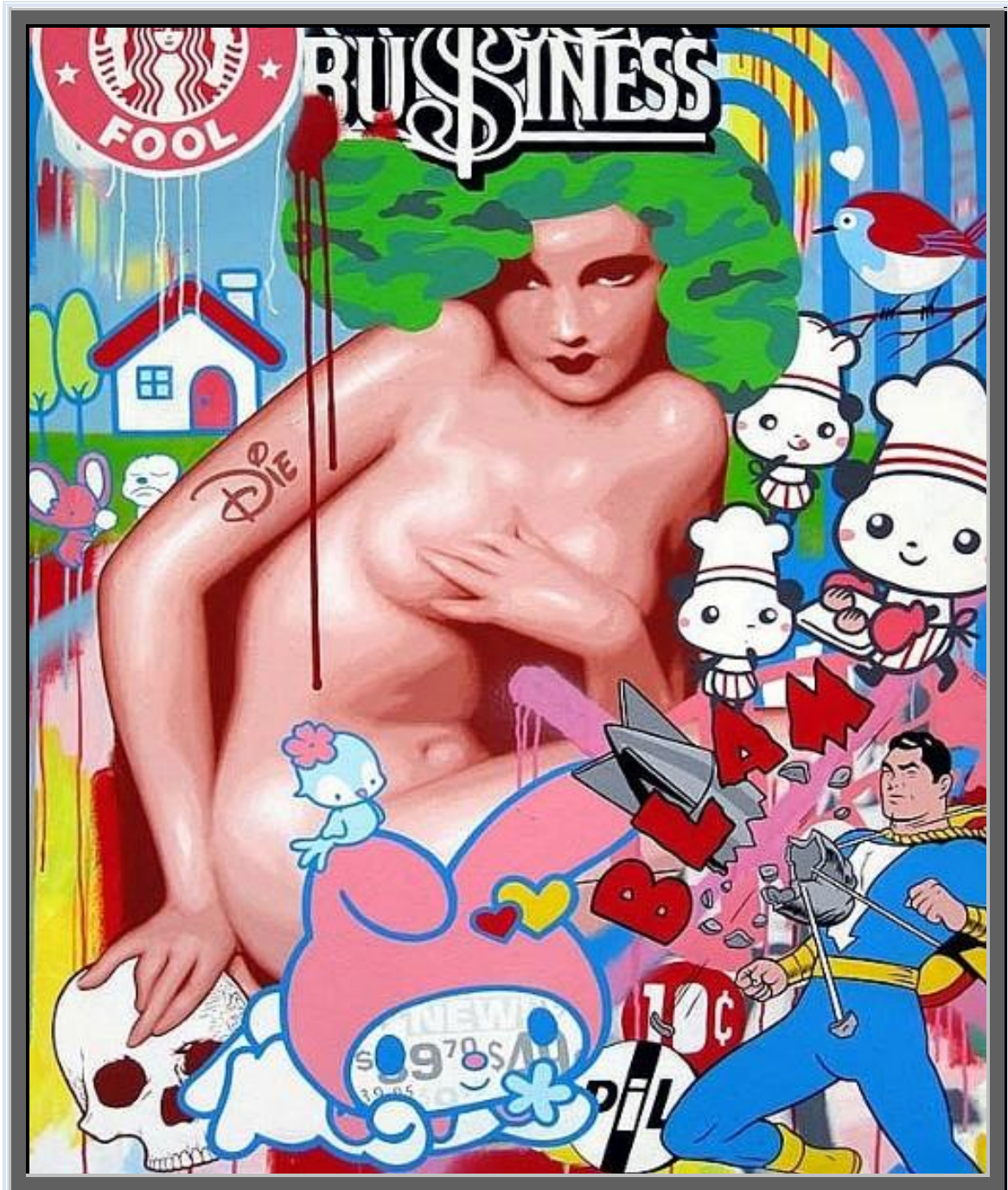


Freedom of Trade

Bradley Stoke



Advertisements of one kind or another were all Lance could see wherever he looked around him. They dominated the supermarket aisles, were suspended above the shelves and plastered all over the store's windows. But how could it ever be different? A man needed help when he went shopping. And at the moment, he was browsing in the pharmaceuticals section where the dominant ads paraded images of infeasibly muscular men and seductively desirable naked women,

What Lance was looking for wasn't really a performance enhancing drug as used by the world's best sportsmen whose stamina, strength and endurance improved every year, if at some expense to their future health (as explained in detail in the small print). What state would international sporting records be without the open and public consumption of steroids, growth hormones, Beta-2 Agonists and Corticotrophins? The world would surely be a poorer place. There'd be no three-minute mile, no one and a half hour marathon and no 850 pound weight lift.

Neither was Lance looking for narcotics, although he dropped a packet of cocaine wraps and ready-rolled reefers into his shopping basket. He'd once tried harder stuff, like the heroin and LSD on full display on the top shelf, but he decided that a packet of MDMA was what suited him best at the moment.

The pharmaceuticals Lance had primarily driven across town to buy were primarily for the enhancement of sexual pleasure. Those were what he needed tonight. But as always he walked out of the store with considerably more in his shopping basket than he'd originally intended. He'd filled his shopping basket with goodies from the shelves, fully aware that many would be thrown away without him even tackling the fiendishly difficult packaging. Into the basket went fizzy drinks, sweets,

cigarettes, processed meat snacks, a penis stimulator, a pornographic DVD (promising bizarre and extreme erotica), a luxury car magazine, chocolate biscuits, ear-warmers (even though it was summer) and a tabloid newspaper whose headlines, as usual, highlighted the threat to civilised life from open immigration, radical extremism and depravity (but mostly the last).

Lance hesitated by the gun counter which was adjacent to the check-out tills and prominently displayed an alluring selection of the latest semi-automatics, lady's pistols and hand guns. Although Lance already had a good arsenal at home, as so often he was tempted to buy more. A man could always do with the latest fast-loading, repeat-action piece. Even so, Lance held firm against temptation. There was still a week or so until his next pay cheque, so all he bought were cartons of bullets for the high velocity semi-automatic pistol he was carrying. Safety was of paramount concern for Lance, as it was for all men, women and children. It was wise to be properly armed at all times. Gun fights and massacres were such common events these days, especially in malls, cinemas, high schools and, of course, supermarkets.

Even at such a reputable chain as SteinMart.

Lance flashed his credit card at the automatic check-out reader under the watchful eye of a battery of security cameras that would detect whether he tried to walk off with something he hadn't paid for. Lance didn't want to be frisked by one of the heavily armed security guards, who were trained to sort out even the bloodiest of supermarket shoot-outs. As always, Lance had only himself to blame when he realised that a shopping trip ostensibly to buy only a few dollars' worth of aphrodisiacs and performance enhancers had resulted in a bill of nearly a hundred bucks for stuff he

didn't really need.

But that was the power of advertising for you.

Lance waddled across the supermarket car-park to his SUV where he tipped the security guard who'd kept it secure from vandalism and theft and then loaded the boot with countless free plastic bags bulging with sugary snacks and trinkets. He squeezed his considerable bulk into the driving seat and drove out the supermarket car park to the first of many toll-booths between the Retail Park and home. Even though he'd bought an annual pass which allowed him almost unlimited access to the country's roads, there were enough drivers who paid for every individual car trip to slow his progress. As it was, the four mile journey across town took nearly an hour, as Lance crawled along congested suburban streets where it was too dangerous to wind down the windows. Thank goodness for bullet-proof glass and air-conditioning. It might burn off gasoline that in turn blackened pedestrians' lungs, but it kept Lance safe and sound.

And so it should. His car hadn't come cheap. The in-car entertainment, the military-grade chassis, the navigation aids and climate control all cost a pretty penny, but they were of the highest quality. Lance could survive a World War in relative comfort, as long as he didn't have to wind down the windows or refuel the engine.

Today, Lance was in a state of excited anticipation, which was reflected by his choice of loud electronic swing music on the car radio, interspersed every two minutes or so by an ad for loan companies, insurance firms, realtors and pharmaceuticals. And these were often louder and more intense than even the heaviest brass and organ rhythms.

And this eagerness was because, waiting for him at home, was Lance's latest high value procurement: an indentured sex worker he'd purchased online at GirlsULike.

Although such women were informally known as sex slaves, she wasn't really a slave as such. The institution of slavery had been outlawed long ago when the weight of lawsuits and civil actions overwhelmed the arguments in its legal defence. For once, the law had triumphed over the freedom of commerce and the result was a more carefully circumscribed trade in human traffic which benefited all concerned. Very stringent legal restrictions had to be observed, primarily with respect to the inheritance of indentured status and the terms by which indenture was bound by mutual agreement. And, so, in this much more agreeable environment, the trade of sex workers was protected by consumer rights and quality control. To be on the safe side, Lance had taken out Liability Insurance that protected him if, in the pursuit of sexual satisfaction, he should accidentally damage the goods he'd purchased. So, if he should accidentally impregnate her, pass on a venereal disease or break any of her limbs, Lance was fully covered for his first million dollars of liability.

Lance's home was a four bedroomed detached house in a gated community which had been on the edge of town when he'd bought it with his ex-wife ten years earlier, but was now surrounded on all sides by a mix of other gated communities and squalid high-rise apartments. The house which had cost so much when Lance had bought it, but now worth several multiples of its original cost, seemed rather too large these days for just one man. But when Betty left him, taking with her as much as her solicitor could squeeze out of him, Lance became the sole owner of a house with three

more bedrooms than he could sleep in at one time.

But now, in one of them, almost certainly watching television, was Candy, the indentured sex worker for whom Lance had paid almost as much as the price of an estate car or a time-share in a beach apartment in the subtropical south.

Candy was Lance's treat for himself. And by heck he deserved it after all those years in middle management at Rothberg Utilities. No longer did he need to invest in VR porn or the occasional visit to the flop house. From now on, it was pussy every night and exclusively for himself. No more sharing with strangers.

Candy was unlikely to be the girl's real name. Judging from the hue of her skin, the girl came from a southern country—possibly one of those where Lance's colleagues bought time-shares—so her name was probably something like Juanita or Fatima or Francesca.

She wasn't quite the best flesh that money could buy. She wasn't exactly slim, although no one could describe her as fat. She was just above five foot tall. One eye was slightly squinted. Her bosom was no better than B-cup and the thickness of her waist was a natural complement to her womanly thighs. Her long black hair wasn't quite straight and it wasn't really curly, but there was a lot of it, which she liked to tie back but Lance preferred she let hang loose.

So, she wasn't perfect. But at the price Lance paid for her, what girl could be?

But what was most important of all was that Candy belonged to Lance. And what's more Lance could do with the girl whatever the heck he liked.

And what could be more perfect than that?

Lance drove through the gates of the community, up the driveway of his house

and into his garage. A series of security locks later, he was able to carry the many plastic bags into the kitchen where he emptied the contents and arranged them in the cupboards where they belonged. Lance felt a need to keep his house tidy now a woman was living there. He'd recently extended the hours that the maids would service his house each month and thrown out some of the more shabby items of furniture. He'd also, perhaps reluctantly, disposed of the last few remaining signs that he'd once shared the house with Betty.

Lance knew it didn't really matter what he did to make life comfortable for Candy. She would serve his sexual needs in whatever state he kept the house or whatever opinion of him she might privately hold. But it was into a life of sexual service that either she'd sold herself or, more likely, her indebted family had sold her, and Lance had no intention of not taking full advantage of what was on offer. But it was surely best to treat the girl with some respect.

After all, you don't want the girl to hate you when you fuck her up the backside or ask her to suck your dick.

Lance climbed the stairs to the second bedroom which was furnished with a double bed, a 58-inch TV and a wardrobe-full of lingerie, lace, leather and chains. He pushed open the door and greeted Candy while carrying a tray laid out with glasses of brandy and nuts. She returned his greeting with a smile of weary resignation and accepted the brandy which she cupped in the palms of her hands as if it was a bowl of hot soup. She was wearing black lacy knickers and bra that were designed to accentuate her bosom and show off as much skin as possible. Candy might have wanted to wear less obviously provocative clothes, but this was quite simply not an

option open to her.

The attempts at conversation that Lance initiated with Candy were not especially successful. It wasn't that Candy had difficulty speaking English, although she wasn't a native speaker and frowned quizzically at some of Lance's more colloquial expressions. It was rather that Lance's conversational skills had never been particularly good, especially not with women, and Candy was clearly apprehensive about what would happen once the talking stopped and the action began.

Lance had visited many prostitutes in his life and, of course, he'd lived with Betty for several years, so he knew his own pace well enough, although it was obviously far from being in tune with Candy's. In fact, it was apparent that she wasn't looking forward at all to having sex with Lance. It was with an expression of surrender to impending doom that she divested herself of her few clothes when Lance stripped himself down to his socks and underpants.

And then bolstered by his purchases from SteinMart's pharmaceutical shelves, specifically a StiffenYou tablet and a shot of Upnatem, Lance was ready for the sex he'd been fantasising about all day ever since an already naked Candy was delivered to him along with a selection of chains, bolts and keys. She'd looked fearful, helpless and submissive. From the moment Lance had signed the delivery receipt, he wanted to fuck the whore so hard that his main worry was that he'd fail to last more than two minutes before embarrassing himself on a girl who was indentured to him for the next ten years of her life.

After which, she'd no longer be Lance's responsibility.

But then who'd want a sex slave approaching her thirtieth birthday?

Lance needn't have worried. Modern medicine was a wonderful thing. It provided drugs to help you pass exams, compete in the most arduous cycle race, fend off the symptoms of lung cancer and diabetes, relieve the worst kind of constipation, and, of course, perform in bed when it mattered most. Indeed, Lance's lovemaking took so much more than two minutes that after an hour or so he was almost becoming bored of it, while Candy was showing no more evidence of enjoying it than she did on his first furtive fingering of her shaven vagina.

Lance made sure to tick off all the sexual activities he'd been missing for so long. Fucking in the vagina, up the buttocks, in the mouth. Slapping his dick on her cheeks, both on the face and behind. Back and forth and in and out and on and on and on. But eventually all that thrusting into a vagina and anus artificially lubricated by SteinMart's own brands had to come to a climax otherwise the entire exercise would be wasted. And when he did so, Lance's semen was copious and splattered all over Candy's face and bosom.

While Candy wiped off the fluids with the tissues he'd thoughtfully left for her on the bedside cabinet, Lance contemplated how he might improve on his sexual pleasure next time they had sex. Perhaps he'd get her to swallow. Perhaps he'd hire a whore from Milly's Pleasure Palace and make it a threesome. Perhaps he'd tie her up while he slapped her on the buttocks.

There was so much to do with her and he'd barely got started.

Lance lay naked on his back on the bed, his penis limp over his thigh and his socks still on. He smiled at Candy whose mouth dutifully returned his smile, but whose eyes remained unamused and almost hostile. She continued to wipe down her

bosom and the corners of her lips even though there was little evidence of there being any more semen to clean up.

Perhaps Lance could have a second go later that evening. But to do so he'd have to consult the guidance printed with his pharmaceutical purchases. He didn't want to get penis rash or a ruptured testicle. You heard such stories.

For the next few weeks, Lance spent as much time as he could with his fresh purchase. He slept with her at night, enjoying the pleasures of an early morning fuck that he'd not savoured since his early years with Betty. He spent his hours at work, when not poring over spreadsheets and workflow diagrams, daydreaming about Candy and how he would fuck her seven ways to heaven. Or at least give himself a taste of paradise. He browsed online not only to buy sex toys, sex pills, lubricants and erotic lingerie, but also to get advice on sex games, sexual postures and tips on how a man could achieve the very best ejaculation. He deliberately glossed over the sections in the literature that described how a man's sexual gratification was often exactly reciprocal to that enjoyed by the woman. There was no point in concerning himself with Candy's sexual pleasure in the sex they had together. She was Lance's to do with whatever he wished. Her own needs were really neither here nor there.

Nevertheless, Lance did take the precaution of reading the terms of his purchase agreement with regards to sale and return. The conditions by which he could return his purchase and get a full or even partial refund were very stringent. Unless Candy attacked him with a steak knife or burnt down his house, and that within the first week of her indentured service, Lance really had no recourse to return the goods.

On the other hand, GirlsULike did offer attractive rates for the training courses

they provided for indentured sex workers should their services not be wholly satisfactory, although it did emphasise that such training should also be followed by a strict regime to reinforce the lessons learnt. And these, naturally, included restraint, regular discipline and a prescribed course of libido-enhancing pills.

When at last free from the demands of working and commuting, Lance climbed into the bed he shared with Candy, the sheets freshly washed every day, and ploughed into her lubricated orifices while regaling her with his complaints about colleagues, bosses, road-hogs, scroungers and, worst of all, fanatical, scrounging, bad-smelling foreigners. There was so much to complain about.

Although Lance was proud to live in a country that respected the freedom of business, commerce and the individual (as long as it didn't stretch to heresy, treason or dissidence), there was too much tolerance for the kind of scum who wanted to spoil it all with their fraudulent sympathy for the environment, diversity, foreigners and pacifism. If the bastards had their way, Lance would have to cycle to work, surrender his guns, cut back on the calories, give up smoking, and, worst of all, let Candy loose with no likelihood of even a penny of compensation for the considerable sum she'd cost him.

And then, his prick stiffened by HardWood or DeepThrust, Lance would turn over to Candy, who visibly shivered whenever he mentioned the training courses provided by GirlsULike, and take her doggy style, pushing his hard penis as deep inside her as he could, splashing around in a lubricated hole that would otherwise be rather rough and resistant.

And then, one evening, not long after Lance had become accustomed to his

new way of life, his prick still deeply embedded in Candy's arse, he heard the doorbell ring.

At first he ignored it. The only thing it could be was a fund-raiser for a minority political candidate, so unlikely to win that he couldn't attract backing from the nation's millionaires, or, if not that, a fanatical religious cult or a charity for the poor and needy, who Lance believed didn't deserve a penny more than they could earn for themselves.

However, the doorbell was so insistent that Lance reluctantly withdrew from inside Candy and with his penis still stiff, he wrapped a dressing gown around his ample body and left Candy to wipe herself clean of Lance's perspiration.

"What is it?" Lance asked the two men in smart suits who stood at his front door. He knew they must have provided some kind of credentials to be allowed into the gated community, but it could still be that they were insurance salesmen or canvassers of one kind or another. And, in any case, it was possible that the credentials they'd presented were in the form of dollar notes.

Both men wore dark grey suits with white striped shirts and black shoes, but one had deep blue eyes and blond hair, whereas the other was well-built: the menace of his muscular frame accentuated by a totally bald head and expressionless dark eyes.

"You are Lance Apfelbaum of 58 Aspidistra Gardens, are you not?" asked the blond-haired man.

"Well, yes," said Lance, while the man's larger colleague made a note of this on his hand-held tablet.

"And I believe that on the fourteenth of last month you were in receipt of an

indentured sex worker with the trade name of Candy. Is this true, Mr Apfelbaum?”

“Yes,” said Lance with a strange sinking feeling. This conversation wasn’t boding well.

“I am here to inform you that there are complications with your purchase that are in contravention with the legal requirements for commerce of this nature.”

“You what? Are you from GirlsULike?”

“GirlsULike? That’s the name of the company from which you made your purchase, isn’t that so, Mr Apfelbaum?”

“Yes, it is. There must be a mistake of some kind. I have all the paperwork if you need to see it,” said Lance. And then, thinking that maybe he was acting too hastily. “But first of all I need to see proof of who you are.”

“Of course, Mr Apfelbaum. A wise precaution. You can’t be too careful these days, can you? We’re from Holden, Merriweather & Buchner. The stock reclamation company. You may have heard of us.”

Lance gulped as he examined the documents presented to him. Yes, he had heard of them. There were several well renowned stock reclamation companies, whose reputation for ruthlessness and unwillingness to compromise in pursuit of their clients’ interests was second only to that of debt collectors. And Holden, Merriweather & Buchner represented only those wealthier clients who had no time for complicated pleas of innocence and were indifferent to what methods might be employed. Like debt collectors, they were literally above the law, but only in the sense that the law of the land was deliberately framed in such a way that just as the wealthiest citizens were never liable for tax and no serving politician could be charged

with corruption, those employed to serve the interests of free trade and enforcing debt liability could do almost anything they liked to serve their clients' needs.

"I don't understand," said Lance, aware that no argument he made could possibly persuade these gentlemen to relent. "I did everything correctly. I even took out Liability Insurance..."

"Well, that's no use to you in the present circumstances, sir."

"Can you at least tell me what mistake I made?"

"Well," said the blond man as he consulted his notes. "We're most certainly not obliged to tell you anything of course. However, I can see that there was an irregularity not so much with your purchase but with the one made by GirlsULike. As you must be aware there is a chain of suppliers between you and the ultimate source, whose identity is as much a mystery to me as it is to you. Somewhere along the line, Candy was purchased by my client but was also sold on to another supplier. Very irregular, you must agree."

"Yes, I suppose so. Do you know who the client is?"

The larger man snorted angrily. "That isn't the kind of information we're at liberty to divulge," he said. "Let's stop wasting our time, sir. We want to collect the goods and leave."

"Certainly. Of course," said Lance nervously. "Am I entitled to any compensation for my loss?"

"Not from us, sir," said the blond man. "You'll have to take that up with GirlsULike. Unless of course you're insured against this kind of thing."

"Errm..."

“Just let us in, sir,” said the larger man. “Yours isn’t the only house we’re scheduled to visit tonight.”

Lance had no choice but to let the two representatives from Holden, Merriweather & Buchner in through his front door.

“We would prefer that you didn’t accompany us while we collect the goods, sir,” said the blond haired man. “First of all, where is the girl?”

Lance gestured up the stairs. “Second door on the left,” he said. “Candy will be on the bed. She won’t have any clothes on, I’m afraid.”

“Don’t worry about that, sir,” said the blond man as his larger colleague thundered up the stairs. “We have no interest in reclaiming subsidiary items that you’ve paid for either yourself or as part of the service provided by GirlsULike. We’re only interested in the girl. In fact, we prefer them naked. It makes our job easier. Now, if you could excuse me, sir.”

The blond man followed his colleague up the stairs, while Lance hovered around in the hallway, feeling both impotent and strangely violated. His main concern was what compensation, if any, he’d get from GirlsULike, especially now he’d been told that his Liability Insurance didn’t cover the current situation.

From upstairs, he first heard some startled screaming, followed by the blond man’s more measured reassuring words. For a moment, there was almost silence from upstairs. Then came a series of more screams accompanied by angry shouts that must have come from the bald muscular gentleman. This continued for several minutes while Lance continued to stand alone, uncertain whether to stay where he was or pretend to busy himself elsewhere. Perhaps he could raid the fridge and put together a

sandwich. But as it was he maintained his ground while letting his imagination wander as sounds came from his second bedroom that could have been almost anything.

It was nearly half an hour later that Candy was dragged downstairs, totally naked and in handcuffs and chains. One of her eyes was bruised and swelling, and from both eyes there was a stream of tears over her cheeks and onto her bare bosom. Lance caught a last glimpse of Candy's face before the representatives from Holden, Merriweather & Buchner dragged her out of his house and into the white van they had parked outside with the company's impressive Royal Crest and Latin motto adorning the bonnet and sides.

And Lance had never in his entire life before seen so much misery, dread and fear etched on a person's terrified face as he did on Candy's in that brief glimpse.

It was so unlike the image of a smiling, acquiescent and enthusiastic sex worker that GirlsULike had advertised and, in a sense, promised.

"Yes, we understand your problem, sir," said the call centre operator from GirlsULike when Lance made the phone call and navigated his way through all the options to the one most like his case. The woman on the other end of the phone had a weary patient voice very different from the enthusiastic upbeat voice of the salesman from which he'd originally purchased Candy. "However, your insurance doesn't fully cover your loss and the compensation we are legally obliged to offer you is only 40% of your original purchase price."

"Only 40%!" Lance wailed.

"You've had possession of your purchase for more than the 28 days trial

period and the terms by which you lost possession do not meet any of the prescribed conditions,” the call-centre voice continued. “However, we can offer you several options, sir.”

“And what are they?”

“Well, the first and simplest is to provide you with another indentured sex worker who is worth rather less than the original cost price. As a special offer to a loyal customer, we can offer a girl worth up to 55% of the price you paid. However, she isn’t going to be even nearly the same quality as your original purchase who was called...erm...Candy. She won’t be as much to your satisfaction as Candy was.”

“What would such a girl be like?”

“It’s unlikely she’d be a girl as such, unless she’s damaged in some way...”

“Damaged?”

“Disabled. Amputated limbs. Facial or genital injuries. Somewhat worse than plain. Nonetheless, GirlsULike prides itself on the quality of its merchandise, so she’s unlikely to be a girl and more likely to be a woman. And at that price she’s unlikely to be much younger than you are, sir.”

Lance didn’t like the idea of that at all. What was the point in buying an indentured sex worker who was about the same age as his wife would be? Or, worse, some kind of deformed freak?

“What are the other options?”

“Well, the next easiest option is that we simply reimburse you for 40% of the cost of the original procurement. You’ll have nothing else to show for it except the memory of your initial purchase.”

“And the other options?”

“There’s only one other, sir, and that is that we take the compensation cost of 55% and you can pay extra on top of that to choose another girl. Perhaps another ‘Candy’, sir, if that’s a name you particularly like.”

“And can I insure against similar problems in the future if I do so?”

“It’s funny you should say that, sir,” said the call-centre voice. “We do have a new Platinum Premium Insurance Scheme that bundles Liability Insurance in with other products that will protect you in future.”

“And if I pay 45% of the original price plus the extra insurance, I can have a girl just like Candy?”

“Subject to availability, of course, sir. Shall I pass you over to a Sales Representative?”

“Yes, of course,” said Lance, who realised once again that he’d agreed to pay substantially more than he’d originally anticipated.

But such was the penalty of living in a free society and one which Lance would rather face any day than any of the altogether unpalatable alternatives.