

Chapter One

JERSEY GIRL

Growing up in a small town on the Jersey shore, I never thought I would wind up running a brothel. Hell, I didn't even know brothels existed. Bradley Beach was a summer resort town, a mile square, certainly not big enough to entice a prostitute. The world of prostitution, legal or illegal, was never a thought that crossed my mind.

In 1976 I moved to Las Vegas. It was quite an eye-opening experience leaving a sleepy little beach town and relocating to Sin City. I started working in the casino industry, and that was where I was introduced to the world of prostitution. I worked in gaming for many years, working my way up to executive casino host manager. The goal of every casino host was to keep the high-rollers in the casinos. It didn't take long to learn that big players played big away from the tables, too. They wanted gourmet meals, headliner shows, airfare, limos, suites, and company to share their comps with. As a casino host, I became a provider of all, including the company.

After many years in the gaming industry, I grew tired of the 24/7

gig. For twenty years, I was not home for most of the major holidays. Gamblers wanted to spend the holidays in Vegas and that was my job, hosting the gamblers. A night didn't go by without a series of phone calls from pit bosses, who were usually irate because one of my players was hitting the house hard. I can't recall how many calls I would get, I can only remember that the conversations were all the same.

"Come get your guy off my table, he's killing me!" the pit boss would scream into the phone.

So I would get up, get dressed, and head down to the casino. Oh yeah, he was killing us all right.

"Come on, Dave, I'll buy you dinner," I'd say. "I couldn't sleep and you know I don't like to eat alone."

I ate way too many dinners in the middle of the night and I wasn't even hungry. I was tired! Can't anyone just let me sleep? Not tonight.

After my children were grown, I decided to retire from gaming and the midnight meals. Maybe a more subdued job. Yeah, I liked the sound of that. I decided to go to school and become a manicurist. Set my own schedule, work when I want to, put my heels and elaborate wardrobe in the back of my closet. Perfect!

There I was, sitting at my manicuring table in a beautiful salon, doing nails and shooting the shit all day. I'd wear sundresses and sandals, shorts and T-shirts, and I loved every minute of it. No more fancy outfits and high heels, and no more panty hose! Life was pretty good.

A few months had passed when I ran into an old friend. I hadn't seen him in quite a while and he told me all about a new project he was involved in. He was telling me about this ranch.

"Ranch? When did you become a rancher?" I asked.

He explained that it wasn't your typical ranch, it was a brothel.

"Brothel! How the hell did you get involved with a brothel?"

"I was out golfing and drinking and came across some guy who had a brothel for sale, so I got a group of guys together and we bought it,"

he said. I think “drinking” was the key word in that sentence!

We talked for a while and at some point during our conversation I realized that this was an interview, not a casual conversation between friends. Laughing, I said, “I’m not your girl. I’ve been giving it away all my life. What do I know about selling it?”

He tried to persuade me, saying that I would be perfect for the job. Maybe some people would have been offended by that statement, but I considered it a compliment. A few weeks went by and I didn’t give it much thought. But my friend, whose name was Sam, called again and suggested I take a ride out to Pahrump and check out his brothel. So I did.

Pahrump is about sixty miles from Las Vegas. I drove west out of town. It was a hot summer day and the desert was in full bloom. The wild burros in Red Rock Canyon looked as if they were totally fed up with the heat, and it was only June. There was a bit of relief from the sweltering temperatures as I drove over the Spring Mountains, about 20 degrees to be exact. Coming down off the mountain I was once again greeted by the desert heat.

The road seemed to go nowhere. Being from the East Coast, where buildings were huddled together, and one town bordered on another, which bordered on another, and so on, I still enjoyed the openness that Nevada had to offer. The drive was actually very scenic and I found myself enjoying the desert solitude. Just me, my cute little convertible, and Toby Keith on the radio; I was perfectly content.

I finally reached Pahrump and turned off the highway. I found myself on yet another road that seemed to go nowhere. Who put these roads here? There’s nothing out here, why would you need a road?

At the end of the road I saw a small group of buildings all connected together, sitting in a dirt parking lot. Could this be it? Three double-wide trailers in the middle of nowhere? Reading the sign, I was disappointed to learn that I was in the right place.

Everyone has some preconceived notion of what they think a brothel should look like. Perhaps dark, dirty trailers at the end of a long, lonely road? Well, there was a good reason for that notion, because judging from what I saw in front of me, that's exactly what they were.

Debating whether to turn around and go back to civilization, a part of me said, "What the hell. You're already here, go in. How much worse could it be?"

So I went in. You know how when you think things can't get any worse, they do? Well, they did. I walked into that place and it was so dark and dingy that I wouldn't even put my purse down. There was a good-sized bar straight ahead when you walked in. At the bar were some ladies, and I have to say that in this respect I use the term "ladies" loosely. (No pun intended.) These "ladies" were twice the man my husband would ever be, and he was a strapping, six-foot-four former police officer from New York!

My mind was racing. People pay for this? Are you kidding me? Sam had his partner, Shawn, meet me there to show me around. Shawn is a tall, handsome man with a boyish grin. He introduced himself and said, "You must be Sam's friend." Not an overly perceptive statement, as I was the only woman in the joint who actually looked like a woman. We chatted for a few moments. Shawn seemed like a nice enough guy and tried his best to make me feel welcome. Looking around the place, it was good to see that at least one person besides me had all his teeth.

There were no customers in the place, although that didn't shock me. I couldn't see why anyone in his right mind would want to come to a place like this. The "ladies" looked extremely agitated because a woman had walked through the door, and the bartender seemed irritated because he thought I might want to order a drink. I tried to imagine what would compel Sam to even consider this as a business opportunity. I knew Sam drank, so I could only assume he was drinking when he made this deal. Doesn't my day just keep getting better and better?

I walked with Shawn into the parlor, which was sort of small and wasn't inviting whatsoever. Actually it blended quite nicely with the rest of the place. Covering the floor was blood-red shag carpet that probably hadn't been cleaned since it had been installed twenty years earlier. There were two white pleather — more plastic than leather — couches, three oversized wall sconces with shades, which at one time I'm sure were white, but twenty years of cigarette smoke had taken its toll on them. And there were red velvet drapes, which hung from ceiling to floor and were dirtier than the shades on the sconces, if you could imagine that. There was a chandelier hanging in the middle of the room with crystals that were now opaque from smoke and dirt, but I was sure that at one time it was absolutely beautiful.

This, Shawn explained, is the parlor where we conduct the lineups. Lineups? I'm sure police lineups would be far more attractive than anything here. Okay, no need to spend any more time in this room, I was thinking to myself, I've seen about all that I care to see here.

We proceeded to the rooms where the ladies entertained their clients. They were small and dirty with a double-sized mattress on a plywood platform. No box springs, no bed frames, just a mattress on a sheet of plywood with four makeshift wooden legs. The linens looked a lot like the shades on the sconces in the parlor. They were threadbare, dingy, and stained. There wasn't a piece of furniture in the room that matched, and a shadeless lamp was sitting on the floor next to the bed. I couldn't believe what I was seeing and had an even harder time imagining that anyone would pay for sex with these ladies in a place like this.

It seemed to me that I had been to both ends of the spectrum. At one time I handled high-rollers who would accept nothing less than the best of the best. And now this. Talk about night and day! The more we walked, the worse it got. As Shawn and I toured the property, he must have noticed the look of disbelief on my face. He explained that this was not the brothel he was proposing.

“We have plans to transform this property into a resort,” Shawn said.

“Plans . . . this transformation will take more than plans,” I answered. “It will take a miracle.”

Shawn replied that he thought I was the one person who could pull off that miracle.

I wasn't quite sure where Shawn had gotten his information to think that I could pull off a miracle like that, but I was betting it probably came from Sam, who I was sure was drinking at the time. I knew Sam well enough to know that if he had seen this place when he was not, he never would have considered it an investment opportunity.

I looked at Shawn's plans and I must say they were impressive. What he envisioned was a first-class, upscale destination resort. Restaurant, retail, pool, Jacuzzis, salon, spa — all the amenities you would expect to find at a five-star resort but with a kicker: legal prostitution. My interest was piqued.

I told Shawn that I would have to discuss the possibility with my family. After all, I didn't want to do anything that would embarrass them. I told Shawn that I would get back to him and we left it at that.

On the drive home, my mind was desperately trying to process what I had seen over the last couple of hours. “You can't really be considering working there, could you? You wouldn't really leave that nice, clean, little salon to go there, would you? You're a manicurist, not a madam! Are you crazy?”

Crazy or not, I am a woman of my word. I told Shawn that I would discuss the possibility with my family, and that was what I did.

I first spoke with my husband, who was very supportive. What guy wouldn't be? “I love my wife's job” seemed to be the fitting response.

Next: my very animated daughter. Her first response was, “What are you going to do there? Are you going to . . .?” I interrupted her and told her that I would be running the brothel. I would be the madam.

“Oh, okay, I could see you doing that,” she said.

At that point, I began to wonder what it was that I portrayed to other people. Oh well.

Next up was my son. His reaction was totally unexpected. I didn’t even finish my sentence when he picked up his cell phone and started dialing. He couldn’t dial fast enough. “Hey, you’ll never guess what my mom is doing . . . how cool is that?”

So, there you have it. Apparently, the family wouldn’t be embarrassed.

I called Shawn and arranged a meeting. “Okay, I’ll see you Thursday at two o’clock.” Thursday rolled around and Shawn and I met for a cup of coffee.

“So, what’s the verdict?” Shawn asked.

“Well, I spoke with my husband and my kids and they don’t seem to have a problem with me taking this job.” I always knew our family was a bit dysfunctional, but I never realized how dysfunctional we really were. I was considering the job and they didn’t have a problem with me taking it. We really are screwed up!

“This is what I can do for you,” I said to Shawn. “I will build your brothel, decorate all your interiors, put procedures in place, and have you up and running within a year.”

“A year! That’s fantastic,” he said. “What happens after a year?”

“Well, if I still like you, and you still like me after a year, we’ll revisit this whole thing. How does that sound?”

“Sounds like a deal to me.” We shook hands and that was that.

As I drove home I couldn’t help but think, what have you gotten yourself into? Put procedures in place? You don’t know anything about prostitution, so what procedures could you possibly put into place? What procedures could there possibly be for prostitution? How many “procedures” could there be in selling sex? What were you thinking? I found myself arguing with myself. Congratulations, you are now a sex

merchant, a retailer of sorts, I guess, yes, a sex retailer, a sex peddler, a seller of sex — a madam.

That was it. I did it. I was a madam. Well, that didn't take long. I guess if I could make the transition into a madam that quickly, I could transform the brothel into a resort. It appeared I was pretty good at this transitioning stuff, so how hard could it be?

I couldn't help thinking back to my early casino days. I was so new and naïve and I didn't know a thing about gaming. The situation I was in now really wasn't that unfamiliar to me. I didn't know a thing about legal prostitution. Well, I certainly understand the concept, but I didn't know anything about the business side of it.

I laughed to myself as I compared my new endeavor with the gaming business. I remembered in the casino industry that "BJ" stood for "blackjack." Not anymore! It had a whole new meaning now. Many things would take on new meanings from that point forward.

Shawn was a hard guy to say no to. Although he was a few years younger than me, it was plain to see that he was an extremely successful businessman. He spoke with such certainty that you just couldn't help but believe in him. And then there was that boyish grin. It was that grin, you know, the grin that makes you drop your guard. The one that doesn't allow you to think straight.

Did I make the right decision? Are you sure you can do this? Again I reminded myself, you didn't know anything about the casino industry when you started working there, so don't sell yourself short. You are your own success story . . . you can do this.

As my friends heard the news that I was now a madam, they were all of the same opinion: "That is the perfect job for you."

What the hell did that mean? Why would people think this would be the perfect job for me? What was it that I did that would lead people to think that?

Okay, I admit I'm not your typical, ordinary, run-of-the-mill person.

I tend to be spontaneous, unpredictable, fun-loving, and unconventional. There wasn't a lot I took too seriously. I think life is too short to take things too seriously. I guess it was evident that I was a very spontaneous person. After all, I just became a madam, right?

Maybe my being voted "Most Likely to Commit a Homicide" in my senior year of high school led my friends to believe this was the perfect job for me. And I was given that honor by the teachers, not the students!

When I was growing up in New Jersey, if your last name ended with two consonants and a vowel, that did it, you had to be connected. Talk about profiling! Maybe their thought process was an "unconventional" job for an "unconventional" person. They may have been right about the job part, but not the homicide part.

I started working with the assumption that what I didn't know about the business, which at that point was everything, Shawn could teach me. I knew Sam didn't know anything about the brothel business. Sam would strike you as the kind of guy who was always looking for the fast track to becoming rich. So my plan was to rely on Shawn.

So much for plans. There is an old Italian saying that translates to, You make plans and God laughs. Well, He was having a party with me!

It turned out Shawn didn't know anything about the brothel business either. He just "happened upon" this particular business that was for sale and thought it might be a fun endeavor. What kind of people would buy a business they knew nothing about? Rich boys and their toys. As it turned out, he was relying on me!

I started researching the brothel business. I pulled all the state statutes and codes that governed the industry. I knew the first step was to learn the laws and regulations, and let me tell you, there were plenty of them. I had never studied for a job before, especially not after I already had the job! Throughout my career as madam, I would reference those books quite frequently.

I dragged my high heels and my elaborate wardrobe out from the back of the closet. They didn't stay there as long as I had planned. Of course, being a madam was something I hadn't planned on either. Really, who would plan on becoming a madam? Young children dream of becoming firemen and policemen and nurses and teachers. Some of those dreams come true through planning. You train or you go to school and get a degree to transform those dreams into reality. But a madam?

There was no training programs or schools for madams. What were the qualifications? What were the requirements? Well, I wasn't a virgin. Maybe that was all the criteria I would need.

The drive from Las Vegas to the middle of nowhere had now become a daily ritual, just me, my cute little convertible, and Toby Keith. If Toby knew where I was driving him to every day, he'd shit! I thought, I have to get some new CDs. I love Toby, but I'm going to need a little variety now that I will be spending so much time on the road. Was I nuts? I used to work right around the corner from my house. Now, I'm driving to another county for a job I don't know a thing about! I didn't have any idea yet that on some days that drive would be the best part of my day.

During my first few weeks at the brothel, I just observed the employees, the ladies, and the few customers who wandered in. They were an interesting bunch. It seemed to be more like *The Breakfast Club* than a brothel. Customer service did not exist. It appeared that everyone had mistaken hospitality for hostility. Everybody in that place had an attitude. The minute anyone walked in, it seemed that they were a "bother." Gee, I can't imagine why there never was an abundance of customers in the place. It wasn't bad enough that the place looked so awful, they had to treat people that way, too?

The ladies were rude, crude, and tough. Hardly the traits that a guy would desire, much less pay for. Their language was vulgar, so much so that even a sailor would blush. Really, the only way I could confirm

that they were indeed women was through the results of their STD/HIV tests; they really did possess female genitalia.

I quickly learned my way around the property. At first I was hesitant to wander too far from my office into the maze of narrow hallways connecting one trailer to another. I couldn't be sure what may have been lurking in those dark, dingy hallways. The bar and parlor were in one trailer, the ladies' rooms were in another, and the third trailer was the kitchen/dining room and lounge area for the ladies.

The kitchen was just like a kitchen you would find in any manufactured home. It wasn't a commercial kitchen. Naturally, the kitchen was modeled in the same décor as the rest of the place: filth. Everything was dirty and covered in grease. How anyone could prepare a meal in that filth was beyond me. There was an oven in the kitchen that went from zero degrees to 400 degrees and nothing in between. The cook made breakfast and dinner for the ladies. If you didn't like what she cooked, you didn't eat. It was that simple. All the ladies ate at the large dining room table, labeled "the training table." There they shared stories about the daily dramas that were going on in their lives. They would complain about their "man," which translated to "pimp." After all these years, that was something I just could not comprehend. Why on Earth would you give your money to a pimp when you are working in a legal house of prostitution? It didn't make any sense then and it doesn't make any sense now. I was surprised at how many ladies had pimps, then and now.

When there were no customers in the brothel, which was most of the time, the ladies would sit around and watch TV. That always made things interesting. You see, there was no cable at the brothel. Who was going to run cable to the middle of nowhere? There was a satellite dish, but only one box, so the ladies had to agree on what they were going to watch. Agree? Are you crazy? There were always catfights. They would sit and argue on the old, tattered brown couch and loveseat. I never did

know if that furniture was brown originally, or just became that color from the grit and grime over the years. It was apparent everywhere you looked that cleanliness was not a priority at this brothel. There was a housekeeper at the brothel, but I couldn't figure out what she might have cleaned.

An average day consisted of fourteen to sixteen hours, not including the sixty-mile drive each way. I would shower for what seemed to be hours, trying desperately to cleanse myself of the filth that surrounded me during the day.

As time passed and I made my observations, it was clear that the majority of the staff had to go, not to mention the ladies. Housekeeping would be the first plan of action. I went in to the housekeeping office and there was a housekeeper, sitting behind the desk smoking a joint. Well, this was going to be easier than I thought. I fired her right on the spot. The ladies were quite upset when they heard that I had fired a housekeeper. Apparently "housekeeper" was just a title. What she really did for a living was sell marijuana to the ladies. I had fired their connection. Well, I guess that explained why she never cleaned anything. She didn't have time. The drug-dealing business can be so demanding. I hired new housekeepers and made cleanliness a priority. What a concept!

The bar was next. All the bartenders were male, and since they weren't swamped with customers, they entertained themselves by fondling the ladies. They would grab and grope them, stick their hands down their shirts and up their skirts. They were all over the ladies. When a policy was put in effect to stop that behavior, the bartenders could find no reason to stay. Another problem solved. The bartenders hired from that point forward were all females.

After the old bartenders left, the ladies felt as though I cared about their well-being. They began to open up to me with stories about the previous ownership and how a manager, who was a man approaching his golden years, would force them to sleep with him. Evidently, he

had a room at the brothel and stayed on the property quite often. He wasn't what you would consider an attractive man. He was short and stocky and walked around in leopard print boxers with a matching robe. Picture that, a short, stocky senior citizen strutting around in his leopard print boxers, with his stomach hanging over, as if he's some kind of king or something. Hey, King, have you taken a good look at your kingdom? Are you kidding me? They said he was pompous, arrogant, and demanding, not to mention a self-proclaimed "ladies' man." Oh, I'm sure he was a vision to feast your eyes on. He apparently drank quite a bit and the way the ladies would tell the story, he was much worse when he was drinking. I've never known alcohol to enhance anyone's personality, and apparently it didn't enhance his. The ladies, in fear of losing their jobs, would comply with all his demands.

In the years to come, I would learn that this was quite a common practice in the brothel industry. Owners, who were primarily men, would force the ladies to have sex with them routinely. I guess it was one of the "perks," but it was something I never agreed with. The ladies are still people, and by the way, you idiot, they make you a lot of money. Don't you think you should treat them better? If it weren't for the ladies, you would be out of business, moron! I am sorry to say this type of activity still takes place today.

The shift managers worked in the office area and were responsible for booking any parties that the ladies may have during their shifts. A "party" is the term used for a session or sexual experience between the customer and the lady of his or her choice. The ladies are independent contractors who negotiate their own prices. The house (the brothel) does not get involved whatsoever in any pricing that the ladies quote. The house does set "minimums" for the use of certain "party rooms," and there is also a house minimum. The house minimum at this particular brothel was two hundred dollars. Every house set its own minimums. If a customer came in with less than the house minimum, he wouldn't

be able to party with a lady.

The lady would escort the customer to her room and then the negotiation would begin, with the lady asking what type of activity the customer might be interested in. The lady would then quote the customer a price. Some customers agreed right away. Others did not, and at that point the lady and the customer would negotiate until price and activities were agreed upon. The customer would pay the lady before any services were rendered. The lady would bring the payment — cash, credit card, travelers' checks, etc. — to the shift manager. The shift manager would process the transaction. In watching the shift managers, I soon learned that they had a license to steal. There was no accountability for anything.

There was one shift manager who had a franchise going with one of the ladies. They partnered up and had their own business within the walls of the brothel. The lady would not book the party, but rather give the shift manager a percentage and keep the rest of the money for herself. "Booking" a party consisted of, at the time, recording the lady's name and the amount of the party on a log sheet. The shift manager would then place the money in the cash drawer. But with this particular shift manager and lady, nothing was going to the house because nothing was being recorded. It was like the old Vegas soft-count rooms where they counted the money drops from the gaming tables: one for you, two for me. There was a 50/50 split between the lady and the house; that is, with the exception of this one enterprising shift manager.

Other shift managers were in cahoots with the bartenders, who would get the ladies drunk. When a lady came up to the office to book a party, the shift managers would skim money off the top and put it in their pockets. The lady was too drunk to notice. The shift manager would give the bartender a "kickback" for his help. Nothing like teamwork!

As for the maintenance man, now there was a piece of work! The guy couldn't fix anything. Whatever he worked on was destroyed by the