



THE PAPER

EDITION ONE

APRIL 2011

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SCREW US
AND WE
MULTIPLY

What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?



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ALICE SPENCER

Part one: It's a long way to the top

I started working in a brothel called Top of The Town. I rang up the number listed in the directory, went in for an interview and I started the next day. I told management a fictional story about being a single mum, but gave my real name, address and age. I was 23. My working name was (is) Alice Spencer.

Top of the Town was an old brothel. You can feel the time dragging past you as you walk through it. Red carpet and red velvet are everywhere, as are mirrors; one is constantly on display, reflected ten times around the room. At the time I always thought of it as a factory. A factory that produced illusions that satisfied clients' desires. A business that dealt in fantasies and flesh. The red velvet of downstairs is contrasted with the fluorescent lights and lino floor upstairs in the 'girls' room', the place that clients never see, the place that belongs to – and better signifies – the women who work there. Work shifts were eight hours long. We were not allowed to leave before the end of a shift. If you did then you would not get any more shifts. We were not even allowed to go outside to get meals or take a walk. These rules were enforced even though we were not considered to be employees; instead we were 'independent contractors' who paid a shift fee in order to work: twenty dollars for the first shift of the week, and five dollars every shift after that.

Most Friday and Saturday nights there are over 30 girls working. Negotiations between clients and girls occur in the downstairs bar and clients choose which (if any) girl they would like to take upstairs. With eleven rooms you never really have to wait that long for a room. Clients paid the house for

what is called 'room rental'. In reality this is 60% of the total fee paid for the service, the girl gets the other 40%. After the house has got their fee you are allocated a room. From there you ascend the stairs with the client and once in the allocated room you negotiate your fee. Standard fees apply for bookings depending on time length.

Part two: Time and companionship

A colleague in the industry in London recommended the agency to me and I liked the look of their website. I telephoned the number advertised on the website and spoke to Lisa, the owner of the agency. I introduced myself as Alice, mentioned my friend's name and after hearing my statistics of young, platinum blonde hair, 34-26-36, Lisa requested that we meet for a coffee (read: interview).

At the interview she explained the terms and conditions of working for her. She made me sign a contract (which I signed with the name Alice) that stipulated the rules of her agency. 'Working for her' is not how she would explain it; she sees herself as an agent 'representing us girls'. Due to the legal situation in the UK she sells 'time and companionship'. What consenting adults then do in private is not her business – or so the story goes. She agreed to take me on her books. She told me I needed to get professional photos taken to be put on her website. I have my face blurred to protect my identity and sanity. The prices of bookings are listed on the website and are determined by time.

For the purposes of work I rent a room in a 'working flat' in the centre of London. It costs £1000 per month. As a result I am available for what are called in the industry 'in-call' bookings. In-calls are bookings where the client comes to you. An out-call

is when you go to them. In London this is most likely to be a hotel room. A one-hour in-call costs £200, a four-hour in-call costs £450, and an overnight booking is £1000. I receive 70% of the total amount charged. It is my responsibility to collect the money from the client and to send Lisa her 30%. Failure to send her the money results in no more work.

To receive work from Lisa you need to sign on. This consists of sending her a text message informing her of your availability for the day. Signing on does not guarantee you work, rather it means that when clients call she includes you in the list of girls that are available. Lisa conducts all negotiations with clients and arranges all bookings. Lisa sends a text message when she has a booking. *2hr in-call @ 6pm can you do it?* A reply that you are available confirms that the job is on. The client is given the address of the flat and (usually) arrives at the time arranged. Money is exchanged for a service and after the time allocated the client leaves. The only difference between in-calls and out-calls is that with out-calls I arrive at the address given, at the agreed time, and somehow make it past the hotel staff using various props (such as an overcoat or glasses) and mannerisms so as to not appear as a sex worker, and the up to the room.

As workers in the sex industry we are often denied a voice, we are considered only passive victims, we are taught to be ashamed of our work, we are made invisible by discriminatory laws that illegalise our work and us, and we are spoken for and about but rarely are we allowed to speak for ourselves. As migrants even more so. Sometimes our voices are not heard even amongst each other because we don't speak the same languages.

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