

jan bee landman

Love and Kisses





a short, literary, mainstream story

by

Jan Bee Landman

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As an only son, with a seafaring father, I had been raised and shamelessly pampered by my mom. Normally we also spent vacations together, until I was twelve. That summer something came up – I never found out what – that made it necessary for me to be out of the way. So I was to spend a few weeks in a youth hostel in Zandvoort, a seaside resort, to my total delight. My first vacation alone. I became the envy of all the other kids in the neighborhood.

My mom took me there one rainy afternoon. The place proved a bit of a letdown. The International Children's Mansion proved to be just an ordinary corner house, in the middle of the village. The dormitories were rooms of an ordinary size with a few stacked beds. A glass conservatory served as dining room. Along one side of the house there was a paved courtyard with a few climbing frames, surrounded by trees. My mother was not amused. She called the place a dump and kept stressing that I did not *have to* stay if I did not *want to*. But I definitely wanted to. Everything thrilled me. I would be alone. Independent. A big boy. As good as grown up. Reluctantly she allowed me to stay, stressing again and again that I only had to

phone if I wanted to be picked up again. She made such a fuss that I was glad to see her go.

The place was run by a tall and sternly handsome woman with a huge confusion of gray hair wrapped around her head and large, drooping breasts that dangled loosely and mysteriously inside the flimsy summer dresses that she wore. She was assisted by a small, potbellied man, apparently mute, because he never said a word, with a big, carrotty moustache and a naked skull fringed with curls in the same carrotty color. While my mom was around they both grinned incessantly, but the moment my mother went out of view, their faces sprang back like rubber masks into expressions of grim annoyance and they left me alone without any further ceremony. All I was told was that Natalie would take care of me.

I was in the conservatory. It was just beginning to rain. The clatter of the drops on the surrounding glass was deafening. It made me think of the biblical flood, which gave the noise a creepy overtone, but soon began to make me drowsy. I was just dozing off, when Natalie appeared. She turned out to be a very pretty little girl aged about sixteen. She was exactly

my size. Black hair, loosely curled, dangling on her shoulders. She had a smooth, finely carved face, lightly tanned, with a sprinkling of freckles around the bridge of her nose and wide-open, icyblue eyes. She had rather thin lips, nearly always curled in a slightly disdainful smile. That day she wore white jeans, skintight, and an equally tight pink t-shirt, which followed the swell of her small breasts like a second skin, with the buds of her nipples clearly embedded in the fabric. She had a lovely smell. I was instantly smitten, which she acknowledged by broadening her smile.

She led me up two stairs, to an attic, which I was to share with one French and two American boys. They had just gone into the village. When they returned and I eagerly wanted to make friends with them, all three reacted with the same lukewarm indifference. The Americans were brothers, almost opposites. The older one, Alan, was annoyingly handsome, with thick, honey-colored curls, a flawless face and a quick, fetching smile. His brother Steve was outright ugly, with a long hatchet face, pimples, spectacles and a vile temper. They were always bickering. The French boy, Michel, was a skinny little

lad, quiet and absorbed in himself. His sleek, auburn hair was much too long and hung before his eyes like a lame wing, so that he was forever flinging it aside with a toss of his head. Alan was the leader. He told the others what to do. Michel went along with everything, Steve with nothing. That meant that I would also have to go along with everything, because I did not feel like teaming up with that morose Steve.

The first days there was little to do. Downpours eliminated the beach and for the rest there was wretchedly little to do in the Zandvoort of those days. There was a small cinema but the movies were so hideous and old that I had to team up with Steve to prevent our going there. So we largely spent our days in the playroom, an old shed containing a rickety table tennis table, a dining table with some old chairs and a sitting arrangement that consisted of an amazingly comfy couch of green leather with matching easy chairs. They all smelled a bit peculiar: a blend of mustiness and cat's piss but sat wonderfully well. I wanted to play table tennis (one of the very few physical activities that I was good at) but when we did a few games I proved to be so much



better than the others that they would not play against me anymore. There were quite a few board games, but there were always so many parts missing that they had become impossible to use. Monopoly was the only complete game. So we played that, rarely all together, because Alan and Steve nearly always got into an argument, with Steve the inevitable loser, refusing to continue. Alan then took possession of Steve's stuff, to my indignation but Michel could not care less. He would win anyway, no matter what. Strangely quiet and serious he would immerse himself in the game and think long and hard before he did anything. I usually got bored after a while and I was always glad to go bankrupt and retire to the couch.

We were left almost entirely to our own devices. Our minders, Natalie and Maryke, also had to do housework, such as washing, cooking, cleaning etc. They were often running around dripping with sweat, toting buckets and brushes and would not have a second to spare for us. There were also other kids in the house but they were kept strictly separated from us. If we ever ran into one, it would almost panic and

flee as fast as it could. They looked shoddy: pale, skinny and wearing grimy, threadbare clothes. When I asked Natalie about them I received a vague answer. The International Children's Mansion apparently doubled as a kind of orphanage.

The days dragged along gray and drizzly. For the first time in my short life I got bored. The eternal arguing of Alan and Steve was getting on my nerves, so I sought refuge in a tree beside the house. The trunk split in two halfway up and formed a comfortable nook to sit in. So there I sat, rather forlorn and miserable, waiting for the time to pass. Although I had much rather have been at home, it never occurred to me to call my mother. I don't really know why.

One evening our minders came to fetch us for a stroll along the beach. I did not feel much like going but Alan persuaded me. He acted a bit mysteriously, saying that I would not regret coming. I could not imagine why, but went along nevertheless. The girls behaved differently. They were loud and boisterous. Especially Natalie, who could be so serene,

mysterious and beautiful. Now she was running around shouting and waving her arms about, which disappointed me a bit. Angels were not supposed to behave that way. Alan kept giving me conspiratory looks, which whetted my curiosity. Something very special was apparently about to happen.

When we reached the beach, the sun had already set. Dusk was gathering. We walked to a row of beach huts along the bottom of a dune. Maryke had a key to one of them. She was half a head taller than we. Chestnut hair, green eyes, a broad face with full, slightly pouting lips. Her voice was a little hoarse, which I liked. When she had opened the door, she turned round with a strange smile I had never seen on her before.

"Alan first," she said.

Alan barged in. Maryke followed and closed the door behind her. I looked at Steve and Michel in astonishment. They were both grinning from ear to ear. Natalie giggled.

"He doesn't understand at all," she said.

"No," I said. "I don't, what's going on?"

"Just wait and see," said Steve, uncommonly well

tempered. I gazed at the closed door of the hut in amazement. There was complete silence inside. What on earth were those two doing in there? Only a few minutes passed before the door opened again. Alan came out. He staggered like a drunk. He spread his arms.

"I've been to heaven," he said and fell headlong into the sand.

"Your turn," said Natalie to me and pushed me to the door. I hesitated. What was I to do in that dark hut?

"You're not afraid of the dark are you?" Natalie asked.

"Of course not," I said and stepped forward bravely. Still, I felt ill at ease. The hut was steeped in darkness. Briefly I could not see anything at all. Then I heard Maryke's voice, very near.

"Who are you?"

"Jan."

"O, the new boy. Just come closer."

A hand touched my arm, grabbed it and pulled me forward. I bumped into the big, soft body of Maryke. She drew me tightly against her, one hand around my waist, the other around my neck. I did not dare do

anything in return, stood like a dummy in her embrace, overwhelmed by the touch of her unfamiliar curves. Her breath caressed my face. Her nose touched mine. Then suddenly I felt her lips on my mouth, delightfully big and soft and warm and sweet and a little bit sticky. A tingling sensation surged through me. Never before had I felt anything so wonderful. Instinctively I pursed my own lips a little, intensifying the sensation. From there on I had no notion of anything but those soft, warm cushions of flesh pressing against my mouth and sending quakes of delight through my body. Very carefully, almost devoutly, I pursed my lips into a hesitant kiss. Maryke uttered a small, plaintive little sound. Instantly I froze with shock. What had I done? But she embraced me even more tightly, withdrew her head briefly, leaving a terrible emptiness on my mouth.

"Do that again," she whispered, "It was very nice." And immediately her soft mouth enveloped mine again. I repeated my kiss. She kissed me back. The tip of her tongue brushed my upper lip. I almost swooned, giddy with joy.

That was when the door was banged on.

"Hey, stop cheating," shouted Alan. "He's in there much longer than I was."

Maryke gave me one last peck and released me. She walked to the door and pulled it wide.

"Don't be such a little baby, Alan," she said. "It was his first time."

I staggered outside in a complete daze. Just like Alan I dropped into the sand but in my case it was not my own doing. I was really dizzy with emotion. My head was swimming. My lips seemed to glow. I touched them. Strangely enough that did not feel differently from touching any other part of my body. How could it be so divine to touch the lips of a girl? I was interrupted by Alan, who sank to his knees beside me.

"And? What did I tell you?"

I looked at him. The dusk had already turned everything darkblue and dull. His face was dark, only the white of his eyes and his teeth were visible.

"Great," I said.

"Arent you glad you came along?"

"You betcha."

He chuckled.

"And there's still Natalie to come."

My heart lurched. Natalie? Did she also do this? It gave me a very double feeling. The prospect of kissing her went beyond my wildest dreams, but at the same time it sort of disappointed me that it would be so easy.

The first session in the hut had finished. Maryke came outside. A blessed shadow. Natalie went into the hut, Alan in her wake. Maryke went to sit on the wooden steps in front of another hut and lit a cigarette. In the flash of the exploding match her face lit up brightly for a moment. She was quite pretty. I hung around her, wanted to say something but could not think of anything. She did not say anything either. Each time she took a puff, her face lit up. The door of the hut opened again. Alan came staggering out. I moved forward but Michel cut me off, slipped inside before I got to the door.

"Hey, that's not fair," I shouted. But my words were only greeted with giggles from within. My heart grew heavier. I was to kiss Natalie. Beautiful inaccessible older Natalie. Unimaginable. Michel stayed inside an eternity. It seemed to make my heart heavier and heavier, almost a brickload inside my chest. I was

just about to bang on the door when It opened. I almost bowled Michel over in my haste to get inside. There I remained motionless, expecting to be embraced again, like Maryke had done. But nothing happened. I heard Natalie breathe, a bit hurried. Only after many seconds did she move.

"Where are you?"

"Here," I said.

She came to me. I held my breath. It was about to happen again. Her hands stroked my chest. She put them on my shoulders, but only pressed her belly against me. Her lips brushed along my cheek and found my mouth. The first touch gave me another tingle of pleasure, but much weaker than with Maryke. Natalie's lips were also much less soft and warm than Maryke's. Thinner, harder. Restless, too. She gave me a barrage of short, quick kisses. Confused I underwent it. Where was the rapture that Maryke had offered? This did not feel so good at all, but it was the adored Natalie. She made some jerky movements with her belly against my abdomen, which I did not understand, even disliked. Pushy. The banging on the door almost came as a relief. She let go instantly. Not pleasant either. Crest-fallen I



stepped outside. I felt terrible, almost on the verge of tears. In the deep dark I could just make out the figures of Alan, Michel and Maryke. Without thinking I walked up to Maryke, put a hand on her shoulder. She turned.

"What?" she asked.

I said nothing. We could hardly see each other, but she took me in her arms and pressed her wondrously soft, warm lips on my mouth again. I could taste the bitter cigarette she had smoked but it did not matter. My rapture returned at once, making me tingle all over. I put my arms around her and kissed her back, very carefully. She whimpered softly.

Time slowed down. We seemed to stand entangled for many minutes, tender and speechless, lips touching and caressing. My joy was infinite. Now and then we tightened our hold even more. I went into a kind of trance, floating within a womb of pure bliss. Then, as in a half-dream, I heard far-away voices. Slowly I awoke to reality. The others were jumping around us and shouting. Natalie the loudest.

"Maryke fancies Ja-an, Maryke fancies Ja-an."

"Don't be silly," Maryke said, "It's just a game."

She detached herself from me, but gently, with a

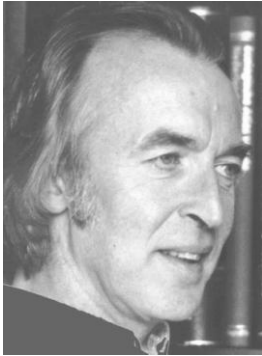
reassuring squeeze in my hand. She could not have been sweeter.

We went back. Maryke pretended nothing had happened, fooling along with Natalie and the other boys. I did not mind. I knew better. Something unforgettable had happened. And I cherished it, fulfilled and happy, like an old, contented man. But there was also confusion. The simplicity of childhood had gone forever. I had adored Natalie but her kisses meant nothing. I had only liked Maryke but her kisses had been the summit of my life so far. That made no sense. But it was true all the same.



**About the author:**

Jan Bee Landman was born in Middelburg, the



Netherlands, on January 13, 1948, from a French/Scottish mother and a Dutch father. He studied English, became a teacher and translator, wrote many short stories and retired from the big city to the countryside in 1997 to

devote himself mainly to his three horses and to research and write a historical novel. In 2009 he resumed writing imaginative fiction.