

Asian Aphrodisiacs

From Bangkok to Beijing—
The Search for the Ultimate Turn-On



Jerry Hopkins

Author of #1 *NY Times* bestseller

No One Here Gets Out Alive

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Asian Aphrodisiacs

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(Website: www.jerryhopkins.com)

Email: jerry@jerryhopkins.com)

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The Search for the Ultimate Turn-On

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Asia Pacific
Berkeley Books Pte. Ltd.
61 Tai Seng Avenue #02-12
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Tel: (65) 6280-1330
Fax: (65) 6280-6290
inquiries@periplus.com.sg
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To my ever-patient wife, Lamyai

Contents

Introduction

[Groucho & Me, On a Prowl . . . 11](#)

[A Note about Geography . . . 18](#)

Chapter one

[Rhymes with Niagara, Means the Opposite . . . 19](#)

Chapter two

[The Anatomy of Excitement . . . 29](#)

[**Sidebar: The Lucky Lady's Anatomy . . . 34**](#)

Chapter three

[Aphrodisiacs from 400 B.C. . . . 37](#)

Chapter four

[Ayurvedic Medicine: Going to Bed with the Gods . . . 47](#)

[**Sidebar: Chewing Betel Nut . . . 56**](#)

Chapter five

[Traditional Chinese Medicine: Better Sex with the Help of the Yellow Emperor . . . 59](#)

[**Sidebar: Horny Goat Weed & Bald Chicken Tonic . . . 66**](#)

Chapter six

[Jammin' with Jamu . . . 69](#)

Chapter seven

[The Spices of Life . . . 77](#)

Chapter eight

[Tempest in a C-Cup & Other Arousing Tales . . . 87](#)

Chapter nine

["Medical" Marijuana . . . 95](#)

[**Sidebar: One Consumer's Endorsement . . . 103**](#)

Chapter ten

[The Other Story of O . . . 105](#)

Chapter eleven

[The Placebo Effect . . . 115](#)

Chapter twelve

[Cruel & Unusual Aphrodisia . . . 121](#)

Chapter thirteen

[Great Balls of Fire . . . 131](#)

Chapter fourteen

[Garden Snakes & Trouser Snakes . . . 137](#)

Chapter fifteen

[Sex from the Sea 143](#)

Chapter sixteen

[Birds Do It... . . . 151](#)

Chapter seventeen

[Bees Do It... . . . 157](#)

Sidebar: More Buzz . . . 162

Chapter eighteen

[Herbal Whisky, Scorpion Wine & a Serpent's Beating Heart . . . 165](#)

Chapter nineteen

[Better Loving, Through Chemistry . . . 173](#)

Chapter twenty

[Goopy Is Good . . . 181](#)

Chapter twenty-one

[The Sweet Smell of Success . . . 187](#)

Sidebar: Scents of Seduction . . . 194

Chapter twenty-two

[Ragas for Lovers Only . . . 197](#)

Chapter twenty-three

[Different Strokes for Different Folks . . . 205](#)

Chapter twenty-four

[The Tao & Tantra of Ejaculation Control . . . 213](#)

Chapter twenty-five

[From Pillow Talk to Pornography . . . 221](#)

Chapter twenty-six

[The Joy of Mechanical Sex . . . 231](#)

Sidebar: Condomania . . . 241

Chapter twenty-seven

[Surgery: Fact or Phallusy? . . . 243](#)

Afterword

[Things That Work . . . 251](#)

Introduction

Groucho & Me, On a Prowl

The *Lonely Planet* guide to Thailand calls Bangkok's weekend market at Chatuchak the "Disneyland of Thai markets," some eight thousand shops and stalls spread over thirty acres making its claim to be the world's largest open air bazaar a believable boast. It is a place where it's said you can buy anything—from hot meals, potted plants, kitchenware, arts and crafts, new and used clothing, Buddha statues and magic amulets, furniture, fresh fruit and vegetables, and exotic pets, endangered ones if you ask discreetly and don't look like a cop.

So I was not surprised to find a man with a folding table selling aphrodisiacs. I picked up a bottle made from brown glass, about four inches high, approximately an inch in diameter. The label was in English as well as Thai and read: SKINK OIL WITH HERB INCEREASE PENIS SIZEL ADD HARD MAKES GUARNTEE SALE FOR YOUR SPECIAL PURPOSE CERTAINLY 7 DAYS BY RMASSAGE. From which I gathered it was for external use rather than something to be consumed.

I was relieved to learn that because the word "skink" sounded familiar, but what, exactly, was skink? I asked the vendor, a man about fifty wearing a baggy shirt and slacks, if I was correct.

"Same-same *jing jok*?" I said, using the Thai word for gecko. Was a skink a member of the lizard family?

His spoken English facility seemed even less equal to the challenge than the label on the bottle. Smiling, he said, "Four hundred fifty baht." A little more than \$10.

I next looked at a jar no more than an inch high and an inch in diameter. Its label merely defined its purpose: GROW FOR HAIRY CREAM. Asians don't have much body hair and I guessed that along with the general wish to have lighter skin, there was a market composed of the non-hirsute.

"Two hundred baht," the salesman said.

That wasn't all. Along with the rows of small bottles and jars were flat boxes containing...I wasn't sure what. Picture a pale rubber band about the size of a coin with what looked like short stiff hairs about a quarter of an inch in length projecting outward from the perimeter.

I looked up at the vendor for guidance. "What's that for?" I asked, shrugging and turning my palms upward in what I hoped was the universal gesture for puzzlement. He smiled and mimed picking one up and fitting it over his penis. I bent forward and looked again.

Was it a cock ring? I guessed it was, but I'd never seen one that looked like that. Most were made from leather with a snap or Velcro to tighten it around the base of the cock. This looked like... suddenly I stood straight up. When I accepted the assignment to write this book, I sent an email plea to everyone I knew, asking for input and among the dozens of replies came one from a woman who told me about the dried eyelid ring of a sheep or goat (including the eyelashes). The dried ring was put in water to soften it, she said, then stretched open and placed on the penis just behind the head (not at the base) with the eye lashes upward. The idea being that the lashes tickled the lady's vagina as the man moved in and out.

I leaned forward and looked again. As far as I knew, there weren't that many sheep or goats in Thailand. And the eyelashes of a pig or water buffalo not only might be inappropriate, but also somewhat outsized, given the size of most local penises. (A subject I'll address soon.) I examined the product more closely, deciding that it, like so much for sale in Thailand, was counterfeit.

I returned my gaze to the “skink oil.” I lifted the bottle and unscrewed the top, then raised it to my nose and sniffed. It smelled faintly reptilian—if something can smell slithery and somehow menacing—but who could tell for sure? As I screwed the top back onto the bottle, I asked myself: would I risk anointing my cock with this for seven days?

My reverie was interrupted as the vendor stated the price again, but this time it had come down to a hundred baht. Recalling how many other things I’d done over the years with and to my genitals, I grinned and said, “Make it two hundred and fifty” and reached for my wallet.

Near the end of his fabled life, Groucho Marx was given an honorary doctorate at Harvard University and praised as a genius who contributed a new dimension to comedy, creating an original comic vocabulary and style. He acknowledged the critique with his trademark raised eyebrows and said every bit of the praise was well deserved and then he added that he would give it all back for “one more hard-on.”

It was unfortunate that he didn’t visit Asia, because when it comes to making it bigger, harder, longer-lasting and more fun, the men of the world’s largest and most populous continent have been and continue to be more inventive and daring than their horny counterparts anywhere else.

And if Groucho had accompanied me on the journey I’ve taken around Asia, going where I’ve gone, swallowing the potions and pills that were guaranteed to make me “strong,” doing what I’ve done to my genitals with lotions and mechanical devices and “toys”—his eyebrows would have gone up and down as never they had before.

He, like me, would have been amazed.

When my publisher suggested this assignment, he was too tactful to say so, but I knew he figured that I was suited for the quest. I was a skeptical Westerner who didn’t believe in what I called “superstition.” Tiger penis soup and rhino horn? Give me a break. Not only did men who consumed such things threaten the existence of two of the planet’s magnificent creatures, the idea that they recharged one’s sexual batteries seemed as ludicrous to me as it was environmentally incorrect.

Equally important was the fact that at age sixty-nine, like Hugh Hefner, who was a decade older, I was a fan of Viagra and other pharmaceutical wonders now part of what is called the “erectile dysfunction” (ED) marketplace.

Put simply, my cock no longer responded to my call as it once did and I found myself looking for help.

I’m also an old hippie who doesn’t much care for chemicals, preferring (when I was a young hippie) peyote and hashish and marijuana to uppers and downers and LSD. And if I scoffed at much of the “alternative” medicine and therapies gaining a big following, I knew that numerous scientists in Europe and America were open to the notion that there might be real promise in the alternative health systems then making inroads in Western medicine than we doubters had surmised.

What’s more, after researching and writing *Strange Foods* and *Extreme Cuisine*, two big books looking at what their titles implied, it was clear that I was willing to put just about anything into my mouth and swallow it. So when it came to exploring the world of aphrodisiacs, up close and personal to my publisher it appeared that I had the balls for the job.

Finally, it furthered my belief that life was for adventure...and that there was always time for one more. Thus researching and writing about Asian aphrodisiacs seemed a reasonable way to spend a year or two.

Call it a quest.

Call it a search for perfect sex.

Or, at least better than what I had last week.

And should there be any readers who think that I’m a male chauvinist pig, I plead guilty, but I also

believe that if the preponderance of material on the subject of aphrodisiacs is male-focused, it may be because it's a phallogocentric society we live in—and perhaps even more so in Asia than in the West—and it is he (not she) who has the bigger problem.

Say the word “aphrodisiac” and most people think you’re talking about something to eat or drink. Some say it is something that has to “create desire, not improve performance and ability.” That same source—*howstuffworks.com*—goes on to say some aphrodisiacs “create sexual desire by working on the mind, and there are those that create desire by affecting parts of the body. For example, something that increased blood flow in the sex organs might stimulate the feelings of sexual intercourse and have the effect of creating desire. Likewise, there are things that can make our bodies produce more of the chemicals associated with sexual desire. Something that lowers inhibitions in the mind, such as alcohol or marijuana, might also create (or allow) the desire to have sex. Sometimes, just thinking something is an aphrodisiac makes it appear to work as one.”

Another authority, *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, says an aphrodisiac is “any of various forms of stimulation thought to arouse sexual excitement” and divides them into two principal groups: “(1) psycho-physiological (visual, tactile, olfactory, aural) and (2) internal (stemming from food, alcohol, drinks, drugs, love potions, medical preparations).” This, too, remains somewhat vague, but it opens the door wide to interpretation.

In the chapters that follow, I meet the people, visit the places, and “road test” many of Asia’s most popular aphrodisiacs. Following the *Britannica*’s lead, I include any substance, animal, vegetable, or mineral—and in the age of Viagra and its competitors, pharmaceutical—that is used to stimulate a man’s or woman’s libido, increase sexual energy, encourage and maintain the erection of the penis or increase feeling in the vagina and clitoris, intensify orgasm for all partners, and in any way possible enhance the enjoyment of sex. I further embrace belief systems such as Tantra and Tao; substances and mechanical devices for external and internal play (vibrators and cock rings and penis extenders and other toys, lotions, and aromatherapy); a variety of surgical procedures; music; and pornography that is used to win the same results.

This is not a book like any other about aphrodisiacs, and not just because I’ve gone with an expanded definition of what an aphrodisiac is. Go to *amazon.com* and you get hundreds of titles and from those I read, virtually all offer little but praise, most of them with a lot of strings attached. Quit smoking and alcohol and all recreational drugs, start an exercise program, change your diet (swear off fast food forever, etc.), and take these expensive pills two times a day for six months and, guess what, you’ll feel healthier and probably sexier, too.

I don’t see anything wrong with that. But it’s not for me. Nor am I necessarily looking only for the quick fix. Let’s face it, there’s nothing growing on a vine or swimming in the sea or moving through the jungles that’s going to produce the quick if temporary results of Viagra and a number of other chemical pick-me-ups that have been introduced in the past few years.

What this book is, then, is a look at the information that’s come down through the ages about aphrodisiacs, with the focus on Asia, the region that has what I think is the most interesting history and greatest variety. Most of it is crapola, but some of it, after all this time, seems promising.

A Note about Geography

When embarking on this survey, I planned to include the Middle along with the Far East, as well as all the “stans” (Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Turkistan, et cetera) and eastern Russia. But

the outside world's notion of what is and isn't the Orient has changed. Where once Istanbul was regarded as the gateway to the East, now Turkey is knocking on the European Union's door. Including that vast part of the world also threatened to make this book overlong and unwieldy. So I decided to limit my study to what is more widely considered Asia today, stretching from the South (India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan), across Southeast Asia (Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Brunei), and northward to include China, Taiwan, the two Koreas, and Japan.

Chapter one

Rhymes with Niagara, Means the Opposite

Back in the 1980s, researchers at Pfizer & Company, an American pharmaceutical conglomerate that today is known for such popular over-the-counter remedies as Benadryl, Listerine, Neosporin, Rolaid, Sudafed, and Visine, as well as for numerous prescription drugs and animal health products, started looking for a class of chemicals with the potential for treating cardiovascular disease. The company began its research by examining hypertension, and that soon led them to angina, the chest and arm pain caused by poor blood flow to the heart. In the discovery process, Pfizer's chemists reportedly concocted about 1,500 chemical compounds, testing some for as long as four years.

In 1989, they found the chemical mix that we now know as Viagra and started clinical trials in the U.K. By 1992, results showed the medication to be not so wonderful as they'd hoped and the tests were stopped. That's when something unexpected happened. Men refused to return their test samples and some research subjects camped out on pharmacy doorsteps to see if they could get more of the stuff. It turned out that, as a side effect, Viagra gave erections to men who had long been suffering from impotence.

Pfizer hadn't become one of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies by being stupid, though its chemists went full speed ahead with testing Viagra as something to treat erectile dysfunction, or ED. To everyone's delight, it turned out to be medicine's newest magic bullet, and the bedroom's Holy Grail. Not since the birth control pill was introduced in the 1960s had a medical discovery so completely changed the way many of the planet's inhabitants started relating to each other, as millions of flagging penises rose up like daffodils in the spring.

What Pfizer discovered was that their failed cholesterol drug suppressed the action of an enzyme that was responsible for breaking down nitric oxide. Nitric oxide (NO) had the effect of relaxing the walls of the capillaries, thereby allowing blood to flow freely into the penile shaft, engorge the tissue and cause erection. As men get older, they produce less and less NO. Viagra reversed that process and got the blood flowing freely again, becoming the first oral medicine (a pill you take by mouth) that was proven to improve erections in a majority of men with impotence.

In 1998, after gaining approval by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the U.S. and the European Union's equivalent, the European Medicines Evaluation Agency (EMA), Pfizer found itself riding a wave of a size and force rarely seen in pharmaceutical history. This diamond-shaped blue pill became a cultural phenomenon—it seemed every issue of the *New Yorker* and *Playboy* had at least one cartoon—spreading around the world until, by 2004, Viagra was available in 123 countries, where more than twentyseven million men had been treated by 600,000 prescribing physicians. Pfizer claimed on its website that nine Viagra pills were dispensed every second, nearly three hundred million tablets per year. In another statistic provided by Pfizer—reminding me of the signs we always used to see beneath the Golden Arches, tallying the number of worldwide burger sales—in the first six years, there were 1,066,102,768 tablets sold.

A billion new hard-ons! Think of it.

Okay, now here's the humorous side of the story. Pfizer insisted that Viagra was not a

aphrodisiac.

When I discovered that Amal Naj, a onetime reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*, was the honcho for Pfizer in Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, and was a fellow member of the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand, I requested a meeting and asked several questions. He did what men in his position likely do everywhere: he referred me to a “spokesperson” at the company headquarters, in Pfizer’s case in New York. Daniel J. Watts, with whom I then began an email correspondence, toed the company line voiced in early advertising stating: “VIAGRA is not a hormone, an herbal supplement, or an aphrodisiac. VIAGRA is a prescription medication that can improve the erectile function of most men with erection problems. So with VIAGRA, a touch or a glance from your partner can once again lead to something more.”

That sure sounded like an aphrodisiac to me, although I understood why it couldn’t be marketed such—especially in the West, where prevailing puritanical attitudes insisted that sex should be procreative and otherwise repressed.

Viagra came to Asia fast and within a year or two of its introduction, people started thinking it could have an unintended beneficial side effect: reducing the lethal pressure on some of the world’s most endangered species. Viagra wasn’t designed to have an environmental impact, but there was hope that its power to correct impotence might also reduce demand for various animal parts and plants that were consumed in the region as aphrodisiacs.

“For years,” wrote Susan McCarthy in *salon.com*, “I’ve been hearing that rhinos—horribly endangered—are being slaughtered because Asian medicine prescribes rhino horn as an aphrodisiac. I’ve heard that tigers are nearing extinction because tiger bone is used in Asia as an aphrodisiac. I’ve heard that abalone, seahorses and sea turtles are also threatened by the same enormous demand for aphrodisiacs.

“So the advent of Viagra, the famous new erection-granting drug, made me wonder whether there would be a case of technology to the rescue. There was such a frenzy over Viagra in the U.S. —if there were even a fraction of that going on in Asian countries, might not people around the globe stop putting guns to the very heads of tigers and rhinos, turning on their heels and rushing down to the pharmacy?”

Susan was not alone in expressing such optimism. Frank von Hippel, who taught conservation biology at the University of Alaska, and his brother William, a professor of social psychology at the University of New South Wales in Sydney and a frequent customer at Chinese herbal shops in Hong Kong, published a hypothesis in *Science* magazine in 1998 and following three years of study published positive results in the journal *Environmental Conservation*. They said sales had fallen in the market for sex organs of Canadian seals and reindeer antler—virtually all of which usually had been exported to China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, and other parts of Asia. While *Time* magazine shouted on its May 11, 1998 cover the message, “Forget the deer tail, powdered seahorse, oysters on the half shell and candlelight dinners. There is a cure for IMPOTENCY and it’s a pill called Viagra.”

(A reporter conveniently named Bruce Handy wrote the story. He did not admit to trying Viagra or any of the other ingredients, himself.)

Alas, it didn’t mean much, as John Roach reported in *National Geographic News* soon afterward that “Despite Prediction, Viagra Hasn’t Stemmed Trade in Threatened Wildlife.”

I wasn’t surprised. For several reasons.

One: Many of the animal and plant “cures” for impotence appearing in what is called Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), in India’s Ayurvedic medicine, in the Himalayas and Indonesia and elsewhere in Asia, and in the ethno-botany and folklore of just about everywhere else, were believed to salve or solve not just sexual problems but a variety of other maladies. Bear gall bladder and bil-

for example, was hailed as an aphrodisiac, but also was used in TCM to treat a variety of illnesses including fever, convulsions, diabetes, and liver and heart disease. Similarly, tiger bone was thought to stimulate the libido, but it was also used to cure rheumatism, muscle pain, and paralysis.

Two: Superstition and folk belief die harder (and far, far more slowly) than Viagra and other pharmaceutical concoctions make any penis firm. The U.S. FDA declared that there was no scientific proof that anything sold over-the-counter (without prescription)—or, presumably, hunted and gathered in the wild—worked to treat sexual dysfunction. Still, a lot of people—mainly in Asia and Chinatowns around the world—weren't listening.

Why? Simple. FDA's blanket condemnation clashed with "tradition" based on anecdotal evidence and ritual that had been handed down from generation to generation for millennia—TCM and Ayurvedic medicine dating back at least two and a half thousand years. Such traditions were not given up easily, because to surrender them would require the believer to admit that he or she was "wrong" and to abandon any hope that might be attached to those beliefs. And to deny any real benefit from the "placebo effect," the demonstrated good that sometimes comes from taking something that has no provable value.

In addition, the rarity of any species of fauna for which demand was high, especially in Asia, led to costs so high, the price itself often was regarded as evidence that they were the best possible "cure" available. A bowl of tiger penis soup might go for \$350 in the black market in Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan. Some consumers also purchased food and drugs made from endangered species as a show of affluence and of macho braggadocio.

Besides, even if the true believers had any doubts, so long as they could afford it, didn't it make sense to continue to use the traditional remedies and take Viagra or one of the other chemical compounds as well? What the hell could it hurt, except the endangered animal?

Three: Viagra and other prescription drugs were too expensive for most Asians, while the cost of most herbal remedies remained affordable. In 2006 in the pharmacy in Bangkok where I did my shopping, a package of four 100 mg Viagra pills cost \$45, and its leading prescription competitor, Cialis cost \$50, extravagant sums in a country where the minimum wage is under \$4 a day.

This brings us to the subject of counterfeits. In the 1980s, the Itewon district in Seoul was one of Asia's first magnets for foreign shoppers looking for cheap knock-off goods. By the turn of the twenty-first century, there were markets throughout Asia where copies of anything you wanted were available for an affordable price. In my neighborhood in Bangkok, credible copies of Rolex watches, top-of-the-line perfumes, the newest CDs and videos (including European, American, local, and Japanese pornography), designer clothing, computer software—were sold right on the street, and Asia's counterfeit countries led the world in the production of fake goods, including pharmaceuticals.

Much of this counterfeit medicine came from what could be called the "patent-free zones" of China and India. One copy, made in Mumbai, India, was called Kamagra, its name surely designed to evoke the *Kama Sutra*; in 2005, it was priced at \$10 for four 100 mg pills, less than a quarter of the cost of Viagra. Another from India, called Zeagra, that I purchased in Cambodia, cost only \$3! So, too, were several "clones" from China. And, speaking from experience, they worked.

It's not surprising that Pfizer and other big drug companies in the West were not thrilled about this. Because these were not, in the legal sense, generic drugs. A generic drug—quoting America's FDA again—was a copy that was the same as a brand name drug in dosage, safety, strength, how it was taken, quality, performance, and intended use. The only thing that distinguished a copy from the "real thing" was usually the cost, with generics priced up to seventy per cent less than the identical compounds that carried the recognized brand names.

Generic drugs were less expensive because generic manufacturers didn't have the investment costs that the developer of a new drug had. Thus, new drugs were marketed under patent protection—the

patent designed to safeguard this investment (including research, development, marketing, and promotion) by giving the developing company the sole right to sell the drug while the patent was in effect, usually a period of twenty years. Only as patents neared expiration, could other manufacturers apply to sell generic versions. Currently, almost half of the world's prescriptions are filled with generic drugs. And Viagra and *sildenafil citrate*, the chemical compound that is Viagra's active ingredient, isn't yet one of them.

Four: Governments in Asia have done nothing to promote the use of alternatives to products made from endangered species. While it is understandable that governments don't wish to be put in the position of endorsing herbal treatments and the like that haven't been clinically tested, it should also be pointed out that these nations also have, for a variety of reasons, failed to enforce existing laws about the killing and trafficking of these animals.

Five: My final reason for believing Viagra and all the others won't save the tiger, the rhino, the bear, and other threatened species is something I learned after I ran into a friend at a party and asked him if he'd met any interesting aphrodisiacs lately. (A conversational icebreaker guaranteed to work every time among Bangkok's aging expatriate community.) He said he'd purchased a bottle of something in Shanghai called Xingshijiu, supposedly made entirely from herbal ingredients. It was, he said, better than Viagra.

I went to good old Google and typed in the word Xingshijiu and learned that the Taiwan Department of Health had had a number of imported Chinese medicines tested. Xingshijiu was one of seven that were found to contain *sildenafil citrate*, the patented ingredient that made Viagra work but was not naturally found in any of the herbs listed as ingredients. Another story, from Singapore, reported Xingshijiu was among three "herbal remedies" found to contain the same Pfizer chemical again appearing in the bottled drink anonymously.

The obvious lesson being that you don't want to fight the enemy; you embrace him, add him (and it) to your recipe. In this fashion, ironically, Viagra didn't cut into sales of herbal remedies, it actually augmented them by increasing their effectiveness.

Chapter two

The Anatomy of Excitement

The body of evidence is not overwhelming, but what exists is in agreement: the Asian penis is smaller than those of Western men and men from the Middle East and Africa.

Many serious students of sex—from Alfred Kinsey in the mid-1940s to Masters & Johnson in the 1950s to the Janus Report in the 1990s—didn't consider size that significant, so they didn't care so much about its measurements as they cared about what men did with it. That said, in the smallest sampling the researchers did do, Asians always placed last, nearly an inch (2.5 centimeters) shorter than the average worldwide. A Caucasian penis averaged 6.4 inches (16 cm) in length, erect, while black males closely followed with 6.2 inches (15.5 cm). Hispanic men averaged 6.0 inches (just under 15 cm). And Asian men brought up the rear with 5.6 inches (13.7 cm). Some Internet webpages put blacks ahead of whites, but like so much information available in cyber-space, no recognizable verifiable sources at the sites I found were identified. For the record, the longest on record (erect) was reported to be about 12 inches (30 cm), the shortest under half an inch (1.3 cm), not counting cases where men are born without.

More evidence was anecdotal. When I lived in Hawaii, where at least half the population was Asian heritage, two sizes of condoms were sold in the pharmacies, marked on the packages "Regular" and "Oriental." Guess which ones were smaller.

Another story was probably apocryphal. Sometime during World War Two, or maybe it was the Korean War, America's propaganda geniuses suggested that condoms eight inches long (20 cm) be distributed behind enemy lines marked "Made in the USA —Small." I have not been able to find anyone to confirm this story, yet it remains a tale that begs the question: why would anyone make up?

The important question is, does it really make any difference?

Ask the man who has one.

I don't know when people started measuring penises. Nowadays, all men do it. Is there a man reading this book who doesn't know the length of his cock? (It's measured from where the top of the erect penis meets the body, while holding it straight out, perpendicular to the torso. Not from beneath which can add an inch or so.) The Kinsey Institute may say that "size is no more a measure of manhood, sexual capacity, or the ability to please a partner than is the size of a man's feet," as it did in a report in 1990, but many men disagree. Most men believe that size counts, and the problem is for so many that it doesn't count high, or long, enough.

Before getting into the myriad things that Asian men do to increase their size, firmness, stamina, and pleasure (for their partners as well as themselves), we should consider the anatomy of a hard-on. For that is, after all, what much of this book is all about and it should be understood. Once acquainted with the basic physiology of the erection, it may be easier to comprehend and evaluate what is being offered on both the open and underground markets to enhance its appearance and performance.

And please, ladies, be patient. There is much here for you, too. Kinsey may have gone on to say there was "no scientific research suggesting that women generally prefer large penises, but there is research showing that most women *do not care* about their sexual partners' penis size." (Italics the Kinsey Institute's.) Still, knowing what normally happens to the penis, however large or small, when

sexually attractive human comes into the horny man's view and/or imagination should be of interest to both sexes. In a moment, too, we'll take a look at what gets a woman excited, a subject about which most men probably are as dumb as a brick.

Okay, here we go, with a very short lesson in male anatomy.

Think of the penis as three hot dogs, two fat and one thin, running parallel, wrapped in a strong fibrous and expandable sheath resembling a sausage skin (called the *tunica albuginea*) and topped by a small, helmet-shaped onion with a hole in it. The two fatter wieners, called *corpora cavernosa*, are next to each other on top and the thinner one, called the *corpus spongiosum*, nestles between and beneath. It contains the *urethra*, the thin duct that carries urine from the bladder, sperm from the testicles, and other precious bodily fluids from the prostate, Cowper's, and urethral glands. All three hot dogs are made up of erectile tissue and are inflatable.

Now picture the hot dogs with much of the contents removed. That's what the penis looks like when flaccid, or unerect. There are small arteries from the body leading to these hot dogs that are normally dilated, reducing inflow of blood. In addition, there are small muscles down there that tighten to keep the hot dogs limp, so men don't embarrass themselves on the beach or in the office.

Okay. Now take that three-in-one hot dog into a go-go bar in Angeles City in the Philippines or show it some *anime*, the animated comic book porn that makes up such a charming part of the video market in Japan, or place it in a sexy setting with its owner's partner or new best friend anywhere from Jakarta to Shanghai to Mumbai.

If all goes well, desire assumes control, fantasies take flight, and messages from the brain zip down the spinal cord to the genitals, where several chemicals are released that relax the muscles, allowing blood to flow freely as the libido demands, simultaneously inflating all three hot dogs and the onion to capacity.

This is when it gets exciting, when the hot dogs become noticeable as an elongated bulge through a man's jeans and he begins thinking with what's called the "wrong head," as jokers say, the blood exiting the one on top of his neck to fill the one below his belt, often leaving the topmost one incapable of making a responsible decision but with a sappy grin on its face.

Judgment is suspended as the hot dogs almost double in diameter and length, due to the increased blood flow. The veins feeding the *corpora cavernosa* and *corpus spongiosum* when pumped up they are squeezed almost completely shut by the pressure of the bloated erectile tissue. The small muscles tense like rubber bands. The gates are closed! The blood cannot escape!

But of course that's not so for everyone. Millions of men can't get it up or maybe it goes on halfway or once there it goes quickly to sleep again. There are many reasons why.

Psychological explanations top the list, fear of failure being the most common, and in the list of diseases affecting a man's ability to get an erection, diabetes is the most common. It's estimated that up to fifty to sixty per cent of diabetic men are thus affected, tens of millions of them worldwide. Obesity is another cause and where once this wasn't a big problem, nowadays it's a growing one. Multiple sclerosis, bladder dysfunction, Parkinson's disease, stroke, and chronic kidney insufficiency add more.

Smoking and alcohol make things worse. Studies indicate that even two cigarettes will markedly decrease the blood flow to the penis if smoked before sex—and men who smoke two packs a day deflate faster, because the arteries as a longterm result constrict and harden. Alcohol attacks on many fronts, causing nerve damage, shrunken testicles, brain failure, and a rise in the female hormone estrogen. And let's not forget that bit of Shakespearean wisdom about booze increasing desire while simultaneously reducing the capacity to do anything about satisfying it. How many cigarette smokers and heavy boozers are there in Asia? They are numerous.

More culprits are prescription drugs, especially some of those used by men with prostate cancer

diuretics, beta blockers and other drugs prescribed for high blood pressure and cardio-vascular disease, tranquilizers, and decongestants. No one knows how many men these affect, either.

The number of older men affected by the Limp Willy Syndrome for reasons of age is another unfathomable mystery. But it's estimated that as many as fifty per cent over the age of fifty are affected to some degree.

For me it did not seem promising. I drank—only beer, but in quantity. In 2000, I had had open heart surgery—a triple bypass—and I was on a full complement of drugs to reduce my blood pressure and cholesterol level. And I was, alas, of a certain age.

The Lucky Lady's Anatomy

The female anatomy and its “requirements” during sex are both simpler and more complex, and surely deserving of more than a sidebar to the male's. Yet, as stated, the question of being better in bed is substantially more a man's problem than a woman's, as most women will attest.

The vagina is a pink, tubular hallway about four inches (ten centimeters) long and about an inch (two and a half cm) wide that takes the visitor from the vulva and fleshy lips on the outside to the uterus on the inside. This is where much of the fun occurs. This also is the path for menstrual fluids leaving the body and the elastic channel through which a baby is born.

It is the elasticity that allows objects far larger than the relaxed dimensions here stated might indicate. Just as a man's little worm may, on excitement, become a fence post, the vagina may become a orifice into which the fence post comfortably fits. This is most easily accomplished when glands near the vaginal opening and the cervix release a woman's natural lubrication. More liquid may seep through the vaginal wall.

For some women this doesn't always happen so easily. Some men are so randy they may be turned on by a Victoria's Secret catalog (in my youth, it was Sears Roebuck), but for many women it often takes a greater effort or commitment from both sides of the bed. Still, for sexual intercourse to occur, the woman doesn't have to “get it up” and keep it there. In this way, sex may seem “easier” for the female than the male, although that's probably a male point of view.

What leads a woman to sexual pleasure, or orgasm? There are nerve endings close to the entrance of the vagina, not unlike the nerve endings in the man's penis. Equally important, at the opening of the vagina is the clitoris, a bump often compared to the penis because it becomes larger and more erect when the woman is sexually excited. Gentle friction here usually delivers pleasure, too.

Finally, about two inches (five cm) inside the vagina (for some but not all women) is the legendary “G-spot,” which can produce intense orgasm if stimulated in a way that suits the individual.

Chapter three

Aphrodisiacs from 400 B.C.

India might not be as much fun today as it was back when the *Kama Sutra* was first compiled in Sanskrit from more than a dozen ancient texts, when in the fourth century AD, a Brahman scholar named Vatsyayana explored the connection between mystic experience and amorous Ecstasy. In the centuries that followed, his text was well received, and the numerous and imaginative positions of sex described in the book were artistically carved in stone and graphically displayed on Hindu temple walls over much of India.

In this fashion, what purportedly described the sexual mores of cultured Hindus became a sort of “chapbook,” first for the population of the great subcontinent and later, in the twentieth century, when it became a sex manual for the Love Generation in the West. With the introduction of the birth control pill in the early 1960s and the “sexual liberation movement” that quickly followed, the pages devoted to “sexual congress” that read somewhat like a handbook for Chinese acrobats became the world’s most widely known guide to the pleasures and techniques of sex.

Ironically, by that time in India, the sexual tide had reversed, thanks in large part to Victorian era Anglo-Saxon prejudice. Mahatma Gandhi, educated in England, is justly revered as the guru of modern India’s spirit and spirituality, but what isn’t generally remembered is that he dispatched his disciples in teams to smash erotic temple art. And as Alain Daniélou stated in the introduction to his translation of the *Kama Sutra* (published in 1994), Pandit Nehru, hailed as the true father of what we know as India today, “was irritated by my having photographed and published the photographs of sculptures showing homosexual relations, dating from the eleventh century, when he claimed that such vice in India was due to Western influence.” It was Nehru, too, who pushed through laws forbidding anal and oral sex “with a man, woman or animal.” Daniélou observed, “The country of the *Kama Sutra* had thus been relegated to the level of the most backward countries in the sphere of liberty.”*

It was in the holy city on the Ganges called Benares (since renamed Varanasi) that Vatsyayana collected the ancient manuscripts from which he drew his inspiration and quoted numerous important passages. When I visited Varanasi more than 1,600 years after Vatsyayana, I stayed in a guesthouse overlooking the Ganges and the *ghats*, the wide riverside platforms with steps that led directly into the river. Varanasi had been continuously populated for three thousand years, making it a contemporary of Thebes and Babylon. This also was Shiva’s sacred city and that made the waters especially powerful. Every Hindu at some time in his or her life, if possible, made a pilgrimage here, more than a million every year, coming to purify themselves with a dip at dawn.

I had missed the early crowds when I walked the mile or two into the old city center my first morning in the ancient city, but still there were many dressed in loincloths or translucent white garments, submerging themselves and pouring the water over their heads, even drinking it, while praising and imploring the multitudinous Hindu gods. Here and there, too, were some of India’s famed *sadhus*, the naked holy men who invented dreadlocks centuries before Bob Marley stopped combing his hair, their bodies painted in bold colors, carrying tridents and human skulls, and smoking *ganja*—another taste that long predated that of the Jamaican reggae king.

I passed a dozen men hosing away a thick accumulation of silt from the upper steps, deposited by seasonal flooding from the melting Himalayan snow hundreds of miles to the north. As the storm

stairways returned to view, women moved in and draped them with saris and guesthouse laundry and bedding they had just washed in the river, to dry quickly in the scorching sun. Here, as we wandered, cows left their pungent deposits and more women formed the manure into large pancakes to be used after drying as a fuel for cooking.

Today the Ganges is one of the most polluted rivers in Asia, but I was assured the crowd increased every year, as Varanasi was India's Jerusalem, the Moslem faith's Mecca. To die in Varanasi, was to achieve *moksha*, to escape the eternal wheel of reincarnation and be transported in Shiva's arms in heaven. This occurred at the "burning *ghats*," where open cremations were staged around the clock, the untouchable Doms, the lowest of India's castes, cutting and splitting an endless supply of wood and supervising the fiery passage to paradise. Flower petals and powdered sandalwood were sprinkled over the corpses and when the ashes cooled (up to three hours later), the remains were sprinkled on the holy river below. If the deceased couldn't afford the fees for this service, they were wrapped in cloth and merely set adrift. Infants and children were not cremated, either, as they were regarded as innocent; instead they were taken out in boats, their small bodies weighted with rocks, and sunk.

Anywhere else on the planet, riverfront real estate would long have been usurped by developers, but Varanasi seemed to be the exception to all such rules. Some of the low-rise buildings closest to the river were converted into guesthouses, like mine, and souvenir stalls nearby offered a variety of lurid postcards and cheaply produced replicas of the *yoni* and *lingam* statues seen in every Indian village square, guaranteed to produce giggles back in the U.S. or the U.K. But when I entered the old city, it was to disappear into a labyrinth of alleys too narrow for sunlight to reach the ground or two large horned cows to pass, a neighborhood that reeked of the past.

Merchants in tiny storefronts sold lacquerware and brass pots, lotus flowers and red tilak powder, saris in a hundred hues. Teashops with stained plaster walls and low stools and tables served *ganj* cookies and pastries adorned with silver foil. Bags of curry powder and medicinal herbs added their scents to those of burning incense, garbage, mildew, urine, and manure. There were motorbikes in the alleyways and small children wore tee shirts bearing the names of European rock and roll bands, but I felt as if I might encounter Vatsyayana at any turn.

For nearly an hour I wandered aimlessly—easy to do as there seemed to be no plan to this urban honeycomb—and after stopping for tea and cookies and outpacing the last of too many persistent "guides" and touts, for which India is infamous, I finally exited the maze and with considerable relief came upon a bookshop with a single clerk.

"Do you have any copies of the *Kama Sutra*?" I asked.

With a slight bow, he told me he did and asked if I'd heard of the *Ananga Ranga*? "It's another fine old text," he said, leading me to the rear of the shop. "We also have copies of *The Perfumed Garden*, from Arabia. You are a student of the sex?"

His English was schooled, almost scholarly, the words emerging in the charming Indian fashion that sounds a bit like water boiling.

We halted before some shelves that ran from the floor to the ceiling, from which he extracted a large book called *The Erotic Art of India*.

"You will enjoy this," he said, his eyebrows rising and falling twice, reminding me of my inspiration, Groucho Marx.

Half an hour later I left with four different editions of the *Kama Sutra* and several other volumes extolling in picture and prose the failure of Gandhi's goons in their effort to wipe out the country's erotic past, some of the photo books depicting the numerous erotic carvings and monuments that survived, the best display of them in a temple complex a two-hour plane flight away. I planned to go there on the weekend.

That night in my guesthouse, following a vegetarian supper, I turned the pages of some of the translations of the *Kama Sutra*, learning that there were three types of men according to their genital size: the rabbit type (small), the bull (medium), and the horse (large). Three different animals were used to type women, depending on the depth of their respective vulva: deer, cow, and (I'm sure wasn't meant as an insult) elephant. Vatsyayana went on to say that there were three equal unions between persons of corresponding dimensions (rabbit/deer, bull/cow, and horse/elephant) and several unequal ones (rabbit/cow, rabbit/elephant, bull/deer, bull/elephant, horse/cow, and horse/deer).

"The woman places herself on all fours on the ground in the posture of the cow ready for the bull assault. This is the position of The Cow," Vatsyayana advised. "In the same fashion, one can imitate other animals, mounting the woman like an ass, playing with her like a cat, attacking like a tiger, stamping like an elephant, pawing the ground like a pig, riding horse-fashion. Thus one learns a thousand ways to copulate."

I was told also to mimic the insect world. (Think about that the next time you watch the Discovery Channel.) There were four kinds of mild embrace and four more that were more vigorous, five kinds of kisses, eight kinds of oral intercourse, and nine ways of moving the *lingam* inside the *yoni*. Everything from sex with several women (called The Herd of Cows) to male and female homosexuality to bestiality to adultery to transvestism to violence was described and approved.

There were sections on "The Art of Scratching" and "Biting," not playfully, but seriously, drawing blood and leaving marks. "There are four ways of hitting," it was advised in the chapter called "Blows and Sighs," "—with the side of the hand, with the palm of the open hand, with the fist, with the ends of the fingers joined. The woman groans under the blows, because they hurt her." This chapter concluded with a warning: "One must in all cases know when to stop if there is a risk of mutilation or death."

For many readers today, such advice was as sexist as it may have been sexual. It's true that women were told how they could get money from men, but always they took a submissive role in doing so. "Vigor and audacity are manly qualities," Vatsyayana wrote. "Weakness, sensuality, and dependence are female characteristics."

The young men and women on the old hashish trail that led from Europe through Turkey and Afghanistan and to the beaches at Goa on India's west coast, then north through Benares and Kathmandu, with a visit to an ashram somewhere along the way to chill out, may have fancied themselves liberated, but the text many said they admired (and may never, in fact, have read) was not.

Yet, it suited the time of its compilation, when Hinduism, so class- and color-conscious, espoused behavior not only aimed at satisfying religious, social, and moral obligations, but also material comfort (*artha*) and sexual pleasure and love (*kama*). In Reay Tannahill's superb *Sex in History* (1992), the author called *artha* and *kama* "the sugar on the pill of sanctity. But they were sanctified just the same. Sex, for the Hindu Indian as for the Taoist Chinese, was a religious duty—not one that would put him straight into tune with the infinite, but certainly one of the least taxing and most pleasurable ways of improving the state of his *karma*."

My interest in the *Kama Sutra* was drawn to the text's final pages where there were sections dealing with "tonic medicines" and "ways of enlarging the *lingam* ...miscellaneous experiments and recipes." A few were simple and sounded harmless, however dubious. For example: "Mix garlic root with white pepper and licorice. When drunk with sugared milk, it enhances virility." Another said a man "who wishes to copulate during a whole night, and whose desire, having come on suddenly, must get a great number of eggs, so that he may eat to excess, and fry them with fresh fat and butter when done, he immerses them in honey, working the whole mass well together. He must then eat them as much as possible with a little bread, and he may be certain that for the whole night his member will not give him any rest."

It was advised that boiling a goat's testicles in sugared milk would accomplish the same thing. In another recipe, I was assured that "camel's milk mixed with honey and taken regularly develops vigor for copulation which is unaccountable and causes the virile member to be on the alert night and day."

Was this really the way the Hindus lived fifteen hundred years ago? I took a plane to Khajuraho, a dusty village in the middle of nowhere that fortunately was served by the national airline in daily flights that went from Delhi to Agra (where the Taj Mahal is located) to Khajuraho to Varanasi, and back again. Khajuraho was on this esteemed route because twenty-four temples situated there of which the original eighty-five were among the world's greatest temples of love, where handsome men and extraordinarily voluptuous women and more than a few strong animals brought the *Kama Sutra* to life or at least to stone. Nowhere on earth, outside of a porn shop in San Francisco, had I witnessed sex depicted with such frankness and variety...and in India, unlike in California, sex had been rendered as art.

Khajuraho—now a small town of about 7,000—was once the religious capital of the Chandela Rajputs, a Hindu dynasty that ruled this part of India from the tenth to the twelfth centuries. The temples, now listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, were built over a span of a hundred years, from 950 to 1050 AD. Then, like the larger Khmer temple complexes in Cambodia, they were abandoned to the engulfing jungle until rediscovered in 1838 by a young British engineer, T.S. Burt, who said in his report: "I found...seven Hindoo temples, most beautifully and exquisitely carved as to workmanship but the sculptor had at times allowed his subject to grow a little warmer than there was an absolute necessity for his doing: indeed some of the sculptures here were extremely indecent and offensive which I was at first much surprised to find in temples that are professed to be erected for good purposes, and on account of religion. But the religion of the ancient Hindoos can not have been very chaste, if it induced people under the cloak of religion, to design the most disgraceful representations to desecrate their ecclesiastical erections." I will assume that last phrase was a slip of Mr. Burt's facile tongue.

Apparently, no one really knows why the carvings are so erotic. The Chandelas barely mentioned the temples in their literature. Some say the carvings were inspired by the *Kama Sutra*. Others link them to Tantric cults that used sex as a part of their worship or to honor and appease the gods, so that the city would be spared from natural disaster. Another explanation came from the Indian scholar Shobita Punja, who wrote in her book, *Divine Ecstasy* (1992), that the sculptures represented the marriage of Shiva and Parvati and the subsequent orgy that may have matter-of-factly followed such heavenly events.

Mr. Burt was, of course, a man of his culture and time. When I arrived in Khajuraho a hundred and fifty years later, I confess that I found everything just as I wished it had been in my Protestant temples of worship in the U.S. when I was growing up but, alack and alas, was not.

Footnote

* The *Kama Sutra* will be quoted in several chapters, sometimes from other translations, and which version will not always be identified.

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