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## brief encounters

This woman set herself a challenge to sleep with 10,000 men. In a startlingly candid confession, Valerie Tasso tells Emma Cook of her sexual marathon (including a stint as a prostitute) and how she used her body to earn acceptance

Valerie Tasso is the stuff of male fantasy. Not just because she is French and glamorous with a low husky voice, doe brown eyes and a mane of dark glossy hair – although that helps. It's her tireless and extraordinary quest for sexual adventure that has made her an irresistible proposition to countless men over the past 10 years.

A decade ago, Tasso, aged 27 and living in Barcelona, set herself a rather unusual sexual challenge. She decided to try to sleep with as many men as possible. 'It was sort of a joke. I thought that if a man measured, on average, 5in, in order to get past a mile, I would have to sleep with over 10,000 of them,' she says. 'It was sending up the fact that men are obsessed with length and women don't really care. It was really a challenge to myself.'

It was a challenge indeed, and one that borders on the incredible. What is incredible about her story is that it is all true. So what made an intelligent, attractive woman embark on such a quest? To find out, I met Tasso in a quiet London hotel bar where we chatted over a bottle of wine.

Now 36, she has written a book, *Insatiable: The Sexual Adventures of a French Girl in Spain*, about her conquests (in their hundreds if you are counting) and it's become a big hit in Spain. 'They respect me because I told the truth about everything. A lot of women identify with my experiences,' she says. Many, however,

have found her approach to sex shocking.

Unlike bestselling memoir *The Sexual Life of Catherine M* or infamous blog-turned-book *Belle de Jour*, this candid confessional isn't arch or emotionally detached. Tasso is passionate – and proud – about her desires, and here is a decidedly male take on sexuality. She is sexually assertive, delighting in the thrill of the chase and the sheer physical pleasure of no-strings sex. 'I wanted physical experience. I used sex as a process to

know my own limits, to find out how far I could go.' She even chose to become a prostitute for five months – a decision that Tasso cites as the ultimate sexual experience.

As she lights another cigarette, I had to ask her why such an articulate and educated woman (she has an MA in business administration and is now studying psychology) would give up her advertising job to spend five months as a call girl.

'I was attracted to it because it was such a taboo,' she explains. 'It was intellectual curiosity, too, and I thought I'd enjoy it sexually.'

Tasso joined a high-class brothel in Barcelona after the break-up of one particularly destructive relationship with Jaime, a much older man she

had met through work. They had lived together for over 18 months and Tasso had supported him financially, only to

**EROTIC ODYSSEY**  
'I used sex as a process to know my own limits,' says Valerie

discover he was having an affair. Devastated, she took the extreme measure of turning to prostitution. 'After we split up I wanted to die,' she admits. She was also desperately hard up – she had given all her savings to Jaime and quit her job. So she moved from her chic loft apartment in Barcelona's Olympic Village to a cheap boarding house in the poorer district of Poble Sec. 'I found myself lost and alone ►



in the world, but I was fascinated by the prostitutes. I felt glad each morning when I recognised one of their faces.'

In her fragile emotional state, prostitution seemed a logical step. 'I needed affection and a boost to my self-esteem, not forgetting the financial reasons,' she says. 'I also saw myself as a liberal-minded woman, so the idea of becoming a prostitute didn't upset or frighten me.'

Tasso saw it as a way of liberating herself emotionally. 'I wanted to set free another more human and sensitive being, with more curiosity about life.'

As far as the challenge to sleep with 10,000 men was going, Tasso was doing pretty well. 'I had no desire to go shopping or to the Prado museum,' she writes about one particular day in her book, 'so I had four sexual encounters. Two in the morning, two in the afternoon: a perfect balance.'

Many of those encounters make for flacid reading; a chance meeting at night with two grave diggers in a churchyard is one of the more memorable ones. Two men tie her up, have sex with her and leave her lying in the mud. She wakes up alone with her head hanging over a grave – not the nicest place a girl could find herself the morning after the night before. Yet Tasso looks baffled when I say it sounds humiliating.

'I enjoyed it,' she says. 'People always think women want tenderness and romance but, no, they're so wrong,' she says emphatically. 'In female sexual fantasy, women like sado-masochism. All I was saying is it's OK to have fantasies about this.' And to act upon them if you want to. 'That part of the book caused a furore in Spain. I'm sorry, but I'm not the first or the last to do it.'

Tasso also confesses to enjoying sex while she was a prostitute. 'It may seem strange to a lot of people,' she says, 'but the time I spent in the brothel gave me some of the happiest moments of my life.' This wasn't a girl who just lay back and thought of the cash. When the sex was especially good, Tasso wouldn't let the client pay her. 'I did that twice. I felt it wasn't fair because we both enjoyed it so much.'

So which did she enjoy more, picking up men or being a prostitute? 'Oh that one is easy to answer: being a prostitute,' says Tasso, smiling. 'It was easier to enjoy the sex because I didn't know the clients. I didn't

have to please them so much, I didn't involve myself emotionally. I was just thinking about myself and my body. I had orgasms with clients and I don't feel ashamed about that.' Tasso also insists this isn't unusual among prostitutes. 'They just don't like admitting to it. Somehow that would demonise them even more. Mostly, people find it easier to believe that prostitutes can't really enjoy what they do.'

Tasso is aware her experience as a high-class call girl was very different to women working on the streets with no protection. Unlike more vulnerable girls, Tasso was there for the adventure, not because she had to be. After five months she left, partly because she didn't want to get hooked on the incredible sums of money she was making – 18,000 Euros (£12,400) in a good month. 'The problem is you get addicted and it was difficult to quit.'

The decision was made easier when she fell in love with Giovanni, an Italian businessman and one of her clients.

'It sounds like something out of *Pretty Woman*, but it was nothing like that. He didn't come along and save me. I wanted to leave because I had gone as far as I could with it. I knew all there was to know about the experience.' She also discovered more dignity in prostitution than in an unhappy relationship. 'I felt more used and violated when I was in love with Jaime and he was treating me badly. Prostitution never made me feel like that.'

You can't help wondering if some of Tasso's motivation is to shock, more than to seek sexual thrills. Yet her curiosity does seem genuine. 'If you're attracted by or interested in something, you should try it out. Otherwise how will you ever know what you like and don't like?'

Tasso is the first to admit her sexual behaviour may be linked to her family background. 'I wonder if the lack of emotion in my family was at the root. I was an emotion addict. I used sex because it was one way of getting love.' From the age of 15, when Tasso first lost her virginity, sex also became a substitute for communication. 'Being physical was the only way I had to explain myself. I was

always very clumsy with words so I started to communicate through my body,' she says. Tasso's relationship with her mother didn't help. 'It's terrible,' she says bluntly. 'I love her, of course, but she's impossible to talk to. She's a typical conservative French woman who wanted me to get married and have children.' Instead, Tasso wanted to travel and escape her middle-class home in Champagne.

Her parents must have been horrified when they learned about the nature of Tasso's book? 'It was awful when it first appeared. My mother didn't know I was a prostitute, but she said she wasn't surprised because I'm so curious. Of course they still judge me; my brother refuses to speak to me.'

Since the book came out, however, Tasso's appetite for sexual novelty has waned, partly because she appears to be

**I had no desire to go shopping or to a museum, so I had four sexual encounters. Two in the morning, two in the afternoon: perfect'**

happily in love and very settled. No longer with Giovanni, she now lives with an artist. When they first met, he knew nothing of her book or her reputation. When he learned about her past, he didn't judge her, she says. 'He said to me, "I behaved the same as you but in the opposite way: as a man I stopped having sex to discover myself, whereas you used it to discover yourself, but the process is the same". We have a very good relationship.' So much so, Tasso finds it unlikely she'll return to her old habits. 'I can't make promises, but I have no desire to pick men up on the street.'

Prostitution simply now fascinates her intellectually; she is regularly quoted in the Spanish press about it. Finally viewed as 'respectable' by Spanish society, she now looks back on her sexual odyssey with affection. 'I did enjoy it. There is no aspect of that life I regret. If I had to start again, I wouldn't change a thing.'

So, did she ever reach her target of 10,000 conquests? 'Oh, I don't know,' Tasso says breezily. 'Really, I never counted.' ■

*Insatiable: The Sexual Adventures of a French Girl in Spain* by Valérie Tasso (Corgi, £6.99) is out now