

A true crime story about guilt and innocence, delusion and truth

The Damiaan Farm

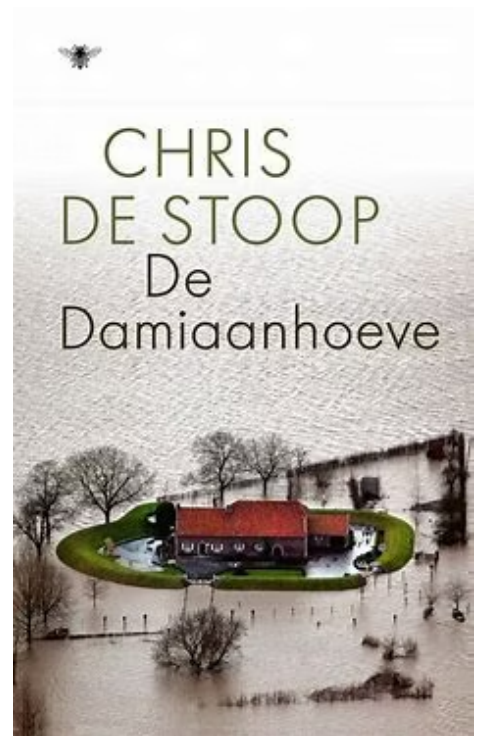
CHRIS DE STOOP

On the banks of La Meuse, a centuries-old farm called Damiaan lies like an island in the river's winter bed. During floods, the farm literally looks like an isolated fortress, protected by a two-metre-high ring dyke that Bert built single-handedly after the Christmas floods of 1993. The farm also becomes an island in a hostile environment for Bert after some shocking events.

When Bert comes home one summer evening, the farmhouse is burning. He is able to drag out his dying wife. Autopsy reveals that the much-loved and committed Gerty has been gruesomely murdered. The police investigation stalls, but after two years Bert himself is arrested on suspicion of murder. He spends months in prison, is released but not acquitted, and remains a suspect in the eyes of the local community.

Alongside this story, a second narrative unfolds in 'The Damiaan Farm': that of the changing landscape under the influence of industrialisation and the commercialisation of gravel extraction, a theme the author also explored in his book *This Is My Farm*. Bert refuses to sell his farm, and this refusal may also play a role in the context of the murder.

In a poignant manner, Chris De Stoop paints the context and impact of what has become known as 'the farmhouse murder'. A true story about guilt and innocence, truth and lies, and the tunnel vision that can plague judicial investigations. "The more I learned, the more I realised I would probably never know," the author concludes.



AUTHOR



Chris De Stoop (b. 1958) is an author and a journalist for the Flemish weekly *Knack*. In 2004 he was awarded the Golden Owl Readers' Prize for 'She Came from the East'. In 2010 he wrote *Peace Be With You, Sister*, about the first Jihadists to leave for Syria and Iraq. With his debut 'They're So Sweet, Sir' he became the first to write the inside story of the international trafficking of women, a bombshell of a book that caused great commotion at home and abroad. Photo © Lenny Oosterwijk

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