Lovereading.co.uk
Helping you choose your next book

You loved your last book...but what are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

Mr. Miller

Written by Charles den Tex

Translated from the Dutch by Nancy Forest-Flier

Published by World Editions

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

Charles den Tex

Mr. Miller

Translated from the Dutch by
Nancy Forest-Flier

World Editions

Published in Great Britain in 2015 by World Editions Ltd., London

www.worldeditions.org

Copyright © Charles den Tex, 2005
English translation copyright © Nancy Forest-Flier and
World Editions, 2015
Cover design Multitude
Image credit © Millennium/Hollandse Hoogte

The moral rights of the author and translator have been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

First published as *De macht van meneer Miller* in the Netherlands in 2005
by De Geus BV, Post office box 1878, 4801 BW Breda

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available on request from
the British Library

ISBN 978-94-6238-011-0

Typeset in Minion Pro and Calibri

Distribution Europe (except the Netherlands and Belgium):
Turnaround Publishers Services, London
Distribution the Netherlands and Belgium: Centraal Boekhuis,
Culemborg, the Netherlands

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of the publisher. Phone: +31 (0)76 523 3533. Email: info@worldeditions.org.

1 Bellilog 06.13.04

Kurt today. Tears in my eyes every five minutes. Didn't know I was so sentimental. Maybe it just means more than I'm aware of. Or want to admit. And with no more than half a day free. Even then it's a squeeze, since I have no idea how I'm going to make up for all those hours. Life on the margins. That's all I've got. Everything counts. Fuck it. Jess in S.F. at least until the end of the week, probably longer. So no sex, except in my head. Living for the future, the eternal now. Now, now, now, so much now. Anyway. Three and a half hours, three if all goes well. Going back in time.

Wish me luck.

2 Hyperventilation

The end of my life landed at Schiphol four weeks ago. Since then nothing has been the same. On a Monday morning, eight-eighteen, it came in on a Boeing 747 flying non-stop from Atlanta, and I even went to meet it. From the minute the plane landed—seven minutes early, in fact—I was lost. Robbed of very bit of control I thought I had—if I had ever had it in the first place, of course. But as long as nobody tests you, you can think what you want.

At the gate there was that sense of expectation of people doing something for someone else that they'd never do otherwise: being part of a crowd staring through a glass wall at an area they cannot enter, where there's always less to see than what they had expected. Yet there I was, standing on tiptoe, struggling to see someone I wanted to recognize. Preferably a face with a probing gaze, with the same expectation, searching for emotional release. Arms and hands waving, men and women jumping up and down, children running all over the place, straining eyes that are sending signals past every obstacle to the other, THE other, the one they've come to meet.

I was waiting with my parents for Kurt, my younger brother, who had left five and a half years before and hadn't been back since. He was twenty-two at the time. He had gotten stuck in some course of study that changed its name every year, and meanwhile I had charged ahead on my way to a job that would cut me off from my past forever. Kurt and I are just over two years apart and we're not in any way alike. He's blond and I'm dark, but that may be the least of our differences. Our tastes

always ran in opposite directions: flavours, colours—it didn't matter. If I wanted sports, he wanted music. And vice versa. If I felt like a burger, he campaigned for pizza. There was always a certain something, though, and we were always together, inseparable. Because with Kurt I knew who I was. He was my brother, I was his brother. It was as easy as breathing, as spontaneous as walking. Except he had signed up for an exchange programme in theoretical mathematics, a field he ended up in because it came easy to him. What he himself wanted was never entirely clear. He went to America, and five years later he still hadn't come back. After a couple of months he stopped answering his e-mails. The phone number I had for him was cut off overnight. I just didn't get it. There were things that drove my parents crazy, things they wouldn't talk about. Screaming behind closed doors, breathing so shallow that the air hardly had a chance to get down their throats and built up behind their eyes.

But they said nothing.

By the time Kurt left, we had both been out of the house for some time. I had gone from the outskirts of Dordrecht to study in Rotterdam and ended up in Amsterdam. The fact that I could move from the Bible Belt to the heart of international commerce just like that, without a passport or vaccinations, strengthened my trust in the things I had been unaware of in the austere religious world of my parents: the business community and the enormous amounts of money, drink and expensive clothing that go with it. Men and women competing at every conceivable level: status, position, relationships, power and property. Nothing is certain, except for the fact that you have to fight for it. Before the end of my fourth year I had a job in Amsterdam as a communications consultant with a large

consultancy, HC&P. The economy had an insatiable hunger for young, recently graduated individuals with a high hormone level and a higher than average IQ. More than four hundred consultants and staff worked at HC&P in a gleaming glass tower in Amsterdam's southern quarter. It's the Dutch branch of a firm of consultants that operates worldwide. So there I was, on the ninth floor, with a hot desk, a complete array of modern equipment, a leased car and more money in my bank account each month than I had ever seen in my life.

I can talk to anybody, anytime, under any circumstance. That's what I do. I live by talking, e-mailing, phoning and meeting. Sixteen hours a day. I train other people so they always know what to say: how to be more relaxed on camera, better in meetings, more effective in consultations. That's my job. To a certain extent I've learned it, but mainly it's a natural gift. My clients are directors, chairmen and politicians. I saw the Minister of Justice every week, sometimes more than that, to teach him how to introduce tough policy with as little public resistance as possible.

I did that—for years—and during those years Kurt disappeared. Little by little he receded from my memory, where all the things we had done became happier but also less prominent.

Until that Thursday morning, as I stood with my nose pressed against the glass wall and projected images from the past onto the hesitating crowd of people shuffling around the conveyor belt in search of suitcases and bags. There I waited, lips dry and breathing too fast. Without thinking I pulled a chapstick out of my pocket and spread it around my mouth. Force of habit. Nowhere did I see anyone who looked the least bit like Kurt.

My parents, who were standing next to me, were just as surprised as I was when our gaze was finally reciprocated. A waving arm, first hesitant, then full of conviction. My parents waved back. I did not. For some reason I couldn't even raise my arms. My limbs felt as if they had been screwed onto my body. My lungs were bolted onto my back, full of air that was far too heavy. My heart was pumping panic through my veins. Kurt waved, at me, and looked at me with eyes that seemed to suck me through the glass.

Soon the sliding doors of Gate 3 opened. Kurt dropped the bags on the floor and ran up to me—arms around my neck, pulling me close without uttering a word, pure physical contact—and finally said, 'Jesus, I missed you!'

That was the moment when I lost myself. Right there in the arrivals hall, Kurt in my arms. I knew what I was seeing, but I didn't see what I knew. Something fell apart somewhere and slowly I felt my knees go slack. The arrivals hall at Schiphol grew darker and darker, and it wasn't until later, much later, that I was aware of an unknown man tugging and pulling at me.

'He's come around,' the man shouted. I saw my parents in the midst of the crowd. And Kurt. And right after that everything went black. The next thing I saw was a man in a greenish yellow outfit in the back of an ambulance. He slapped me on the back, listened to my chest, shone a light in my eyes and moved his right forefinger slowly from left to right and up and down.

'Hyperventilation,' he said, and gave me a small bag to breathe into if it should happen again.

What did he know.

3 Bellilog 06.14.04

I'm not here. Okay?

4 Exclamation points in the void

Yesterday my flow of words was brought to an abrupt halt. After getting out of the ambulance, filling in forms, answering questions and being given a clean bill of health, I found myself standing alone in front of the terminal at Schiphol. Without parents, without Kurt. Between the attacks of hysteria I had made it clear to my father that they were not to wait for me. Best not to wait. In my hand I was holding the little bag and the instructions, 'what to do in the event of another attack.' I had nothing more to say. No matter how hard I tried, I could find no answer to the questions that kept coming at me, bigger and bigger and increasingly aggressive.

Except for drink. That's what I wanted. Lots of alcohol, and with no one else around. Especially no one I knew, no consultants or clients. Leeches. I went to the closest bar and asked for a double vodka on ice. After a third glass I didn't want to see anyone anymore, not even the bartender. His professional cheerfulness had the opposite effect on me. Half drunk and half unhinged, I went back home. I couldn't go back to the office in that state, and I certainly couldn't meet with any clients. Nor did I want to. But with all that alcohol in me I didn't even have to think about it.

I closed the door to my apartment and started in. A little while later, as I was smashing the empty bottle to bits against the wall, I felt a total blockage of uncontrollable thoughts and disordered emotions raging in my head. The three hours I had taken off to pick up Kurt had turned into five. The first appointment came and went as I poured myself another drink

and was unable to suppress a sense of victory. The phone rang, my cell. The office, I saw in the display. Otherwise I ignored it. Alcohol had taken control of all my systems. My schedule disappeared as the hours passed. Meetings dissolved into thin air. The weekly session with the Ministry of Justice. The preparations for the European Summit on Security and Integration would have to take place without my input. Ethnic tension and religious claims were leading to increasingly sharp differences of opinion throughout most of Europe. The EU had to come up with a joint policy, but sensitivities were so acute that progress seemed impossible. For HC&P it was the biggest assignment ever. The firm was working on the conference from ten different countries. So was I. The counselling I was providing the minister was an essential part of the entire project.

But not now.

The endless peeping of my cell phone was only the beginning of a frenzied barrage of phone calls between the office and clients who were waiting in vain in various conference rooms. They didn't disturb me in the least. Nothing but irritating noises from another world, signals that were trying and failing to make any kind of connection.

Trembling from the drink, I picked up the phone and turned it off. Put it back on the table. It was silent now, a solitary object. A thing among things. I wanted to grab the bottle, which was just out of reach, but I lost my balance. Nothing unusual, except I could no longer remember how to stop myself from falling. My arms and legs still had some of their reflexes, such as swaying and groping for things, but the vodka gave me no control.

I went down with one enormous crash. Flat on my back. Nicely done, I thought, until my head hit the wooden floor with