



Some Girls: My Life in a Harem

Jillian Lauren

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A jaw-dropping story of how a girl from the suburbs ends up in a prince's harem, and emerges from the secret Xanadu both richer and wiser

At eighteen, Jillian Lauren was an NYU theater school dropout with a tip about an upcoming audition. The "casting director" told her that a rich businessman in Singapore would pay pretty American girls \$20,000 if they stayed for two weeks to spice up his parties. Soon, Jillian was on a plane to Borneo, where she would spend the next eighteen months in the harem of Prince Jefri Bolkiah, youngest brother of the Sultan of Brunei, leaving behind her gritty East Village apartment for a palace with rugs laced with gold and trading her band of artist friends for a coterie of backstabbing beauties.

More than just a sexy read set in an exotic land, *Some Girls* is also the story of how a rebellious teen found herself-and the courage to meet her birth mother and eventually adopt a baby boy.

Some Girls: My Life in a Harem Details

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From Reader Review *Some Girls: My Life in a Harem* for online ebook

Wendy says

I didn't love this book. I thought it was a waste of time. The language was awful, and I didn't understand many parts. She skips around and brings in analogies that don't make a lot of sense. Lots of reviews talk about how she "found" herself and grew up. I didn't get that at all. Seemed to me like she didn't learn anything from her mistakes. It skips 14 years ahead and gives one page on her life now with her husband and baby. Somewhere in that 14 years she may have learned, but if so, she skipped right past it. And I felt bad for her parents that she rips apart throughout the book. She seemed like a spoiled, ungrateful brat to me.

Caitlin Constantine says

I liked this a lot more than I thought I would. I've often found there is a relationship between the quality of the writing in a memoir and the outlandishness of the story - The crazier the life story, the crappier the writing, and vice versa. So I figured that it doesn't really get much more bizarre than spending several months as part of a harem for the sons of the Sultan of Brunei, and that the writing would be horrible.

Well, it wasn't. I thought it was actually really good. I tore through it in about two days flat and enjoyed all of it, even the parts that made me really uncomfortable (like her discussion of the way the women systematically undermined one another, and her description of sex with the prince).

I think a lot of people may not have liked this book because they found Lauren's choices distasteful. I don't particularly understand that, because if they actually read the book (which I suspect many of her critics did not), they'll see that she actually makes life in a harem out to be a pretty dull affair, punctuated by shopping sprees, perfunctory parties, even more perfunctory sex and endless backstabbing among the women. I mean, she made it actually sound pretty sucky. Anyone who comes away from this thinking, gee, I'd love to be part of the harem, may need to go back to school for some reading comprehension classes.

In all, a worthy entry to the microgenre of sex-worker memoirs.

Loederkoningin says

Why, hello there Your Royal Highness Pengiran Digadong Sahibul Mal Pengiran Muda Jefri Bolkiah ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Haji Omar Ali Saifuddien Sa'adul Khairi Waddien or, in short, Prince Jefri aka Robin (for the ladies).

Wow, this man and his lifestyle really intrigues me. I had heard the rumors, but thanks to this excellent memoir by Jillian Lauren I started to *really* roam the Internet.

Prince Jefri is the youngest brother of the sultan of Brunei. He is - or in fact, was - known for his extravagant lifestyle. He owned a collection of 2000 luxury cars, a private Boeing 747, countless properties, including

hotels all over the world, an enormous art collection and a yacht names Tits (its lifeboats were called Nipple 1 and Nipple 2). He's also a notorious playboy (in case you hadn't guessed it yet with a Yacht named like that, ha!). Despite his 4 wives and 18 children, he was spending upward of \$250 million per year just to fly in expensive calls girls, centerfolds and runaway teens from all over the world to compete for a position in his infamous harem.

And that's where Jillian Lauren, the author of the memoir *Some girls: my life in a harem*, comes into play. In tight, effective prose she describes how she was adopted into a somewhat dysfunctional family, became a stripper when still a minor and an escort girl not much later. She frankly tells how she was driven by her insecurities, a need for money (she had dropped out of college) but mostly by a thirst for adventure, when she one day accepted an offer to audition for a somewhat mysterious job: an anonymous Singaporean businessman was looking for girls who would entertain him. The chosen girls would be compensated very well.

"My job description was elusive at best, but I fantasized that I might arrive and find a wild adventure, a pile of money, and an employer who was no less than Prince Charming. This was my opportunity to shake of my bohemian mantle and re-imagine myself as an enigmatic export, maybe a royal mistress or the heroine of a spy novel. More realistically, I suspected I had signed on to be an international quasi-prostitute. There are worse things I could do."

At that time, the sultan was the richest man on the planet. And Jillian was part of one of the first groups of American girls that were flown in to the bizarre and decadent world of the sultan's youngest brother, prince Jefri. Here, she and numerous other beauties were paid generously (\$20.000 for only 14 days, but teenager Jillian ended up receiving approximately \$200.000 to \$300.000, what she would call *"a gigantic amount of money, especially in the early nineties."*) to attend his nightly dance parties as entertainment for the prince and his buddies.

It's incredible and unbelievably surrealistic, this life that prince Jefri was able to lead. The girls would attend his million dollar parties in their prettiest outfits and then just hang around, bored senseless. However, when Jefri was due with his entourage, they were given a signal and hurriedly started dancing and pretended to have the times of their lives, all the time trying to capture Jefri's attention. He often hardly acknowledged his harem though. Although every night another girl went missing, presumably to have sex with the prince. After which she was showered with expensive jewelry.

In the meantime, the other girls would back-stab their way towards becoming Jefri's first or second favorite girlfriend. They planned the terrible things they could do to make other girls go home to increase their chances. Despite the rivalry, Jillian did manage to attain the position as the prince's second favorite girlfriend. Something that would provide her with many interesting and entertaining anecdotes to share in *Some girls: my life in a harem!*

Long after Jillian had bitten the dust, a former Miss USA, Shannon Marketic, sued the prince and the sultan in 1997 for holding her against her will as a sex slave in Brunei, drugging and raping her. Her suit claimed she and other young women were lured into traveling there under false pretenses. It said that their passports were confiscated on arrival and that they were checked for sexually transmitted diseases. She said she and the other women were routinely groped, fondled and otherwise sexually assaulted in the palace, where they were forced to show up for late-night disco parties to entertain Jefri's pals.

However, Jillian's story makes it perfectly clear that she and the other girls were never held against their wills and could leave at any given moment. The prince's sexual desires too, were - considering the endless

possibilities that must've been up for grabs - almost laughably normal. Jillian only ever had completely normal sex with him. He was really into voluptuous booties and would give hers a slap after sex, but that was as 'violent' as it would get..

Even Playboy playmate Rebecca Ferratti, who had headed for Brunei to see if the wild stories she'd heard about actresses, models and escorts making \$35,000 a week to 'entertain' the prince were true, told the NY Post - despite not having had the jolliest time of her life in the harem - how she *"never saw evidence of anyone being drugged or tortured unless you count boredom in that category. There was plenty of that."* She never had sex with Jefri either. *"There were so many of us, by the time they'd get around to you, it could be a year."*

Marketic's suit was dismissed (diplomatic immunity), but the scandal embarrassed the sultan so much, that he began investigating his brother and claimed he'd stolen billions from the family. It would be the beginning of Jefri's decline.

In 2006, the prince began legal proceedings against his former advisors, the barrister Thomas Derbyshire and his wife Faith Zaman, in both the UK and US, accusing them of stealing funds from him. He eventually lost the case. Zahman said: *"He is a very, very smart man. And he had hidden assets so well that the sultan, with all of his resources and all of his private investigators, couldn't find them. The assets were registered in layer upon layer of 'bearer shares'. Eventually we gained his trust, and then he opened up and we got to know everything: the art vaults full of paintings, the jewelry, gold, diamonds, bullion, and secret bank accounts."* (check out this interesting Vanity Fair article)

According to Wikipedia, in late April 2008, a New York court officially transferred control of what was believed to be prince Jefri's last major asset, the New York Palace, to the B.I.A. After he finally surrendered what he contended were the rest of his diamonds—five stones worth approximately \$200 million and a hundred paintings, his 10-year odyssey had finally come to an end and he had to kiss his lavish lifestyle goodbye.

That must have been hard to deal with. His lawyer had told the court earlier: *"The idea of prince Jefri working for a living is on a level of when during the Russian Revolution they put the aristocrats in the streets of St. Petersburg in the middle of the winter without any clothes to sweep. Unimaginable wealth all his life. He's 55 or so. Now he's going to go and bus tables?"*

Towards the end of her memoir, which is, by the way, prohibited in Brunei, Jillian ponders about how *"..treasure loses its power as an ego boost pretty quickly and becomes just another watch, another pair of earrings, jewelry so gaudy it looks like you probably bought it at Patricia Field. Eventually the jewels lose their sentimental value entirely and you wind up selling them to an estate jewelry buyer in a second-floor office in the diamond district."*

And Ferratti summarizes the prince's lifestyle concisely: *"I think he viewed himself as some sort of Islamic Hugh Hefner - but he really should consult with Hugh on how to throw a party."*

In the end *The Beatles* were right again, weren't they?

Thomas says

I admit that I gave this memoir five stars instead of four because I know the author, though only distantly. I admired her writing early in her career and when I finally read this memoir I was pretty blown away. I hear a lot of hating in the comments, but that doesn't really make sense to me. It's really quite a beautifully-written

book. Maybe memoir is just one of those things that either clicks with you or doesn't. But I've read a lot of books about sex work, and this one was unquestionably one of the most insightful, sex-positive, and non-judgmental. More importantly, it was amazingly poetic at times and a pleasure to read just for the writing style.

Lauren is close(ish) to my age and I felt very much like the generational aspect was very close to my experience. A lot of the wacky bohemians she knew in NY were similar to those I knew in SF, and the era she describes, I remember vividly. That scenery coexists with the bizarre, dysfunctional, warped, emotionally sadistic world of the prince's harem, and the juxtaposition is utterly demented. I really enjoyed almost everything about this book.

Marie desJardins says

Just, kinda, eh. I mean, certainly some of the "behind-the-scenes" details of the Sultan of Brunei's younger brother's "party girls" were kind of interesting. But the book purports to be about the author *and* her experiences, and the part about the author -- who she is, why she took this gig in the first place, why she left, why she went back -- is just all over the place. There's no real story arc, and it's really hard to understand where she's coming from. It seemed like it was trying to be an autobiography *and* an expose, and I didn't really think it worked as either one.

On the plus side, it's a quick and easy read and not *un*enjoyable -- just not deep or especially insightful.

Amanda says

I'll refer to an update I made when finishing this:

"Varying degrees of disinterested while reading this. At times yawning, why-am-I-reading-and-more-importantly-what-am-I-reading. Then thinking, this might've been interesting, but the complete lack of reflection from the author makes this a long list of things she did in her late teens. Unimpressed by the writing too, weird analogies to jilt the prose."

While I appreciate that this book never felt like it wanted to shock simply for the fun of it, it's devoid of emotion in the prose. The author makes few reflections on how she feels about it now, after it happened. When reading biographies, I read it with that hope; that the author will comment on how she/he feels now. Lauren's writing is full of strange analogies that pulls the reader out of the story, and she doesn't attach any emotion to the story. In the end, the result was me wondering what the point was, which is rarely a good feeling to leave the reader with.

♥Xeni♥ says

Okay, so I know it's rude to judge someone's memoir, but if they publish their life story, I feel it's okay to judge them. They could just keep these things private if they don't want my judgements.

That said, I was so totally disappointed by this book. It was lousy. I had expected something to be learned from this tale, or at least leave the book with the idea of "Now I am prepared!" but there wasn't even that in it. It was just one huge monologue on this girls' horrible life as a middle-class up-and-coming, spoiled, wretched, hates-herself actress, who makes bad decision after bad decision and then blows them off with some more parties.

These are the people I loathe so much... if you want to do something, why not just DO it? I understand that it's hard, but once you've done it the sense of accomplishment is so much greater! UGH! This book left such a bad taste in my mouth.

I really wonder why I even bothered to continue to read, let alone finish it. I suppose in a way I was hoping for something, anything, even a tiny little grain of advice or glamour or anything that could justify the really super disturbing life that this person has led. The fact that she ends up adopting, just like how her 'real parents' did, doesn't make up for all her other negative thoughts, self-loathing and so on.

I would also like to point out that this title is misleading. She says that her life was in a harem, but that which I have come to understand what a harem is, isn't that you can come and go whenever you want. And that the prince might just only look at you or whatever, and not even take you sexually. As a harem girl, you are the prince's property, something I felt never actually came across. Jillian made her life sound glamorous, vaguely dangerous and very distasteful, but never did she make it sound like she hated it. She hated herself for doing it, but not the life itself. And then she'd go back for more; trying to get more money out of the rich prince.

There are no moralities, no values and nothing of any consequence to be taken away from her life story. It was a huge disappointment. I wish I had listened to some other GoodReads reviewers and left this book alone. That's a whole afternoon and evening of lost reading time. And probably lost brain cells too.

Pam says

How does a fairly wealthy adopted Jewish girl end up in a modern day harem at 18? Lauren does a good job of explaining her journey. She is a very angry teenager. She has been physically and mentally abused by her father for yrs. When he gets angry at her he beats her and then later apologizes. After one of her father's tantrums she tells her mother she is moving out. Her mother agrees with her. HUH????? She is only 16! Her mother suggests she gets her GED and skip her senior yr of High school. I would NEVER send my child away at 16. What was her Mother thinking??????

Lauren passes her GED and enrolls at N.Y.U. as a theater major. After 6 months she drops out. Her parents tell her if she doesn't stay in school they are going to cut her funds off. She tries acting in a horrible horror/porn movie and working as a stripper in a dance club to support herself. She meets a "friend" who tells her about her other job making much more money. Before she realizes it she is a hooker for an "escort" agency with high paying customers. Her "friend" tells her about an interview for a position as a "party girl" for a rich businessman. The job is to last 2 weeks and make them quite a bit of money. Like a lamb to the slaughter Lauren goes to the interview and is chosen for one of the girls. Once she is chosen she is told the real story.....the businessman is the Prince of Brunei and she will make far more money than previously stated.

As Lauren gets on the plane to leave for Brunei she does have some misgivings about white slavery.....Duh? She is only 18 yrs old. Where in the world are her parents????

So much happens after this part in the story. Once she gets to Brunei she sees mirrors everywhere, even in the bathrooms. She learns later that behind every mirror is a camera watching her all the time.....YUCK.

The prince plays cruel mental games with the girls too. He enjoys the girls fighting with each other over him. He does things like deliberately choosing a girl's arch enemy to be his favorite just to punish her for something. He will ignore a girl just to show her he can, and that no one has any control over him.

There is so much more to the book but I don't want to spoil it for any of you. Lauren does tell the reader what it is like in a modern day harem. However, it is not what you expect. She shares the everyday boredom and feeling like a bird in a gilded cage being watched all the time. She does not share the erotic details of what happens in the bedroom. The reader does feel her angst as she makes life choices. She also shares how she wants to find her birth mother and what happens. She is such an angry young girl searching for something that will fulfill her.

The negative thing I have to say about the book is her usage of very crude language. She doesn't use it all the time but it does pop up from time to time.

Liz says

I picked this book up after reading about it in the paper. I was unaware that it was a memoir type story. I figured it was fiction. My bad. The writer appears to be bi polar as far as her story is concerned. On one hand she glamorizes being a hooker, on the other she tries to show she regrets her choices, wants to be a better person...but keeps going right back to all the perks of being a prostitute. She waxes poetic a lot, it's all BS, like a creative writing assignment gone bad.

Some of the events sound like a lot of BS. In her story she says she leaves home at sixteen to go to college, drops out a few months before she turns 18, is left on her own and turns to stripping. At 18 she joins the harem, but she likes to throw things in there that make you wonder how someone had time (and money) to do these things in a six month time span.

There's an undercurrent that she really is a good girl, she just happens to do drugs, take off her clothes and have sex for money. Had I known this was the basis of the book, I wouldn't have bothered. It was like a train wreck though, you knew it was going to be bad, but you looked anyway.

Overall the writer is extremely shallow in her own words and didn't leave you much room to be sympathetic. Not sure what the lesson was in this book, but I'm not sure she learned it.

Ruds says

In the mid-90's, the Philippines was gripped by a scandal on the alleged flesh trade of Filipina models, actresses and entertainers in Brunei that a senate investigation was even called. I picked out this book hoping to glean insider accounts of the mysterious, sensual lives of the girls(or, as the author lightly put it, the royal

entertainers) inside a harem. And yeah, I was hoping Ruffa Gutierrez's name will be brought up.

In her time inside Prince Jefri's harem, the author befriended a Filipina actress named Fiona(definitely a pseudonym) who was the prince's favorite among the lot. He even proposed to her but the actress turned him down, hightailed it out of the country bringing with her expensive clothes, jewelries, at least a million dollars, and never came back. I made a quick, mental calculation and concluded it can't be Ruffa because the age did not fit. Or Cristina Gonzales's. They might have come some time later. In the book, Fiona spoke with a slight British accent. That should narrow it down. Or not.

Towards the end, the Prince got engaged to a Filipina singer named Iyen, who I'm pretty sure was Ayen Munji who later would become one of his four wives (highly disputed, as it was reported that the Prince married several times more than the four allowed by Islamic law). Ayen, later on divorced the Prince and married Franco Laurel.

♥ Marlene♥ says

Finished this yesterday. One word comes to mind about this book. That word is... Honest!

Wow That girl is so honest, I was sometimes shocked but loved it as well.

How she spoke about her father. That was the first thing that surprised me.

Quote: "In Great tradition of Jewish parents, his dearest belief is that when he is dead, I'll spend the rest of my life regretting my callous behaviour towards him"

Wow. I do not find that a very positive thing about Jewish parents if that is true.

She also wrote that her dad sometimes called her on the phone when he had heard a song and that reminded him of himself! He wanted her then to listen to that song and have the same sentiments, meaning listen to that song and think about HIM!. I think dad was very into himself ;)

Another thing I noticed was her love for difficult words. Well to me they were. ;)

Quote; My family is one of those old Jewish families whose octogenarians are sought out for interviews by ethnohistorians"

Loved that one. What I also loved was her telling about the weird thoughts she had. It turned out I had the same thoughts. lol. Wondering what you would do in a war like ww2 or in a crisis situation. Everybody always thinks they would be the hero. ;)

Talking about how she loved to watch herself cry. "Sometimes I spent so much time acting the part that I forgot How I was really feeling"

Another sentence that struck a chord was "The diet part that worked out fine. It was the liking myself part that never happened"

"I stuffed any display of weakness or emotion and planned to have my feelings when I got somewhere else. But when I got home I couldn't find the feelings I'd put aside for later"

Okay I'll stop with the quotes.

Another thought after reading. Wondering how the relationship with her parents is now?

She told the whole world she used to be a prostitute! That is very brave but I could not help wondering about her parents.

I highly recommend this book because it is thought provoking and interesting.

Cat says

I saw this author on The View promoting this book. I immediately thought 2 things: 1) I am about to rewrite a story that is set in a modern-day harem and this would be good for research and 2) here is another person who got a publishing contract not because she can write, but because she happened to have a good story which in light of the recent Oprah book club memoir debacles may or may not be true. Amid the depressing thoughts that I would perhaps have to join a harem to get a NY publishing contract, I ordered the book immediately.

Again, I was proved wrong. This woman was no sham, she can really write. It is later revealed in the text why. To keep her sanity while in this harem she would write. First a journal, later short stories, then later her memoir.

This book is very thought-provoking, the main question being how in the world does a girl who grew up in New Jersey end up in a Prince's harem in this day and age? The answer soon follows in this passage. Besides the money, jewels, nightly parties, free-flowing champagne and gourmet food, designer clothes, lush accommodations and free international travel, there was this...

----begin quote----

Sometimes I fell prey to fantasies of becoming a princess. It seemed so strange that it had entered my orbit of possibilities. What Disney-brained American girl hadn't lain in bed and known deep in her heart that she was worthy of being woken from an evil spell by the kiss of a prince? That she would open her eyes and, due to no effort of her own, find that she had been saved? Who wouldn't consider attempting to grab that gold ring, that diamond crown? ~ from Some Girls page 189

The more I thought about it, the more I read, the more I realized that this modern harem was not such a phenomenon after all. I had visions of Hugh Hefner's mansion teeming with 'girlfriends' and 'Playmates' at nightly parties. Of ABC's The Bachelor where 25 women will claw each other's eyes out for the chance to be with a man who yesterday was a complete stranger to them.

How did Lauren, an NYU student/drop-out, end up there? A struggling actress from an abusive family she went from stripping, to being an 'escort', to the harem within about a year when she was 18 and struggling to pay to live in NYC while waiting for her big acting break.

My impression, besides the realization that the Playboy mansion and The Bachelor were both very harem-like, was that being in a harem was far less exciting than I had imagined. The girls wore their normal clothing, not see-thru I Dream of Jeannie outfits. No one made them perform the "Dance of the Seven Veils". Instead they disco danced. Even though this was the early 90s and disco was long dead, apparently the Sultan of Brunei's prince brother still liked it and he always got what he wanted. There was no training for the girls on how to be a sexual expert. In fact, there was hardly any sex at all. Understandably. There was 1 prince with 3 wives, and 40+ girls. Hard to get to them all for any mortal man, even a prince. Some girls had sex with him once then were sent home after their 2 week stint. Others became a favorite and stayed for a year, not because they were particularly good at sex, but because they added to the 'drama' which entertained the prince, much like the crazy girls on The Bachelor always seem to hang around for a long time because they are good entertainment.

For the Disney-fied little girl in all of us... Yes, the prince did eventually propose to a harem girl since he was allowed legally to take 4 wives, and his first wife had already provided suitable heirs. The joke was on him. The harem girl of his dreams took the money and jewels and disappeared, never to be heard from again. She wasn't an American, apparently Disney doesn't reach Thailand and being Princess #4 didn't appeal to her.

Shawna says

It's hard to feel sorry for a woman who prostituted herself to the richest man in the world, and was allowed to fly to Singapore and spend more than "the down payment on her house" on designer clothes. Sure, she was bored, and manipulated, and pulled into the catty machinations of the harem, but in the end she walked away with ten of thousands of dollars in cash, and jewelry. It was a fascinating story, and the author's background/upbringing explains a good deal of dissociative relationship with love and sex.

It's also hard to feel much of anything but disgust for the sultan, a man who uses his money to buy rugs with genuine gold sewn into them, and Monet paintings that sit in isolated corners never to be seen, and brings desperate 18 year old girls (and some underage girls from Thailand etc.) into his palace and bribes them with cash in order to get his jollies. He could be doing so much good in the world. It's a tragedy.

Still an interesting read.

Meredith says

I heard the author give an interview on Howard Stern about this book, and was intrigued not so much by her harem/hooker past but by the fact she is now married to the bassist of Weezer, and they adopted a little boy from Ethiopia... just like me (the Ethiopia part, not the Weezer part).

And okay, the harem thing was sort of interesting. But though this book was readable, by the end I was totally annoyed by the writer. She has the pretense of being this fantastic author who honed her craft during her second tour of duty in the Brunei harem, but there's nothing particularly gripping or striking about her just-competent writing. This book would be downright boring if not for the salacious harem details, and there was nothing really uplifting about it, just the story of a troubled upper-middle-class brat with no ambition

and no talent, relying on her body and (dull) wits to make a mint of money as a prostitute. (Two stars because I'm a sucker for salacious harem details.)

Alice says

(2.5 stars) This is a very quick, interesting read. The author is looking back at her 18-19 year old self who dropped out of NYU, became a stripper, became an escort, and ended up as a member of the Prince of Brunei's harem (this is all on the book jacket, so it's not a spoiler). While I really enjoyed some of the passages (the scenes where she spends spends spends in Chanel, Dolce & Gabbana, etc. are crazy), there are a lot of long boring flashbacks to her upper-middle class Jewish upbringing in Long Island. Since I grew up with a lot of middle-class Jewish girls in Westchester, this was really familiar and repetitive to me, especially as it seemed that the author dwelled on a lot of abusive situations without ever blaming her parents, instead internalizing a lot of the abuse. I would have liked to have seen some more reflection on the events that transpired in the harem, rather than the superficialities of the court (what girl was fighting with who, who wore what on what night, etc.). Overall a decent book club book or library read, but if you're looking for an epic memoir about either the sex trade or the life of the uber-rich oil monarchies, this is not it.

Suzanne says

This was a pleasant surprise. The subtitle gave me pause for a moment, but this memoir was not the tawdry, cheesy and/or poorly written mess I feared it might be. Why was I reading this at all? A \$1 find at the library and a mood to indulge in a light, easy-breezy summertime read. It was that, but more, a coming-of-age story about the author's search for identity at ages 18 and 19 in an unusual setting with a twist, and finally, her learning how to have compassion for her own mistakes and shortcomings.

The writing here was so much better than I expected. I think I've bumped it up almost a star just for the "gap reaction," the happiness I experienced realizing how much of a difference there was between my low expectations and my enjoyment.

An adopted New Jersey teen with a troubled home life, Jillian Lauren drops out of college and supports herself in New York with a job as a stripper, then graduates to an escort service. She's offered an opportunity to go to Brunei to party with a prince (why not!), an assignment that promises exceptional compensation. Yearning for adventure – and the cash—she leaves her boyfriend, lies to her parents, and lands on Borneo, at a complex of palace-adjacent guest houses that are temporary homes to a rotating collection of young women from all over the world who are kept around for the entertainment of Jefri, Prince of Brunei, brother to the reigning Sultan. The subtitle "My Life in a Harem" is a bit misleading. Actually, Jillian stayed several weeks on two different occasions. The girls' main activity was hanging out at dull disco-style parties each night where they would vie for the attention of their host. The relationships were redolent of the personal politics of a high school lunchroom, but understandably, given their ages. At 18, Jillian was not even the baby of the group. And the Prince, known to his visitors as Robin, played each of them against the others for his own amusement. In the midst of the scheming, manipulative rivalries, Jillian develops an unhealthy attachment to the powerful, charismatic, but bored, spoiled, sex-addicted and emotionally sadistic prince.

To battle the "skull-crushing boredom" there are field trips. "When faced with such despair, a girl can always

shop. We hit the Yaohan with travel goggles on, the kind that make every little thing look irresistible because it's exotic and the money makes no sense and you feel like you're in a video game with tinny Asian pop songs and smiling wide-faced shop girls who speak to you in rhymes and giggle at your strangeness. In this video game you gain strength by acquiring snacks and T-shirts and little stuffed animals and sweet-smelling soaps and brightly colored lip gloss." This trip was just foreshadowing another retail binge where Jillian is taken to a shopping marathon that lasts for eleven and a half hours and where she is encouraged to spend in one day probably the annual revenue of some small third world nations.

When she finds herself working as a stewardess on the royal yacht without any warning, training, or experience, she realized that the Prince "liked to put his people in bizarre situations just to see what they'd do. We were his little lab rats." After a while Jillian does become, at least temporarily, a favorite, and she shares Robin's bed and is his regular companion. "I kissed Robin good-bye every morning and sat next to him every night at dinner. It was like having a boyfriend, except he was a dictator's brother who was married three times already and had forty other girlfriends . . . Power was something I'd never experienced before. I'm not sure that I was in love with Robin as a person, exactly, but I was in love with that feeling, ecstatically in love. I may have gotten the two confused. Power tasted like an oyster, like I'd swallowed the sea, all its memories and calm and rot and brutality. "

While theoretically she was not a prisoner, there were times she was locked in a room to wait for Robin, or found herself on a journey where she had no idea of her destination. A guard who fetches her one evening takes her into an elevator and she has a moment of over-dramatic imagination and panic. "I was like that guy in the gangster movie who knows he's about to get whacked for some infraction. . . I imagined the headlines. Despairing Spurned Mistress Throws Herself Off a Malaysian Rooftop. American Prostitute Dies in a Drug Deal Gone Wrong at the Kuala Lumpur Hilton. Jersey Teen Disappears While on Holiday in Southeast Asia. At least I'd die in an evening gown."

Jillian is a very young woman trying to recreate herself, but gets all tangled up in the shallow and superficial in this bizarre and toxic environment, and when she returns to New York, very well compensated as promised, she has trouble adjusting to life there. She goes back to Brunei for another stint as a Prince Jefri groupie. Needing a creative outlet, a sense of purpose and a way to deal with the idiocy of the whole situation, she begins writing about her experiences in letters and journals, which became the foundation of this book.

When she goes home to America once again, to search for her birth mother and for herself, she knew she "had severed the connection between my soul and my body so profoundly that I could barely feel my own skin anymore. If I never saw Robin again, maybe I'd be free to return to myself. I knew I was facing a long road back." There is a happy ending epilogue for Jillian. Things didn't turn out so well for the Prince (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jefri_Bo...).

I wouldn't recommend this highly, but if you're in the mood for this sort of thing, it is entertaining and the writing, again: not bad.

Teresa says

I found this book sad and disturbing, bereft of any real point.

I picked it up out of curiosity about Brunei and an abiding interest in each

person's unique story, but finished it only to see if the poor girl eventually found some sort of redemption. It seems she didn't.

Jillian and her brother Johnny grew up in the middle-class non-observant Jewish family into which they were both adopted. Both experienced troubled and wild teenage years. Johnny found fulfillment in God, becoming a devout Hasid. Jillian takes a condescending view of her brother's path, while proceeding to make one unfortunate decision after another. In the course of the story, which is told in very vulgar and melodramatic terms, she becomes a stripper, a prostitute, a "porn performance artist," and the mother of an aborted child. She is perpetually miserable, and yet refuses to seek any path that might lead to true freedom and joy. Her primary philosophical guideline is "What would Patti Smith do?" Despite endless self-analysis, she never seems to get it. It is obvious that she is full of self-hate, and yet there is a smugness about her that I found very annoying. I can't think of one reason to recommend this book to anyone. In fact, I'm sorry I read it myself.

Rachel Kramer Bussel says

Some Girls is about, on the surface, Lauren's time spent in a harem in Brunei, but dig just marginally beneath that surface and you will see that this is a memoir that tackles major moments in both her life and one's that many women struggle with. Lauren leaves home at 16 to head out on her own at NYU, but soon finds the life of the theater and, later, escorting, more her style. She is young, brash and carefree, but Lauren never makes it as easy as "I was rebelling." She transposes her freewheeling time against her search for meaning--and her birth mother. Her descriptions of life in the palace, the over-the-top, almost sickening shopping sprees, and encounters with Prince Jefri vividly, including rivalry, jealousy, desire and boredom.

Some of the most moving scenes here, though, having nothing to do with the harem, even if they were informed by her time there. Her quest, and eventual success, in finding her birth mother is at the core of what it means to find oneself, and the ways that meeting falls short of Lauren's expectations are poignant. When she writes of her accidental pregnancy, the boyfriend who wasn't interested, and how she chose to deal with that, she starkly highlights the humanity within the debate around abortion in a way we truly need to see more of in our society. And when Lauren finds tattoo culture (fun fact: Ed Hardy once had a magazine called *Tattootime*, which becomes Lauren's bible), she writes of having found her people, and promptly gets a major tattoo that even her tattoo artist advises her against.

I found myself repeatedly marveling that the protagonist is only, at most, 19 or 20 when most of the scenes here take place. Lauren displays a maturity beyond her years in her self-assurance (though, again, beneath the surface much more than toughness bubbles up) as well as in the writing and self-reflection. This is a memoir in the truest sense of the word, not a dashed-off "I did this for a year" but a piece that flashes back and reveals her childhood piece by piece, showing why she had this restless yearning to travel so far and get involved with the Prince, even dreaming of having his child at one point. She complicates prostitution and her role in it, while never disowning or disavowing that word or the reality of what she did, and in doing so, has written an outstanding story that is both a fast, at times glamorous read, and one that is very likely to make you cry which, in my book, makes it a winner.

Kavita says

I thought this was going to be about Brunei. I thought this was going to be about life in a harem. I thought this was going to be about a woman's descriptions and feelings about harem life. It was none of this. *Some Girls* is a pathetic attempt at storytelling about a woman's boring childhood, family, and sex escapades.

First of all, the word "harem" is used in a very modern sense, and not in the traditional or Islamic sense which means the place where the women of the household live their lives. The book starts off with the author whining about her family problems. Then she moves on to become a sleazy actress and gets promoted to being a sleazy prostitute. All this just takes up more and more space. By the time she flies to Brunei, you are already heartily bored.

But it's not like the book picks up once she is in the "harem". Oh no! That would be money for worth! So it's basically this woman and a number of other similar boring women whining about shit and having karaoke parties. One of the princes makes an occasional appearance and picks out one of them and has sex with them. Jeez! A newspaper article on this subject would be more intriguing!

I found Lauren annoying and while I began to realise that she had severe problems and came from a terribly dysfunctional and abusive family, I don't understand the need to write this book. There is nothing interesting in it. She has no insights, no descriptive abilities, no writing capacity, no ideas, no ability to dig out hidden gems from everyday life, and frankly no moral values, even one of which might have made this book non-redundant. I didn't even hate the author, that's how boring this book was!

As for Brunei, forget it! This might have taken place in the White House or in some other galaxy. It wouldn't have made an iota of difference to the ... ehmm ... "story", to give this atrocity a graceful appellation. The author makes no attempt to get to know or understand the local culture, and indeed, she doesn't even meet any of the locals. At all! She just meets other prostitutes and none of them are interesting either. Or maybe they are, and Lauren just couldn't bring it out. I wouldn't know. I didn't manage to finish this book.

Allison Floyd says

If you've been a real, live, contemporary harem girl, and you can write worth a damn, then clearly you have a story to tell. Jillian Lauren certainly can write worth a damn, which makes for an entertaining and rather sickening glance into a mental landscape that is frequently unflattering, vacillating wildly between a preciously narcissistic self-concept and good ol' low self-esteem. In Lauren's world, other women are a series of assets and liabilities to be assessed as "the competition". It's enough to make you want to bust out the Bikini Kill. To be fair, she is also quite intent on documenting the physical flaws of the gentlemen who appear in this book too, so at least it was equal-opportunity grossness (particularly cringe-inducing is when she observes—unironically, as best I can tell—that a boyfriend is in need of a "de-geeking makeover"). Also, the WWPSD (What Would Patti Smith Do?) gimmick got annoying, but at least she seems to have the self-awareness to realize she really has no effing business putting herself in the same league as Patti Smith. To be fair, it's entirely possible that the narrative voice of this memoir was intended to represent the author at nineteen, and who doesn't want to disown more or less everything she said and did at nineteen?

All grouching aside, this was an almost compulsively-readable glimpse into a life I suspect I can safely assert I will never be a part of, and I found at least one part to be deeply moving.

For me, *Some Girls* helped to salve the Michelle Tea lacuna of recent years. You could say that if Michelle Tea is sugar, *Some Girls* is Stevia.

This book also represents for me the beauty of working at the library: I probably wouldn't have come across it otherwise, but I'm glad I did, because I'd place it in that important category of books that remind us that reading, after all, is supposed to be fun.
