

Creeps

Chapter Three

It is a widely disseminated axiom that the only way to stop a bully is to stand up to them. While no more ironclad than any other axiom, it holds true more than most. This is not to suggest it is the only, or even necessarily the best means of addressing a bully. For example, in Stacey's case, the last time she had been bullied had been her freshman year of college, and in response she arranged to join the bully's faction and rule them from the inside. It had worked remarkably well. Nobody had dared bully her since, and when need arose, she now had her own pack of minion bullies to do her dirty work for her.

Martin had no such experience with bullies. Not to say he had never been, but he had been fortunate. His had been more the sort to tease, or occasionally gently ridicule, but they hadn't ruined more than an hour or two at a time, not the bulk of his K-12 education as some did. He'd never needed to stand up to them, only weather the occasional storm. As such, in the face of the unjust anger of one Stacey Reeves, he found himself quite unprepared for the staredown that ensued.

"Yeah, why don't you have a seat." She loomed for a moment after driving him back into his chair, but then, mindful of the glass door and the presence of Kira in the next room, took her place on the couch.

"What the hell did you think you were—"

"What on earth did you say to her about—"

The two started and stopped speaking in perfect concert, but Stacey took advantage of his courtesy faster than Martin could seize upon her outrage at being talked over. The low volume of her voice was almost swallowed by the beach noises still playing from before. The sound-proofing had been adequate to keep her from eavesdropping on Kira's session, but it would be unwise to treat this encounter as a live fire exercise to prove which Reeves had keener ears.

"Martin, I know we shared something last year. I haven't forgotten that. I'm appreciative of what you're trying to do for me – for us – too. Still, that doesn't give you the right to manipulate me into coming into your office. I have a huge amount on my plate. Double major double minor, graduating in the spring magna cum laude, maybe summa. Vice president at DAT house, a job search for my first real career job, keeping up a social life, cultivating my brand—"

"I'm sorry, did you say 'cultivating your—'"

"But even aside from all that... Martin, you cannot go forcing matters between me and Kira like that. You simply cannot. We had a falling out. A big one. So when you up and surprise me by stuffing us into a car, playing musical couches in your office, you're

playing with fire. You don't know how close you came to ruining everything. You still might just on our ride back to campus. So drop it, all right? I thought I was very clear on this. Get in her head, make her want it like you made me want it. But don't try to patch things up like you're a real therapist. You're not, and even if you were, this is too big for you. Do you understand?"

Taken somewhat aback by her shift toward earnestness, Martin found himself nodding. "Yeah. I understand. I didn't... I'm sorry."

Stacey allowed a mollified smile, though only for a moment. "Thank you."

"Though if I may...?"

"Martin."

He held up his hands. "I'm only asking. Not because I'm nosey, but because it affects our project. And I understand if you don't want to answer. No pressure. If you're not—"

"Oh my god just ask already."

"This beef between you two," he began, and seeing the dangerous glint in her eye immediately return, hurried on, "which I'm not asking you to explain the particulars of, at all! But so I know. Is this her problem with you, your problem with her, or is it mutual?"

"Why does it matter?"

Martin threw a hand in the air. "Because I'm trying to get into her subconscious and warp it until it thinks the universe begins and ends in your panties, so it might be helpful to know if she hates you or what. That's why."

Stacey folded her arms, a clear sign that she saw his point but still didn't like it. "It's her problem with me. OK?"

"Hmm. I thought it might be. But that's a good thing, actually."

"How is her loathing me a good thing?"

The truth was that it meant Kira's admission that she wanted to remedy their relationship signified her willingness to change. There was no telling Stacey that, however, not without passing on that one and only tidbit he'd withheld. If Stacey knew Kira had asked him to restore conviviality to their sisterhood, it could be disastrous. For one, Stacey might think he was looking to meddle, which it was crystal clear was a deal-breaker for her. For two, and more frightful still, it was the kind of sappy little tidbit that he worried might give Stacey second thoughts about the whole process.

Accordingly, he dissembled. "That means the obstacle I need to break down is in her, and she's the one I'm meeting with twice a week. You say she loathes you, but all I did was suggest she hit you up for a ride since she doesn't have a car. And was ditching her boyfriend."

"For a new boyfriend, actually. They were texting on the drive over."

“Really? Jesus. School’s only been in session for two weeks and change. You’re sure?”

“I’ve seen how Kira grins at texts from her friends, and I’ve seen how she grins when it’s from a guy she’s into. This was the second one. Trust me.”

“Damn. Fair enough. Anyway, I casually said she might try asking you for a ride, which she obviously did. If she really hated you so much, she would have found another way. That she took my suggestion means the animosity might not be so severe as you think.”

“You weren’t there this summer. You didn’t see what it was like.”

He thought he had seen a great deal of it, actually, by way of their respective instagram stories during their family vacation. The two faked it beautifully. “I guess not. But I’m here now, and she did ask you for a ride. Look, all I know is that getting her to want to fuck us – fuck you – is going to be easier the less friction there is. I don’t want you to force it, but being able to sit in the same room together, or car, or whatever, without wanting to throw punches would help. A lot. Like, as much as it would have helped last year if you were into guys. But if you tell me you can’t do it, then I’ll find another way.”

Stacey regarded him coldly for a time. Wisely, he let her mull it over without interruption. “Fine,” she harrumphed at last. “If she still wants to ride with me, she can. But I’m not going to pretend we’re still meeting.”

“I told her we were, though. What if she gets suspicious?”

“Tell her I had to reschedule. Which I would, if I were. Make something up. Again. I don’t care.”

Martin folded his arms. He had not forgotten his initial cause for his own outburst. Kira had told him point blank that Stacey had revealed to her that she intended to fuck her. He didn’t know the circumstances of it, but it had potentially dire implications for his ability to get to work on her. What on earth she’d been thinking, he couldn’t guess, but he needed to know.

That, however, was going to be confrontational. Stacey did not handle confrontation well, at least not when she was the one being confronted. So instead, for the moment, he buried that line of inquiry and pursued an appeal to her rationality. She seemed to be in a conciliatory mood, after all. Stacey was capable of approaching his requests logically, though her temper had an unfortunate tendency to get in the way, validating all manner of offensive stereotypes of her ilk.

“Actually, that’s another thing. I was actually thinking, it might be a good idea if you and I continued to work together. Like, um... Like last year. I know, I know!” He motioned for her to keep her protests quiet, at least, and succeeded in silencing them altogether for the time being. “I know, things have stagnated a little, from where they were, and you might not be interested in picking up like things were.”

“Let me clarify that ‘might’ for you. Am not. Absolutely not. I let you get away with dressing me up like a slut, groping me and pinching me and and putting your lips on me and...” She shuddered, shaking her head vigorously for a moment. “No. I let you get away with that because I spent eight months being brainwashed into allowing it, baby step by baby step. It took the whole summer to clear my head, and thank you no. You had your fun, and that was that.”

“So you’re saying you don’t want to have sex with me any more?”

“No. I don’t. I’ll do what I agreed to, and we’ll have fun with it, but that’s it.”

Martin drummed his fingers on his lap, allowing a few waves to crash while waiting for an unspoken point to sink in. When it didn’t, he rendered it spoken. “See, that’s the problem. It’s going to be months yet before Kira’s ready, in all likelihood. At best. If you’re already at the ‘meh, I guess, if I have to’ stage after three months’ break, where will you be at six? Or twelve, if it takes that long? Do you really want to go into that feeling just... obligated?”

“I *am* obligated.”

“Right, but... Come on. Real talk, Stacey. I know you know I had a great time with you. And it looked like you had fun, too. Am I crazy?”

Stacey folded her arms. Her desire to issue a scathing retort was plain, but after giving him space enough to imagine a few, she relented. “You know I did. I can fake an orgasm as well as the next girl, but I can’t fake five. And then another three.” She bit her lip to keep her smile of remembrance from growing too big.

“Well? Don’t you see? We could have another awesome time like that, except with...” He jerked his head towards the waiting room. “Or, you could have sex with her while I hover around with my wiener out trying to get it on it. Which I will, I assure you, and I double assure you that she will insist right along with me. So why not spend a little time each week refining it, keeping the spark alive so that when it happens, it makes for an amazing memory and not some bitter awful thing you resent me for forever? Because right now, that’s what you’re setting yourself up for.”

Once again, the office was silent except for the waves. Or at least, that was their perception of it, and the title under which the mp3 had been marketed. The file being played was actually a sound editor’s enhancement of an audio recording of wind blowing through leaves on the trees outside his apartment in the suburbs of Minneapolis, played on top of itself several times with the volume fading in and out. The gulls were added from a recording taken in the derelict parking lot outside the town’s derelict K-Mart. It made for a convincing illusion, earning the editor enough in royalties to bring him current on his child support payments, followed by one hell of a weekend in Atlantic City.

If Martin managed to weave an illusion half so convincing, it would pay for a truly legendary threesome.

“You make a decent point. So fine, OK. But no more creepy mantras. Tune-ups only, and no hanky panky along the way. It was hot the first time because it was fucked up and wrong, and I could see you were going to say yes to the big ask so I didn’t have to hold anything back. But this time, some ground rules.”

“Right. Great. Lay ‘em on me.”

“No touching. Even if I initiate it, you stop me. No dress-up. That’s no to slutty outfits, no to beach wear, no to lingerie, no to costumes, and absolutely no nudity. No porn. And in case it didn’t go without saying, no sex whatsoever until I get mine. That’s no sex with me, and no sex with her.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it.” Probably true, if only because he almost never remembered his dreams.

“Once a week only, and I’ll be recording it after today, in case you get any cute ideas.”

“Wow, what ever happened to ‘I trust Martin Manning?’”

“I do trust Martin Manning. I trust him to want me pretty freaking badly.” Even smirking, Stacey Reeves was somehow beautiful. “So fine. We still have a good while left. Let’s see if you can still work that voodoo that you do.”

“Assume the position, Ms. Reeves,” he quipped, prompting her to lie down on the couch. Once she was settled into place, he probed whether the white noise was distracting, but she insisted she didn’t care, and it might help conceal whatever they talked about from the next room, just in case.

It felt appropriate to employ the same brevity of induction he’d left off with in the spring. Rather than beginning at the beginning – *close your eyes, listen for your heartbeat, feel for your breath, breathe through your nostrils, in, and out...* – they had milestones, shortcuts he could take to move her to the final destinations more quickly. It wasn’t snapping his fingers and having her slip into a trance immediately, like in the porn they’d enjoyed together, but it still meant less of their time together was wasted on induction, so more could be devoted to posthypnotic conditioning. To his surprise, it worked just like it had back in the spring. Only a little over five minutes later, Stacey was lying still on his sofa under a trance once more.

Even so, five minutes was a lot of time to drone on the same old words. While he did his spiel, it gave him time to consider the basic nature of the woman before him. It occurred to him that she had given in to his request with a great deal less pushback than he was accustomed. Doubly so, considering how pissed off she’d been mere moments earlier. Very strange. Good luck? Benefits of hard work last spring?

Or could... could she be... humoring him?

He contemplated a moment while he watched her. Stacey was as gorgeous as ever, even if it was disappointing to see her dressed like a normal hot girl and not like

some fetish slut straight out of his favorite subreddits. After a moment, he leaned in and said, with a dry smile, “Stacey, pick your nose.”

“What?!” Her eyes shot open, turning to glare hard. But Martin only laughed, and after a moment, she did, too. “Sorry, I know I shouldn’t play hypno-hooky. It’s just been a while. I figured it’d come back to me after a while. Go on, try again. I’ll be good.”

“No, it’s fine. I rushed things there, so that’s on me.”

It was not, in fact, on him. Stacey had tried to play him, and her relief at seeming to get away with it had been subtle, but unmistakable. This time, Martin went back to basics, no more games. It was the sort of induction he’d tried and tried all last fall with her until it finally worked, the same sort he’d never been able to get to work on Naomi. It took real time that go around, more than twenty minutes of guiding her to the suppression of her conscious mind. Finally, he recognized the slow, rhythmic breathing of her fully tranced state.

Yet Martin still wasn’t buying it.

For the remainder of their time, he played it absolutely safe. Repeating that she trusted him, was attracted to him, looked forward to fulfilling her promise, even to the point of qualifying that she only had to cooperate so long as he delivered. Absolutely nothing to give her the idea that he meant to abuse the very limited faith she was placing in his manipulation of her subconscious.

“It will be fun to celebrate our success,” he prompted.

“Will be fun to celebrate our success,” she echoed. No *mm*. She didn’t, not always, but after catching her faking it once, he wasn’t inclined to be fooled again.

Martin stood, took a few steps toward the sofa, merely halfway, then shook his head and sat back down. She would read it as temptation. Stacey would never buy it if he didn’t appear to be tempted. “Nope, you held up your end. Now I gotta do mine,” he mumbled. If she were faking it, he was going to sell it.

And there it was, a flicker of a ghost of a smile, so ephemeral that only someone who had spent days and days staring at those lips could detect it.

After that, he started to bring her out of it. Nothing at all out of the ordinary aside from ending a few minutes early. When he commanded her to wake up, her long, dark eyelashes fluttered open, and she sat up with a slow stretch and yawn.

“How’d we do?” she asked.

“You are now completely under my control. Muahahaha!” Martin joked.

Stacey rolled her eyes, but gave him his grin even as she put a finger to her lips and glanced to the door. “Not too bad. I almost missed it.”

“Only almost? Come on, I could use an attaboy.”

“And you’ll get one once Kira’s dtf. Until then... keep at it, Mesmer.”

“You know I will.” He produced his planner and the two arranged their next session to coincide with one of Kira’s two the following week. With that, Stacey left his

office without a backward glance. Martin walked her to the door, where Kira turned to wave a farewell, her smile evaporating once she looked back to Stacey.

He waited until their car was out of the lot and down the street before letting out a whoop of triumph that reverberated around the walls. Whatever the woman had blabbed to Kira, he had his Stacey back. He would have to move carefully, risking nothing. If he took his time and played his cards exactly right, Stacey Reeves was going to be his once again. Finally he would get to see just how far her subconscious could bend.

“Whuh... what happened?” Kira asked, sitting up groggily.

Martin laughed in a manner that he hoped was disarming. “My fault. I sneezed. You don’t remember?”

Kira’s eyes widened, and she laughed even harder than he had. “Oh my gosh! No, I don’t at all. That’s wild. And gesundheit!”

“Thanks.”

“So are we going to try again?” She found the clock. “I guess we have a lot of time left, so... may as well, huh? If it’s OK. Not to sound over-eager, but I left here feeling like a million bucks last time.”

“That’s great, Kira. Yeah, we’ll have a second go. Lie back down, and I’ll begin.”

Once she was again entranced, he momentarily excused himself to the empty waiting room and shot out a series of expletives until he had it out of his system. When he felt calm enough, he returned. Clearly, asking her to tell him about Stacey’s incestuous confession had been a mistake. The moment the question had left his lips, Kira had shaken her head, and then seconds later was wide awake. It had been a harder dead-end than he’d ever reached with Stacey, even when it escalated to the point of open fondling. Kira had kept her good spirits, at least, but her subconscious obviously wasn’t ready to revisit whatever had happened between them.

That was a problem, and one for which there was no obvious solution. The entire point of their time together was to prepare her to want to have sex with her sister. To a lesser extent in Stacey’s mind, and a greater extent in his, it was also to prepare her to want to have sex with him, too. Yet somehow Stacey had made her intentions known, setting up the mother of all mental barriers for him. It would have been hard enough getting the girl to overlook such a taboo, but now it was one she’d confronted.

The difference between enticing her into fucking Stacey and enticing her into fucking Stacey after telling her no might not seem like much, but a simple visioning exercise should suffice. Take grave robbing, for instance. The average person has most likely never devoted a moment’s consideration as to their precise feelings on the subject of grave robbing. If anything, the subject exists as a nonspecific apprehension of moral wrongness and therefore was not something in which to develop and pursue an interest.

Then one day, along comes some unsavory sort who asks our average person if they might like to rob a grave this weekend, and upon hearing a refusal, demands that they explain why. Only then do they begin to walk themselves through it and really examine their relationship to the dark act. There’s the sense of defilement, of course, of committing an act so fundamentally iniquitous that the sin may forever stain their conscience, perhaps even their soul. Then come the more pragmatic aspects, such as the dread about being discovered, which would lead to the ruination of every laid plan to say nothing of the looks one will garner around the neighborhood after that insufferable gossip Donna finds out. As if that weren’t bad enough, the act of robbing a grave in and

of itself is fraught with difficulties and grotesqueries. The hardships of shoveling so much dirt. Fear of getting lost, of digging up the wrong grave, or of simply stumbling and injuring oneself in the dark. The smell. Oh god, the smell, that horrific discovery of the gulf between Hollywood's portrayal of a putrid rotted corpse and the damned reality.

Oh, and the cleanup! Nearly forgot that. Very messy stuff, robbing graves.

Following such a consideration, no doubt one's resolve never to do this thing they had never been going to do anyway must assuredly be manifestly stronger, resistance amplified by orders of magnitude. This was the circumstance with which Stacey had now presented him. For now, Martin evidently couldn't bring Kira to even speak of it, much less reverse her stance.

For now, there seemed to be little to do but go to work on her in much the same way he had her sister. He hadn't known Stacey was a lesbian at first either, and with months and months of chiseling away, he had cut a doorway through that barrier, too. Or so he told himself.

Thankfully, some of the foundations required no work at all. *I like Professor Manning. I trust Professor Manning. I enjoy being hypnotized by Professor Manning.* She repeated those the first time he bade her. Other bits needed a little work to get done, but she didn't make it difficult, and he didn't abuse his good fortune. *I will be honest with Professor Manning. I want Professor Manning to like me.* Each admission received most of a session worth of attention, working her up to saying the words, and from there, repeating and repeating. In hypnosis, sometimes it was helpful to have a subject evoke and seize on a feeling, as he had with getting Kira to embrace the feeling that her words were truth in their first session. Other times, it was better to simply bait out the words themselves and then have the subject repeat them until the subconscious forfeited its slippery grip on their context. With enough repetition, a technicality could evolve into an epiphany. For weeks, that was his course. Pick up a new admission, repeat it until it was embedded as firmly as a catchy tune.

"Do you think your old therapist Dr. Rivers was helping you, Kira?"

Kira was awake for this portion of the session, if only for these first few minutes. "I don't know. Sometimes. It was good to have somewhere I could shut my brain off, at least."

"And yet you're still willing to undergo hypnosis to solve your problems. Why is that, do you think?"

"Well... I mean, at first, my mom kinda made me? I know that sounds bad," she rushed, "and now I'm pretty glad she did. But I guess it's just never made that much difference. Like, she hypnotized me and hypnotized me, but the stuff I wanted to be working on, it didn't get much better. It's like when you start a diet on New Year's or something, where you want it to work and you try at first and you're like 'yeah! maybe I can do this!' but then you slow down, make excuses, throw in the towel. You feel guilty

when you start cheating but in the end, it's just this pressure in your head that you wind up ignoring."

"I see. Well I want you to know that I do have some techniques that are more aggressive if we don't make enough progress to satisfy you. For now, though, I want to see what headway we can make with the basics."

"If you say so, Professor Manning. I'm up for whatever." There was once more a sudden grimace, but he had learned to stop fretting them. The girl experienced physical discomfort every time she suppressed a "that's what she said."

A short while later, an entranced Kira reiterated the same sentiments, confirming that her conscious and subconscious were of one mind on the matter of hypnosis. Kira liked it because it was a respite from her anxiety, but didn't really believe it was something that could translate into real world results. His work building himself into la Mesmer had been much more theory than practice, yet even so he wondered how much of Dr. Rivers' practice was founded on using hypnosis as a relaxation technique that masqueraded as real therapy. Was the woman a con artist, or did she simply delude herself into thinking her hypnosis actualized better results than it did?

No need to antagonize your gift horse, he chided himself. Whatever this Dr. Rivers' shortcomings as a hypnotist, she'd presented him with a patient who gobbled down hypnosis with no more suspicion than if he'd offered her a tylenol.

It was time to make a believer out of Kira. For now, she seemed to enjoy having so much one on one time and attention from a professor, as well as getting to play couch potato. Stacey's transformation had begun once she'd realized his efforts had yielded tangible results, and he needed to do that for Kira. Getting there, he figured, should be a simple matter of having her achieve one of her goals, and linking the achievement with their sessions.

Of her candidate goals, one was the obvious frontrunner. *Lose fifteen pounds*, she'd said. It was perfect. Achievable, measurable, short-term. Today, they would begin work on beginning work. Still the beginning of September, still plenty of time to guide her where he wanted her.

"Kira, do you remember your goal to lose weight?"

"Mm."

"What was it specifically?"

"Lose fifteen pounds."

"Why do you think you need to lose weight?" It was more than fair, as questions about a woman's weight went. Few would describe Kira as "skinny," but nobody would resort to "heavy." Plus she possessed that fortunate genetic disposition to displace a good amount of her excess body fat in her butt and in her boobs, and she also possessed the even more fortunate social disposition to cut herself off from further weight gain

before it more than grazed the rest of her. She still had a good deal of “curvy” and all of “plump” to get through before a justification for any vanity was jeopardized.

“I want to rush a sorority.”

He waited for more, but nothing came but imaginary waves breaking on an imaginary beach. “That’s it?”

“Mm. Big girls don’t get as many bids, or as good of ones. Really hot girls can go pretty much anywhere, though.”

Shallow, but probably at least a little truth to it. After that, he brought out a bathroom scale – \$17 at Target, not including the fuel to go to the far away Target to avoid Naomi – and carefully guided her onto it. 133 pounds. Fitness-minded as he wasn’t, he had no real notion as to whether that was high or low for her height and build. In any event, it was a baseline. Martin took the remainder of the session to walk her through a process to help her internalize some basic weight loss tips. She spent the final fifteen minutes before her wake-up call chanting, “I will eat healthy food. I will reduce portion sizes. I will exercise regularly. I will feel good when I do something healthy. I will feel bad when I do something unhealthy.”

He gave that two weeks, splitting their other sessions between reinforcing her fitness regimen and reinforcing her attitudes towards him – trust, amicability, respect. Meanwhile, he continued to play it safe with Stacey, making only the most token efforts to rekindle her trust and desire for intimacy, the latter always contingent on his success with Kira. She was recording him again, back in the spirit of her paranoid phase from the year before, and he had fewer doubts that she might actually be checking the tapes than he’d harbored last year. That is, if she were even going under. She had received ample opportunity to learn to fake it, and true to the common perception, there simply wasn’t a way to hypnotize someone who didn’t want to be hypnotized. Maybe she was going under and maybe she was faking it, but he couldn’t push the envelope under those conditions. He needed her to trust him again, and that trust would only be regained once she believed he was convinced he had it. Or something like that.

As for the younger Reeves, Martin’s frustrations with her slow start were minimal to nonexistent. Stacey had taken a long time to get going, too. Besides, their rapport was quite good. Kira was smiles and sunshine both in his office and in his class. It could be the hypnotic conditioning working or simply her kindhearted nature, but either way, he took it as a good sign. She even asked if he minded if she stayed after in his office one afternoon to talk about an up-coming exam, and the two spent several hours studying, reviewing, and chatting.

Finally, their next session – after congratulating her on a near perfect score – it was time to check on her progress. He put her under and retrieved the scale, excited to see how far she’d come. Kira struggled to her feet, loose but steady, and followed him over.

“Step on the scale, Kira.”

“Mm.”

He watched as the digits adjusted, at last settling on...

“One thirty-five? What the hell, Kira?”

Wrinkle wrinkle wrinkle.

He winced immediately. “What the hell is your secret, because wow!” he hurried to assure her. She’d been twitching her nose like she was cosplaying Samantha from *Bewitched*, but flattery seemed to do the trick. “You did... good. Great work. Let’s lie back down again, OK?”

With minimal additional fuss, he got her back on the couch. How in the hell was this possible? He hadn’t assumed she’d lost it all already, but he’d listened to her promise to be a health nut in one phrasing or another hundreds and hundreds of times. He took a moment to inquire after what she’d had for lunch, but unless it was a bowling ball with a dumbbell for dessert, she hadn’t lost fifteen pounds. (It was not.)

“Kira, have you been exercising and eating right?”

She shook her head. “No.”

“Why not? You told me you were going to.”

“Mm. Feels bad. But... hard. Want to, but... can’t seem to make myself.”

“But... you said you would,” he whined piteously.

“Sorry, Professor Manning. Hypnotism doesn’t work for me like that, I guess. Every time I weigh myself, seems a lil sillier that it would.”

Fuck.

Fuck!

Already over a month into the school year, and the girl was less capable of being hypnotically conditioned than before she started! And not in spite of him, but *because of!*

Fuck!

Consigning the undisciplined tart to repeating her fitness lines (despite this new realization that they seemed to be achieving nothing at all), Martin sat down to think.

How the hell was he supposed to help her? Maybe one of the other goals? He fished out his notepad where he’d copied them down. Dean’s list – while she was doing great in his course, he had no idea what her performance was like in her other classes, and even less of an idea of how to link that success to hypnosis rather than her own good study habits. Plus it wasn’t put out until January.

Call her parents more? Achievable, sure, measurable, certainly, but as he warped the girl’s mind to the point of craving a shot at her sister’s pussy, the last thing he wanted as a lurking factor was frequent contact with Mommy and Daddy Reeves.

Improved relations with her sister, and with her roommate, both of which sounded a lot more like they required some combination of a real therapist and a committed RA.

And the last one on the list, being committed to her goals? He actually agreed with her on the need to work on that one. It had been a month, and the only progress she'd made was negative.

Fuck!

Focus. Martin took a few minutes, stared at her boobs rising and falling with each breath. It was calming. Motivating. Mesmerizing, in fact – a pity she wasn't the one out to hypnotize him.

All right, so there was no sense bemoaning six problems at once. Pick one. The goal he'd chosen still seemed the best prospect, and frankly, if the girl was poised to pack on the freshman fifteen, maybe it shouldn't be ignored. The thought was as superficial as her hopes to land a sorority bid on looks alone, but this whole thing was rooted in base lust. No sense trying to be chivalrous about it.

So the problem was, his suggestions were doing less than nothing, convincing her further that hypnosis couldn't do anything for her. Sure, another six months of chants might eventually achieve something, but as or more likely, six months with minimal results would serve to deepen her conviction that hypnosis was only good for a power nap.

So, a different tactic. But what? Mantras remained a bad idea. If she wouldn't do something as basic as put down the fork, she certainly wouldn't do something as weird as brainwash herself in her free time. He could offer to exercise with her, once he taught himself how, but even if she allowed it, that was pretty far outside the parameters of their involvement, and was awfully public. If his department head found out he was fraternizing with one of his students – a young, hot, female student – his belt might tighten beyond his ability to tolerate it. They could use their hypnotherapy sessions to work out, but even if she could stay under for it, she'd surely notice waking up sore and sweaty. Plus all of those ran into the same basic problem, that she would be aware that hypnosis wasn't solving her problem; her hypnotist was.

Shit, he'd work enough jobs to hire the girl her own damn trainer, except a trainer wasn't hypnosis either! As well to wish for a magic wand for all he could make it happen.

One measly little miracle. To have the pounds melt off in a flash. Or have the January rush period commence tomorrow and really put the pressure on. To have her forget how much she'd wanted to lose in the first place and–

“Kira?”

“Mm.”

“You want to lose that fifteen pounds, don't you?”

“Mm. Feel fat.”

“Right. Now I want to do an imagining exercise with you. How does that sound?”

Wrinkle. “Weird? I dunno. Maybe fun?”

“That’s right, it will be fun. Now I want you to stand up for me, OK?”

“Mm.”

Kira was quite capable of remaining in a trance with her eyes open. It was helpful for these rare occasions when movement was necessary, though he was well aware it wasn’t ideal to overdo it. The eyes were too sensitive, provided so much stimulus that it made it hard for a person to stay in their trance. Once he had her standing in front of, but not yet on, the scale, he bade her close them again.

“Now. I want you to think about the future. Think about a day when you’ve achieved your goal. You’ve lost the weight. Imagine it.”

A little smile tugged at the corners of her lips. “Mmm.”

“How will it feel? To stand on that scale and see that, thanks to my help and your hard work, you’ve done it?”

“Good. Proud. Surprised? Wasn’t sure I could do it. Didn’t think you could help.” Hurtful. “And you should be proud. That’s not something easy to do, is it.”

“Hm-mm.”

“Rewind a few minutes. Now you’re standing in front of the scale. You’re about to find out, but you don’t know yet. You don’t think we’ve done it, but you have to be sure.”

She nodded, looking glum again.

“Take a moment, picture the scene in your head. Where do you usually weigh yourself? The gym? Your dorm room?”

“Locker room. At school.”

So a high school memory, but that was fine. The freshman was still settling in.

“Good. So you’re in the locker room, Kira. Picture it around you. The familiar scene, the sounds, the smells. Do you have it?”

“Mm.” Martin gave her a twenty count to let the impression sink in anyway.

“The scale is there. Right in front of you. In a moment, you’ll step on it. You’ll see that your time with me has paid off. Hypnosis has done it after all.”

Wrinkle. A skeptic, even on the eve of her victory. So be it. “All right. Are you ready to weigh in?”

Martin was surprised when she shook her head, though. “Hm-mm.”

“Um... why not?” The question had been rhetorical.

“Wearing clothes. Adds a couple pounds.”

Martin froze in the midst of licking his chops. No. Of course not. That would be an insane risk, incredibly irresponsible. Absolutely out of the question. A momentary pleasure for what could be an irrevocable catastrophe. Definitely not doing it. Nuh, uh.

“Go ahead and get ready then. It’s OK.”

Well that wasn’t what he meant to say at all. Shoot.

“Mm. Right.”

There, in the middle of the main office of the Manning Mental Wellness Clinic, Kira Reeves started taking off her clothes.

When had he gotten Stacey to this point? March? April? They'd started a bit later in the year, but still. It was still September, and the moment her sandals came off, the girl was taking her shorts off, too. God, that ass. It was clearly a great ass; she'd worn shorts too brief and too tight too often for him not to be sure of that. Seeing it in only a pair of blue panties, the right side creeping quite far into the crack... It was incredible. For all their similarities, it was so distinct from Stacey's. This was rounded, generous, broad. Kira bent at the waist to pull them to her ankles before kicking them off, and her butt jiggled slightly just from her straightening back to her full height. On closer inspection, those panties were nearly translucent except for tiny blue kittens sewn into them. The girl tanned in the nude as near as he could tell.

Kira's top followed. The reveal was perhaps a smidgeon less sexy, only on account of her having worn a sports bra rather than a regular one. (*And yet you haven't been hitting the gym*, he silently chastised her.) It didn't allow for much cleavage, Martin noted, craning his neck to inspect her from the front, but the dark gray spandex clung like a second skin, hugging each heavy breast independently. And spectacularly. Martin supposed he could see how, growing up in the bedroom next door to Stacey's, she might feel like there was more tummy than she'd liked, but if there was a man alive who'd kick this bombshell out of bed over it, Martin had never met him, and didn't want to.

That was as far as she undressed, however. Bra and panties. She might go through boys like a shark through krill, but still Martin felt like he had joined an elite group of men as he stared at this mostly naked girl in his office. His eyes locked back on the panties, the clear winner of the Oglympics. From the front, a dense thicket of black pubic hair was clearly visible through the gauzy fabric. After a moment to burn the image into his brain forever in case everything else went tits up, Martin forced himself to continue. Even though Kira herself never showed the least sign of impatience. Maybe he could take a few more minutes to...

No. He remembered the Lakeview bear and that beautiful, terrible cum stain in Stacey's hair. Stay true to the mission.

All the while, the girl never even opened her eyes.

“The scale is right in front of you, Kira. Keep your eyes closed, and step on.”

Wrinkle. His heart stopped at the sight of that scrunching nose. It had done that right before she'd spontaneously awakened a few weeks ago, when he asked about Stacey's confession. He'd been lucky then – patients were far more apt to remember details from their sessions if woken suddenly. If Kira woke up now, like this... “Can't see...” she muttered, tapping one foot around in front of her. She kicked the scale a moment later, knocking it askew. “Need my eyes. Or help.”

“Of course, happy to help. How can I help?” The offer was out of his mouth before he had time to rebuke himself for such greedy thoughts, the image of him guiding her with a mostly bare ass cheek onto the scale. What was he after here, a cheap feel, once, or a chance to be double-teamed by the Reeves sisters?!

Wrinkle. “Can you... put my foot on the scale?”

“Um... yeah. Sure, Kira. How, ah, would you like me to...?”

Suddenly she was standing on one foot. His stomach lurched, imagining her losing her balance and waking up bruised, on the floor, in her underwear. With no time to take another course, Martin dove to his knees at her feet, putting the scale back in place and guiding her by the calf down onto it. Only once he was one hundred percent sure she was stable did he let go, recoiling like her leg was scalding him. Kira waited, though, not moving the other smoothly waxed leg until he finally realized she was waiting for him. In fairness, her stance was wide enough she might well have missed it if not for his help.

Then he heard a soft giggle, and then he smelled...

No way.

But there it was. He knew that smell all too well. Still jerked off with the memory of it filling his nostrils. There could be no mistaking it. The Reeves girls were sisters right down to identically scented pussy leakage.

Martin shook his head. No. This had already veered miles off course, and he wasn't going to let it drift further. The whole routine was a variant on a hypnosis parlor trick, something he could have done when he was a teenager on a subject who was only half-willing. Make someone forget their birthday, miscount the fingers on their hand, or tell you with all certainty that they were a foot taller or shorter than they were. His shows as *la Mesmer* had featured the trick frequently as a warm-up to more interesting suggestions, and it was surprisingly easy to pull off. Martin remained where he was, however. He could do this as well kneeling behind her as standing in front.

“In a moment, Kira, you're going to open your eyes. When you do, you're going to be looking down at your feet, looking at the number on the scale. It's going to tell you whether or not you met your goal. Understand?”

“Mm.”

“My eyes are already open, so I can see the number. So can I tell you some good news?”

“Mmm!” She smiled. Her weight shifted, and the right side of her panties slipped further into her crack. Her ass cheek was almost completely bare, yet he couldn't decide if he preferred it to the tantalizing half-concealment of the left side.

“We did it! That's right, Kira, our hypnosis did it! Isn't that great?”

“Mmm! Yes. Great,” she murmured dreamily, though sounded only half-convinced.

“So when you open your eyes, you’re going to see exactly the number we discussed. Imagine that feeling, that pride. Seeing exactly the right number. Can you feel it?”

“Mm. Exactly right.”

“Yes. So whatever that number is, it’s the one we worked for. You’re going to feel so accomplished, so happy, so proud. You still feel it?”

“Mm. Accomplished. Proud. Happy.”

“No matter what. Don’t let go of this feeling, OK? You earned it.”

“Mm. Don’t let go. Feel good.”

“With my help.”

“With your help.”

“Great. In just a moment, I’m going to tell you to open your eyes. What is going to happen?”

Kira grinned brightly. She really did have such a sweet smile. He couldn’t wait to see it wrapped around his cock. “Open my eyes. See the right number. Feel good about myself. Feel thankful for you. No matter what.”

He didn’t correct her embellishment. “Atta girl. Now...” He took a deep breath, bracing himself to have her suddenly come fully awake and panic at her state of undress. “Open them.”

Her eyelids fluttered open, fixed on the readout in front of her toes. 135, it read, the same as before. But Kira’s smile blossomed, and then she gasped in what could only be rapture. “We did it!” she exclaimed.

“That’s right, we did it. Thanks to your hard work and my hypnosis, you did it.”

Kira stared at the number giddily, then peered around to direct it at him after a moment. “Thank you, Professor Manning.”

That fragrance. God.

“You’re welcome, Kira. You lost the weight.”

“Mm. Fifteen pounds,” she said. “Wow. I did it. We did it.”

“So do you see now that hypnosis can help you achieve your goals?”

She nodded. “Yeah. Thought it was impossible, but wow.”

“That’s right. And we can do more, if you want.”

“More weight?” she asked.

“Sure. And the other goals, too. If you do what I ask, and follow through, we can help you do anything you put your mind to.”

Kira nodded. “Mmm. You’re so good at this, Professor Manning. We did it.”

“You made it hard, but I did my best.” His tone was probably too jocular for a trance, but so be it.

“That’s what she said!” Kira exclaimed, giggling. And then blushing. And then wrinkling her nose, scrunching her face, frowning, gasping, and...

“Oh my gosh!” Kira squealed, looking down at herself. She found her clothes in the next instant, hastily tugging her shorts back on, then her t-shirt. “Oh gosh oh gosh oh gosh...!”

Martin stumbled backward onto his feet as she hastily dressed herself. “Kira, I...”

“No, I...! Oh gosh, oh gosh...!”

As casually as he could, Martin interposed himself between his patient and the exit. “Kira, let me explain.”

She looked past him, frowned, face pallid. “What, um... Why was I...?”

“It was a weight loss exercise.” May as well stick to the truth. “I asked you to imagine yourself wherever you usually weigh yourself, right up to the point of stepping on the scale. Before I knew what was happening, you... did that. I was surprised, embarrassed, but... I don’t know. I used poor judgment. I thought since I’d already seen it, maybe if I didn’t wake you, we could complete the exercise and I could get you dressed again without you having to wake up and get embarrassed.”

“Then why were you kneeling right next to me like that?” she asked testily.

“You couldn’t find the scale with your eyes closed,” he mumbled lamely. “You asked me to help you put your feet on it.”

“You... you touched me? While I was hypnotized?” She grimaced, looking not far from being ill. “My feet?”

“Your shins,” he corrected, as if it made some grand difference.

“I... see.”

Martin hung his head despondently. “Kira, I’m very sorry. I should have cut our work short and stopped you immediately. It caught me off guard, and I tried to act like I thought I a doctor would,” he lied.

“I... see. I guess none of your other patients tried anything like that, huh.”

He shook his head. “She sure didn’t.”

“I... I think I’m gonna go now. This was...” *Creepy*, said her eyes. “Weird,” said her mouth.

“Sure. Just... we’ve been making such progress, so please don’t...”

Martin cut himself short. Of all things, he suddenly remembered that moment when Kira had confessed her desire to mend things with her sister. Her first goal, no delay, to patch things up with the morally bankrupt woman who had sent her here to be dehumanized and abused. His partner in that very crime.

“You know, never mind. Do what you have to do, Kira. I understand.”

“Yeah. Um... I’ll, yeah, see you in class tomorrow, I guess. Have a nice night, Professor Manning.”

Martin slumped down into his chair. Somehow, though, as he watched the girl leave, there was a part of him that felt an immense relief. Never much for foresight, he nevertheless had a clear mental image of a future in which this whole foray into

hypnoslavery ended with a drained bank account rather than a tarnished soul. And in that moment, he was glad.

Then he thought about having to tell Stacey.

Maybe there was still a way to make this work. Surely Martin's soul could take one for the team.

The following day was their discussion section, an overheated classroom in an obscure nook of an even more obscure class building. It was a more intimate gathering than the full lecture hall, though. His course had three such sections, two Thursdays and one Friday morning. Kira's was his favorite of the three. (Since he didn't care about the class in the first place, this favoritism was due entirely to Kira's presence.) Needless to say, after the previous afternoon's catastrophe, its status was in jeopardy. One could only throw up from anxiety so many times before it began to taint one's perspective.

There was no seating chart, and Kira used the freedom to remove herself from her usual place in the circle at his side to take a spot almost opposite, though not quite, since opposite would mean they were positioned directly facing one another. He was distracted, clearly, enough so that he could tell they could tell. He finally muttered an excuse about how he wasn't feeling great and let them out twenty minutes early.

With both dread and delight, he noted Kira dawdling about packing up her things. Another student also stayed after to complain about his grade on the exam, yet still she lingered. At last, once they each accepted their mutual inability to travel back in time and prepare him better, they were alone.

"I guess you still feel pretty bad, huh," she said with impressive sympathy.

"That obvious?"

"You look awful. Like you haven't slept in days."

"Just the one."

Kira nodded. "So... should we talk about it? It's past the add/drop deadline, so we're stuck together until at least December. Don't think I can handle an awkward silence that awkward for that long."

"Sure, Kira. I feel like I talked at you pretty hard yesterday when I was making excuses, so maybe this time I should shut up and listen."

"Yeah, maybe." Kira settled herself on the edge of her desk. "So did it really happen like you said? I sorta remember it, parts, but..." She shook her head. "It's fuzzy."

He hadn't lied about anything major, had he? The layers upon layers of deceit were all so hard to keep straight. "Yes. And again, I'm really sorry I didn't handle it better. They don't cover what to do when a patient spontaneously disrobes in the manual. Still, I should have done better."

It netted him a faint smile. "OK. I believe you. Like I said I sorta remember..." She quickly discarded the most apt term for it. *Stripping*. "It," she finished at last.

"I'm sorry for that, too. The dissociation can be uncomfortable, I know."

Her face did that scrunching thing. It was a great deal more adorable when it wasn't the harbinger of end times. "That happened a couple times with Dr. Rivers where something woke me up early. Her phone, once, I remember. Felt kinda the same. But yeah. Now you know, that's how a girl weighs herself." Her head drooped in shame. "God, I am so bad at freaking boundaries."

“Kira, no! Hey, that wasn’t your fault at all. It was an accident it started, and my fault it didn’t stop. You did nothing wrong.”

“Well... kinda. I mean...” She shivered, despite the oppressive late summer heat of the room. “You know why I woke up, right?”

“Pff, yeah,” he replied, nodding. Did he? It had felt sudden, he remembered. Whatever. No take-backsies. “I bet I’d panic too if I was inexplicably half-dressed in some guy’s office.”

“Well that, yeah, but... I was...” She looked up at the ceiling, cheeks coloring. “I was, um... I dunno. Flirty, you could call it.”

“Flirty?” Martin arched a sweaty eyebrow. “No, Kira, you were just focused on your weigh-in.”

Her cheeks puffed out as she forced out another lungful of air. “No, I mean... You know...” Her eyes darted around as if looking for an escape, yet nothing held her there but her own feet. “Hrmr.”

The word was so low he had no idea what she’d said. “You were what?”

Kira shot him an exasperated look, and she had never looked more like her sister. “I said, I was *horny*. Oh my god, I can’t believe I just said that word to my teacher.” Indeed, she both looked and sounded mortified.

“Uh... you were?”

Somehow, his confusion seemed to be the right answer. “Yeah. I mean, I don’t know, I guess on some level... It was, like... kinky, or whatever. Being in my underwear... in front of my professor... And you were kneeling at my feet, you know, so it’s not like it’s my fault if I got ideas!”

She was accusatory, suddenly, and he held up his hands in protest. “I was only guiding you onto the—”

“No, I know.” Kira shook her head. “I know. And ya know, maybe I should feel mad, or embarrassed. No, I definitely feel embarrassed. But I didn’t want you to feel like you were the only one being, like, creepy, or whatever.”

“Thanks, I think.” The thought of Kira, in her underwear, bashfully horny to see him kneeling beside her, threatened to create a fresh embarrassment. Baseball had never been a fresh deterrent for Martin Manning. What to think of though? Grave robbing – that would do it.

“Moving on before I blush myself to death, so... Yeah. I lost a little sleep myself, thinking about what happened. So I thought I should definitely find a new therapist, because... yikes, you know? Like, even if we’re both embarrassed the same amount, that was *really* embarrassing.”

“Yeah. I understand. I’m sure I can find somebody else, do a...” How did one refer to that thing therapists and doctors did, where they referred a patient to someone, and served as a reference for past treatment? “A switcheroo.” Ah, yes, there it was.

“Hang on. So like I said, I was thinking the same thing, except... I don’t know. Maybe it was the thought of a guy looking at my chunky thighs, but I went to the Lakeview gym. At like 11 o’clock. I guess they’re open all night? Crazy. And anyway, I barely did anything because my brain was making me way too dizzy to actually work out.”

“Yeah, yeah, my bad. I’m sorry.” Apologizing had so far kept her from threatening to tell his department head, so he kept to that tactic.

“No! That’s what I’m trying to say. Not your bad. You’re *good*.” She nodded. “When I saw that number in front of me on the scale... it was exactly what we talked about. I felt so proud of myself – and I realized, you did it!”

Martin gaped in shock at what she seemed to be saying. Before he could recover, Kira stood up and crossed the room, stopping only to throw her arms around him. “You are a miracle worker, Professor Manning! I don’t know how your hypno magic works, but whatever you did, you got me to lose the weight, and without even breaking a sweat! That I remember? I mean, I must have been, but gosh!”

After a moment of enjoying her curvaceous body pressed against him, Martin accepted that there was nothing to do but hug her back. A professional hug. Nay, a *professorial* hug. “You did the work, Kira. I just reached inside and helped you build the will to do it.”

“No, you don’t even understand. I’ve fought to keep in shape my *whole* life. When Dr. Rivers tried to get me to diet, exercise, all that junk, it never went anywhere. I seriously thought hypnosis was – pardon my French – bullshit. Every now and then I’d have a burst, but yeah. And you had me drop fifteen freaking pounds in only a couple weeks! And I don’t even remember doing it!”

“Hey, it’s... all part of the Manning Mental Wellness Clinic guarantee,” he said feebly.

Kira finally let go, but remained well inside his personal bubble. “So, if it’s OK with you, I’d like to keep going. And I promise I won’t take anything off again, if you promise not to get me to take anything off. Deal?” The girl extended her hand with a self-conscious giggle.

Martin took it, shaking it with all the confidence and vigor of an overcooked spaghetti noodle. “Deal.”

“So we’re still on for tomorrow?”

“We’re still on for as long as it takes.”