

## A Chaotic Trip

Holiday fever was in the air, as three friends made their way to Amsterdam in a small car. They'd organised everything and yet nothing at all, especially considering they didn't have a place to sleep. They thought they'd be able to arrange everything in the blink of an eye once they'd got there... However, as they arrived in Amsterdam after a comfortable journey, they parked their car in a large car park not far from the train station. Their main priority was to find a hotel, so they set out to arrange this. They were offered beds in the first hotel they went to and the three of them thought to themselves that, as expected, it hadn't been a problem finding somewhere, and that only style was important when choosing a hotel.

They walked around Amsterdam, from sight to sight, all day long, without giving another thought to hotels. Darkness fell and night was upon them and, with it being Easter, they missed the train to get to the three life-saving beds and showers, and everything was already booked up. But they still had the car after all, so they agreed to sleep there for the night and were intent on finally getting a hotel the following morning. Before making the car cosy, they took another trip around the car park. An Italian was parked in front of them, a Frenchman to the left, a Spaniard to the right and, oddly enough, a man from San Marino was also nearby. A small European melting pot. It appeared they'd all met the same fate: no hotel...

Just as night had fallen, so too did tiredness set in. It's quite fascinating what exhaustion can do to a person. In next to no time, the cramped and uncomfortable car had been transformed into three rose-scented four-poster beds, even though the smell of feet alone could have struck you down. In this case, however, everything was perfect and sweet smelling, and sleep overcame them as if by magic.

At four in the morning, there was a knock on their window. A black woman working for the city council stood before them. She explained that in the Netherlands you're not allowed to sleep in your car overnight – it's comparable to camping out in the wild – and that we'd get a ticket but not have to pay it. She took our I.D. s and held them closely. She then did the same to all of our poor fellow European sufferers who'd slept in their cars, windows dripping with thick condensation.

And so the woman from the city council went back to her car with a bag full of I.D.s to write out the tickets. The friends asked themselves, "We're supposed to get a ticket and a fine that we won't have to pay? How crazy are the Dutch?" They made jokes and blamed what she'd just said on the drugs which are legal in the Netherlands. They had a good laugh about it. Oh well, they had let it happen after all.

When she came back to give them their I.D.s and the tickets, she thanked them politely with a smile, which the three of them returned with even wider smiles, and wished them a nice day. The long-suffering community of Europeans had been led up the garden path: It was only when the youngest of us came up with the idea of looking at the tickets that we realised that the foolish Dutch had not only lied to us, but had also slapped each of us with a fine of €140. All three jumped angrily out of the car and headed over to the nearest lamppost to have a smoke and another look at the ticket, as none of them could speak Dutch after all. Within seconds, all the car doors of the long-suffering European community were open. They jumped out of their cars and huddled together like a poor, helpless droplet, looking for consolation after losing the ocean. All of those who'd been fined now stood under the lamppost, as if struck by a blow, and compared tickets. A Babylonian influence could be seen; there was a smattering of English,

German, French, Spanish and Greek. It was clear to them that the woman who worked for the city council had told each of them the same story and that that probably happened every day and to hundreds of people, no, make that thousands of people, every year. What did that philosopher once say? "From the very small, to the very large". Within half an hour, seventeen stupid Europeans had received a fine amounting to €2380 – good job! At least they were all treated the same as foreigners, no actually, as victims. The three of them climbed disappointed into the car; disappointed that a €420 fine had to be taken out of their holiday kitty. Their money had run out and they decided to drive back home to beautiful Germany with the resolution, "grrr...Holland, we'll be back!

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