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All day long . . .

Cees Nooteboom

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Cees Nooteboom

from *Self-Portrait of an Other*

All day long he has been walking through the sweltering city and gone in and out of the subway like a mole, blinking more and more blindly against the light each time he comes up again. He has no purpose, he's chosen the stations arbitrarily: streets with high and low numbers, squares in forgotten neighborhoods, decrepit parks with ruined swings. Everywhere he is encircled by other people, and he has stored the endless succession of their faces away for later, when he will be alone again. He has followed a woman with a dog which doesn't belong in cities. As they were disappearing behind an unpainted front door, the dog had given him a long look such as a dog shouldn't give to a human. So even that one he needed to remember. As the day wears on, he sees the faces change and become unrecognizable. He asks himself how it is with him, but doesn't dare to touch his own face and avoids his glance in the windows. When he climbs up from underground again for the last time, he hears how they follow him in the distorted night, how close they already are. The soft ticks of their nails sound like a watch running faster and faster.

Translated from the Dutch
by **Duncan Dobbelmann**