

# The Creep

## Chapter Four

Martin watched Stacey go because, well, look at her go. Even with Naomi's gaze boring a hole in the back of his skull, he wasn't about to miss out on the sight of Stacey Martin in all her glory, fresh out of his apartment after stripping for him, posing for him, *flirting* with him. Kind of. For a lesbian.

Naomi, however, was not a lesbian. She only stripped in modest, publicly acceptable quantities, and only because Martin "la Mesmer" Manning paid her to. She had never flirted with him. The only thing she and Stacey had in common in that moment was that hypnosis was the only shot he had at either of them.

"OK. I kept my mouth shut. And from what it sounds like I missed, you so owe me. Now talk, because *that*—" She pointed to where Stacey was pulling out of the parking lot. "That can't have just happened."

Martin at last turned to face her. Here he was, paying Naomi to humor his attempts at his dreams, while Stacey had walked in and fulfilled them beyond his wildest dreams. It occurred to him that the best possible thing that could happen right now would be to send her away, pay her her due, and never speak to her again. The only obstacles were that she had seen what she had seen, and that someone had seen what no one was supposed to see. The former was an issue because it meant there were witnesses, questions he wasn't allowed to answer, questions he was sure he didn't know the answers to. The latter was a problem because the urge to share this secret – the juiciest one Martin had ever kept – had been corroding his will for months.

Martin sat down. This was not a standing conversation. Standing conversations were an interval on the route to the door, and he needed to figure this out before she took that journey. He gestured for her to join him. With an impatient glower, she flounced onto her space on the couch, where she had been right up until Martin had seen Stacey's car enter the lot a short time ago.

"Look, Naomi. I know that was... unusual."

"Unusual?"

"All right, weird. Really weird. Sure." That reassessment seemed to satisfy her rhetorical needs. "But I need you to swear to me you won't tell anybody about what you just saw."

"See? I hardly saw anything, just some tasty babe strutting up to your door. I might have seen more, but you told me if I so much as peeked down the hallway there would be 'a catastrophe of Godzilla-esque proportions.' Your words. But what I *heard*..."

Martin could only wish she'd seen nothing. His reaction to Stacey's arrival had startled Naomi, and she'd looked out the window before he could cover for it. She'd

barely gotten half her question of who on earth it was, and none of the follow-up about why he looked so startled.

“And you did great. I am so grateful, truly. But please, can you just... forget that happened? Please?”

“Martin, who was that? Was that a call girl? She looked like a call girl, but she sure didn’t act like any call girl I ever met.”

“How many call girls have you met?”

“Martin...!” It was practically a growl.

“It doesn’t matter who she was. It’s just this... thing I’m doing. It’s hard to explain. But it’s all harmless, and she’d be extremely embarrassed if anybody found out about it, and—”

“Found out about what? I couldn’t hear half of what Little Miss Breathy-Voice said, but I heard enough. That woman, she gave you your pick of a beej or a strip tease. Who does that?”

Later, Martin would concoct any number of satisfactory lies he might have offered Naomi at that moment. The best of his options was that the woman was a hooker who’d arrived earlier than he’d asked, one catering to his fetish, and he was embarrassed to admit it. The worst, that she was an ex-girlfriend who’d been consumed by her own fetish for hypnosis and couldn’t help returning time and again to plead for more. Either would have been better than what he actually said, though, because it was the truth.

“Her name is Stacey. She sought me out to use my hypnosis to help her overcome some... very personal hangups. We’ve been working on it for a while now, and that’s why I’ve been asking you for more time, so I can get practice to do right by her. It’s very very private. Nobody was ever supposed to know about it, and if anyone ever find out, she’s going to kill me.”

That he had handed a woman who’d been all but extorting him the keys to the extortion kingdom occurred to him only in time to avoid explaining that the killing might well be literal. He imagined trying to convince Stacey that he hadn’t sought out a witness, that it was all an accident. She’d never believe it.

Rather than asking for the slow train to Disappointmentville by demanding his debit card and PIN, however, Naomi asked, “What kind of hangups?”

“It’s private.”

“Pfff. I guess I’ll just make something up for the newsletter then. See ya!”

Martin seized her by her wrist. A bluff, but also a message. “Hang on. Let’s talk this through.” She let him restrain her, returning to her seat pleased at her triumph. She’d wanted him to acknowledge that she had him by the cojones, and he had.

After a moment to consider, he tried for empathy. It was cheaper than paying blackmail any day. “Imagine it was you for a second. Say, you were frigid or something, and wanted me to help you past it.”

“I would never have that problem, and if I did, I would never ever ask you to hypnotize it out of me.”

“All right, so imagine it was smoking.”

“Why would I care if people knew I was a smoker?”

“Dammit, Naomi, you know what I’m trying to say!”

“You’re trying to get me to admit that having someone hypnotize you out of your kinks isn’t fucking weird as fuck, and that paying you with sex stuff isn’t ten times weirder! And I won’t.”

“I already admitted it’s weird!”

“What kind of hangups?” she asked again.

“Naomi, it would be a betrayal of her trust.”

“How long do you think it will take me to ID a college girl named Stacey with *that* body? Lakeview’s not small, but it’s not *that* small. From what I saw, she sticks out.”

“That’s all the more reason not to tell you!”

“Well tell me something because right now, I am losing my shit more than a little.”

Martin shook his head. “You’re losing your shit? What the heck for?”

“Oh, I dunno, the guy who’s been moving heaven and earth to get me to let him hypnotize me, who pays me to do PG-13 sexnosis shows, has been working on another woman who’s now showing up at his house and asking to be allowed to blow him. Are you doing something to me? Because I swear...”

“Oh my god. Oh my GOD! Naomi, no! No, I would never...” The look in her eye caught that lie in his throat. Of course he would. Until Stacey, only the fact that it was impossible had held him back. “I haven’t. I’m only practicing inductions. She’s had a hard time relaxing—”

“Oh yeah, she seemed real uptight.” Naomi adopted a high, breathy falsetto. “Oh Mr. la Mesmer? Can I pretty pwease suck your fat dick? No? Aww, well can I at least show you my big round—”

She let Martin silence her with a finger to her lips, but not without a little giggling. “As I was saying, she’s had a hard time relaxing into a trance. So I’ve been using you to practice putting, shall we say, a less willing subject under. That’s it. No weird post-hypnotic suggestions or anything. That’s mostly fiction anyway. Come on, Naomi, you know I haven’t tried to make you do anything you don’t want to. At least not without compensation.”

“Is that what your pal Stacey thinks, too?”

“Naomi!” It was, by some metrics, impressive that the man was able to muster sincere indignation at her assertion that he might ever have the temerity to do the very thing he had pleased himself not three hours earlier imagining doing.

This raises questions, however. Did one bear any moral culpability for the inadvertent realization of one's most depraved fantasies? Does lusting after the impossible assign a karmic taint to a man's soul when the impossible is achieved? If so, did his level of enjoyment deepen his debt?

Martin, however, was not pursuing a post-secondary education in philosophy, so these questions did not interest him. What did interest him in that moment was how soon he could get Stacey Reeves back into his apartment and under his spell. A very distant second was dealing with Naomi and her insinuations.

"Martin. What's her hangup?"

"Why do you care?"

"Because I do. Now answer my question, or we're done." There was little doubt in the way she inflected it that they would not merely be done for the evening.

Martin took a moment. Telling her was definitely a bad idea. It was a betrayal of Stacey's incredibly fragile trust, and if she ever found out, she'd never come back. Yet conversely, *not* telling her was as bad or worse. There was no telling what Naomi might do with what she'd seen and heard tonight, and she'd made it fairly clear she understood the leverage it gave her.

All he knew right then was that one of those paths seemed very likely, and very immediate. Perhaps if he could stall Naomi long enough, Stacey would be too much in his grip by the time it all inevitably blew up in his face. This is what Martin convinced himself of. So, like so many men in generations of his predecessors who likewise had little experience in delicate matters between beautiful women, he opted to rely on her basic humanity.

"She's gay. OK? Happy now? She's gay, and she asked me to help her see if I can bring her around to the other side. Or maybe both sides. I don't really know. It's a work in progress. But it would be super embarrassing, and unless you want to out that poor woman—" (Note: This was the first recorded instance in Stacey's life someone had spoken of her with pity, apart from sycophantically, to her face.) "—then you have to take this to your grave. I'm begging you, Naomi. Please."

Her dark face lit up at the revelation of this juicy gossip. "*That* girl is a lesbian. *That* girl. No way."

He nodded, his own instinct to grin proving irresistible. There were few joys like sharing a truly delectable secret, coerced or no. "It's true. Hand to god."

"Damn." Naomi slumped back on the couch, mind blown. "That's wild. And she sought *you* out?" Her incredulity was hurtful, but not unfair.

"We hypnotists are in short supply these days," he remarked dryly.

"But why you? Did you know her or something?" Her tone indicated she thought this about as likely as him having a brunch appointment the next morning with Beyoncé.

“Who, me?” He tried to apply the appropriate dismissiveness to that ludicrous premise. “She went looking for somebody with some skill, saw one of our shows, and the rest is history.”

“But... wow. I mean, that’s a lot to trust some random creepy dude with. No offense.”

Martin took *some* offense, though only some. “I try to earn it. I haven’t told anybody but you, and I really didn’t want to tell you.” That didn’t include Dustin, who’d laughed his tale off, or anyone from the hypnofetish message boards he frequented, but it still kept Naomi in a small window of a few hundred people, most of whom didn’t know his name or locale. So mostly a secret.

Slowly, Naomi gave a thoughtful nod. “All right. Your secret’s safe with me. I won’t tell anybody.”

“You promise?”

She raised her hand in what he thought was a girl scout salute. “I swear. Put me under and make me if you don’t trust me.”

He laughed, mostly because he would have done so in a heartbeat if he thought he could, but since he couldn’t, why not laugh. “That’s a load off, Naomi. Thanks.”

She pushed out a breath, still digesting this news. “Say, I was going to go get Thai with a friend after we wrapped up here, but now that our timing’s off... wanna order in?”

“You want to eat?” He blinked. “With me?” The sudden shift was obvious to him. Martin Manning was not a man completely ignorant of the ways of women. He had been with ~~many~~ ~~several~~ more than one, after all. It was a casual but open-faced flirtation, this, familiar enough. Still, coming from such a *pretty* girl... suspicion was only natural when exposed to the heretofore unknown. Naomi may not have the raw beauty of his other hypnotic subject, but she was still pretty, and he’d been handily supplementing his TA income with an assist from her more than generous curves. (Or he had been, until recent renegotiations, now supplementing her income from her real job at Target.)

“C’mon. Buy my silence with pad thai.”

The nod to his blackmailable status, however much it seemed in jest, was sufficient to cover an order to doordash, albeit with a diminished tip.

“So... we should probably talk about the other night, huh.” Stacey crossed her legs guardedly, even though the suggestion was hers. Still, she was wearing a dress for once rather than sweats or mom jeans. On Stacey Reeves, even exposed calves were not something to be taken for granted. It engendered an empathy for the fascination with ankles experienced by his fictitious Victorian contemporaries.

“No, we shouldn’t.”

“Come on. Sherri gave me the ninth *and* tenth degrees, leaving DAT house dressed like that. Made such a scene, half the house came out to grill me about my big date. I barely made it out the door, and now Sherri’s sure I have some big secret lover.”

“Who’s Sherri?”

“She’s my...” She shook her head. “A friend. It doesn’t matter. That’s not what we need to talk about.”

“We’re not going to talk about it, I said.”

Men not wanting to talk to her was in itself unusual, but a man who’d seen her naked and didn’t want to rehash it upon open invitation... it was inconceivable. “Seriously? I came in here and took off my clothes for you. Said I’d blow you. You don’t have any questions about that?”

“Of course I do. But like you said... we’re not here to buddy-buddy our way into nearly fucking. We’re getting there with hypnotism, remember? So zip it, lie down, and let me get you to a place where I can ask them.”

A smile stole across her ruby lips as she saw he wasn’t saying no, but rather yes-and. “All righty, then.” He took note that she still set up her camera, but with that measure in place, Stacey took her spot on the sofa almost eagerly.

She went under in record time, in Martin’s book a cause for celebration on par with her strip tease. She repeated the words of the induction with conviction, he thought, or as much conviction as a sleepy monotone could muster. If hearing her acquiesce to trusting in him absolutely gripped at his conscience after betraying her confidence to Naomi, his voice fought to give no sign of it.

It had been weeks since she’d last been under, since she had outed herself to him and revealed her true purpose in coming to him. Her mantras came out in crisp, precise repetitions, however, as if no time had passed at all. She’d texted him that she had kept at it, and by all appearances she had.

“If I tell Martin Manning I won’t do something, I don’t have to. I don’t have to do anything that’s humiliating. I don’t have to change the way I dress unless I want to. I don’t have to tell anyone about our time together unless I want to. I don’t have to let him touch me unless I want to. I don’t have to touch him unless I want to.”

“Otherwise, I have to go along with what Martin Manning wants. If he wants to talk about stuff I didn’t forbid, I’ll talk to him. I’ll be honest with Martin Manning. If he wants me to watch something or read something, I’ll do it attentively. If he asks me to

do something I didn't forbid, I'll seriously consider doing it – especially if it doesn't cost me anything. Embarrassing isn't humiliating.”

What drove her to such lengths to reinvent herself, he still didn't know. Whatever it was, it at least explained some of her paranoia about the need for secrecy. Bigoted family, her own deep-seated homophobia, religious hang-ups and fear of hell... They could be powerful motivators. For now, that barrier could remain intact. He had more interesting topics to discuss with her today.

Impatient though he was to get to them, he nonetheless gave her a half hour to repeat the litany of trust and comfort, swearing to be honest and obedient\*.

Not a bad way to bide one's time. Her dress was nothing flashy or ornate, the sort of thing any girl on campus might wear on a spring day like today. With free license to stare, though, the presence of even the less interesting portion of her legs, the barest hint of cleavage at her neckline, were enough to keep him twiddling his thumbs while doing the important work.

Finally, it was time. “Stacey, I'm going to ask you some questions now.”

“Mm.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Answer them honestly.”

“Why?”

“I'll be honest with Martin Manning.”

“Good girl.” He winced at the slip; that was something he only said in his fantasies, not during sessions. Indeed, her fingers warned him with one of those telltale fidgets they exhibited when she was resisting him. “Do you remember what happened last time you came over?”

“Mm. I told you I would strip for you, or give you a blowjob. You said strip, so I stripped. Then you made me pose. Then you said we could keep trying.”

“That's right. If I had asked you to blow me, what would you have done?”

“Depends.”

“Depends on what?”

“Whether or not you asked before or after I stripped.”

“OK, so before. You offered me the choice, and I chose a blowjob.”

“Then I would have given you a blowjob.”

God, he felt lightheaded in that moment. “What about after?”

“No. You already got to see me naked. Either/or, not both. Ungrateful fuck.”

Martin was nothing if not grateful for that night. Waiting for Naomi to leave so he could retreat to his bedroom and beat it half the night had been almost physically painful. “Previously, you'd told me that I couldn't make you dress a certain way, that I couldn't touch you. What changed?”

Her hands fidgeted suddenly, and he knew he'd tread on dangerous ground.

"Nothing."

"Stacey, you have to be honest with me."

Frown. Fidget. "I was. Nothing changed. You can't change how I'm dressed unless I want to. You can't touch me unless I let you."

"What made you want to, then?"

Fidget. "I was losing you."

Recent exposure to Naomi made him cognizant of the ways in which he might attempt to leverage that sentiment into something, but such temptation was quickly squelched. The idea was to hypnotize Stacey, not coerce her, into not-quite-fucking him.

"Repeat after me, Stacey. I know that won't happen again."

"I know that won't happen again."

"I trust Martin Manning."

"I trust Martin Manning."

Her fright had been a useful one-time nudge, but to get where they needed to be, where he wanted to be, fear wasn't much good. He went through those lines a few more times each, reasoning that trust and security might ease her into it. Her hands fell back to the couch cushions, still and calm as the rest of her. For his part, Martin very much hoped that it *would* happen again, but a few repetitions of a soothing lie were unlikely to hurt those odds.

"How did you feel when you were naked in front of me, Stacey?"

"Humiliated. Creeped out. It was hard not to show how it made my skin crawl." That was certainly honest. Then she added, as a very distant afterthought, "But I guess part of me was turned on."

What a relief that was. Martin certainly hadn't forgotten her saying as much, but it was to the good that she hadn't either. "Why do you think you were turned on?"

"It felt like it might actually work." A thin, hopeful smile.

"That's it? Not because you were naked in front of someone?"

The smile faded with a shrug. "Dunno. Never been naked in front of a guy before."

"Did some part of it feel good? Powerful, maybe?"

Her head shook side to side. "Always feel powerful that way."

"Of course you do," he muttered. So much for feeding on her vanity. That was a wild mustang the likes of which he was unequipped to ride.

Was there even anything to this, or was he simply pursuing his own desires? He certainly wouldn't say no to another free show, but would it even bring her closer to their goal?

"Stacey, how do you feel when you dress sexy?"

"Mm. Sexy."



“Is sexy... horny?”

Fidget. Her reply came slower. It always did when it was one given under the “if Martin Manning wants to talk about stuff I didn’t forbid, I’ll talk to him” clause of her mantra. As wordy as that all was, he took it as a sign that it was achieving results that Stacey could process it so quickly.

“Yeah. Feels good to look good sometimes.”

“If you’re going to ever want to fuck me, you’re going to have to get horny around me. Right?”

“Mm. Prolly.”

“So don’t you think it would help to wear sexier clothes? Or no clothes?”

“No. I don’t have to change the way I dress unless I want to.” Fidget. “Not being horny is your problem, not mine.”

“My problems are your problem!” He began in a shout, but dropped it to a loud whisper before it snapped her awake. As it was, there was a lot of hand movement. Martin brought her back to her mantras while he stood up and paced up and down the hallway, contemplating. Now here she was, finally giving him a hint about how he might turn her on (and entertain him in the process). She had seemed so eager to make more progress after the stripping incident. Enthused, energized, ready to take direction. Now, days later, it had been relegated to regrettable necessity in her memory. Worse, she’d used the H-word. Mere embarrassment, he might be able to play around some.

Although...

“Stacey, is it humiliating for a doctor to see you naked?”

It took her a moment of consideration. They were already at their time threshold, but she wouldn’t complain if they got something out of it. Time to see where this went.

“Prolly not. As long as it’s not some creepy old man.”

The “creepy” and “old” parts were practically one word to her. “Why not?”

“Necessary.”

Not the answer he wanted, but he could roll with it. Whatever good the more blunt force brainwashing they’d been focusing on had done, hypnotic suggestions had achieved minimal effect. From his self-tutoring in the craft, that was supposed to be where the meat of hypnotism lay, tapping into the subject’s existing feelings and attaching other thoughts. Perhaps she was more susceptible now after some months of tinkering? Time to find out.

“For a doctor, it’s just a job, right?”

Her nod and shrug combined into an awkward spasm. No fidgeting, though. Her hands remained flat on her flat tummy. “Yeah.”

“And it’s nothing they haven’t seen before, right?”

“Mm. Yeah.” Even quicker that time.

“Now keep that thought in your head. It’s OK for a doctor to see you naked. It’s just a job. They’ve seen it all before.” Not her words, but she’d agreed easily enough. “Repeat that.”

He had her say it a few times before beginning his pivot. “Now what’s my job for you, Stacey?”

“Hypnotize me. See if you can make me wanna fuck you.”

“Right. It’s just a job. Say that.”

“It’s just a job.”

“And since I started doing that job, I’ve seen you naked, haven’t I?”

Fidget. “Not part of the job. Seduced you. Brought you back. Not supposed to see that. No choice.”

“Sure, but if I didn’t have that job, to make you want to fuck me, would you have ever let me see you naked?”

Her face puckered up like he’d shoved a lemon in her mouth. “Fuck no. Never. Not inna million years.”

“Right. So me seeing you naked was because of the job. Part of the job.”

Her head lolled side to side as she considered, and finally relented with a shrug. “I guess. Kinda.”

“Say it. Me seeing you naked was part of the job.”

Fidget. “Seeing me naked was part of the job. Once.”

Martin didn’t love her edit, but there was only so far micromanagement would take him. “So it’s sort of like a doctor, right? Seeing you naked is part of the job. It’s nothing your doctor or I haven’t seen before. Say it.”

She struggled a bit, but he helped her through it. Her thumbs twiddled.

“So, with that in mind, how would you feel about me seeing you naked again sometime?”

“No.” Instantaneous, adamant, hands at rest. Hope died almost audibly in the room.

“Well dammit, why not?” he snapped peevisly.

His rhetorical question was not understood as such by her pliant brain, however. “Because I don’t have to change the way I dress unless I want to.”

One of his least favorite concessions in her mantra. Martin wasn’t about to give up, though. Not quite yet. He knew he was reaching, but it still felt like he was circling something. “But you also have to seriously consider doing what I say, don’t you?”

She nodded with only a fraction of a second more hesitation. “Long as it’s not something I don’t have to do.”

“Stacey, is there a difference between making you fuck me, and making you *want* to fuck me?”

“Yeah. Can’t make me fuck you. Supposed to make me want to.” Another immediate agreement.

“That’s right. So there’s also a difference between making you dress a certain way, and making you *want* to dress a certain way?”

Somehow, even with her eyes closed, even responding in a clipped monotone, she managed to sound impressed. Not half so impressed as he felt when he heard her say, “Yeah. There is.”

“So I *can* make you *want* to dress a certain way.”

“Mmmmmaaaaaaybe,” she agreed uncertainly.

“Say it.”

“I.. I don’t...” She shook her head, hands fidgeting like she was stuttering in sign language. He watched with excitement as her own brain-washing set in. Saying these words was something she hadn’t forbidden, and it cost her nothing. Right out of her own lines, recited now hundreds, perhaps thousands of times. Martin wasn’t sure what the cumulative effect of saying the same words so many times was, though deep down he did suspect that there was one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all.

“You can make me want to dress a certain way.”

“Again.”

“You can make me want to dress a certain way.”

A dozen repetitions later, her hands lie still. Then he had her reinforce her own assertion that she enjoyed dressing sexy, that it felt good. That it was something she liked doing. Even a woman as contrarian as Stacey Reeves couldn’t deny that she wanted to do things she liked doing. She wasn’t embarrassed to be sexy, much less humiliated, she had no trouble admitting.

From there, he removed the lines from her old mantra about clothes, then set her to memorize the revision while he drafted a fresh set of lines. It was nearly an hour late when he awakened her, but the last thing he heard before guiding her out of the trance were the hundredth repetition of the words, said unhesitatingly, with conviction:

“I’m not embarrassed to dress sexy. Dressing sexy feels good. I feel horny when I dress sexy. There’s nothing wrong with looking sexy whenever I want, around anyone I want. Martin Manning can tell me to dress sexy around him. It’s nothing he hasn’t seen and he’s only doing his job. I don’t have to obey, but if I don’t, I have to justify to myself why it would cost me something to do it.”

As ever, a complex bit of memorization, but in a trance her mind was significantly more spongy, and Stacey had come to him with a head for memorizing quotes and passages.

Stacey Reeves stretching, arms over her head, was quite a sight, though his hard-on predated the display by some minutes. “Dang, that was... holy fuck, an hour over? Seriously, Mesmer?”

“It was necessary. I would have woke you up for permission, but then it might have taken three hours.”

“You didn’t even know if I have plans tonight, asshole,” she grunted, pushing herself groggily to her feet.

“Do you?”

“No.” Her head snapped back. “Oh god, that honesty thing... god dammit, it’s becoming more and more automatic. Ugh. Anyway, just... try not to, OK? I don’t want to have to lie to Sherri and my sisters about where I’ve been and why I don’t answer. They always think I got kidnapped or something if I don’t pick up right away.”

“I thought you just had the one sister?”

Her fists clenched, and fire flashed in her eye. Martin actually leapt back from his seat. “What the fuck do you know about my—” Belatedly, she processed the root of his question and calmed back down almost as quickly as she’d escalated. “Fuck. Sorry. My DAT sisters. I don’t check in with Kira or anything. Kira’s my actual sister.”

He made a mental note not to dig around into her family business, lest her pistol make a return to her purse. She stayed only long enough to pack up her camera and schedule their next session. After such a long delay, she pressed for more time together. Backed up with work though he was, Martin caved easily, and they slotted back to back appointments two and three days later. Then she was gone.

*Is this her?*

The text was appended with a URL that Martin recognized as Stacey's. Lovely. She hadn't let it go.

*Yeah, that's her.*

*Wow she's even hotter then I thought from the little I saw  
Guess you saw more than me tho huh? ;)*

*haha  
Guess so*

Martin was careful to use a "haha" rather than a "lol" so the lack of intensity behind his professed bemusement would be obvious.

*She's got kind of an Olivia Wilde vibe but not anorexic*

*That's a bit much, don't you think?*

*Do you think she's prettier than me?*

This question is well-established in its association with second- or even third-rate minds. It ranks in blatancy of mediocrity just below *which thank you cards should we use?* and any variety of *would you still love me if...*, but above *do you like me like me?* A wise man gives the answering of such questions due process in proportion to his hopes to have sex with the women, tempered by the level of his fear of her displeasure.

*I mean, it's not a contest*

Martin would very much like to have fucked Naomi, but knew he had no real prospect of it, and his fear was only secondhand by way of having her foul things up with the objectively prettier woman. For heaven's sake, she was the one who compared Stacey to one of the most beautiful women in the world.

*lol your an ass*

She took it well, at least.

*So hey your paid up on practice*

*When are we going to get at it?*

It was suspicious, her sudden and as near as he could recall unprecedented interest in him getting his money's worth out of her. Yet at the time, he was still distracted by the link she had sent, trying to assess whether Stacey's outfits in her recent posts bore any measurable shift towards sexiness. Not that he could tell, but she only ever posted something if she looked good in it.

*I'll text you – working with Stacey tonight and tomorrow, and I don't know  
when after.*

*Wow, back to back with the Wilde thang? lolol look at you, hard at work for  
your little crush ;)*

Two winky faces in one conversation. It meant something, but since Naomi had seldomly engaged with him socially beyond the minimum required by their professional relationship, he wasn't sure what. Could she really be flirting? (Again?)

No matter. He had bigger fish to fry. Prettier, too.

*I'll be in touch Naomi. Have a good one!*

With the exclamation point in place, the discussion was closed.

The sessions with Stacey went smoothly. If her clothes grew any sexier, he couldn't have said, but she didn't revert to the old uglies. He wouldn't have called her choices of attire sexy except for any bias imposed by the girl wearing them. They adhered to their time constraints, the duration of the session largely consumed by reinforcing the new mantra.

A belated recollection of her mentioning exploring a hypno-porn fetish tickled at Martin's memory, so he pursued that. In the pro column, Stacey was refreshingly open about what she'd told him about it, and confirmed she hadn't been making it up to bait him into responding to her during the leave-me-alone phase of their relationship. Though in the other column came the admission that she had found the stuff, as she put it, "really hard to imagine getting off to." Nevertheless he slotted the last fifteen minutes of each session to watch one such video with her, careful to choose something he hoped might appeal more to his lesbian audience.

"Are you turned on right now, Stacey?" he asked as his final question each night.

"A little," she said the first night.

"I'm menstruating, so I've been horny all day. Always happens," she said the second.

The cause was bolstered by the result, a net win. He offered her as much more time as she wanted, venturing to share openly that she'd told him she was horny on account of her period, and that it may be best to strike while the iron was hot.

"Did you just call my period a hot iron? Because... I don't even know. I do not enjoy period metaphors. Especially from you."

"I didn't mean anything by it. I only thought, if you're turned on already, we might have an easier time. It's your call."

Stacey rubbed at her face as if to massage herself out of a strange dream. "Fine. I have company visiting, but I can sneak out for a while."

"Oh! I don't want to get in the way of—"

"That's sweet, but you're right. Lord knows you do less than nothing for me, so if we can trick my pussy into giving off a little heat around you, we probably ought to."

"I really hope someday you're forced into a frank and open relationship with someone who's as disinterested in you as you are in me. I really do."

"Don't hold your breath, la Mesmer." She fuzzed his head and set out.

Their follow-up session went well. She was definitely dressed up that time, a cute skirt and tight sleeveless blouse in a dazzling royal blue, lots of makeup and her glossy black hair in an ornate braid. Alas, she explained that she was meeting up with friends (Sherri again, and whoever her visitor was, along with a few other DAT girls) for a frat party, so he still had no reason to think her appearance had its root in hypnotic suggestion.

More mantra, some questions about what she did and didn't like about his porn choices. (Bigger boobs, she said, and then some bitchy digs at the hypno-fetish on the whole. "Less chanting, more fucking. Get to the good shit.")

As Stacey left, she ran headfirst into Naomi. Nothing was bowled over, save for Martin's hopes at keeping the two from ever meeting.

"Whoa, hi, sorry," Stacey said, jumping back. Seeing that Naomi was heading towards Martin's apartment rather than down the hall to somewhere else, she hesitated again. After all, anywhere else was the most likely destination for the curvy young woman with her dirty blonde hair.

A stand-off formed in the doorway. Stacey had seen Naomi before at his show, when she had been "Holly," a "randomly selected" audience member, "hypnotized" into showing her bra to the "crowd." Naomi had only seen Stacey by accident the other week, though, of which Stacey knew nothing. All it would take would be Naomi uttering Stacey's name to trigger a shooting spree the likes of which local police would never solve. (Admittedly it would top any episode of every cop drama Martin had ever seen.)

"Naomi, hi! Naomi, this is my friend Stacey. Stacey, Naomi. She works with me in the la Mesmer act."

Stacey glanced over her shoulder, as if amused to be called a "friend," but far better condescending bemusement than psychotic rage any day. "Right, right. I came to one of his shows once. I think I remember you. 'Getting sleepy, arf arf cluck cluck, oops my boobs popped out.' Yeah. Nice to meet you."

Naomi's face had been bright when the door opened. A face that had plainly been lying in wait for just such an ambush, albeit without quite so much velocity on the part of Stacey. The uncharitable yet accurate summation of her acting career soured that tout de suite. "Hi. Sorry about the bump there – I was just about to knock, and... yeah, sorry. So... yeah. Hey, you're looking like you're off to have some fun. Or maybe fun already had?"

The feigned innocence in the allegation wasn't lost on Stacey. "No no, already on my way out. He's so very all yours."

*Girls, please, don't fight over me*, said mirror dimension Martin, where the two women were having a very different argument.

Still, neither of them had moved, each planted firmly in the other's path. They weren't fighting over him, he knew, but there was a power struggle at play, governed by some inscrutable girl rules he didn't know. Was the less hot one supposed to flinch first? The one with the least claim to Martin? If Naomi knew about Stacey's documented habit of packing deadly weapons, surely she would have stood aside first.

The actual deciding factor, of course, would be simple democratic displacement, a process as old as *Survivor*. When Martin chose a side, that side would trample the other, at least insofar as the stakes of pride invested in the conflict.



Both held some appeal. Stacey for the obvious reason. Hotter, and here on the voluntary basis of pressuring him to brainwash her into becoming his pliant fuck buddy (though without the fucking and likely never to be buddies, as he always had to remind himself). Naomi was likewise here of her own volition, but it was clear she was playing some weird game he didn't quite understand. Still, that game seemed to involve a fair amount of flirtation that may lead to actual sexual activity rather than stopping on the brink. Almost but never fuck a certified 10, or take a plausible shot at a solid 8? The whole conundrum was an indictment of the uselessness of every story problem his math teachers had foisted off on him.

"Text me later, Stacey. And have yourself a good time with your friends." If he remembered his lessons in rounding improper fractions correctly, this was the clear choice. It gave him cause to place a hand on her shoulder as he swept her past the defeated Naomi. Her deferential smile was forged in melted daggers.

"You know I will. And you two... yeah. Have fun." Stacey upped the ante with a patronizing squeeze on the girl's shoulder as she passed, not so much as diverting her head to the side in acknowledgment as she sauntered away. Never before had Martin witnessed so much jiggle in her step, and he had watched her take a great many steps.

After a sulky glower at the raven-haired bombshell's parting strut, Naomi choked it down and buried it under a rubble heap of cordial smiles as she entered the apartment uninvited. "Hey there stranger. I didn't hear back, so I thought I'd surprise you."

"Surprise!" he droned, thick with sarcasm, all but slamming the door behind her. "And you happened to arrive on my doorstep the exact second Stacey was leaving?"

"Yeah... What, you think I was lying in wait for the thrill of meeting the Wilde child? Believe it or not, I've bumped into hot bitches before. The thrill is dulled after the first thousand or so."

"If you say so. Anyway, I'm busy. This really isn't a good time for a practice session. I've been working with her almost every night of the past week, and my brain is just kinda fried on hypnosis." This was a lie, a damn dirty lie, and it hurt to give it voice. He would hypnotize beautiful women every waking minute if he could. Still, he was angry. If she blew things with Stacey this far into things, he didn't know what he'd do.

Naomi offered a half-sympathetic chuckle. "Oh. Sounds like it's been stressful. Must be rough, having that body lying on your couch, lezzed up in spite of your best efforts. Frigid, untouchable."

"Believe me, I'm more than used to having beautiful women I'm forbidden from touching lying tranced out on my sofa."

He'd meant it as a barb, but it was plain she'd found some other way to take it. She took a familiar stride closer, put her knuckles to his chin and gave it a faux punch. "Oh come on, Marty. Not all of us beautiful women are so bad."

Ah, there it was. Right when he began to think she'd come by to sabotage, out came that flirty smirk. "I like you just fine, Naomi. This is just a bad time. And please don't call me Marty."

"Right, sorry, Martin. I just like you as a Marty. My bad." Her lips twisted sympathetically. "You sound stressed."

"It's nothing. I just really don't want her to find out anybody knows about us."

He was surprised she actually looked abashed. "Hey, I'm sorry. It won't happen again, OK? You and your instagram model chica do your thang, and I'll stay out of the way. Hand to god."

Martin eyed her warily. Her game wasn't over, whatever it was, but there was no point rejecting a peace offering. "Thanks. It means a lot." He turned, intending to open the door to show her out, but suddenly there were two hands on his shoulders, fingers sunk deep into tense muscle.

"Naomi? What are you...?"

"Shhh, relax. Jesus, you really are tense. Come on, let me. It's the least I can do, after..." She nodded to the direction Stacey had departed. "Sit down. Give me ten minutes, and you'll be right as an angle."

Like anyone suddenly brought under the effect of a shoulder massage by a person they'd like to fuck, Martin was helpless, a rat before the Pied Piper.

Aha! There was another famous hypnotist. Several months too late, but still. (Was he fictional, too?)

An hour later, he was shirtless, in his bed, Naomi astride his back. His fingers were well past any intense work now, but he was at least as happy with the feather-soft tickles back and forth across his skin. Whatever she was up to (if she were up to something; anyone this generous with their affection might well be above suspicion), he no longer cared. When he finally summoned the grit to roll onto his back, depositing her on the bed beside him, he hadn't even thought about Stacey since...

Well, since the last ten times he'd had that realization since her fingers first settled on his shoulders.

"Feel better?" she asked with a quiet smile. She'd let her hair down at some point, a mop of brownish blonde curls pooled on his sheets.

"You're amazing."

"More amazing than your 'friend?'" Her chin jutted forth teasingly. She was really close.

"I mean, it's not a contest, but..."

With a squeal of delighted rage, she grabbed his pillow and launched an offensive. The attack failed as catastrophically as intended, with Naomi on her back and Martin atop her, lips pressed together hungrily.

Before long he made a move on her top, but she caught his hands. “Hold on...” He stopped immediately. Just because a man’s deepest fantasy was to render a woman incapable of denying him his every wish did not mean he didn’t believe in the sanctity of consent.

Her smile grew as he anxiously awaited an explanation. “You have to say it.”

“Please?” Begging wasn’t a good look, but this close, he wasn’t worried about his pride.

Yet she only laughed. “No... Come on. You know the words.”

Martin’s mind raced. ‘Pretty please’? ‘Fine, OK, you’re prettier’? ‘Are you starting a prank show and am I on it?’ Nothing sounded quite right.

“Say it, la Mesmer.”

Oh god.

Oh *GOD*.

He’d been hard for hours now. He nearly came in his shorts.

“Holly,” he began, employing her stage name, “you are totally alone right now. You don’t hear anyone, or see anyone. My voice is your own voice, inside your own head.”

“Alone...” she murmured dreamily. That giddy smirk was still warring with the dream-state blankness on her face, but the latter was gradually winning. “You’re... in my head...”

“You’re actually at home. You’ve just arrived at the end of a long day. Tell us: do you live alone, Holly?”

She shook her head. “No. Roommate...”

“Oho,” he said to their phantom audience, as if intrigued at this unexpected development in their thoroughly rehearsed act. “Is your roommate a boy, or a girl?”

“Chris,” she answered. Or perhaps it was, “Kris.”

They could hear the usual tittering in the crowd at the ambiguity. “Is Chris” (or perhaps “Is Kris”) “a boy or a girl?”

“Girl...” she murmured, not at all self-conscious.

“Right. So it’s just you and Kris. In for the night, ready to relax and unwind after a long, long day.” She affected a blissed smile. He could feel the hypno-fetishes budding in the audience. “You don’t wear a bra when you relax around the house, do you Holly?”

She shook her head. “Never. So... tight...”

“That’s right, it’s very tight. But you’re home now, ready to relax. But Kris is right there, so you can’t just take everything off. Do you know how to take your bra off while leaving your shirt on?” He turned and addressed his ceramic Diablo figurine on the dresser. “Sorry guys, that kinda show costs extra.”

She nodded. “Yeah. Just gotta... squirm... a little...”

*Squirm* was a word they had workshopped. They had wanted to sound just a little bit sexy without breaking the illusion. *Wriggle* was too rhymy; *peel it off* was a tad suggestive; Naomi's initial suggestion, *free my titties* was Martin's favorite, but mutually agreed to cross a line.

"Go on, then. Squirm, Holly."

Her lips, still glistening from prolonged contact with his, twisted down. "Can't..."

He started. That wasn't the script. "What? No, you can. It's just you and Kris, very OK. Go ahead."

She shook her head. "No. Not... wearing bra..." Slowly, in a reasonable approximation of the sleepy movement she employed on stage, she rose to her knees on the mattress, crossing her arms to grab the bottom of her shirt. She peeled it off (definitely too suggestive) inch by inch, though somehow it still looked like she was totally oblivious to an audience, unhurried to the point of a tease. She paused at the exact moment the underside of her tits came into view. Still lying down, he had the perfect view. There was a little mole on the left side of her right boob. He had never been so fascinated by a mole in all his life.

"What's wrong, Na- Holly? Why did you stop?"

"Kris is home," she murmured unhappily.

"No no - Kris is gone now." He leapt out of bed, darted to the bedroom door and swung it broadly, loudly closed. "See? That was her leaving. It's only you now. She won't be back for a long time. Maybe never."

Naomi, her face shrouded behind her upraised shirt, giggled in spite of herself. "Good... Now I can..."

And the shirt came off.

Her tits were spectacular, he had to hand it to her. He'd come very close to seeing them countless times before. In some variations of their act, she removed the bra, letting a tight shirt, or a low-cut one, or one that could display some eye-popping jiggle, sell the crowd. Others, mostly older scripts before they'd been warned to stop, she'd ditched her top and kept the bra on. She'd looked good, of course, but the right bra could make any old floppy granny tits look at least decent. As to where the one she had most definitely been wearing when she entered his apartment had wandered off to, he had no idea. He hoped it never resurfaced.

"Spectacular."

Naomi stared forward blankly, but her eyes sparkled.

"Now they've been hot and cramped all day, Holly, so why don't you give them a little massage."

She nodded slowly, as if his suggestion made perfect sense. One hand found each pert, lightly freckled breast and began kneading them affectionately. A satisfied whimper trickled up from her throat as she played. He said nothing, willing to watch for

as long as she continued. After some time, he caught the barest questioning glance in her eyes and realized he might have let it run a little long.

“I got carried away. You look amazing. Sorry.”

She looked up, suddenly alert. “Don’t be. One thing I learned a long time ago with you is that sometimes it’s kinda hot to be somebody’s fantasy.”

“Yeah? Why didn’t you ever...?”

“Hey, I’m doing it now, aren’t I? Now do you want me to sit here squeezing my tits all night, or would you like to take over and give me something else to do with my hands?”

La Mesmer returned at the snap of his fingers, which, like in their act, was all it took to put her under. “Just as you’re finally relaxing, Holly, the door opens, and in walks the man of your dreams...”

“Did you do something to me?”

Martin jumped almost out of his skin. She was almost an hour early, and hadn't buzzed or knocked. He must have forgotten to lock the door after he walked Naomi out that afternoon. She'd stopped by for lunch and a bit of light making out before work. Knowing what was under that coarse red shirt made even the boring Target uniform look hot.

“Can you be more specific?” he grumped, composing himself.

The door slammed behind her. Stacey hastily shed her coat, and comprehension dawned instantly.

A black crop top, loose, but so brief that the bottom inch of a royal blue bra peeked out underneath. *DAT GIRL* was printed in white, billowing across the curves of her chest, split in the middle by a broad, savagely cut V that displayed incredible cleavage. Her shorts (which Martin then mistook for a mini skirt) were a narrow band across her midsection so black it was impossible to tell if they were spandex, lycra, or some other fabric. Whatever it was, they were skin tight. The V of her hips was displayed eye-poppingly low, visible almost to the point of confirming what he'd already learned, that she waxed her pubic hair. If she'd been wearing panties, he would see some sign of them. He didn't.

She put her hands on her hips, waiting for him to stop staring and get to her question. “You look nice.”

“I look hot as fuck, which you know damn well. Me looking hot is the foundation of your side of our relationship if you recall. Now tell me why I felt guilty coming over here in anything less than this get-up.”

Considering he wanted to throw a fist in the air and cheer, the fact that he only clapped his hands once and chuckled was a compromise. “Sorry!” he said immediately after when she looked like she might hit him. “OK, yes. We added a new mantra.”

“We? What the fuck we? *I* zonked out on your couch while you spun me around and made me feel like some kind of black-haired Barbie bimbo!”

“No no no, see, this is good news! Great news, maybe. You just have to stop and think it through.”

“Think *what* through? That you found some pervy way to make me dress slutty for you? So you can beat off, laughing about how you're changing me for your own sick amusement?”

“Hey!” Martin's hackles were officially up. “I tried to put a stop to all this. I tried to find some techniques to do this without hypnosis. Remember? You insisted. Said it *had* to be this way. Did you think I could hypnotize a lesbian into wanting to fuck me without changing the way she does things?”

Her chin tilted up, but she held her tongue until her temper was under control. For the moment. “So explain then. Tell me why this—” She hefted her tits under her shirt. “— is such a great development.”

Martin invited her to sit down. Once she grudgingly accepted, he took his usual spot in the chair across from the sofa. It was one of his kitchen chairs. In the early months with Stacey, he would drag it from the tiled area lovingly dubbed the dining room to the living room for each session. After the first month, he’d simply left it there between sessions. Even when he said he’d quit.

“So first, tell me how you’ve been feeling. What you’ve been doing – as it’s relevant to... this. So I can better understand the situation.”

Her hair was back in a bun, sprayed and gelled so it looked wet. There was a single thin strand in an arc around her forehead, almost across her left eye. She swept it back, and it immediately snapped back into place. It looked like something she’d done many times.

“For the last... I dunno. Around a week or two? Around the time we started back up. Obviously. I’ve been... I don’t know. Like every time I’m leaving the house, I go through my closet, the back part, looking for the hottest thing in it. It’s like this debate I’m having with myself almost, like skanky frat party outfits are the norm and I have to come up with a reason to wear jeans and a sweater. It’s supposed to be the other way around! And that’s chump change next to how I’m... how I’ve been...”

Horny. That was what she couldn’t bring herself to say. The flush in her cheeks, however, the way her thighs pressed together, her tongue’s betrayal in darting out to moisten her lips... Martin had fresh experience in seeing a horny woman.

“Right.”

“Not right! Not right at all!”

“You thought changing your sexual identity was going to feel right?”

“It wasn’t supposed to feel like *this!* I’ve changed clothes more times in the past five days than I did in the past five weeks! My— Sherri was getting suspicious, catching me staring at myself in the mirror... Sexy little outfit after sexy little outfit... Those long, hot, steamy showers...” She drew a shuddering breath. “So whatever you’re doing, do it right, and fix this!”

“Stacey, if there was a switch in your brain I could flip that would make you want to fuck me, don’t you think I would have flipped it? I mean, crap, don’t you think someone would be out there flipping it left and right on every woman like you?”

He expected a barb about how he must have flipped it on Naomi, welcomed it, looked forward to getting to brag to her that she wasn’t the only woman in his life. Not for days now. Instead, it seemed the chance encounter was the furthest thing from her mind, if indeed she even remembered Naomi’s name or even her existence. When she didn’t take the opportunity for a retort, he went on, moderating.

“It’s not a perfect process. I don’t know if anyone has ever done what you’re asking me to do, and I really am doing my best. You’ve made it abundantly clear that you understand my motivation. So let’s look at this. This is definitive proof that what we’re doing, the process, is working.”

“This is *not*—”

“It’s part of it!” he thundered. “Like you were ever going to want to fuck me if we can’t even get you aroused in my presence! And look, we’ve done that. You see what this means? It means, however indirectly...” Martin leaned in and looked her hard in the eyes. “*I can turn you on.*”

By increments, her livid expression faded, then bloomed into a sly smile. “If clever guys turned me on, I’d want to fuck you already, la Mesmer.”

“Thanks?”

Stacey reached into the pocket of her coat, folded over the arm of the sofa, and fished out a phone. “Looks like we got about forty-five minutes before we start up... Wanna watch some more of that creepy porn you like to set the mood?”

“Don’t act like you don’t love it. Now make room, horndog. I get to use my own couch for once.”