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Opening Extract from...

On Demand

Written by Justine Elyot

Published by Black Lace

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On Demand
Justine Elyot

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This book is a work of fiction.

In real life, make sure you practise safe, sane and consensual sex.

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No Reservations

(Do you have a reservation? Then this isn't the hotel for you!)

Welcome to the Hotel.

All baggage is to be left at the door.

Please sign in, under whichever name you have chosen, at Reception.

You are now free to explore. Enjoy your stay!

I have always been drawn to hotels.

Call me commitment-phobic, but I love their eternal temporariness, their anonymity, their fluidity and flux. They seduce you without expecting your heart and soul; your home expects time and attention, but your hotel only wants your money, and only for as long as you care to give it. You can walk up the steps as plain Jane Smith and enter the lobby as Lady Furcoat-Noknickers; the hotel does not care what you do, or with whom.

A luxuriously appointed building full of people escaping reality can brew a heady atmosphere – I should know; I've worked here for four years now. Few of the comings and goings here pass me by. Especially the comings.

It all started so innocently.

A delayed train, an hour to kill. I was halfway to the queue for styrofoam-flavour sludge before I stopped myself

and the idea sparked. I could spend my dead minutes on a spit-drenched platform staring at time ticking by on the 'Next Arrival' screen. Or I could spend them in the hotel across the road, drinking half-decent coffee and reading a complimentary magazine.

It was almost one o'clock, so I wouldn't stand out too much amidst the lunchtime rush – if I could find a comfortable chair in a quiet corner, I could pretend to be a bona fide businesswoman meeting a client or something. It would be fun; a tiny masquerade to enliven a dull wait.

This particular hotel was of the swankier variety; a row of international flags flapped above the plate glass, and uniformed doormen stood on sentry duty either side of the revolving entrance. I wondered if they had to remain impassive and still, like Beefeaters, but one of them unbent and smiled at me when I trotted past, intent on getting through the revolving door without a pratfall of some kind.

Sophie Martin, bored office drone and unsuccessful photographer, pushed her hand against the glass.

Sophie Martin, supercharged business bitch, stepped out on the other side.

Not that there was any telephone-box-whirlwind-style action going on in the revolving doors – all it took to turn from drab to diva was exposure to the seductive particles of the hotel lobby air, weighted with possibility and chance and choice and an undertone of wickedness.

My heels click-click-clicked on the marble lobby floor, passing the curved Reception desk, catching a haughty lip-curl from its pointy-nosed custodian. She wouldn't be looking askance at me once she knew exactly who I was, I told myself grandly. I would have her lilac-rinsed head on a platter.

I strutted into the bar, carpeted now so that my heels were muffled, found a corner with an armchair and a copy of some style glossy and sashayed straight over.

Within seconds, a waistcoated waiter was taking my order, hovering and fawning in a manner I could imagine myself getting quite used to. The prices were steep, but when you considered that a morale-boost came with your cappuccino, perhaps they were worth paying.

He was a few years younger than me, maybe twenty or so; the rude whiff of barely post-adolescent testosterone clung to his white shirtsleeves and poorly shaved chin. I wondered what he would do if I flirted with him.

'Do I get anything extra with my cappuccino?' I asked him, dropping the level of my voice a notch or two and hoping it would make me sound like Lauren Bacall. I raised one eyebrow, a forefinger tapping my lower lip to pull it down to a pout.

He coughed slightly. 'A biscotti, Madam,' he said, the tips of his ears reddening. 'And chocolate or cinnamon sprinkles.'

'Oh, cinnamon, I think,' I drawled, striving to keep my voice on the sexy side of forty-fags-a-day. 'I always prefer spicy to sweet, don't you?'

I almost laughed at my own cartoon vampishness, but it seemed to be doing the trick for him. He flushed beautifully and scurried away, leaving me to terrorise him with my eyes over the rim of my magazine until the coffee was ready.

The room was filling up with conference attendees on a lunch break: lots of men in suits talking loudly into mobile phones and gesturing over to whoever was getting the round in at the bar. Mmm, I thought, stretching a leg beneath my table and rotating my ankle slowly. I do like a good suit. Some of these were very well-cut indeed; I wondered what the conference was about. Were they bankers? IT consultants? Estate agents even?

My question was met with a question.

'What did you think of that session? Not enough

statistical evidence, I thought; bit too much reliance on the anecdotal.'

A man slid into the armchair opposite mine, placing a plastic wallet of papers on the table between us. Through the green shade of the cover, I could just make out the words 'Probate Law'. *Ooh, a lawyer, I thought; I've never met one of those before. Though if this one is anything to judge by, I should get myself arrested more often.*

Everything about him was top-of-the-range, from the haircut down to the polished Italian leather that peeked from the crossed trouser-leg. The voice was warm and smooth; an asset if he was a barrister. Even as I looked up and smiled back, I tried to picture him in one of those horsehair wigs and a black cloak; it proved to be a surprisingly sexy image.

'Oh, I'm not here for the conference,' I said, flicking the page of my magazine.

'Really? Meeting someone? Am I intruding?'

'No, no.' I waved him back down to his sitting position. 'Just taking a breather,' I told him.

'Right. I thought I hadn't seen you in the meeting room. My attention was wandering a bit from the flipchart, and I'm sure it would have rested on you.'

Wow! He was flirting with me. A man who knows how to wash and earns a wage flirting with me! Unheard-of in the annals of my experience. I had to wonder what all that pure new wool would smell like. Not to mention that subtly tanned skin, from which a hint of expensive aftershave was drifting over, activating my saliva glands.

He had beautiful hands as well; I could picture them gesturing in court. I could also picture them on my hip, my belly, my thigh. All in all, the effect he had on me was instant and acute. I found myself leaning forward, crossing my legs so that my skirt rode a little higher, just to the point

where the elasticated part of my hold-up stocking might be a teensy bit visible.

'What's the conference?' I asked. 'Charm school headmasters?'

He laughed, throwing his head back, oh, Adam's apple, oh, deep, rich laugh, oh. I took advantage of his moment's lapse in eye contact to slip open my top button and put aside my magazine. I wanted him in the most sudden and violent way. I wanted to touch the fine cotton of his shirt, open it wide and see if what lay within was as luxurious as its cladding.

'No,' he said eventually, his bright blue eyes damp with mirth and ... something else. 'Solicitors. I specialise in soliciting.'

Now it was my turn to laugh. 'Clearly,' I purred.

Some form of conversation followed, of the kind you might hear between Mae West and Sid James, predicated entirely on smutty innuendo. I don't remember what we said, but I do remember the feeling of being involved in a dirty-minded game of verbal tennis: serve, volley, lob, smash, grunt, new balls please. Just like our more athletic fellows, we were getting sweatier and hotter with each point scored.

Much as we pretended to wit and sophistication, the real gist of what was said was:

Him: Get your kit off.

Me: Work for it.

Him: Look at me like that and I'll have you up against the wall before you can say 'No win no fee'.

Me: Sounds good; prove it.

Before the cinnamon sprinkles of my cappuccino had melted into the froth, he had a proposition for me.

'Listen,' he said, eyes now piercing blue laserbeams of seduction, body wide open in a pose at once relaxed and

predatory. 'How long do you have? Do you have to rush back to work?'

I bit my lip and smiled inscrutably.

'Come on, help me out,' he said. 'Do I have to issue a summons?'

This made me laugh again. I can't resist a man with a sense of humour. I also can't resist a man who looks as if he could be in the running for the next James Bond.

'What do you have in mind?' I asked. If he was James Bond, I was pretty close to Pussy Galore at this stage. 'Does it involve handcuffs?'

'Would you like it to?'

My mouth watered.

'You've got me on a technicality,' I told him, standing and taking his proffered pinstriped arm. The warmth and scent of him tripped my switches; I wanted that, just that, just for now.

'What's your room number?' he murmured, sweeping me past the potted plants into the lobby.

Ah.

'Can't we go to yours?'

He stopped smartly, frowning down at me. 'I'm afraid not; the conference finishes today.' He shook his head. 'You aren't staying here?'

I chewed the inside of my cheek, blushing. 'Well, no. Just came in for a coffee.'

'Just a coffee? You aren't another kind of solicitor, are you?'

I breathed in sharply. 'Fuck, no!'

He breathed out for me. 'I'm sorry. I didn't think you ... OK. "Fuck, no," you say, but I'm still thinking, "Fuck? Yes!" If you're with me. Still with me?'

I giggled, a little bit hysterically. It wasn't the first time I'd been taken for a member of the oldest profession, but certainly the least opportune.

'We don't have a room,' I pointed out.

He manoeuvred me behind one of the substantial palms, pulled me against him and patted the seat of my skirt. 'I do have a car,' he growled.

The feel of him, hard chest, taut shoulder, large crotch-bulge, was enough to chase away my doubts. I wanted that, on me, above me, in me.

'Reclining seats?' I asked.

'Of course.'

'Good.'

In the underground car park, he bent me backwards over the bonnet and mashed his lips into mine. That well-cut cloth was covering my feeble manmade fibres, rubbing them up and down, sparking them into static cling. My nylon stockings nudged at his trousers, slinking up beneath his jacket and around his hips, wrapping around his back and clamping that central hardness right into the open maw of my skirt.

I ground my mound around it, enjoying the sensation of the fabrics pressing into me, while his tongue plunged downward and his hand excavated the hidden depths behind my blouse. His fingers plucked and sneaked under the lacy cups; there was pressing and kneading and hot breath and jammed pelvises and mock-thrusting, and all beneath the spotlight concrete ceiling of the public car park.

'Do you want it then?' he asked, holding my wrists pinned to the cool shiny paintwork.

'Maybe *in the car*?' I whispered, moving my head sideways to check for CCTV cameras and irate attendants.

'My command is your wish,' he said, pulling me up as if preparing for an energetic jitterbug and spinning me around to the side of the vehicle. He ducked inside the door,

pressed the button to recline the passenger seat and bundled me on to it. I was a little confused when he shut the door, leaving me supine on the chilled leather, but he soon reappeared on the driver's side, kneeling on the seat and looking ravenously down at me.

'Get your knickers off then,' he prompted.

Thrilled at his excellent grasp of the command tone, I wriggled them down my thighs, past my knees, and brought my still-shod feet up in the air to release them from the legholes.

My escort put a steadying hand on one leg, indicating that he wanted them both kept up in that position, and moved his other arm down for a good feel of my newly exposed parts.

'Now that's wet,' he said, impressed. 'A good fuck is what you need.'

I couldn't argue with him. The speed, the suddenness, the rudeness, the wrongness of it all was the turn-on of my life. It was dirty and slutty, but I like dirty and slutty, and so, it seems, did he.

In his haste to mount me, he lost a button from the placket of his trousers, swearing as it pinged into the distance, then he slipped swiftly and efficiently between my knees, levering me up by the bum in order to skewer my dripping centre in one move.

We groaned in chorus as it stole inside so easily, so satisfyingly, filling the hole in perfect proportion.

'Do you do this often?' he asked, beginning to thrust.

'Mmm?' I replied absently, lifting my hips towards his, grabbing his bottom to push him greedily as far in as I could.

'Pick up strange men in hotels for dirty sex? I bet you do it all the time.'

It was on the tip of my tongue to protest, to say no, that I'm not that kind of girl, but before I did, my imagination stepped in front of my indignation and I realised that I liked this idea. I imagined him as one of a string of anonymous men, using my body, day after day, week after week, in the hotel bedrooms, the toilets, the car park. I'm not a whore, but I felt like one, letting this man whose name I didn't even know slam his cock up me within quarter of an hour of meeting.

'Yes,' I said. 'I do.'

'Thought so.'

The windows had steamed up now and I had to spare a thought for the expensive upholstery, which was getting the pounding of all time. I pushed my hands down, clutching at his belt, the buckle end of which slapped lightly against my bottom with each forward motion. These were becoming more frantic now, the jingling urgent, his loosened tie flapping over my face until I sank my teeth into it, irritated by the tickling effect. I could feel the quake, shuddering seconds away, and I accidentally kicked the dashboard quite hard, so that he stopped for a second and turned around to assess any damage. Luckily there was none.

All the same, 'I'll make you pay for that,' he vowed, ratcheting up the force of his thrusts, body-slamming me into a new realm of fierce sensation. The more I pretended to be a hooker, concentrating on servicing my client and avoiding orgasm, the more orgasmic I felt, until the wave crashed and I yelled until I was hoarse.

For a while, it was as if our bodies had melted together; the sweet glue of our exertions filled the air and stuck us to each other. The car seat was slippery now and my thin summer blouse drenched. He unpeeled himself shortly before I had to pass out, crouching between my sore thighs, which were chafed to bits by that pure new wool I had so

admired in his trousers. Thank God they hadn't been made of cheap stuff; I would have been skinned alive.

'Nothing like a mid-conference knee-trembler,' he opined, taking a wallet from the glove compartment and stuffing a wad of twenty-pound notes into my cleavage. 'Get yourself something pretty. Off you trot then.'

Eyes on stalks, I removed the money – a hundred pounds – and tried to give it back, but he simply unlocked the car door and opened it, gesturing me away impatiently.

I straightened myself up in the car park, snapped the elastic tops of my hold-ups back in place, pulled my skirt down and re-buttoned my blouse. I would have to sort out my face and hair in the toilets.

Before leaving, I threw the money back inside the car. Much as I could have used a hundred quid, it seemed important that I did not accept it. To do so would have been to concede control of the encounter to him, and I did not want that. If I behave like a trollop, it's because I want to; the pretence is an essential part of the excitement.

Of course, I missed the train.

The memory of my soliciting solicitor sustained me through some long and lonely nights, replaying the scenes on my darkened ceiling while my fingers wandered beneath the sheets.

The hotel was not really on my way anywhere, but sometimes I would take detours just to gaze at its gilded splendour, my eyes moving slowly upwards beyond the striped awning to the windows of the rooms, picturing what might be going on behind those heavy white drapes.

Temptation took a week to lure me back inside.

Another lunch hour, another conference, but this time I was dressed for the occasion in my highest heels, my tightest skirt, my sharpest jacket over a lacy camisole. My

eyes cruised the bar while I slunk over to order a drink. Not a coffee this time; they can sour the breath so – this time I would go for a cocktail. Something fruity.

I leant over the counter, wiggling my bum out at the rest of the room. The stuttery waiter was lurking in the background stacking glasses in the washer and he smirked at the barman, a sleazy-looking character, when he swaggered up to ask me if he could help.

‘Oh, I’m sure you can,’ I said, releasing the inner vixen in full effect. ‘What I really fancy just now is a Sloe Comfortable Screw.’

The barman double-took; I had to have a stern word with myself to stifle the unvampish giggle struggling to escape my Bitch Red lips. Then his lip flipped up at an Elvis-like angle, his eyes glazed over slightly and he leant right down.

‘I’m sure that can be arranged,’ he smarmed. Creepy as he was, there was something primitively attractive about him, though he severely overestimated his own charms. ‘Or maybe a Screaming Orgasm?’

Much as I enjoy repetition of this beach-holiday-classic conversation, I was not after shagging the man, so I toned down my performance for his benefit.

‘Oh no, I don’t think so,’ I said primly. ‘But I do want an umbrella and a sparkler. The full tarty works, if you can manage that.’

His eyes narrowed and he began shaking ice with venomous purpose. I took advantage of his preoccupation to scope out the room again. Knots of business people in twos and threes were drifting in, beginning to line the counter. Some of them tried to catch my eye; even more so when I took a seat on a high bar stool and sipped at my glass of neon-orange slapper juice. Stocking tops in sight, I unbuttoned and removed my jacket, leaving my shoulders bare and my bra visible beneath the fluttery scrap of camisole. I

took a straw from a dispenser on the counter top and began to suck the drink up, pouting my lips.

The barman was barely able to serve the other customers, such was his distraction. I was watching him fumble with a bowl of complimentary olives when a voice behind me caused me to spin around.

'How much for half an hour?'

He was not my type. Shortish, balding, the beginnings of a paunch. But, perversely, the idea of being available to the first bidder was exciting enough to overcome my personal tastes.

I looked him up and down and smiled. 'I don't charge,' I said.

He raised his eyebrows. 'I'm sorry, I got the wrong idea,' he said apologetically, holding up his hands and backing away.

'No, no,' I whispered, beckoning him back. 'I mean, if you can persuade me it will be worth my while, I'll give you a freebie.'

He was motionless for a while, staring at my cleavage consideringly.

'I'm not sure I understand,' he said at last. 'Come and sit with me and tell me what you mean.'

I followed him to an alcove and plonked myself on the cream leather banquette beside him.

'So you aren't a working girl?' he opened, taking a draught of his lager and regarding me enquiringly.

'Oh, I am a working girl,' I contradicted him, deciding to get into character. 'But I'm off-duty at the moment. It was a long night.'

'Oh.' The man chuckled with relief. 'I thought I might have offended you there. So ... you aren't available then?'

'I'm available to the right client,' I told him. 'Although I had a few earlier on, none of them were up to much. Definitely a case of business rather than pleasure.'

'Really?' The man puffed up his chest a little, clearly preparing to convince me of his Real Man status. 'So you ... you enjoy your work?'

'Oh, yes, I love it,' I told him, sucking on my straw again. 'Do you? Are you here for the conference?'

'Yes.' He shook his head. 'I like my work, but I hate these dos. Bloody icebreakers, meetings about meetings and all that. I'm dreading this afternoon – role-playing, would you believe?'

'Oh, I like role-playing,' I protested. 'How about we do a little one now, just to get you in the mood?'

'You're quite something, you know,' he said, almost nervously. The power of knowing that this man wanted me, feared rejection from me, would probably go to some lengths to have me, was intoxicating. I felt like Cleopatra.

'Thank you. So are you up for it?'

'Depends what "it" is. What's my brief?'

'You're a wealthy businessman. I'm a prostitute.'

'Well, that's not far from the truth,' he said, brow furrowed.

'Good. It'll be all the more convincing then. Come on, let's play.'

I sat back and waited for him to make the opening gambit, wondering if I would actually go through with it. Sex with a man I didn't really fancy, just for the sake of satisfying my newly discovered kink. It was my fantasy, but would it crumble in the face of reality? I had to know. I decided then and there that I would have one rule in my game, and the rule was that I could not say no. Obviously I *could*, in the face of danger or serious illegality – but up to that point, I would say yes to everything and everyone.

'OK then,' he said, sitting back and determinedly getting into role. 'How much for half an hour?'

'Two hundred,' I said.

'Two hundred? For half an hour? You must be good.'

'I am. Do you want to find out how good?'

'I think I do. Hold on a minute though . . . I thought you said this would be a freebie?'

'Yes, yes,' I said impatiently. 'It will be. But in the game, I cost two hundred.' I lowered my voice, looked him straight in the eye. 'In real life, I'm a no-strings free fuck.'

'Christ knows you don't get many of them,' said the man, his voice a little uneven. 'Right then. Let's go to my room, shall we?'

'Yes.'

In the lift on the way up, I stared at the pair of us in the mirror. He looked a little crumpled and slightly sweaty. I looked like a tart. It would have been pretty obvious to all in the bar and lobby what our relationship was.

Now we were out of the public areas of the hotel, he seemed to gain an assertiveness that had been only half-present in the bar.

'So you had a long night,' he said, his tone rather severe.

'Yes.' I blushed. 'I didn't get much sleep.'

'Time for bed then, eh?'

He took my arm as the lift door slid open and escorted me along the corridor, our feet sinking in the deep pile of the carpet as if we were walking through snow.

It was only when he slipped his key card into the slot that I began to have misgivings. The solicitor was one thing – carried along on a wave of lust that knocked doubts for six – but this was another. A strange man's hotel room.

Could I really go through with this?

My escort answered the question for me. He strode straight over to the bed, sat down on the edge and unzipped his fly.

'Right, if I'm paying two hundred for this, I want my money's worth. Let's see you with your clothes off.'

His sudden switch to 'in charge' mode awakened my wilder streak. I straightened my spine, did a little twirl and threw the jacket I was carrying on to a chair. Never having done a striptease before, I was unsure of the ritual, but once I had unbuttoned and shimmied out of my skirt, everything seemed to flow naturally. Down to the lacy camisole, silk French knickers and lace hold-ups, I slowed the action, teasingly pretending to drop something and bending over to pick it up, or standing with one foot on the dresser while I ran my hands up my leg. I could see myself, at a peculiar angle, in the wardrobe mirror and I was impressed by the figure I cut. I momentarily considered a career in burlesque. If only I had a feathery fan and a Venetian mask.

Indeed, I was loving my work so much that I almost forgot my 'client' was waiting until I was forced by his impatient cough to look back at him. His fist was closed around his erect cock, his face quite red and collar loosened.

'We've only got half an hour,' he reminded me brusquely. 'I'm not paying you to dance. Get the rest of your kit off then get down on your knees over here.'

'OK, just one more move,' I promised him, hip-swaying over to the fruit bowl and taking the banana from the top. I peeled it slowly, ran my tongue up the exposed pale yellow flesh and swirled its tip around the top of the fruit.

'On your knees, now!' entreated the client, groaning when I simultaneously put one hand down the front of my knickers and the banana in my mouth, swishing it around in there, sucking on it for all I was worth. 'Sod the banana, wrap your lips around this!'

He leant back, presenting his cock to me in all its fat purple-crowned glory. Giggling, I tossed the banana aside and fell to my knees in mock-worship of his manhood, ogling and caressing it as if it were made of gold. Slowly and deliberately I ran my tongue around my lips, staring boldly

up at him, before taking the plunge, closing my mouth over the considerable girth, forming a seal and sucking for all I was worth.

My fingers played with his balls, squeezing gently and sometimes creeping back to push against his perineum, which tightened the sac all the more. Even when my mouth began to ache, I revelled in the effect I was having on him, his helpless little yaps of pleasure spurring me on to greater efforts. He was going to remember this as the blow job of his life; if I was going to play the part of the expensive hooker, I was going to do it properly.

My tongue played lightly against his steely erection, flicking up and down the shaft and around the frenulum. One of my hands closed tightly around his base while I worked at fitting more and more of him into my mouth; the other continued its foray around his testicles. He was shaking now, making strangled utterances, his hands clenching and unclenching in my hair; the end could not be far off.

'Lap it up, slut,' he panted, before roaring and thrusting into my face. A burst of liquid saltiness filled my mouth, pumping in and down my throat for what seemed like a long time. Even when I thought I had swallowed the lot and slid off his cock, an extra jet squirted on to my breasts, staining the lace border of my camisole.

I sat back on my heels and he lay down on the bed, spent.

'You can go now,' he murmured.

'You still have ten minutes,' I pointed out. 'And besides, I want my turn. I'm going to sit in that chair and sort myself out.'

He propped himself up, squinting. 'You aren't a real whore,' he said. 'A real whore would have been off with the money.'

'Like I said, I'm off-duty,' I told him. I sat back in the plush boudoir armchair, slung one leg over an arm, pushed aside

the gusset of my knickers and began to delve into the slippery recesses, throwing my head back and shutting my eyes, imagining an audience crowded round me, brandishing twenty-pound notes. I squirmed on the velvet, flicking and plucking and plunging my fingers, pinching and squeezing my tits until I came hard, imagining applause, whistles, a shower of notes.

Then there was real applause; the clapping of my very own audience, now sitting up again with a noticeable erection threatening to poke him in the eye.

I glanced at the clock. Time was up.

'You'd better go down,' I told him, yawning and rising reluctantly from the chair.

'Hang on, though – for two hundred I should get another go, shouldn't I? I haven't even touched your pussy yet.'

'Time's up,' I said briskly, stepping into my skirt. 'And you have a role-play to perform. Not such an interesting one as this, though.'

'But I want to fuck you now,' he moaned.

'Thanks, but no thanks,' I told him, buttoning my jacket. 'You know where to find me if you fancy another go. And you know what it will cost.'

'How can I go downstairs with this?' he beseeched me, staring disconsolately at his treacherous stiffness.

'Good afternoon.' I smiled, opened the door and sailed off down the corridor, surging with wicked glee.

The lift door opened and I crossed the lobby, feeling every eye upon me, X-raying through to the semen stain on my camisole, the wet spot on my silky knickers, the traces of salty spunk on my tongue. *They all know I'm a whore*, I thought, swinging my hips and letting my heels click on the polished floor.

When I got home, I had to bring myself off again.

* * *

After that, the hunger was upon me. It became a game as addictive as any of those online fantasies; truly a second life.

At least once a week I strutted my stuff, maximally tarty and overdone amid the minimalist décor of the bar, lacking only a flashing beacon on my head to proclaim my shamelessness.

The men came in all shapes, sizes, ages, degrees of attractiveness and intelligence; the rule was, I could only say no in the most extreme of situations.

My juices stained dozens of pristine bedsheets; I took it lying down, standing up, on all fours, on chairs and desks and over windowsills; between my tits, in my mouth, cunt, arse; three ways, four ways, six ways till Sunday; with women, with an audience, with a camera, with a blindfold, with a webcam, with a whip, with a will.

There came a time when I could rely on three or four regular 'clients' being in the bar at any one session; sometimes I would only take up the first to offer; on other occasions, I would treat them all, one at a time or as a group. About six weeks into my new 'career', logistics were careering out of hand. The number of men waiting for their free ride every time I entered the bar was becoming unmanageable.

I pitched up one day at a new and unpopular time – half past three in the afternoon – and was relieved to find just me, the waiter and the barman in attendance.

I ordered a strawberry daiquiri and gave my creepy friend a dazzling smile. Perhaps today his luck could be in after all. For once, he smiled back instead of tossing his fringe sulkily.

'Have you heard? We've got a new manager. He wants a word with you.'

My fingers tensed around the stem of my glass. 'Why? How would he know me? What have you said?'

The barman simply shrugged and leered at me. 'His office is behind Reception. Go on and find out what he wants.'

I cannot say no. So I went.

I noticed that the severe-looking middle-aged woman I was used to had been replaced by a young girl with a pierced nose and an antipodean accent; a temp, I guessed. She smiled brightly at me and pointed to the door at the back of the area when I told her the manager wanted to see me.

I had no idea what to expect, but obeyed the terse instruction from the other side of the door to enter, and pushed my way into a huge windowless office. The manager sat behind a massive desk, about half a mile away, or so it seemed.

'Ah,' he said, and crooked a long finger. I made the epic journey across the carpet, my knees already weak, concentrating on keeping atop my heels and avoiding any humiliating wobbling. He did not stand or attempt to shake my hand, but simply looked me up and down through gold-framed spectacles, neither approvingly nor disapprovingly. Eventually he sat back and said, 'I'm new here.'

'So I've heard,' I replied, hoping for a swift cut to the chase.

'But you aren't. Are you?'

'I'm ... a fairly frequent patron ... of the bar.'

'You've been inside a few of the bedrooms too, I gather.'

So what? It's not a crime. But I bit my tongue.

'Anyway, that's by the by,' he said, waving a hand. 'I've been studying the books. Bar takings have taken quite a turn for the better in the past six weeks. We have many rebookings for rooms, especially in the traditionally unpopular midweek slots. A little business-minded bird told me you might have something to do with that.'

He really had the gimlet-stare off pat. It was quite

disconcerting, but I faced down the blue-grey gleam and shrugged. 'Not for me to say.'

Finally his lips twisted from rigid to relaxed and a half-chuckle leaked out. 'You needn't be defensive. I'm not about to ban you from the premises. The hooker in the bar is a fact of luxury hotel life; I'm inclined to turn a blind eye.'

'I'm not a hooker,' I blurted.

He frowned. 'It's all right; I've told you where I stand. There's no need to deny it ...'

'Really. I'm not a hooker. I just ... it's ... kind of like ... a hobby ...' I broke off, realising that there was nowhere to go with this statement. He would probably prefer a prostitute; somebody with a sharp business mind. A slut, on the other hand ...

'Now that's very interesting,' he remarked, leaning forward. 'That would explain why these men are spending so much in the bar and on room service, as well as going for the more expensive suites. They aren't paying for ... anything extra.'

I scowled at him, then looked away.

'Look at me,' he said, and his tone woke me up; a visceral lurch in my stomach. I had never heard anything so commanding. 'I have a proposition for you.'

'Oh?'

He picked up a pen and wrote something with a flourish on some documents ranged on his blotter. He was signing his name, I thought.

'I'm offering you a job, if you're interested. I need a receptionist - somebody like you: smart, sexy, dressed to kill, with a bit of a come-hither behind the professional veneer. Take a look at the details and tell me what you think.'

I skim-read the contract; the terms and conditions seemed fair, the work easy and the money good. I needed good money.

'I . . . think it looks like something I might consider,' I said cautiously.

'And for how long might you consider it?' he asked sternly, his brows creasing at me. He was, I realised in that moment, exceptionally attractive.

Caution scattered into the four winds. 'For a few seconds,' I said, breathing hard and flushing. 'OK. I'll take it. Thanks.'

It was only then that he stood to shake my hand. He had a firm grip, his skin warm and smooth, his hand comfortably large.

'Good,' he said. 'I'm Christopher Chase; Mr Chase to you. Or Sir.'

'Yes, Sir,' I breathed, feeling funny in a squirmy sort of way at the use of the honorific. 'Oh, yeah, I'm Sophie Martin.'

'I'm very glad to have you on board, Sophie,' he said, and for a millisecond an image of him lying on top of me on the deck of a ship, thrusting manfully, distracted me from the matter at hand.

'You will be friendly but professional behind the desk,' he reminded me. 'What you get up to when you're off-duty, however, is entirely your own . . . affair.'

He perched on the edge of his desk, curling a flirtatious lip at me. Basically, he was encouraging me to carry on my bar-based shaggery for as long as I liked.

I could not say no.