

Turn a New Trick

By A. Richard Langley

Jennifer Jason Leigh has the prostitute gig down pat. She has walked the streets – and bared her heart, soul, and body – in such films as *Miami Blues*, *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, and the upcoming *The Machinist*.

Even with non-hooker roles, Leigh gravitates to characters who are greatly influenced and affected by sex. As the horny virgin protagonist in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, she deftly captured troubled teen pubescence and peer pressure. In *Heart of Midnight*, she was overwhelmed by disturbing events and more disturbing memories of her creepy uncle after she inherited and moved into his club. Most memorably, she was a frustrated, stay-at-home mom in Robert Altman's *Short Cuts* who did the dishes, laundry, and horny listeners as a phone sex operator.

But Leigh is no one-trick or one-note actor. She is a vastly underrated star with rich Hollywood genes (her father was the late Vic Morrow; her mother is screenwriter Barbara Turner) who also makes onscreen noise in non-sex roles, especially as conflicted creative types. She was an intrepid '40s reporter in *The Hudsucker Proxy*, the legendary satiric scribe Dorothy Parker in *Mrs. Parker and The Vicious Circle*, and an aging actress at career and marital crossroads in *The Anniversary Party* (which she co-directed and co-wrote).

No matter the part, Leigh fearlessly inhabits and conveys the professional, emotional, and sexual turmoil of every character she plays in complex, creative ways. She has nailed the nuances of prurient parts. Now, like her character in *The Anniversary Party*, she needs to challenge herself, moviegoers, and Hollywood.

So please, Jennifer, turn a new trick.