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Hearken

Autobiography of a faithful drifter

By

Rienk Kroese

Written with love
For God above all else
For truth
For Jesus Christ
For Siddharta Gautama
For mankind

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Introduction

This translation of my autobiography I write for those people who wish to know more about life, the spirit and everything else. Let me introduce myself. My name is Rienk Kroese, born 29th of March in the year 1984. For the last seven years I have lived without financial income and made two great journeys. Both of them without money. The first journey was born out of the injustice of the world and a sense of needing to do something about that. The second journey started because I learned to love to travel. Life is a great journey by itself and requires to be viewed in this way. You must be brave, not only to start your journey, but you must be brave in doing the right thing. Be that person that jumps into the water to save a child. Be the humble hero of your story. Be brave and humble and all things will come to you. This is what I learned over the course of these years. We need to be that person that we admire so much. Be it Jesus, Gandhi, the Buddha, Martin Luther King or any other of the greats. Learn from them and you will get the greatest of experiences without charge or debt.

The contents of this book will be somewhat weird. It is a very personal story and as such, stands close to my heart. That means that I will have had a tendency to protect my ego, as it were. I have suppressed that feeling where ever it surfaced and written down my annoying, embarrassing and stupid actions as well. Because this is a translation I no longer have to be aware as much of this feeling, because next to the introduction, everything is already written. In Dutch.

The main body of this book will exist of anecdotes and highlights. For many a mile I have walked by myself and there isn't much that one can say about these matters. I will sketch the events as lively as possible. Chronologically there will be some errors, but that is something you will have to forgive me.

The reasons to write this book the way that it is, is to show myself, to inspire and to amaze. I hope that you, as the reader, will enjoy it and that it may reveal a reality that stays hidden from too many people.

Have fun,

Rienk Kroese

Chapter 1 – About how I am and how it started

My name is Rienk Kroese and I am a wanderer. I was not always a wanderer of course, but on my 24th birthday I decided that I that I would leave the life that I led. I was thinking about this since I was 17. After my high school I had accepted the idea that a human had to spend the rest of the natural life in an unnatural manner. Working for money to fund your life, support a family and to die without knowing why, was and is an abomination to me. Yet I traveled the same road as everyone else. Books about people who were pointed out as wise by that same world, taught me that it can be done differently, that it is acceptable and that is even is a blessing to do so! It is a blessing to, in good trust, leave the materially orientated world behind you and to life from what you encounter. To live from your trust.

I wanted to hear this when I was 17. I wanted to hear that it is possible, that it is right and that it counts as a merit to do so. I did not find any relation to other people. Only these dusty old books that I ferociously devoured as if my life depended on it.

But knowledge is one thing, knowing how to use that knowledge is something different entirely. And beyond that, if you understand, will you live accordingly? How many times do you think; I should do this or that, act thus, but fail to comply? I did that a lot. It was partially because I let in the words. If these old writings showed me that I was, in truth, living the wrong life, why did I keep reading them? If a book says that the job you have is not the morally right choice and that you are better off quitting your job, why would you read that book!? Maybe I knew. Somewhere deep inside, I knew that the work I did was not fulfilling to me. I sought

confirmation in those books. First, I read the texts of the teaching of Siddhartha Gautama, better known as the Buddha and after that, of course, the bible with the teachings of Jesus Christ. Later I developed a taste for philosophers and sages from many cultures and regions. I read as much as I could. From this I learned how to be righteous. I have a great feeling of gratitude towards all sages. But my decision to leave everything came after all this.

Now, I am 23 years old and I work at a furniture factory. It's one of the many jobs I've had, to pay my way through life. I don't really mind what I do, as long as I am doing the right thing. I've read so much about 'good', 'righteousness' and 'the highest moral standard' that I lived in those terms. I think about everything I do 'is it right?' and 'can I do better?' I discovered that to find out if it is the right thing to do, I ask myself: Why? Why am I doing this? Why is that happening? Why is it like that? Can it be different? It keeps me sharp and on the right track. With the question of 'why?' I ask myself about my motivation, my intention. It only works if you make no excuses for yourself. You are not allowed to lie to yourself! That is never a good thing. Because why do you lie? To protect yourself, your ego, your lifestyle? Protecting yourself is egotistical and maybe not a problem if there is no one else bothered with it, for example by jumping out of the way of a boulder, but a huge problem when the Nazi's put up signs with: "Join us and we will give you a job!" Why did you join the Nazi's? For a job, for money, security or to support your family. Out of self-protection. Do you know, that you joined one of the greatest criminal organizations, mankind has ever known and that you are partially to blame for the deaths of

millions of people? Ignorance is your last salvation. If you truly don't know. 'Ich habe es nicht gewusst.' If you say that you don't know, while actually you kind of do, then you are lying to yourself and to others. This is one worst things a person can do. Faked ignorance. There is no responsibility claimed for your actions. Should a human murder, let that person speak out the deed and beg for forgiveness, but let that person never tell a lie about it! Rather an honest criminal than a lying king.

Those were my thoughts and still are. I don't want to lie! I am 23 years old and I am constructing foldable footstools. There is nothing wrong in my world. I am doing the job that I asked for and for which I am asked. I was given a half years contract, I got fun colleagues and money in the bank. I do the right thing and there is not a single cloud in my sky.

China's claims of the Tibetan highlands are controversial. In battle, the Tibetans don't stand a chance. Sticks and swords against modern soldiers. The Dalai Lama, spiritual leader of Tibet, calls on his people to cease the fighting and start a peaceful resistance. China reacts with an official declaration that Tibet was already part of the Chinese empire and thus no crime was committed. In that same declaration the Dalai Lama is marked as 'Enemy of the state' by the Chinese government...

I can't hear the rest of the radio-broadcast. Tools in hand, I stare into nothingness. The Dalai Lama, enemy of the state? Everything I know about the Dalai Lama spins through my head and it's all good. Kind, peace-loving, compassionate, caring, slow to anger and quick in forgiveness. The 14th incarnation of the spiritual leader of Tibet. In lack of better

words: A kind man. And he is marked as an enemy by the Chinese government. Not because he is bothering them, but because the Chinese government says so. 'Enemy of the state.' If a good man is their enemy, that makes them the bad guys by default, right? Sounds logical: if you despise the lamp, you have no love for its light. Okay, so if the Chinese government is the bad guy in this, then the whole world is going to fall over this and everyone will have opinions at the ready. They have to! A child can see the problem here! Suppression of a people, usurping its leader. Invasion. When will the gas chambers be built? The politics of the Netherlands will be furious! With our history of suppression. Wait a minute, what was that on the news the other day? *"Chinese and European relations better than ever due to trade."* Oh no, the Dutch government is not going to do anything! This will be forgotten as soon as it is heard. And why? Trade agreements! I just know this is going to be ignored and I can't stand it. I am disgusted to be a Dutchman. We are not going to judge this atrocity, because we are making money of it. I have to do something! What can I do? I will have to go into politics. And dance to the tune of the people who create this abomination? Forget it! I must make a statement, public, grand so all will see. I will go to The Hague, the heart of Dutch politics with a sign "Free Tibet!" or "Fuck off with your money! I want justice! Free Tibet!", get as many people as I can. Then what? Yeah, demonstration happens sometimes, but even the press and media don't care about these things anymore. Nothing will change. I will starve myself. I will not eat until Tibet is free! They will arrest me and feed me through a tube. Once in a hospital, no one will see my meaning. I will set myself on fire, so they can't ignore

me. Yeah, this I will do. As soon as possible. Then what? I'll be dead and Tibet will be free. No, of course not. Tibet will not be free because some nutcase set himself on fire. It's a cry in the desert. Three weeks later and no one will remember why you did this. But what then? I must do something! I can't live in a world where these things are simply accepted because we make money off it! My plan was to sacrifice my life for this cause. Now I can do anything.

I am thinking as I air press plastic caps into steel stool legs. What did the Buddha teach us? What is the best thing a human can do in this world? The Buddha said: "The best thing a living being can do is reach enlightenment. This is not a selfish deed, because it is good for the entire universe." Sure, why not? Reach enlightenment! Sounds better than suicide. And maybe it is good for the entire universe and for Tibet as a part of that universe. But how do I do this? How did the Buddha do it? "The Buddha left his wife and child while they slept and went out of his castle in secret. He gave his rich clothes to a poor farmer, took dirty rags to clothe himself in and shaved his head. 'I will find liberation of the suffering of life or I will die searching for it.'" Leave without possessions. That's what I'll do. I have had the idea since I was 17 and now is the time. It's better than suicide. Much better! In a week and a half I'll turn 24 and the day after that I will leave. I will not say any goodbyes so they cannot convince me to stay. I will walk south and I am going to reach enlightenment!

On the eve of my 24th birthday, Saturday 29th of March 2008, I take my family to a Japanese restaurant. My mother and Dirk, her husband, can't join us, but that cannot withhold me from my plan. I have to do this or I cannot look at myself I the

mirror any longer. The evening is wonderful! The chairs are around the open kitchen. You are right on top of the grill. I get a little candle that cannot go out and I get to catch egg that the cook throws into the air with his spatula. Warm sake, rice wine. "Did you study cooking in Japan?" I am impressed with his skills. "Hihi, nooo, this is temp-job.", snickers the chef. A truly magnificent evening. I am leaving everything behind the next morning, so paying has never been easier. I can't spend it anyway, is my reasoning. I am driving to the house of my father and watch a little television before I fall asleep on the couch. I sleep till an hour of one at night and wake up. I look at the clock. It is time. I walk to the kitchen and put my wallet and phone next to the kitchen sink. I take a look around. It is very quiet. The walls seem to wonder if I am really going through with my plan, but zen-buddhism taught me: "When you scream, I'll bet the whole forest screams." I don't fool myself and know that I am asking myself if I am really going to do this thing? I have to look myself in the eyes. I wander to the hall and stare into the mirror. "Are you really going to do this?", I ask myself out loud. I am looking into the eyes of someone I barely recognize. He is afraid. I am afraid. "Am I really going to do this?", I ask out loud. What will happen if I don't? Suddenly I see images of myself; me as an old man on my deathbed. Wondering: "What if I had?" That is horrible! If the main character of a story does not partake in the story, there is no story to begin with! Frodo says to Gandalf: "Find another. I am too afraid." "Are you really going to do this!? You're insane!", I tell the mirror out loud. I have to. I know this by now. If I don't do this now, I will do this later. At the moment I don't have a wife or kids, so it's easier for me than it was for the Buddha. I also

understand that, once this decision is taken, I will probably never have a wife or children. I think back to my old poetry album I had, when I was young. Next to; 'What do you want to be when you grow up' It says; 'Father.'

"Right. Let's do this." I nod at my reflection and it looks back with determination. I walk back to the kitchen, grab a banana from the fruit bowl as I pass it and put it in my pocket. I am not thinking anymore. I grab a one-and-a-half liter bottle and fill it with water. I walk to the door and pull it open. I walk down the driveway and into bright moonlight. A beautiful cool moon. It's a bit chilly, but that can't spoil my fun. I start walking.

Chapter 2 – The journey – The Netherlands

Where shall I go? Does it really matter? India? Reaching enlightenment is an inner journey. So why am I walking? I will have to walk first. I must explore life. I walk the entire night and the next morning. It is quite cold. I am only wearing a T-shirt and a fleece vest. Simple step-in shoes. The morning dawns and I keep walking. I am walking along the freeway, towards Zwolle? I am not good at geography. That's because I once got a 4 out of 10 at a test. I was in tears, but nobody couldn't care less. I realized that all the kids that got low grades just didn't do anything about it. I never learned geography by heart again and got sixes instead of nines or tens out of ten. I hear something that sounds exactly like the 'Fell beast' from Lord of the Rings. I read once that Peter Jackson used the sound of a kind of goose. I am going to take that as a good sign. Three ducks fly along sides me. They are quaking like madmen. They fly with a left curve around me, around back, besides me and in front of me again. And again. Three times the three ducks circle me and land next to me in the water filled ditch. A good sign, we shall say. It cheers me up. The walking is a breeze and I think I have made quite a few miles already. I am walking through a village and my left foot is aching. After trying to walk off the pain, I take off my shoe and sock. The left side of my left foot is all blue and purple. Considerable, but no panic. These kinds of things will happen more often. This cannot upset me, because I will have to go much further and if this mentally defeats me, I will run into some major problems in my future. I have to try and carry on. After a while I take off both my shoes and walk barefooted. The freedom my feet are getting feels very nice.

Like my feet are sinking sideways, now the simple shoes are not holding them back any longer. After a few miles going barefooted, a man comes walking out of a house. "Are you all right?", he asks. "Sure.", I answer. "Up there?", he asks as he taps his head. "O yeah, sure, it's conscience choice.", I say. We talk a bit and I tell him how I am going to make a spiritual journey and that I am going to reach enlightenment. He looks at me, surprised and amused. It must have been something weird to hear, I imagine. "Wait a sec, I got something for you." He walks into the house and comes back with a pair of shoes, socks and a plastic bag with bread and bananas. "These are my old forestkickers.", he says with a smile. "It ain't much, but it's beats going barefoot, I think." With tears in my eyes I put on the sneakers and naturally I accept the bag with bananas and bread. His name is Aad. "Rienk." I introduce myself. "Maybe we'll see each other around, Aad!" "Yeah, who knows." We say goodbye. I make a mental note: Aad. I am thinking that I will remember everyone that helps me along the way. A naïve thought of a pessimistic little human. There will be too many.

'Orangetown.' Haha, that's a small theme park from my youth! Shall I go there? Maybe sneak in? And then what? Sleep there? Get arrested? Ah, no. Keep walking. I am tired. It's been a few hours since Aad. I am sitting down next to a little hedge. I am staring at the hedge at the other side of me. I see a boy, walking with a backpack. He is walking over hills and valleys. He is having fun. I am looking at it more closely, but... that's me! But I don't even have a backpack? I snap out of my trance. I was hallucinating. I saw the scene with the boy, in the leaves of the hedge. Not wise to sit here like this. I

have to walk. Why did I sit down here? A cold wind gives me an answer. Wow, that's chilly. I wrap my arms around me. Good thing it's not raining. 10 minutes later, it rains. Yeah sure, uhuh. I keep walking through the rain, but decide that it's better to try and find some form of shelter. At that house? No, that probably spells trouble for me. At that little electricity house. There is a little roofing of about two inches and keep me clear of the worst rain. There I stand. Still. "So unwise", says the Rienk that is typing this. It doesn't take long or the field of view turns black from the outside in. Like a Looney Tunes cartoon. 'That's all folks!' Very slowly I start to fall over backwards. "Wow!", I call out loud and start to stomp my feet and drink some water. I eat some of the bread and walk small circles as fast as I can. Suddenly I notice that I am very cold! Running circles is getting me wet, so I am better off walking on. Maybe I'll find something better. After about 5 minutes trotting through the rain, I run into a bus stop. There I sit and I start to shake uncontrollably. Signs of hypothermia, I know. Not good! After some 10 minutes with my arms pulled back into my sleeves, I sit quietly in the bus stop. I stopped shaking. Out of the wind, wet as a dog, but relatively warm. I start laughing. Haha, yes! I conquered the first obstacle! I feel like I have struck a blow at the harsh life. Invincible I feel. But it puts things in a whole new light. The Netherlands is not suitable for this kind of thing. I have to get out of the Netherlands as fast as possible. Rather today than tomorrow. I will hitchhike.

A couple with a small child of about three years old, picks me up after standing still for about 10 minutes. "No funny business, right?", I am instantly warned when I answer the

question, "Where do you go?" with "South." I try and explain that I am on a spiritual journey, but there are no major reactions to this. We do talk a lot, but it's mostly discussions. I notice my tendency to fall asleep and that is mainly due to the warmth. It dries me up fair and well and that's a Gods sent gift. The family of three is going to Apeldoorn and they can drop me off there. Wonderful. I think that a nice ways down the road and ask if they can turn up the heater, so that I can dry up. After an interesting car ride and numerous conversations about the comings and goings of family life, we arrive in Apeldoorn. "Where can we drop you off?" "Right here's fine." Doesn't matter to me, I am thinking. We say our goodbyes and wave to each other whilst the car pulls away. Apeldoorn. I am walking along the sidewalk. What's this? My legs don't want to go. I have a muscle cramp like you wouldn't believe! The warmth of the car has dried my clothes and have also given me back the feeling in my limbs. Like a stick figure I walk into Apeldoorn. As I continue walking I regain control over my limbs. I can walk off the muscle cramp. I will have to keep walking, so that's what I do. In Apeldoorn I run into an old lady. She is instantly worried about me and tells me that she has been evicted by her daughter. I tell her that I don't have a home anymore either. She shows me a place where a few people are asleep in a shed. "These people are all homeless. You can sleep here for a while if you like." There is the smell of beer coming out of the shed and a smell of something undefinable. "I have to go on.", I tell her. After a good conversation, I trade her two bananas for some bread with peanut butter, cheese and jelly. A good trade she finds, bread is easily acquired, she says. I go on.

I keep walking. I walk far. Very far as I believe, but what do I know of these things. I have little to no experience with such things and I have walked beyond my tiredness, so my mind is not a 100% sharp anymore. The evening kicks in. I look at the setting sun and think it's around the hour of five or six. Seven maybe. Dark clouds are gathering. A night with rain, that's trouble for me! I start to worry, maybe I should have slept during the day, whilst it was reasonably warm. Now that I am writing this I link that feeling with the shed the old woman offered me. Karma is a rollercoaster. But anyway, I am walking along a freeway to the left of me and bushes to the right of me and I am looking to the right side. The clouds part just a tiny bit and a sunbeam falls through the clouds and behind the bushes. I am standing, staring with my mouth open and start laughing. "How cliché!", I call out. Doubt a couple of seconds if I should go to the beam of light. It dawns quickly that I have nothing better planned for today and so I step in and through the bushes. At the other side of the bushes there is a field and on that field, in a beam of light, there is a white tent. With a lazy smile on my face I go to the tent and call out a couple of times. Nobody answers, so it's clear. I see a pair of sturdy hiking boots next to the 'door' and consider taking them and keep walking. Silly idea, I am here to spend the night, not to steal stuff. There are a kind of large containers on wheels inside the tent. I get into one of the containers, pull my vest over my knees and my arms back through my sleeves. I barely sit when outside all hell breaks loose. Raindrops the size of pigeon eggs. (Clearly nonsense, but in my imagination there were extra wet as well.) It's pouring like there will be no tomorrow, but I am dry as a bone. I instantly feel the temperature drop a few degrees at

account of the rain. I am thinking about the beam of light and I start praying. How can this be anything else but a Divine intervention to save my little hide. I want to show my gratitude, but I am not exactly sure how. I also pull my head back into my vest and keep myself warm with my breath. “Thank you, thank you, thank you.” It wasn’t really sleeping, but I think I got about an hour of rest. It was a long night. Well yeah, I wasn’t going anywhere and was very happy that I would survive another day.

I am not exactly sure about the chronology of it, but you can see where the cities are situated. I got a ride from a religious man and was even at his house for a while. He gave me a brevier and some good advice. A night spend standing in the store next to a gas station, talking to a Turkish man who tried to convince me to return to my family and that I shouldn’t do such silliness. When it was clear that I was very determined, he bought me a crocket with bread and an energy drink. Tears. Walking, walking, walking. Man, did I ever walk! In Deventer (?) I was stopped by a police car while I was walking down the local industry park in the middle of the night. “I have here a ‘person’, een ‘persoontje’ (literally, little person. It’s Dutch, you know.) with the name: Kroese, Rienk.” “Hey, you say ‘person’ instead of ‘missing person’, so that person won’t run?” The officer in the car (he never got out) looks at me and pulls a smile. I am not registered. My family has not filed a missing persons report. They know me and trust me. I have the most wonderful family! Loving and warm and also smart and wise. And understanding, thank God! Otherwise maybe, I could have never returned home. I had talked about that I wanted to travel like this, but when I talked about this

with my mother, she would convince me not to go, or at least travel the conventional way. With money, passport and a tent. And call once a month, week, a day. I love you mom, but then it is not my journey any longer. I think I am in Amersfoort, or somewhere near there. Beyond Utrecht in any case, because I have hitched another hike and a boy named Bart picks me up. We started talking and he seems like a bright fellow. He invites me over for a shower and a pizza and I gladly accept. It's in Utrecht, but I don't really mind. It's a little further north than my current position, he says. I eat pizza and take a shower. Nice! I am Bart very grateful! I am crying in the shower. He looks up my name on Hyves (an abandoned social media site) and posts a message on de page of my younger brother. "Picked up a hitchhiker by the name of Rienk and he sits next to me and is well. Gave him pizza and a shower. He is doing all right." Or words of the same meaning. So now my family know where I am and that I am doing okay. That's a relief.

Got a ride from a Russian couple who were moving to another city. Slept along the highway, A2 towards Maastricht. They were working on the road, so I could walk entire sections on the highway. Got a lift into Maastricht. That night I try something different. I ring at the door of houses and ask if I can stay the night at their place. After being rejected at four houses, a woman opens. "I would, but I have two little children. The risk is too great." After a short conversation, she closes the door. I turn around and think about what I am doing. Strange that I would suddenly ask this of people. I find some shrubs and drop myself in backwards. It's cold, but the shrubs protect me against the wind at the very least. I slept

maybe an hour of two? It's still dark, but I start walking anyway. I ask a man with a dog which way is south. He has a compass, so that's not a problem. If I ask him about the compass, we start to talking. He has traveled a lot. South-America and Spain. Also with nothing to his name. That's why he always has a compass on his person. He would take me home, but thinks his wife would not be amused, it being three at night. He can take me to a youth center where I can stay for one night. The men at the door know him and they chat a little. "Come on, you.", says the man. I say goodbye to the ex-traveler and he gives me his telephone number on a memo. It's hectic inside. There are boys my age walking around and there are bunk beds. "This one's yours, there are the showers. Need anything else?" I tell the man that my feet hurt. In the first aid office I take off my shoes. My feet are swollen, red and full of blisters. The left side of my left foot is still sensitive, but not as purple anymore. Lance, clean, plaster. Bandage on it and I'm back in the game. Taking the bandage off, cuz I'm taking a shower. Not allowed at night under normal circumstances, but they are making an exception for me. Clean, dry and dead on my feet I drag myself to my designated bed. I sit down on it and write the names of the people I got to know on the memo with the phone number. I talk to no one else and will take care of the bandage tomorrow morning. Tomorrow I am leaving the Netherlands. But first I am walking into dreamland.

Chapter 3 – The journey – Belgium

I walk out of Maastricht and cross the border. I am walking across a sort of dam, where I meet the very first hills. (The Netherlands are called thus, because of the lowness and flatness, duh) It's a strange bit of road, a kind of dam in the middle of a village and it's all slanted upwards, or downwards or course, if you're coming from the other way. At illogical places there are signs with: "Welcome to Belgium." I am begging for the first time. I ring at a random house and want to ask that person if they have some food for me. A large woman opens the door. "Bonjour.", she says. I don't know what to say. I did not expect French. "Je.. eh.. voudrais.." De woman looks at me like I am her son and make the universal hold-on-don't-tell-me gesture. A moment later she comes back with sandwiches and a packet of cookies. I have never forgotten about her. I was so grateful I could have burst! Around the hour of two, three in the afternoon I come into a village called Eijsden. I decide I want to read something. I go into the local village library and go inside. I take a look around and almost all books are in French. I was lousy at French grammar, but the read and listen tests I was pretty good at! Fine, I'll read a French book. After paging through a few books I find a book called 'L'Aurora Trilogy'. It's about a girl that has a little creature with her that is her 'âme'. Her soul. It's well written and a novel idea and the French is not hurting me any. The girl hides in a closet to spy on her teachers when a bell rings. A voice tells me in French that the library is about to close. Ow, it's almost six! Well, the reading was nice and a nice change of pace from the walking. I exit the library and walk on.

It's starting to get dark. I am going to have to find a place to get some sleep. After about an hour walking, I come to a fork in the road. On the left hand side is a highway with a tunnel for cyclers. Maybe I can get some sleep in that. On the right hand side is a path that leads along some hills and an old wooden sign. I close in on the sign to get a better look. "Hotel L'Aurora". Amazement. Just like the book! Okay, that could be a coincidence. But what else am I going to do? Coincidence or not, I have to take a looksee! I go right at the fork and after about a third of a mile I come to a building. It's old and decrepit. And empty. At least, it's appears so. I try a door. Locked. I try some other doors and the third one opens, although difficult. I'm in the kitchen. It's pretty dark, so I try the light switch. There is a bald bulb in the middle of the kitchen. Light. It was once a nice white kitchen. I would say from a residence instead of a hotel. There is also a couch in the kitchen. I pull the couch close to the wall, that way I lay in cover. Putting the pillows of the couch partially over me, as to keep a little warmth while I lie still. It's still early, I'm thinking, so I can check out the rest of the hotel. The room next to it stays dark when I try the light switch. Shame. I carefully walk into the room and across to the doorpost, which has no door, and from the other room, someone walks out of the shadows towards me! I turn cold and a chill goes down my spine. I immediately stand dead still and the other figure does the same. I look properly and it's not a doorpost at all, but a mirror, from the ground up to the ceiling. "Who does such a thing!?", I ask out loud and run back to the couch. I lie still and repeat to myself. "It's all in my mind, it's all in my mind, it's all in my mind." After a few scared moments I eventually fall asleep.

I wake up that following morning and the light has chased away all fears. I go to the mirror and laugh at myself. "Chicken." I take a look upstairs and to my amazement, it's warm up there! The heating works upstairs. There is also a bath. It's works! Oh bah, if I wasn't so scared I could have slept warm. Ah well, calm acceptance. There is warm, running water from the tap over the bathtub and there is a flask of almond soap, a box of razors without a handle and a fashion magazine. I fill up the bath with nice hot water, take off my clothes and soak. Almond soap! What luxury. I stay in the tub all morning. I shave off my beard and shave my head with the razors, even without a handle I am doing a fair job. I dry myself with the pillows casings of the couch where I slept. I am looking at the fashion magazine and it's full of pretty ladies. After a few days of cold and effort and with the contrast of the warmth and comfort, my hormones are going into overdrive. I do what boys do. Unwise, because then the bathing doesn't really help and it costs you the essential nutrients. I get right back in the tub. After an hour I get out again. Clean again, I dry myself with the pillow casings and leave the almond soap and razors. For the next. I get dressed and go outside. It's a beautiful day and somewhere it's a shame that I wasted so much time. I walk the rest of the day, but at night it's getting pretty cold. I pray for warmth and sit in the branches of a pine tree for a little shelter against the wind. There is a grass field nearby and I spot a yellow thing between the trees. I head towards it and find an abandoned excavator. Very old and worn out. Inside the excavator I find a box of matches. Hah, what fortune! I feel blessed, sit under the tree and make a fire, put some wood on it and lay down to sleep. Nice and comfy. At night, the fire has died on me.

And it's started to rain. I decide to start walking again. My luck, it's not raining very hard. At least I am warm. I got what I prayed for.

More walking. This is my second or third day in Belgium. I enter a large village. Very beautiful with a magnificent 250 feet hillside on the south side. Late in the afternoon I am in the village and in the evening I go up the hillside. On the field on that hillside there is a bunch of branches. They are very wet. I collect as many branches as I can and put them on a great big pile. It's starting to rain. There is also some hay on that same field and beneath the wet hay there is still some dry hay and dry twigs I find in the bushes. I go to the big pile and try to light it. It's going nowhere and I'm burning through my matches in record time. I got five left as the wind suddenly blows over my shoulder. The hay, which I tried to burn, glows and catches fire. Oh, blow! I blow and blow and within a few moments I got myself a reasonable fire going. All the branches dry each other as they are catching a flame and after a while I have a great big roaring fire on the hilltop, overlooking the village. It a stunning view with all the village lights. It's raining, but I don't care. With this fire I'll be dry in no time flat. You can't come close, it's so hot. And I learned a valuable lesson. Blow on your spark, then it lights up very fast. Acquired more branches and I sleep next to the fire and if the rain should be stolen, I wouldn't have noticed.

It's nighttime and I am walking over hills and valleys. There are houses around 150 to 300 feet apart. I am cold. Very cold. I am walking, but once in a while I stumble off the road. I feel like I'm drunk. I have to go on, I can't stop and sleep, because I don't think I will wake up if I do. I try to get a lift, but there

are hardly any cars in this place. Who would take a complete stranger, in the pitch black dark. He is wobbling down the streets. I'm looking at a house without doors. It's still under construction. I wander inside. Cardboard from building materials. I lie down on that. Out of the wind, on cardboard. It's not very warm, but... I awake with a start. I slept. How long? It's still dark. An hour? Three hours? I can't wrap my mind around it. Walk on then. Outside the wind is turned into a howl. I can't do it like this. I come by a house with trash along the road. There is a broken lawn chair, but they left the pillow on it. Oh yeah! I take the pillow and rib it open. Foam. That foam would one day save my miserable hide! I pull it into four big strips and put them down my trouser trunks and sleeves. The two remaining pieces go on my belly and on my back. I stand up in the wind. It tries it's best to kill me, but the foam is doing its job. I am so happy! Ecstatic! Immediately I am not tired anymore and I am warming up very quickly. Lovely. It's like wearing a sleeping bag. I lay down behind a hedge down in the grass. I sign off directly. It seems I was tired anyway. Sleep.

In a town I sit down at a train station. I see a man dressed in black, getting into a train. He looks at me strangely and inquisitive. Too long for the situation, he stands there for about a second of five in front of the open train doors, before he gets unto the train. Weird. Now I know it to be a Benedictine monk, but then I thought it to be a confused person who likes dressing as a magician. With a cloak and everything. Strange enough, some day after, I am thinking about finding myself a monastery. Walking has had its charms but I left to find enlightenment and not to walk. It rains from

time to time. Crappy, but the foam doesn't only keep me warm, it stops the rain as well. I take shelter under some trees for a while. It doesn't help much, but I don't need much anymore. After a half an hour, a van stops next to me. Two men look at me through the window and a wave of French flows my way. My two years of high school French can't take that much punishment. I hear *cherche*, searching. I tell them in my most beautiful French: "Oui, je cherche un monastery." I speak monastery as in English, but the two men look at each other and one says: "Poverello?" Pover, as in 'poverty' I wager. "Oui, pover!" They wave me inside the van. It turns out to be a strange ride. We try to understand each other, but we're all in the dark here. "Je marché." "Je travailler." I don't know. Listening tests are not as fast as these two. Even my "douchement" doesn't achieve much. After a car ride of about three quarters of an hour, we arrive at a big building. It doesn't look like a monastery, but there is "Poverello" in a huge sign above the door. Ah, that's what they meant. We are greeted by a Flemish speaking man. Flemish is close to Dutch, so I can understand him. In some too fast French the men talk about if I can stay. He wants to talk to me before he makes his decision. The other two men leave. Waving. Once inside, I am in an office. We talk some. I tell him about my plans and he fully understands. Poverello is a shelter for people who don't fit in society anymore. Understanding is the magic word here. Where is my luggage? I don't have any. A surprised look. Do I need anything? Nah. Do I want a shower? Yes please! I am being let through the rooms. There are people watching television and playing board games. I try to make an estimation about the people that live here. 'Damaged', is the first word that pops into my head. These