

SPACE

(Survivors of Prostitution-Abuse Calling for Enlightenment)

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30th October 2012

To the Honourable Members of the Committee:

The submissions contained within are each from formerly prostituted Irish women and are presented to you now under the banner of SPACE – Survivors of Prostitution-Abuse Calling for Enlightenment – the international survivors’ organisation we have formed in recent years. We have included submissions only from members who’ve been exploited on this island and we would like to make clear that two of these three submissions are by women who have been exploited in prostitution both in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland.

We would appreciate hugely if you would consider our submissions, each of which are drawn, painfully, from our personal life experiences, and keep them in mind during the process of the impending legislative change.

You will notice that our stories are very individual. This reflects the reality of women in prostitution generally, some of whom come to prostitution through destitution or the fear of destitution, others come to it through the grooming of sexual abuse; still others come to it through the horror of narcotic addiction.

Many women come to prostitution by a combination of these and other routes. Though we do not pretend to speak for every prostitute who ever lived, we assert our experience that *all* of the women we met in prostitution came to it through some negative circumstance and also that they were very obviously psychologically wounded by it. We would like to point out that, as a group, we have a combined life experience of prostitution that amounts to well more than a hundred years, and that on not one day of that time did any of us meet a woman who was happy in that lifestyle.

We believe our shared experience makes clear that the vast majority of women in prostitution are deeply unhappy and that no other logical conclusion can be drawn from it. We also know, however, that leaving prostitution is not an option for many women because they lack the supports we would like to see implemented, which would include assistance in education, training, housing and counselling services. We would like to see the right to access to these services worked into the working of this Bill.

We assert that prostitution is commercial sexual abuse; that this is how we lived it and this is how we witnessed it, and we are strongly in favour of clause 6, which criminalises

the demand for paid sex. We cannot state this strongly enough. We also believe that people who sell sex should not be criminalised, on the principle that no person should be criminalised for their own exploitation.

There needs to be a total social change in the way society perceives prostitution. We believe that this is possible, and if we look at how views have changed in recent years on the island of Ireland towards drink-driving and indoor smoking, we see two examples of how legislation and strong governmental leadership have led to radical shifts in long-held social beliefs. We see also the great benefits that have come about because of it.

We want to see this sort of strong leadership applied to the social harm we have lived. We have, each of us, been profoundly damaged by prostitution and we desperately do not want this human rights abuse to be considered tolerable anymore.

We wish to strongly state that we support Lord Morrow's Bill. It is an honourable effort towards social justice and we trust in it, and in him.

Yours sincerely,

Rachel Moran, Justine Reilly and the other members of SPACE

Rachel Moran
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30th October 2012

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am a thirty-seven year old Dublin woman who was prostituted in Dublin, Limerick and Galway between the years 1991 and 1998, from the age of fifteen to twenty-two.

I left home a few weeks after my fourteenth birthday because my schizophrenic mother did not know how to grieve the recent suicide of my father, and took to mentally and emotionally abusing me as an outlet for her grief. I was taken into care and placed in a residential unit, then shifted from hostel to hostel, a number of state-funded B&B's, one foster home and then eventually expelled from school and thrown out of a hostel, where I found myself on the streets. I fended for myself through shoplifting and sleeping in squats and derelict buildings and then I met a man who had a great idea about how we could earn money and how I'd never have to worry about being homeless again. He was my boyfriend as far as I was concerned, and my pimp as far as everyone else was.

I cannot quantify the painful memories that followed that. I was used sexually by hundreds and hundreds of men before I reached my sixteenth birthday, and I quickly learned how to imagine myself away, how to pretend that I was not there, to pretend that it was not happening.

But it did happen - and it happened over and over and over and over again - and I am not pretending anymore. I have spent fifteen years trying to come to terms with this. I have spent the same length of time trying to learn how to live in the world. I am still learning, and some part of me fears that I probably always will be.

I did try to move on to the best of my ability. I returned to adult education at twenty-four and went to DCU the following year, where I completed a BA in Journalism. I spent most of my twenties trying to find my feet in the world, get my degree, secure a home in a decent area in which to raise my child. I did these things, normal things; I got a job. I had two relationships. I found though that the deepest part of me could not move on until I had done the one thing that would free me: tell the truth about prostitution; and so I returned again and again to the painful task of trying to write my book ('Paid For' released in the Republic, April 2013) I finally realised, in 2008, that I had spent the last ten years trying to move on in practical ways, while also trying to tell my truth, but I had done nothing to try to heal myself from the emotional and psychological trauma of prostitution, which had left me crippled with anxiety and the deepest sort of depression. It was a psychological wounding that went right to my

soul. I realised that if I was to truly move on I had to first truly heal, which meant confronting my past in therapy, and so I did that, for over three years.

I have found the timing of all this extraordinary, because just as I was coming towards the end of writing my book, prostitution had begun to heat up as a political issue in the Republic of Ireland. Two years ago I attended the launch of the Turn off the Red Light campaign in Dublin and I felt compelled to speak at that meeting, introducing myself as a former prostitute, before talking briefly about my experience of prostitution; about the homelessness that led to it, the harm caused by it and the relief I felt that prostitution and trafficking were being tackled together. I said that there was no difference worth regarding when this is only a matter of two different sets of circumstances bringing women to exactly the same place.

There is a great deal of healing to be done from the emotional and psychological torment inevitable for somebody who has been used sexually by thousands of unfeeling, uncaring and often contemptuous and violent strangers. This healing, I am thankful to say, has already begun, and it is greatly aided by the actions of men like Lord Morrow, who have undertaken to tackle the abuses of prostitution head-on, by criminalising the demand for paid sex itself.

I want to make the Committee aware that over the course of seven years I never met a woman who maintained that she was happy in prostitution. I have only ever come across that sort of talk on the internet; I never heard it anywhere in prostitution.

The arguments I have heard in favour of prostitution's legalisation or decriminalisation always ignore one vital truth, and that is the simple wrongfulness of society accepting one class of women should be set aside to be treated as less than human. We none of us, whether prostituted or not, would choose prostitution for the women close to us in our lives. Pimps and punters would not choose prostitution for the women close to them. Those who argue for the legitimacy of prostitution always argue, without fail, for the legitimacy of prostitution for *other* women; they do not argue for prostitution to be introduced into the lives of their own daughters, sisters, nieces and mothers. They argue for the *institution* of prostitution, but they do not argue for its touching the lives of the women they love. Women in prostitution are the very last people who will ever argue for prostitution to be introduced into the lives of women they love, and this, for me, tells its own story.

Many pro-prostitution arguments just do not stand up to the lived reality of prostitution. For example, I know people will make the point that sexually using the bodies of those under seventeen is already illegal. Please believe me when I say that the men who buy sex couldn't care less about that, and when they think of it (which is often) it is to give themselves the kinky little thrill they get from doing something they know to be illicit. Wherever prostitution is tolerated there will always be men seeking the bodies of underage girls to commercially sexually abuse. The truth is that adolescent bodies in prostitution are most highly sought after and most highly prized and making the sale of adult bodies acceptable will do nothing to erase this. We have only to look at Switzerland for evidence of this. In Switzerland, where the bodies of sixteen-year-old girls are legally for sale, a serious problem continues whereby clients are not satisfied with sixteen-year-old legal prostitutes and the problem of adolescents

younger than this being sexually commercially abused (and often trafficked for this purpose) in illegal prostitution continues to doggedly persist.

And this brings me to the issue of the persistent attempts to separate trafficking and prostitution. Having your body used sexually against your wishes is experienced as sexual abuse, whether it was a gun or a less obviously coercive scenario that was responsible for your acquiescence. There is no meaningful distinction to be made between the victims of trafficking and prostitution. Please imagine how unthinkable it would be if we were to divide domestic violence sufferers into two categories: genuine victims and misbehaved wives who were asking for it!

What I would like the Committee to know is that there is no such thing as autonomy in prostitution. People talk about a woman's right to do what she likes with her own body. Well, what this opinion ignores is that it is not the women in prostitution who choose what to do with their own bodies; it is the men who pay to use woman's bodies who choose what is to be done with them. In seven years of prostitution I never once had the opportunity to choose what was to be done to my body and I do not believe the nonsense that anyone else has because that is not how prostitution works. Once a body has been commodified autonomy is lost to the person who lives in that body and they then find themselves used to the whims of those who pay to use them. I have never known prostitution to operate any other way.

It is clear that what we need to do to reduce prostitution is to deter the demand for it. Many reports, including the 2011 Boston study 'Comparing Sex Buyers with Men Who Don't Buy Sex' and other recent studies closer to home, in London and Glasgow, point to clear deterrents in dissuading men from buying sex. One is public exposure, another is inclusion on the sex offenders register, and another is a criminal conviction.

I believe that criminalisation of demand is the only way forward, and that any other way is doomed to the same failure we have seen in all the countries that have implemented them.

I set up SPACE in recent years because I wanted us women to come together and work together to help in bringing about social change. When I think about what we are doing here, what we are campaigning for, I think of all the young girls on this island who go to sleep soundly in their beds every night, with no notion how welcome their bodies would be in the brothels if only the circumstances existed in their lives to place them there. I think about those girls as I campaign for change because I was one of the girls whose life conditions *did* place her there; and I would never forgive myself if I did not speak up and say something, and do something, to try to prevent the perpetuation of what happened to me and what I saw happen all around me.

I have heard it argued that disabled men should have a 'right' to sexual intercourse with women, and I have heard this view espoused as one of the arguments in favour of prostitution's legalisation. What I have never heard is anyone express the view that perhaps we should share the responsibility for disabled men being sexually satisfied equally among women; I have never heard anyone suggest that perhaps we could run a sort of lottery system, a public service duty, something akin to jury duty, which

would randomly select women from among the population to service the 'needs' of these men.

We all know how unthinkable such a suggestion would be. We do not have to think about it; we immediately see it for what it is; we immediately *sense* it for what it is. But let me put it to you that the institution of prostitution does just the same thing. In prostitution, women are randomly selected from the population because of homelessness, poverty, addiction, histories of childhood sexual abuse and other circumstances and combinations of circumstances beyond their control. Let me put it to you that this lottery is already in operation, and that I know because I was one of those selected.

Yours Sincerely,

Rachel Moran

I am a woman who worked as a prostitute for nearly 20 years. Like many I got into it for a so-called loving partner. The stories I read about how glamorous it's supposed to be make me ill. It's a hard cruel life filled with lies, beatings and rape. In the end you feel like a toilet. People call you terrible names when you get caught, even the ones you love turn on you.

What I'd like to ask is what about the men? They can do whatever they want to us and there is nothing we can do about it. Why aren't they named and shamed? What they are doing is pure abuse and they are doing it for fun so why isn't what they're doing a crime?

I was so lucky to get away from my pimp/partner and then leave the brothels behind me but I'll never leave the scars behind. If men were charged and named and shamed believe me there would be no prostitution, or very little of it.

The men that pay for sex are weasels, sad ugly-inside men who would never get a second look at the women they pay. If the men had been criminalised twenty years ago the cowards wouldn't have dared pay a woman and maybe my 'loving partner' would never have been able to sell me. Now I see a man's penis just as a sword of flesh, an object to hurt a woman. I know not all men are like that but that's all I've found in the brothels north and south on this island.

I'm so happy to be away from it but I will always be seen as a prostitute no matter how I better myself. It won't stop me trying. Maybe one day.

Justine Reilly

THE GROOMING.

It's difficult to pin-point my exact reason for entering the seedy, sordid world of prostitution, if I were to, it would possibly take years to write, that being a book within itself. Instead I will keep my story as brief as possible, although I would also like to draw attention to the fact that , most women, like myself have a story to tell, although not identical, have one common trait that is impossible to ignore and that is abuse. Abuse takes on many forms from physical violence, sexual violence, name-calling and neglect to name but a few. As a child I experienced, on a daily basis at least three forms of the above, making me the "ideal candidate" for prostitution-meaning I was vulnerable, suffered from extremely low self-esteem and from an early age knew that I had to depend solely on myself for survival.

My mother was and still is an alcoholic. My earliest memories of her were of her stumbling around the streets while holding mine and my brother's hand, spitting and screaming obscenities at strangers and passersby. We spent approximately a year in refuge with her where we were continuously monitored by social workers. To this day it still baffles me that we were legally allowed in her care, given how ill she actually was. My father was an extremely brutal violent man, it's fair to say that his behaviour bordered more on sadistic, although he was never violent towards my mother, it was always directed at me and my siblings.

After a year in refuge, we were given a council house in a disadvantaged area of the city, although I was delighted to finally have a "home" so to speak. My mother's alcoholism kicked off in full force, because she was now free to drink whenever she wished-which was all day every day until she passed out from a combination of booze and barbiturates. My father was absent for this and my sister was eleven, nearly twelve. I was so grateful for having her as it meant I had somewhat of a parental figure in my life, I was seven and didn't understand the concept of the fact that my sister was herself, just a child.

One summers evening, in her drunken stupor, my mother had cleared yet another bottle of Smirnoff vodka and advised a neighbour that she had been dreaming about drowning me and my brother and herself. A short period of time later my sister returned from school. At this stage, my mother was even more obliterated. She was sitting under the stairs with blood streaming from her head. A short while later two women came to our house and told us that my mother was very sick and need to go to get better. It didn't really make much sense to me at the time. My father was contacted at work and set about in his parenting role while my mother was sent to rehabilitation. His parenting role basically consisted of ordering us to keep the house clean and ensuring that my sister brought us to school, made lunches and essentially took on the role as my mother. Essentially, he was an absentee father, but to be honest I was glad deep down because when he was present he was nothing more than a brute and a bully.

I was free to run wild. I had no major parental influence in my life and I even started to have a boyfriend, who, for the sake of anonymity I will refer to as Derek, who was seven years older than me, but I liked his companionship. He would always tell me how pretty I was. I was pretty, but a child, with a flat chest and pigtails. Most evenings he would take me to a field nearby, French kiss me, look at my underwear and push himself up against me. I hated it but thought that it must be in some way normal. I was seven and knew nothing.

When my mother left rehabilitation, there were brief periods of normality and we move to a more up-market area of the city, where I was later to go to Secondary School. I started Secondary School aged thirteen and quickly began to realize that I received a lot of male attention which to me was fantastic at the time as I never believed that there was anything really good about me. This gave me a small sense of empowerment and security about myself. I also became friendly with a girl named Anita. I was warned by teachers, friends and my mother to avoid her at all costs as she was often referred to as "troubled". Of course, I didn't believe that -- I knew her mother was unwell and had attempted suicide on several occasions, I guess in a way, I empathized with her as a result of my own family situation- it had been as a result of my grandmothers suicide that my mother's alcoholism had kicked off..

Anita's mother died as a result of suicide when she was just fifteen years old. A couple of months later she left school and moved to London by herself with money from her mother's inheritance. She would contact me from time to time saying that she was well and working in restaurants and bars for "cash in hand" as she wasn't old enough to claim benefits or work legitimately.

My home life remained chaotic and violent. I hated school and had no real interest. I willed for my sixteenth birthday to come around so that I could get away perhaps get a job. My mother would frequently refer to me as a "whore" and a "useless lazy bitch". My father's fists were his weapon. When I was sixteen, a neighbour named Mike took me for a drink. It was Christmas time and I was delighted that I was going to be out of the house for a while. I had two glasses of beer and returned home. My father was waiting at the gate for me. Mike wished me a happy Christmas while, my father, standing at the gate in his underwear called him a pervert and and a whore master. Mike continued walking. My father dragged me by the hair, along the cold pavement into the sitting room where he proceeded to thump me repeatedly into the face with his fists. The attack lasted about ten minutes until the intervention of my brother. Strangely, I didn't feel much pain, maybe because of shock, I was aware mostly of the taste of blood in my mouth. The following morning when I looked in the mirror, my face was beyond recognition. My lip was swollen, my jaw swollen and both my eyes were black and blue. My mother told me that I wasn't to go to a hospital, that my face would soon be OK. I couldn't eat for almost a week.

That Summer I completed my Junior Cert and found a boyfriend named Declan. Although, at my young age, it's fair to call it more puppy love than real love, but I cared about him and he minded me. I spent less and less time at home, we would hang out in his brother's apartment or go to the pub. He always thought that my home life was strange and we rarely went to my parent's house.

One particular evening Declan came to the house to the house to collect me. My father had started an argument with me in front of Declan. I think it was over something as trivial as a tea stain that had been left after a cup of tea that I had drank. He proceeded to thump me with full force into the face, fracturing my jaw. Declan took me to the hospital and later we moved into the spare room of his brothers apartment. He was appalled and horrified by what he had witnessed but to me it wasn't abnormal. I was so relieved to be away away from that house. Within a couple of months of living in extreme poverty, the relationship between me and Declan had broken down, I was forced to go back home again.

One day, killing time as I so frequently did back then I was wondering around the city centre and strolled into Penney's for a look around when I bumped into Anita. She told me that she was home for a few weeks and had

been trying to contact me. She looked great. Stylish hair, clothes and she was curvier than I remembered. She invited me to her apartment for tea. I was completely taken aback-her apartment was modern and bright and her fridge was full. I was so envious. To me her life had really gone full circle while mine had more or less remained the same. She invited me to come and stay with her for a while, that she wasn't working but still had money left over from her inheritance to pay for her apartment. I was delighted. Although, I loved staying there, most evenings she would "pop out for a bottle of wine" or so take away. And not return for a couple of hours.

One evening, after a couple of beers she was slightly merry and decided to let me in on a little secret. She told me that she had been coming home from a bar one evening in a red-light area of the city when a number of cars were lined up and one of the occupants asked her "how much?" She told me that she didn't have sex with him but that she had charged him sixty pounds for hand relief and that she charged, later that evening eighty pounds of oral relief. I remember laughing hysterically at this, because initially I didn't really believe her. She told me that it was handy cash and she didn't really view it as prostitution, because she didn't have full sex with them. She asked me to accompany her that evening; I explained that I wasn't going to do anything which she said was fine.

LOSING MYSELF

When it was dark enough, we walked down the street. I was gobsmacked at the amount of cars circling around us and that this was in fact a red-light district. Within a few minutes a BMW pulled up, Anita started talking to the punter. He told her that he wanted me but Anita explained that I didn't really work. After negotiating a price, she instructed me to wait at the top of the laneway while she entertained the punter. In less than ten minutes she emerged, pleased as punch and said she wanted "one more". I told her I wasn't feeling well and wanted to go home, she wasn't too happy but she was still on a high from her so called "easy money" that she just giggled and chatted the whole way home. I was in complete shock, but back at the apartment I laughed at how stupid and bizarre this man really was. She told me that with my looks that I could make a small fortune if I wanted. I laughed it off because a part of me still believed that this was something that she had done purely for kicks.

Within the next few evenings, she would leave at ten and return at 2am. She spent her days shopping for clothes, food, CDs, etc, she was earning a couple of hundred pounds per night. One evening, she came home, had a glass of wine and told me quite simply that it was time for me to "pay my way". I had been aimlessly job-hunting for weeks but with no real qualifications and just a few months waitressing experience, it was proving difficult. She urged me to come with her explaining how easy it was. She explained that just one trick would really help her out with the rent and bills. So when it got dark we went for a quick walk. Again there was an abundance of punters. We both got into a car. Anita confidently explained to the punter that it was my first time, that I was nervous and that she would be accompanying me, but that she would get out of the car as soon as he needed to get down to business.

So we drove to the nearby lane way and she got out. The punter was elderly and I explained that he wasn't allowed to touch me but that I would perform hand relief for sixty pounds. He was quiet and didn't say much and following Anita's advice, I requested cash up front, the transaction lasted a couple of minutes. I was glad when it was over. Although it was extremely brief, I think that from the moment that I had accepted cash for a

sexual service something changed inside me, almost like crossing a line that I couldn't go back. That line I still struggle with on a daily basis today.

Initially prior to turning that trick, I had been feeling quite hungry, but once the deed had been done, my stomach lurched and I actually felt quite sick. Anita was delighted that I was now a member of her club as she saw it. We purchased alcohol and fried chicken with gravy and chips. Returning to the apartment I couldn't eat. I scrubbed my hands continuously to try to get rid of that soiled feeling that the punter had left, but that feeling just wouldn't go away. Despite that, I was, in my innocence slightly giddy at the prospect of this fast cash. That was my initiation into street work. I worked the streets for approximately three months after that, maybe two or three nights a week and stayed with Anita until I had a deposit to get my own place.

My apartment wasn't much to write home about, but at least it was a roof over my head and near my place of work-the streets.

At aged seventeen, I was still a minor and looked every inch of it, yet it never seemed to bother the punters, there was always an abundance of them happy to pay me. The one thing that struck me about the streets was the fact that I always felt cold. Cold and invisible and when I would pass a certain block of apartments and see lights on and occasionally see the shadows of its occupants, watching me or when a taxi would pass full of party-goers, I would catch brief glimpses of myself and become acutely aware of the fact that I was not in fact invisible that I was now a stigma, a walking talking breathing marginalized member of society, yet I was a child. I don't actually remember owning any of my emotions back then, because in order to survive in this ugly sub-culture I had to disassociate myself completely from what I was doing.

HIGH CLASS PROSTITUTION.

Eventually, I moved on and got myself a job in a factory and distanced myself from Anita. I started to have a normal life, despite the fact that I felt tainted and angry all the time-my hangover from the street. I started to have friends, socialize, had a boyfriend and decided that I wanted more from life and for a while I genuinely did have all the happy things any young woman deserves from life. I saw Anita from time to time but neither of us really discussed the life on the streets. I was more than happy to leave it in the past.

I later found myself landing the job of my dreams. Although it was temporary I nearly had to pinch myself on a daily basis to see if it was real. For the first time in my life I decided to forgive myself for the past, to move forward and be confident and proud of who I was. I travelled a lot, made a lot of friends and had a decent salary-somewhat of a striking contrast between life on the streets.

When my contract finished I was devastated, mainly because it was the first time in my life that I had felt a part of anything .So, unemployed again, I emailed a number of companies in the hope of finding a similar position..

One Summers Evening, I bumped into Anita again and we decided to go for drink. I remember confiding in her my frustration at the volume of cvs I was sending and not getting a response. She advised me that she had just started working for an escort agency and that she was earning over a thousand Euros a night, that there were lots of lonely men out there willing to pay for a girl's companionship. To me it sounded great, you work four

nights a week and that sex with clients was at her discretion. She took me to the internet shop and showed me the site her boss owned. At the time it was Irishescorts.com and, just as Anita had stated the site promised the companionship of beautiful young women and also that anything that occurred was coincidental and at the discretion of two consenting adults. I later learned that this was just a legal loophole for that site to exist and also that this site was in fact attached to organised crime and had been assisted by an inmate at an Irish prison with the assistance of a mobile phone. Not the fairy-tale the site presented itself with. The women on this site were glamorous, happy and appeared to be enjoying their work.

Anita gave me the phone number, my voice quivering when I rang, although, the voice of the receptionist on the phone was soothing and put me at ease, asking me for my height, weight, eye-colour and bust size etc. She gave me an address of where to go to the following day where I would be shown the ropes by a woman named "Abigail". The next morning, I showered, dressed and packed a bag contain high heels, a black dress make-up and a hair straightener.

When I arrived at the apartment I was greeted like a long loss child by Abigail, who was warm and friendly to me but appeared to be arguing with a coloured woman over fifty euro. This woman didn't have much English and she left the apartment. Abigail referred to her as a greedy bitch advising me that this girl had made over four thousand euros. Abigail; was maybe in her forties but looked much younger as a result of cosmetic surgery. When she asked my age she looked surprised and rang the boss to tell him I looked about 17 and should advertise me accordingly. I then asked her about the dates, where I would be going what time my first date was, how I should behave and if she though my dress was appropriate. Abigail looked a little confused and then laughed asking if I knew what escorting really was.

When I explained my understanding of it she laughed and took me to a balcony and pointed to a block of apartments across the road, advising me to play my cards right and that I could have a deposit for one of those in less than a month if I wanted. She told me that it involved having sex with clients, but that it was essentially harmless as I would be well paid and more or less in control of what took place. She even gave me a working kit which consisted of usual brothel material, condoms, lube, baby oil and underwear. When I asked her how long she had been working she advised she had been working since she was thirteen, that her partner and children knew about it and were ok with it. Her phone rang from the agency; it was the boss informing her that a client was one the way. She told me to relax that she would see him, that I could relax, have a cuppa and familiarize myself with the apartment. When she returned she advised me that there was a client on his way to see me, that he was a regular and a gentleman.

When he presented at the apartment, I was surprised to learn that he was 27, a professional and paid for sex on a regular basis. He paid me €150 and took off his clothes and spent about 20 minutes chatting to me. At about half an hour into the encounter, my phone rang from the agency, the client advised that he want to stay for another hour and paid me €250. I couldn't quite fathom why a young attractive seemingly nice man would do this. The sexual encounter itself was extremely brief and in no way aggressive.

Looking back now I think this particular client was sent deliberately so I would see how easy it all was, because what was to follow was not easy, or in any way humane.

Three clients came to see me that evening and I had the company of Abigail so the whole operation had the illusion of somewhat of a pleasantness about it.

The following morning Abigail had left a note for me instructing me to do certain things such as never answer the door unless I got a call from the boss or his receptionist "Carla", always keep the sitting room door closed as this gave the illusion to the client that I had security present, tell them I was 17 and I was never to organise meetings outside work hour with clients. I was later to learn that a young woman spent two weeks in an apartment forced to work as a result of organising outside dates and that another received 20 stitches to her face as a result and also a young coloured woman could not see out of one of her eyes after been beaten to a pulp as a result of seeing clients outside of work hours.

That Sunday can only be described as an extremely ugly education. I started work at 11 am and finished at 2 am in the morning. There was very little of a time lapse between clients. At one point I remember explaining to the receptionist Carla that I needed some time so could shower and she told me that I didn't have time.

It was quite simply an assembly line of men, one after the next happy to pay for sex from what they thought was a minor. Strangely, I don't remember any of their names, faces or even how the conversations had gone. I had learnt to leave my emotions outside the apartment door with my soul and just my physical self inside the apartment. The following day was the same.

To my relief, the next day a young African woman named Maria presented for work, thankfully the receptionist had on this occasion made a mistake. I was more than happy to allow her to take over.

To this day that woman's story still breaks my heart. She had been raped on 15 different occasions and saw prostitution as somewhat of a bonus, although she did sit me down and warn me that the people we worked for were not nice and that we did a very dangerous job. The next day was my last day and I can't put into words the relief I felt. The "driver", an evil sadistic brute of a man, whom I later learnt had spent time in prison for rape, came to collect my money. When I got home I counted mine. There was over three and a half thousand Euros there. I remember looking in the mirror and looking myself in the eyes. I was no longer the sparkly eyed bubbly young woman that had presented for work that Saturday, my eyes looked like Marias, no sparkle, wounded and hurt.

I drank two bottles of wine that night trying to figure out the undertakings of the previous few days, because it was all so surreal. I put the money away and cried and cried.

The following morning I got up and booked a flight and went away for a few weeks, my reasoning behind it at the time was to find myself, but in reality, I really just wanted to get away from myself. I drank wine by myself religiously and suffered extreme panic attacks and I also couldn't wait to get rid of the money I had just made.

Upon my return I received a phone call from the boss; he was really pleased as I had done financially so well. He seemed extremely nice, chilled almost. I explained that although the money was great I didn't think I could do it again. To my surprise, he seemed to know more about me than what I originally thought-he knew I had worked streets. The way he saw it was this-I could earn a lot of money working from a secure, up-market apartment whilst keeping my anonymity and that he owned several business, that I could work someplace less busy if I

wished. He also told me that I was lucky because he was frequently inundated with telephone calls from women from all over the world wanting to work for his agency.

He was correct about a couple of aspects of things, such as his multi cultural workforce and also the fact that this particular website would, if for example a punter rang looking for a girl in Newry or Galway, his receptionist Carla would answer and give you directions to the apartment. Basically, this man had brothels everywhere in the country.

I later learnt that although some women were there by consent, some were trafficked, given fake passports and fake promises and sent to work. The ones that originally consented found themselves in situations of where the area of consent became extremely blurred. When describing consent, it's easy to think of as yes/no area, as definitive as black or white, however in the sex industry the only way to describe consent is the shades of grey in between, grey and murky.

The strange part about prostitution, although it is extremely lucrative, most of the women never make it rich, either through addiction, or quite simply getting rid of their earnings as soon as they are made. I was a combination of the two.

Stupidly, I went to work for a few days in another apartment and certain factors became very apparent. This was extremely well organised. Somebody different would collect money and that the four day shift pattern was essentially to avoid garda detection. Initially I was treated like royalty, because I was young and Irish, I made a lot of money.

One weekend, as I hadn't worked in a number of weeks funds were low and I decided to give the boss a ring. He put me to work in the apartment I had initially worked from. I knew this place was an assembly line of punters so I had to prepare myself mentally.

At this stage my personality was really beginning to change. I was anxious, depressed, moody and suspicious of everyone in my path. I bought two bottles of wine. My plan was to drink them after work, however as soon as the assembly line of punters started I knew I needed an anesthetic. I had seen a couple of clients and already I was drained in every sense. There was maybe an hour of quietness where I filled myself glass after glass of wine. To my surprise I topped it off fairly quickly and lay down on the bed. The warm haze of alcohol hit me; I closed my eyes and then sweet oblivion.

Then the banging, extremely loud banging and shouting "Open the fucking door". It took me a few minutes to realize where I was; when I did he was already in the hallway looking at me. Blue piercing eyes. "Who the fuck are you?" I asked, because of the shock my voice was barely an audible croak. "What fucking happened to you?" "I fell asleep". "Look at your phone. "Oh shit shit shit! There were 36 missed calls. He searched every room in the apartment and finally made his way to the kitchen, where the wine bottles were. I was rooted to tether spot. "Hide the bottles, he instructed, the boss is coming, and you have some explaining to do".

Within seconds 2 men entered the apartment, searched the rooms and came back to the sitting room where I was instructed to sit on the couch. From the corner of my eye, I saw them open a black hold all bag and produce bundles of cash, neatly stacked in bundles, where the two men negotiated together. There must have been at

least ten grand there. One of the men collected his share, winked at me, calling by my first name and left the apartment. The other man, the boss and the guy with the blue piercing eyes sat opposite me and I was instructed to strip to my underwear. I did exactly as I was told, the sheer terror I was feeling indescribable. "What the fuck were you doing for four hour?" The boss asked. I was aware of the guy with the piercing blue eyes watching every inch of my flesh. "I fell asleep", I mumbled. Then he quite cheerily asked me where his money was and asked if I wanted to count my share. I told him that I didn't and he responded "you weren't fucking getting it anyway." He took the money and explained to me that as a result of this evenings escapades I would continue to work three more days at this apartment and another four in another extremely busy apartment to make up for loss of earnings. He also informed me that the apartment was watched and not to bother contacting Gardai as I would be very surprised as to who exactly he had on his payroll. I wasn't to move or there would be serious repercussions. The full reality of what I was really involved in winded me at that very moment. He then informed me that the reason he hadn't "split your pretty little face" was because I had been so honest with him.

So the next morning, I got up and prepared myself for the minefield that was to be my Sunday. I remember looking around that apartment that initially had felt so safe and welcoming and couldn't believe I had been so gullible. I remember standing on the balcony, watching the watery sun break through, the cars passing by, the chatter of voices below and it struck me how normal the world was below, yet, here I was in this apartment that had now become my prison. I wanted to scream from the top of my lungs, but my assembly line of punters was awaiting.

Knowing that consent was not an option I felt even more repulsed. I didn't say anything to the punters just took their money and carried on in autopilot, but it must have been clear to each one of them that I was petrified. Approximately 15 men came to the apartment that day and out of them all, there was only one with the humanity in his heart to see I was frightened. He left the money and the apartment disgusted and promised not to tell the boss.

Unfortunately, the next client wasn't quiet as nice. He informed me that he wanted to perform a particular sex act, one that I hadn't even performed with a boyfriend. I told him that I didn't do that particular act. He aggressively informed me that the receptionist had advised that I did this and since he was paying, he was entitled to do as he wished. I closed my eyes and allowed my soul to leave my body, find a safe place in the corner of the room and began doing algebra equations in my head. I felt no part of this repulsive act. The sound of oil passing through the radiators snapped me back to the room and it was over. He was finished. The next three days were the same, each as busy as the previous. To this day I'm shocked that I managed to leave that apartment with ounce of my sanity intact, because the option of throwing myself from the balcony was appearing more enticing. It was hell.

The following day, the driver was at the apartment to collect both me and the money. I was drained. He informed me that the apartment I was due to work in had been raided and I was to book a hotel room. After seeing four punters, the hotel rang informing me that I had to leave as I had "too many guests" visiting the room. I rang the bosses' receptionist who gave the address to a nearby hotel. The boss then rang telling me to hurry the fuck up, when I tried to explain what had happened, he cut me short screaming "Do you think this works like

fucking Disney land?" "Be in that hotel and ready to go in ten minutes or this time when I send my men to you, I'll send them to take your life".

When I arrived at the hotel the cheerful young man at reception informed me that there were no room available yet. Trembling I burst into tears and offered to do the house-keeping on the room myself. The young man told me to take a seat in the bar, have a drink and that he would be with me in a few minutes. I ordered a wine and tried to ignore the missed calls on my phone. The young man from reception appeared and asked if I was in some kind of trouble. It all came out of my mouth what was happening through hysterical sobs. He told me that they would stay with me until the guards arrived to make sure I was safe. Within a few minutes two plain clothed detectives arrived and took me to the station. They appeared to be familiar with my boss and his operation, they warned me that it was too dangerous for me to take public transport and told me not to answer my phone, they drove me home.

The following morning, when I turned on my phone, as expected a torrent of abuse was awaiting. One in particular which springs to mind was one from his receptionist, telling me how much she would enjoy cutting me to pieces as soon as she found me. I rang Anita, who was now living in Belfast where I'd worked before, packed a bag and just went. She was now working for a new agency in Belfast. I had enough money to lie low so I wasn't interested within a few weeks money was low and I decided to return home and found a job in a bar. Every time the door opened of the pub, I was convinced it was my previous boss or one of his henchmen; I was a complete nervous wreck.

MOVING ON, OR SO I THOUGHT...

Like with everything in life, no matter how painful the experience, the world doesn't stop turning and life goes on with or without you. Eventually, despite never having counselling for the most horrific chapter that was my life, I continued with life. I re-educated myself and I also became a mother. I remember once taking my child to the beach and feeling so grateful just to be in the presence of this beautiful person who loved and needed me for everything that I was.

A couple of years had passed since my experiences in Prostitution and I had myself convinced that I would never have to revisit it. However, circumstances proved me wrong. Last Summer I found myself having to return for a brief period. This time I worked for myself, taking out an add on escort-Ireland. My add was glamorous and enticing and my photos attractive. However the relity of my situation was not. This time I had to go back as a grown woman, eyes open to my profession and reopen those ugly wounds from the past. My clients ranged from Doctors, barristers, accountants a social worker and even a mental health professional and also a judge-a legislator. The everyday people everybody respects. These men were educated not stupid or blind to the reality that is prostitution, yet they don't care. Escort-Ireland has this warped sordid sub-culture glamorized to the point that to the untrained eye shows the world of prostitution as a sanitary and safe place where everybody is having harmless fun.

I'm out of Prostitution about a year now, but the sad part is I don't know if it every really leaves you, that part of yourself that you have to shut down completely in order to survive is the part of yourself that you have to rediscover in order to really heal again, which is a long and excruciating road, which I'm currently taking with a

qualified therapist on a weekly basis. Then there's the transition period into having a normal life which for me is extremely difficult as I find myself faced with the same issues that led me there in the first place such as poverty. Sometimes prostitution becomes somewhat of an institution to the women who find themselves in its constraints that it is quite simply because you lose so much of your sense of self in it that I found myself deluded into thinking I wasn't worth anymore.

THE NEED FOR LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Until 2007, it was not illegal to traffic another human being into the Republic of Ireland for the purposes of Commercial Sexual Exploitation. Thankfully that law has changed. International police operations know as Operation Gladiator saw the imprisoning of two of my previous bosses Carla aka Shamiela Clarke and TJ Carroll. Hundreds of young women were trafficked and forced into situations similar to my own, although the full brutality of their operation was never really highlight in the media. Unfortunately, the pair were charged with money laundering when the pair were eventually caught up with in Wales and served three year sentences. A much lesser conviction than what was deserved.

In the Republic, to date, nobody has yet been charged under the trafficking act, however, The Irish constitution itself explicitly recognises the unenumerated right to bodily integrity, given current legislation which penalises the women in this business rather than the purchaser it certainly begs the question if this is a right or just an aspiration, particularly if you consider that the purchase of sex from a minor or another vulnerable class of society is just the click of a button away?

Prostitution will probably always exist in society, I am aware of that, however I am not willing to accept that the purchase of sex from somebody with little or no option does not equate as rape. The legislation on rape in the Republic of Ireland always has and still remains to be draconian, the rights of the perpetrator being favoured over the rights and dignity of the victim, which must, in a court of law be "proved beyond a reasonable doubt". It is the victim that must prove their case. Out of every hundred rapes in Southern Ireland, less than three will see a successful prosecution.

It is easy to ignore or perhaps blame the women involved in this industry; however, it is imperative to highlight the role of the purchaser in this. Without the purchaser, the sex industry could not survive, which leads me to conclude that it is the purchaser that should instead be prosecuted instead of the prostituted person.

Escort-Ireland is a site hosted from the United Kingdom advertising sex for sale in Ireland. Beside the profile of each woman is a list of her "favourites" the sex acts that she is willing to perform in exchange for money. Operation Gladiator, although in my opinion, served two perpetrators of horrendous crimes with lenient sentences, it still highlighted that with the work of the Garda Siochana and the UK Police, that it is possible to trace and convict criminals with a simple IP address from a computer and a mobile number. If so, why are the perpetrators of Commercial Sexual Exploitation allowed to continue? In finish, I'd like to state that I, like all the women in my group, support Lord Morrow's Bill, most particularly clause 6, because without it stories like mine will continue to be commonplace.

Ailish Kingsley