

How to relax in Amsterdam

by John Waterhouse

(excerpt)

Cast

- Saskia** - early 30's - a bright, friendly young woman.
- Peter** - late 40's - intelligent but unassuming Englishman.
- Truus** - late 20's - bohemian and feminist neo-punk.
- Bert** - early 60's - worldly-wise hippy, with his fingers in a few pies.
- Dagarada** - 30's- a journalist, living in the same block of flats.
- Henk** - 30's - a policeman and friend of Saskia, living nearby.

The setting is Saskia's flat in Amsterdam.

The time is the present.

Peter has received an invitation from Saskia to stay at her flat, having met her at a pension in Southern Spain. Saskia is Dutch and lives in Amsterdam. Peter is pleased to be invited but wonders how he will go on living for a while amongst the Dutch.

Act 1.

Enter PETER and SASKIA. PETER is carrying a suitcase and a shoulder bag. SASKIA has a carrier bag full of food and drink.

PETER: So this is your place?

SASKIA: Yes; do you like it?

PETER: Yes, I rather think I do. It has a distinct style.

SASKIA: It's ok. Just a typical city-centre flat! Have a seat; I'll make some coffee.

PETER: Thanks

(PETER sits down and SASKIA exits. PETER looks at her books and CDs.)

PETER: How long have you lived here?

SASKIA: *(off-stage)* Eighteen months.

PETER: Always just by yourself?

SASKIA: *(off-stage)* I had a friend stay with me for a time.

PETER: Oh yeah?

SASKIA: *(off-stage)* Truus. You might meet see her later.

PETER: Oh, good.

SASKIA: *(off-stage)* I think you will find her interesting

PETER: It sounds like you've got quite a few interesting friends, from what you've already told me.

Saskia enters with coffees.

SASKIA: Yeah, one or two. Here you are.

PETER: *(takes coffee)* Thanks. Dutch coffee?

SASKIA: Of course. *(they drink their coffees)* So, what would you like to do?

PETER: I'm not sure. It's very kind of you to invite me here but I've no real plans.

SASKIA: Well, you're not just going to sit around reading books, like you did in Spain, are you?

PETER: (*laughs*) No, of course not. Well, let me think. You won't think it too boring if I say I'd like to go round some of the galleries?

SASKIA: No, that's cool.

PETER: And maybe see a bit of the villages outside of the city? Like Volendam?

SASKIA: Yeah, that's ok.

PETER: And I'm looking forward to meeting your friends.

SASKIA: You will find them interesting. Especially Truus; she is a kraker!

PETER: Oh, really. So you think I'd think she's sexy?

SASKIA: What do you mean?

PETER: You say she's a cracker; in English, that normally means good looking, sexy body, you know!

SASKIA: Ah. No, a kraker is, er....I think you say 'squatter'. She is with a group who are illegally living in an empty building.

PETER: Oh; so that's a cracker! Do the authorities know about that? Or do they have some legal right to, you know, live in empty spaces?

SASKIA: Oh, yes. It is a big issue here. Not strictly legal but Truus and her friends are trying to the government to pay to refurbish empty flats and let them out cheaply.

PETER: So the fact they are living rent-free is nothing to do with it?

SASKIA: Oh, no; because they see it as an environmental issue!

PETER: Well, talking of sharing the environment, since you're putting me up here, I'd like to do my share of cooking.

SASKIA: Hhhha. You English have such a reputation for haut cuisine; you might put us to shame. Anything else?

PETER: What else do you suggest?

SASKIA: What about looking for a job?

PETER: Are you serious? I don't speak a word of Dutch.

SASKIA: I've known people get some kinds of work here without knowing the language.

PETER: I won't ask what doing!

SASKIA: I didn't mean that kind of work, although I don't know though. You have a good body and...

PETER: No, don't even think about it.

SASKIA: Well, you have no commitments back in England, do you?

PETER: No, that's true.

SASKIA: Something to think about, then. Maybe even something with computers.

PETER: Hmm. Well, I suppose so.

SASKIA: You might even meet a nice Dutch girl and decide to settle here!

PETER: I don't think that's likely.

SASKIA: You might be surprised. People are a lot more open, here in Holland. You might find less of the barriers you have in getting to know a person over here.

PETER: It's not quite as repressed in England as you think, Saskia!

SASKIA: So, what happened with that girl in Spain?

PETER: You mean Christina?

SASKIA: Yes, that waitress. Unless you met any others you've not told me about?

PETER: Well, you know. After you'd left the hotel, I stayed around for another week and we did a few things together. Nice girl but very excitable; typical Latin temperament.

SASKIA: So not really your type?

PETER: No, not my type at all. Although we're still in touch!

SASKIA: Ah!

PETER: But I've told you; I'm really not looking for a relationship. Me and my ex-wife turned out to be so incompatible, I'm not sure what kind of person I'd be looking for, in any case.

SASKIA: Ok, then. Do you want to freshen up? Have a shower maybe?

PETER: Yes, that would be good, thanks. After waiting two hours at the airport and then being cooped up in that aircraft, I could do with a shower.

SASKIA: Go right ahead. I'll start making something to eat. Do you like fish?

PETER: Yeah, sounds great.

SASKIA: Help yourself to a towel in the cupboard inside the bathroom. The shower is second on the right through the entrance.

PETER: Thanks.

SASKIA: Your bedroom is the one on the left. I'm just going to get changed.

PETER: Ok. See you in a bit.

Exit PETER with his suit case. SASKIA sits down and checks her shopping. The doorbell rings. SASKIA opens the door and in walks TRUUS, looking a bit startling in punk clothing and make-up (high-piled haired, heavy eye-shadow, black boots, spandex trousers and short black leather jacket).

TRUUS: Hoi (hi) Goededag (good day), Saskia.

SASKIA: Hoi Truss. Hoe gaat het? (How are you?) *(they kiss on the cheek)*

TRUUS: Fijn, fijn. (fine, fine) I think I'd better speak to you in English as your friend is here. He is here, yes?

SASKIA: The plane was a bit late so we've only just got back. He landed about an hour ago

TRUUS: *(looks around)* Where is he, then?

SASKIA: Having a shower.

TRUUS: Oh. Ok.

SASKIA: We're probably going out for a drink soon so you're welcome to join us.

TRUUS: Cool.

SASKIA: Peter is quite reserved so it might do him some good to go to one of the more cultural bars.

TRUUS: So long as it's not to the Irish bar. Seamus is driving me mad; he wants women to perform as objects in the bar! He can't see that things have changed.

SASKIA: There are still bars like that.

TRUUS: I know but if he wants to be with me, he's got to move into the 21st century.

SASKIA: Maybe he's just wanting to experiment a bit!

TRUUS: Yes; well, I'm not going to be his guinea pig!

SASKIA: I'm glad you're here actually. I've just remembered that I've forgotten something. Can you wait here just for two minutes, whilst I just go the shop on the corner?

TRUUS: Yeah, sure.

SASKIA: Ok, thanks. Won't be long; Pour yourself a coffee if you want.

Exit SASKIA. TRUUS gets herself a drink and sits down. She lights a cigarette and starts smoking. She is amused at the sound of PETER singing in the shower.

PETER: (*off-stage*) Do you have any shampoo, please?

TRUUS: Er.....I'm not sure. Just what you can see there, I guess.

PETER: (*off-stage*) No probs. There's some in my bag.

Enter PETER with just a towel around his waist and rubbing his eyes.

PETER: Seem to have got a bit of soap in my eyes. (*Looks at TRUUS*) Heavens above! That was quick. You have changed. What have you done to yourself? You look like some kind of punk!

TRUUS: I am some kind of punk. Is that a problem?

PETER: But you never mentioned that before!

TRUUS: Should I have done?

PETER: Well, I don't suppose so but it's a bit of a shock.

TRUUS: Really! I wasn't expecting to see you half naked!

PETER: Er, yes. Well, nothing you've not seen before. I'll just finish my shower.

PETER turns round and is about to leave.

TRUUS: Mmm. Nice ass.

PETER: Really!

PETER hurriedly takes his bag and exits.

TRUUS: And Saskia said he was quite shy and retiring!

TRUUS sits down to relax and he mobile rings.

TRUUS (on mobile) Truus Van der Molem. Ja? Oh, it's you. Well, I don't know. I'll have to think about it. I didn't hear that; it's a bad line. Can you hear me? Yes, I can hear you ok.

(raises voice) Sorry, again. *(shouts)* No, I am not dancing again! You think I'm just going to be a decorative object! Yes, you do, you sexist pig!!

PETER: *(off stage)* What?

SASKIA: *(in loud voice on mobile)* I am not dancing for you.

PETER: *(off stage)* Well, have I asked you to?

TRUUS: *(looks towards the bathrooms angrily and continues conversation)* Don't even think of asking me to perform topless!

PETER: *(off stage)* Please let me finish my shower and we can talk. I'll be out in a minute.

TRUUS: *(on mobile)* Look, I'll phone you back! *(TRUUS puts away her phone as SASKIA enters with some shopping.)* Ah, Saskia. I've just had Seamus on from the bar. He's like a dinosaur, still living in the 70's! And why has everything got to be green? He's obsessed with green! Green curtains, green walls. He even wants me to stop wearing black and wear green!

SASKIA: I could see you in green.

TRUUS: Now don't you start!

SASKIA: Why not just blue, then?

TRUUS: Why blue?

SASKIA: You could become a Smurf!!

TRUUS: Very funny! I need to sort something out with him, or sort him out! I'll be back soon.

SASKIA: Oh, ok. See you in a bit. I'll text you if we go out.

Exit TRUUS. SASKIA takes her shopping into the kitchen and returns. She takes off her top to reveal a tight fitting T-shirt. The phone rings.

SASKIA: *(on the phone)* Hallo, Saskia Lier. Ah, hi Bert. How are you? Yeah, he's here; just having a shower as we speak. No, nothing planned. I'm just fixing something to eat. Why don't you come over and bring some beer? No, I'm sure he won't mind. Yeah, we can go out later. Yeah, Truus will probably be here. Provided she's sorted out some issue with Seamus! No, not personal. I think its work related this time. Don't ask but you know what a crazy place he runs. Truus really could do a lot a better but how often have we told her that, huh? Ok, see you later. *(puts away phone).*

Enter PETER, in casual clothes.

PETER: Oh, so you've changed back.

SASKIA: I'm back, yes.

PETER: I don't think that dark eye-shadow really suited you, if you don't mind me saying.

SASKIA: Well, I don't normally wear much eye-shadow, if at all.

PETER: Oh, I see. You're just trying a different look. I must say, I quite liked the high boots and leggings.

SASKIA: Hmm? I'll see what I can do.

PETER: Anyway, I've never asked you to dance with me! And certainly not topless!

SASKIA: Er, no. Are you saying you would like to go dancing?

PETER: I don't know. Why not? I used to do quite a lot of modern jive. But I don't really want to go to any topless bars or anything.

SASKIA: Peter, I don't know what you're thinking but Amsterdam isn't just sex, drugs and er, crazy clothing.

PETER: I'm not into drugs and crazy clothing!

SASKIA: Look, why don't we have something to eat. My friend Bert is coming over later. You will find him really interesting; he's seen a lot and done a lot and Truus will probably be coming over as well. Then later, maybe we can go to a bar.

PETER: Oh, all right. I think I was a little uptight after all the travelling but after a hot shower and a good meal, I'll be ready for anything.

SASKIA: Good, I'll just get the meal ready. You just relax.

PETER: Fine.

Exit SASKIA.

SASKIA: *(off stage)* Are you ok with spices?

PETER: Yeah. Sounds great! *(PETER fumbles in his pockets and looks uncertain)* Just a minute! *(PETER exits and quickly returns with his shoulder bag and jacket).*

SASKIA: *(off stage)* What's up?

PETER: I just wondered what I'd done with my passport. Can't seem to find it!

SASKIA: *(off stage)* It'll be there somewhere.

PETER: It should be in either my jacket or bag. *(PETER fumbles in his jacket pockets and then checks his bag.)* But I can't find it here!

SASKIA: *(off stage)* What about your suitcase?

PETER: Oh, yes. No, hang on. I haven't opened it since leaving England and I had my passport at the airport. I might have dropped it!

Enter SASKIA with two plates.

SASKIA: Don't worry. Even if you've dropped it somewhere, it will probably be handed in. If not, this is the EU. I'm sure it can be easily resolved.

PETER: Yes, I suppose you're right. Hmm. This looks good. Spiced cold fish! Typical Dutch meal?

SASKIA: Traditional, certainly.

PETER: But everything else is all mashed up!

SASKIA: That's how we do things. We mash up pretty much everything.

The doorbell rings.

SASKIA: That'll be Truus.

PETER: Ah, your friend!

SASKIA opens the door and HENK enters with a bunch of flowers.

SASKIA: Oh. I was not expecting you.

HENK: I was passing a flower shop and saw these and they made me think of you so here they are! (*HENK sees PETER*) Oh, I'm sorry. I did not realise that you had company. (*to PETER*) Hello.

PETER: Hello.

SASKIA: Henk, this is Peter, my friend from England.

PETER: Pleased to meet you. (*HENK shakes hands with PETER but views him curiously.*)

HENK: I think I have seen you before somewhere.

PETER: I don't think so, unless you've been in England or Spain recently.

HENK: No, I have not been to Spain for many years. Maybe you look like someone else!

PETER: Well, we all have a double somewhere, so they say.

SASKIA: Were you just passing or is it something important Henk? We are just about to eat.

HENK: Er, no. It wasn't important. (*HENK looks again curiously at PETER*). I'll call back later. (*to PETER*) Pleased to meet you.

Exit HENK.

PETER: Seems a pleasant enough guy.

SASKIA: Yes, Henk is all right!

PETER: He's not the one you were telling me about in Spain?

SASKIA: No, not him. He lives in another part of town.

PETER: But you're not with Henk?

SASKIA: No, no. We've only been out for a drink once or twice and occasionally he er.....calls round for a coffee.

PETER: I remember you were doing yoga and reading that therapy book on getting over your ex!

SASKIA: Yeah and it worked. I got over him. Henk is completely different to him. I think I can trust him but he's very conservative. I don't know if I could cope with that. I'm not sure that I'm ready to start another relationship in any case. Can you imagine what Truus would think?

PETER: What has she got to do with...

SASKIA's mobile rings.

SASKIA: *(on mobile)* Allo Truus; ja. Ja? Right now? Ok.*(to PETER)* That was Truus. She's asked me to turn on the T.V. right now!

PETER: Did she say why?

SASKIA: No, she just insisted that I do it this moment. Hang on; It's probably something stupid, knowing Truus.

SASKIA turns on the T.V. Some commentary is heard. SASKIA looks amused and then stunned.

PETER: What is it?