opened the front door. It would hardly budge; they had to squeeze their way in.

Smelly garbage bags were piled up in the hall. The place had been severely neglected and the whole front entrance stank.

“Can I have that writ?” Marek asked. William handed it over and Marek held it up to his nose. “I don’t think they’ll catch the fish smell.” He handed the paper back to William.

William looked defeated as he gazed around the place. “We will never get this rented out again.”

“This is going to cost us tons.” Marek kicked an old refrigerator on the other side of the garbage bags and moved it back. He began shoving the bags away from the door. Then they heard a wailing sound from above.

“Sounds like the Bakker’s apartment,” William said. “I was afraid of that.” He started up the stairs, Marek following.

The noise had ended by the time they reached the upstairs door. William paused outside, listening, then inserted a key and turned it. Click! The sound echoed in the empty hallway. Sobbing resumed inside. William entered first, Marek lagging behind him. Just as William had suspected, there was the Bakker family, only something was not as he expected, not at all. What he saw looked horrible and messed up everything.

*Bastards!* William thought. They were supposed to already be moved! Seeing that he had apparently entered unnoticed, he stood in the open doorway, amazed. Marek waited behind him, equally perplexed.

Sitting in the middle of the living room was a shiny brown coffin with a body inside. The mother, who looked to be in her 70s, was sobbing into a handkerchief. Her two boy’s faces – two young men, actually – were gloomy as they stared at the deathly container. On the end of the coffin facing the door was taped a picture of Father Bakker, a worn-looking angry man in his 70s. And that was the man himself laying in the coffin, dressed in a blue suit, white shirt, and orange tie, with a small bunch of cellophane-wrapped supermarket flowers on his chest. John, the oldest son, glared at William.

William was stunned at the scene and self-conscious of how he had barged into the apartment intent on doing his business no matter what. He crossed himself, though he wasn’t even Catholic.

“What are you doing here?” John demanded.