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WOMAN WITH A PAST

Patricia Perquin hit the jackpot as a prostitute and a writer. She even advises the city of Amsterdam. But does her story tally with the facts? Under her real name she got herself more than once bandied about.

Maud Effting and Anneke Stoffelen, reporters

"We undressed and he got on top of me. Then he looked at me with eyes that scared me stiff. But I couldn't move left or right. 'If I can't take you then nobody ever will,' I heard him yell.

"The rest went very swift. His heavy body made that I couldn't get up. He put one hand on his mouth and the other around my neck. Had I not knocked on the cardboard wall and had the woman in the adjacent room not come dashing in, he would have strangled me."

In the Fall of 2011, *Parool* and *Algemeen Dagblad* published the first stories of prostitute 'Patricia Perquin'. She describes the ways of the Amsterdam Wallen world from the inside. It is her 'true story,' as she will state later on the cover of her book. Her family doesn't know what she does, and that's why she writes under a pseudonym.

In revealing articles she leads her readers into a world of sex, violence, humiliation, and exploitation. A world that is new to her. 'I rip my curtain open with fright in my body. Here I am. From now on I am a prostitute, no kidding,' she writes.

She describes broadly how nervous she is buying the prostitute's basic tools, 'Condoms, lubricant, and kitchen roll. Whips and dildos are for later.' Because of her appearance – tall, slim, blond, D-cup – she gets jealous glances. Further down she writes about a SM session with a well-known tv-anchor crawling through her room barking like a dog; at his request she gives him 'some twenty kicks in his balls.' She also tells about suffering from bipolar disorder for years on end.

In her stories Patricia says she got into prostitution after having built up a 150.000 Euro debt due to buying addiction. She still manages to pay it off in four and a half year. In that period, she says, she worked through ten thousand clients. Her record is thirty-one in one day.

Patricia Perquin's articles make a deep impression. Publishing house Prometheus contracts her for a book. In March 2012 the bestseller *Achter het raam op de Wallen* (Behind a window in the Wallen) is released. Things go so well that producer Talpa develops a tv-series with Susan Visser in the lead. As of this week Patricia is a columnist for *Libelle*¹.

Amsterdam policymakers

But her success reaches further. The stories attract the attention of Amsterdam Alderman Lodewijk Asscher. Meanwhile Lodewijk Asscher is Deputy Prime Minister. Asscher is very busy with Project 1012:

¹ A kind of *People's Magazine* for women

cleaning up the Wallen area. He takes Patricia so serious that he has a number of long conversations with her. 'If one wants to get a realistic picture of what is happening on the Wallen all you need is reading Perquin's book,' he says. Her tale strengthens him in his mission: stricter actions against exploitation.

Perquin penetrates deep into the world of Amsterdam policymakers. She meets with Mayor Eberhard van der Laan. 'Her book moved me and it gives a very clear picture of what is happening on the Wallen,' he says in the Senate in June 2012, pleading for a quick introduction of a new prostitution law².

That same month some of Patricia's recommendations land almost verbally in the city's prostitution memorandum. She recommends a language test for prostitutes, and stricter control on double shifts and long work hours. Patricia is hired as an advisor for the city's P&G292 health center, and still works there eight hours per week.

Nobody there knows who she is, says her supervisor Heleen Driessen. 'We always meet outside the office. I talk with her as Patricia.'

The question is if Mr. Asscher and mayor Van der Laan know with whom they are talking, if they are aware that this woman is, in fact, a journalist who had her name bandied about more than once, who has been fired on the spot once, and who got on the wrong side of many.

The Unmasking

The first cracks in her story begin to show when prostitutes call Metje Blaak, former spokeswoman of the prostitution advocacy organization, De Rode Draad. 'Nobody had ever heard of her. They asked me where Patricia worked. They wanted to work where she worked because she made such good money. She had sometimes seven clients in one day, whereas if you do well on the Wallen, you might get four.' There is also suspicion on hookers.nl where clients share experiences. 'A slim, blond, Dutch woman on the Wallen, who assumedly does SM, too? She would have to be known with members of hookers.nl,' some H. writes on the site. 'Any idea, someone? In any case not me.'

And then 'Patricia' blunders: in March 2012 she does a radio interview. Until then she has avoided all attention from radio and tv. This time however she talks with her real voice for one and a half hour in a PowNed program about her experiences as a prostitute.

This interview leads to her unmasking. One of the listeners is a man who knows 'Patricia' from the past. He recognizes her voice. At the time he does nothing with that information. But when this newspaper contacts him, he says that he knows who she is.

When the newspaper subsequently confronts several other sources with the radio excerpt, the wall comes down. 'Patricia Perquin' is the alibi for a journalist with a dubious reputation: Valérie Lempereur. This newspaper speaks with 25 people who know the society-and-crime journalist. Some do not want their name in the newspaper for fear of retaliation. Lempereur, as it turns out, has worked in both the Netherlands and Belgium, among others for *Nieuwe Revu*, *Story*, *TV Family*, and *Het Laatste Nieuws*. Many, often well-known people, accuse her of lies and deceit.

In the Nineties Lempereur was fired on the spot by crime reporter, Peter R. de Vries, on account of 'fraud and deceit, committed more than once,' he writes in an open letter to *Trouw*. That she resigned,

² Which nevertheless failed to pass the Senate's consideration to vote.

as she maintains in an interview, is not true, says De Vries. 'Valérie Lempereur is everything: junk, fox, thief, shady.'

Rebuilt

Valérie Lempereur's history begins in Sluis, Zeeland³. She's born there as Daniël. Lempereur is a transsexual since she had that surgery many years ago. 'It's true that I was *rebuilt*,' she said in *Trouw* in 1996. Some people think that they also removed my brain, but it's still working very well.'

Lempereur has no easy life. She told several journalists that she was addicted, probably to heroin. 'I've used it for eight years,' she said in *Trouw*. 'But I kicked the habit. I'm proud of it. And it pays off because I know exactly what a junk experiences. They can't fool me.'

According to *Algemeen Dagblad*, in the Netherlands she was sentenced to prison for several months, for drug theft. 'Addicted to drugs and pills, he sneaked into hospitals in the East of the country to steal the goods, dressed as a nurse.'

Ten thousand clients

The stories about Valérie Lempereur make one wonder if she actually did work as a prostitute. This newspaper has indications that she did, but was everything as she writes in her book?

A well-known window owner who wants to remain anonymous, says he knew Valérie around 2000 as a prostitute in the Singel area. That contradicts the fact that Lempereur began working only five years ago, in all innocence. From the four and half years she worked in the cribs, she also managed for two years a publishing company in Belgium. It's not clear how she did that with simultaneously working ten thousand clients on the Wallen. Her book also doesn't say a word about the effect of her transsexuality on her work in the crib.

The experiences that she presents as an eye witness are known anecdotes from the scene, according to Metje Blaak. For instance Patricia writes about a good friend who keeps working although she has cancer. Blaak says, 'it's a well-known story about this woman who died a few years ago.'

A tenacious gal

In the past Lempereur did some things incognito. She called herself once the girlfriend of Charles Groenhuijsen⁴ in order to get access to a prison. 'If I had to pose for Prince Claus⁵ tomorrow to get some information, I would do it,' she has said.

After that, former chief editor of *Nieuwe Revu* felt doubts. 'I had the feeling that she distorted also other facts, but I could never put my finger on it,' he says. Around 1994 Lempereur freelanced for him. He didn't think she was a good writer. 'Still, she is a tenacious gal. She got hold of everybody. But I never regretted that she left after that incident.'

³ A Dutch province, bordering on Belgian Flanders

⁴ A well-known and well respected political journalist and anchor, who works mainly for Dutch National Television.

⁵ The deceased husband (1926-2002) of the current Queen, Beatrix

Later he got the news that a big bunch of flowers was delivered to Lempereur's new job. 'Good luck with your new job from all your colleagues at *Nieuwe Revu*.' Strange, he says, 'nobody here had sent flowers. But it's the kind of things she does. She wants people to find her interesting.'

Then she gets at loggerheads with attorney Theo Hiddema in 1996, when she writes a book about the Venlo Gang. It accuses Hiddema of encouraging one of the (female) suspects to forge her diaries.

'I was furious,' says the attorney. 'It was pure nonsense; when the police got hold of those diaries I wasn't yet involved in the case.' The book got an insert stating that the girl has sworn under oath that she has accused Hiddema wrongfully and that her diaries have not been forged. The incident gets nationwide attention and damages Lempereur's reputation.

Then she surfaces in Belgium as a journalist. There, too, she's entangled in conflicts. *TV Familie magazine* is reprimanded by the National Council for Journalism because Lempereur entered a clinic and improperly interviewed a serious depression patient about the divorce of his brother, a well-known Flemish figure.

In 2008 she starts the hubbub publishing company *Lampedaire*. She snares famous Flemish people for a book publication.

'She hurt me and especially my family very much,' says actress and singer Jacky Lafon, who had a book published about sexual abuse in her youth. 'In the beginning she was very friendly. She would let me read the whole book and change quotations before it would be published.' But it went differently.

'I did inspect a few excerpts, and suddenly the book was in the store before I was informed. She has magnified things, distorted things, and written things that I never said.'

[...]

Splendid stories

In 2011 when she makes the spotlight in *Het Parool* and *Algemeen Dagblad* as Patricia Perquin, and later as an advisor for the city of Amsterdam, nobody seems to know her past.

Chief editor of *Het Parool*, Barbara van Beukering, says that she knew her real identity all along. 'We visited the crib where she worked. She showed me receipts for the rent. It's not a sure-fire check: someone can rent a crib for one day and forge receipts. But at the time I had no reason to assume that her stories were not true.'

When one googles Valérie Lempereur, accusations turn up right away. Ms. Van Beukering doesn't want to say if this made her doubt. 'It got the paper some splendid stories. And I have no further comments on the issue.'

[...]

Mayor Van der Laan and former Alderman Asscher have no comments. Asscher's spokesman adds, 'But Asscher was aware that he might not hear the whole truth talking to people from this scene.'

[Translated by Frans van Rossum]