

Bas van Hout

# **TRACKING THE BRUINSMA HEIRS**

## **and the Delta Organization**

translated into English by Sheila Gogol

***“Ruled by the lie ...”***

Confidential statement by Her Majesty Beatrix Wilhelmina Armgard Queen of the Netherlands, Princess of Orange Nassau, Princess of Lippe Biesterfeld and so forth on 27 November 1999 at the fortieth anniversary of the Association of Editors-in-Chief about the media.

***“Shocking! This book sheds new light on the IRT Affair. A breakthrough with new insight after the Van Traa Parliamentary Inquiry on Organized Crime in the Netherlands ...”***

Dr. Frank Bovenkerk, Professor in Criminology and one of the academic investigators for the Van Traa Parliamentary Inquiry.

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## Introduction

In recent years, unprecedented efforts have been made to track the *Bruinsma heirs*, the alleged leaders of a criminal network also known as the *Delta bosses*, the alleged threesome the Delta Method was named after. According to the Dutch Department of Justice, the three *leaders* were Etienne Urka (a common criminal), John Engelsma (a lawyer) and Charles Geerts (a businessman). They were viewed as the successors to Klaas Bruinsma, the *godfather* who the detectives felt had been in charge of a crime empire that smuggled huge amounts of soft drugs into the Netherlands up until his death in June 1991.

This triumvirate, which gradually grew to mythical proportions, was thought to have turned over billions of guilders within a tight hierarchic structure. A turnover safeguarded by a rigid system of violence and special money laundering and investment divisions. The Department of Justice orders were to dismantle the whole operation, regardless of the cost.

In the early 1990s, a small team of Department of Justice pioneers launched a revolutionary and highly secret method to round up this criminal organization. The Inter-Regional Team (IRT) of about sixty *super cops* founded especially for this purpose only had one full-time assignment, i.e. to track down the Bruinsma heirs and the Delta bosses.

The special Delta Method was developed for this purpose. An infiltrator referred to as *growth informer RRW-X* was to work within the organization, engaging in as many criminal acts as were needed to rise to a position of power. This is how the Department of Justice planned to deal the fatal blow to Delta and its bosses, a.k.a. the Dutch Network.

One legally and psychologically weak link in the plan was that the growth informer could pocket some of the illegal earnings in return for the services rendered. There was also another little shortcoming ... the Delta bosses described in numerous Department of Justice reports did not exist, nor did the Delta Organization itself. The Department of Justice based its findings on reports written by deluded officials who deliberately leaked misleading information to the media. In fact the whole enterprise was based on a misconception. In essence, if anyone was in control, it was a very different group of individuals, but the Dutch underworld basically consisted of pretty independent individuals. There was no evidence of any kind of criminal organization, it was more of a criminal anarchy.

The informer was thus able to grow on to unmanageable proportions without any control at all, and for years huge quantities of hard and soft drugs – officially estimated at anywhere from 15 to 25,000 kilograms of cocaine and more than 500,000 kilograms of hashish worth at least seven billion guilders – were passed on to the Dutch underworld in what the authorities still viewed as their *controlled system*. What is more, there is reason to believe the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) itself incited liquidations in criminal circles by strategically allowing certain information to leak out.

In fact the only result of the Delta Method, an investigation strategy that cost millions of the taxpayers' guilders, was that a small group of criminal offenders on both sides of the line became incredibly rich.

## Acknowledgements

This book is the result of more than a hundred and fifty talks and interviews with people directly involved on both sides of the law. It is inevitable that the information should overlap in some cases or be contradictory. I had to include it all though to present as complete a version as possible of this complex story. Up to now, barely anyone had a total overview of the situation. Not that I have any pretense of presenting one now, but I do come pretty close to *a truth*.

I am nonetheless very aware that the information largely comes from criminals – nice ones and not so nice ones. Wherever possible, this is why I have tried to only present claims confirmed by one or more independent sources. It is still impossible though to exclude any possibility of untruths creeping in, especially since the parties involved, criminals and authorities alike, all had their own reasons for talking and their own agendas.

After hundreds of hours of interviews, thousands of documents and dozens of hours of video and audio material, there is at any rate one conclusion to be drawn: tracking the Bruinsma heirs and the Delta Organization was a beautifully orchestrated fantasy. There was no good reason for an investigation that cost more than a hundred million guilders of the taxpayers' money.

One might very justifiably wonder what happened to the billion guilder turnover that resulted from this Delta Method. Where did it go? Whose pocket did it disappear into? We have not learned much about this point since the Van Traa Parliamentary Inquiry. The IRT inquiry into the controlled supply of drugs was one-sided, to say the least. Investigators confined themselves to *reliable sources*, in other words official authorities who had played a role themselves in the IRT affair and thus had a personal interest in creating a favorable impression of what they had done ... and not done.

Moreover, not much has changed since then. The responsible parties are either still in the same positions or have just switched chairs or been sent home with generous severance pay. The field investigators were swamped by the paper work and the lethargy it generated, bogging down the whole inquiry. This book mainly focuses on the other side of the IRT debacle, the wrong side and the right/wrong side.

For reasons of privacy and on their explicit request, certain individuals are referred to by a pseudonym. This gave them an opportunity to tell their story without any reservations. In a number of cases, certain facts and circumstances have been changed to limit the recognizable aspects of punishable acts. These changes do not however detract from the authenticity and I have not made any journalistic concessions about the truth.

I would like to express special thanks to the lawyers who very rightly deleted the points in the text that could have led to legal problems. I would also like to thank everyone who made an indispensable contribution to this book, my girlfriend S. O., Samantha Minne, Alan Sodenkamp, Ronald van der Looy, Hans Emmering, Marieke

Geerligs, Marcella Spel, Jan Haveman, Frans Starreveld, Ati and Peter Koopman, Prof. Frank Bovenkerk, Prof. Jaap van Donselaar, Lucien Laseur, the lawyers R. de Lauwere and J. L. Leijendekker and all the people I have not mentioned by name. Especially the dozens of people who operate on both sides of the law and openly told me about their role in the Delta IRT affair and the efforts to track the Bruinsma heirs. Without them, the facts in this book would have been swept under the rug forever.

Bas van Hout

## PART 1

# FALSE START

### *Delta according to ...*

#### **The Fiscal Information and Investigation Department official**

“The investigation into the Bruinsma heirs and the criminal triumvirate heading Delta was launched because of an article in *Het Parool* in December 1991. When we started our inquiry, we didn’t really have any incriminating evidence against the three suspects. The media items media were the direct reason for the special tax assessments and the whole legal procedure.”

#### **The Public Prosecutor**

“The way I saw it, there was no evidence of any kind of organization ... We noticed soon enough that contrary to our expectations, the buying and selling was being done by any number of different groups and individuals. They worked together if it was convenient in much the same way that the Dutch East Indies Company did at the time.

The Delta Organization was a fantasy. There never was any Delta middle management headed by a Delta top management consisting of the criminal Etienne Urka, the lawyer John Engelsman and the businessman Charles Geerts. As a matter of fact, John Engelsma and Charles Geerts had nothing to do with any semblance of a Delta Organization. There was no criminal hierarchy with all those people in it. There was no information pointing in that direction. The whole Delta scenario was a deliberate effort by individuals supposedly *on the right side* to mislead the Department of Justice. Someone definitely earned a fortune on this Delta Method. It is sad to have to conclude that it was not only criminals who were stuffing their pockets.”

#### **The highly placed criminal investigator**

“There are a couple of very highly placed civil servants who we keep a careful eye on. One is a Public Prosecutor and one is a Chief of Police. They cover things up or lie if it is convenient for them. They do not want certain things to come out. There is a lot of garbage in the vicinity of Haarlem. I want to know exactly who is corrupt and

how high it goes. And especially how much money is involved. But if they know me at all, they know I will keep going way into the twenty-first century. If they have done anything wrong, they will have to deal with me personally.”

### **The Delta boss**

“The whole thing about the triumvirate leading Delta is nonsense. It is something the Department of Justice made up and the media. There is no hierarchy and no top management in our group. Believe me, I would have been the first to know.”

### **The growth informer**

“I was a *business partner* at the Haarlem Criminal Investigation Department. It was all about earning money, nothing else. My *partners* in Haarlem earned tens of millions of guilders, and investigating was never a top priority. I was never anywhere near the Delta group, let alone that I could have risen to the top, whatever that was. The story about how I was going to bring the Department of Justice to the Delta bosses and Etienne Urka is just something someone made up. Never in my life did I as much as see the guy.”

### **The reporter**

“The Delta Organization headed by the Delta bosses, a criminal, a lawyer and a businessman, is something that exists. And I am going to prove it, no matter what it takes ...”

## CHAPTER 1

### Klaas Bruinsma

#### *The polder don*

The man in the woods wipes a drop of perspiration from his eye. He is nervous and in a light trance. Virtually without moving and practically invisible, he has been standing in the dense vegetation around the entrance to Club Juliana's – Members only – for hours. His right hand is clenching a heavy caliber revolver loaded with five 3.57 magnum hollow-point bullets to make sure his aim is good and fatal.

Shadows are moving along the lawn in front of the night club on the way to their cars. They don't notice the man in the bushes. One of the guys coming out of the bar shouts something to the tall guy he is with just as he is about to get into a taxi. The tall guy, who has already got one foot in the taxi, says something to the driver, gives him a twenty-five guilder note and gets out again. He joins his friends, who have apparently just offered him a lift. His long legs take giant steps towards the Hilton Hotel parking lot. The man in the woods steps out into his path and as he walks towards him, the man aims at the body of his prey. For a fraction of a second, the man looks him in the face, emotionless, to verify his target, who instinctively realizes what is going on. He automatically grabs for his holster. He is packing a 9 millimeter Smith & Wesson pistol. He doesn't have a chance to pull it out. The killer is on the attack, so he is always faster. "No, no, it's a mistake, don't shoot ..." These are his last words. A loud bang breaks the silence. A bullet hits the victim in the chest and smashes his thorax and myocardium. Even before his body falls back and hits the ground, the tall guy is dead. Three shots fired from close range at his head finish off the job.

It is June 27, 1991, thirteen minutes past four in the morning.

Crime scene investigators examine the vicinity of *The Preacher's* corpse. Klaas Bruinsma was shot with four bullets and died instantly (photograph 't Sticht).

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From case number 0230-02201991, at the scene of the crime, recorded on tape by Detectives P. de Niet and V. Corver of the Serious Crimes Division of the Amsterdam Police Department:

It is seven fifteen on Thursday morning, 27 June 1991. We are now on Breitner Street in Amsterdam. We are near the entrance to Club Juliana's, a combination bar, night club and disco. To the right of the door, there is a sign saying *Club Juliana's. Members only. Proper attire is required. Minors under the age of 23 not admitted.* From the entrance, we turn to the right, where the staircase begins. After six steps, we arrive at a plateau. Then after approximately another yard and a half, there are five steps to the pedestrian path on Breitner Street. We are now on the sidewalk. It is daylight, it is not raining and the sidewalk is dry.

Approximately thirteen yards from the entrance to Club Juliana's in the direction of the Hilton Hotel parking lot, the lifeless body of a man is lying on the sidewalk of Breitner Street. This man is lying on his back with his head on the sidewalk tiles. His legs are on the stones surrounding the Hilton Hotel. His back is on the earth of a small triangular garden. His legs are in the direction of the thoroughfare on Breitner Street. The man's left leg is stretched out, his right leg is in a ninety degree angle. Both the man's arms are in the direction of the thoroughfare on Breitner Street. His lower arms are at a ninety degree angle to his upper arms. The man is Caucasian and has dark blond slightly curly hair. The victim's eyes are partly open. His mouth is also partly open. There is a large wound on his forehead. There is a round hole under the corner of his mouth. The man has a five o'clock shadow. The right corner of his mouth is turned downward. The back of the man's head is in a puddle of blood. We also see a small round hole in his skin near his right ear. There are still drops of blood coming from the right ear. There are several fragments of bone and skull on the sidewalk near his head and in his hair. The man is dressed in jeans with a belt in a light color. He is wearing blue socks and black suede loafers. He is also wearing a dark jacket. Under the jacket he is wearing a blue sweater. There is a perforation on his chest. The man is wearing a scarf of a light color around his neck. The scarf is slightly under the jacket. In the man's blue t-shirt there is also a perforation on his chest.

We take the following items out of the right pocket of his jacket: one tube of ointment, one piece of lined paper with the following words written on it: *K. 26 June 10.30 pm at the same place IMPORTANT*, four hundred-guilder bank notes, two twenty-five-guilder bank notes, one ten-guilder bank note, three packages of toothpicks, two pieces of blank paper from Hotel Okura and a pen, one pair of tweezers, a disposable lighter and a plastic envelope containing a small quantity of hashish. The right inside pocket is empty. In the left inside pocket we find a ballpoint pen and a comb. In the left chest pocket of the jacket we find a pair of sunglasses with a dark frame. In the left pocket of the jeans we find a cartridge clip containing fourteen cartridges with a stamp on the bottom saying *9 mm Luger SNB*. In the back pocket of Klaas Bruinsma's jeans we find nine thousand-guilder notes. In the front right pocket of the jeans we find two five-guilder coins and five one-guilder coins.

We turn the victim over on his stomach. In the back of his belt we find a Smith & Wesson pistol, the caliber is 9 mm, the model is 5904, the serial number has been filed off. In the holster of the pistol we find thirteen 9 mm



Luger SNB bullets. In the chamber of the pistol we find the same caliber of bullet. Approximately fifteen inches from the man's skull, there are three fragments of skull on the sidewalk. Up to this spot there is blood on the sidewalk.

At about seven forty-five on Thursday morning, 27 June 1991, on the request of Public Prosecutor Kortenhorst, we take possession of the remains of Klaas Bruinsma on the public street, Breitner Street in Amsterdam. On our request, the remains of Klaas Bruinsma are transported by personnel from the Municipal Health Department to Westgaarde Mortuary and placed in cold storage. This is done with the necessary accompaniment and supervision.

The corpse of Klaas Bruinsma was examined on Thursday 27 June 1991 at ten past six in the evening by Dr. J. P. Kortekaas, Coroner of the City of Amsterdam. We would like to now add the Coroner's Report: Autopsy finding regarding the corpse of Klaas Bruinsma, thirty-seven years of age. The victim was hit by four bullets, two of which were found in a twisted state in his chest and in the left corner of his jaw. Several parts of bullets with a joint weight of 13.00 grams were found in his brain. the weight of the bullet in his chest was 10.02 grams and the weight of the bullet in his jaw 8.63 grams. The victim was shot:

1. In the forehead, a fatal shot in itself
2. In the middle of the front of his chest, a fatal shot in itself
3. Under the right ear, a fatal shot in itself
4. Under the right corner of his mouth, not necessarily a fatal shot.

The bullet wounds referred to in 1, 2 and 3 can each have been fatal in themselves due to the wounds to the aorta in the chest and to the brain matter. signed by the Coroner of the City of Amsterdam

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"Fear and hatred dominated the first years of my life. Especially fear. The hatred came automatically. I was crazy about my father, but at the same time I felt enormous hatred towards that man."

This was Klaas Bruinsma's earliest memory, his hatred of his father. Klaas Bruinsma's father was unintentionally the pivot of his son's emotional life because this hatred was to dominate his life and turn itself against everything that crossed his path, with all the consequences this entailed.

"Klaas Bruinsma's childhood was no bowl of cherries," concluded the psychiatrist who drew up a report on him in the mid-1980s. In a recorded interview, he described him as a "tall, intelligent, slim and handsome young man. A young man with a great deal of self-control who knew how to put on a poker face to hide his deepest feelings." The poker face had been beaten into him by his father's fists. The interview with the psychiatrist is the only one ever recorded with Bruinsma.

"My mother's name was Gwen," he said. "She was British. We lived on Bilderdijk Street in Amsterdam. My father knocked her up four times in a row, real quick. I was the second kid. When she was no longer any good to him, my father literally kicked her out of the house. I was about five years old at the time and I never wanted to see her again. That is all I know about my mother. My father used to say she didn't know

how to take care of children. And he was right about that. As a little boy I remember the rashes I had from wearing wet underpants for such a long time.”

After his mother left, an aunt sent the children to the doctor. Malnutrition was the diagnosis. A rich businessman in an eleven-room home and children who were undernourished. “My father,” Bruinsma recalled, “turned a little brewery into a lucrative soda factory and was on his way to becoming a multimillionaire. He was so busy earning his fortune he didn’t notice his children were undernourished!

My oldest brother Charlie was the director of the same kind of factory as my father. Charlie was a hard worker, but he was not exactly smart. He always agreed with my dad about everything. I didn’t like him much. And I didn’t like my brother Anton much either. He was a year younger than me. Anton was married to the daughter of a rich banker, and that gave him a good start in the real estate world. Without her, he never would have made a success of it. I was crazy about my sister Ada. She was the only one I was really attached to.

My parents used to fight all the time. There was a lot of insecurity in our life and absolutely no room for love or warmth. But on Sunday my father would play these classical records. He turned up the volume so loud you could hear it all over the house. My love of music dates back to those days.

I had my own room in that huge house. It was the farthest from the living room so I could stay up as late as I wanted. No one was paying attention to me anyway. I created my own world in that big room with my own toys. Or I could spend all day on my father’s sailboat. All I wanted was to escape into an immense freedom, and water gave me that kind of feeling. No one could get to me there.

After his marriage was over, my father did not want to ever get married again, but it wasn’t long before he had a new girlfriend. My brother Charlie, my father’s favorite, couldn’t stand our new surrogate mother. In retrospect, I understand what he was feeling. Charlie was jealous of anyone who got my father’s attention. When I was eight years old, my father’s girlfriend moved in with us. She stayed with us up until I was twelve, and after that she would just come over for the weekends. That went on for years, up until the moment when my father decided he had had enough of her and kicked her out, just like he had kicked my mother out. It was an awful blow for me.

I was very mad at my father for kicking her out like that. She was a very nice lady who took good care of us. She was the one permanent haven of tranquility in our life. The one good peaceful person among all the garbage and violence. I loved her a lot. For the second time in my life, I had been robbed of my mother. I once bicycled past her house. I could see her through the kitchen window. I saw her standing there but I was afraid to ring the bell. I can still kick myself for being such a coward. My father just used her and then threw her away. All he gave her was a second-hand car, a real honest businessman!”

When Klaas was ten years old, the Bruinsma family left Amsterdam and moved to Crailoo near Hilversum. They moved into a large villa in the woods with a huge back yard. One housekeeper after the other came and went, and the rejected stepmother was soon replaced by a German woman fifteen years younger.

“That was when all our lives turned sour. We started having problems at school, we couldn’t concentrate any more, we didn’t do our homework and we were unmanageable. I was left back in the seventh grade at the Goois Lyceum in Bussum and without any warning, one of my brothers was taken out of school and put to work at my father’s factory in Germany. Without any explanation. My father was the one who made all the decisions.

My father was strong as an ox. A huge man without an ounce of fat on him. He was good with his hands, intelligent and inventive. A man everyone looked up to. I had a great deal of admiration for his positive traits, but when I think back to my childhood, there are very few good things I can remember. Never a hug, never a kind word.

He could be very enthusiastic about his soda though. Sometimes he would get home late at night and wake me up because he had developed a new flavor and wanted me to taste it. He taught me to sail and to play chess, but he also taught me to turn off my feelings. To be cruel and ruthless.

I have still got a lot of resentment against my father. Resentment caused by frustration because the love I felt for him was never returned. Everything my father did, he not only did well, he did perfectly. But he couldn't establish real emotional ties with people. As soon as our relationship was going well, he would start a fight. Maybe we had been out sailing all day and having a great time. I simply adored the man at moments like that. I couldn't go any higher. But then on the way home, he would suddenly start hitting me. It was so prosaic, so pointless. For him, it was normal. It was just the way he was. And he passed that on to me. It makes me sad and depressed.

He hit me a lot and he hit me hard. With all his strength. I would be standing there talking to him, and if I said something he didn't like, he would bash me in the face. There was something sadistic about him. I was not the only one he would hit. Once I woke up in the middle of the night because I hear a bashing sound downstairs. I went to have a look and I saw him literally kicking my oldest brother across the room. He was using him as a football because he hadn't done his homework.

I started drinking when I was around thirteen. In secret of course. My old man would have murdered me if he found out. A little rich boy from the neighborhood who I was friendly with invited me to a party at his house. He already had girlfriends. Not me. I was interested in sex but I hadn't done anything yet, I didn't have the nerve. I was too shy. I used to hang out with girls and they liked me well enough, but it never went any further than friendship.

At that party of his, I drank a whole bottle of whisky. It was an expensive bottle too, I had taken it from my father's liquor cabinet. I had acute alcohol poisoning. My friends took off my clothes and dumped me in the lake, then they dropped me off on my father's doorstep, still unconscious. My father was enraged. He went at me with a plank, he beat me senseless. Not that I felt anything because I was totally out of this world due to a combination of liquor, the beating and my tough skin. I was used to it by then.

My father completely lost his mind. Not because I had poisoned myself, but because I had done it with *his* liquor. He was not the slightest bit interested in my physical condition. Not that it was any better after the beating. He grounded me and he wouldn't even say for how long. Punishment and discipline were supposed to get me back on track, or so he thought. I could just go to school and come straight back home, no detours. I was careful and I obeyed. That is what fear and guilt do.

Being grounded made me start concentrating on my schoolwork. A couple of months later I had a report card with lots of As and an A+ for algebra. All the color went out of my father's face when he saw the report card. He didn't say 'Well done.' No, first he wanted to check and make sure I wasn't pulling his leg. He made an appointment to go see the teachers. They confirmed that everything was above board. There was no fraud, I had followed the rules. The teachers told him I could

play a leading role in the world of commerce. They were very impressed with my intelligence and thought I could easily go to the university.

But my dad still had the same old tendency to put me down. He kept beating me, just like he always had, but more frequently now. It seemed as if by getting good marks, I had met his expectations less than ever. I was totally confused and didn't know which way was up. I cut myself off from any kind of emotions. No one could touch me. That is when I really became rebellious, and my grades suddenly went way down. I had to switch to an easier kind of high school, it was more of a vocational school. I was stoned all day. But I still managed to get my diploma without much trouble. By then, I had already taken my first very cautious steps towards a life of crime, and I liked where I was going. I started selling hashish to the other kids at school. I kept going until I was caught in the act one day.

I was so scared of my dad the whole time. As a child I would stand in front of him and pee in my pants because I was so scared and I knew he was going to start beating me. But when I was fourteen, it was over. One day I walked up to him and I said, 'You are not going to hit me any more. That was the last time.' It worked. There were still plenty of arguments, but he got the message. He never touched me again, not once.

The harm had been done though. The antagonism with my father shaped the whole rest of my life. I was damaged. My attitude to the outside world is the same as it was to my father: no compromises. Regardless of whether I am dealing with the authorities or my friends, I always stand up for my rights. It doesn't matter how scared I am or how strong the other guy is or if he has a pistol bigger than mine, no one can deny me my rights, even if they have got the whole Red Army behind them.

My father was the one constant theme in my life. He once wrote me a letter. He felt the father-son relationship was very important and suggested that we go to a psychiatrist. Not so that we could solve our problems together, but just to show me how disturbed I was! I was so angry about that letter.

I think that underneath it all, he did love me. That was also clear from the letter. But he was making me responsible for everything. He had no idea what kind of influence he had had on me as a father. He came to see me when I was in prison in Denmark for smuggling drugs. He just stood there and cried. The guards were there too and I was so embarrassed. But the worst thing was that he said 'What have you done to me?'

I have been selling hashish ever since I was fourteen. On a small scale. My real career dealing hashish started when I was twenty. I borrowed money from the bank and bought some hashish for it and sold it. I had plenty of contacts. In no time, I had a partner with a lot more experience than me. When he decided to leave the whole drug dealing thing, I went on with Thea, the woman who had worked with him for nine years. It went very well, I must say. I was growing, even though everything I did was in the underworld. Before then, I had always felt no one was giving me any respect.

I knew I had certain capacities, but I had never had an opportunity to demonstrate what I could do. I could get along with people well, I negotiated, I organized and coordinated transports. Just like my father had done with his factory. But I outdid him financially, and I had done it on my own. I knew that was the only way I could get back at my father, by earning more money than he had ever seen. That is how I got to him. It was worse than any of the blows he ever gave me. For the first time in my life, it gave me confidence. I know there is only one way out of this

labyrinth of violence. A violent death is part of a violent life. My fate is sealed but I am not afraid of it. I accept it. That is why I can take risks.”

Klaas Bruinsma wanted to die like a gangster and he did. But by then it was a style he had long abandoned, and dying was only a formality. Some say he was asking for it. Only it wasn't a T-Ford tearing past with an army of hit men on board armed with 45 caliber Thomson machine guns, it was a lone shooter who got to him. It was all over in five seconds. Four flashes of light, four bangs breaking through the silence, and then the sound of a sack of potatoes falling to the ground. Whether the true killer was ever arrested is something no one knows. The ex-cop convicted for the killing has always denied it.

Was it a question of honor, or of a comment someone didn't like? It couldn't have been about money, because Klaas Bruinsma's pockets had been empty for quite some time. He was just a shadow of the man so respected in the circles he associated with, whose dignified style of dressing and patient way of telling a long story earned him the nickname *The Preacher*.

Bruinsma's death came as a relief to most of the people who knew him, but to some it meant a serious financial shortfall since there was now no longer any chance of ever getting back the huge sums of money he owed them. Bruinsma had never really recovered from the loss of a mega transport of hashish worth 450 million guilders in 1990. Towards the end of his life, his finances and his morale both hit rock bottom. The bubble had burst. In an effort to keep up the last remnants of his once so illustrious and carefully constructed criminal image, he had to borrow money from the people around him. Paradoxically enough, it was the millions he still owed that kept him going for a while.

In August 1989 Klaas Bruinsma was arrested as a suspect in a bank robbery. As it happened, the suspicions turned out to be unfounded. But the downward spiral had started. It would not be long before members of the Bruinsma group were tossing dice to see who would liquidate Bruinsma (photograph Willem Middelkoop).

The atmosphere was serene in the small room at the funeral hall. No one said a word. The cremation at Vijfhoek in Zaandam was not the Corleone-like funeral the *polder don* had imagined. There was no cars filled with flowers and wreaths. No respectful farewells from other underworld dons, no procession of mourners. Even the sometime wise guys Bruinsma had done business with for years were not there that day. Only a handful of friends and relatives. His brothers Charlie and Anton and his sister Ada had preferred a closed cremation. The family had had its fill of the negative publicity after Klaas' death.

Klaas' lawyer John Engelsma was one of the people who came to pay his respects. On the request of Klaas' family, he had made the arrangements for the cremation. Before the official ceremony began, Bruinsma's girlfriend and confidant Lin Chi Kwan put a few small things in the coffin while Etienne Urka looked on, personal belongings and some Chinese bank notes. A Chinese ritual to guarantee a safe journey to the hereafter.

There was an enormous red curtain behind the walnut coffin. The lid of the coffin was open. Bruinsma looked very dignified as he lay there in one of the black suits he liked to wear with the nicely tailored high lapels. A mere imitation of the

distinguished man he had once been. The bullet holes in his face had been skillfully concealed, though one dark shadow was still visible just under the hairline.

The ritual was over in less than ten minutes. Lin Chi Kwan, Etienne Urka and John Engelsma had just left the funeral hall to go to the parlor where they could talk in a more relaxed way when the funeral hall door was suddenly shoved open and five men came out. They were detectives from the Inter-Regional Team who had been hiding behind the red curtain during the ceremony, expecting to see or hear something that could help them with their investigation. It was a known statistical fact that murderers were usually in their victim's circle of friends and acquaintances. Studying how people behaved at funerals was part of the standard procedure of an investigation team. What is more, it was an excellent opportunity to observe the pecking order in the Bruinsma group from close by.

But that was not how it worked out. There was no evidence that John Engelsma, Etienne Urka or Kin Chi Kwan were in a position of authority vis-à-vis the others. Nor was there any evidence that they were connected to the murder in any way. Embarrassed, the investigators apologized to Etienne Urka and Lin Chi Kwan, nodded to John Engelsma, and beat a hasty retreat.

For the detectives from the North Holland / Utrecht Inter-Regional Investigation Team, Bruinsma's murder was a godsend. The observation team had been following Bruinsma for months and registered the names of everyone he met. On the evening of the murder, they had also been observing at Club Juliana's but at a certain moment they had called it a day, according to a witness, since there *was nothing going on with Bruinsma anyway*. If they had stayed a quarter of an hour longer, they finally would have seen something going on in the Bruinsma case.

In all the years of the investigation, nothing worth mentioning had ever happened. Not a single gram of drugs could be directly linked to Bruinsma. Some team members believed Bruinsma's importance was greatly overestimated. At any rate they were sure he was no longer active. His heyday as a mega importer up until 1986 was apparently over. Tens of millions of guilders of the taxpayers' money had been more or less wasted. With four shots, the fiasco was shot to kingdom come.

Bruinsma had gradually been demoted from the Major League to the amateur division where *free spirits* tried to organize a shipment of their own now and then. There was no way he could compete with the new generation of drug yuppies, kids in their twenties with fast talk and faster cars. But he still had a reputation so the investigation was prolonged. The authorities wanted it to end with a big catch.

Bruinsma had lost his sharp edge and had become reckless. He looked shabby and his behavior was unpredictable, sometimes he was openly provocative and at other times he acted as if he couldn't care less. He got caught in the kind of traps he would have seen coming from miles away in the mid-1980s when he still had his cocaine habit under control. For example a plastic grocery bag tucked under the windshield wiper of his armored Fiat. There was a time when he would have immediately got the point and certainly would never have touched the bag. But the new Bruinsma, his mind ravaged by cocaine, just grabbed the bag, irritated, and tossed it on the street. "They are after me, don't you see that?" he would shout to his friends.

One time he completely lost his temper. It was already the third bag in a row. He had tossed away the first one with even thinking about it, as if it was some schoolboy prank. The second time though, it started to get on his nerves. It was clear that they were trying to drive him crazy. "If it is war they want, that is what they will get!" he roared. If it was the police who were playing tricks on him, he would get back

at them. A Stinger ground-to-air-missile would be coming their way all gift wrapped and tied with a bow and a note saying "The next one will be coming by air mail if you go on like this." He took Columbia as an example, where drug barons had just blown up an apartment building with sixty people in it. He thought it was great, "That is what I am going to do with the police station," he said.

Cocaine, liquor and a shortage of sleep were the ideal breeding grounds for his paranoia. In early 1991 he was also considering the possibility of having Chief Inspector Jan van de Wetering disappear in his trunk. Van de Wetering, the Amsterdam chief of the police force's Criminal Investigation Department, was not afraid of anyone, and not of Bruinsma either. Van de Wetering could fill a criminal encyclopedia all on his own just with the facts he knew by heart, but he was also a man with a selective memory who didn't mind telling a little fib now and then. Van de Wetering had been after Bruinsma for years, the polder don was thoroughly convinced of that. He might well have been the one to put the plastic bags under the windshield wiper, just as a warning: *Keep doing the things you do and one of these days you'll end up in a plastic bag yourself.* Or maybe someone wanted to compare his fingerprints with something they had in the archives. At any rate they were still interested in him, Bruinsma knew that for sure. He was still playing a role of importance in the world of crime.

It wasn't until years after Bruinsma's death that the real story behind the plastic bags came out. A detective on the underworld pay roll once told Bennie Saab, one of Bruinsma's business buddies, that the Inter-Regional Team had thought up an emergency plan to get what they wanted. The pressure from above had apparently become unbearable. Every day some big shot would come by begging for something that could be passed on to the Department of Justice. There was a whole army of detectives backed by a huge budget, each of them the best in his field and strictly screened for reliability. But they could not have caught a purse snatcher, let alone find an informant who could get them anywhere near Bruinsma and his organization. There was no indication of any breakthrough in sight.

This is why they started putting plastic bags under the windshield wiper. Just as they hoped, Bruinsma would remove and discard them, and the detectives later came and picked them up. The bags were later "found" when Bruinsma's house was searched, this time filled with cocaine. Lucky for them, it just so happened the Dactyloscopic Division of the Crime Lab in Rijswijk found fingerprints on the bags leading straight to Bruinsma, the boss himself! The fingerprints were to serve as indisputable evidence in a case against the Bruinsma gang, which was perhaps innocent of this particular crime but not of all the earlier ones they had never been arrested for. So in the larger scheme of things, justice was served.

Since it would insure Bruinsma's disappearance into one of the country's best guarded prisons as a guest of the state up until retirement age, the emergency plan was called Operation Early Retirement. A conviction for smuggling cocaine could put him away for fifteen years, but one for smuggling even a huge quantity of hashish would only put him away for two years at a semi-open prison like Bankenbosch somewhere in the rural province of Drenthe, with plenty of sports and recreation. They called it resocialization. If your conduct was good, they would let you go home on weekends after half a year and go home altogether after another couple of months.

The team had very different plans for the polder don. Of course the detective who told Bennie Saab about the plan was not in favor of the tactic but he had no choice in the matter, either you swam along with the team or you drowned. And in

essence, everyone agreed the conventional methods were not working. By the late 1980s the investigation into Bruinsma and his alleged successors had already cost about twenty-five million guilders. Ernst Hirsch Ballin, Minister of Justice at the time, had more or less signed a blank check in the hope of getting the organized crime genie back into the bottle. After Bruinsma's death in June 1991, it was difficult to accept the fact that the three-year investigation by sixty elite detectives had led to naught. The next target, and preferably of the same caliber, had to pop into place right away if the Inter-Regional Team was to survive.

That is how the efforts to track the Bruinsma heirs were launched. No one had any idea who they could possibly be. And no one bothered to ask whether the remains of the Bruinsma empire were even worth tracking or whether there was anything left to inherit. It was no secret in the underworld that Bruinsma was deeply in debt at the time of his death. But the authorities were nonetheless relentless in their pursuit of the prize, the leading men in the Bruinsma organization. There was a great deal of pressure from the media and plenty of investigators. It was evidently in their interest to put up a smoke screen to keep their own sidelines out of sight. Operation Delta was launched. The most expensive and most prestigious investigation in Dutch history! By the end of the 1990s, it had cost anywhere from a hundred to a hundred and fifty million guilders.

I met Bruinsma's former girlfriend Lin Chi Kwan late in 1997, a striking oriental beauty with an authentic Amsterdam accent. I ran into her at Sal Meijer's, a kosher delicatessen on Schelde Street in Amsterdam. Her face looked vaguely familiar. "Hi, Bas," she said, "it has been a long time, how are you?"

"I am fine," I said and I risked a guess, "Aren't you Lin, Cha's sister?" Cha Kwan was an old classmate of mine from elementary school. He was one of the main suspects in the case against Etienne, who was on trial at the time for importing a large shipment of soft drugs. The Public Prosecutor thought Kwan was in charge of transportation and Urka's partner. What is more, the media called him a member of the Delta Organization, the organized crime group supposed to have risen from the remains of the Bruinsma era. Kwan was charged with belonging to a criminal organization and later acquitted when the case was appealed.

About three and a half decades earlier, we had grown up in the same neighborhood, the Red Light District in Amsterdam, a tiny free state where anything went. Wise guys like Haring Arie, the Veth brothers, Black Jopie de Vries and Frits van de Wereld were running the neighborhood, where no one had ever heard of junkies yet. It was a safe neighborhood that pretty much took care of itself and the police rarely ever came around. I remembered the Kwan family as nice people, decent and hospitable. There was always a plate at the table for the hungry kids in the neighborhood. The whole family including the children worked at Daddy Kwan's restaurant on Bethaniën Street. He sold the best Chinese noodles and the most generous portions at the lowest price.

From when I was about six to nine, Cha and I were in the same class. He was a year older and more experienced, so he was the obvious leader. Cha's Chinese blood had always been more of an advantage than a problem for him. Not that people's background played that much of a role in our neighborhood. He made quite an impression with the dart gun with pressure barrel that he used to wear in his belt. I switched to another school when I was nine and lost track of the Kwan family. I hadn't seen Lin since then.



I had heard talk about Lin Chi Kwan being on the inside of everything in the Bruinsma group. She had been Klaas Bruinsma's girlfriend for years and some said she was even a prominent silent partner in the hashish business with very good connections in the Orient, a factor to take into account. She was said to have picked up the pieces after Klaas' death and to have gone on with the business, but that was just a rumor. "I would love to talk to you some time," I said. Her initial enthusiasm cooled off as soon as she understood I was a reporter, but she kept smiling. I gave her my phone number. She called a couple of weeks later and we made an appointment to meet at 747, a Chinese restaurant on the corner of Oudezijds Voorburgwal and Oude Hoog Street, less than a minute's walk from where we had lived thirty-five years earlier.

Lin was reluctant to talk and asked me not to publish her real name. She was scared. Bruinsma's former business partners were in the eye of the storm. No one knew what was what, who was a friend and who a foe. "Everyone is having problems with everyone else and sooner or later the whole situation is going to explode," one of Bruinsma's former partners had predicted. That was supposedly why two of the partners had themselves arrested for the possession of arms. When the shit hit the fan, prison was going to be the safest place around. Lin Chi wanted to stay out of the battle and wasn't willing to name any names.

As a child in the neighborhood, in 1982 she had met the rising star Klaas Bruinsma at the home of Frits Adriaanse on Zeedijk. Adriaanse's nickname was Van de Wereld, *Of the Whole World*. He was a neighborhood legend, a professional smuggler, first of cigarettes and later hashish. He was the big man behind *De Lammie*, a smuggling vessel legendary for the unprecedented amounts of hashish it could transport. Klaas considered Frits his mentor. He was the eager apprentice and like a dry sponge, he sucked up everything Frits had learned from forty years of illegal business. Lin remembered Klaas as a charismatic figure with an irresistible sense of humor, usually with himself as the target of his jokes. He would make jokes about his looks, his height and his awkwardness in dealing with it. He came from a wealthy family and was well read and could talk about anything. A bit out of place with his eloquent way of talking, especially in that kind of neighborhood. A bit fancy shmancy for us.

According to Lin, Bruinsma didn't start ascending to power until 1984. He saw the period before that as lead time. A kind of traineeship, like what you have in the real world if you are new at a multinational. First you look around to see what everyone else is doing and then you try and make some improvements. Lin Chi and Bruinsma always stayed in touch, way up until the very end. "Klaas was doomed to be defeated," Lin said. "He was well aware of that. In the last years of his life, he had these awful depressions that kept getting worse. He would sometimes start crying and couldn't stop. His past was catching up with him. He was sinking deeper and deeper into his own garbage, and he felt there was no way he could get back to a normal life, no matter how hard he tried.

Simple things could intrigue him, going out sailing or taking a trip by train. It wasn't the money, money was just a tool. What he liked was the game itself. But he was losing his skill at playing the game he had once been so good at. He was losing his connection with reality and becoming a danger to himself and to others. For himself and the people around him, Klaas had to die. It didn't have anything to do with cocaine. There was never any cocaine when he was with me."

When Lin saw the pictures in the paper of Klaas' lifeless body in front of Café Juliana's, she knew he had now found his tranquility, and would not have been that

unhappy with how it had come about. Like an Indian chief who walks off into the woods without further ado to await his death, Klaas chose his moment. It had been a kind of suicide. Death by provocation. "Life made Klaas tired."

His debts of more than seventeen million guilders made him tired, always hanging over his head like a sword that could fall any minute. His numerous enemies made him tired, and the power games just to stay in the running. The pressure the whole underworld entailed exhausted him, and sometimes death can be a liberation. That is why Klaas kept outside the law, even the law of the underworld. His former partners wanted nothing to do with him. Abandoning his former habits, now he would go out on his own, provoking everyone around him. Insulting people, threatening them and extorting money. Even from his best friends. The same friends were to ultimately decide his fate. He knew he was tempting fate, and he still went ahead.

He had become indifferent, not because he felt invulnerable but because he didn't care any more. There was nothing left for him. His power had crumbled, his days at the top were over. The depressions lasted longer and became worse and more frequent. He used to have them a couple of times a year, but at the end it was a few times a month or even every week. Sometimes one depression would start where the last one ended. Combined with the excessive hashish and cocaine and drinking, they put an end to his position of power. There was not a very cynical edge to his self-mockery.

The Amsterdam police also knew there was no way back for Bruinsma. "He was on a roller coaster going down down down," one detective at the Criminal Investigation Department said. "He would do bizarre things. He beat up prostitutes. Threatened people left and right. He gave people verbal death sentences, even the people he used to work with. You can't do that with impunity. He was a time bomb for himself and the people around him and he was disturbing the peace. We just wanted to get rid of him. He also started threatening us, that was the problem. Let nature go its course, that is what we were thinking. Why intervene? This was a man considered an enemy of the state, a plague. That was one thing everyone was in agreement about. What is more, there was the suspicion he was planning the murder of certain authorities. There was evidence he had played a role in any number of liquidations, so it was not so far-fetched. And the law is powerless if murders are committed by hit men from abroad.

We deliberately ignored the information from the underworld about his impending liquidation. Normally speaking, we would have had to intervene or at any rate to warn him. That is standard procedure. But Bruinsma was someone who had to be eliminated. We were going to just wait until the dust settled. Then we were going to look and see what was left of the Bruinsma group."

Klaas Bruinsma was an underworld agent, what was called a *matchmaker*. Someone who could bring people together for some specific purpose. A spider in the web of the Dutch Network. But contrary to what the Ministry of Justice analyses might say, there was no evidence of organized crime with a solid structure or strict hierarchy. In the last months of his life, Bruinsma would change partners and bodyguards almost every day. There was no punching in and punching out, no bonuses and no overtime. No drops of blood exchanged, no oaths sworn to pictures of the Virgin Mary. There were sometime partners like Etienne Urka, *the bookkeeper* Edwin S., Sam (Simon) K., Johnny M., the British Roy Adkins, the partners Maiers and Cohen, the inseparable duo Bennie Saab and Tommie Sanborn, two or three chauffeurs who also served as bodyguards and a couple of guys just around for

certain projects like Karel Vosseveld and Stephan Cherval. All of whom also had their own things going on that Bruinsma had no interest in or even no knowledge of.

"The rest of it was just made up by the reporters," *the bookkeeper* told me from prison. "The hundreds of armed staff member he was supposed to have, the hierarchic structure, the special divisions for violence, transporting and money laundering, whatever. All nonsense. The whole structure mainly consisted of friends and acquaintances from the drug world who would keep running into each other. Often just by chance. At any rate I was never able to discover any kind of structure. You might as well call it *unorganized crime*."

Not that Bruinsma would not have loved to see himself as the boss of an Italian style secret society. "I am going to bring all those people together," he once told his right hand man Etienne Urka. "We are going to be the biggest crime organization in the Netherlands." But he never made good on his promise. He didn't have the discipline. Don Klaas was good at manipulating, he would try and get everyone to do what he wanted. That is a short-term thing, not a way to build up a close knit organization with people willing to do anything for you.

Each of the guys had their own specialty, their own interests, but without being under his authority. They didn't work *for* him, they worked *with* him. There were hashish importers. transporters and exporters. Bruinsma was not paying them regular wages, and if the shipments stopped for any reason, they wouldn't get paid at all. They were independent entrepreneurs, unorganized and unmonitored. "Have you got something coming in? Then I know somewhere you can store it or someone to take it off your hands." Or "Have you got a half empty container coming in from that harbor? Nice, then I can put some of my stuff in it." There were also the *honest businessmen* who came in for a few million guilders now and then. They would invest the money they had earned off the books or try and double it. So there were plenty of periodic links between people. And if a project did not work out or was taking too long, they would just as easily drop it and go their own way. "Better luck next time."

Some of the people became friends and were even loyal to each other. That was something Bruinsma experienced too, though he was just as quick to break off a friendship. That had become second nature to him, to break off connections that came too close to him, to his feelings. It was not winning him any popularity contests. That is why in the end, there wasn't any more loyalty either, let alone the kind of close knit framework needed for an effective criminal organization.

By then the stories were already circulating at the media and the Department of Justice, and the stories were becoming more exciting, since factual information from the Criminal Investigation Department has a tendency to get mixed up with gossip. "The facts have to be creatively processed," a chief inspector at the Amsterdam CID commented, "otherwise no one would ever start a preliminary investigation. Bruinsma was nothing. Everyone knew it. But he still deserved to go to jail. It is hard to come up to a CID officer and say 'You know that guy is down and out nowadays, he isn't earning a penny, but we still think he is active in the drug trade.' That might have been the reality, but it was not enough to get the CID interested."

On the one hand, there were practical minded Public Prosecutors who said "That Bruinsma gang is a bunch of amateurs who got lucky and earned some money, and now let's address the real problems. The Turkish Mafia for example, or the Yugoslavs and Russians." On the other hand, there were the more theoretically minded who were less familiar with day-to-day practice. They held that there was a well-organized Mafia-like organization with special cells, special divisions for the

import, the liquidations, the finances, the media, whatever. People who largely based their mind set and investigation policies on what they read in the newspapers.

The brothers Alexander (left) and Branco (right) Marianovic.

André Brilleman (photographs left and below).

Those in the know say André Brilleman was one of Klaas Bruinsma's first victims. He and his friend Alexander Marianovic are said to have set up the *ketchup murder*. Bruinsma told Marianovic to liquidate drug dealer Hugo E. Instead, Marianovic poured ketchup over the *corpse*, took a Polaroid picture, and pocketed the 300,000 guilders for the job. With this little trick, Marianovic and Brilleman signed their own death sentence. According to a member of the Bruinsma group, it was a CID investigator who gave Marianovic the photograph to *verify* the murder. In 1994, Marianovic's brother Branco confessed to the murder of Klaas Bruinsma (photographs Bas van Hout).

"In the mid-1980s," one of his partners recalled, "Bruinsma still had all his wits about him. That was the old Bruinsma, the man I respected. One of his strong points was the good contact he had with Pakistanis and people from the Middle East. He could somehow talk them into sending guys to the Netherlands. Hit men. They would do a job and off they would go. Whenever he wanted to *get someone out of the way*, he would just have one of those guys sent over. Bruinsma's philosophy was you only get one chance, so you have to make sure you hit your target. He didn't trust the Dutch as far as that was concerned. The Yugoslav Alexander Marianovic, who had done odd jobs for the group, was gotten rid of this way after he cheated Bruinsma. The hit man was flown in, did the job, and left on the next flight." Bruinsma was later to tell Etienne Urka he had *solved the Marianovic problem*. That is all, he was smart enough not to go into further detail. Today's friend could be tomorrow's foe. Afterwards he contacted Marianovic's wife and had an affair with her. "It was a kind of necrophilia and it turned him on," the partner recalled. "First murder the husband and then fuck the wife. Like when a serial killer goes back to the scene of the crime to relive the excitement. Klaas was a little bit like that."

Once Klaas asked his right hand man Etienne Urka if he would shoot his bodyguard and friend Geurt Roos. "Urka thought Klaas must have lost his mind and looked at him as if he was making an indecent proposal." The whole idea did not come as a surprise to another faithful Bruinsma follower. "Klaas always had these nutty ideas. He would test your loyalty by asking you to do the craziest things. Just to see how far he could go. And how far you would go for him. Were you willing to die for him? That turned him on. Especially if you would actually go ahead and do it.

Once when Etienne was having a problem with a short-lived cocaine addiction, Bruinsma said to the professional criminal Roy Adkins, 'Etienne is becoming dangerously unmanageable. Maybe he will have to do something about that.' Etienne had taken an immediate liking to Roy Adkins and from the first time they met, the feeling was mutual. Nice guy. A typical old-fashioned bank robber. He came to Holland to sell the loot from a jewelry heist. Gold and diamonds. Klaas was quick to buy it all. Roy had brains and he used them. Klaas had his own plans for him. 'You ought to stop that nonsense. Robbing banks and jewelry stores isn't going to do you any good. Let us take a look at the contacts you have on the other shore. Maybe we can move some hashish via you.' And it worked out fine."

They earned money together, lots of money. Roy had the right contacts. What is more, Bruinsma saw him as a man who could kill someone if he had to, or at any rate arrange for it to be done. He had the right contacts. That made things a lot easier in the world they lived in, where violence was viewed as a business-like solution. In no time, Bruinsma had a new right hand and Etienne Urka was now his left one. "That is how *the Etienne problem* came up. 'Roy, if things get out of hand with Etienne, would you back me up if I had him taken care of?' 'Of course,' Roy said. 'Not that it is going to come to that, Klaas. But I would be right behind you all the way if the problem gets out of hand.'

That is how Etienne's best friends were making plans to get him out of the way if his problem got out of the hand. He didn't find out about it until later, when Bruinsma happened to mention it during a dinner party. 'You know Etienne, your life was hanging by a very thin thread for a while there.'

'What do you mean, Klaas?' Etienne asked. 'We were going to liquidate you if your coke habit got out of hand,' Klaas explained. 'Just in case you became a risk factor.' Roy interrupted his business friend. 'Klaas, why are you telling him that?' 'Well,' Klaas said, 'then at least we all know where we stand. That ought to be possible, don't you think, among friends? I would expect the same from you if I was of unsound mind.'

Roy was not happy with the way the conversation was going. Later he spoke to Etienne separately and said, 'You understand, don't you, Etienne, that I am loyal to Klaas.' The Englishman felt he had been somehow compromised by what Bruinsma said and was afraid of how Etienne might react. 'Of course, Roy, don't worry. I am not going to bother you. After all, I know Klaas, don't I?'

The man never spoke about it again, but Etienne would never forget that conversation. He had been warned. His friend was not going to make an exception for anyone, that much was clear."

In September 1990, Adkins was shot in the head from close by at a bar on Leidseplein in Amsterdam. No one had any doubts about Klaas Bruinsma's involvement in the murder. Things were going downhill with *The Preacher* on all fronts. Matters were no longer going the way he wanted. He was headed in a new direction and started doing the kind of deals that had been inconceivable up until then. He wanted to go into dealing cocaine for example with Charlie Da Silva from Chile. In the past, this had been something that could not even be discussed. But cocaine was a lucrative business and could give his crumbling empire new hope. It was compact merchandise compared to hashish, a lot less fuss and bother and the profit margins were considerably higher.

This meant the end of Etienne Urka's career with Bruinsma. Not because he had suddenly become such a good boy, but because he was a pragmatist. He didn't want to live that life any more, he didn't want that kind of rhythm. He went to live abroad with his girlfriend and only came back if he felt like it or for some very important reason. Bruinsma was enraged. And jealous. He thought Etienne should have asked his permission first before starting a serious relationship with a woman. "He wouldn't allow himself to get seriously involved with a woman," Urka later recalled, "and no one else could either."

Seething with frustration, Bruinsma completely lost it. One night he shot a whole round of bullets into a garbage can somewhere along the road just because he hadn't been able to get Etienne on his cell phone. He was going to murder him. Charlie from Chile was there and still remembered the incident.

In December 1990, Bruinsma and Charlie thought up a plan. Bruinsma invited Etienne Urka *for a ride*. Charlie from Chile insisted on sitting in back. That could be threatening under normal conditions, and certainly now. Klaas was driving, something he otherwise never did. All three of them were edgy and tense. Roy Adkins had recently been brutally murdered, and this could well be Etienne's last ride. Etienne figured he would just wait and see what happened. He thought about all the good times they had had together. He was the only one Klaas had ever been able to really trust. And now this. Years earlier, his psychiatrist had cautioned him about Bruinsma. "You can't associate with someone who has no limits without getting hurt yourself at some point. Bruinsma has no one to monitor him, no Board of Directors to check on what he is doing. There is no way of predicting what can happen if someone like that loses it." Etienne had not listened to the psychiatrist but now, sitting in the car with Charlie in back and Klaas at the wheel, his words came to mind.

Bruinsma broke the silence. Maybe the tension was getting to be too much for him. He asked if they were still friends and if Etienne was planning to murder them. Etienne burst out laughing. It was not him but Klaas and Charlie who were scared out of their wits all this time. Etienne saw Bruinsma's frightened expression and put away the gun he had held under his armpit all this time aimed at Charlie's ribs. With only the slightest of movements, he could have shot Charlie right through the seat. And then Klaas. "We were more scared of him than he was of us," Charlie later admitted. But it had been a warning. Now Etienne knew it was time to take a step back.

Other business partners of Bruinsma's also began to grow uneasy. He had become unpredictable and a danger for everyone around him. One day he would ask Bennie Saab what he thought of the idea of liquidating Etienne, and the next day he would tell Etienne that maybe they ought to get rid of Saab. The plans were becoming more and more absurd. He was going to blow up an airplane. He thought it would be a good way to go down in history. Or what about the main police station in Amsterdam? Just in case they came after him. He had the missiles all ready to go, he just had to push a button. If he went on like that, it could lead to casualties. He was a time bomb that could go off any minute. He had to be stopped.

In early 1991, Bruinsma's former friends agreed it was time to talk about early retirement. If Bruinsma did not change within the next couple of months, *The Preacher* would be *relieved of all his functions* before the summer started. One former Bruinsma partner admitted that he knew for sure Martin Hoogland, the former policeman sentenced to twenty years in prison in 1994 for the murder of Klaas Bruinsma, had not committed the murder. "You want to know how I can be so sure of that?" he added rhetorically. "Because we were behind the murder ourselves!" They had tossed a coin to see who would do it, heads or tails just to keep it simple. It was not about whether it would happen, just about who would do it. The one who threw heads first would do the job.

"A friend of mine threw tails and so did I. One of the others threw heads and had to see to the whole thing. No, I am not going to say who it was. But it certainly was not Martin Hoogland, that is for sure. He was just at the wrong place at the wrong time, too bad for him."

## "I AM THE REAL MURDERER OF KLAAS BRUINSMA"

Three years ago Klaas Bruinsma alias *The Preacher* was shot and killed in front of the Hilton Hotel in Amsterdam. Former policeman Martin H. is now serving a prison sentence for the murder of the drug baron. And unrightly so,

according to a former Yugoslav who claims he and he alone was the one who murdered the Dutch Mafia boss. To avenge the honor of his brother. *Panorama* reporter Bas van Hout had an exclusive interview with him.

"I am the one who shot Klaas Bruinsma." In 1994, Branco Marianovic from Montenegro revealed in *Panorama* that it was him and not Martin Hoogland who murdered Klaas Bruinsma (photograph Bas van Hout).

The liquidation was to be *fast and painless*. Bruinsma was afraid of torture, he had told the psychiatrist who wrote an extensive report for the court in connection with an earlier homicide case. Bruinsma stated at one of their sessions that if someone tortured him, he would tell them everything he knew. That is why his final wish was for his death to be fast and painless. And fast and painless it was, he was dead even before his body hit the ground. The first shot tore his aorta apart. He was so high from the liquor and cocaine he didn't even notice. "No, no, it's a mistake, don't shoot," were his last words, said the Montenegrin killer. I tracked down in 1994 with Jan Boon, Martin Hoogland's lawyer. We made a video tape of the man, Branco Marianovic, who confessed he had killed Bruinsma and not Martin Hoogland. His motive was revenge because it was a known fact that Bruinsma had killed his brother, the hit man Alexander Marianovic.

He had followed Bruinsma for weeks and observed everything he did so he would not miss his target. He wanted to get him at just the right moment. Bruinsma's bodyguards happened to be off that night, and the Montenegrin took advantage of the opportunity. He had been hiding in the bushes around the Hilton Hotel all evening. He was able to describe the vicinity in great detail. The gun, the caliber, the surroundings, the getaway route. According to Marianovic, Bruinsma never even took out the gun was carrying, a 9 millimeter parabellum Smith & Wesson he had been given as a gift by one of his partners. Bruinsma never had a chance. "Bang, bang, bang, bang, four shots, one right after the other," Marianovic reconstructed the last moments of Bruinsma's life. "One in the chest, three from close by in the head when he was on the ground." The end of a Mafia dream and the beginning of a myth.

Etienne Urka was taking a shower when the phone rang and he heard from Bruinsma's lawyer John Engelsma that Bruinsma had been shot that night. Engelsma asked him to come to his office that day, there were a lot of arrangements to be made. Etienne Urka hung up the phone and it was like a load was off his shoulders. But it was not over yet. On the contrary. Bruinsma had left a sizeable legacy behind, be it in a negative sense. Shortly before his death, Bruinsma had said to any number of people, all criminals of the most dangerous type, "Let me borrow some money from you. If anything happens to me, you can always get it back from Etienne, he is in charge of my money." The first Etienne heard of this was when the creditors came to him to get the debts paid. There were some twenty million guilders involved in all. An amount of seventeen million guilders was owed to Bruinsma partners Saab and Sanborn alone, not including interest. And there were sizable debts to Sam K., John M., Cohen and Maiers. Someone was going to have to pay.

Victim  
Entrance to Club Juliana's  
Loading platform  
Gate  
Parking lot

Taxi stop  
Breitner Street  
Submitted by J. Schoelin and certified by the Examining Judge  
Amsterdam Municipal Police

A police diagram of the site of the crime. It was at this spot on the east side of the Hilton Hotel that Klaas Bruinsma was shot and killed at a quarter past four in the morning on 27 June 1991.

There was also another promise Etienne Urka had to make good on. He had once promised *The Preacher*, who loved sailing more than anything else, that he would have a grave at sea. "No burial and no cremation," Klaas said, "Etienne, I want you to take me out to the Kattegat and toss me overboard." Shortly after Bruinsma's death, Etienne went to a relation of theirs, an expert at breaking in and breaking out, with an unusual request. He wanted him to steal Klaas Bruinsma's corpse and deposit it in the depths of the North Sea in keeping with the don's last wish. No matter what it cost. All the partners would chip in. It was the least they could do. To pay their respects. After all, they had all had some pretty good times together. The preparations were made, but in the end the plan never went through. The captain of the ship hired to do the job said the currents in the Kattegat would make the body float up to the surface, so it was not a good idea. Klaas Bruinsma did wind up in the ocean though, at any rate his ashes did, or part of them. The wind was not exactly blowing in the right direction when his ashes were thrown overboard and most of them stuck to the bow so that Bruinsma's returned to the port.

Shortly after the murder, ex-cop Martin Hoogland was arrested as the main suspect. Hoogland had served on the police force in the turbulent Warmoes Street period. He made the switch in the 1980s and became a full-time criminal. As a member of the notorious Belgrade group, he soon made a name for himself as a hard-hitting hoodlum very familiar with both sides of the line. He could act like a criminal and act like a cop. Martin was respected because he knew his way around, even though his past as a cop did sometimes make people wonder. His Serbian buddies saw him as a real he-man who had no trouble accepting their *shoot first talk later* mentality. Hoogland was released soon after his first run in with the cops because officers at the police station had creatively messed up the file.

That was about the time when Etienne Urka and Martin Hoogland happened to run into each other. "Hey, man, so you are really one of us now, Martin," Etienne said with a big smile and got into his car. "Do I have to watch out for you now, are you gonna get me for that murder?" Martin asked. "After all, Bruinsma was your friend. But I am ready for you," he said and opened his jacket to show Etienne the two pistols in his belt.

"No," Etienne answered. "In the first place, I have good reason to believe you didn't do it. What is more, you are the one with the guns, not me. I am unarmed. You don't have to be afraid of me. And if they do convict you for that murder and you wind up in prison, I'll send you some pocket money for the canteen."

Hoogland was going to be seeing a lot of the prison canteen. For twenty years, and he wouldn't be up for parole until 2007. And all based on a statement made by his business friend at the time, crown witness and former heroin dealer Steve Brown. Brown was later to say he knew almost for sure that Hoogland has been wrongly convicted, but it had been a nice opportunity to get rid of him. If Brown hadn't testified, he would have been convicted himself for the murder of Tonnie



Hijzelendoorn. This way he made a deal with the Department of Justice and got off scot-free, but with a price on his head.

It could have gone very differently. After all, Etienne had also been invited to come to the Hilton that night, as had the Stutterer Johan V. and Koos R., who was only a couple of feet away when Bruinsma was murdered. But Etienne had canceled all his appointments for that night. He often wondered what would have happened if he had gone. He certainly would never have gone unarmed. The bodyguards would probably have come along. Etienne would definitely have been on guard with Klaas around. "You never knew. Klaas had made too many enemies recently." At any rate the outcome of the shooting would have been different, because Urka would not have allowed himself to be slaughtered like a rabid dog.

There was essentially only one problem for Etienne Urka, a friend of his recalled. "People thought Etienne would take revenge for Bruinsma's murder." But Etienne was not out for revenge. On the contrary.

### **Death Certificate**

Bruinsma, Klaas,  
born in Amsterdam on 6 October 1953  
never married  
was pronounced dead on Thursday, 27 June 1991  
at 4:30 a.m.  
The deceased is a son of Bruinsma, Anton, deceased  
and Kelly, Gwendolyn Theresa Mary  
born in Australia.

The deceased was born on 6 October 1953  
and lived at Vancouver Street 19.  
The funeral arrangements were made by  
John Engelsma  
residing at Stadhouderskade 35, 1071 ZD Amsterdam.  
The address of death: murdered in front of Hilton Hotel.  
The cremation is to be done at Coöp PC  
on Tuesday 2 July 1991 at 2.30 p.m.  
in Zaanstad in the municipality of Zaandam.

"Roy, if Etienne becomes a problem, will you support me if I have him eliminated?" In 1990, Klaas Bruinsma was actively looking for a solution to *the Etienne problem* (photograph Bas van Hout).

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Etienne Urka**

#### ***The general***

*What the press said (and didn't say)*

***De Telegraaf*, 3 July 1982**

"He is frighteningly quick to shoot and his aim is excellent, he doesn't smoke or drink, he hones his skills at Amsterdam shooting ranges and generates panic downtown whenever he pulls out his gun for a show of power. According to the Police and Justice Departments, Etienne U. (28) is a deadly killer. No matter how many prison sentences he has served, he is incorrigibly trigger happy whenever he feels the situation calls for it. The police are afraid to arrest him with ordinary police officers because he is considered the most dangerous shot in the Netherlands."

### ***Het Parool, 8 March 1995***

"Tax Department officials have launched an offensive against Etienne U., former right hand man in the organization of Mafia boss Klaas Bruinsma. The Tax Department estimates that he owes them a total of more than twenty million guilders."

### ***Het Parool, 23 April 1995***

"The North Holland / Utrecht Inter-Regional Team launched Operation Delta early last year. The aim was to dismantle the crime syndicate of Etienne U., former number two man in the Bruinsma organization. The result of the operation is unique in the worldwide history of fighting crime. It was ultimately not Etienne U.'s Delta Organization that was dismantled but the Inter-Regional Team itself. The IRT affair even almost caused a Cabinet crisis. U. began as a simple burglar in the mid-1970s and has since risen to become an unassailable top criminal."

### ***Vrij Nederland, 3 August 1996***

"The Inter-Regional Team solely had one aim and that was to arrest Bruinsma's alleged successors, the three godfathers of Delta, according to the Police and Justice Departments the largest and most dangerous crime syndicate: former sex club bouncer Etienne U., porno dealer Charles G. and lawyer John E. The IRT was willing to go to any extreme to achieve this aim."

### ***De Volkskrant, 3 December 1996***

"U. is viewed as the successor to drug baron Klaas Bruinsma, who was murdered in June 1991, and is thought by the Justice and Police Departments to now be heading one of the most powerful crime organizations in the Netherlands."

### ***Rotterdams Dagblad, 3 December 1996***

In Haarlem the arrest of Etienne U., suspected of leading a large and ruthless crime syndicate, means the fulfillment of an age-old dream."

### ***De Telegraaf, 10 December 1996***

"An international police army of more than seven hundred officers toppled a worldwide crime syndicate yesterday, which the Justice Department claimed was run in part by prominent Amsterdam hoodlum Etienne U. (42)."

### ***Vrij Nederland, 17 May 1997***

"The worldwide campaign against Delta had to be postponed at the very last minute, when it appeared that U. and the others were well informed about the imminent threat and had taken the necessary measures to evade the Police and Justice Departments."

### **Elsevier, 25 October 1997**

In the past U. committed some pretty brutal acts of violence himself. He was in prison on several occasions, including one time for ripping off other drug dealers and a shooting. In 1975 he served a provisional sentence at a psychiatric institution for his role in the death of a soldier. According to the psychiatrists, there was an element of violence that was out of control in U.'s personality.

### **Het Parool, the Internet, 1998-today**

"John Gotti, leader of an influential Mafia family in the U.S. who managed to stay out of the authorities' hands time after time, was nicknamed the Teflon Don, a nickname that gradually seemed more appropriate for drug baron Etienne U. After all, when his case was appealed, U. was found not guilty of having taken part in a criminal organization."

### **Statement by the Amsterdam Court in the case against Etienne U., 29 March 1999**

"(...) It has not been proven beyond a doubt in this case that U. really earned the title *drug baron* given to him in the press and literature."

Etienne Urka had an image problem, to say the least. He was viewed as Public Enemy Number One. Everyone seen with Urka or referred to in the same breath was automatically corrupt or guilty or at any rate a pretty shady character. After all, Etienne Urka was the man a whole regiment of IRT investigators was after, and the North and Central Randstad Core had been especially set up just to dismantle his *Delta Organization*. The efforts to keep track of U. went on for years, cost the taxpayers millions of guilders, and finally ended in only a mini-triumph for the Justice Department when the Amsterdam Court sentenced him to six years in prison for leading a criminal organization and importing large quantities of soft drugs. The triumph was short-lived and barely half a year later, he was back on the street. There was a sense that the Amsterdam Court would not get any further in the final sentencing than the length of the remand period, a total of about a year and a half.

As he stated at the end of 1997, from the start Amsterdam Public Prosecutor Fred Teeven, known as the Number One Crime Fighter, was wary about a successful prosecution based on the available evidence. The District Court had dismissed the case. Due to the limited feasibility of the case against Etienne Urka, it was passed on to the Haarlem Court.

In the end, Teeven was right. Before the Amsterdam Court, the Public Prosecutor lost the battle that had taken almost a decade of investigation. On 29 March 1999, Urka was sentenced to a measly eighteen months in prison. Like Al Capone, Etienne Urka did not go to prison for leading a criminal organization but for tax evasion. In his closing statement, the Chairman of the Amsterdam Court expressed his doubts about the media hype surrounding Urka. "It has nonetheless appeared that everything we always thought about how good an honest day's work can be should be subjected to further investigation now that – despite all the work done by various investigation agencies, it has not been proven beyond a doubt in this case that U. really earned the title *drug baron* given to him in the press and literature."

Etienne Urka was no angel, he had an impressive criminal record, there was no doubt about that. And he made no bones about it. But was he the criminal leader who had flooded the Netherlands with tons of cocaine and hundreds of thousands of

kilograms of hashish and was responsible for any number of liquidations, the dismantling of the IRT and the fall of two Cabinet ministers? Or should the question be formulated differently? Had his past made him the right person for the IRT to target? Was it right for a hundred million guilders to be spent on prosecuting this alleged importer of illegal substances?

Whatever the case may be, Etienne Urka was cast in a leading role in the 1990s in the continuing story known as the IRT Affair. At the peak of the chase, I did my best via various channels to interview Etienne Urka. I kept on hearing that Etienne did not speak to the media and certainly was not giving any interviews. "He never does that because he has had some really bad experiences with reporters."

My phone rang one day though. "You wanted to speak to me?" I heard a cultured voice carefully pronouncing every word.

"It depends on who you are," I said.

"This is Etienne. What do you want from me?"

It was June 1996. A couple of days later, I was sitting across from the most notorious hoodlum in the Netherlands at an Indonesian restaurant on Ceintuurbaan in Amsterdam. In the first instance, he looked like a very ordinary guy, not too tall and with a tendency towards baldness. He had a cheerful face and a healthy tan. An articulate man with a sense of humor, who was doing his best to be nice and charming. An entrepreneur with a good sense of self-esteem. "Business is business and you can make more money with soft drugs than with let's say jeans, so it was not a hard decision to make."

We had a little something to eat and made some small talk. We played with the idea of an interview and talked about some very everyday things. At the end of the evening, Etienne said he was perfectly willing to meet with me again, just so he could help do away with some of the misunderstandings about him. But he wanted to get together at a spot where he would really feel at home. He asked me if I would come to Paramaribo for a background story. But not in the form of an interview.

Three weeks later, I landed at Zanderij Airport in Surinam. A relic of times long past, crumbling from repairs long overdue. Like a damp blanket, the moisture and heat hit me smack in the face as I walked down the stairs from the air-conditioned DC-10. Hundreds of people with white parasols and even whiter handkerchiefs were waving to their relatives descending from the airplane carrying huge cardboard boxes and plastic bags. I immediately felt right at home. The humidity was sky high, the grass bright green and the faces friendly. The toothless driver of a 1963 model Mercedes taxi that must have been white at some time drove me northwards to Paramaribo and my hotel. A whole expedition, even though it was only forty-four kilometers. Three quarters of an hour dodging bumps and pot holes and cliffs on half-paved roads in a car obviously on its last legs, with asphalt visible through the holes in the floor shooting past under my feet, and wires like laundry lines suspended around my head.

In Paramaribo, I found myself once again face to face with the most dangerous man of the Netherlands, Etienne Urka in bermuda shorts. Etienne was a man who easily created a relaxed atmosphere. He looked totally open, but he was always on guard. He would never allow himself to say anything without thinking first. He formulated every word carefully so that the message came across, no more positive than intended, but no more negative either. A question was usually answered with another question. He had a talent for analysing people in depth, and never let an opportunity slip by to do so. In everything he said, you could hear the

clear-headed candor of the rough and tough reality of a world where only the fittest survived.

Etienne Urka was born in Paramaribo in August 1954 and came to the Netherlands with his parents as a young child. As later Justice Department testing showed, Little Etienne from Surinam was a child with a high IQ, a quick wit and a good head on his shoulders. He was *good at playing people against each other to get what he wanted*. It was a matter of *looking for attention and getting it*. As he admitted himself, he was an unreliable child.

At the age of fourteen, Etienne was sent to Amsterdam Juvenile Prison for the first time, a detention center for youngsters caught committing a robbery or burglary. There were clothespins to make and floors to scrub. After that, there was always some reason to punish Etienne. At a given moment, the Juvenile Court had him removed from his parents' custody and placed in a home. "That shaped the rest of his life," a friend from those days recalled. He met all kinds of guys there, from small fry to professional criminals. Experienced guys who knew how to steal cars, get nice clothes, crack safes. The practical training he got from them was essentially the only education he ever got, and it was tough and efficient.

For the young prospective hoodlum, it was a question of holding his own. According to a psychological report the Justice Department ordered, he was not addressing the real problem, i.e. a youth that had been tough and devoid of affection. But he was never going back to prison, that was one thing Etienne promised himself. It was a promise he made to the judge, the parole officer, the lawyer, everyone. He was going to be good.

His intentions were good, he just didn't stick to them for long. In barely a month, he was back. And not just once, he came back five or six times. Always to the same clothespins and the same floor. Time after time, he made the same solemn promise.

Scrubbing floors and making clothespins are not good for a juvenile delinquent's self-esteem. So at a given moment, Etienne gave up altogether. It all had to do with his lack of confidence, his insecurity. He wanted respect and recognition. The only way to get it was via violence. In the world of prospective wise guys, that was how you got the others to respect you. Etienne's reputation curve leaped way off the board. It mushroomed and expanded to mythical proportions. "Plenty of those stories were based on nothing, just fantasies, but some of them did have a bit of truth to them."

Etienne was soon known for his self-control. Even though he was not particularly strong, he could hold his own in the violent circles of young hoodlums and prospective wise guys. His gift of gab enabled him to keep the largest boys in the group under his thumb. And if that didn't work he would outsmart them. That would usually catch their attention and even more importantly, their respect. He would outdo his friends with little feats of courage. Petty crimes, fighting, and pointless recreational violence. It always resulted in another stay at juvenile prison. Until he reached the age for adult prison. In the late 1970s, he won first prize for involuntary manslaughter – he was locked up for an indefinite period of time. After a while Etienne submitted a request for a trial leave. He felt he had earned it. As a reward for the time he put into a rehabilitation project. But the director did not quite see things that way. "Etienne Urka is an incorrigible repeat offender," he said. The request was denied.

The disappointment was too much for Etienne to cope with. Twenty-three by that time, he made sure he got his leave, his own Midnight Express. He and his cell-

mate Victor C., a talented Italian he was good friends with, used a hot plate to burn their way through the prison's shatter-proof windows. After their successful escape, Victor C. got Etienne a job with a wealthy family in France. He managed to hold out for quite a while there without making any of his old slips. But in the end a restless, agitated feeling got the better of him. The only option seemed to be to go back to Amsterdam and settle his past accounts. After his arrival there, he roamed around without really knowing what he was doing. In a bar on Warmoes Street, he met a plainclothesman who recognized him and introduced himself as Martin Hoogland. It was about ten years before Klaas Bruinsma's murder. Hoogland had followed Etienne's story since his arrest in the media and apparently felt some kind of admiration for the dangerous criminal on the run. He should have arrested him, but instead he gave him a few words of caution. "They are looking for you. You better get out of here." He did not get far though. He was arrested at the end of Warmoes Street.

The problem soon resolved itself. The authorities terminated Etienne's sentence because he had demonstrated that he could get along in society. He had survived without getting into trouble. On the run, he had always kept in contact with his parole officer, and had even visited him when he was on vacation in France. That is why they let him go.

So Etienne was a free man again, but he felt useless, he didn't know what to do with himself. He had no plans, no future, nothing. He lived from one day to the next and reverted to his old behavior. Clothespins and floors. Every so often he started feeling sorry for his victims. But a couple of hours later, he forgot all about them.

Prison was to remain part and parcel of his life. "It was as if he would do things on purpose just to get arrested again," a parole officer suggested. "It is how he gets attention." In the period when Etienne was still on his guided tour of the country's prison facilities, his old childhood friends Karel Pleizier and Sjakie Enthoven were already in full swing in the drug scene of the 1970s. Drugs were so lucrative they had both become millionaires. Etienne hadn't seen them in five years, but they still trusted him. On a very free-lance basis, every so often they would have him do some little job for them. They took him under their wing, as it were, as long as he protected their interests. His charisma was enough. In fact protection was his strong point. "Etienne just had to look mad and your problems were over. That is the kind of reputation he had. It was very useful."

It was about that time that *an intellectual small-time dealer with an affected way of talking* suddenly emerged out of nowhere. He became Karel's partner. He called himself Tall Frans van Arkel, but in reality his name was Klaas Bruinsma. Up until the mid-1980s, he was known as Tall Frans. He did the marketing and Karel took care of supplying the hashish. Then there was a power shift and Karel was out of the picture for good. He withdrew to a simple home in the suburbs and a quiet life, but advised Etienne to go have a talk with Bruinsma. "I am sure he will be able to use you."

"We knew each other when we were younger," Tall Frans said when Etienne came by in the early 1980s to ask for a job. "Etienne, you were going in the wrong direction for a while, and in the meantime we achieved quite a bit. We are rich, we are millionaires, and you are still a poor slob. I have been working day and night to build something. I am investing because I want to achieve something, something big." Klaas explained how he was working on setting up a multinational in drugs.

Etienne could play a role, for example as a driver. The fact remained that Klaas was impressed by Etienne's knowledge about guns and his violent reputation.

"You can become part of my plan, but you don't have to say yes too quickly. I expect a great deal from you." He mentioned a couple of points. "No getting drunk, no sniffing coke, and no ripping me off. You can't turn's against me. If you say yes, I will be expecting your unconditional loyalty, for as long as it lasts. You can't just say 'Bye now Klaas, I am out of here' and go work for the opposition. You can start tomorrow. You decide your working hours for yourself. If you want some time off, that is another thing you have to decide for yourself. But I am often too tired to drive, and then you have to be there. Make sure you are there when I need you. Get it?"

Etienne's first impression of Tall Frans was that he was superficial and uninteresting. "An irritating speed freak you could have a lot of laughs with though, because he was smart and he could think fast." Tall Frans was not scared of anyone or anything. "But you could kill him with one good punch." Bruinsma meant what he said and never took anything back, never, and would never take a step back. There was no confrontation he was not man enough to accept. Not that he was so tough, but he wasn't soft either. Klaas would manipulate others who were not as gifted. He saw people as a means to an end. And not as anything more.

Bruinsma always did his homework. He paid someone to get Etienne's psychiatric file from the Justice Department. One of the facts he got from the file was that Etienne's IQ was higher than his own. That was something he did not like, and he told everyone Etienne's test was rigged. The results were fixed. He even went and read a pile of books just to figure out the best way to take an IQ test so he could some day outdo his *servant boy*. That is what Klaas was like, he wanted to be better than everyone at everything. Whether it was a game of chess or a smuggling route, Klaas Bruinsma had to be the best.

He paid his latest employee Etienne a couple of hundred guilders a week. Not much, but he didn't have to do a lot of work for it. Etienne was happy enough, he had never had a regular job and a fixed income before. Now he was employed at a real up and coming multinational. He was working for a criminal entrepreneur who dreamed of being the number one drug importer in the country. Etienne was going to be a big shot too. But first there were a couple of obstacles to get past.

Bruinsma was aware that Etienne was capable of a lot more than just being his chauffeur and he offered him a couple of options, ways to *grow* in the organization. In the course of time, Etienne had met any number of interesting people who would be able to invest large amounts of money in the business without any problems. Ordinary legal businessmen who Klaas liked to call *financiers*. They could easily park tens of millions of guilders abroad, without there being any way the Tax Department could possibly trace them. Klaas would give them the usual interest rates and other conditions. Etienne introduced Klaas to one important financier, real estate magnate Jaap Enstrada, who pretty much owned the entire Kalver Street and Nieuwendijk, two of Amsterdam's main shopping streets. Enstrada blindly helped finance all the drug transports and doubled his investments. Uncle Jaap never doubted that everything was on the up and up. It was to be a lucrative alliance for years, and made Enstrada even more wealthy.

Besides making contact and networking, Etienne was good at organizing. He was attributed for example with organizing spectacular escapes from Bijlmer Prison. In the 1980s, he also turned the distribution of hashish to local coffee shops into a successful and carefully organized branch of business. He himself did not smuggle any hashish, at least that is what he always said. At any rate he was not the one to

set up the lines, Klaas did that. His former partners said Etienne single-handedly set up an extensive system of coffee shops that the Bruinsma group would supply at regular intervals. So the group was distributing directly to the coffee shops via the back door. This eliminated the middlemen, who were simply informed that the Bruinsma group would not be supplying them any more. Bruinsma and his group had a monopoly and the coffee shop owners were happy to deal with them. There were rumors that they had no choice in the matter, that they were intimidated, but the Bruinsma partners denied that there was any truth to them. "You can't earn money with people who are scared. It had to be interesting for them to do business with us. Repression always comes back to haunt you in the end."

Klaas and Etienne made a deal. Klaas would manage a quarter of the profits for him *for later*, just like he managed the shares of the other members of the collective. According to Klaas' calculations, he was making them all incredibly rich. "A quarter for you," he would say. "You are worth this much, I am worth that much. What more do you want? You aren't going hungry, are you? So leave the money in the business, then it can grow and grow. It is as safe with me as with the Bank of England." But no one was ever to see a penny of the money.

The media wanted to see a successor, someone to take Bruinsma's place. Preferably a hard-hitting killer but also a charismatic person who would have no trouble filling the Don's shoes and measuring up to his image. Urka did not have Bruinsma's charisma though. He was intelligent. And he was streetwise. But without the special dynamics. Etienne was someone who would be perfectly happy spending the rest of his life fast asleep in a hammock. Rocking softly to the rhythm of the breeze at twilight blowing between the pillars of the patio at his house on Princess Juliana Street in Paramaribo. It was not his ambition to be number one.

In 1998 the national media extensively quoted the transcript of an interview attributed to Etienne. According to the police records, I was said to have interviewed Etienne on the island of Sint Maarten.

Etienne U. stated in interview:

**"Police helped liquidate criminal"**

*Alleged drug baron Etienne U. is pointing the finger at the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Amsterdam police force and claiming they helped with an underworld liquidation. In 1982, an Amsterdam CID detective is said to have given Mafia boss Klaas Bruinsma a photograph of the Yugoslav criminal Alexander Marianowicz. The Yugoslav was later murdered.*

AMSTERDAM, ALLARD BESSE & PETER DE KNEGT

This is clear from the transcript of a recorded interview with U. now in the possession of this newspaper. It is also clear from the interview that the 43-year-old Amsterdam man believes that his former boss Klaas Bruinsma, nicknamed *The Preacher*, was planning to murder him.

The document is in the confidential criminal file against U. The alleged hashish baron and six fellow suspects are now on trial at the Amsterdam Court. In the interview, U. admits having sold hashish and having been active in the large-scale distribution of drugs in the Netherlands.

According to a statement made by U. to the police, the recorded interview is to lead to a book. The interview was made with U. by an unknown interviewer on 22 July 1996 on the island of Sint Maarten in the Caribbean. U. talks about events that occurred up until the moment when Mafia boss



Bruinsma was murdered in front of the Hilton Hotel in Amsterdam in June 1991. The detailed transcript of the interview was found when U. was arrested in Paris in December last year. The document was only recently added to the U. file by the Haarlem authorities.

In the course of the interview, U. is usually very open. For example about the role of the Amsterdam CID in the murder of the Yugoslav criminal Alexander Marianowicz in 1982. "I can tell you some pretty unethical things about Van L. (CID detective, ed.). Klaas got the photograph of Marianowicz via Van L. for the liquidation."

U.'s lawyer C. Korvinus informed the court this week that the addition of the transcript to the criminal file is illegal. According to him, the Justice Department wrongfully appropriated the document. The court is to decide today whether the prospective manuscript can be used in the case against U.

**Page 3. Stutterer crown witness Karman also in case against U.**

## CHAPTER 3

### Charles Geerts

*Chubby Charlie, wholesaler in porno*

One of Bruinsma's friends in his heyday was Charles Geerts, a former grocer who later became a pornography tycoon and headed Scala Ltd., one of the largest import firms for sex items and porno films, up until the end of 1993.

In connection with the taxes he had or had not paid on video and film rights, for years the wholesaler was under close Tax Department scrutiny. There were sizeable amounts of money to be had in Geerts' vast porno empire. At the end of 1997, he and Scala were to settle out of court with the Tax Department for 12.2 million guilders of unpaid income and sales tax. This bought off a prospective prosecution for tax fraud. According to Public Prosecutor Teeven, the case could easily have led to a prison sentence for Geerts, but would ultimately cost more than it would yield. So Geerts' lawyer A. Moszkowicz advised him to settle with the Public Prosecutor, and that is what he did. It was not much of an added expense for Geerts, who got a big load off his chest. After Bruinsma's death, Geerts was one of the few people not hesitant to publicly acknowledge he had had good relations with Klaas. Not that it did much to improve his image.

"I made a big mistake. After Klaas Bruinsma was murdered, I should have said 'Oh, how awful and what a horrible man he was.' That would have meant a lot less trouble for me. But I said, 'No, I thought he was a nice man and he was a friend of

mine.' I was not going to lie about that." But swear to God, Geerts had never done business with Bruinsma. And no, he was not part of the Delta Top. Yes, he was also a good friend of Etienne Urka. He did not make any bones about it. "A man after my own heart."

Appearances were not in Geerts' favor though. Not many people believed he was all that innocent. Wasn't he someone who regularly frequented Amsterdam's shadiest night spots, and wasn't he crazy about anything even the slightest bit naughty? Didn't he go for the same lifestyle as all the wise guys with the big cars and the bodyguards? In the underworld, you just did that if you were afraid of someone or had something to prove. There was something fishy about Geerts, there was no one who didn't agree about that. The rumors were mainly fed by the fact that Geerts did so little to hide his frustrations and ambitions. He was the type who said what he thought before he thought about what he said. That was one reason he was viewed as a big drug transport financier behind the scenes. And why the Public Prosecutor was so interested in him. Rightly or wrongly. Geerts made himself a potential target.

"Up until just before his death, Klaas would come by pretty regularly. To relax and quiet down, I think." Lost in thought, Chubby Charles rolled a bank note into a straw and discretely poured out a pile of white powder from a half folded envelope, took a sip of vodka and continued where he had left off. "We would stay up all night talking. Mainly about nothing and about the meaning of life, deep into the wee small hours of the morning. He could talk all night with those deep philosophical ideas of his and no one had any idea what he was going on about. And of course he would talk about sailboats. I was not the least bit interested in sailing, but I was unintentionally financing his favorite hobby. A couple of months before he died, I lent him a lot of money for some boat he couldn't do without that was supposed to cost two hundred thousand guilders. Everyone thought he was a multimillionaire, but in reality he didn't have a penny to his name.

Sometimes he would talk down to me as if I was a child. Tell me not to sniff so much coke, not to drink so much. He said it would be the death of me, and I should eat more fruit and things like that. Can you picture that? There I was, and people didn't call me Chubby for nothing. I would have a couple of grams of cocaine a day and a bottle of vodka, and then some fruit for my health! So okay, every so often I did have a piece of fruit. Then suddenly the time of day when I was eating it was no good. He read that in some book. That is the kind of thing he would come up with.

Or we would come home early in the morning after a night on the town and he would say, 'It is not good for you to have any more coffee, you know. Then you won't be able to sleep.' 'Klaas,' I would say, 'I have had more coke than any man alive and you are telling me a cup of coffee is going to keep me from getting a good night's sleep? Leave me alone, I am going to bed, nightie night.'

In principle of course he was right, but there were two sides to it. Klaas thought I shouldn't sniff so much coke and drink so much because people wouldn't respect me. I couldn't care less what people thought of me. I did everything out in the open, I am who I am and I did not make any effort to hide it. He would do it in secret and everyone knew it. That was the difference between us. Maybe people don't have any respect for a coke head, okay, he was right about that. But they didn't have any respect for him either because everyone knew what he was doing.

I was really in very bad shape at the time, I had the tax people after me, I was having a lot of problems with my kid and the media were casting me as Bruinsma's partner in crime. I couldn't stand the tension any more. I was willing to go for a compromise with the Public Prosecutor, even if it cost me millions of guilders. So it

was only logical that I would score a line now and then or treat myself to a bottle of vodka. Or two, if I felt like it. But Klaas acted as if he still had everything under control. Bullshit. You don't have coke under control, it has you under control. He was also heading downhill fast. Klaas was finished, totally burnt out.

Klaas had a certain philosophy of life that I couldn't make heads or tails of. He would say, 'I am going to die soon, I know that, it is inevitable. I have put myself in an impossible position. There is no way back.' By that time, he no longer had any sense of reality. Klaas didn't turn into a myth until after he died. That was mainly Bart Middelburg's doing, that reporter from *Het Parool*. The police were very happy with all those stories of his, they served their interests too. They had spent tens of millions of guilders trying to track Bruinsma's ghost and they had to come up with something. Klaas was dead, so they had to find a criminal successor. Etienne Urka, John Engelsma and Charles Geerts were referred to as the heirs to the Bruinsma empire. That is the biggest bullshit you can imagine. I have never been a choir boy, but Middelburg cast me in the craziest role you can imagine. He never even spoke to me, but according to him I was the biggest Mafia boss since Don Vito Corleone. And why in the world should Klaas need to have heirs? There was nothing for anyone to inherit. Except his debts.

He would borrow money from everyone including me. Everyone knew he was in debt. Sometimes for small amounts, sometimes not so small. Thousands of guilders, and before you knew it, hundreds of thousands. If he had had millions of guilders, he would never have asked me for a loan. Borrowing money wasn't good for his reputation. But that was the way it was the last couple of years of his life. A man of his status wants to spend money, especially on other people to let them see he still has it. That is what keeps the money coming in. Because of the stories Middelburg was writing, I started having my doubts. I even asked Klaas, 'What about those millions of yours? Don't you think you ought to pay me back one of these days?' He said 'It is all because of Bart the Liar. That bastard is deliberately spreading lies. He wants to have me dead in my grave or safely put away in prison.' It wasn't even such a crazy idea. There just had to be one creditor who took Middelburg's stories seriously and it was lights out for Klaas. Before you knew it, he would be locked away in someone's trunk.

At a given moment even the Van Traa Parliamentary Inquiry Commission started believing there was something to inherit, so there had to be someone to inherit it. And Middelburg kept on repeating the stuff he made up, again and again. If you keep on repeating something often enough, after a while people start thinking there must be some truth to it. Or so they say."

## CHAPTER 4

### THE PARTNERS

#### *The killer guys*

#### **Cohen and Maiers**

Flip Cohen and Timo Maiers, two friends who did business together, were always the first to know everything. Information would come in from all sides. Not automatically though, you had to buy it. Like for instance the complete file of the private addresses of all the Amsterdam police officers including their social security numbers and positions within the police force, printed out on Police Department paper. Or on disc, whichever wanted.

"If Police Chief Nordholt stubbed his toe, we were the first to know," Bennie Saab, one of Bruinsma's business partners confirmed. And just to prove it, he took out some confidential internal memos from Field Officer Vrakking to his superiors about matters like tapping cell phones ... including the tapping schedules. They were always immediately aware of the latest news, which legal investigations were being launched, which files were for sale or who was going to be arrested.

Rumor had it that Maiers and Cohen had been involved in all kinds of jobs, large and small. Insignificant ones like the stolen Lottery Show money chest, and big ones like the three masterpieces stolen from the Rembrandt House and the theft of discs from the home of Public Prosecutor J. Valente. The burglary had been a very deliberate step, it was not just a question of a couple of kids getting lucky, as the Justice Department claimed in the first instance. Whoever commissioned the burglary paid 165,000 guilders to have it done. The information had been passed on at cost price to fellow entrepreneurs Johan V. and Charles Z. "Just to fuck around." There had not been any relevant information on the stolen discs about the activities of Cohen, Maiers or any of the other partners. But in addition to the harm the incident did to Valente's private life, the loot – twelve brightly colored grocery bags filled with pictures of dogs and people, private possessions, certificates, trophies, discs with Justice Department information – had a paralyzing effect on the whole legal system.

What the burglars were basically after were the computer files. Most of the Public Prosecutor's belongings, including his driver's license and private photographs, ultimately wound up in the paper shredder. Contrary to the claims circulating in the underworld, the foreign burglars had not shot Valente's dogs, they *simply kicked them because they were making so much noise*.

Maiers and Cohen were the puppeteers. With their contacts high in the official world, they were the personification of everything the legal system is so wary of. That is how the informer positions were also undermined. In the end Cohen and Maiers and with them the rest of the partners got anything they wanted. And they needed to if they were to survive. They had a monopoly on violence and on information.

## **Spic and Span**

"The former Bruinsma partners Sam K. and John M. are bad news, keep away from them. Ruthless killers," a Justice Department official warned me. "Don't start anything with them. They are bloodthirsty and we can never get to them because no one would dream of testifying against them. Anyone who even thinks about it is in for a sad fate."

I heard such awful things about their reputation for violence that in the beginning, I didn't even want to get in touch with them. Besides which, I didn't see how meeting them would be relevant. They seemed to have always kept their distance from Delta, as was confirmed by my contacts in the Public Prosecutor's Office. K. and M. stood for a lot of monkey business, but not for Delta, no matter how short and direct the underworld lines were.

Sam and John were also known as Spic and Span because of their neat way of getting rid of problems. You were either with them or against them. A friend was someone they could earn money with, and there was only one way out for an enemy. There was nothing in between. A compromise was not an option and they were suspected of any number of punishable acts. Crimes of violence, the arms trade, smuggling. They were clearly subversive enemies of the state, but they also did plenty of things *just for fun*. They would send an antitank missile to a car dealer who

failed to comply with their delivery conditions for example. No problem. It was what they were known for.

Wherever there was money to be earned, they were always first in line. And their earnings were always sizable. By the age of eighteen they were millionaires, they simply walked into a bank and took what they needed. They were in their forties now and no one could touch them, constantly surrounded as they were by a handful of hard-hitting buddies who doubled as bodyguards and did not hesitate to jump into the line of fire if necessary.

K. and M. were suspected of the murder of a former sports instructor of mine. Jean-Paul the Third, Esq. was a man of substance. He came from an old aristocratic family that lost its fortune in 1916 on the eve of the Bolshevik revolution. The entire family capital had been invested in Russian government bonds. All the patrician Amsterdam family had left was its title and its dignity. Jean-Paul was mugged and beaten up on the street. The aristocrat blacked out and when he came to screaming in pain, he saw that his hands had been slashed to pieces and his fingers were just barely connected by what little was left of his tendons and muscles.

Earlier that evening, insiders said he had gone too far. In a rash moment, he had raised a hand to Spic and Span and threatened to come back later with a gun. That was not the kind of remark they appreciated. The nobleman will never be pulling a trigger again, was the curt comment made by one of the Yugoslav hoodlums when they reported back to their boss, who by the way was never officially identified, to let him know the mission was accomplished, and how. When Jean-Paul was taken to the hospital, the surgeons barely found enough tissue to reconstruct anything even barely resembling hands. Jean-Paul had just ran out of luck. He was a peace-loving and highly civilized man who never hurt a fly.

Spic and Span were difficult to approach. They were not interested in an interview, but a background story was not a problem. We were to have five talks in all along the deep throat lines – there would be no mention of the source, and they would just say yes or no to whatever information I had at hand, though here and there they might make a few short comments. This was a way to put a number of persistent rumors into a clear perspective. They did indeed appear to be the men in charge in the underworld. If you had a problem or there was something to be earned, you would go and talk to them. *Money talks*. There was always a solution, sometimes this way, sometimes that, often horizontal.

But they had not been Bruinsma's only important partners. Bruinsma surrounded himself with a constantly changing group of *business relations*. The changes were due more to his turbulent nature than a fondness for variety.

### **Saab and Sanborn**

At the Greek restaurant where I spoke to Captain of Crime Nico Mink K., who I will write about in greater detail later, a man joined us without waiting for an invitation. He was about thirty-five years old, and was not particularly big. He had dark curly hair and gave me a blank stare with his deep-set eyes half closed. We shook hands and he introduced himself. "I am Bennie. People have been saying you are looking for us. You are working on a book. What do you want to know?"

It was Bennie Saab, half of the notorious criminal duo Saab and Sanborn, who worked with Timo Maiers and Flippie Cohen as partners. Extremely wealthy and just about the most feared criminal entrepreneurs in the Netherlands. Their hobbies were fast cars, the latest gadgets, counter-espionage, games, guns and refined violence. In the 1980s and early 1990s, they were a criminal society most other criminals did

their best to avoid. They were untouchable. Anyone who didn't spontaneously get out of their way was roughly shoved aside.

Wasn't he scared the ghosts of his victims would gather round his bed one day for a final reckoning? Bennie didn't hesitate to answer my question. "For practical reasons alone, that would be impossible. Those guys would never all fit in my bedroom at the same time." And he was not joking.

After trying in vain to talk him into an interview, a reporter from *De Telegraaf* had called Saab *the last of the old school crime bosses*. I myself had not made any active efforts to get in touch with the partners. In fact there was some definite resistance on my part. Judging from their reputation, I didn't think they would be exactly pleasant to talk to.

But now I could see a smile cross Bennie's face. "There is only one reason to talk to you for your book. You could write down whatever nonsense you want, or I can give you the information first hand, straight from the source. The facts, all the facts and nothing but the facts." He looked me straight in the eyes and as if we had just closed a business deal, he said, "If you mess around with us, we'll kill you."

He stopped for a second to see my reaction and then he went on. "Okay, you can write whatever you want, but no nonsense. And you have to leave my family out of it. They have nothing to do with this." There were no ifs and buts about his tone of voice or the non-verbal presentation of the decree. Just to avoid any chance of misunderstanding, I let him read the interview when it was finished. There was one detail that was wrong, he knew that for sure. The gun found on Klaas Bruinsma's corpse had not been a Beretta like I wrote, it was a Smith & Wesson. He himself had given it to Klaas as a gift.

"Bruinsma was a very unusual person. There is no doubt about that," Bennie Saab dove right in. "When he came into a room, there was no way you didn't notice. We learned an awful lot from him and we loved him. He had his heyday when everything went his way. A man who saw to the tiniest little details and never compromised about anything. He was brimming with energy. Dynamite.

But he burned himself out. At a given moment he couldn't do anything any more. The man we had all looked up to turned into a dangerous maniac. Totally paranoid. He was living on credit, he would borrow money from all of us just to keep up his lifestyle. He did the craziest things. One night we were having a meal at a restaurant. There was a group of people from Surinam at the next table. They were from a cultural drama group or something like that. Klaas happened to overhear they had lost their subsidy of fifty thousand guilders. He asked if any of us happened to have fifty thousand guilders on us. I hadn't heard them talking about the subsidy and I gave him the money, which he immediately passed on to the next table. That is the kind of guy he had turned into. We did get four free tickets to their performance though.

Or Klaas would call me up in the middle of the night and tell me to come over right away, all the way from Luxembourg, where I live. He would also invite the others, Timo, Etienne, Philip, Sam and John. Everyone had to come over. He couldn't wait, and it wasn't something he could say over the phone. I took everything along, my guns, extra ammunition, whatever, and I drove to Amsterdam at 250 kilometers an hour. I thought there must be some kind of emergency, a gang war, a rip deal, a murder. Then it turned out we all had to rush to the Presidential Suite at the Amstel Hotel to admire *the pinkest cunt he had ever seen*. He was holding some whore's vagina open with two teaspoons. As if I am interested in the fantastic color of it at three thirty in the morning.

‘Klaas, couldn’t that wait until tomorrow?’ I asked him. ‘No,’ he said, ‘never in your life are you going to see something like that.’ Or he had taken a little midget lady up to his hotel room. He would go on for days about the most divine sex games they had played and the unprecedented heights they had reached. We had to hear all the details. Or that time when two big shots from the Genovese family, Mafia from the United States, came over to do business. He received them half stoned, unshaven and still in his pajamas. They saw right away he had a screw loose and went straight back home. He was too far gone, he was lost, there was no turning back for him. Klaas had to be eliminated, and in a nice clean way. We were all in agreement about that. And we were going to have to do it ourselves.”

The money Klaas Bruinsma still owed Saab and Sanborn – about seventeen million guilders and change – was ultimately written off as *irrecoverable*. “There was no other way to deal with it,” Saab said. “It was just a matter of damage control. The hundreds of millions of guilders he was supposed to have had never really existed. It was just a fairy tale the media made up. If there was any truth to it, I would tell you. But Klaas had nothing, less than nothing. All he had were debts.

“Late 1990, early 1991, Klaas was there for the taking for the authorities,” Saab was convinced of that. “There might be some people who don’t see it my way, but believe me, all they had to do was sweep him up. He would have told them anything they wanted to know about any kind of business he had done in the past. It was because of his indifference. He was finished because he had made too many mistakes. Beginner’s mistakes. Because he was sniffing too much cocaine. We tossed coins to see which of the partners would do him in. That story is true, it is exactly what happened.”

Bruinsma wanted to go on being the Don, but he was without subjects now and penniless. An emperor without clothes. Etienne had recently turned his back on him. Geurt Roos had fallen from grace and the other partners also saw less and less of him. “The only thing that was left was a motley crew and some body builders to keep up the cover,” one of Bruinsma’s men recalled. “A fictional molehill the media turned into a mountain. Klaas didn’t have any more investments, no millions coming to him, no reserves, nothing. In his heyday, he had about twelve million guilders in cash from the hashish trade. That was around 1985. But it had dwindled down to less than nothing years before his death. Bruinsma was a totally empty shell by 1991. We were all in unanimous agreement about that.”

The mercy blow came in 1990. Klaas had organized and messed up the import of forty-six tons of first-class hashish from Pakistan worth 450 million guilders. That was the last straw. “Klaas couldn’t pull it off any more,” his partner Flippie Cohen confirmed. “He was a master in a whole lot of things, especially in games. But he couldn’t keep track of things any more. He would forget what he had said to whom. In the end everyone knew about that gigantic mountain of Pakistani hashish. Everyone had a share in it or was an equal partner. He used to be able to delegate things without having to make any commitments. He had charisma. He could bring together the right people. But that was all over. He lost the magic touch. The mountain of Pakistani hashish was supposed to be the big bang he would end his criminal career with, after that he was going to retire. He had already divided up the loot. But there was nothing to divide. The shipment had already gone up in smoke even before it came on shore. The huge shipment had been floating around on the North Sea for ten months, Bruinsma was so scared that that was how he had arranged things. It would have been inconceivable for *the old Bruinsma* without a cocaine habit. We used to be so proud he was a friend of ours and happy he was on

our side. In that sense it was a loss, no matter how necessary his death may have been. Up until 1988, Klaas was a master of his craft. Unparalleled. Everyone was relieved that he was dead, but we didn't open a bottle of champagne the way other people did – in a manner of speaking. A friend's death is never something that makes you happy. We weren't going to put down an old friend. Now everyone talks about what a jerk he was. They should have said that to his face when he was still alive."

## CHAPTER 5

### **Karel Vosseveld** ***The Fed Ex of the underworld***

Karel Vosseveld was known as one of the biggest hashish importers of the twentieth century. Not only in the Netherlands, but in the rest of the world as well. Bigger than Saab and Sanborn, Spic and Span, Johan V., Fouad Abbas or even Klaas Bruinsma. He was the logistic jack-of-all-trades. Without him, none of the others would have mattered.

He was the man who was always in the middle, he knew all the routes and back doors for successfully working drugs into the Netherlands. Vosseveld always knew someone at the right spot, a Customs inspector who could keep his mouth shut, an administrator who knew when to look the other way, a detective who was dirty or a court official who could get a hold of crucial information.

His name kept coming up. Was there anyone in the underworld who didn't know Vosseveld? And everyone liked him and his Caribbean laissez faire and great sense of humor. Vosseveld was known as a bon vivant, a clown, and also as a dyed-in-the-wool criminal, a real professional. Directly or indirectly, he was involved in importing soft drugs with an estimated worth of hundreds of millions of guilders. He was the Fed Ex of the underworld, specialized in container shipments of more than ten thousand kilograms of hashish with a safe cover and dirty Customs officials all along the route.

"Cees Janssen, who worked at the Fiscal Information and Investigation Department, was earning a pretty penny on the drug business," mega drug importer Karel Vosseveld recalled. "He was paid in thousand guilder notes. Eight million from me alone, and plenty more from my business relations" (photograph Bas van Hout).

Vosseveld was earning anywhere from 500 to 1500 guilders for his services on every kilogram that came into the country. A shipment of ten thousand kilograms of soft drugs could easily mean ten million guilders. And that was before anything was sold. Sometimes there was an additional bonus of 10% of the profits without his having invested a penny of his own. He had to pay his business expenses, but there was still plenty left.

"In one year I earned more than Klaas Bruinsma in his whole career. Especially since I was always the guy in the middle, sometimes in three or four routes at the same time. So I deliberately ignored Bruinsma's demand that I work exclusively for his group. I didn't work exclusively for anyone."

It was easier for Vosseveld to earn money than to keep it. He was a big spender. No one had ever been a multimillionaire and then gone broke the way he would. If he spent more than he had and he had to borrow a few hundred thousand



guilders here or there, it was rarely a problem because everyone in the underworld knew he was good for it.

Where did all the money go? He liked the good life. He would buy a Ferrari for himself and the most expensive BMW for his wife or girlfriend. And the cleaning lady had to have one too, because she was working so hard keeping the dozen rooms clean at Karel's huge villa in Aerdenhout. And the made-to-order indoor swimming pool also had to be paid for, and it had to be done over three times because the foundation was too skimpy. What else was money for?

Two years before our first meeting, we had also happened to be seated together at the wedding of a prominent man from Volendam. It was quite an experience, just observing this bon vivant. His humor and straightforward approach saved his life on more than one occasion. Like one time when he was driving with an acquaintance who also happened to be a hit man if circumstances called for it. Karel was in front and the hit man in back had already but a muffler on the barrel and cocked the small caliber pistol. He had his hand in front of his face to catch the blood. Karel instinctively turned around and looked at the man with his disarming smile. "I couldn't pull the trigger," the hit man recalled. "He was lucky that time."

Vosseveld was not always that lucky. In the mid-1980s, the shots hit their mark and blew away the whole right side of his face. At great expense, his face had been invisibly reconstructed. Vosseveld himself was known as a non-violent man. Even after the incident, he still refused to carry a gun. Which was pretty unusual in the Dutch underworld, where the size of your gun determined your status.

This aspect was something the Justice Department could appreciate. It is why Vosseveld was not known as armed and dangerous – Code Willem – and generally was not arrested by a SWAT team in bulletproof vests. One telephone call was enough to get him to come down to the police station, at any rate if he wasn't mysteriously out of town.

Vosseveld was someone who could do anything and knew everything. He only saw the Netherlands as a transit country, because it was places like the United States, Canada and England where the big bucks were to be had. The profits were two, three, four times as high. They were also countries where he was better off not spending his vacations, because they were ready to put him away for life. The courts were unanimous, Vosseveld was the biggest fish in the pond and Interpol had him classified in the major league at the worldwide level. But he was not an easy man to catch.

It was clear that I would have to talk to Vosseveld and have him further verify my version of the events in and around the Bruinsma group. Even though he had not been a regular partner of Bruinsma's, he had to know an awful lot. Via an intermediary, I finally got in touch with him. The fact that it had not gone easily did not mean he was not willing, it just meant he was not available. Karel Vosseveld had been serving a prison sentence in the north of the country and was not exactly free to arrange his agenda at will. Some time later, I heard that a solution had been found. He had a weekend leave every six weeks and there would be time for a chat. Since I had no idea whether he would be able to tell me anything about for example who was supplying drugs to the Delta Organization and how and when, it was just a shot in the dark. Due to miscommunication, our first appointment didn't go through. It was late in the summer of 1996, he had a weekend leave and there would be no more than half an hour for a talk. "Otherwise my girlfriend – and bride-to-be – will get mad," he confided conspiratorially and with a big grin.

“Klaas didn’t have anything left,” that was one thing Vosseveld was sure of. As a specialist in the transport of anything illegal, he had been an associate of Bruinsma’s on occasion. “I could observe him from up close. He acted as if he was still loaded. Everyone was fooled. He was a demagogue. He used all kinds of psychological tricks to get his partners to depend on him and be committed to him. For years, Bruinsma was always talking about the huge sum of money he was managing for everyone, *saving it for a rainy day*. All the money from the successful shipments – not that there were that many of them – had to be put aside for later. He once told me to also put whatever I earned from other shipments in his *rainy day fund*. That really made me laugh, I thought it was a joke. But he really meant it. Then we would all be dependent on handouts from him and he would have power over us. I wasn’t about to have anything to do with that kind of thing. I was running drug lines with other contacts Bruinsma didn’t know anything about. There were hundreds of millions of guilders involved. Klaas had never even dreamt of that kind of money.

I was bigger than Bruinsma and ten years earlier. Other guys fell for his demagoguery and his bullshit. I felt sorry for Etienne Urka. When Klaas died, he didn’t leave Etienne anything. Etienne was broke and all Klaas’ creditors came after him with a vengeance. Etienne had been a partner in Klaas’ rainy day fund and the money box was empty. So all he was a partner in was in Klaas’ debts. Klaas was living on credit the last few years of his life, and he was living way beyond his means. Which is understandable, I do the same thing myself. People like us, we spend whatever comes in, whether it is a thousand guilders or a hundred thousand or a million, and we spend it as fast as it comes in, or maybe faster. Klaas owed a lot of people money, and I am not talking about a few hundred thousand but about millions and millions of guilders.”

Klaas Vosseveld had a two-sided reputation in the Dutch underworld. No one was sure whether they could rely on him. Some people thought he was working for the police, others felt he was unreliable if nothing else. But there was always money to be earned with him, that was a fact. In the 1980s, the Justice Department estimated his turnover at four or five hundred million guilders. According to the partners Saab and Sanborn, the estimate was not far off. For them alone, he was bringing in more than two hundred million guilders worth of hashish. That was without even counting the Bruinsma partners Timo Maiers and Flippie Cohen. He was also doing some very lucrative business for two other partners he preferred not to mention by name. “It is just a matter of respect.”

Vosseveld was sentenced to seven years in prison. An old and almost forgotten conviction for large-scale drug smuggling was put into effect after an observant detective happened to see a photograph of Vosseveld meeting with Johan V., the Stutterer, who was heading the national and international wanted lists at the time. The police had been observing Johan V. for months for what was still only the alleged trade in drugs. The detectives on the team wondered who the dark man with the cheerful smile was talking to Johan V. on the photograph taken at the parking lot of the White Mountain Motel near Hilversum. It turned out to be the notorious Karel Vosseveld.

One of the detectives suggested having look at Vosseveld’s file. Because *shouldn’t that guy be in prison?* It turned out to be quite a job, since the file was nowhere to be found. It finally did surface though, and that is when it became clear there was still a sentence to be served. It had obviously simply been *forgotten*. The file had been *misplaced*. Karel Vosseveld would have been off the hook if the observant detective had not done his homework. Now the Justice Department did its

best to find the file. A year earlier, Karel Vosseveld had one last chance to have everything disappear for good down to the very last shred via a sympathetic female Public Prosecutor in Haarlem. Vosseveld preferred to take his chances, confident as he was that his conviction would be spontaneously forgotten forever. A little miscalculation on his part, though it did almost work.

"Welcome home, Mr Vosseveld," the prison warden at *Nieuw Vosseveld* in Vught said with a big smile when Karel arrived. As if Karel was doomed to spend his days behind bars at the top security penitentiary that happened to bear his name. Vosseveld got the joke. But barely a day had passed before he started working on his future. He was always a man who thought ahead. Even his trial leave had already been arranged. On paper, he was going to work for a friend with a plastic factory in the south of the country. He never actually turned up in person, but he was there on paper and that was the only thing that counted with the Justice Department bureaucrats. It is all so easy if you are open to creative solutions! This kind of lifestyle, whether he liked it or not, was very much in keeping with his Caribbean nature. Go with the flow. Why do today what you can put off till tomorrow? No money? That is something to worry about tomorrow. Today it is time to party.

When I met Vosseveld, he was in his fifties. He had begun as a petty burglar and later started smuggling cigarettes. The *robbery business* wasn't for him, he openly confided to Frank Bovenkerk and Marten van Traa when they came to visit him in prison, where he was serving a sentence of a couple of years. "Vosseveld told us he was starting to feel sorry for his victims. Especially after a discussion about how much money a cashier was supposed to hand over. That is when he decided to stop soon."

Cigarettes turned out to be a goldmine for resourceful people like Vosseveld. He was from the same illustrious generation of smugglers as Frits van de Wereld and Black Jopie de Vries, old time hoodlums from the Amsterdam Red Light District. In those days you could get to prison for a decade for one shipment of smuggled cigarettes, and for two years just for stealing a bicycle. Hartsuiker, the Amsterdam Public Prosecutor was still fighting his own battle with the immorality of the city's ladies of the night.

If you had the right connections and went through the right channels, you would never get caught with cigarettes. Vosseveld knew the right people and was always on the lookout for a new challenge. In the early 1970s, he was one of the first to catch wind of a new trend, the trade in hashish, which was going to be the best ever. A lot more lucrative than even the best cigarette scenario. It was the free trade of the future. Cigarettes had always generated a nice income, but it was ultimately no more than one big tax cut. Hashish was the real fun. Even if ten shipments went up in smoke, all your troubles were solved as long as you pulled off the eleventh. The profits were excellent. According to an eye-catching article in *De Telegraaf*, pit bulls, guns and spending plenty of time at brothels were all viewed by the Tax Department and criminals alike as necessary business expenses that could be deducted. Hash may have been illegal. but it wasn't nearly as bad as heroin, opium or coke, the real killers. It was socially and legally much more acceptable in the progressive climate of the 1980s.

You could even go to the Tax Department with a proposal. One lawyer negotiated a deal on behalf of an anonymous client by saying, "I have a client who earned ten million guilders importing hashish, how much tax does he have to pay over that amount?" It didn't take them long to close the deal. Something was always better than nothing. Most people accepted the sale of hashish and others were too

stoned to care. Prison sentences were short, fines were low, and the chance of getting caught was minimal, but none of this mattered to the born criminal, because if there was a mass demand for something, there were always shady characters who would happily see to the supply, legally or illegally. And two or three years in prison were simply an acceptable occupational hazard.

In the mid-1970s, Karel Vosseveld proved to be a talented pioneer with the transport of hashish as his exclusive specialty. He had a nose for this kind of business. What is more, since other people were investing the money, the risk he was taking was minimal. Vosseveld was merely in charge of the transportation and it was a win-win situation. He created lucrative lines between Lebanon, Afghanistan and Europe with the Netherlands as transit port. "There was so much of a demand for the merchandise that it sold itself. Foreign buyers would stand in line just to get their hands on the stuff."

According to the Ministry of Justice, Vosseveld was even heading a firm with branches all across the globe and connections with outposts wherever drugs were produced. He smuggled hundreds of thousands of kilograms of hashish into Europe, which was quite an amazing feat, certainly in those days, to say nothing of the astounding profits. But Vosseveld was not the only ambitious smuggler at the time. At the peak of his dominance, there was a new rising star, someone with the exact same aim in mind, Klaas Bruinsma. Klaas was in his mid-twenties and up to then, he had been selling drugs by the kilo or even sometimes by the gram around Paradiso, the hippie temple in Amsterdam. He also wanted to be the biggest in the field, so it was inevitable that the two ambitious men would cross paths pretty soon.

At the end of the 1980s, Vosseveld and Bruinsma did indeed join forces, but they hadn't had much personal contact, mainly because they didn't particularly like each other. There was a coalition though. Commercially speaking, it made a lot of sense because Bruinsma had the ambition to do big things and Vosseveld had the logistics. But Karel was always getting on Klaas' nerves, even if he was just fooling around. As a matter of fact, he loved to drive him up the wall. That is why most of their communication went via an intermediary, Bennie Saab.

There was a kind of truce, but the daggers were still drawn. Bruinsma wanted to be the ruthless sole ruler, and he wanted the status that went with it. Vosseveld couldn't care less about status. Bruinsma could play boss if it was that important to him, just as long as Vosseveld had enough money coming in to lead the good life he had become accustomed to.

Vosseveld and Bruinsma had been introduced via Bennie Saab and his associates Tom Sanborn, Timo Maiers and Flippie Cohen. From a position of relative anonymity, at the end of the 1980s they were each controlling their own interests in the conglomerate of hoodlums that Bruinsma had happened to bring together. Legally speaking, it was definitely a *Section 140*, i.e. crime in an organized framework, though they were barely organized at all in the strict sense of the word. They were also the men who kept Vosseveld away from Bruinsma for purely strategic reasons. By deliberately creating a certain distance between them, they were keeping Bruinsma from gaining control over an invaluable link, the drug transports, which were Vosseveld's specialty. So in a sense, Bruinsma was always dependent on Saab and Sanborn and the other partners.

Bruinsma rose to power by way of intimidation and intrigues, that was something Vosseveld knew from experience. If there was one thing Klaas couldn't stand, it was not being in control. He would examine every agreement again and again in detail so that none of the escape clauses would stand a chance. Vosseveld

felt Bruinsma was lacking a sense of reality and was too violent and paranoid. If he didn't watch out, he would get caught in the negative spiral. That is why he repeatedly advised Spic and Span, Saab, Sanborn and the rest of the guys to stay away from *that psychopath*. Sooner or later, it would be their turn to be eliminated, Vosseveld was convinced of that. But they did not take his advice. After all, they had no problem functioning in an environment where conflicts and differences of opinion were settled with bullets and blocks of concrete.

Bruinsma & Partners were to elevate this particular form of conflict management to a craft only paralleled in the Yugoslav and Italian underworlds. Vosseveld had been part of the club long enough to know what it stood for. He was earning a great living, but he still wanted to preserve his independence. He didn't accept anyone else's authority and was not about to be manipulated either. "Which was exactly what Klaas was after. It was all about power with him. The hegemony of the intellect." The differences between the characters of the two men led to huge clashes. Bruinsma was crazy about meetings, but always with himself as the Chairman and Board of Directors. As if he was following in the footsteps of his father with his soda factories. Vosseveld however couldn't stand get-togethers of this kind. He called them *meetings just for the sake of meeting*. It was no secret he was reluctant to attend. "Fuck you Klaas and all your meetings too!"

Sometimes Vosseveld would deliberately show up an hour late. Just because it was like him to be late and of course to clearly demonstrate his lack of respect. The others would sit there looking at their watches, irritated and wondering *where the black guy was*. "Oh shit, guys, I am sorry," was his standard response. "Let's not hold it against him," the Chairman would say, "after all, he is from South America!" They needed Vosseveld much too much to be able to openly express any criticism. What is more, they knew he could be overly sensitive sometimes and would walk out on them.

It was all part of the game. In the end, he was also benefiting from them and from their violent image. In a pinch, it was always handy to be able to say, "Hey, don't you know who I am? I am a friend of Klaas Bruinsma!" Nine times out of ten, it would get him out of a fix. In fact it would usually get people to give him a big pat on the shoulder and compliment him on what a great guy he was.

Vosseveld was not a man who liked to fight. Fighting was for the brainless musclemen with the hot tempers and it usually meant trouble. They were the guys who would toss a hand grenade into a restaurant because the waiter made a comment about their noisy behavior. Or put a bullet in your kneecap if you accidentally failed to shake their hand. If you went along with that kind of conduct, Vosseveld reasoned, you were only one step away from liquidations with a smile. And that was not the kind of business he was in, he preferred to keep his hands clean.

In the early years, maybe the Bruinsma group had exhibited the vague contours of a well-run criminal organization, but it had never really gotten off the ground. There had never been a tightly organized hierarchic structure. "It was like a pile of loose sand that could fall apart with one kick, and no one was particularly loyal to anyone. Each of the guys had their own interests to promote." By the end of the story, there wasn't really much of anything left. "I myself was at the other end of the spectrum," Vosseveld recalled. "I didn't have any particular need to be recognized as a power factor. Just as long as the money kept rolling in, I was satisfied."

When Vosseveld first started out, the Dutch authorities barely showed any interest in him. All that changed though when the Criminal Investigation Department

heard *from a very reliable source* that Vosseveld was planning to move his export firm in bulk transports to the United States. In conjunction with the American Drug Enforcement Administration, the decision was made to take advantage of this great opportunity to stop Vosseveld. The Americans were given permission to use whatever means they wanted to do so, most of which were pretty new to the Dutch. A DEA agent provocateur was going to catch Vosseveld in the international police nets with a shipment of hard drugs, the kind of merchandise he had initially been very clear he was not interested in. If Vosseveld bit and the deal went through, then to celebrate the occasion he would be invited by DEA agents for a vacation in the United States. In reality though, it would mean a life sentence at Marion Penitentiary, a maximum security prison in Illinois. That was where the real tough guys like New York Mafia boss John Gotti were spending their lives, knowing full well they would only get out after serving three life sentences plus a day. Vosseveld was going to be charged with the *mega import of illegal substances into the United States of America*.

In the end, the undercover agents were able to win Vosseveld's trust and at the end of February 1985, a ship came in from Rotterdam with a thousand kilograms of hashish on board, which the bill of lading described as first-class cotton. Karel Vosseveld sold the shipment to the undercover DEA agent for \$600,000, but didn't take him up on his offer of a nice vacation in the U.S. In November 1986 he did go to trial in Alkmaar though for the American transaction as well as a number of shipments from Morocco to the Netherlands and England. But the charges of shipping drugs to the United States were dropped. The court ruled that it was a case of unjust provocation. On his own, the suspect was never planning to ship any drugs to the United States. The court ruled that he had been incited to do so by the undercover DEA agent. In the beginning, the examining judge did not share this opinion, and held on like a pit bull, much to Vosseveld's irritation. With a smile, Vosseveld whispered to him, "You are one very troublesome judge, and I know what they do with troublesome judges in Italy." The examining judge made it clear that he was not impressed, and charged Vosseveld with *uttering a verbal threat*. With official permission, he purchased a pistol because of the seriousness of the intimidation. He told Vosseveld he *would not forget him*. The Public Prosecutor demanded ten years and eight months. In the end, Vosseveld was sentenced to seven years, an extremely long sentence for the criminal offense he had committed. It was evidently because the threat to the examining judge had also been taken into consideration, Vosseveld felt. "That much was clear!"

Later the Public Prosecutor stated he found the verbal utterance inappropriate for a man of Vosseveld's caliber, *the biggest hashish dealer in the world*. In the years to come, any number of drug dealers were to be called the biggest in the world. After all, there was barely a Public Prosecutor who didn't want to be the one to put away the biggest hashish dealer in the world. But for the time being, there was no doubt that the honor went to Karel Vosseveld.

Of course it didn't come as a surprise that a man like Vosseveld, with his friends at Customs, should play a role in the Delta affair. But it is not quite clear just exactly what that role was. There was always a fog of mystery surrounding Vosseveld and his activities. Some people *knew for sure* Vosseveld was the growth informer. In 1996, this claim was even made in print in the *NRC-Handelsblad*, after which I immediately got an angry call from Vosseveld, still in prison at the time, to ask whether I had been talking to those reporters. After a bit of digging, I discovered it was an Amsterdam Public Prosecutor who had been a bit too forthcoming to the reporters. Vosseveld assured me he was not the growth informer. After all, a growth

informer was a small potato whom the police would spoon feed till he turned into a watermelon. In a given period of time, he was supposed to grow up into a top infiltrator. It did not make any sense to suspect Vosseveld of any such thing, especially since he was as big as he would ever get. For years, he had already been the biggest importer in the Dutch underworld. But this did not stop the rumors about his selling out a whole bunch of his colleagues just so he could go on with his import business undisturbed. There were also people though who had blind faith in him.

Whatever the case may be, in the past Karel Vosseveld had been worth his weight in gold. He did however give rise to certain questions. But who didn't, in circles where pretty much everyone was called a police informer at one time or another? Or as one chief investigator put it, "85% of them are police informers and the rest talk to the police off the record." At any rate, no one was anywhere near Vosseveld's level and no one could even vaguely remember a time when he had ever operated like a small potato.

The first time we talked, it seemed as if we would be finished in no time. Vosseveld didn't know anything about the alleged Delta Organization. He had no idea who the term could refer to, and he hadn't ever had any contact with any of them anyway. At any rate, not that he knew of. He did know Etienne Urka. "A nice guy," but as far as he knew, he wasn't part of that group. "If you want to know about the Delta Organization, then I guess we are through here. I am sorry, but I don't know those people, and I never had any contact with them." It was obviously time for me to leave.

I made one last try. "Did you ever have anything to do with a guy by the name of Janssen?" Cees Janssen was a Fiscal Information and Investigation Department official who was dispatched as a kind of flying goal keeper to any number of investigation agencies all across the country, including the Regional Criminal Investigation Department in Haarlem. His name had come up a couple of times. According to my sources, he was the mysterious link between the underworld and the official world.

"Henk Janssen from Luxembourg?" Vosseveld asked me.

"No, not him," I said. "His brother Cees, he is an official at the Fiscal Information and Investigation Department in Haarlem."

"That's his brother?" Vosseveld couldn't believe it. The smile disappeared and his face fell. You could hear a pin drop. "That guy Cees from the Fiscal Information and Investigation Department is the brother of Henk from Luxembourg?" I nodded and waited for him to go on. "Damn. Now everything is suddenly very clear!"

A lot of Vosseveld's questions seemed to have been answered in one fell swoop. Pieces of the puzzle were apparently falling into place for him. "Now I finally know what game I have been playing. Those bastards were playing me. Incredible," he said, and burst out laughing.