



There's a Bear in There (and He Wants Swedish)

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This behind-the-scenes look at life in a brothel is a wonderfully funny tale, told with a lively sense of the absurd and a rare and forgiving understanding of human frailty. 'I have several young busty blondes, Derek,' Ruth sang like the weathergirl. 'One is a very sexy Danish girl, just back from a skiing trip, five-foot-five, long wavy blonde hair, blue eyes, twenty-five years old. A fantastic figure: thirty-six, twenty-five, thirty-five. Or I have a more demure, very pretty, young strawberry blonde Australian, Derek. She's nineteen ...' When her acting career stalls, Merridy Eastman lands a challenging role: night receptionist at a Sydney brothel. A long way from the bright lights of a TV studio, she is swept into the high drama of the sex industry. This former Play School presenter learns words for items and acts she never imagined, she opens the door to first-timers, old hands, couples and the occasional celebrity. But the place she spends every moment she can is the kitchen table, having a cup of tea and discussing investment portfolios, and life's many great mysteries, with Sapphire, Shelby, Antoinette and Bree - the women who make a living from having sex with strangers. And then, in this most unlikely of places, she finds herself falling in love ... There's a Bear in There (and he wants Swedish) is a funny, fascinating and true account of a forbidden world.

There's a Bear in There (and He Wants Swedish) Details

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From Reader Review There's a Bear in There (and He Wants Swedish) for online ebook

Maggi Tipton says

Surprisingly eye-opening and very entertaining....so glad I took the chance on it!

Cassie says

I picked this book up at a second hand book fair, because I found the idea of a children's tv presenter working in a brothel hilarious.

The book isn't particularly well written - no one is going to mistake it for important literature, but it was a very enjoyable read. Eastman talks about her time working as a brothel receptionist in a way that is warm, funny and non-judgemental. She writes about the women she met there as whole people, not one-dimensional cut outs as sex workers are often portrayed as.

Mark says

Merridy Eastman was a playschool presenter for a time on Australian Television. As an actress, she has had roles in some of Australia's most well-known TV shows.

In between acting roles, Merridy was forced to find other employment. Unlike so many that join call centres or wait tables, she took a role as a night receptionist at a Sydney brothel. She spent 11 months in the role and "There's a Bear In There" is her memoir of those 11 months. Unlike other memoirs where you get sucked in only to find only a chapter or two is given to the title description, this whole book is dedicated to her time at the brothel. She brings you with her to work each she and you feel like you are meeting everyone as characters in a book.

Merridy is at pains to show you that some women work as prostitutes because they WANT to and not due to the often thought reasons of an abused girl strung out, selling her body for another hit. She does not step around the drugs issue and it is clear that they are rampant even with the women she works for but that is not the overlying point.

These women are people too. Some are struggling for permanent housing, some do it because they like to feel like an elegant model, some fear they have nothing else, some are illegally in the country and others just wish they could find a good relationship and settle down. The joy of this book is the way that Merridy refuses to look down on them - often she argues with them over bookings made - but she talks to them and laughs with them as if they were lifelong friends. Perhaps this would be different if she was a highly successful rich actress, but then she would never need this job anyway.

I appreciated this book for being on such a human level. Merridy, as a receptionist, was never privy to what went on in the hotel rooms she sent the girls too, but they would tell her if she asked. The thing is she does not resort to sordid details about sex and kinks and the like to get readers to buy her book. This book appeals

to those her want to know the human side of the sex industry, not just the prostitutes but the drivers, brothel owners and other receptionists.

Heather Barrett says

Having never read anything about the sex industry before I was drawn to this novel for the reputation of the author's humour. I feel enlightened now about this now, and thankfully, without the usual sombre indulgence one could expect of violence and low-life. The author's humour was effective and I found it a good read that I at times could not put down.

Belle says

At times I found this to be moving but it was also full of humour - both self depreciating and observational. Merridy Eastman writes with a caring but assertive manner. She was brave enough to question her own prejudices and values too. It felt honest. She describes the women (and men) in her book so intricately and with such flair that it feels as if you are also in the room with them or that you know them. I've read this book a couple of times now and wouldn't hesitate to recommend it; especially as it is a relatively quick read being about 330 pages and quite a page turner to boot.

The only negative is that she does reveal some dodgy dealings in the office which could have cost some jobs. I'm not sure that I would have included so many details of the collusion involved, as the potential fall out wouldn't necessarily only affect the madam and her husband.

I am keen to read Merridy Eastman's subsequent books.

Nemo (The Moonlight Library) says

See this review and more on The Moonlight Library!

I'll admit, I didn't recognise Merridy Eastman's face or name prior to the end of this book where she reveals she got a job on the one TV show mentioned that I actually watched (Always Greener). Her stint on Playschool was before my time, and I've never sat through an episode of Blue Heelers or managed to see her in the countless other programs and commercials namedropped in. I wasn't a fan of hers. What drew me to the memoir was the fact that it was about a brothel. I've read another fascinating prostitute memoir called *In My Skin* by Kate Holden, which I love. Eastman's memoir doesn't compare, because she never sells her own body, but it is still an interesting read.

The memoir is told as a collection of linear anecdotes from the day Eastman found out about the receptionist job to the day she quits for her aforementioned acting job. On the cover it claims it's the story of 'how my brilliant career went from Playschool to brothel receptionist.' It's slightly misleading. Eastman was apparently on Playschool in the Eighties, and the events of this novel happened around the turn of the century. It's not 'how my career turned' but 'what I did to survive.' Eastman has an easy way of writing and a fantastic sense of humour. Her prose is friendly and a pleasure to read.

I think the most difficult thing about this book is the fact that Eastman is constantly an outsider to the goings-on of the prostitutes. She's desperate to be friends with them – for unspecified reasons – and she openly admires them. There's never any disrespect, even for the nasty ladies. There's a lot of pity for the ones who can't find work (translation: men will not choose to pay to have sex with them). There's a lot of exasperation for the expensive ladies who get a lot of clients but hate the job and won't quit. There's a mix of pity and revulsion for the clients desperate enough and brave enough to enter a brothel or ring up an escort line asking for a woman they will pay to have sex with. Even though Eastman comes face to face with lots of clients, the focus is always more on the working girls.

Overall I enjoyed this memoir. It's not quite what I expected on account of being only about the job, not the journey to the job, and mostly focusing on the women instead of reflecting more on the clients. For that kind of prostitute memoir, I recommend the aforementioned *In My Skin* by Kate Holden. But since Eastman's prose was clean and her sense of humour and friendliness evident within these pages, I do want to read her two other memoirs, *Ridiculous Expectations: Or How To Find A Prince*, and *How Now Brown Frau*.

My favourite part was where it was revealed that actual prostitutes were hired to play prostitutes in *Moulin Rouge*!

Luke West says

This book is about an unemployed Merridy Eastman, an actress in her forties who can't find an acting job so she decides she wants to try being a receptionist but little does she know, when she gets a job at a brothel how much she will love it, it's/her troubles and it's/her prostitutes. The book is very entertaining as there are so many interesting stories that go on and all the different characters (my favourite being Urszula/Sapphire an elderly lady, by prostitute standards, who despite living in a Land Rover with a dog, chain smoking and has breathing problems is almost always cheerful and can do 7 laps of Centennial Park a day on her rollerblades).

Melina says

Amusing enough, but way too long for the amount of story.

Cass Moriarty says

Those of a delicate sensibility might want to look away now...because Merridy Eastman's book *There's A Bear In There (And He Wants Swedish)* is a frank and honest look at the sex industry, told in autobiographical form from Merridy who went from clean-cut Play School presenter to brothel receptionist. Merridy spent over a year working with an in-house and escort service in Sydney. An out-of-work, or sporadically working, actor, and previous presenter on the well-known children's show *Play School*, Merridy accepted a job through Centrelink as a phone receptionist at the busy brothel, and had her eyes opened to the world of women who choose to make their living out of having sex with strangers. This is the story of her developing friendships with the sixty or seventy women who work there, the charged and often stressful atmosphere of the work environment, the requests from clients - ranging from the absurd and ridiculous to the sweet and generous, the brothel owners - tough but loyal, ruthless but caring, and the hilarious results of miscommunication, bizarre demands and a hectic pace. This book gives us a glimpse into the seedy and sad

side of prostitution - the very young girls, the women addicted to drugs or alcohol, the violence and abuse they sometimes suffer. But it is also a commentary on women who choose this job voluntarily - women who are smart and savvy, and determined to make a lot of money very quickly in order to secure a nest egg for their future, or to care for their families. The story is peopled with charismatic and memorable characters, both working girls and the men who visit them. It is a story about how a nice girl from a nice family ended up working in a brothel, and walking the fine line between answering phones and resisting the temptation to 'cross over to the other side'. Also threaded into the story is her unsteady romance with Patrick, the brothel driver. The hilarious predicaments the women and clients get themselves into will make you laugh out loud; the sadness and despair they experience - both the women and the men - will make your heart contract. Thanks to Flickchicks for lending me this book that I might not ordinarily have picked up, but which has shown me an enlightening perspective on the human condition.

Denise Sutherland says

Not the sort of book I usually read, but I found it very amusing and a quick read. It was really interesting reading about Merridy's experiences as a brothel receptionist, and nice to read a book set in Sydney, with many familiar places.

Anna Hepworth says

Pleasant enough. Not inspired enough to recommend it to people. Felt increasingly sad for a bunch of the individuals described.

Victoria says

This is one of the most hilarious books I have ever read. As I am Swedish myself, with a title like that I had to buy it straight away! Unemployed actress Merridy accepts (as a last resort) a job as a receptionist in a brothel, and she has no idea what is going on at first which makes for some good laugh out loud misunderstandings. What was supposed to be a short-term temp job turns into a longer employment, as Merridy gets to know both her job and the working ladies better. I especially like how she is able to give the different prostitutes proper hearts and make some of them very likeable in all their bizarre life-stories. Well worth a read!

Chel says

Loan from Fiona, ANZLL

Read whilst on holidays in Melbourne for friend's wedding. Merridy writes humorously about her experiences as a receptionist in a brothel.

Each vignette was interesting and was well written but the book became a bit stale by the second half. I persisted to the end, with full knowing that she would return to acting full time.

Pauline says

One day late in the twentieth century an out of work Australian actor called Merridy Eastman took a job in a brothel as a receptionist. This is what she learned. There's a Bear in There and He wants Swedish, like the famous Australian novel name-dropped on the cover, is a bullshit-free zone. Like Miles Franklin, Eastman is funny, caring and not easily intimidated. She writes about her own life, is not afraid to be vulnerable, and is fair to the people she describes. Like Franklin, Eastman has a great ear for dialogue, is an excellent observer and has a prodigious vocabulary and a wicked sense of humour. And like Franklin, Eastman has created a new kind of Australian heroine. Unforgettable.

Beky-Mae says

A bit of a trashy read . However it reads like fiction and is actually quite an addictive easy read . I'm just disappointed as I honestly do not remember her from Play School or anything she was actually in .
