

The Creep

Chapter One

Martin Manning was everybody's nobody. He'd been a nobody as a kid, a nobody in high school, a nobody in college, and remained a nobody in grad school. It wasn't deliberate. To the contrary, Martin had tried his hardest to carve out a reputation. Those who knew of it, however, didn't think of it, and those who didn't likely wouldn't have anyway.

To be fair, it was easy for anyone to fade into the woodwork at a school the size of Lakeview U. Close to twenty thousand students, of whom only a scant handful were popular enough to be able to call themselves such. A young woman in one of the classes Martin TAed for had close to half a million Youtube followers, a bit of trivia that impressed exactly no one Martin had mentioned it to in conversation. Nobody was starstruck to meet the fourth most popular collegiate freegan survivalist content creator. Even less so if they got close enough to catch a strong whiff. Nevertheless, he had to concede that even she was more of a somebody than him.

Which was why his chance meeting that afternoon with one of the genuinely popular members of the Lakeview student body was so damn strange.

It was backstage after one of his shows—
Right. That bears some explanation.

Martin was no showman, despite his assiduous efforts to demonstrate otherwise. Nevertheless, he did put on shows, after a fashion. Martin la Mesmer, he called himself. (No one else called himself by this title.) The effort at alliteration was unnecessary considering it was already present in his actual name, but once a pretty girl had told him she thought it was clever, and whether it was to pacify him and send him off or a compliment given sincerely, he had seized on it and was no longer willing to budge. As to the nature of the show, it was nothing so unusual in the context of a university, where every talent under the sun could and did find purchase. There was an audience for it all, from musicians, to standup comics, to contortionists, to chainsaw jugglers. A hypnotist like Martin was far from exotic.

He had no following of note, and by this late stage in his career, many venues wouldn't even permit him any more. They were advised up front that his was an adults only show, so any blame could hardly be placed on his shoulders. Nothing more shocking than a little disrobing, but not past the underwear, followed by a few cheap thrills from the then-scantly clad young woman. Garden variety, but for folks who liked that kind of thing, it was that kind of thing. The diversion wasn't exactly smiled upon by his academic contemporaries, but it so happened that one of his fellows in his program remained (very) gainfully employed at a local breastaurant as a side hustle, which he

had pointed out to the academic director when the man's "concerns" came under discussion. It left them in the possession without firm footing to make an issue over adult-themed employment since fortunately, at a liberal university like Lakeview U, they couldn't come after him without risking the PR landmine of shaming a student for what she chose to do with her body.

Martin wished she would come to one of his shows and let him use his craft to help her make some different choices. She never did. Still, it was a cover, and he'd take it.

"Is that shit real?"

Martin nearly jumped out of his socks. He was in the midst of changing out of his costume and back into his street clothes, backstage in the Lakeview Lounge. The joint was a comedy club by weekend but a pretty much whatever they could find club other nights. The dressing room had no door, though nobody but staff was supposed to have access. The sudden presence of a strange voice – a *woman's* voice – was unexpected.

"Of course it's real," the performer said quite defensively, tucking his costume shirt back in as if he'd been in the process of donning rather than ditching this outfit. It wasn't much of a costume, a purple-red tuxedo that seemed to split evenly between reminding viewers of My Cousin Vinny and Beetlejuice. He wasn't about to take it off in front of *her* though.

Her, after all, was none other than Stacey Reeves. Yes, *that* Stacey Reeves.

"Bullshit," was all she said.

Doubt and mockery were very familiar responses to his craft, if not quite so much as the more standard accusations of being a creep. Still, unlike most who bothered to go out of their way to express their disregard, Stacey leaned against the doorway to the dressing room, arms folded across her chest.

That chest was a not insignificant portion of what fuel Stacey Reeves's celebrity status. Not true celebrity, of course, but the sort of cheap, temporary celebrity that would fuel any such woman's sense of general superiority for at least until she hit her forties. The woman was a stunner, no doubt about it. Raven black hair hanging straight down past her shoulders framed a face that was conventionally beautiful, so much so that one even had to inflect "conventionally" without the standard veiled derision. Her breasts weren't celebrated for their enormity, (though they were at least ample, probably even generous), yet even more so they were prominent, jutting forward and slightly up in celebration of these final sag-free years of her life. Her ass was no less sexy, round and perky and simply made for bikini wear, as Martin knew from ample study. Not that he'd ever been in a room with her to do any such studying, much less at the beach, but like half the men at Lakeview he followed her instagram, and like all those men lamented that she had too much social collateral and family wealth for an onlyfans.

“Am I in your way or something...?” he asked after a moment. He knew there was an open mic music night happening shortly, though he’d thought not for another half hour yet. Sometimes he stuck around for those, in case someone wanted to chat up Martin la Mesmer. (No one had yet, but perhaps someday.) “I’ll be done here in—”

“Nope.”

Martin tried not to stare, but there was really nothing else to do. He couldn’t change with her standing there, and his instinct to slink away from this vision of sex appeal was stymied by her position in the doorway. For a moment he wondered if it was really Stacey Reeves; the light was behind her, and the dressing room lit only with a single dim red bulb. The face was a silhouette, though the basic contours – symmetry, conventionality – seemed right. The tits, however, were a dead giveaway. He knew the outline of those tits.

She didn’t say anything, though, so when he began to find it growing harder to avoid looking directly at her chest, he finally had to say something before he risked offending her. The consequences for such offense were unknown, but one of them was likely that she would stop standing near him and talking to him, which was motivation enough to force himself to behave. “Did you want something?”

She tapped her lip a few times. “I think your hypnosis stuff is bullshit. Tell me how it works.”

Martin frowned. It was easy to be intimidated by beautiful women, but her abrasive approach, combined with his acclimation to regarding undergrads as his subordinates, won the encounter. “If you think it’s bullshit, why would you want to know how it works?”

“So you admit you have no proof.”

“Did you not see the show? Do you think my volunteer – Holly, I think she said her name was? – took her shirt off in the middle of the room? At my mere suggestion?”

“Some people get off on that. Lots of weird kinks out there.”

“That’s your theory. That I happened to stumble across a one in a thousand freak as my one and only volunteer for my show.”

“Let’s not get rude about it. I didn’t call her a freak. People can have kinks. Nothing wrong with that. Bet you have a few yourself.”

“How fun. Hypnotist meets mind reader.” He rolled his eyes. It was difficult. Everything about her told him to be polite, smile, do what she asked and maybe she’d throw him a bone, maybe see that he was *#special*. Existing in the presence of this much sexiness was heady, all the more so with all of her attention on him.

“Not like it’s hard. Guy running an erotic hypnosis show... you don’t exactly hide what gets you off, ‘la Mesmer.’ And by the way, what’s your real name? Is it actually Martin, or is that bullshit too?”

“Yes, my name is Martin, and no, my skills aren’t bullshit. I’ve been practicing for over a decade. I’ve taken courses.” Sort of. Enough youtube tutorials surely counted as coursework.

“Courses? That’s right, you’re a TA, aren’t you. Big shot grad student. Lotta courses, I bet.”

“Excuse me? How do you know I’m a TA?”

“It’s called google. Haven’t heard of it? You should google it, it’s tits.”

Her phrasing beat out his irritation, and he gazed down. Hers was a plain white t-shirt, but there was a thin gap that showed some of that well-known cleavage. Fuck, she was hot. “Why were you googling me?”

“You like my tits?”

Martin blinked. “What? I mean, why...”

“You looked right at them a second ago. And like six other times since I came back here.”

“Look, I didn’t mean to offend you or anything. I’m sorry. OK? There. I apologized. Now maybe you should—”

“Did I say I was offended?” Stacey shrugged. “I have great tits.”

“Are you... What are you even doing back here?” Lord knows the girl didn’t need to seek men out to validate the merits of her bosom. Was this how girls as hot as Stacey Reeves flirted?

“I wanted to know if you’re legit. Like I said. Should we be having this dialogue via text, or can you handle ogling and talking at the same time?”

“I was not ogling! And yes, I am legit,” he added in less of a shout. While trying not to continue ogling. (Was she inviting him to? No, that couldn’t be.) The profile of that perfect rack of hers resting on her forearms was hard to ignore, though.

“Seriously? If it’s all an act, just say so. Nothing wrong with putting on a show or whatever. But if it’s real, you gotta be straight with me.”

“It’s—”

“Because there’s probably half a dozen guys in earshot who’d beat your ass up and down the street for any of a dozen things I could scream.”

Martin hesitated. It was not an implausible threat. Still, it was obviously his hypnosis show that had brought him onto the woman’s radar. He wasn’t about to admit that “Holly” was an aspiring model named Naomi whom he’d hired after she flunked out of the university two years back. He *was* a hypnotist, and he *had* studied; no sense explaining to her that obviously you couldn’t make a total stranger take her shirt off and strike poses with a five-minute induction. Nuance never worked in opening explanations.

“It’s real.”

Stacey pivoted to face him, the single red bulb in the dressing room finally catching her face. It smiled. In red. “You do private shows?”

It was three days before Martin heard from Stacey. Three long days of answering every unknown number that called him. He'd twisted Naomi's arm to let him get some real practice in instead of mere performance. She'd twisted back until he'd had no choice but to offer her an extra \$50 a show if she let him practice on her. It had been a while since he'd actually hypnotized someone. No guess what a woman like Stacey might want with his talents, but the last thing he wanted was to embarrass himself in front of her. Being a nobody was familiar, comfortable; the prospect of transitioning into the somebody who'd become a laughing stock in front of Stacey Reeves herself was not something he relished.

Naomi had been her usual grudging self. It made for the worst kind of subject, one who didn't want to be there, didn't seem to have a submissive bone in her body, didn't trust him farther than she could spit. Naomi might not have been a great student, but she wasn't so stupid that she didn't know full well that Martin wanted to fuck her, that hypnotizing girls into sexy situations was his whole deal. He insisted that the whole hypnotizing girls into sleeping with you routine was really only a thing in fetish porn. Of which Martin was surpassingly familiar. Still, letting go of herself in front of a man with that familiarity was beyond Naomi's comfort level, which meant his practice was barely enough to slow her breathing and heart rate a little. It could as likely have been sheer boredom.

"Martin?" Stacey asked after he merely said hello. Expecting it to be another scammer like the last ten times he'd hoped an unknown number would be Stacey's, he didn't answer the phone with his name.

"Yeah, this is. Is this Stacey?"

"Obviously. So are you still interested?" There was only a half second pause before a burst of giggles. "Just kidding. I know you're interested. But are you free tonight?"

He made a face. "You know, you're the one asking me to do you a favor."

"Yeah, yeah. Sorry, I guess. Anyway, are you?" He could sense her satisfaction in his affirmative reply before he even answered. "Cool. I'll text you the address where we're meeting. Eight OK?"

"Yeah, eight's fine." In fact, he had plans that night, but there was no way bowling with some people from his grad program was going to take precedence over literally anything Stacey wanted. (The admission stung a bit, but only a bit.) Martin reminded himself for the hundredth time that it was obviously nothing erotic, no matter how much this scenario resembled the beginning of one of his hypnofetish pornos. (If she had been his stepsister, it would have been a lock.) As to the question of what she did want, he could only guess. Help with studying? Stopping smoking? Repressing some horrible memory?

He'd find out at eight.

This address is a hotel..., he texted back once she'd provided it.

Yep was all she said. Great.

The hotel in question was a Best Western a few miles off campus, coincidentally the same one his parents had stayed at when they'd visited in the fall. It was a reasonably nice place, though the prospect of sitting alone in a hotel room with Stacey Reeves had him hard all evening. (Would they even be alone? That was an assumption, not anything she'd promised.) Around 7:15 he gave up and beat off some of that excess big dick energy, with an assist from some of Stacey's instagram pics from her vacation to Cancun a couple years back on spring break. That pink and white mismatched bikini could get it. He had to click around the images containing her little sister, a girl who lived in that uncanny valley between barely legal teen hottie and a 3-year stretch for misdemeanor statutory rape. Inconsiderate of the kid to intrude on his masturbation.

Martin wasn't sure how to proceed upon arrival. She'd merely sent an address, after all. Were they meeting in the hotel lobby? Did he ask for her at the desk? Or were they meeting in the lot and going together somewhere? And what in the name of all fucks did a woman like Stacey Reeves want with a nobody like Martin Manning? His sweaty palms were still gripping his steering wheel in indecision when there was a knock at his car window that made him yell in fright.

"Easy, la Mesmer. You coming in or what?" Stacey asked.

"Yeah, sorry, I was... using a technique. Autohypnosis, it's called. Getting my mind relaxed, limber."

"Yeah, ya seemed pretty zen." She blew a raspberry and flashed a thumbs down. "Well whatever. I'll be in the lobby when you're ready."

"I'm ready," he said quickly. She started without him anyway, so Martin was left trailing in her wake like a baby duckling. Only no duck had ever had an ass like that. Her cell phone, tucked in her back pocket, swayed with a rhythm that any hypnotist would envy.

As it turned out, Stacey had a reservation. The clerk checked her ID and then handed over a key card to a room, up on the fourth floor. The top floor, he was pretty sure. Was that significant? Who could say.

In the elevator, she finally acknowledged his presence again. "Could you believe that guy?"

"Who? The guy at the desk?"

"Yeah."

"How do you mean? He seemed nice enough." In truth he'd been preoccupied trying to recall what he'd learned in the autohypnosis videos he'd watched. Years ago, at this point. He could use help calming his nerves. He couldn't help dreading that when they got to the room, there would be a bunch of Stacey's friends ready to laugh at him.

Why all the effort, he didn't know. Could it be a robbery? Maybe it was a cult thing, and he would be their human sacrifice. Or—

“The way he didn't even say anything when we checked in. Like we were a totally normal couple.”

The scorn in her tone was sufficiently thick that Martin forgot his anxiety. Rudely kind of her. “Was he supposed to do a spit take or something?”

She snickered at that, but didn't reply. It was enough that he was only just remembering the potential for curved daggers waiting behind that door. Yet when she keyed it open, it was dark, and prohibitively cold, like any hotel room he'd ever stayed in. Stacey gave a little shiver, too, though he wondered whether it was the chill or if she had her own anxieties about... whatever this was.

Stacey looked around as if there might be something here that could provide her the opportunity to criticize her surroundings. She didn't seem to find anything, though, and after a moment settled into the swivel chair at the desk in the corner of the room, setting her purse down beside her. Martin plopped himself down on the edge of one of the two beds, what he hoped was a respectful distance away. And out of stabbing range, if it went that way.

“So,” she said.

“So.”

She took a deep breath. “Tell me about your hypno-skills, Martin.” Stacey folded her hands in her lap. She hadn't worn anything special, simple jeans and a pink t-shirt. A little makeup, lipstick, but nothing beyond what he expected she wore every day. Maybe less, even. Surely murder cultists would wear something more exotic. The thought did make him feel a little more at ease. A little, exactly.

“Sure. So, I got started when I was in middle school, actually. I found a book in the school library, and it seemed interesting so I started looking at stuff online. I did it for a school talent show.” Four, actually, one each year of high school. That sounded pathetic somehow though, and he couldn't be pathetic in front of her. “Since then, I've studied a fair amount, refined the art. I like to think I've gotten pretty decent at it.”

“Art, eh?” She considered his use of the term, nodding slowly. “What would you say is the most extensive thing you've ever done with it?”

“Done with it? You don't really ‘do things’ with it. I don't know that I've ever...” He paused. Clearly that was not the answer she was looking for. Crap. Time to cover. “I suppose I don't think of it as ‘doing with it.’ It's not really something you can use ‘on someone,’ so much as unlocking things inside of people. Things they might not have realized were there, or that you helped expose them to until they take root.”

Her frown faded, though only somewhat. “Hm. So, can you make someone do something they don't want to do?”

“Sure. It’s harder, more involved, but it can be done. I literally just did something like that a couple days ago.” Not with hypnosis, but for \$50 extra per show. In truth, he’d never gotten someone to do something more contrary to their nature than getting his mom to make breakfast for dinner. That may well have been her humoring him. He was pretty sure it was the hypnosis, though. “After all, you’ve probably heard of people using hypnosis to lose weight or quit smoking. Both examples of people who don’t actually want to quit, but with hypnosis, you can sort of make them re-prioritize, start valuing the parts of their lives their behaviors are damaging more, the parts of their lives the behavior rewards less, until the behavior follows”

“Yeah, I guess that sort of vibes with what I read.”

“You read up? None of this is classified, you know. If all you wanted was answers, you could have just used google. I hear it’s tits.”

“Write your own material.” She sneered. No points scored for revisiting that quip. “And duh, obviously I could get answers. The problem is that half the stuff that pops up when you look into hypnosis is a bunch of creepy fetish sex shit, and the other half looks pseudoscientific at best. Barely a step above the crap my anti-vaxxer aunt posts on facebook.”

“So you wanted answers from an authority on the subject. Fair enough. But why drag me way out here? You didn’t need to rent out a room for this. We could have just met at my apartment.”

Stacey snorted. “Yeah, and risk getting trafficked? No thanks.”

Martin rolled his eyes. “I couldn’t traffic you from here?”

“I’ve taken some security precautions.” With perfect calmness, Stacey reached into her purse and returned with—

Martin leapt to his feet, scrambling back until he hit a wall. “Jesus fucking Christ, is that a gun?!”

“Uh, duh.”

“Well put it away!” His hands crept into the air unbidden. Unless the presence of a gun barrel whose trajectory was waving back and forth across his torso could be considered a bidding, in which case the gesture of surrender was quite bidden.

“In a second. What was I saying? Right, precautions. So if I disappear, you should be aware that people will be looking for me. There’s the obvious text trail – you’re my last phone call and I texted you an address, this hotel, where I got a room with my card under my name, which should point the police right at you. Still, I made sure that people will be alerted in short order if I go missing, and those people will have your full name, cell number, address and class schedule. In case you had any thoughts of getting cute.”

“How the hell did you get my class schedule?”

“Hey, looks like we can update it with this crash course in social media privacy settings. Fun.”

“All right already! Now would you put it away?!”

“Guns make you nervous, huh.”

“Of course guns make me nervous! They’re *guns!*”

“Bleh, it’s just a girl gun my dad got me before I left for school. But suit yourself.” After fiddling with something on the side of it – *did she just turn the safety back on?!* – Stacey placed the pistol back into her purse. “I only wanted to make sure we have an understanding.”

“I understood I wasn’t a human trafficker well before you drew a gun on me,” Martin grumbled, though the removal of the weapon from his eyeline did have some small calming effect. Slowly, sulkily, he returned to his seat on the bed.

“Sticking around still, though? Guess you don’t hate them *that* much, so...” She grinned, though it only touched one side of her mouth and neither of her eyes.

“So?”

“So, I pulled a gun on you, accused you of trying to sell me to traffickers, and you’re still sitting there. You must be pretty desperate to find out what I brought you here for, huh?”

The truth of it stung, if not so much as her last assault on his dignity. “I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t curious.”

“Weren’t curious,” she corrected.

“What? What’d I say?”

“You said ‘if I wasn’t curious.’ That’s the subjunctive mood. Changes the infinitive *to be* from wasn’t to weren’t.” She shrugged. “Thirty grand and counting on my English degree.”

He wanted to make a retort about misallocated funds, but instead Martin replied, “English minor here, and I said ‘if I said,’ not ‘if I wasn’t.’ The ‘wasn’t’ is the main verb in the appended subordinate clause. If you were looking to learn anything.” He leaned back on his palms.

“Good, good. I didn’t want to risk liking you, and shit like that is basically ice water in my panties. Very good. That was a pop quiz, and you passed.” She took a long breath, letting it out in a huff, and then another. Martin was about to demand she finally get to her point when she finally blurted it out.

“So... yeah. I want you to make me want to fuck you. Can you do that?” Her hands did a good deal of animating her query, right down to her index finger plunging in and out of a hole made with the other hand. On Stacey Reeves, the juvenile gesture was one of the hottest things he’d ever seen.

Then her words broke through the smoke screen of her body language. Martin blinked. Then rubbed his eyes. Nope, she was still there. He wasn’t sitting alone in a hotel room hallucinating one of the most popular, best-looking girls on campus

demanding he act out his darkest, innermost fantasy. Something wasn't connecting right. "Hold on. You... what now?"

Her head shook irritably, once again pointing back and forth between them and illustrating the fucking still more demonstratively. "I said: I. Want you. To make me. Want. To fuck. You. I can try it in Spanish, but I promise it won't be as smooth."

"You want me to make you want to fuck me? I... I don't get it. What?"

"You know, for a guy I found hypnotizing girls in a comedy club to take their tops off and shake their tits around, you sure are bad at hearing what you want to hear."

"I... I just don't... I don't get it. Are you saying you want to, um, have sex with me?"

"No. Ew. Gross. Oh god no. Definitely hard pass, no."

That smarted. "Then... what?"

"Look. I'm not attracted to you. Not at all. Like, you're a guy and I'm straight, but that's about as close as you come to fitting the bill. Are you circumcised?"

"What? I mean yes, but what's that—"

"OK, so that's two things you have going for you. What I want to see is, can your hypno-crap make someone want to do something they are totally opposed to doing."

"But why *that*? Like, if you want me to see if I can get you to do something you don't want, why not have me try to get you to go skydiving, or eat grass, or... you see where I'm coming from?"

She cocked her head to the side, looking at him like he was the single densest idiot she'd ever met. "So you'd rather watch me eat grass than see me spread my legs for you and ask for your dick?"

A more than fair point, put that way. "Right. OK. But like..." He shook his head. "Did someone put you up to this? Are you being paid to ask me to do this or something?"

"I guarantee you that if I didn't want to be here, you've never heard the amount of money it would take to get me here, asking you to do this."

"So then... why? Why does someone like you—"

"One of the top five hottest girls at Lakeview," she clarified.

"—ask someone like me—"

"A creep nobody's ever heard of." A less charitable clarification, but not inaccurate enough to split hairs.

"—to hypnotize you to make you want to have sex with me?"

And yet, in the middle of asking him to break her will and bring her under his control, she still had to demonstrate that she was in charge. No simpler illustration than completely disregarding his consternation and replying with a question of her own. "Can you do it? Yes or no."

Martin sat up straight, trying to look as officious as he could. How had he sounded when that kid came asking him to change his F to a D on his mid-term? He

tried to channel some of that energy. “Of course I can.” Only after the words came out of his mouth did he realize what bullshit they so obviously were.

“All right. So... do it.” She gestured, as if her request were perfectly mundane, its satisfaction readily achieved.

“What, now?”

“You said you were free tonight.”

“Hold on, Stacey.”

“That’s Ms. Reeves.”

“Ms. Reeves, then—”

“I’m kidding.” The ease of her manipulations brought a pretty, if smug, grin to her face.

Martin threw his hands in the air in exasperation. “Can you focus? God! What you’re asking... this won’t be easy. If someone could swing a pendant in someone’s face and say a few words to get her to sleep with him, don’t you think people would be doing that all the time?”

“All right, that’s fair. OK. So I got time. Not infinite, but... how long you thinking? A few hours? I have class early tomorrow, but I can be tired for it.”

“Hours? I’ve never tried anything like this before, but if you’re as resistant to the premise as you’re suggesting—”

“I am.”

“—then try weeks, at minimum.” It wasn’t easy keeping the panic from his voice at the daunting nature of her request, the certain humiliation if and when he failed. “How, um... how long do you have?”

She didn’t look pleased at his pronouncement, but neither did she look deterred. “How about we shoot for... end of the school year. Yeah? That gives us weeks and weeks. Then you can spend your summer bragging to all your sweater-vest-wearing grad student buddies about how you almost banged Stacey Reeves.” She suddenly doubled over laughing. “Sorry, just imagined how somebody would react if you tried to sell them on that.”

Martin might have liked to snap back at her, but she had a point. “That time frame should work. I finish my program in May, but I’m still here for the summer before I leave to start my doctoral program, in case we need the time.” Would even that be enough? He had no idea. So far as he knew, if she really were so disinterested, there was no way he could make this work if he had a hundred years and Svengali’s own pocket watch. Stacey, however, only nodded gamely. “So should we establish some parameters, expectations?”

“What’d you have in mind? I know you don’t expect me to pay you for this.”

He had in fact been about to suggest that very thing, grad student income being ever in short supply. “Of course not. I meant that we should set up a schedule, meeting

dates and locations. Somewhere private, obviously, though I assume you don't want to keep shelling out for a room every time we try."

"How often do you think we should try?"

"As often as possible," Martin insisted quickly. This would likely turn into nothing more fantastical than getting to sit around staring at her with her eyes closed, but even that he'd take, the closest thing to the fantasy he would ever realize. "Let's shoot for roughly one-hour sessions, extending them if and when there seems to be merit, and three days... No. Better make it four days a week."

Rather than counter, negotiation ended with the opening offer. "Then four it is. We can meet at your apartment," she said as if she were offering him a favor by inviting herself in. "Any other stipulations?"

"Nothing coming to mind."

"Great. On to my own conditions. Number one, sessions will be on video. That recording will be streamed live to an address only I and people I trust know about."

"Recorded? Why? You can't re-hypnotize yourself with a recording. Not effectively, at least." He was pretty sure, anyway.

"Good to know, but that's not the point."

"Then... why?"

"You want clarity? Sure. Let's get clear. Your job is to make me want to fuck you. That's it. Not to make me actually fuck you, not to make me your sex slave, not to pick out my clothes or walk me around on a leash or get me to give you a private strip tease or whatever kinky sub-dom shit you're doing a fair job not drooling over. You're exclusively to make me *want* to fuck you, and nothing else."

She was clearly winding up to a point, but he interrupted. "But... you don't see a paradox there?"

"How so?" Stacey sounded genuinely curious.

"Let's make the assumption that by the time the process succeeds," and what an If that was, "I also want to have sex with you."

She snorted. "Right, that one will take months to achieve."

Martin soldiered on. "I'm saying, if we reach a point where you want to have sex with me, and I want to have sex with you, then... why wouldn't we actually do it? At that point, we're two consenting adults."

"Let me stop you right there. I can appreciate you're going to get some spank bank material out of this. Obviously you've got a fetish for this shit or you wouldn't be doing it. At least, not the way I saw you doing it at the Lounge with Little Miss Thang. That's fine. I don't judge people for their kinks. Got a few of my own. When I'm not around, you can beat off all you like."

Martin nodded, listening, but still trying to figure her out. Was it a submissive thing? Coupled with an edging thing? Like she wanted to want it but not have it?

“So getting back to my point. Internet says hypnosis can make people disassociate, forget stuff you do and say while they’re under. No offense intended, but I don’t know you. I have people – that’s as specific as I’ll be – who know about what we’re doing. People I do trust. They’re running my security on this, which means they’ll be watching everything you do and say to me. If they catch the slightest whiff of anything I didn’t ask you to do, you better hope you can hypnotize somebody into submission between the time they draw and when they pull the trigger. Which, based on your reaction tonight, seems unlikely.”

“Jesus.”

“Damn straight. Everything we do, everything we say, is on that record, so if you’re thinking about trying anything that has even a chance of moving me from wanting to doing, you better run it by me beforehand because I can’t vouch for what my people might do. They’re very protective of me.”

“I... see. OK. So wanting only. Looking, but no touching. Got it.”

“And let’s keep the looking to a professional level so long as I’m, you know, awake, or whatever.”

“Sure. Sounds fine.”

Stacey swished her hair back over her shoulder with a flip of her neck. Even that small gesture, even in the midst of this barrage of threats and demands, was sexy coming from her. “One last deal breaker. I know all this, what I’m asking, is pretty fucking weird. Maybe you’ll lose some sleep over it. Whatever. But if you try to go looking into my reasons, we’re done. If you don’t like our arrangement, you speak up and we’ll talk. Until then, we’re both committed, and never mind the why.”

“You’re sure there’s nothing else?”

“Don’t sulk. It’s not cute when you do it.”

“I’ll try not to.”

Stacey slapped her knee. “Great! So I got people waiting for me now – we’re already two minutes past when I said I’d check in, so before they do anything too crazy. Let me just...” She fished her phone out and began typing something as she mumbled the rest of her words to Martin. “So, yeah, how about we... tomorrow good? My last class is out at two, so any time after that.”

“I’m not free until six. Call it seven so I can eat first. I’ll text you my address.”

Stacey finished her text, then her bright blue eyes flicked back up to him with a warm smile as she hopped to her feet, grabbing her purse and its nefarious contents. She practically skipped across the room to him. “No need. I know where to find you, la Mesmer.” She patted his cheek. “Tomorrow at seven.”