

TRAPPED IN THE NETHERLANDS

By Deena Gomersall



ILLUSTRATED BY CHAS

A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL

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IN THE NETHERLANDS

By Deena Gomersall

Chapter One: A DODGY DEAL

The high court in Paris was sitting. Press reporters, cameramen and television crews were all assembled. The court usher called the witness. Shortly afterwards, a pretty young woman with long locks of auburn hair entered the room. She was tall and shapely and was wearing a low cut, figure hugging dress which revealed ample cleavage; her long shapely legs were adorned in black fishnet stockings. She walked eloquently on four inch stiletto heeled shoes. She looked alert, cool and very confident as she straightened out the black dress that she wore with a delicate hand ending in long, well manicured, red lacquered finger nails. She answered the question of her name in a husky, feminine, Dutch accent.

"I'm Maninka Barends."

Her calmness and confident manner was there for all those present in the courtroom to witness, but her composure before court was a far cry from when she had lived in Leicester, England just a few years earlier. She had also looked very different back then.

LEICESTER, ENGLAND March 1991

The four youths were talking quietly in the corner of the public bar where they had agreed to meet the previous week.

"Look ,it's simple: I've got the money together, my contact in Rotterdam has the goods, 20,000 worth of crack. It just needs collecting by us," the older of the four announced.

"So then why don't you get it yourself?" Mark, the leader of the other three asked.

"You gotta be jokin', ain't ya? Look, the government have been keeping tabs on me for the last year or so, my face is known to every customs officer in the country. I have a whole lot of stuff to get over, this is only the first batch. I'm talking big money."

"Yeah, well we ain't exactly unknown to the Police ourselves, you know," Mark replied.

He was right. He and his friends had a string of convictions ranging from assault and house breaking to mugging and joy riding.

"Listen mate, I wouldn't have come to anyone who didn't have a record. I need people with some form, someone not afraid to do the job and who aren't scared of the Law. But none of you are being watched in connection to drug dealing and shipment, nor are you known to the customs officers," the stranger reminded Mark.

Mark knew that his gang had been a little too high profile for his comfort recently. But there was one person Mark had ties to that was not known in police circles.

Jeff Robinson was a rather shy and retiring sort of young fellow who was well liked by the older residents of the community where he lived. But he found it difficult to mix with those of his own age, who usually regarded him as a bit of a wimp. At one time he had hung out with his cousin Mark and his gang, but as they always seemed to be getting into fist fights or other trouble, he felt out of place in their company. He disliked fighting or any form of violence and was too honest to commit a crime so he always walked away if the gang were planning something. The only real reason that he associated with his cousin at all was that he found it easier to meet girls in the gang's company; a number of them hung with the gang. These were all rough girls who used bad language and joined in with the boys' dodgy activities. They were all keen on sex though, and Jeff was just regarded as another lay to them.

He would have preferred to date a nice, quiet girl more like himself. He had been well brought up, but he was painfully shy of making a first move, a problem he didn't have with the girls in the gang. He was quite good looking, being five feet nine inches tall with a slim build. He wore his long brown hair in a modern ponytail, but it was his large mouth and attractive smile that girls found most appealing about him. Even though they found him rather boring, a few had gone about seducing him when they fancied a change from the rougher boys or wanted to make one of them jealous.

As Mark and his friends became known to the police, however, Jeff's parents attempted to stop him from associating with his wayward cousin. He hadn't hung about with Mark now since his seventeenth birthday and he was now going on nineteen. This also meant that he hadn't had a girlfriend for a similar length of time, something he deeply missed. It didn't usually take him very long to fall in love with any that he became involved with, although, of course, he didn't mean the same to them and always ended up being hurt after being dumped.

Jeff was surprised one day to see his cousin Mark at the front door.

"All right, cousin?" Mark inquired. "Is Auntie Mary or Uncle Fred home?"

"Hello, Mark! Er... no, they've gone out I'm afraid," Jeff answered.

This came as no surprise to Mark, who had watched the car pull from the driveway. "Are you still out of work then, Jeff?" he asked.

"Well yes, I am at the moment. But I've got an interview next week."

"How long you been out of work now, cuz? I bet it's goin' on a year, isn't it?" Mark continued as he began to push past his cousin to walk by him into the house.

"Well, it's been ten months now."

"Ten months!" exclaimed Mark, cutting Jeff short. "And I'll bet you never even got away on holiday last year either, did you?"

“No,” replied Jeff, shaking his head despondently.

“Well... me and the lads are having a few days over in Holland at the end of this month. You know, just a weekend break.”

“That should be nice for you.”

“Yeah it should be. Why don't you join us? I've just remembered Terry paid for the expenses, all you would need is spending money,” Mark said.

“I'm not sure. I've never been abroad before”

“So? Now's your chance since you don't have a job to go to everyday,” Mark continued. “I'll bet you haven't ever had a girl since you used to knock about with us, have you?”

“Okay, I'll come along. But no funny business.”

Later That Week

“Okay, it's all set then,” Mark was saying as he put down the phone. “You'll send us the air tickets and you will be paying us 1,000 pounds when you receive the merchandise? ...Yeah, I got this dopey cousin of mine to come along with me; don't worry he'll be no trouble... No, he knows nothing about it, he just thinks he's getting a free weekend with plenty of shagging thrown in.... Ha ha, yeah, that's right.”

28th March 1991

“Come on, you wanker, hurry up with the cases,” Roy snarled at Jeff.

Jeff was puffing behind the rest of the boys and carrying two large and very heavy suitcases as well as a small case with his own change of clothing. The other three, rather unfairly, he thought, had just a small case each to carry.

“Could one of you help me with one of these cases please?” Jeff asked hopefully. “What do you have in them? They weigh a ton.”

“You ungrateful git, you're getting a free holiday and you're not even prepared to help with the luggage,” Mark sneered.

“Sorry Mark, I suppose I do sound a bit ungrateful; it's just that they are rather heavy.” Jeff sighed.

Nothing else was mentioned nor did anyone offer to help with the bags. Before long they had made their way through customs without any incident, and the luggage was on the conveyor ready to be loaded onto the plane.

“Right, here we go then,” Mark announced as they all settled into their seats. “It's time to hit the booze while we make the journey. What you say to that, Jeff?”

“I'd better not, I haven't flown before. I'd better see how my stomach holds out first,” he responded.

The other three looked at their travel companion and then at each other, then burst out laughing.

“What's the bravest thing that you ever did, Jeff?” Roy asked in mocking tones.

“Being born probably,” Craig suggested, causing the other two to laugh again.

Jeff reddened as all three laughed at him. What was so wrong or funny about him not wanting to chance drinking alcohol when he had never flown before? They were always putting him down for no reason. He remembered clearly now how relieved he was after he had stopped hanging out with them. But now it seemed he was going to have to endure three days of ribbing from them again.

By the time that the plane had touched down in Rotterdam, the three friends were well oiled from booze, leaving Jeff to look for the cases.

Mark searched his pockets for the name of the hotel they were staying at, while Roy and Craig eventually came to help with the cases which Jeff had already collected and carried out to the terminal exit.

“Okay, what we need now is a taxi to get into the city,” Mark suggested to his colleagues. “This airport is northeast of the city, and we need to be in the center.”

“What if the taxi driver doesn't speak English?” Craig questioned.

“He should, shouldn't he?” Mark replied. “Anyway, I'll just hand him the address to read. That is, unless Jeff can speak the lingo.” They all laughed at that improbability.

“He'll have to learn his own language first,” Roy joked.

Jeff decided not to bite. ‘Let them have their pathetic fun,’ he thought.

Mark flagged down a cab. “Are you boys English?” the taxi driver asked, speaking good English as he looked at the address. “Ah, you'll be okay to find your way back to this hotel; it's next to the Euromast, and you can't miss that.”

“What's the Euromast then, mate?” Craig asked with almost genuine interest.

“You'll see. It's a structure 85 meters high, as good a landmark as you'll find,” the driver chuckled.

The boys did indeed see the tremendous tower and were equally impressed.

Roy and Craig shared a double room at the hotel while Mark and Jeff each had single rooms, Mark having no desire to share with his cousin.

Jeff looked around the inside of his room: it was spacious and airy and had a color television, phone and shower. Perhaps he would enjoy the weekend break after all, even with the other three constantly heckling.

Putting his change of clothes away in the drawers, he then rested on top of the bed. He watched television for a little while, knowing that the others would now probably be sleeping off their on flight drinks.

Jeff had nodded off himself when there came a knock on his room door. Getting up he went to see who it was.

Mark, in the doorway, looked upon his cousin as he waited to be invited in. Jeff was naked to the waist, revealing to Mark his slim build and pale skin with very little chest hair, his slender arms and light brown hair that was pulled tightly in a ponytail.

‘This jerk,’ Mark thought, ‘is such an embarrassment, being a blood relative and a puny one at that.’

"I thought I'd let you know," Mark said to Jeff, "we're all going down to the bar until the evening meal is served. Are you coming?"

"Yes, I'll just put something on and see you down there."

"Yeah right," Mark responded once more casting his eyes over Jeff's boyish frame. "We'll see if we can catch us some rays tomorrow, mate, looks like you could do with some tan."

"Oh, er, yes, right. I'll see you downstairs then."

"What are we going to do about collecting the gear without that sissy cousin of yours suspecting anything?" Craig asked Mark.

"Don't worry, I've fixed everything. We're meeting our contact and I'll take care of everything then."

"Yeah, okay Mark, whatever you say."

By the time that Jeff joined the others half an hour later, they were sitting with a group of Dutch girls. Jeff bought himself a drink and joined them. He was wearing a tee shirt, jeans and an old denim jacket, hoping that he would fit in with the others. His hair was pulled loosely back over his head. The girls had been attracted to the rough and ready look of the other three but were interested in Jeff in another way, like so many other girls that Jeff had met. They found him charming and were captivated by his enchanting smile, which was his best feature. His teeth were white and perfect, and his wide mouth lit up his face whenever he grinned. His eyes sparkled with an innocence that none of the other tough guys had. He was attractive, not so much in a manly way but in an almost pretty way. As Jeff drank he became more relaxed in the girls' company and began to become less uncomfortable.

Jeff began to command more of the girls' attention, leaving the other three guys feeling put out and annoyed. Mark knew that his cousin didn't even smoke cigarettes but still offered him a joint in front of the girls. "Come on, Jeff, you don't want the ladies to think that you're a wimp do you?" he challenged. "I bet they would like one."

"Er, isn't it illegal to smoke joints?" Jeff inquired as a way of hopefully refusing one.

"No, relax. The Dutch don't bother too much so long as you're not peddling the stuff. Come on, don't show yourself up in front of these nice girls."

Jeff felt compelled to take one in an attempt to save face with the four girls in their company, whom he'd been getting on so well with. Soon however, the alien smoke in his system mixed with the drink had him feeling dizzy.

"Sorry girls, looks like my cousin here has had a few too many. I'd best send him up to his room, maybe you'll see him tomorrow."

Jeff was now feeling too sickly to even say good night to them. He allowed Mark to escort him back to his room.

Back in the company of the others once more, Mark chatted up the Dutch girls until they retired at about 11 PM. Shortly after that the boys went to their rendezvous to meet Koerse.

Koerse was a tall, heavysset man, unshaven and tough looking. There were two other men with him.

“Are you the ones sent by Brady?” he asked.

“Yeah, you Mister Koerse?” Mark responded.

“That's me. I have the stuff in two cases in the back of the car. The agreement was twenty thousand British pounds; you got the money?”

“Right here,” Mark replied lifting up a small case and offering it to Koerse. The man took the case and looked inside at the contents.

“This looks okay to me, English. Tell Brady that there's plenty more when he's ready to collect.”

With that, the two men with Koerse brought out two cases packed tightly with plastic packages full of cocaine. All satisfied, the meeting ended and the boys made their way back to the hotel.

“Easy money or what ?” Mark laughed, feeling safe now that they were back inside their rooms. He pulled out the two heavy cases that they had brought with them and which Jeff had carried at the airport. He then removed the stacks of old newspapers that had packed them. They then began to pack the drugs in their place.

“Do you reckon that Jeff will notice the difference in weight?” Roy asked.

“Nah, I doubt it. Anyway, like the caring cousin I am, I'll get him a luggage trolley for the outward journey,” laughed Mark. “And then, good old 'butter wouldn't melt in his mouth' Jeff can walk happily past the nice customs officers for us.”

Day 2

Jeff was out and about bright and early the next morning, wearing a black jacket over a white tee shirt, black corduroy trousers and black shoes with a large buckle. He looked passable as a well dressed, modern day youth. He was still feeling a bit groggy from the previous night but was keen to do a bit of sightseeing before they all returned to Leicester the following day.

He received some rather rude expletives when he tried to wake the others; they were all of a mind to sleep in as long as they could.

Although Jeff was unsure of using Dutch guilders, never having handled foreign currency before and desperately hoping that nobody spoke to him in Dutch, he made his way down to the dining area of the hotel for a continental breakfast.

Mark had changed all of his money into guilders for him, and he soon found that if he didn't try thinking in the equivalent of pound sterling and just paid out in the guilders that it was relatively easy.

Most of the hotel staff communicated in English, and only when he left the hotel to look around Rotterdam did he feel lost in the sea of foreign words, signs and conversa-

tion. After seeing the few sights he could find without knowing the language, he headed back to the hotel. He arrived just in time to see the others packing the last of the drugs into the suitcases.

"...We'll get the stuff out today and be gone before they know it," Mark said before he noticed Jeff standing there.

"Why Mark?" Jeff asked. "Why are you messing with drugs and why didn't you let me know what was going on?"

"Because I didn't want to involve you; you're my cousin." Mark lied. "But now we are going to need you to get the cases out."

"No, no way. I'm not touching them."

"But if you don't, then they'll catch us with the drugs. I'd go to jail, Jeff..."

"Just leave them here and lets get back to England today."

"You're joking. If Brady doesn't get the merchandise he'll have us killed, all of us. He's paid a lot of money for this stuff."

It took a lot of persuading, but eventually Jeff was talked into getting the cases out and making his way to the airport with them, putting them in lockups. His confidence was drained and his nerves on edge; he really didn't feel competent enough to do all that was instructed.

"Look, you'll be all right," Mark encouraged him. "Flag a taxi outside here and tell him to take you to the airport. Deposit the cases and then get back here. We'll see you back in this room, okay?"

Only the fear of ending up in some rough Dutch prison kept Jeff from going totally to pieces. When he had gone, the others allowed themselves to be seen leaving the hotel. Then, some time later, returning again. They didn't want to raise any suspicions that they were aware that they were being watched.

Jeff had returned himself before they did and sat nervously in his room.

"Did you get the job done as I told you?" Mark asked.

"Yes," Jeff said uncomfortably.

"Good boy. Okay, give me the keys to the airport locker. We will act as naturally as possible for the rest of the day, and I suggest you keep out of our company. Then they won't associate you with us. Just as soon as it gets light tomorrow we will sneak out."

Jeff could hardly sleep that night for worrying. He eventually did fall asleep only to be waken again after what seemed to be a comparatively short space of time; the alarm sounded at 5:00.

Quickly pulling on his clothes, he packed his small travel case and silently opened his door. He crossed the landing to Mark's room.

Several soft taps on the door failed to get any response, so Jeff tried the door, finding that it was unlocked.

Entering inside he was alarmed to find that Mark wasn't there. With his heart beginning to race, Jeff went over to Roy's and Craig's shared room and found their door

was similarly unlocked and the drawers empty. He noticed that the beds had not been slept in. They were all gone!

Not knowing what else to do, Jeff went back to his room and sat with his head in his hands. He suddenly felt totally alone, betrayed and very scared. He actually broke down and cried as his emotions got the better of him.

Chapter Two : ALONE

Jeff stayed in his room for the next three hours. He didn't want to believe it but it appeared that his own cousin and the others had made their getaway and left him there. He felt desolate, abandoned and more afraid than he had ever been in his life. He had never had much confidence so far as his own abilities were concerned and had always allowed himself to be led; now in a foreign country he was totally alone.

He thought perhaps he should leave the hotel himself, go to the airport and try to get the plane home. But what if the police came to the airport checking on all those bound for England and found that he hadn't checked out of the hotel he had been staying in?

Could he even check out? Had Mark paid the hotel bill beforehand or was he going to do so after their stay? A mistake would draw suspicion to him, but he didn't know. Perhaps they would stop him, prohibit him from leaving if it needed paying, call the police and they would find he had been with the other three. He wasn't even sure just how much money he had, since it all was in guilders. He was beginning to grow more and more afraid.

Then a sudden awful truth dawned on him: Mark had been holding his passport. Needlessly he ran into Mark's room and began searching the drawers in the hope that he had left it, but he already knew they were empty from earlier.

Starting to panic, Jeff knew that he had to at least get out of the hotel, knowing that the authorities would be watching. He wondered, had he already been identified by the staff?

He sat down to think. If they were watching him and he left with his case, then they would know that he was leaving. Maybe they would try to stop him.

'No, I've got to leave my case and clothing here,' he thought. 'Then they'll just think that I am going out to take a walk. It's 9:20. Okay, I've got to think, I've got to get out of the hotel and go back to the airport. It just may be that the others are there waiting for me. I doubt the police would start to follow me if they think the others are still inside.'

By 10:40, Jeff was back at the Airport. Checking on all the scheduled flights to England, he made sure that he covered each boarding plane to look for his cousin and friends. There was no sign of them, not even on the 2:30 PM flight, the one they were scheduled to catch. With nowhere else to go and not knowing what else to do, Jeff wandered around the airport until almost midnight. He clasped his hands to his head in despair as tears trickled down his cheeks.

The empty desolate feeling he now experienced was unlike anything that he had ever felt before. He went over and over everything in his mind, again and again; he

even came to considering if the other three may have been caught and were locked up somewhere. Would they tell on him? Were the police already combing Rotterdam looking for him?

He checked his wallet and found he had 340 guilders in notes plus a small amount of change. He believed that he had enough for a flight back, but what could he do without a passport?

Realizing that he had gone a long time without anything to eat, he bought himself a light meal and something to drink at the terminal. Then he bedded down on a seat just outside the airport in the cold night air.

Jeff woke with a start by someone prodding him in his back. He looked round and froze as he saw a policeman standing over him and saying something in Dutch.

Getting over his initial shock, Jeff realized that the policeman was moving him on, obviously taking him for a vagabond. Although he had no idea as to whether the officer could speak in English or not, he decided not to let him know that he was English in case they were looking for an Englishman.

Getting up, Jeff grumbled but didn't speak, simply moving on as commanded. Setting off on foot once more he soon found himself heading back downtown. As the first glimpse of the cold, early morning light appeared in the sky, he was back in the center of the city.

Every once in a while cars would pass by, figures flitted around street corners and alleyways. Once or twice he saw groups of scantily dressed girls who were obviously plying their trade. He dodged a group of five approaching men by ducking into a doorway. A gentleman startled Jeff. He figured he must have looked suspicious to the man by hiding in the doorway.

Jeff assumed the man was asking him what he was up to huddling in the doorway. "I'm just looking for a place to buy cigarettes," Jeff replied nervously.

"Pardon me, English, but you look like... How you say? A fish out of the water. My name is Henk," the stranger announced offering his hand to Jeff.

"Oh, my name is Jeffrey, Jeffrey Robinson."

"It looks like you've had a fright, Jeffrey. I was about to go for a nightcap, would you care to join me? There is a bar I know which stays open late."

"Thank you, Henk, but I've really got to be going."

"And where may that be to?"

Jeff's awkward reply indicated that he really didn't know.

"I think that you are maybe lost? Or maybe have a big problem you are hiding. You are not afraid of me, are you?"

"No, of course not," Jeff lied.

"Then come, let me buy you a drink while you tell me your problem. The streets are not safe at this time. And who knows, I may be able to help you."

Jeff was afraid the man was homosexual and was trying to pick him up but not daring to offend him, he went for a half way option. "Well, maybe just one drink, then I must be on my way, really. I have friends waiting for me."

Henk led Jeff through several streets and then down a flight of steps just off the sidewalk. That led into a dimly lit, smoke filled bar. Inside were a number of rough looking men drinking and talking. There were even a few young women, one of which came over to greet Henk, kissing him on the lips. This was light relief for Jeff; at least it indicated that Henk wasn't gay as he had first feared.

Several drinks of strong lager later, Jeff's tongue was loosened enough so that he found himself blurting out his whole story. In a way it was a relief to tell someone. Throughout, Henk sat quietly and listened.

"I think I ought to phone my parents and let them know what has happened," Jeff suggested.

"No!" Henk quickly interjected. "This may not be wise. The police may be intercepting all calls to England from the exchange."

"You don't think they would do that, do you? But if I don't contact them, how else will I get home?"

"Listen, I have contacts who can forge you a British passport with your photograph, but it may take a week or just longer."

"A week?" Jeff gasped.

"I think that it would be unwise for you to make a move before that time anyway. You would be better laying low for a while."

"But what can I do for a week? Where could I stay?"

"How much money do you have?" Henk asked.

"About 350 guilders"

Henk scratched his chin. "This is not much. You would need 700 for the passport alone. Look, English, I like you and I want to help you. I can put you up somewhere for the week and maybe find you some work to pay for the passport. What do you say?"

Jeff once more allowed himself to be led and let other people sort out his problems, forgetting how well he'd been doing on his own so far.

"I really don't know what else to do. Thank you," Jeff said. "I've nowhere else to go and I don't suppose my money would last long. But I must contact home somehow. My parents will be worried. If I cannot phone them, then I'll write."

"No, mail from Rotterdam may also be intercepted."

"Oh, this is getting ridiculous. Anyone would think I was an international spy or something. Isn't it possible that the police would think we have already gone back to England?"