



**BUNNY TALES: BEHIND CLOSED
DOORS AT THE PLAYBOY MANSION**
Izabella St. James
Running Press, 2006
253 pages

Bunny Tales is a simple story—the first-person account of Izabella St. James, a woman who was one of Hugh Hefner's young blonde Girlfriends (a titled position, hence the capital "g") from 2002 to 2004. It's easily the dishiest book I've ever read. St. James answers every question you've ever had about living as a paid companion to a man in his late seventies.

Unfortunately, one of St. James' reasons for writing the book is to attempt to explain and defend her choice of becoming a quasi-sex worker/promotional toy for two years. Although she's very materially driven, she seems unable to honestly recognize that her "allowance" (\$1000 cash every Friday) had nothing to do with love or romance. She seems desperate to get the reader to acknowledge that she is a unique person, perhaps because she felt like an interchangeable blonde lifestyle accessory. The book is packed with gossip and her personal history, but she seems determined to dance around and deny the sex work aspect of her life at the Mansion. She explains herself by musing, "It is as difficult to label my relationship with Hef as it is to explain its nature."

The \$1000 weekly cash allowance is the obvious number one benefit of Girlfriendhood, and from St. James' details of the

gifts Girlfriends got, as well as the fringe benefits they received, it's pretty clear that Girlfriends are a tax-deductible expense for Hefner and/or the *Playboy* corporation (even with her law degree St. James never questions the reasons for these rules). Significantly, the allowance is not handed out if the Girlfriend in question doesn't participate in the week's public appearances and outings. In other words, if you don't do your part to promote *Playboy*, you don't get paid. St. James becomes irate over this, feeling that Hefner cares more for promoting the magazine and his image than about her as a romantic partner. St. James gripes when her material desires are thwarted because she wasn't putting out for Hefner; she seems incapable of realizing that she was, at best, a mistress, and at worst, a badly behaved prostitute.

St. James becomes excited about meeting Snoop Dogg and Don Magic Juan at a Mansion party. She gushes over their pimp outfits and bling, seemingly unaware of what a pimp is or what they do. She chafes under Hefner's seemingly arbitrary rules of behavior yet never connects the dots.

St. James refuses to entertain the idea that she falls under the broad umbrella of "sex worker." She looks down her nose at strippers, hookers, and wannabe-Girlfriends. Her tangled mass of emotions after she leaves the Mansion is not much different from those of sex workers who were harmed by their jobs. By refusing to acknowledge her feelings as anything other than romantic hangover she denies herself a chance to heal.

The book doesn't reveal anything about Hefner and his life that isn't obvious to any sex worker. I found St. James sadly curious because she is in such deep denial of the small role she played in helping to pimp *Playboy* magazine and Hefner; she is also unwilling to realize that she was technically a sex worker. Hefner didn't pay her because he felt a deep connection to her as a woman. She was an easily obtained means to an end. St. James, in denying the truth of the arrangement, lost her opportunity to use her choice as a springboard to better things—writing a tell-all is not one of those better things—or the opportunity to give herself some closure.

—Amanda Brooks