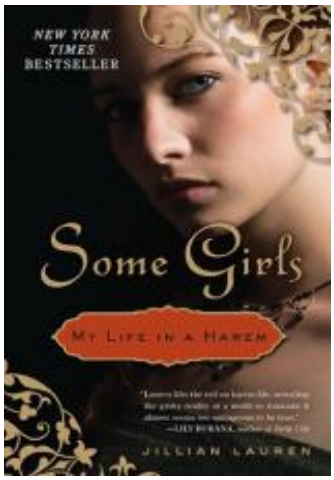
Some Girls: My Life in a Harem

by Jillian Lauren



About the Book

Spending her last 30 dollars to catch a yellow cab to the airport, restless and determined 18-year-old Jillian Lauren was at the precipice of an incredible journey. One that would and take her halfway around the world, shatter her illusions, and altogether challenge her sense of self. Lauren would become part of the harem of Prince Jefri Bolkiah of Brunei, emerging from the experience only a couple of years older, but infinitely wiser.

Some Girls traces Lauren?s life from growing up in suburban New Jersey, to living with artist friends in a gritty East Village apartment, to her arrival in an art filled, gilded palace in Borneo. After dropping out of NYU theater school, Lauren follows a tip about upcoming audition, where a ?casting director? promises a rich businessman in Singapore will pay American girls $20,000 to stay for two weeks and spice up his parties. Soon, it is revealed that Lauren, and a host of other international beauties, will spend time entertaining the charming, yet taciturn, Prince Jefri Bolkiah of Brunei, nicknamed Robin, and his entourage.

Jillian was one of the first Western women to infiltrate this modern-day iteration of an ancient institution. As she recounts the lavish parties, a parallel tale unfolds --- rich in an entirely different way --- of Jillian?s quest for her identity. Knowing little of the etiquette and duties expected of her, Lauren quickly learns the unwritten rules of harem life. Evening parties are a competition, with the ladies all vying for the playboy Robin?s attention --- not just for sport --- but for survival.

Jillian is intoxicated by the riches, the glamour, and above all by the Prince?s charm. She learns to play the role of a modern day Sheherazade to keep his interest. But eventually, amid the late night discos, extravagant shopping sprees and diamond-faced Rolexes, catering to Jefri?s capricious whims takes its toll. Lauren ultimately comes to question whether this prince?s kingdom really is the happily ever after she imagined. She leaves set on a different course entirely --- to find her birth mother and eventually adopt a baby boy.

With poignant storytelling, at times heartbreaking, yet hopeful, **Some Girls** is the story of a young woman?s remarkable search for identity.

Discussion Guide

1. Lauren recalls her first time performing as a stripper at the Kit Kat Club, and discusses the common societal attitudes about why people become sex workers. Lauren writes, ?What makes one financially strapped girl turn into a stripper and another into a Denny?s waitress and another into a med student? You want to connect the dots. You want reassurance that it won?t be your daughter up there on the pole. Shitty relationship with my father, low self-esteem, astrologically inevitable craving for adventure, dreams of stardom, history of depression and anxiety, tendency towards substance abuse --- put it all in a cauldron and cook and the ideal sex worker emerges, dripping and gleaming and whole.? Discuss the common stereotypes and misconceptions about sex workers. Does society oversimplify why people become sex workers? How has Lauren?s story altered your own perceptions about sex work?

2. Lauren explains, ?Nevertheless, two roads diverged. I picked the one that seemed a bit wilder. Because that was who I wanted to be.? Discuss how our personal choices reflect our identities. Do we choose who we ultimately become?

3. Describing the harem?s power dynamic, Lauren writes, ?All the girls were transformed in some way by the pressure, the paranoia, the insidious insecurity that creeps in when you size yourself up against a roomful of other girls every night. Who would you be? Would you shine or would you buckle? Would you stay and slug it out or would you run?? Describe how the harem?s competitiveness begins to affect Lauren. What would you have done in Lauren?s place?

4. As a very young girl, Lauren has an idealized image of her birth mother, who was a ballerina. Lauren explains, ?in my fantasy, my birth mother was a life-size version of the tiny dancer twirling inside my satin-lined music box. My plastic ballerina had the smallest brushstroke of red hair and limbs the width of toothpicks. She never lost her balance; she never had to let her arms down. I imagined my birth mother posed in a perpetual arabesque, swathed in white tulle, with a tiara of sparkling snowflakes in her hair.? How did Lauren?s perceptions about her birth mother match up to reality? Do you feel there was a sense of disappointment? How did the meeting change Lauren?s feelings towards her adoptive parents?

5, After meeting her birth mother for the first time, Lauren writes ?I was only twenty, the age Carrie had been when she put me up for adoption. And when I chronicled my list of outrageous fuckups in the preceding couple of years, when I visited my dismal graveyard of buried aspirations, when I looked at all I had trampled, I was forced to forgive her.? Do you believe Lauren?s forgiveness of her birth mother was justified? Has there been a time when you forgave someone in a similar situation?

Author Bio

Jillian Lauren is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the memoirs EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED and SOME GIRLS; the novel PRETTY; and the true crime book BEHOLD THE MONSTER. She is married to Weezer bass player Scott Shriner. They live in LA.

Critical Praise

"Riveting. Lauren illuminates the murky world of high-class prostitution with humor, candor, and a reporter?s gimlet eye."

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