



If  
you like  
Sylvia Day,  
you'll love  
Eden  
Bradley

*The  
Seduction of  
Valentine Day*

EDEN BRADLEY

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## About the Book

*She lives in a world of silk sheets, champagne, and expensive hotels...*

She fulfills the deepest fantasies of the most powerful men in the world: Valentine Day is a high-class call girl, pampered and adored by her exclusive clientele.

But Valentine has a secret. Always in control, she's never experienced true pleasure. But now, the woman who spends her life pleasuring others is about to embark on an erotic journey of her own...

**An irresistible erotic romance, perfect for fans of *Pretty Woman*.**

## About the Author

Eden Bradley has been writing since she could hold a pen in her hand. When not writing, you'll find her wandering museums, cooking, eating, shopping, and reading everything she can get her hands on. Eden lives in Southern California.

Also by Eden Bradley:

*The Dark Garden*  
*Forbidden Fruit*  
*Exotica*  
*The Beauty of Surrender*

Writing as Eve Berlin:

*Pleasure's Edge*  
*Desire's Edge*  
*Temptation's Edge*

*Praise for Eden Bradley*

'Intelligent, haunting and sexy as hell... for you people who like story and heart with your erotica, I'd definitely recommend any of Eden's books' Maya Banks

'People are constantly looking for books similar to Fifty... well look no further, I have what you need! ... Eden Bradley writes the most sensual books I have ever read' *My Secret Romance*

'No one writes erotic love stories like Eden Bradley'  
*Romance Junkies*

'Bradley delivers the goods. There is intense intimacy and heartwrenching emotions... This is delicious and delightful from the first page until the conclusion' *Romantic Times*

'Everything about *The Dark Garden* worked to perfection... the most beautifully written BDSM novel this reviewer has ever read. Ms. Bradley has a masterful touch to make pain the ultimate reading pleasure' *Love Romances & More*

*The  
Seduction of  
Valentine Day*  
EDEN BRADLEY

BLACK  
LACE



To my father:  
*I love you, Dad.*

## Chapter One

THE COSTLY SCENTS of the finest imported champagne and custom-blended cologne fill my nostrils as I straddle his prone figure on the big bed. I love these beds at the Beverly Wilshire—plush and lovely, with soft Egyptian cotton sheets. Only the best for Enzo Alighieri. Including me.

“Fuck me now, my Valentine,” he says, his elegant, Italian-accented voice rough with desire. “You know just how to do it, *mi tesoro*.”

“Ah, Enzo ...” I sigh in pleasure as I lower myself onto his erect cock.

I have always loved Enzo’s cock. The skin is a deep gold, as it is all over his body, which is still fine and beautiful, no matter his age. He is strong, well muscled. And he has the stamina of a twenty-year-old. Which is the only way he manages to please his wife, his mistress, and me. And he does please me.

I squeeze the walls of my sex around his cock and he moans a little. Pleasure is swarming my system already and I smile down at him, moving my hips, grinding onto him.

“Touch me, Enzo.”

He reaches up and takes my breasts in his hands, plumping them, kneading them, playing my hardened nipples between his fingers.

“Oh, yes ...”

I reach back and slip my hand between his thighs, caressing his balls. He loves this. He loves my every touch, to hear my panting breath, to watch me come. Oh, yes, I know exactly what he loves, what he needs. It’s my job to know. And I am nothing if not a perfectionist.

He pumps up into my body, shafts of pleasure filling me, spreading, making me shiver. One of his hands has snaked down and is teasing my clit, tugging, rubbing, pinching. He knows how to make me come. After all, we've been together nearly a decade, Enzo and I. My mentor, my friend. My client.

Why is that the most important part? But I don't want to question it as his thrusting hips take on a more urgent rhythm. His breath is a panting gasp now, and I feel him tense beneath me.

"Ah, just another moment, Enzo. Give it to me ... I know you can do it."

"You will be the death of me, Valentine," he says, his voice rough.

But he does it, pistoning into me, his clever fingers never leaving my throbbing clit, my swollen nipple, until I'm coming in a flood of heat onto his thick, lovely cock.

"Oh, yes ..."

I throw my head back, let it wash over me. And he tenses beneath me, cries out, his hands going to my hips, his fingers digging into my flesh.

And I catch that scent I adore, the scent of arousal, the scent of come, beneath his expensive cologne. And underlying it all, the scent of money.

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I LEARNED ABOUT something called suspension of disbelief a number of years ago in one of my English lit classes. This is when a writer must make the reader buy into the unusual long enough to be drawn in and believe in the world the writer has created.

It's something like that with my line of work. Our clients must suspend their disbelief long enough to believe the girl likes it. My particular "talent," if you want to call it that—my particular perversion, really—is that they don't have to do that with me. The truth is, I love it.

This is my dirty little secret. Because this is supposed to be taboo among the professionals of my world. Call girls. Prostitutes. Hookers. It doesn't matter what you call us. The fact is, I get paid for sex. And it's the only kind of sex I can get off on.

Who knew a nice Jewish girl from the Valley could end up here? Well, half Jewish, anyway, my father being a lapsed Catholic. And maybe I've never been all that nice.

I grew up in Van Nuys. Van Nuys is possibly the most generic, boring place on earth. Middle class, cardboard-box houses that all look the same, block after block. The entire area looks as though a dull film has settled over it.

My family was at the lower end of the middle class. Not that we were poor. We always had a roof over our heads, food on the table. My father, a construction foreman, worked a lot, but he spent his money anywhere but at home. My mother never did much other than drink. Strange that he wasn't the drinker. Jews don't tend to be drinkers. Not that it ever stopped my mother. But my life has been a combination of the utterly dull and the most perverse, in every way, on every level. Classic hard life story, I know, but that's my story. Or it was. Too fucking bad.

I make a lot of money. Enough to keep me very comfortable in my Hollywood Hills home. Enough to pay for the expensive clothes I buy at Barney's and Kitson, my weekly facials and massage at the spa. Enough to pay for the breezy little Mercedes I drive, if it hadn't been a gift from a happy client. This is why I do it.

Actually, that's a lie. It's what I tell myself when I'm not in the mood for the kind of deep, soul-searching honesty that keeps me up at night. How I justify it in the most basic, simple terms.

The truth, or part of it, anyway, is that I began in this business because I needed to distance myself from what I was before. From that lower-middle-class Jewish girl from the Valley whose mother was always passed out on the

couch, surrounded by a sticky puddle of whatever she was drinking on the floor, the overflowing ashtrays. Repulsive. I won't even allow my clients to smoke around me. If they don't like it, they can find another girl. I'm at a point in my career where I can make a few demands of my own, and I do.

I am someone else entirely now.

I look different. I *am* different. No one from my old life would even recognize me. And truly, I wouldn't care if they did. My life before this is almost in another dimension, in my mind. I like it that way.

I don't look like the average girl from the Valley. My one gift from my mother is a fine-featured, beautiful face. I don't mean to be vain; I am beautiful. People who pretend not to know these things are full of crap. I have long legs, a great body, hard and tight, even this close to thirty. My brown hair, highlighted in gold and caramel, hangs in layers almost to my waist. Most men prefer long hair on a woman, so I rarely cut it. My eyes are green, without the colored contacts the other girls wear. High cheekbones, a full, lush mouth. My ass is superb. I've been told so often enough. But what really gets them is that I love what I do. I love sex. I don't care who I'm doing it with. I just like to fuck. I like to suck cock. I love the anonymity of these men not knowing who I really am. I get off on it.

But there's one catch. I have to get paid.

I have never had an orgasm with a man unless he's paying to have sex with me. My first trick was like an epiphany. The moment he handed that wad of cash over into my greedy little hand, my body started to heat up, my legs began to shake, and I was coming almost as soon as he touched me. That's when it became magic for me.

Which brings me to Italian film producer Enzo Alighieri.

He was one of my first clients. Enzo found me at this cheap call girl outfit where I got my start. And he knew right away I was different from the other girls there. He told me I

was too beautiful, in his lovely Italian accent. I adored him on the spot. Not the way a normal woman might adore a lover. It was never that complicated. I liked him the moment he walked into the room. So sophisticated. Elegant. And he's sexy. He really is, even at nearly seventy now. He has that commanding air about him; I'm sure everyone else in his life kowtows to him. Everyone but me. He lets me get away with anything.

I understand perfectly well that I'm nothing more than a sort of pet to him. A project. And a priceless piece of ass. He often tells me so. But it was Enzo who took me under his wing, got me out of that dump of a warehouse in Hollywood, and made me go to school.

Yes, school. Because if you're going to be what amounts to a modern-day American geisha, a 21st-century courtesan, you must be well educated, just as the geishas are. Just as the old Venetian courtesans were.

In addition to having studied history, literature, business, and political science, I now know how to play golf and tennis, although not too well. Men prefer to win, don't they? I read the *Wall Street Journal* and *Forbes*. I've studied massage therapy, I know wine. I've learned to speak German, a little French and Italian, and even a few words of Japanese and Arabic, both of which are a necessity in my line of work.

The Middle Eastern rich have tons of money. More than the usual wealthy do, and they aren't at all shy about spending it on whatever brings them pleasure. I admire that in a person. They're the ones who fly the girls to Miami for a week, to Europe, even. Give us entire wardrobes of designer clothes. They like to have a lot of girls at once. I don't mind. We all get paid, regardless, and it makes the workload a little easier. And the food is always superb. Unfortunately, I'm thinner than most of them like, so I don't get those dates the way some of my friends do. But once a man is with me, he'll always come back for more.

They can always tell, my clients. Even the most selfish, the most dense. They know right away that I'm into it, that my orgasms are the real thing. And these men are the sexual sophisticates of the world. They've had first-class ass in every corner of the planet: the pros in Amsterdam, Paris, Berlin.

I know I sound crude when I talk about these things, but this is a crude world. I'm not bitter, I swear it. I see the beauty in the world, too. I've spent far too much time around the rich and privileged to be blind to beauty, not to appreciate it. I love the ballet, could watch it for hours. I could wander every museum on earth and never get enough. My current obsession is art history, and I've been taking classes off and on for the last few years, soaking it all up. This is something I do purely for me. I may be a classless kid from the Valley, but I've learned about the rest of the world, seen enough to develop a real appetite for the finer things in life. And for me, art has become a necessity.

There is the gritty side to my lifestyle, of course. Even the girls at the top of this food chain can get into trouble. There was Trina, a gorgeous girl, new to the business, who was kidnapped and taken to some godforsaken place in Southeast Asia and never heard from again. These things happen, and when they do, when we working girls hear about it, it scares us, even if we pretend it doesn't. This job, as luxurious as it is, is not entirely without risk. But we keep doing it anyway, don't we? Some sick part of me gets off a little on the cheap thrill, I'll admit to that.

I don't like fast cars, in particular, and you'll never catch me climbing a mountain. My thrills are all of a sexual nature. Which makes me the perfect woman for this job. I am embedded in this life for the long haul. It suits me to a T. It makes having a "real" relationship entirely impossible. But the circumstances of my life since childhood have made that impossible anyway, so I've never minded. What other

sort of life would I have? What would I even want? No, I'm perfectly fine right where I am.

THE SUN IS beginning to lower in the sky as the cab exits the freeway and turns onto Grand Avenue. I love this time of day: the pale light turning the sky an ethereal shade of gold, like an iridescent film over the deepening blue. It's even lovelier now, in the fall, when that bit of moisture in the air, that first hint of the coming cooler weather, adds a pearly glow to everything. But it's difficult to really enjoy it; it's after seven and I'm running late. I hate being late, especially to meet a client. It's unprofessional. But the traffic was horrible, as usual in Los Angeles.

We pull up in front of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion and I pay the driver. My cell phone goes off as I step out into the warm evening.

"This is Val."

"Val, it's Bennett. I'm not going to be able to make it tonight. A problem at the office."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. Shall we meet later?"

"No, no. This is going to keep me busy all night. But you shouldn't waste the tickets. It's opening night."

"I do love *La Traviata*."

This opera is the story of a prostitute. Why wouldn't I love it? And I've become a huge opera fan, thanks to Enzo's expert guidance.

"Enjoy it, then. I'll call you to reschedule in the next week or two."

"I hope you will, Bennett. I'm so sorry you have to work tonight and miss this."

"You can tell me all about it when I see you. Ah, there's my other line, I have to go."

I flip my phone shut, turn it off, and get my ticket at the will-call window, feeling a lovely sense of freedom at having



the night off. Being able to enjoy the opera without having to be “on.”

Of course, this also means no sex for me tonight. But for once, spending the evening on my own sounds even better. I realize I’ve been craving some time away from work lately. Strange for me. But I have been doing this most of my adult life. I suppose it shouldn’t come as a surprise. When was the last time I even took a small vacation—three years? Four?

Inside, the theater is cool, lovely in its stark modernity. The lights are bright, making me blink. I really would love a cocktail, but nearly everyone is seated already; I’d hate to be locked out of the first act.

An usher, all gangly legs and leering eyes, shows me to my seat. Not that I mind. A woman in my position can’t afford to be offended by male attention. And I wore this champagne bias-cut silk dress to show off my lean curves, my pale skin. I don’t have much in the way of cleavage, but the boy eyes the low neckline, anyway. My nipples have gone hard from the air-conditioning, so perhaps there’s something to look at after all.

I slide in, murmuring apologies to those already seated as I go. The seats are fabulous: third-row center. I settle in, leaning down to set my small bag at my feet.

And that’s when I catch a scent in the air, something masculine, sophisticated. I sit up and turn my head to see who is sitting next to me. I’m trained to be attuned to men. I can’t help it.

He smiles. A gorgeous smile. His face is beautiful. That fact is what I notice first, and it’s a few moments before I see that his features are a bit irregular. But still beautiful, in the most masculine way possible.

He has dark brown hair with a few natural highlights, cut very short, a little spiky on top. Warm hazel eyes, a full mouth, a strong, clean jaw. Broad shoulders in his designer suit. Nice. And he’s young, maybe thirty-five. Too young for

my tastes. So why is my body heating up? Why do I want to touch his mouth, just put my fingertips to his lips?

*Stop it.*

I make an effort to smile back, then turn away, looking at my program. But I'm not really seeing it, the faces of the cast members, the synopsis a blur. I can't stop noticing him out of the corner of my eye.

He seems entirely relaxed, something you don't often find in a man of his age. This makes him all the more intriguing. And there is a strange sense of anticipation, of tension. It's almost as though I can feel the heat of his body next to me. And I am hyperaware of that scent. Crisp and dark at the same time, like the woods with a faint wash of citrus.

I roll my program up in my hands, my fingers tightening around the glossy paper as I look around the auditorium. Why can't I calm down?

Finally, he turns to me and asks, "Are you waiting for someone?"

"No. My friend had to cancel."

"Ah, mine did, too. Well, my mother, not my friend."

"Oh." I don't know what else to say. I can always talk to men. It's my job to talk to men. Among other things. What on earth is wrong with me?

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to intrude," he says, mistaking my tied tongue for offense.

"Oh, no, it's fine. I'm sorry, I was ... distracted. It's lovely that you come to the opera with your mother."

"She loves the opera. I've learned to enjoy it, although it's taken years. But I like *La Traviata*. I like the tragedy of it."

"Most operas are tragic," I say.

"Yes, but no one does tragedy like the Italians."

I smile. "True. Unless it's the French."

We sit quietly for a moment, and that's when I notice he's looking right at me. I don't mean that in any sort of romantic terms. But I'm used to men seeing me as an object. That doesn't offend me. It's a requirement of my

occupation. But when a man really looks at me, sees *me*, I notice.

This man is obviously far too nice a guy to be talking to a woman like me. Not that my clients aren't good people. But this nice man thinks he's flirting with a nice woman. If he only knew.

But that doesn't mean I can't enjoy it, does it? Just an evening of innocent flirtation. It's fun being a bit of a tease now and then, something I rarely get to do. When you get paid for sex, everyone knows up front what you're there for, even when a client simply wants me to be arm candy at an event. Of course, even those evenings usually end in sex. It's far too easy for the guy. I'm right there, paid in full. Why wouldn't he want to have sex with me? Or a quick blow job in the car, at the very least. I am every bit as good at being a companion as I am at sex. But it's nice to play at it for a little while. To simply be myself, to savor this sort of attention.

The house lights dim, go dark, and the orchestra begins. I let the music wash over me, trying to ignore this man seated only inches away. This man who I have no business flirting with.

The opera is wonderful, the woman singing the part of Violetta is beautiful and incredibly talented, a lovely, pure soprano. But I'm unable to become lost in the story. I am much too aware of his scent, his presence. I swear I can feel the heat emanating from him like an invitation.

I glance over at him, looking for a moment too long, and he turns and smiles at me.

I look away, flustered now. Embarrassed.

When was the last time a man managed to fluster me?

I force myself to focus on the music, on the costumes. It really is a wonderful production, the sets colorful, dynamic, the costumes gorgeous. And the singing is superb.

Hours later, or so it seems, the lights come up. Intermission. God, I need a drink. I rise quickly and make my

way to the lobby bar.

It's crowded, as it always is during the intermission. Voices, laughter, mingled with the clink of ice in glasses, the flash of jewelry. I look around, scanning the crowd. I realize that I'm looking for *him*.

I realize that I have turned into some sort of foolish schoolgirl. I shake my head in disgust.

A voice just over my shoulder. *His* voice.

"It's impossible to elbow your way to the front at these things, isn't it? Let me order a drink for you."

"Oh, no, that's not necessary."

His gaze catches mine. I can see flecks of green and gold in his eyes in the bright lights of the lobby. He's taller than I'd thought.

"I'd like to buy you a drink."

I feel momentarily stunned. Whatever is wrong with me? "Well. Alright. I'd appreciate it. A Tanqueray and tonic."

"Don't go anywhere," he says, giving me a wink.

I watch as he makes his way to the bar, shifting into the crowd. Utterly confident. Polite. Graceful.

There is a certain kind of man who moves that way. Men of power. Men who are entirely assured of themselves. A small shiver runs through me.

He returns in only a few minutes, handing me the drink and a paper napkin. I notice he's drinking scotch on the rocks. I can smell it, a nice blend.

"Thank you. I'm Valentine Day, by the way," I tell him, giving him my full name. My clients know me only as Val. Only Enzo gets to call me Valentine. Only Enzo knows my last name. But my name is *mine*. I have to draw the line somewhere.

He takes my hand in his. "I'm Joshua Spencer."

A current flashes up my arm, shafting deep into my body. Heat. Desire. I pull my hand back, trying not to do it too quickly, trying not to appear rude.

“So,” I ask, pausing to sip my drink, covering my discomfort, “what do you do besides taking your mother to the opera?”

“Professionally? As in ‘what do you do’?”

He’s grinning, but there’s nothing mocking in it; he’s just being nice.

“Professionally, personally. Whatever you’d like to tell me.”

“My job is fairly boring. I’m in real estate development. A family business.”

“I don’t think that’s boring at all.”

He shrugs. He has the broad shoulders of an athlete. Nice. “It doesn’t make for exciting discussion unless you’re also in real estate. Are you?”

I can see he’s teasing me, but I like it. “No. I’m definitely not in real estate.”

“Ah, good. Because I really hate to talk about work.”

“Tell me something else, then.”

“Something else?” He pauses. “I play hockey twice a week. I’m on a team. I run sometimes in the mornings. I don’t have time for much else. The occasional play. Or the opera with my mother. Or without my mother, as the case may be.” He flashes a boyish grin. “And I love art. I like to go to the Getty at least once every couple of months. I’ll see whatever’s there.”

“I love the Getty.”

He steps closer, his voice lowering, as though we’re having a private conversation. Perhaps we are. Another shiver runs up my spine, long and slow and warm. Exactly as I imagine his touch would be.

He says, “Let me guess. You like the Impressionists. Paintings from the more romantic eras.”

“I do like the Impressionists, especially those who came into the game a little later. But I’ll admit what I really love are the Neoclassicists. Leighton, Alma-Tadema, Collier. Waterhouse, of course.”

“Ah, but still romantic.” He gestures with his drink, then takes a sip. I watch the muscles in his throat work as he swallows.

I smile. “Yes, I suppose they are. But I’m afraid my taste in art isn’t very sophisticated. I like it to be pretty.”

“A feminine trait. Not necessarily a bad one.”

He moves in a step closer, a few inches, really. But I feel as though we are in our own bubble, apart from the crowd around us.

“What about you? I’d guess you like something completely masculine, the more modern artists. Pollack? de Kooning?”

“Actually, I prefer the surrealists. Hockney. Dalí.”

I nod my head. I love a man who knows art; it really makes me swoon. Or maybe it’s just him?

“So, what do you do for work, Valentine?”

I freeze for a moment. I have a few standard answers I use in order to sidestep this question. But suddenly my mind is a blank. The lies won’t leave my mouth. I lift my drink, take a long swallow, letting the gin go to work, loosening my insides. I still have no idea what to say.

The house lights flash.

“Time to go back in,” he says. “Let me get rid of these glasses.”

He takes mine, holding it between his fingers along with his, brings them to the rapidly emptying bar while I stand there, feeling a bit lost. Then he’s back at my side, his hand going to the small of my back as he guides me through the theater doors.

His palm is warm through the thin silk of my dress. And my sex is going so damp from this nearly innocent touch, I’m almost afraid to sit down. To try to hold still for another hour or more, next to him in the dark.

I manage to do it. But the entire time I am more aware than ever of his tall, muscular body next to mine. I don’t dare to look at him. I don’t have to. I can feel him. And I’m soaked the entire time.

Torture.

When the show is over we stand and I feel awkward again. Do I simply leave and say good-bye?

“Did you drive?” he asks.

“I took a cab.”

“Let me find one for you.”

His hand at my waist again as we walk out of the theater. I can hardly stand for him to touch me. To touch me but not *touch* me.

At the curb he waves a taxi down.

“I won’t be so rude as to ask for your address, so you’ll have to tell the driver where you’re going. But I hope you’ll call me.”

He pulls a business card from his pocket and slips it into my hand, grasping it with his fingers for a moment. He’s looking into my eyes, and even in the dark I swear I can see a dim green and gold glow in his. He is too beautiful, this man.

I want him to kiss me. I want to pull him into the cab with me. I want to take him home and fuck him. But I do none of this.

“Thank you for the drink. And for the conversation.”

He gives my fingers a final squeeze. “It was my pleasure. Call me, Valentine.”

I smile, nod, and he hands me into the cab. He shuts the door, and I give one last shiver.

The cab pulls into the night, and we are immediately stuck in traffic. I don’t dare look behind me to see if he is standing there.

*Joshua.*

I clear my throat, smooth a hand over my hair. His card is in the other hand. I should tear it up. Toss it out the window. But instead I slip it into my bag. I can throw it away later. That’s exactly what I should do. Anything else would be ridiculous. Unrealistic. And life has taught me to be realistic. I am the poster child for accepting reality, no matter how

ugly. It's this beautiful, nice man who's thrown me off balance.

I know what I should do. But I close my purse, my fingers tightening on the metal clasp, as though I am still holding the card in my hand. As though I really can call him tomorrow, go on a date. One in which I don't get paid.

I'm not the sort of woman who can afford to indulge in this kind of fantasy. I will toss the card the moment I get home.

Won't I?



## Chapter Two

I LET MYSELF into my house, the heavy wood door swinging shut behind me. The moment my feet hit the small rug in the entry hall I step out of my gold stiletto heels, curling my toes, enjoying the warm flow of blood. I love the way my legs look in a good stiletto, but they hurt like hell.

I flip on lights as I make my way down the short hall and into the living room, flopping onto the long dark-brown leather sofa and lying back against the Indian and Moroccan pillows piled there.

I love this house. It's a big Spanish style with an open floor plan that makes me feel like I can breathe. So different from the oppressive environment I grew up in. But I don't want to think about that now. No, now I just want to enjoy my house.

I've been decorating for the last four years, ever since I bought the place. It's my favorite thing to do. Besides sex. I love picking out individual pieces. Exotic imports are my favorite; I have a lot of heavy, carved pieces from India, Spain, Southeast Asia. My artwork is a mix of those same ethnic cultures and a few pieces from Japan. I love the stark aesthetics of modern Japanese art; it's soothing. And all the dark, rich colors put together feel homey to me. I adore the exotic fabrics of these countries: the embroidery and damask, the dark, earthy tones mixed with bolder accents. And then there's my collection of orchids.

I know, I hardly seem the type. But there's something special about orchids. They seem so fragile, but they're stronger than they look. I can't help but admire that. And they look like the darkest, loveliest part of a woman. I'm not the first person to make the comparison.

A small collection of orchids sit on the window seat built into the wall of windows facing west, into the hillside, so they don't get too much sun. I have a particular fondness for the white varieties, but I have some in shades of purple, from pale lilac to deep amethyst.

But enough about my flowers, my house. What I really want to think about is Joshua Spencer. I eye my satin bag, sitting on the table in the entry hall. My fingers itch to take that card out. To feel the papery smoothness between my fingers. To dream of the impossible.

Because being with a man like him, being with any man when it's not a business arrangement, is entirely out of the question. These things do not happen to girls in my industry. And I've been in it far too long to delude myself.

Almost ten years. Has it really been that long? I was barely twenty when Enzo found me, and thirty is on the horizon. I suppose I should retire someday. But not yet. No, retiring now would mean giving up the only sexual satisfaction I can attain. Why would I even consider doing that?

Because maybe then I could have a normal life, a small voice tells me. But no, not me. I will never be normal, whatever that is.

I'm brooding now. I hate when I get like this.

I get up and pad across the cool floors into the kitchen. Pale red granite on the counters, brass pots shining on hooks over the sink, a few more of my precious orchids on the windowsill. It's a great kitchen. Too bad I work so often at night; I love to cook. I love to experiment with Thai dishes, delicate French sauces. But right now all I want is another drink.

I pull the gin out, a glass, some mixer. The ice cubes hit the side of the glass, the sound seeming to echo in my quiet house. I don't mind. I like the peace. I mix the drink, take a long sip, then another.

I don't like myself when I drink. It makes me feel pathetic. But I need it tonight. All these broody thoughts. All because of *him*.

I am suddenly questioning myself. Just because I want a man. But it's more than mere want. No, it's not wanting in the usual way. It's this ridiculous yearning, craving, that won't let me go. My body is stirred with desire.

I take another gulp of the gin. No use in giving in to this kind of desire. Not even here by myself. It never works.

Damn it.

Throwing back the rest of the drink, I feel the alcohol buzz into my system, and head toward the bedroom.

*Just get to bed. Forget about him.*

I unzip my dress and wriggle out of it, hang it in the closet. Naked, I reach into my nightstand drawer and pull out a gummi bear from a plastic bag I keep there. Silly, I know, but this has been my bedtime comfort since I was a kid. I pop it into my mouth as I crawl into the big carved four-poster bed from Indonesia, beneath the heavy silk duvet cover done in shades of pale blue and deep chocolate brown. Soothing colors. But as I lay there in the dark, I don't feel soothed. Even the gin hasn't done its job. And I'm not enough of a drinker to get up and have some more. Not after growing up with my mother.

Shit, I really do *not* want to think about her right now. No, better to think about Joshua Spencer. About what I can't have. Makes it all the more tempting, doesn't it?

He's tempting enough all on his own. Those eyes, like amber flecked with malachite and silver. He has long, dark lashes. Lashes any girl would love to have. It's the one thing about his face which looks completely innocent. The rest is all rugged bone structure, and that lush mouth that looks too purely sexual to be at all pure.

Just thinking about him is making me hot all over, my nipples going taut, my sex damp. I squeeze my legs together beneath the weight of the covers. It doesn't help.

What would his skin taste like beneath my tongue? What would his cock look like, feel like in my hand? In my mouth?

I take in a deep breath and imagine his scent on the air. And I'm absolutely drenched now, the naked lips of my sex swollen and needy when I brush my fingertips over them.

I really do need another drink.

Instead, I roll over and reach into the drawer of my nightstand, pull out the big, phallic vibrator my friends Regan and Rosalyn gave me for my last birthday. I rarely use it. It's of very little use to me. But I need something, need it badly enough to try.

I lie back on my pillows, switch it on, and lower it between my thighs. And in my mind is Joshua Spencer's face.

I can feel the buzz of the vibrator as I touch it to my aching clit, and there is that lovely, momentary shock of pleasure. But as soon as I feel it, it's gone.

*No.*

*Think of him. Joshua.*

Imagine what he'd look like without his shirt on: strong pecs, arms heavily muscled from playing hockey. Washboard abs.

I lick my lips, try the vibrator again. And once more, that one delicious moment before it dissipates.

*Concentrate.*

His pants have to come next, revealing strong thighs. And in between them, his beautifully erect cock. Yes, now my mouth is watering. Smooth golden skin, the purple head glistening with pre-come. And I take him into my mouth, the swollen head hitting the back of my throat, the scent of him, of desire, filling my mind.

I run the vibrator over my clitoris once more, savor the thrill of sensation, the image of Joshua's cock going down my throat, sucking him, hearing him moan. But that's not where I need him most.

Moving the big vibrator farther down, I part my thighs as if for a lover. I'm so damn wet I don't need any lube. As wet as

though there was a pile of cash on the night table, waiting for me. Oh, yes, my pussy gives a hard squeeze at the thought.

*Joshua.*

Yes, think of Joshua ...

Think of him entering me, his cock slipping inside as I spread a little wider to take the tip of the vibrating shaft into me. A shiver of sensation, the low thrumming buzz of the pink, plastic machine. I angle to hit my G-spot, and another shock of pleasure shafts deep into my system.

*Oh, yes ...*

*Joshua ...*

His face, his fine hands. I'd looked at them at the opera. He has big hands, beautiful skin, yet a real man's hands. Strong looking.

*Oh, yes, touch me ... fuck me.*

I plunge the plastic shaft deeper, and the vibration is really starting to get to me. I pump my hips, thrust it deeper, using the heel of my hand to press onto my hard clit.

And soon I sense that first raw edge. Pleasure ripples through me in long, undulating waves. Almost there.

*Joshua ...*

Oh, yes, his cock driving into me, his mouth on mine. He tastes like good scotch: that smooth, that silky. His tongue in my mouth, his cock deep inside me, and I'm nearly coming now ... *ah, yes ...*

My hips arch into the vibrator, my sex clenches ... and then, nothing.

*No!*

I bury the vibrator deeper, angle it harder, and my climax starts again, that heaviness weighing down on my belly, simmering, spreading. But once more it tapers off, disappears.

*Fuck!*