

Allure of the Incubus

By Evelyn Sabbag

Chapter 1.

Jennifer rifled through her clothes while her stomach convulsed. Franklin had said “Something really nice” but there wasn’t much to choose from. Grimacing, she pulled out her old standby, a black linen affair that went well with a single strand of pearls. She held the dress below her chin and stared at her reflection. Brown eyes, flecked with dull gold, stared at her from a long pale face.

“Something really nice. Try something really dull,” she muttered to the rotund white Persian drowsing on her bed. Miss Galore watched her through nearly closed eyes. Sensible black heels, subdued makeup, an indifferent comb swiped through long straight hair. Done. Jennifer cast a sideways look at her cat. Still seemingly asleep, but that could be deceiving. The treacherous feline delighted in covering Jennifer with white fur at the most inopportune time and now would be perfect.

Perfect. Such a—well—perfect word to describe Franklin Stanhope. Pearly white teeth that sparkled from an evenly tanned face that was not too pale, not too dark. His thick wavy hair

was the color of old mahogany, controlled even in gale force winds. Only Jennifer and his hairdresser, Alex, knew that he was fighting the onslaught of gray. Luckily, baldness had not reared its ugly head, but if it did, it would be dealt with quickly. The frequent visits to the salon also included manicures to keep his long fingers trimmed and his hands smooth and callous free. Jennifer envisioned his beautiful body sculpted from endless hours in the gym and tried to dredge up even the tiniest shred of desire, but failed. Under that perfect beauty lay nothing but frigid ambition. A sharp knock interrupted her reverie.

“Hello my dear,” Franklin said with a dazzling smile. He stepped into the apartment then leaned down and brushed his lips over her cheek. Holding her hands, he stepped back and swept quickly over her ensemble.

Jennifer realized she was holding her breath and tried to relax, but could only take quick gulps of air and hope she didn’t hyperventilate. Finally, he nodded. Her lungs and heart started working again and she scrambled for her purse.

* * *

The drive to O’Neil’s—Cincinnati’s premier restaurant—was accomplished in silence, Jennifer dreading the upcoming meal and Franklin most likely thinking about ledgers and bottom lines. Upon arrival, they were shown to a secluded table overlooking the river. Crystal chandeliers sparkled in the dim lighting and a single rose glowed against the white tablecloth. After scrutinizing the menu, Franklin gestured to the server who glided back to their table.

“The lady will have the grilled chicken breast, a side salad with low fat Italian and the roasted Brussels sprouts, no butter or oil.”

The waiter murmured “Excellent choice...” Jennifer studied her pristine white plate, fascinated by its emptiness.

“And I will have the filet mignon, very rare, Caesars salad with extra dressing and the au gratin potatoes.” He handed the waiter the menu and added, “And please bring a bottle of the Sutter Home White Zinfandel.”

The waiter’s face twitched slightly, probably due to the cheap selection delivered with such an arrogant flair, but his only response was the stoic “Excellent choice...”

When the wine arrived, Jennifer sipped delicately, pacing herself to avoid becoming ‘giggly.’ Franklin felt—rightly so—it was unbecoming. So she sipped. And listened. And waited as the night drug on at a steady, trudging pace. Excitement, maybe even pleasure, tickled the base of Jennifer’s spine when they were finally done with their food. The evening was almost over and she had done nothing embarrassing. Her brief moment of happiness was shattered when Franklin gestured to the waiter.

“This is a special occasion,” Franklin announced with the air of a magician signaling his next trick. “I think we’ll splurge with a hot fudge mocha delight. Just one dessert but two spoons.” The waiter nodded and scurried off. Franklin turned to Jennifer and said, “I thought we should share. You’re looking just a trifle chunky.”

Jennifer thought about reminding Franklin that she didn’t like mocha and would’ve preferred the key lime cheesecake, but he was right, some of her skirts were getting a little snug. It just wasn’t worth the effort. At least this way she wouldn’t be tempted to over indulge.

While Franklin dug into his half of the ice cream concoction, Jennifer tried to choke down a few bites. The gluey, coffee flavored dessert gagged her, so she put down her spoon and waited while Franklin finished. When he was done, he pushed back from the bowl and studied Jennifer. She twisted in her seat. *What now?*

Franklin smiled, a flash of blinding white, and made a steeple of his elegant fingers. “Jen, you know how much I think of you, your intellect, your abilities. You make a fine accountant and I have a feeling you’ll go far.”

Jennifer nodded, unsure of where he was leading, but sure he didn’t want help getting there.

“You and I have shared more than just a professional relationship.” He paused, allowing the statement to hang on the air and then, “and I wanted to let you know how much I have valued our time together.”

Confused, Jennifer sorted through the possibilities. *Is this a brush-off? Am I being dumped? Fired?* Betrayal clashed with the excitement of being set free. *Free. What a beautiful concept.*

Consumed by the inner debate, she didn’t notice when Franklin poured each of them another glass of wine. Didn’t sense that he was setting the stage for an announcement of great magnitude. She jumped when his words sliced through her rambling thoughts.

“With the future that I have planned, I will need a sturdy, capable wife. One that won’t attract too much attention and has the intelligence to handle the duties of a hostess.” Another flash of white, this time with just the right amount of warmth. There was no doubt as to his intention. “You are the one I would like for that role.”

Jennifer stared, her mouth gaping and her eyes wide and glassy. A carp gasping for air. Emotions tornadoed through her head as, with a flourish, Franklin produced a perfect quarter carat solitaire that glittered frigidly in the dim light. When Jennifer didn’t move, he gestured impatiently. A buzz swelled in her ears and obediently—mechanically—she thrust out a pale

hand. The finger's rigidity made it easy for him to slip the engagement ring on. Jennifer stared at the delicate gold band.

Franklin watched her reaction with an amused expression. "We'll have to watch our socializing at work, wouldn't do to have people gossiping about nepotism." Franklin discussed their future for another few minutes, everything from cutting her hair to where they would live, before the bill arrived. There was a short period of silence while he checked the bill, \$92.56, and then waved the waiter over. "You have overcharged the dessert by \$0.89," he announced.

The waiter's stoicism vanished. "I am so sorry. So very, very sorry. I will make it right," he stammered and reached for the check.

"That won't be necessary," Franklin said. "I have deducted the overage and based a fifteen percent tip on the correct amount. Then I subtracted the extra from the tip. I've jotted down the calculations on the side here."

The waiter peered at the figures, his face twisting comically as he tried to decipher the crabbed scratchings. As he scurried off, Jennifer struggled to keep from bursting into laughter.

Franklin watched him go with smug satisfaction. "You can never relax," he said. "People living on the edge will do anything to get a little extra. Let's go."

On the drive home and right up to the door of her building, he expanded on his vision of their future. He managed to touch on everything from having children (definitely—family image was important for upward mobility), where they would live (controlled community—a new one had just opened up beside the ninth hole of the country club) and whether or not she would continue working after marriage (probably not—social duties would take precedence). He finished his diatribe and stopped, holding her hands in his and looking at Jennifer intently. He kissed her on the forehead. His lips felt smooth and cool, inhuman, alabaster. Perfect. There

was a dull ache throbbing at the base of her neck and she mumbled something about exhaustion and turned to go. He grabbed her arms and swung her back to face him, eyes burning intently. His fingers dug into her flesh, the manicured nails suddenly claws.

“You’ll leave when I say you can leave,” he said in a calm even tone. The words dropped onto the sidewalk like little icicles, shimmering and then disappearing. “As a matter of fact, why don’t I come up?” His eyes narrowed and Jennifer was reminded of Miss Galore readying herself to pounce on a roach.

Jennifer could see his chest moving with each breath. For some reason, she couldn’t quite catch her own. “I-I’m serious. I’m very tired and I have a slight headache...” The words trailed off. They rang as hollow as the cliché they were.

Suddenly, Franklin’s lips were on hers and his tongue darted into her mouth. It was slippery and hard and she began to gag. She closed her eyes and forced herself to relax as it explored here and there. His arms encircled her and she still couldn’t catch her breath – she began to feel dizzy, out of herself. Pressing up against her, she could feel his erection digging into her soft underbelly. She tried to pull back, but he held her tighter, the rigid slug in her mouth digging deeper and deeper. Then, suddenly, she could breathe. He pulled back, but didn’t let go.

“I want to come up,” he declared; his voice still calm and even. Dead. “Now that we’re engaged, there’s no reason to wait. I want to stay with you. Really stay.” His fingers dug in to emphasize his desire. She summoned all her strength and tore her arms out of his grasp.

“We’ve waited this long,” she said and put her hands on his chest. Gently, firmly pushing him away. “I want our first night to be—Perfect.” She dropped her eyes, disgusted with her own subterfuge. She felt rather than saw him gain control.

“I understand completely. It’s been a full evening. A night’s rest will do you wonders. Good-night, Mrs. Stanhope,” he said. Then he smiled a tight, thin smile and walked briskly down the sidewalk.

* * *

Jennifer’s legs buckled underneath her just as she closed the front door. She crouched in the velvety darkness, her back to the door, trying to dredge up some enthusiasm for the future painted for her. A shimmering ray caught her eye and she looked down, studying the moonlight trapped in the brilliant gem. Fighting the bleak emotion that pinned her to the wall, she dragged herself up and trudged into the bedroom. She slowly stripped the black dress and pearls and lay on the bed. She thought about Franklin and his angry desire. It didn’t feel like love as much as possession. Of course, since she didn’t think she’d ever been in love, she wasn’t sure if she would recognize it if she saw it. Idly, she ran her fingers over the pink satin covering her breast. She trailed her fingers down her flat stomach and ran protective little circles over the area that felt bruised by the erection. She closed her eyes and wandered what it would be like to be kissed by a lover. A real lover, not someone who wanted a hostess. A helpmate.

Left on their own, her fingers slid under the lace band of her underwear. She felt the little button between the soft folds; it was hard and demanding. All around was damp and velvety. A vision began to form in her head. Golden hair and strong hands callused from hard work. Firm, insistent lips, but caring, delicious. Her fingers danced and stroked, teasing and rubbing. She moaned and licked her lips, suddenly dry and tight. The tingles began, soft at first, then electric and jagged. Building with each practiced stroke. Her fingers were gone, replaced by a hot searching tongue. His tongue. Licking her. Tasting her. She arched her back, her soft buttocks rubbing against her flannel sheets and the strokes came hard and fast. Just when she thought she

would never come, she felt the wet explosion. Wave after wave of ecstasy flowed between her legs and up her stomach to her hard nipples and swollen breasts. She screwed her eyes shut, not wanting the feeling to end. Holding on to it as long as she could. But it ended the way it always did and she fell back onto the bed, tingling all over, exhausted with her phantom lovemaking. Smiling blue eyes watched as she drifted off into blackness.

* * *

Later—she wasn't sure how much later—Jennifer huddled on her overstuffed sofa wearing nothing but a pink bathrobe. The plush fabric caressed her bare skin and soothed her jangled nerves. Miss Galore, a mass of radiant heat, was curled on her lap. Jennifer stroked the purring animal and stared at the only light besides the moon—the red dot flashing persistently on the answering machine.

The message was undoubtedly from her mother, demanding the latest on Franklin. Mother would be ecstatic, but Jennifer didn't want to talk about it. Her indifference to the new development in her life would trigger the inevitable discussion. *No, be honest. Lecture. Mother will talk. I will listen.*

“Your problem is that you don't appreciate what you have,” Beatrice Webb would announce in her most matriarchal voice. “Franklin has a great future with infinite possibilities.”

“But I don't feel anything,” Jennifer would respond, hating the whine that could easily have come from a spoiled ten year old.

“You place far too much emphasis on feelings and not enough on peace of mind. You take after your father; he was a man of emotion. Life to him was nothing but fun, fun, and more fun. No business sense whatsoever. When he died, he left me nothing.”

“That's not true. He left you money and a house and memories of love.”

“He left me alone. Memories aren’t worth the paper they’re not printed on.”

No matter how many times they had the conversation, Jennifer always reacted the same way. She knew her mother was lonely but it was her own fault. The love Beatrice had felt for her husband had dissolved into bitterness and anger at being left alone with a teenage daughter. What few friends she’d had drifted away, unable—unwilling—to cope with the blackness that filled Beatrice’s life. But Jennifer refused to succumb to the grief that gnawed away at her mother’s life and as a result, the mother-daughter chat would always fall apart.

Beatrice would get the pinched; “you don’t understand what I went through” attitude and Jennifer would grow sullen and finally hang up, vowing never to talk to her mother again. Just replaying the conversation in her mind brought on a fresh bout of exhaustion and tonight she simply wasn’t up to the strain.

Beatrice Webb’s daughter wrapped her arms around her chest and rocked gently back and forth. A single tear quivered for a moment, sparkling in the silvery moonlight, then fell, disappearing into the deep blackness. Jennifer stared at the diamond winking balefully from her finger while “Mrs. Stanhope” echoed through her brain, blocking out any other thought. It was the right thing—the practical thing—to do, but Jennifer felt as if her life had ended when it should have begun.