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Martin Hendriksma

Yearning

Original title: *Hunkering*

NOVEL

A novel about boys and their yearning for knowledge and fame in a world in which everything seems possible, but nothing is free.

Two bosom buddies yearning for more, but forced to choose between talent and friendship.

‘A top-notch page turner, peppered with gallows humour and magnificent but subdued poetic portraits of the landscape and the people.’

- *Het Parool* on *The Worst Affair* (long list Libris Prize for Literature 2009)

Martin Hendriksma
Yearning

About the author

Martin Hendriksma (Sneek, 1966) studied commercial economics at the NHL University of Applied Sciences and has worked as a reporter for a number of Dutch newspapers, including *de Volkskrant*, *NRC Handelsblad*, *De Groene Amsterdammer* and papers associated with the *GPD*.

He made his debut in 2008 with the novel *The Worst Affair*, which was longlisted for the Libris Prize for Literature in 2009.

Martin Hendriksma lives in Haarlem with his wife and two children. He admires authors such as Vladimir Nabokov (for his precision) and Bruce Chatwin (for his ability to empathise with his characters).

About the novel

Arend and Hugo: two eighteen-year-olds intent on conquering the world, one with his poetry, the other with his painting. Their shared muse is the devastatingly beautiful Dana, who lives on the ground floor of their student house in Amsterdam.

Fifteen years later – their friendship having long succumbed to the rivalry between them – Arend receives a phone call from a woman in France: Hugo is in a coma after having been involved in a serious car accident. Would Arend be willing to come to France and help take care of him?

Whatever happened to Hugo's ambitions? Arend sets off on an exciting journey of exploration in which past and present merge, and he discovers that Dana's role in the entire story is as mysterious as it is crucial.

Yearning is a novel about intensifying friendship; about ideals in a world in which populism has acquired a political voice. It is a novel about love that finds its own way, whatever the obstacles.

Martin Hendriksma, *Hunkering*

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Hardcover, 192 p.

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Bibliography

Familievlees (The Worst Affair) (2008, novel)

Hunkering (Yearning) (2010, novel)

The press about *The Worst Affair*

‘Hendriksma makes his debut with a powerful novel. There’s no hesitating about this book. You have to buy it.’ – *De Pers*

‘A novel that gave me a lot of pleasure. Hendriksma can write, create flesh-and-blood characters, and put humour on paper. He can tackle the big picture and bring history to life.’ – *Vrij Nederland*

‘In short sentences, Hendriksma brings the past excitingly alive.’ – *Elsevier*

‘A refined and exciting tale’ – *NRC Handelsblad*

‘*The Worst Affair* is above all an admirable debut about a disturbingly topical subject. A novel worthy of its setting.’ – *Dagblad van het Noorden/GPD*

‘With the epic *The Worst Affair* by Martin Hendriksma, a resounding novel about a poor young swineherd who fights his way up to become a meat magnate, the Dutch province of Drenthe has been put permanently on the literary map. [...] Horrifically told.’ – *Haarlems Dagblad*

‘The book is a page-turner of the first magnitude, seasoned with gallows humour and beautiful, but restrained, poetic descriptions of the landscape and people.’ – *Het Parool*

Fragment from the novel

She didn’t resemble the army of female callers that usually pestered me around dinnertime with life insurance policies and ‘interesting news about your pension’. I’ve been getting increasingly rude to them in the hope that the system will pick it up and write me off as a hopeless case.

My usual ‘Yes, hello’ is followed by a couple of seconds’ silence. The line crackles. ‘Is this Arie Weber?’

Arie. No one’s called me that in years. I associate it with a student house in Amsterdam at the beginning of the Nassaukade, a twelve by twelve student room, English bands with eyeliner pinned to the wall. A television that regularly gave up the ghost at important moments, in spite of the thumping we gave it.

‘Speaking, yes’, I soften my tone. ‘Arend Weber.’

She tells me her name, which I immediately forget. She’s sorry for calling unannounced, especially around dinnertime. She had already called a couple of times during the day, but no one answered. She found my name in an address book belonging to the painter Hugo Moor. Did the name mean anything to me?

I flick a speck of dust from my jacket and walk to the window, still holding the telephone. A Rhine barge cuts through the water, majestic, no backwash, no swell, as if the boat is standing still and the world is turning around its gangway with agonizing slowness.

What should I say? That Hugo was my only real friend? That we hung around together every day that year we shared digs on the Nassaukade?

‘Hugo.’ I try to make my voice sound as neutral as possible, like a newsreader’s.
‘Yes, I know Hugo. At least, I used to know Hugo. What can I tell you about him?’
I hear her take a deep breath before she says: ‘Two gendarmes appeared at the door a couple of hours ago, Mr Weber. They had first gone to Hugo’s place, but no one was in. His neighbour sent them to us. We’re the only other Dutch residents in the village, and that creates a bond, whether you like it or not.’

‘You live in ...’

‘The French side of the Juras,’ she says, completing my question. She mentions the name of the village, a blurred diphthong, the consonants of which have been worn flat over the years. ‘It’s close to the border with Switzerland. We’ve been here for a year now, Hugo much longer though. Ten years or more, I’m not exactly sure. We stop for a chat when we bump into each other on the street. We’ve never been to his place, and he’s only been to us the once. But as far as the locals are concerned, we’re best friends.’

‘That’s how it goes,’ I say.

‘The gendarmes asked if they could come inside,’ she continues without a breath. ‘I could see from the look on their faces that something serious had happened, that it wasn’t about an unpaid parking ticket. I’m ... I’m still not over it.’

I hear her gulp. Then she forces each word into the telephone, bit by feeble bit: ‘Hugo had an accident this afternoon, a serious accident.’

‘You don’t say.’ I try to wriggle out of my Cantarelli jacket with my right arm, but it gets stuck somewhere between my shoulder blades.

‘His car was hit by a train near Pontarlier,’ she continues. ‘An unmanned level crossing, broad daylight ... Perhaps he was blinded by the sun. Perhaps ...’

‘How is he doing?’ I blurt.

‘Not good, absolutely not good. He’s in hospital in Pontarlier and they’re keeping him in a coma. The doctors can’t tell how much brain damage there’s been. Maybe it won’t be too bad ...’

She churns out a long series of sentences.

I pull back a chair and sit down at the table, the phone propped between my shoulder and my left ear, the jacket still dangling like a shield from my back. SEM NOW THE MOST POPULAR BOYS’ NAME, reads the headline of the evening paper, spread out on the table. POLL: KRISPIJN WINS RECORD NUMBER OF SEATS, COALITION ANNIHILATED. ANTILLEAN TALKS A COMPLETE FAILURE. ‘Sale, sale, sale at the biggest innerspring mattress specialist in Holland.’ ‘Get rid of those jug ears! Special offer, second ear free ...’

The other end of the line finally falls silent. I have no idea what she’s just told me.

‘And what about the rest of his body?’ I hear myself ask.

‘After the gendarmes left, I immediately called the hospital in Pontarlier. If I understood correctly, he’s bandaged from top to toe, more or less. Only his head, neck and left arm are still exposed, and his left leg, I believe. The nurses tried to explain the situation, but they used so many medical terms, *French* medical terms, that I didn’t quite get it. Serious blood loss, that much I understood, multiple leg fractures, right arm crushed, his ribs ... his lung ... his ...’

She finally stops talking. We search for the right words to resume the conversation. Countless images and thoughts of Hugo swarm through my brain, as if the phone call had suddenly brought someone back from a prolonged coma instead of announcing the opposite.

‘How did you find my number?’ I ask.

‘I went to Hugo’s place,’ she says, ‘hoping I might find a telephone number for his family. Luckily, the front door was open; you can still do that in the village. Inside it was ... well ... not quite as organised as it is at our place, if you get my drift. I rummaged around for the best part of ten minutes before I came across an address book. Then I started making phone calls. You were the first person to pick up.’

‘Did it contain many numbers?’

‘Not really, to be honest. No more than twenty, and several have been crossed out or are no longer in use. I looked for family names I might recognise, but didn’t find any. Then I picked numbers at random. Just now I called a number that was no longer in use by the person mentioned in the book.’

‘Who was that?’

‘Elias ... yes, Elias. Do you know him?’

‘Yes,’ I say. The whirlwind of pictures in my mind begins to settle. The woman reads from the list of names, and I picture myself as a drenched eighteen-year-old standing at the door of the house on the Nassaukade, my finger fumbling for the bell as my eyes try to make sense of the confusion of names and associated bell codes in the doorway.

Translation: Brian Doyle
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