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INVISIBLE TRADE II

Gerrie Lim is the bestselling author of *Invisible Trade: High-Class Sex for Sale in Singapore*, his exposé of the escort business in Southeast Asia, and *In Lust We Trust: Adventures in Adult Cinema*, his memoir of a decade spent covering the erotica industry in Los Angeles, California, where he previously lived for fifteen years as a freelance writer contributing to *Billboard*, *Details*, *LA Style*, *LA Weekly*, *Penthouse*, *Playboy* and *The Wall Street Journal*. This is his fifth book.

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The Creation of Celebrity Brands*

** (published by Monsoon Books)*

INVISIBLE TRADE II

Secret lives and sexual intrigue in Singapore

GERRIE LIM



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Once again, for P.H.

“Love you long time!”

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Preface

Free from desire, you realize the mystery
Caught in desire, you only see the manifestations.

—Lao Tsu

Back in October 2006, on board Singapore Airlines flight SQ2 bound for San Francisco, I read Kate Holden's astonishing memoir, *In My Skin*, about her life as a heroin-addicted prostitute in her hometown of Melbourne, Australia.

She had begun by hailing cars on the streets of St Kilda and then graduated to more upscale escorting before deciding that her smack habit was detrimental to, well, pretty much everything. With her personal survival at stake, she cleaned up and finally wrote her amazing book, in the process winning the Judy Duffy Award for literary excellence. One particular passage summed up my own thoughts as I was preparing to write this one, the much-requested sequel to *Invisible Trade: High-Class Sex for Sale in Singapore*, published in 2004.

My intention was to uncover aspects of the sex industry not previously dealt with in that book and her words excited me, rather appropriately, like a drug rush.

At times I was disconcerted by the aggression of sex: a friendly man's face distorted by the ferocity of pleasure; the greedy ruthlessness of sexual momentum. It could still frighten me, beneath everything. People became strangers, and I could do nothing but cling to arms and ribs and hips as the face above me darkened with blood and I understood that I could only rush up to meet this force, or be battered by it. It was easier to mock the fervor of lust than to admit its fearful power. And I reminded myself that I was the one sought; it was I who was in control. These men, I thought, were diminished by their need.

There were men who cloaked their nervousness in disdain, and men who hid their disdain with charm. I enjoyed the game of guessing what each man would be like, and being confounded so often . . . "You're too good to be here," they still murmured to me. Just as they had in the cars of St Kilda.

"So are you," I'd say, but I'd take their hands and kiss their mouths to make sure they'd keep coming back.

Here then, in the pages that follow, are more true stories coated with eerily similar disdain and charm. I sought to unravel and demystify two key areas: the secretive "double lives" led by these girls and the reasons why some men habitually need to spend money for sex. Both involve addiction to a degree, and both are fed by deep existential forces fraught with anger and pain, often disguised as carnal longing.

There's the girl who works at a public relations agency by day and moonlights as an escort by night, with neither her office colleagues nor her parents nor (even more amazingly) her boyfriend knowing. There's the girl who married her much older client, a wealthy Caucasian expatriate who spends little time in Singapore, a perfect situation that enabled her to continue escorting without his knowledge (well, perfect that is, until he found out). There's the *karaoke-bar mamasan* who deals in wild and wanton girls from mainland China, and the American male escort who gets paid by visiting Shanghai socialites for his companionship both in and out of their hotel bedrooms.

There's the university student who freelances as a bondage model, paid to struggle and squirm while rope-tied as her client watches her and masturbates. Why do men pay for this? Ask the Australian gentleman with a penchant for Filipinas, who cruises the basement bars of a well-known Singapore hotel. And the Englishman who went on a self-professed "sex bender" in the Singapore red-light district of Geylang following his own divorce. And the self-proclaimed diehard sex tourist from Los Angeles who came to Southeast Asia to sample its professional paragons of feminine perfection, finally facing his nemesis among the nightbirds of Singapore.

All this and more, folks, in the hope that these disparate views will help to enrich our collective understanding of an industry that remains, for good reason, the world's oldest and

most mystifying.

As with the previous book, this is not a work of fiction, though names and nationalities (and, upon specific request, even locations) were changed in order to protect my interviewees' privacy. And, once again, nothing in this book is written to dissuade anyone, whether escort or client, from their chosen lifestyle.

Gerrie Lim

Singapore

PART ONE

Sirens with Secrets

An Almost Imaginary Life

She loves the sound of her chosen name, she says, and didn't know until much later that it means "illusion." But it's so very fitting, of course, since that's exactly her job description.

Maya laughs. She's proud to be a high priestess of illusion and even came up with a running joke in honor of her name: By day, she works in public relations but by night she works in, misspelling intended, pubic relations.

On one occasion, however, the joke was literally on her instead. "One guy wanted me to shave in front of him, to shave my pubic hair," she recalls, "and yes, I did it. Some guys like girls shaved and others don't like that, so I don't know, it's hard to accommodate everyone. Some like me bare, some like me with a lot of hair.

"Some hair down there looks more natural, doesn't it? I think so. Anyway, this guy wanted me bare and paid me an extra \$50. It was my first time actually doing that. I should have asked him for more!"

Pubic relations, what kind of work was that for a sweet girl like her? Well, she could quit her day job if she wanted to, from the rave reviews she's received from her customers, not to mention

the somewhat disproportionate income gap that results from such adoration. Hot damn, surely she *must* be good! Why else would so many of these guys keep calling to book her again?

Moonlighting for Maya, it seems, has really become a way of life. At the escort agency where she works four nights a week, she brings in the most repeat business of any of the girls. Clients have whisked her away to New York and Hong Kong and several places in Australia, and she even enjoyed an island retreat off the coast of West Malaysia with a famous Hollywood movie star. She remembers digging her nails into his back, and wondering if those marks would ever show up on-screen.

Back in Singapore, she's her agency boss's numero uno go-to girl for the big overnight jobs, where she stays with a client in his hotel suite till the next morning. She has, at any given time, between twenty to thirty "regulars" and she estimates she's had sex with at least a hundred guys. The exact number eludes her since she doesn't keep track anymore, because she's lost count. Just like the number of taxis ferrying her across Singapore, and the many hotel suites she's slept in.

"Well, being an escort is about pleasing people, so it is a form of public relations," she quips. Her daylight hours are spent at a small firm specializing in banking and technology. "My title is public relations consultant. I do research for presentations and I'm still a junior executive so I'm still learning. I started out as a part-time receptionist, as an intern while I was still in school,

and then got a full-time job after I finished my diploma in mass communications."

The job, she knows, affords the perfect cover for her. "Naturally, I'm a friendly person, but my escort job has taught me to go one step higher. And when I'm not working, I do see my friends and some of them now ask me, 'What do you do? What are you working as?' I tell them I work in P.R. I'm on *Friendster* and I have my pictures on there and I go overseas all the time so when they check the site, they notice that I go overseas a lot and that's why they ask me what I do. A lot of these people are very *kaypob*—such busybodies! I tell them I have to go overseas for travel, for my public relations work. Even my mother was asking me about it. But she doesn't anymore, not since I moved out of the house to live with my boyfriend."

Her boyfriend?!! Talk about leading a double life.

Indeed, while everyone knows about her respectable day job, nobody knows what she does after she leaves the office. Not her office colleagues, not her parents and definitely not her boyfriend. She even started escorting two months *after* she started dating him, and she gets away with it simply because they don't actually live together—he sleeps over at her condo only two or three nights a week and that's exactly how she likes it. Any more would seriously cramp her lifestyle.

And all this deft, illusory sleight-of-time is enhanced by the fact that she is a young Singaporean Muslim woman who actually