

THE INTIMATE ADVENTURES OF A CALL GIRL'S CABBIE

Paul Jayson worked as a driver for a secretive London escort agency which hides its gaggle of 120 girls on an industrial estate off the M4. He tells Helen Croydon why he respects hookers more than anyone

Paul Jayson greets me at a rusty iron gate on the side of the road near Kensal Rise in west London. He lets me through the gate and leads me down a steep bank of trodden-down earth onto a canal tow path. 'It's only a five minute walk,' he chirps. 'I'm lucky, I've got the end one. Fewer prying eyes.'

Paul is leading me to his houseboat on the canal, where he's lived with his teenage daughter for 13 years. We walk past around ten other houseboats. They look lively and lived-in, pumping out steam from a funnel in the roof and giving off a sense of inviting

warmth. Some of the occupants peer out of their mini wooden doors or even-more-mini windows and smile or nod at us. I'm a rare guest in this friendly, hidden community.

Paul's barge is a musty-smelling cluttered den. I have to duck to enter, but despite its low ceilings and the kitchen area looking more like a neglected broom cupboard, the living area feels huge. It's littered with stacks of papers, notebooks, and newspapers. On a very unpolished desk is his computer and a wireless router, plugged in to the boat's electrical circuit. Paul's working on his first novel about the grimy end of the escorting world, based on his own experiences as a driver for



several louche and lowbrow agencies.

The one on which he has centred his plot is the most remarkable. It operates out of a bleak concrete building on an industrial estate near Heathrow. 'It's two rooms basically,' says Paul. 'The drivers' room on the ground and upstairs the girls' room. The window frames are made from rusting steel and everyone's locked in. Though they can leave if they ask. Everyone watches telly all night, eats crisps and drinks alcopops waiting for jobs to come in.'

Now, we all know the difference between the business of call-girls and the business of brothels. The clue is in the name: Call-girls get called out. They don't have to sit around a house all night waiting for punters. But from Paul's description, it seems this one has amalgamated the two. A kind of call-girl-cum[sic]-brothel. And it sounds to me like they get the worst of both worlds. They have to report in for duty, but yet they still have to endure the travel and they don't have the luxury of a dressing room, as one would expect a considerate Soho house to provide.

'There were 120 girls working. There would be around 70 on shift in one night.

"Some of the girls were barking mad, some highly intelligent, but all of them were interesting"

The drivers start collecting them from their homes around 6pm so they're in the office for 7ish.' I smile when Paul calls it an office. It's hard to imagine this one has a health and safety manual and a speed dial to technical support. 'They stay until 6am but they only get paid for the jobs they do.' So, I ask naïvely, are they guaranteed to get work if they've come in for a shift?

'On a quiet night...' Paul trails off and shakes his head sympathetically, 'not everyone gets called out. Then they don't get any money.'

What he describes of the Heathrow set-up sounds very much like my local minicab office. A bunch of bored people with varying English skills, sat around an electric heater, smoking, fixating on shit TV—only on a bigger scale and in miniskirts and hold-ups. 'It's not a very healthy lifestyle,' Paul adds helpfully, as if this conclusion needed to be drawn for me.

Paul's experiences are based on his 12 months of employment in 2004 and 2005, but he kept a diary diligently so his memories are fresh. The details are now the tools for work on his speculative book title, *Reflections in the Vanity Mirror*.

'The book shows the impact of sex work on relationships. I'm basing my characters on the girls I met. I got close to a lot of them. Some were barking mad, some highly intelligent and all of them interesting. There were girls from all over the world—lots of Brazilians. The British ones tended to be single mothers, just looking for a bit of money. Quick money is what it's all about. One Brazilian 21-year-old—a stunning girl—was talking on the phone in Spanish in the back of the car one day. She sounded upset. I asked

"One girl told me that the client just wanted to lie in bed next to her and didn't want to have sex at all"

her who it was. She said it was her dad. She was sending her earnings home. Her dad was a farmer, in big debt after all his livestock had all been killed. She wanted to get her family out of trouble. They didn't have a clue how she was earning her money.

'Did you always pry into their personal stories?' I ask. 'After all, if she was visibly upset, she could easily have told you to fuck off?'

'With new girls, I didn't, but you build up a rapport. Whenever they finished a job and got back into the car, I'd always open by asking if they were okay.'

'And were they okay?' I ask, anxious to know the demeanour of a girl who's just had sex in a stranger's house for less than a hundred quid and now has to face a long journey back to a smoky concrete room littered with alcopop empties until 6 in the morning.

'They usually check themselves in the mirror, get some gum out, or a fag. Sometimes they told me about the guy, sometimes they were quiet. I heard loads of examples of marital problems. The girls were their therapists in many cases and I became the girls' therapist. My role was like being a carer's carer.

'One guy—married—said he hadn't had sex for twelve years with his wife. He wanted to do it without a condom because he said it reminded him of intimate love-making with his wife. She refused and he got angry. She came out visibly distressed.

'Another girl told me the client just wanted to lie in bed next to her and didn't want sex. He was from Bahrain, that one. He only booked her for two hours.'

'Two hours?' I repeat. 'That's not a long time to gratify an urge to share a bed with someone. Not enough to reach REM sleep at any rate. So he just wanted someone he could cradle for two hours, awake?'

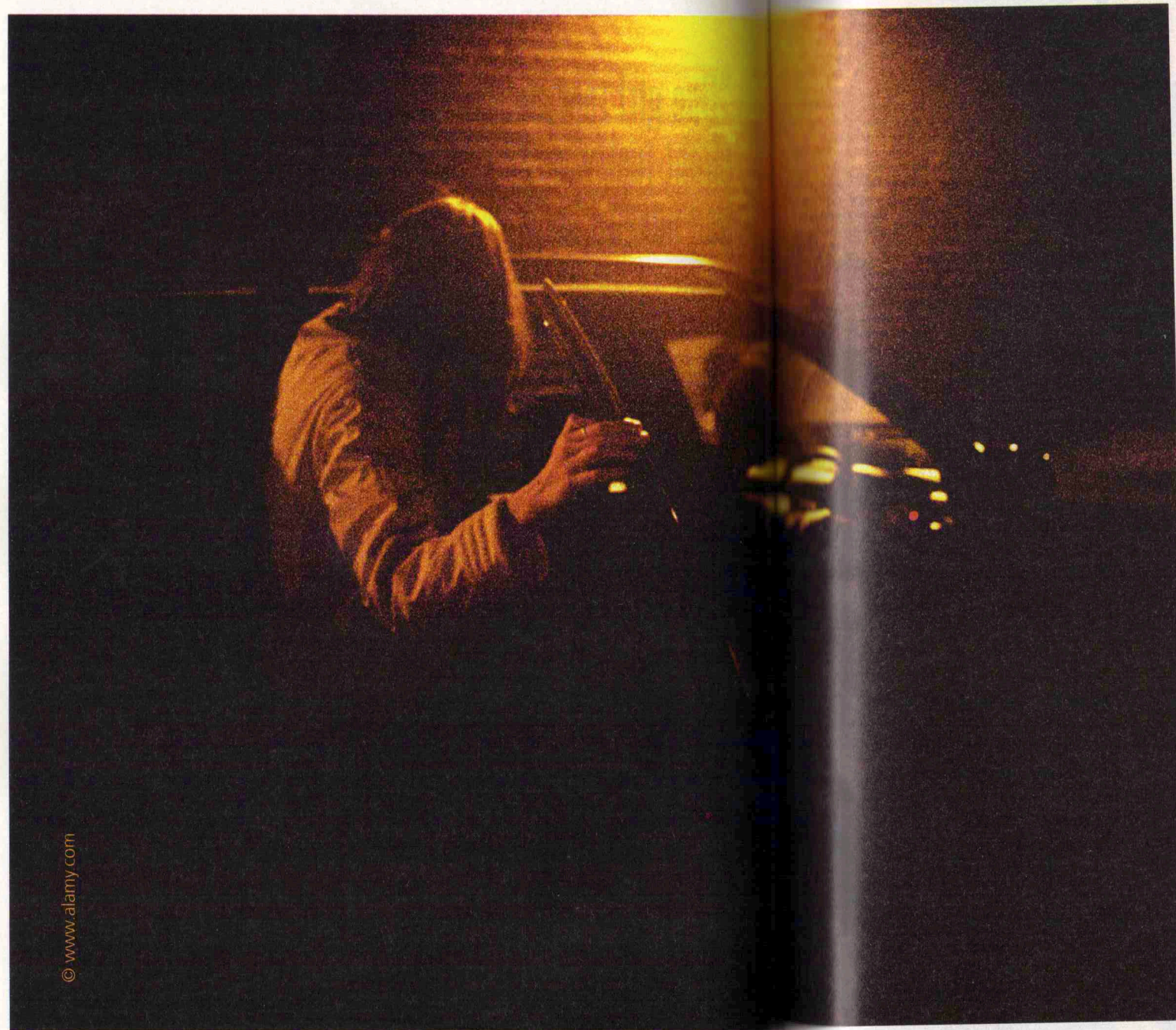
'Sounds like it,' agrees Paul.

'Another girl went to some Greek's house in South London. He had a butler and guard dogs. All he wanted was a massage. Then, towards the end, he turned on her and kept demanding why she was doing this. He kept calling her a stupid little girl for allowing herself to be paid for sex. I had to counsel her afterwards.'

The driver as the girl's rock wasn't uncommon according to Paul. 'There were a lot of relationships between drivers and the girls. Sometimes he would be the only person she got to speak to in privacy. I would find it fascinating to observe them—the tension on their face on the way there and their emotions on the way back.'

'You mean emotion as in tears?' I ask.

'No. Rarely would you see tears. I'd see a sadness on their face and a sense of loss. You have to remember the drivers were bored out of their minds. We were keen to engage with the girls. We could be sitting outside a job for up to six hours. We always waited. We were there for protection. If



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something were to go wrong the girl could always run out or text us to come in.'

'That sounds ominous. Did you ever have to step into the role of protector?'

'Twice,' answers Paul. 'Two guys booked two girls. We had to take them to the cash point first. One got in the back and put his arms around the girls. Something just wasn't quite right about them but they were all giggling away so I didn't say anything. We returned to their place, they went in and I waited. I had a feeling something wasn't right so I called the agency. They told me to knock on the door. I was scared. They were in the middle of a booking! I rang the bell but got no answer. I could hear men's voices but when I shouted it went quiet. I demanded to be let in and said they had 30 seconds before I drove the car through the front door. They opened the door and I walked straight through them. I saw one of the girls wandering around naked and totally dazed, asking where her friend was. I said: 'What the fuck have you done to them?' One of them said, 'It was only Rohypnol, man. They fucking wanted it.' Those girls never worked again.'

And the second instance? 'I had to go in and get cancellation fees from a guy in a hotel in Kingston. The guy decided he didn't like the girl because she wouldn't kiss but then he wouldn't pay. He was vile—ginger and swaying with drunkenness. Lots of the girls wouldn't kiss—they said it felt too real. He obviously wasn't happy about paying a cancellation fee. I got it eventually through by being really nice to him and getting him to see the girl's perspective. When I left he gave me a tip!

Paul assures me that such incidences of

differing expectations were thankfully quite rare. 'All acts were negotiated with the agency so there were never any surprises. But sometimes there were miscommunications. One girl was speaking to the client in the car en route. She was flirting, asking him what he wanted. It turned out he wanted anal. That wasn't her thing so we called the agency, they sent someone else and we turned back! It seemed loads of guys asked about spanking. Most girls were fine with it but I heard so many of them explaining why they had to charge extra for that. In fact...' Paul's face lights up with an expression of fond reminiscence, 'you should have heard them go on the phone. You could tell the ones that were good—the ones that would build up regulars. They'd start off all business-like, setting out her measurements—bust and waist—she'd always make it sound better of course. Then her voice would soften and she'd build up his fantasy, ask him what he wanted and whether he wanted to try any positions.'

Paul says he's haunted by his experience of the sex trade, yet he is hugely in favour of the concept and thinks it should be fully legalised and the whole industry controlled by women. 'The problem is, with new tighter regulations on advertising, previously independent escorts can't place ads and have to use agencies. And they're all owned and profited by men.'

His book certainly won't follow the same formula as the popular wave of escort memoirs that followed on from *Belle du Jour*, portraying the work as a fashionable, exciting, quirky career, with a satisfying ladder to climb. 'They all erode their self-esteem in the end. At the end of the day they are having sex with men they

don't really want to have sex with. All the girls I met did it willingly of course. But you can't do it without conflict. Very few of the men are good-looking and sometimes they smell. Even if they didn't want sex and they wanted the girlfriend experience, that was draining in its own way. Those clients were emotionally needy men.

So what about Belle du Jour herself? She has proven quite spectacularly that the happy hooker did really exist. 'That book wasn't truthful to me compared to my experiences. She came across as a two-dimensional character. She wrote an entertaining read but she didn't talk about relationship troubles or difficulties engaging with men. That's what every single one of the girls that rode in my car talked about. There was probably an element of denial too. We don't want to touch everybody—some people just aren't our type—it takes a huge amount of denial to do that.

Paul paints a holistic picture of the world of escorting—at times sinister and seedy with its characters on the brink of despair. But he also sees the humour, the strong characters and the real, simple reason why this industry is never short of new recruits—easy money. He sees the girls neither as glamour pussies like the character played by Billie Piper in *Diary of a London Call Girl*, nor as victims forced into an underworld. He sees them as savvy individuals willing to endure a temporary phase of life for a bit of money. 'If ever I was looking to hire someone for a business, I'd advertise for an ex-call-girl because they are so clued in. They see through anything. And they are the most remarkable telephone sales people you will ever meet.'

