

A  
HUNDRED  
HOURS  
OF NIGHT

ANNA WOLTZ

Translated from the Dutch by LAURA WATKINSON



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*“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”*

United States Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776



That shocking story on the Internet is not me.

The fairy tale I'm about to tell the American officials is a lie.

Do I still have a story of my own? I don't know.

I'm fifteen and I'm from the Netherlands. My dad wears corduroy pants and likes stargazing more than anything else. And, oh yeah, I almost forgot—last Tuesday he destroyed the world. My mother is Nora Quinn. She was born in Ireland, and now and then she speaks to me in English.

I mean: She speaks to me now and then. Always in English.

She's an artist. Her paintings are in museums all over the world, and if she feels like taking off all her clothes and starting a new painting up on our roof, stark-naked, she does exactly that.

I'm their daughter. That was my story.

But now I have nothing at all.



# 1

I'm the only person in the world who knows what I'm going to do today. That is, if I actually go through with it . . .

My boots wait, perfectly still, on the smooth tiles of the departure hall. Whenever someone glances at me, my heart stops beating for an instant. Do they recognize me from the Internet? Are they about to start yelling at me?

But nothing happens. Everyone at the airport looks right through me. Yesterday they were all reading about my dad and what he did, but today they're off on vacation. They're dragging around suitcases and screaming toddlers and they've already forgotten all about their tweets.

I certainly haven't forgotten the threats on Twitter, though.

My breathing has felt shallow since Tuesday evening. My mouth is dry. Somewhere inside my head, an alarm's ringing, over and over. *Danger*, it says. *Run! Get away!*

I act like it's perfectly normal for me to be standing here all alone at Schiphol Airport. The information boards flicker

above my head; I smell men's sweat; a dog the size of a small horse is pushed past inside a plastic cage.

Every thirty seconds, my hand reaches for my bag to grab my cell phone—but every time, my arm stops halfway. For the first time ever, I've actually turned off my phone.

I take out my passport and flick through the blank, stampless pages. When I get to my photo, I pause. I don't like looking at pictures of myself. My hair's too straight, my eyes are too big, and my face is too pale. I look like I'm fading away into nothing.

But the photo in my passport is different: It was taken four years ago when I was still in elementary school. I'm looking out of the photo fearlessly, as if I'm *superexcited* about the rest of my life. I was eleven and I liked to grow sprouts in empty eggshells.

I'm not that girl anymore.

My name is next to my passport photo: Emilia December de Wit. Seriously, that's my name.

The middle name was my mom's bright idea, and even when I arrived late and wasn't born until January 2, she still thought calling me December was an excellent plan.

My dad could easily have said, "Maybe Susanne would suit her better. Or Margriet." Then again, he could also have said, "How about we call her Cosine Isosceles Triangle de Wit?" Then my mom might have realized that incorporating your own insanity into your child's name really isn't such a great idea after all.

But my dad just kept his mouth shut. Of course he did. Even fifteen years ago, the guy was already a selfish jerk.

He simply didn't give a damn about the name of his only child.

Finally, it's my turn. I put my passport on the desk and desperately try to work up a little moisture in my mouth.

"And what's your destination today?" asks the desk clerk in her bright blue suit.

"New York."

I stand up straighter. I'm scared, but at the same time, I feel something new and exciting running through my veins as I say the name of the city: I'm going to *New York*. My friends all have posters on their bedroom walls of boys they've never seen in real life. But above my bed, I have the New York City skyline. Okay, I've never been there, but I'm in love with it all the same.

"Are you flying alone?" the desk clerk asks.

I nod. Breathlessly, I answer her questions.

Yes, I packed my own bag.

No, I don't have any hazardous substances in my carry-on.

I'm just taking my shoulder bag onto the flight.

The woman looks at me, but she doesn't seem to recognize me from the Internet. And thank God she doesn't suddenly remember seeing a disgusting man on the news last night who had the same last name as me.

My bulging suitcase gets a label and disappears from sight. And I get a boarding pass. Boarding will begin in ninety minutes.

All alone, I walk to the line for passport control. I don't belong with anyone and I feel strangely light without my luggage. My blood is tingling. I still can't quite believe it: I'm really going to do this. Two days ago, it was no more than an idea. Just a thought: If I were a completely different person, I'd give the world the finger and fly to New York.

It's Friday, October 26. In ten and a half hours, I'll be there.