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**Harmen Pols**

**Maartens Maarten**

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HARMEN POLS

**BY THE SAME AUTHOR**

**THE NEW RELIGION**

**BROTHERS ALL**

**THE PRICE OF LIS DORIS**


# HARMEN POLS

BY

MAARTEN MAARTENS

TO THEE, O IMMACULATE  
SCARRED BY THE TOUCH OF GOD'S FINGER,  
THIS PAGE OF IMMACULATE CONCEPTION,  
STAINED IN THE BEAMS OF LIFE'S PRISM.

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MCMX



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# HARMEN POLS

## CHAPTER I

**T**HE last gilt chaise had carried its laughing freight down the long, white road.

Young Harmen Pols stood sideways on the little bridge before the farm-yard: he watched the lessening speck beneath the lofty poplars. Lazily he watched it fade into nothing against the pellucid sky.

The wedding was over. The foolish, noisy wedding that had made so much stir, in a three weeks' burst of country gossip. Aunt Carlina, the middle-aged spinster, was the spouse of Roelant Slink.

The huge sun sank low in the amber summer evening, with a flare that spread wide, like a threat.

All day long the grey farm-house had resounded to the screech of violins and the rattle of laughter. There had been garlands and greenery, smoking platters and flowing beer-vats: there had even been the clank of rhythmic hobnails upon a responsive floor. Some young fellow, flushed, in his festive broadcloth, had caught up, towards the close, some full-petticoated maiden: suddenly the whole company had found itself whirling and twirling, with shrill shrieks of merriment, with high leaps and liftings, in dust and in din. Harmen shouted again, as he recalled that swift scene of rare revelry amidst the fumes of spirits, and tobacco,



and young human heat. None of them could dance, these grimly nurtured Dutch peasants, but all of them could caper, and most of them could kiss. If he had not kissed, it was only because he was the son of the house, and because he had never kissed any one — excepting, very rarely, his mother and, long ago, granddam, long forgotten, asleep in the long rest that follows on the last dance of all.

He wondered what his father, old Steven Pols, had thought of such excess. And he laughed again, at the vision of the bride — Aunt Carlina! jumping round, with those fierce little squeals, in the lusty arms of young Roel. Father's farmhand! Uncle Roel.

It was refreshing to recall the tumult of that red-hot June dazzlement, where he stood now in the silence of the lengthening shades. The stolid canal crept, a shimmery steel, between the faintly flustering poplars and the far haze of drowsy fields. High above, in the silver vault, broke a star.

"Hi! Come along, mother! Your walk!" He turned back, with a few quick steps, into the courtyard. His call blared like a trumpet in the broad vernacular of his birth.

The clatter of dishes and women's voices ceased in the background: the two men on the bench under the lindens looked up.

"I'll help with what's left of the washing, mother! Let's first have our walk!"

The farm-wife had run out into the open. "But, Harmen, the best dishes aren't done; and your aunt —"

"I've my own packing to finish!" screamed the overwrought bride. She appeared at the scullery-window. Her angular form, lanky as her brother's, was attired in a brown silk dress and much clumsy gold jewellery.

A modern hat, like a basket of corn-ears and poppies, rose on top of her lace peasant-cap.

"Why, mother, you won't miss your walk?" insisted Harmen, amazed.

"I — I don't want to walk, to-day," answered the Vrouw, nervously: her fingers plucked at her damp apron. "I — I don't care to go."

"Well, I do," maintained the son. "How should I know what time it was, if I hadn't seen the corn-factor go by?"

"I'll go," said the Vrouw, in the accent which comes to us when the tempter has conquered. "It's — it's too late for Blass to go by."

"Hurry!" answered Harmen, "I promise to wash Grandmother's dishes. Roel can help aunt with her —" The bride's window banged.

"It's cruel to tease her; she don't take to it," reproved the mother, as they passed, the tall pair of them — not angular they! — from the twilight of the trim courtyard into the warm darkness of the briar-hedge. "To-night she leaves the house she was born in."

"With her man," answered Harmen. "I should like to hear how father is making himself pleasant to Roel."

As a matter of fact, Roel, at that moment, was making himself unpleasant to Steven Pols. He was pointing out, concisely and clearly, that a marriage between a young fellow of twenty-six and an old maid of forty-nine means business. "Young corn may shine green, but ripe corn must show gold," he said carelessly patting his rounded thigh. He talked well, to an impervious white countenance, with a beak like an eagle's and a pendent hooked pipe. To the soul behind the mask all he said took the shape of one changeless word: ruin.

Nothing else in the wonder-smitten gloaming beneath the broad gloom of the lindens. Not a sound but that

boom, like a death-bell. Ruin. With old Steven Pols, and the older farm-house, to hear.

"So she's married!" laughed Harmen, strolling beside his mother. He couldn't stop laughing. What a day of laughter, what a three weeks' courtship of laughter it had been!

But the mother did not echo the laugh, the laugh of the whole country-side.

"Not there!" she said, drawing back. "Not the orchard!" Suddenly he felt emboldened, by the licence and jollification of the roaring-red day.

"Why do you dislike the orchard so? Tell me!" he said quickly. He got no answer; they wandered into the coppice: the heat was oppressive still.

"Father said they might take his own chaise," remarked the Vrouw.

"And 'Freckles,'" rippled Harmen. "Freckles! Roel Slink!"

Half the chaise is mine, breathed a thought from the far-away lindens, half the roan mare! A shudder ran through the tops of the taller trees on grandfather's farm.

The pair wandered along the narrow windings through the coppice in the golden-grey twilight calm. Above them, against the darkening heaven, clear-cut, the small crescent lay tossed. In the mellow mildness of the air, breathing gently, the farm-wife, fatigued more than she would easily have chosen to confess, leaned upon the firm arm of her son.

"Juffrouw Slink!" chuckled Harmen, harping, peasant-like.

"Well?" she answered with impatience. "Your aunt's got her lover. I've always said the fairies 'd bring him, if she wouldn't speak so cross!"

"She speaks cross still," objected Harmen, "to us."

He added meditatively: "I wonder, does father think this was the Lord?"

"Father thinks all things are the Lord's doing," steadily answered the Vrouw.

"Mighty queer things sometimes," remarked Harmen, his mind full of Carlina.

The Vrouw sighed. "What a night!" she said suddenly, standing still. "Boy, what a night!"

Harmen's was not the age, nor the temperament, to find adequate reply. In silence he sympathized, undiscernibly. The warm blood pulsed in his young veins. He wiped his forehead.

"And a month ago she was only just old Carlina," he said.

"Not so old! Not so very old!" the Vrouw burst out with sudden vehemence.

"Goodness, mother; she's four years older than you!"

"True!" assented the farm-wife, as suddenly subdued. "So she is, boy. Five years older'n me," her hand trembled on his arm.

"And that's very old to think of marrying," she added eagerly. "So it is."

They passed forth into the brushwood. The opaline radiance of the twilight opened out before them. Tangled masses of oak leaves stretched fantastic and fragrant, alive with a million quiverings of inaudible life. They passed on through the brushwood. Her bosom rose and fell.

"It'll come mighty strange to her, the living in the city will," said Harmen. "I wouldn't. Not I."

"No, please God!" cried his mother, "you'll never have cause."

"It'll suit Roel to a 't,' though," argued Harmen, beating the low bushes as he walked. "Roel wasn't