

BEAUTY: USING WHAT YOU GOT TO GET WHAT YOU WANT

# Honey

## JENNIFER LOPEZ

03.00.2000

J-LO ON THE  
DOWN LO

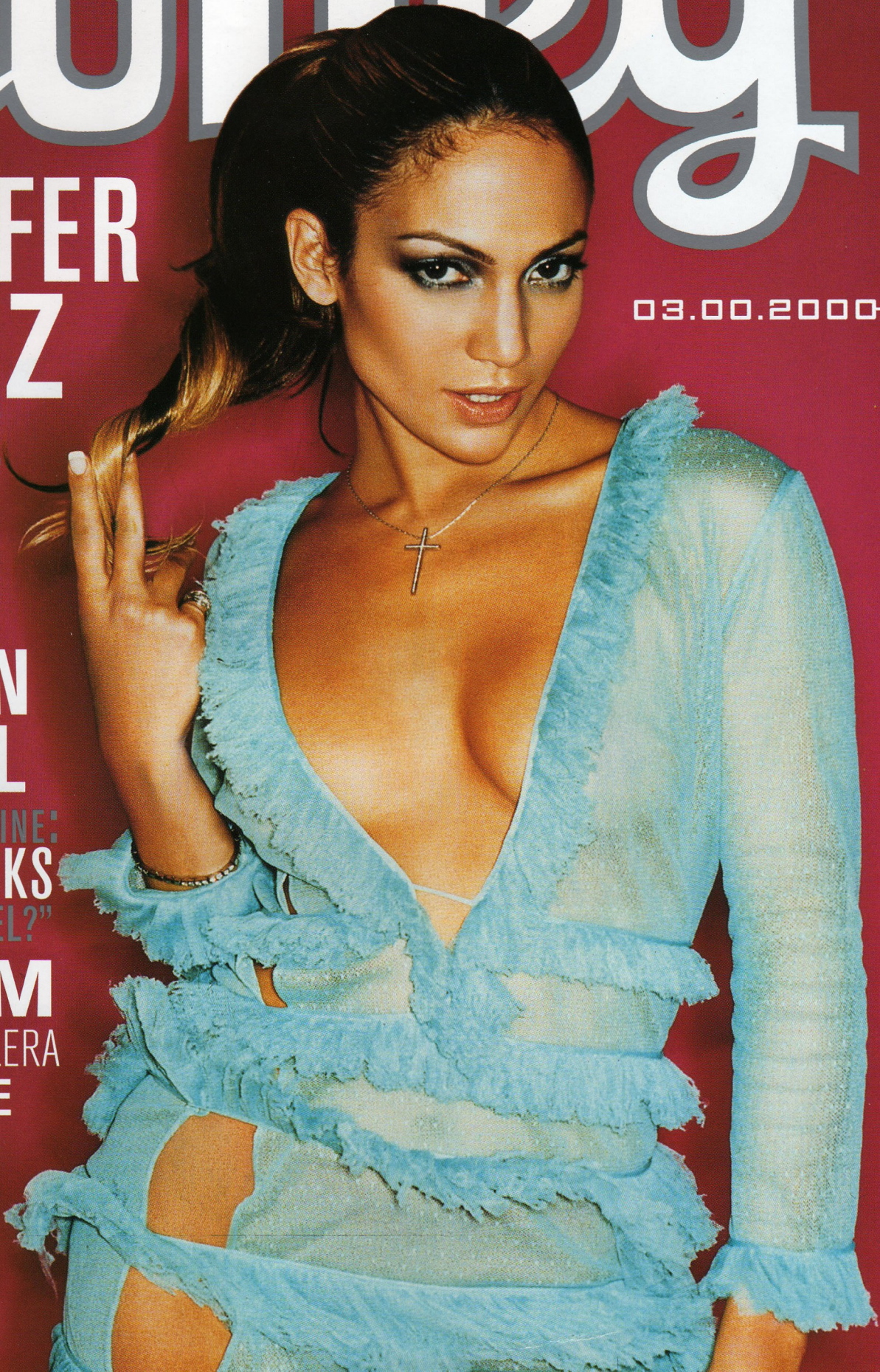
BY NANCY JO SALES

### SPRING FASHION SPECIAL

A SPECIAL VALENTINE:  
D'ANGELO ASKS  
"HOW DOES IT FEEL?"

### LIL' KIM

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“Happy Birthday, Mr. Puff Daddy,” croons Jennifer Lopez. She is sashaying around in a dress made of huggy white satin and she’s wearing a wig like a dollop of meringue, completing the transformation from Puerto Rican homegirl to blonde bombshell. Inside a dark club, up on a movie screen, she’s doing her best Marilyn impression for her man; a man they call Puffy ‘cause he’s got a tendency to get mad. Marilyn knew men like that, too, and conspiracy theorists say that one of them might have killed her.

The crowd oohs and ahs. And get this, Jennifer isn’t even here in New York, she’s in L.A. filming a thriller with Vince Vaughn called “The Cell.” Tonight, the crowd at Manhattan’s Club Orient reacts to the sight of Jennifer on the movie screen with the same excitement and intensity with which they used to react to, well, Puffy himself. And this isn’t just any crowd, it’s Puff Daddy’s 30th birthday party, and all the ranks of the “hip-hoperati” are here, Russell Simmons, Lil’ Kim, Busta Rhymes and Mary J. Blige. The hottest star around, however, appears as a mere celluloid image, blowing kisses and shimmying her hot body to the beat.

“Happy Birthday, Mr. Puff Daddy,” Lopez sings in a whispery purr. The crowd goes wild.

“On the real I ain’t never had nobody love me the way she loves me,” Puffy says when the lights come up, raising a glass of champagne. He’s dressed casually (for him) in a white tank top and five pounds of gold chains. “It’s really real right now,” he says. “Hopefully one day I’ll be able to marry her. I’m a ride with her to the end!”

The crowd goes crazy.

That was November.

But Jennifer and Puffy took a very different kind of ride on the night of December 27, 1999. They ran at least one red light after peeling out in a Lincoln Navigator from a party at Club New York, where there had just been a shooting that left three people badly wounded. A fight reportedly broke out when a patron insulted Puffy, throwing bills in his face and snarling, “You’re not the only one who has money.” Then, 19-year-old Jamal “Shyne” Barrow, one of Puffy’s Bad Boy rappers, allegedly pulled a gun.

Or was it Puffy who pulled the gun, as at least one witness contended? And who owned the stolen 9mm gun police found inside the hip-hop mogul’s car? Was it Puffy’s? Shyne’s? It couldn’t be Jennifer’s, could it?

Lopez was released from jail after a long, tearful night of questioning (and a comforting bottle of cuticle cream bought for her by an unusually obliging New York City policeman). Combs was charged with criminal possession of a handgun, a rap that

could earn him an uncomfortable bid, and Barrow was charged with attempted murder.

As the press coverage reached a frenzy (“Her High-Risk Romance,” read the cover of *People*) there was still this question to be answered: What was a woman like Lopez doing with a guy like the increasingly trouble-prone Puffy?

In the past year, Lopez, former *Fly Girl* for Fox’s now defunct variety show “In Living Colour,” has vaulted into the dizzying realm of international stardom. Her debut album, *On The Six*, stayed at No. 1 on the Billboard charts for five straight weeks. Her No. 1 single “If You Had My Love,” produced by Rodney Jerkins, wafted out of radios from the barrios to the ‘burbs. She looked slinky in the song’s video, which is to be expected of a woman who is presently being touted as the sexiest woman in America, a groundbreaking triumph for a beautifully brown-skinned Latina.

“Jennifer exudes sex appeal,” says Tommy Mottola, the powerful head of Sony Records (Lopez affectionately nicknamed him “Don Tomasso”). It was rumored that Mottola and Lopez were linked at one time, although he becomes somewhat irate at the mention of it: “You don’t know who you’re talking to,” he protests!

“Jennifer exudes charm, she’s disarming. Jennifer has a lot going on,” Mottola says.

Lopez now commands roughly \$9 million per movie, the highest fee ever paid to a Latina actress. From her electric portrayal of slain Tejano singer, Selena Quantanilla Perez, in “Selena,” to her breakthrough role as a sultry federal marshal in last year’s “Out of Sight” with George Clooney, she’s more than proven her star power. In an era when Hollywood’s standard fare is blondes who seem to spend a lot of time thinking about shoes, she’s a welcome and long-overdue breath of fresh air. Jennifer Lopez is a full-blown, complicated, intelligent and passionate woman.

“I think there’s a tremendous fascination with Jennifer,” says Benny Medina, Lopez’s manager (and formerly, Puffy’s). “When she goes somewhere and there are other celebrities, she’s the one the paparazzi flock to. She can’t go anywhere anymore without being mobbed.”

So, back to the question: What’s a woman on top of the world doing with a guy who seems determined to make Central Booking his second home? Don’t forget, Puffy was also arrested last year for beating Interscope Records executive Steve Stoute. The ordeal cost the record executive \$500,000 in a settlement to Stoute and one day of a court-ordered “anger management” class. Is this Pamela Anderson and Tommy Lee all over again? Kate Moss and Johnny Depp? Hill and Bill? Why do good women always fall for bad boys?

Friends of Puffy and Jennifer’s say that the couple’s relationship never fit into an easy paradigm. The word is that, despite appearances, they have a mature romance whose basis is that they have a great deal in common and support each other’s aspirations. Uptown Records founder Andre Harrell, the man who gave Puffy his start, says, “Puffy and Jennifer are an ideal couple in an industry as tough as this. They complement each other professionally because she is a big star, but he is a big star as well. Do you know how comforting it is to have someone who understands what you do in life?”

“Jennifer is standing by her man,” Harrell goes on, “and, as a friend of Puffy’s, I can honestly say that I have seen the loving way they look at each other when they’re in a room together. If Jennifer wanted to use somebody, then she could have anyone in the industry.” Good point. So, the question remains unanswered. Why would she pick a guy whose idea of a Saturday night date means dodging bullets?

“My impression has always been that these two are genuinely in love,” says another close friend of the couple’s who’s known Puffy since he was an intern at Uptown Records. “They have a lot in common: They’re both the same age [Lopez is 29 and Combs is 30] they’re both from uptown, they’re both former dancers, they’re both into hip-hop, they’re both really ambitious, ruthless in fact...how you gonna be a Puerto Rican from the Bronx and emerge as America’s number one sex symbol, with that body type, if you weren’t willing to do what you got to do?” he adds.

What she had to do was work hard and push herself every day from the time she was a little girl. Lopez shared all of this in a recent phone interview. She didn’t talk about anything like guns or shootings but admitted to a certain amount of hardcore ambition. The kind of ambition that is necessary to make it in an industry dominated by people who don’t look like her or come from where she comes from.

“I was dancing probably out of the womb,” she laughs in her sweet, sleepy voice. “I remember being 14, 15, and wanting so bad to be a better dancer and wanting to learn more, more, more. I remember telling my teacher, ‘I just want to be better.’ [He had asked Lopez if she was melancholy over a boyfriend.] And he goes, ‘You will.’”

“My parents said that I could do anything even though we were from where we were from and we were who we were as far as nationality went,” Lopez says. “They taught me that none of that mattered, you know, that we were just as beautiful and smart and intelligent and could accomplish the same things as anybody else in this country.” Jennifer’s parents are David, a computer specialist, and Guadalupe, a kindergarten teacher.



She started off dancing in local shows at the Kips Bay Boys Club. "The Kips Bay Bad Boys and Girls Club," quips rapper Big Pun, a friend who remembers Jennifer from the 'hood. "I remember her once in 'My Fair Lady.' She played a hobo or a bum, a poor kid, wearing little knickers," says Arlene Rodriguez, Lopez's best friend from second grade who is now her personal assistant and constant companion. "She wasn't the star but she was the one who stood out. She was always good at everything."

In her late teens, against the protests of her protective parents, Lopez took off for Europe to dance in a traveling Broadway variety show. A few years later, she became a Fly Girl on the Wayans Brothers' comedy series when Rosie Perez, then a choreographer, noticed Jennifer out of 2,000 applicants. Next came the big screen. Her first role in a critically acclaimed film was in Gregory Nava's "Mi Familia" in 1995. Her first major Hollywood movie break came in the same year when she landed the role of a curvaceous subway cop in "Money Train" with Wesley Snipes. Now, barely five years later, she's the most talked about actress (not just Latina actress, mind you) in the country. "I just have a dream, you know?" Lopez says.

But did her dream ever include the kind of man who would get her name into the tabloids as a gun moll? "Look at the trouble you got me into," Lopez reportedly sobbed at Puffy when they were taken down to the station that night in December. "Puffy is extremely influential in Jennifer's life," says SW Network's gossip columnist, Flo Anthony. "Puffy plays a big part in everything she does. For example, if she asks him whether she should wear a black dress or a white dress to the Grammys and he says trash the white one, Jennifer is wearing that black dress."

"They've both seen adversity," Anthony adds, "and just because she hasn't been through everything that he's been through in terms of dealings with the law, doesn't mean that they both aren't from the hood."

Will Jennifer Lopez, homegirl, weather this storm? "There's a bigger purpose to my success," Lopez says confidently. "I know what I represent, and things still have to get better, and I'm not going to stop working. All in due time."