



SOME ENCHANTED evenings

*Make it a night to remember with these
five imaginative ways to say three little words.*

by josie and martin brown

Looking for more than a simple exchange of cards and kisses and *I love yous* on Valentine's Day? If you're a Venus, you're up to the challenge. But if you're a Mars, well, let's just say that your heart may be in the right place, but your head is pounding at the prospect of hunting down anything more elaborate than a Whitman's Sampler. Either way, it takes only a bit of planning and preparation to show your partner the depths of your love. And a good start is one of the seductive scenarios outlined here.

One thing to remember: Three's a crowd. First on your agenda is remanding the kids to someone else's custody for the evening.

love on all cylinders

For him: Many men fantasize about a fast, sexy little number with whitewall tires. If your lover flips through *Car and Driver* with the sweaty palms most men reserve for the Victoria's Secret catalog, try joining in the fantasy. You can put him behind the wheel of the ultimate boy

toy—say, a sleek Ferrari or a zippy Porsche—even if it just for 24 hours.

Once you've found his dream machine (through rental service or auto dealership), go pick him up at the office, taking care to park as conspicuously as possible. Then turn the keys over to him.

Map a route that takes him past admiring (and envious) friends before you head for the open road. Make sure the journey includes a stop or two at some scenic spot. For most men, romantic sights like a sunset seem just that much more glorious when viewed from the interior of a \$100,000 automobile.

Your final destination: a charming restaurant a couple of hours from home. (That way he gets a good, long drive.) Reserve a cozy table for two near a window so he can keep an eye on his precious toy parked outside. When you look into his eyes and say "I love you," forgive him if he's not looking back. You'll get your thanks later: Once he's through dining and driving, his engine will keep running all night.

Set-up time: one to two hours. You may have

spend this time calling around to dealerships or rental agencies, but he'll love the fact that you went the extra mile. Be sure to throw a disposable camera into the glove compartment; he's going to want to remember how it felt to be king of the road.

room service

For her: Begin with the basics—take her to her favorite restaurant. Then, after you order dessert, give her a card, even if it's not a special occasion. It can just be a piece of notepaper on which you've written those celebrated three little words. Inside the card, tape a room key from that quaint little bed-and-breakfast down the road.

When she looks surprised (and she will), casually say, "I thought we'd spend the night." If you have children, she'll no doubt respond, "But what about the kids?" She'll be amazed when you inform her (go ahead, be a little smug) that you've arranged for someone to stay with them for the whole night.

When she continues her cross-examination with "Well, okay, but what about a toothbrush?" surprise her again by explaining that everything she needs is already safely tucked away in the room.

Now, the final touch: When she walks into the room, wow her with candles by the bed, some scented oil by the bath, and her favorite songs pouring out of a portable tape/CD player. Go ahead, take her by the hand. You deserve the first dance—and the last.

Set-up time: two hours max. Go first to the hotel to register (there is nothing romantic about hovering around the check-in desk late at night), pick up the room key, drop off those much-needed personal items, and set the scene. For some men, the trickiest part of the preparations may be packing her overnight bag. Don't panic. If the night is good enough, she won't worry about what she's wearing in the morning.

tub for two

For him: When spending a romantic night with him, two in the tub can make quite a splash. Run a warm bubble bath, add some musky-scented bath oils, line the rim of the tub with votive candles, and let the waves begin.

As you lounge in the bathtub together, try a little geisha role-playing. Take his head lovingly in your lap and massage a woody-scented shampoo into his hair. Then rinse him all over with an extra-long shower head nozzle that's set to pulsate.

While his face is still moist and steamy, spread a thick coat of shaving cream all over his stubble. Then, with a gentle touch, follow the contours of his face with a razor. (Go for a safety razor here. A straight-edge may be dramatic, but you'll probably draw blood.)

Now lie back down in the tub together, enjoying the scents and suds around you. Let the warm water work its relaxing magic.

When you're ready to come out, dry him off with a

warm, fluffy towel—the bigger, the better. If you don't have a towel heating rack, take your towels straight from the clothes dryer. Comb and blow-dry his hair. Then set him on the edge of the bed for—what else?—a pedicure and a manicure. He'll find your thoughtfulness more than touching.

Set-up time: two hours, if you include shopping for bath oils, candles, toiletries, and possibly the massaging shower nozzle.

passionate picnic

For him: Ants aren't an issue and neither are snowstorms when you and he spread a blanket on the living-room floor and take a match to a couple of logs in the fireplace. Once the fire is roaring, turn off the lights and bring out a basket loaded with his favorite comfort foods: barbecued ribs, garlic mashed potatoes, grilled asparagus, a bottle of wine, chocolate torte, and out-of-season fruits.

If you have a telescope, set it up outside for some after-dinner celestial exploration. Together you can count the stars and name all the constellations you learned when you were kids. Even without a telescope, you can hold hands and gaze heavenward. Then head back inside and unroll a sleeping bag built for two. (You can zip two bags together or just toss a couple of quilts on the floor.) Snuggle up together and watch the flames die down as your passion heats up.

Set-up time: two hours. Most of the picnic items can be found at a good deli, cooked and ready to serve. What you don't have in the way of sleeping bags and picnic equipment can be located at a sporting-goods store.

the secret garden

For her: Express your love with fragrant flowers—enough to make her feel that she's stumbled into the gardens of Versailles. One Saturday when she's out for the afternoon, scatter a trail of rose petals from the front door to the bedroom. When she reaches her destination, she'll find roses of assorted colors and stem sizes spilling out of all those vases you got for wedding presents (the ones that have been languishing on high shelves ever since). Have chilled champagne, strawberries, and chocolates waiting on a silver tray. Write out "I love you" in chocolate (or butterscotch or whatever) sauce on a glass plate. Top off these delights with a can of whipped cream (but watch your aim if you have satin sheets!) and enjoy your just desserts.

Set-up time: two hours. Most local florists have roses available in quantity and may even loan you a vase or two. After all, florists are romantics at heart and well-versed at making the most of their products. As for the champagne, you can get good bubbles without turning over your billfold. The real stuff (like Veuve Cliquot or Pol Roger) may cost upwards of \$40, but sparkling wines (such as Chandon and Korbel) can be secured for around \$15. Fresh fruits like strawberries or raspberries are a perfect additional touch.