

RANDOM HOUSE *e*BOOKS



Scandalous

Laura D

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Postface: Student Prostitution in the Internet Age
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About the Book

The true story of a French university student and her secret life as a call girl

Surrendering to temptation one evening, desperately broke Laura responds to a personal ad on the internet. When a man contacts her, offering to pay €150 for an hour-long rendezvous, she nervously agrees.

He will be the first of many clients. And Laura will receive a crash course in men and their sometimes bizarre fantasies as she turns up to lucrative appointments in hotel rooms, apartments and even a private cinema. But the pressures of leading a double life and one client's growing obsession with her soon begin to take their toll.

In her first year at university, 19-year-old Laura is set to learn more about men, sex and herself than she could ever have imagined.

SCANDALOUS

Laura D



To my sister in the shadows ...

'One word written on this page, and the whole thing starts ... The fusion between ink and paper, between you and me ... Love, one person transcending another, the other responding. The moment where the two become 'one'; writing, our story, this book. This moment that sends tremors through me. How real the words and facts are, the horror set down in writing ... the horror of a quotient of students' time ... A book, about Laura, but Laura is more than one person ... She's too many people at the same time, we need to open our eyes and react ...'

This book was written in collaboration with Marion Kirat, aged 23, a translation student.

Prologue

Don't Close Your Eyes

I SLOWLY PUT the letter down on the edge of the bed. Without thinking I take off my top and, not waiting for any reaction from him, slide my jeans down over my thighs. I lower myself in what I hope is a slightly languid movement to get them right off.

He can't take his eyes off me, his mouth is gaping. I can see the beginnings of an erection beneath his jogging pants.

My bra, cotton knickers and stockings are now the only things hiding my anatomy. I stand in front of him with my hands behind my back, offering him all this intimacy. I'm the child-woman, Nabokov's Lolita, and he loves it. I'm completely disconnected from reality. This is like torture for me but I dispel it with a giggle. I've got so many complexes about my body, even though it's so slim now, and I'm genuinely finding this situation confusing. He doesn't move and hasn't said anything for quarter of an hour.

He takes a deep breath and begins to open his lips. Go on, say something.

'Wow!' he manages to exclaim quickly.

And that's it. One exclamation. No one could understand how I suddenly feel. All at once my body is filled with hope and a sort of happiness. With just one word and in a fraction of a second, this man I've never met before has succeeded where dozens of others have failed: making me realise my body's attractive. Why did it have to be him? I

can't answer that, it's just inexplicable. All I know is that it's the first time I've heard and accepted a compliment. That's when I start thinking of him as a man and not some great creep who wants to put his mitts all over me. He must have seen strings and strings of girls but he can still be impressed.

We give each other a knowing smile and something oddly like trust is reached between us.

'This is exactly the sort of reason I don't like "professionals". They can't have that innocent look you've got.'

My name is Laura, I'm nineteen. I'm a modern languages student and I have to prostitute myself to pay my way through uni.

I'm not the only one. Apparently there are 40,000 female students who do what I do. It all followed its own peculiar logic, and I didn't even realise I was falling.

I wasn't born with a silver spoon in my mouth. I've never known luxury and wealth but until this year I've not wanted for anything. My eagerness to learn and my own convictions always persuaded me my student years would be the best and most carefree of my life. I would never have thought my first year at uni would turn into a real-life nightmare and see me running away from my own hometown.

At nineteen, you don't turn to prostitution for pocket money. You don't sell your body just to treat yourself to clothes or buy cups of coffee. You do it if you really have to, convincing yourself it's only temporary, just until you've paid the bills and the rent, and bought some food. Student prostitutes aren't the ones you see in the street. And they're not drug addicts, illegal immigrants or from poor backgrounds. They may have white skin, be French through and through and come from families on modest incomes. All they have in common is the desire to pursue their

studies in a country where further education is becoming more and more expensive. The story you are about to read takes place in a large French city. I've called it V to protect my parents. They mustn't know. Ever. I'm their almost perfect little girl. Stubborn but not a slapper.

Of course you could criticise me for not holding down some menial job to keep me out of debt. Most student prostitutes – and this is true of me too – have a little job on the side but still can't stay out of the red. Prostitution and its mind-boggling rates are far too much of a temptation when you're short of money and need some in a hurry.

This is my story: it isn't easy for me to open up about it but my main aim is to expose the hypocrisy surrounding student prostitution. The precarious living conditions for students – of both sexes – in this day and age shouldn't be ignored any longer. At the moment too few people know how terrible they are.

This is my testimony, and it is intended as a wake-up call to bring about changes so that impoverished students never have to sell their bodies to pay for their studies. So that people aren't only shocked by stories of dubious practices in *other* countries but also concentrate their efforts on what is happening in France.

And, finally, so that this is never allowed to happen again, so that people don't just close their eyes to it.

Chapter 1

Enrolling

4 September 2006

I WALK CALMLY across the campus of V University. Today is no ordinary day because I'm enrolling in modern languages: Spanish and Italian.

Two weeks ago I received a letter telling me I had to be at the university's administrative office at 2.30 p.m. without fail, to submit my application form and get my student card. Filled with excitement, I quickly got together all the documents I needed. There's a lot of paperwork involved, but I managed in the end. The best bit was writing down my grades for my Baccalaureate because it marked the end of an era in a such a concrete way. I also nipped down into the Métro to take some photos – which show me wearing a big smile ... a triumphant smile.

When I got up this morning I studied my route on the Métro to be sure I got to the university on time. I really didn't want to miss the enrolment. I even cheated public transport because I didn't have enough money for my ticket. I promised myself I wouldn't do it again, and would get myself a season ticket, however much it cost. I'm convinced uni's going to make a lot of changes in my life.

I couldn't sit still on the Métro, too excited at the thought of seeing the place where I'd be studying and spending so much of my time. My MP3 player, which I'm usually hooked up to, couldn't soothe my agitated

enthusiasm. I even checked three times that I'd got all the papers for my enrolment. I couldn't bear to think of getting there and being told: 'I'm sorry but your records aren't complete. We can't give you your card. You'll have to come back.' No, today was the day I would become a student and that was that.

I was so nervous I very nearly missed my stop. A group of teenagers laughing and talking woke me from my daydreaming at the last minute. They were jostling to get off which reminded me that I needed to get out there too. I'm going to have to get used to my new status: I'm a student now, not a schoolgirl. I'm eighteen and a half.

I arrived on the campus at bang on two o'clock. I didn't really know where to go from the Métro station so I followed the group of students. Now that I'm here I've got some time to spare so I'm having a bit of a walk round to explore the place. I find a map on a board and have a look to find out exactly where I am so I don't get lost. The campus is like a whole village, there are even signposts indicating different buildings. On the map I find the place I will have my lectures: 'Faculty of Languages, Building F'. Building F, so that's where I'll be for the year. Right now I can't wait to get to know it, to go up and down the steps like an old hand, to know which shortcuts to take to get there. I can't wait to be part of that world.

I decide to have a quick look at the building before enrolling. It wouldn't be right to go home without seeing where I'm going to work on my degree over the next three years. Once outside, I screw up my eyes in the September sun, a memory of the summer that's just gone. It's a pretty boring building, but I don't care. It looks like the beginning of the rest of my life to me.

I have to admit I chose modern languages a bit by default. I wanted to focus on marketing and go to a college that would give me the best possible education. I've always had a lot of get-up-and-go and I like responsibility. I like

constant stimulation and the challenge of sales. I also think I wanted the quickest route to having a clear idea of the world of work. I wanted to be really well prepared for my future job. I needed a complete break from the school environment, which was an ordeal for me with its nannying and childishness. And, let's be honest, it can prove much easier finding work after going through business school than university. Work that pays well too.

But that dream's out of reach at the moment. Business school is far too expensive for me. And taking out a loan means making a commitment over several years, which I can't afford. Deep down, I don't think they would even have accepted my application. On top of the overall reimbursement, I can't even make monthly payments regularly right now. So I've given up on that idea and made the strategic move of launching myself into modern languages. I'm still convinced that, with my degree in Spanish and Italian, I could change tack and go to business school where modern languages are vital. Especially as the Latin American economy has expanded so quickly in the last few years and, with my Spanish and Italian, I'd hit the ground running. And, who knows, I might overtake all the others with my cultural baggage as an extra. Standing outside Building F, I've got a head full of dreams.

No one needs to feel sorry for me. I've always had clothes on my back and food on my plate. But I don't know what it's like not to have to think about money. My father works in a factory and my mother's a nurse. They both earn bang on the minimum wage, with two children to bring up. Just enough to make ends meet but never any surplus. I'm not entitled to a grant because I'm one of the countless students who fall between two stools: a long way from what could be called rich, but not poor enough to get student funding. After adding together my parents' two incomes, the State deems that they can support my needs. No way out: I'll have to make do with what we haven't got.

I cut my walk short because I really want to get to the office on time. I can't wait any longer, I want my student card in my hand. I'm almost running.

When I get there I'm confronted with a queue of people which winds its way outside the building. I join it patiently, like the good newcomer I am. But they did say 2.30 p.m. *without fail*. This is my first glimpse of student life, which can so often be boiled down to queuing up at some admin desk for hours.

Just as I'm taking my place in the queue, two girls in different coloured T-shirts literally throw themselves at me.

'Hi, are you a first year?'

'Yes, how about you?' I say with a rather surprised smile.

One of the girls looks at me oddly. That wasn't the reply she was expecting and she apparently has no intention of having a conversation with me. Still, she very soon smiles back: I'm going to be easy prey.

The only reason they approached me was to get me to subscribe to a student payment scheme. I quickly gather from their patter that they're doing this job before the term begins and are paid on commission. They're clearly in competition – if not at war – because, although not actually violent, they keep interrupting each other and almost pushing each other over in their efforts to get my attention. I'm not really sure what I should do, this is all new to me. They're talking so quickly and confusingly I'm only getting every other word. They're both so keen to make the most convincing pitch that they've become completely incomprehensible. I just enjoy the surreal spectacle, although I do feel sorry for them. They're doing this to make a bit of money and I bet they're sweet as pie in everyday life.

'So, have you chosen then?'

The two wrestlers stand looking at me. The bout is over and they now want my judgement to decide the outcome. I

haven't listened to a word.

'Umm ... it's just ... I've already got a payment scheme.'

Yes, obviously, that's a good excuse. One of them, clearly disappointed and reckoning she shouldn't waste any more time on me, walks off straight away. The other gives up on me a few minutes later, still trying one last time to persuade me that, sometimes, two policies are better than one, and the one I have isn't the best and *so if you'd like to reconsider your choice for a moment, you'd soon realise ...* blah blah blah.

Faced with an argument so devoid of common sense, I move away to get back in line. It's two thirty, the exact time of my appointment, but I'm sure it wouldn't be right to jump the queue to get to the office, however convincing my explanations. So I decide to wait meekly, taking up my place behind a hugely tall boy. I peer at his appointment card which is just like mine. The words '2 o'clock' are written in red felt-tip right in the middle of the page. Two o'clock! How long has he been here, then?

To one side I can hear the voice of experience from some old hands in their fourth or fifth year, grumbling about how slowly the queue's moving. It must be the same every year. But who cares! I haven't got the urge or the energy to get wound up today. So I don't throw a fit or join in the general complaining.

After half an hour, though, I do wonder whether I've been forgotten. I spot a man wearing a badge with the official university logo on it, and grab him as he passes.

'I'm sorry to disturb you, but I had an appointment at two thirty. I've been waiting nearly half an hour.' As I speak I wave my letter at him.

'Yes,' he says contemptuously, not even looking at it, 'like everyone else.'

'So? Should I go on waiting? Will I really get in there today?'

'We're doing what we can.'

We're doing what we can ... That's not much of a reply, is it? I've just had my first confrontation with the university's admin department and it's not really a victory, or a relief.

Faced with such an evasive reply, I make up my mind to carry on waiting. I'm annoyed with myself for not bringing a book; I could have spent the time intelligently. I rummage through my bag, but find nothing, not even a newspaper or a stupid leaflet to read. I regret sending those two girls packing so quickly; I could at least have taken one of their brochures, it would have kept me busy for five minutes.

Stupidly, I've dressed up for today. I've put on very old high-heel shoes, as if I were going to an important interview. But standing here in the queue I hate myself for choosing them. If I dared, I'd take them off and go barefoot.

After waiting an hour and a half I finally get to the office. I look at all the windows to see which one is free first. I mutter to myself, fed up with today. I'm not in a good mood any more; I just want to pick up my card and go.

A young woman waves me over at last. I launch myself at her with a smile on my face, glad it will soon be over. She looks at me as if I've just made a pathetic joke and no one's laughing but me. Not really helpful for getting your spirits back up.

We come to the delicate question of my payment.

'Are you paying by cheque?'

Yes, my mother made the cheque out last week. A blank cheque. I can still hear her words: 'Now, be careful, Laura, make sure you don't lose it! Just imagine if someone found it!' I've always had a feel for money and, as soon as that cheque was in my hand, I gauged how powerful it was. I put it carefully into a wallet and put that into a drawer of my desk which locks with a key. I'm the only person who can open it and, even though I do trust my boyfriend who I live with, I'd rather take every precaution. You never know.

'Yes, by cheque.'

‘So, as you don’t have a grant but you do have a student payment scheme, that makes a total of 404.60 euros.’

What a ridiculous total! I hand her the cheque, trying to hide my smirk. Without a word, she stamps my papers, scribbles signs all over them, and points to the booth for student cards. The whole thing is over in two minutes.

The man in charge of cards is no more friendly than her, and practically snatches my school attendance certificate from my hand. In one mechanically regulated move, he prints my student card onto plastic, hands it to me and snatches the next certificate.

I couldn’t care less now, I’ve got my student card at last. This is it, a new chapter of my life is beginning. I feel confident and serene, holding my future in my own two hands, on this stupid bit of plastic.

Laura D. First year of Modern Languages Spanish.

Classy.

I head back to the Métro, relieved.

Chapter 2

A Stipulation

8 September 2006

AFTER WORKING A full day at the restaurant I walk back into the apartment where I live with my boyfriend, Manu. We've been going out for a year and moved in together two months ago.

At the time I was desperately trying to solve the problem of where I could live for the start of the academic year. I had no money at all and my parents couldn't help me financially. On top of that, they don't live in V but, ever since I got my Baccalaureate results, I've known I would have to study here. Manu's been living here since he started his physics course and I was really happy to be joining him. So I started looking for an apartment, skimming through the small ads at the student welfare office to find a cheap little room. I soon realised that an actual apartment was far too expensive, not to say completely out of the question. I just wanted a roof over my head, but even that seemed out of reach. I wasn't looking for anything swanky; my budget wouldn't allow for that, anyway.

I'd come to a dead end. Because I wasn't entitled to a grant, I didn't get any help from the State, and that meant no help for accommodation either. The welfare office favoured people with grants for places in student lodgings, and my parents really couldn't put up 200 euros a month

for rent. Apart from finding a job or giving up on uni, I couldn't see how to make it work. Plenty of students manage jobs at the same time as studying, but they are often the ones who fail exams or give up during the course of the year. I couldn't abandon my studies, I knew my future was at stake. Giving in now and finding work would mean drawing a line under my ambitions.

I carried on looking frantically for a miracle in the pages of free papers. At the same time I even went to hostels for the homeless to get information about them. I tried to convince myself it would be my only chance of going to uni and that, once I got there, I could try to find something else. But the thought of spending a night in one of those places made me shudder, it just seemed so degrading.

I was beginning to despair of finding an acceptable solution and one day when I was crying with frustration Manu jumped at the opportunity.

'We could live together! It would be great! Between us we could pay a reasonable rent and we'd be together the whole time!'

His eyes were shining. I liked the idea, but my financial problems stood in the way.

'Manu, look, I really can't. I haven't got any money. I've hardly got enough for a room, so a whole apartment ...'

'You could get a part-time job, uni won't take up all that much time.'

I explained my reservations. Manu's family is comparatively well off and he doesn't always realise all the expenses I have to cover myself. To convince me I could combine my studies with paid work, Manu showed me the university site with timetables on it. I had a lot of lectures but it was workable. I was seduced by this little glimpse of the dream he was offering me.

'You see, you can do it. I'm sure you can. Go on, say yes! It would be so good to be together the whole time. And, basically, you haven't got any choice.'