
Xaviera

ONE SPRING day in 1971, a beautiful, green-eyed, blonde woman walked into my office, causing a few heads to turn. She looked not at all like one of my run-of-the-mill clients. Her name, Xaviera Hollander; her occupation, madam of the now famous brothel at 155 East 55th Street, New York City. And yes, she wanted to retain me to represent her.

All bright and breezy, she told me her problem. For the second time, she had been arrested—even though she was paying \$18,000 a year for police protection. This, she felt, was dirty pool. She thought that she was being framed because she hadn't agreed to pay an increase in protection money.

She wanted to contest the charges, whatever they might be. It seemed to me that there was a fair chance to get the case thrown out, so I agreed to act for her.

She went on to tell me about herself. She spoke seven languages fluently, she said. Back in Europe, she had been voted The Netherlands' Most Outstanding Secretary. As unlikely as this sounded, I could believe it. In fact, listening to her, there was little I felt her incapable of.

She tired of her native country, Holland, and migrated to South Africa, where she met a young American business man. They became engaged. When he returned to the States, she duly followed, planning her wedding en route. But something happened and the engagement was called off.

Penniless, she was forced to find work. Fortunately, her seven languages came to the rescue. She got a job with the Dutch Diplomatic Mission to the United Nations.

But New York is an expensive town. Soon Xaviera was

"turning tricks" during her lunch hour, then in the evenings, and then all night long, until finally she was too tired to type and took to prostitution full time.

Being smart as well as good looking, she was soon running her own whorehouse, the classiest in New York City. Her clients included the wealthy and the successful—politicians, doctors, judges, corporation presidents, even lawyers.

The account books Xaviera kept were truly marvelous. Along each one of hundreds of names, there were one or two phone numbers and addresses (Xaviera was big on Christmas cards) along with notations about each client's personality, physical characteristics, financial responsibility, sexual quirks, and so on.

Xaviera was even tolerant of her difficult customers, although she was put out if their checks bounced too often. Typical account book entries: "very sweet"; "lively person"; "very nice, sweet, young"; "very nice, was married to a hooker" (I forgot to ask Xaviera whether this fellow was entitled to a discount); "lovely advertising man"; "lawyer—talks a lot"; "groovy little guy, genius"; "smart"; "sweetheart."

One client earned the entry "pain in the neck." Another was described as "phony, never pays, snotty." One customer was identified as "gynecologist." Another was starkly described: "drinks vodka." One deadbeat had given Xaviera a phone number that turned out to belong to the Police Department. And a visitor from Canada was so enthusiastic about Xaviera's establishment that she noted that "he wants similar operation in Toronto."

Xaviera was never one to mince words. She complained once to columnist Earl Wilson that Mayor Lindsay and the police were "harassing us hookers."

"Why," she asked, "is Mayor Lindsay cracking down on call girls while taxis carry ads for massage parlors where every man knows he can get all the action he wants for five, ten, or twenty dollars?"

The articulate Xaviera was a persuasive debater. "We call girls provide a social service," she said. "The business should

be legalized. We don't hassle anybody, we don't rob anybody. I have very intelligent girls and I run a respectable house. I don't see why they should harass us."

That Xaviera had grounds for feeling hassled was indicated by the proceedings of New York's Knapp Commission, which was investigating police corruption in the city. Here is part of a taped conversation between a policeman and a friend of Xaviera. A is the friend and P the policeman:

- A: What are we talking about in figures—approximately?
 P: So, if she wants to give like two or three hundred for the division.
 A: Well, how's it work . . . division, borough and precinct?
 P: And precinct, yeah.
 A: Two hundred.
 P: That's reasonable . . . Well, the precinct you can probably buy for two.
 A: Two hundred?
 P: I think . . . I think . . . you could wrap the whole thing up for between 800 and a thousand.
 A: Yeah, look, you gotta have a little for yourself. We appreciate that.
 P: Well, listen, she said I got a hundred dollars a month for myself, right?
 A: Right.
 P: The only thing that would happen is the chief, something like that, the P.C. (police commissioner)—I can't control that.
 A: The chief of what?
 P: The chief inspector.
 A: Yeah.
 P: And the police commissioner—I can't control them.
 A: Who is it—you mean downtown?
 P: Yeah. That's the heavies, that's the heavy. A lot of time they get a communication down there and pass it from the chief inspector to the borough—beautiful. But if they come up themselves then you're [*obscenity*]. But you got like ninety-eight percent guarantee, no matter how, ninety-eight.

- A: That's eleven hundred a month?
 P: Right.

On the morning of the trial, Xaviera told me, "Henry, don't worry. It's all fixed." She went on to say that the arresting officer was now a friend of hers and was going to play down the charges.

"Xaviera, policemen just don't change their stories like that."

"This one will because I've bribed him," she said.

I exploded on the spot. I couldn't imagine anyone as bright as Xaviera doing anything so dumb—and dangerous to her lawyer as well. "Xaviera, you might know a lot about men and all but let me tell you about the facts of life," I almost shouted. "You don't go behind your lawyer's back and bribe cops or witnesses."

To which she said, "Well, I thought you're so straight that you wouldn't do it."

I tried to explain the possible consequences of her bribing the cop but to no avail. Probably, her years of paying protection money had convinced her that that's how things are done.

There was still a little time before court opened so I rushed over to the D.A.'s office and asked him what he would give me—lawyer's talk for plea bargaining. The D.A. said that if she would plead guilty, he'd lower the charge to loitering, a misdemeanor.

So that's what happened. The judge generously fined Xaviera only \$100.

As we left the courtroom, Xaviera kept complaining that it had cost her \$3,000 to bribe the cop and he didn't even have to take the stand. The fact that she was let off with only a \$100 fine didn't impress her. "Three thousand dollars for nothing," she kept repeating.

There was of course a very good reason for not going along with Xaviera's "fixing" the cop—besides the ethics involved. Had the cop admitted on the stand that the defendant had given him \$3,000 to change his story, the assumption would most likely have been that I was a party to the deal. I could be

tried for conspiring to pervert the course of justice, among other charges, all of them felonies. And how could I prove my innocence? There's practically no way in the world. Chances are I would have been nailed. And conviction for a felony means automatic disbarment. A sad epitaph for a successful criminal attorney.

Although Xaviera was not jailed, she was hardly in the clear. Her call-girl house figured prominently in the Knapp Commission investigation. She became a notorious figure overnight, throughout the United States and in Europe as well.

An undercover agent, Teddy Ratnoff, conned Xaviera so beautifully that he became her "financial advisor." He bugged her brothel and put her clients under surveillance. The resulting tapes were turned over to the Knapp investigators. Nothing was ever proved against the public officials and politicians among her clientele, but the general outraged hue and cry put Xaviera out of business.

But prostitution's loss became literature's gain. In collaboration with Robin Moore and Yvonne Dunleavy, she wrote her life story, appropriately called *The Happy Hooker*. It was a huge best seller, with over seven million copies sold.

All this notoriety nudged the Immigration and Naturalization Service into taking an interest in Xaviera. The I.N.S. soon discovered that she was an illegal alien, having violated the terms of her visa. Near the end of 1971 the I.N.S. instituted deportation proceedings against her.

Xaviera decided that she needed a "straight" lawyer and called my office. I represented her at the immigration hearing and managed to get a stay of the deportation order for a couple of months.

Eventually, Miss Xaviera Hollander departed these United States. She went to England and stayed there a while. She returned to North America and settled in Toronto, where she wrote a follow-up best seller to *The Happy Hooker*. Perhaps she is now busily perfecting her piano playing—another one of her talents.

Truly a remarkable, colorful woman. We will not soon see her like—at least not in New York.