

Busman's Holiday

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I led Richard to the door, smiling and saying polite goodbyes. Then I made a beeline for the small kitchen in the back of the office, poured myself a glass of iced tea, and sighed.

I was a little annoyed with myself for having done Richard's session largely on autopilot. That was my own fault, scheduling two different clients in the same day for smoking cessation. That's a single 2-1/2 hour session -- cheaper for the client that way, but very draining for me. I could still hear myself delivering the spiel: *Cast your mind back to your very first cigarette. Your body had a very strong reaction to that first cigarette, didn't it? You probably coughed and gagged, and felt a little sick to your stomach, did you not?* ... blah, blah, blah.

The truth was, I needed a vacation. Ellen, the colleague with whom I shared office space and expenses, had been gently nudging me to take some time off for a while. "You need a break," she'd insisted the last time I'd booked a session for myself with her. "Burnout damages rapport, and you know how important rapport is to our success with clients."

"I know," I told her. "I also know that there's no such thing as paid vacation when you're self-employed."

"That's true; it's part of the price we pay for the freedom we enjoy. But how would it feel if you could look at a vacation as an investment rather than as an expense? You might want to consider how taking some time off will increase your effectiveness with your clients because you'll be more refreshed, more energized, when you return. And you'll be able to let that energy translate into better rapport and more creative solutions. I'm not going to tell you that in the long run you'll benefit more from the rest than from the money you might make working instead, because I know you're a smart guy who can weigh these things for yourself."

"Spoken like a true Ericksonian," I said, half in jest and half in admiration for the easy, natural way she'd worked the embedded suggestions into the dialog. "Do you ever find yourself using those patterns on your husband?"

Ellen smiled slyly. "I'll never tell."

An image formed in my mind: Ellen, her lithe Italian body draped in lacey lingerie, telling me to relax

while she slowly undressed; my eyes growing heavy and closing just as her last bits of clothing hit the floor; my cock going stiff and tempered, surrounded by warmth and softness ...

"Jack?"

I snapped back from my favorite daydream to see Ellen standing in the doorway. She grinned, as if she could tell what I'd been thinking of. "Phone call," she said. "Line three."

"Thanks." Fortunately for me, there was a phone on the table; I grabbed the handset and hit the blinking button. "This is Jack."

"Hey Jack, old buddy. It's Marv." The name didn't register right away, but the voice did. It was a classic salesman's voice -- a little too loud, a little too friendly. My first instinct each time I hear that voice is to run, yet somehow I always seem to find myself listening instead.

"Marv." I sighed and made very little effort to hide it. The last time I'd listened to Marvin Levy for any length of time, I'd let him talk me into investing in some kind of vacation resort place in Puerto Rico. "What's on your mind?"

"You are, partner," he replied, taking no notice of my breach of manners.

I decided to nip this in the bud if possible. "I appreciate that, Marv," I lied, "but I've got a client coming in any minute."

"That's my Jack," he countered, unfazed. "Always busy. Always running from one thing to the next. Never taking any time out for yourself. When was the last time you took a vacation, Jack?"

"A while ago. Is there a point to this?"

"Absolutely. The point is, you own two and a half percent of one of the hottest vacation spots going, and you've never been there yourself. You need to come check this place out, Jack. One week here and you'll feel like a new man."

I was starting to smell another money request. "Your concern for my well-being is touching, Marv, but I'm not looking to invest anything more right now."

"What the? Oh, shit -- no, no, no, Jack, I'm not calling to ask you for more money. No, we're doing great. Don't you read the financials we send you every quarter? Hell, we're doing fan-fucking-tastic. Money is not a problem."

There was something in his voice, though. Some note of discomfort, of uncertainty. "But there is a problem, right Marv? Something you want me to help you with."

A nervous chuckle filled my ear. "Nothing gets by you, does it Jack? Okay, I'll fess up. We do have a little problem. I had this guy booked to do three shows the last week in July. He's a magician, grand illusion type guy; sort of an R-rated Houdini. Audiences love the guy."

"And?"

"Well, he's disappeared. Nobody knows where he is, or how to contact him. He's no-showed his last three gigs. I've called every number in my book, and everyone with any kind of talent is already booked for that week."

"Okay," I said, still searching for a point. "And what you want from me is ..."

"I was banging my head on the desk, trying to figure out what to do, you know? And then I remembered you were a hypno-guy --"

"Hypnotherapist," I corrected.

"Right, whatever. And I remembered you used to do a stage show where you'd put people under and get them to do goofy stuff. That was great. You still do that, don't you?"

"Marv, I haven't done a stage show in ten years," I told him. "I wouldn't know where to start."

"But you still put the whammy on people, right? You just do it in a nice, quiet office. Here you'd do it on stage, with a bunch of people watching. What's the difference?"

"Between entertainment and therapy? It's huge. That's why I stopped doing entertainment."

"Maybe you should try it again. You were good, Jack, you really were. If nothing else, it's a chance to come check out your investment, have some fun, and maybe put the touch on a couple of ladies while you're here."

"Marv ..."

He wasn't taking no for an answer. "Besides, I could be all wrong. Maybe the magician will show. If he does, then you can sit back and enjoy the week, all on the house. If he doesn't, then you're my insurance policy. Either way, you get a week on the island for just the cost of airfare. What do you say, Jack?"

I felt myself weakening. "I say let me think about it. I need some time."

"Take all the time you need, buddy. Just let me know by the end of the week, okay? Catch you later." And just like that, the voice was gone.

I sipped my tea and thought about it. The timing was certainly right. There I was, needing a break, and here was an opportunity to take a low-cost vacation in a beautiful place. What would it take, I wondered, to freshen up my old stage act? I hadn't done it since college -- I'd kept myself in pocket money by doing shows at a local nightclub once a week, hypnotizing coeds and putting them through the usual stunts. "Jack Trancer," I'd called myself, taking just a few liberties with my real surname. It had been fun, for the most part. So why not go for it?

Three weeks later on a Saturday morning, I found myself sitting in the back of a white SUV watching the Puerto Rican countryside roll by. We drove south and east from the airport for something close to two hours, much of that time running through the mountainous center of the island, before reaching my destination.

High sandstone walls defined the perimeter. Crisply carved into the stone near the gate was the name of the place: *UNINHIBITED -- An adult vacation community*. Uniformed security guards at the gatehouse waved at my driver and let us through without stopping, then closed the wrought iron gate behind us.

I remembered the basic layout from the brochures Marvin Levy had shown me when he convinced me to invest in the place. A high-rise hotel building occupied the middle of the compound, with 50 private bungalows spread out in the area between the hotel and the beach. There were two golf courses -- one professional grade, one for beginners -- and two sections of private beach. For those preferring a more active vacation, there was a stable with horses and several riding trails, tennis courts, and a well-equipped health club and spa. The place was pricey, geared toward professional singles and childless couples with lots of disposable income, and it showed in the perfect grass and polished buildings.

A pretty young lady in a white business outfit was waiting for me at the main entrance to the hotel. She led me to the front desk, where I signed in and received a gold plastic key card. I was in suite 1201, one of two suites on the penthouse level. My greeter escorted me up, my luggage in the capable hands of a bellhop, and waited while I looked the place over.

The suite was definitely worth the triple-digit rate that non-owners paid for it. The furniture in the sunken living room was white leather and very plush. The television was a flat-panel wall hung model with a stereo, DVD player and VCR discreetly hidden in a cabinet below. The bedroom featured a four-poster king bed with one of those memory foam mattress pads and had more closet space than my entire house back in Chicago. The bath featured a whirlpool tub and a separate shower stall, either of

which could comfortably hold three adults with ease. But the most amusing touch for me was the balcony. An entire wall of the suite was glass, with French doors leading onto a wide balcony that overlooked the beach. And on the balcony, mounted to the railing, was a compact telescope.

Curious, I aimed the telescope out to sea and tried to focus on something. It didn't show much; not powerful enough to get a good view of anything too far from the shore. Then I had a thought -- sure enough, the telescope had plenty of power when focused primarily on the people on the beach. A young Asian woman caught my attention as she lay topless on a pink beach towel. She had a dragon tattooed on her breast, with the tail encircling her studded nipple. I swept the telescope across the beach, looking just hard enough to note that the trend in bathing suits seemed to range from minimal to none.

Voyeurism, anyone? I thought to myself.

"Mr. Torrance?"

I'd forgotten about my white-suited companion. "I'm sorry ... yes?"

"I realize you've just had a long flight, sir, but Mr. Redman did ask me if you could please come to the shop to discuss show setup. There's not a lot of time to prepare anything you might need."

Mr. Redman, I recalled from one of Marvin Levy's calls, was their technical director. If the magician hadn't shown, they would be very eager to get things set up for my show. "We can go now if you'll show me the way."

We paused long enough for her to phone ahead to let them know we were coming. She led me back down to the main level, then into the main dining hall. At first glance it looked like a big restaurant with a stage; a quick look up, however, showed a lot of serious theatrical gear hiding in the rafters.

I followed my guide through a door marked Authorized Personnel Only and into the backstage area. We made a sharp left into a glass-walled office with a cluttered desk and a separate conference table. As we approached the table, a 40-ish man in jeans and a denim shirt stood up and approached us.

"You're Jack Torrance?" he asked.

I nodded.

"Stu Redman," he said, extending his hand. "Tech Director."

"Good to meet you."

He pointed back at the table, where a young man and woman watched us. "This is my lead sound tech, Rudi," he said, indicating the woman, "and my lead lighting tech, Todd."

Each nodded at me in acknowledgement. "As I'm sure you understand, we're up against it for time here. Whatever you need for your show, we need to know about it now and hope we have most of the pieces already on hand."

That didn't sound good. "What about the magician?" I asked. "Have you heard anything on him? I'm just the stand-in, in case he doesn't show."

Stu Redman looked at me oddly. "You've never seen his act, have you?"

"No. Why?"

"If you had," he explained, "you'd know there's no way he could go on tonight unless he had some major real-life tricks up his sleeve. You can't just give a guy like that a light and a microphone; we usually spend a good month building set pieces and rigging gags for his show before he ever gets here. They told me last month that he isn't coming and you're the headliner tonight, Tuesday, and Friday. So whatever you need for tonight, speak now 'cause I've only got about six hours to make it happen."

I took a brief moment to curse Marvin Levy. Why the hell hadn't he told me this? Then I took a deep breath, centered myself, and got down to business. "Fortunately, mine is a pretty simple show. All I need is a nondescript background, twelve to eighteen chairs in two rows on the stage, and a short podium or stool and electrical outlet for my main prop."

Redman opened a closet in the corner and pulled out a large black box. He lifted the lid to reveal a miniature scale model of the dining room. "This is our setup," he said. "The stage is in thrust configuration right now, and there isn't time to change that, so it'll have to stay that way for tonight at least. Chairs are no problem. There's a mock cityscape in place for a backdrop right now, but I've got a buttload of simple flats we can set up quickly if you want a different color or texture. Tell me about this prop."

"Is my equipment case here? I could just show it to you." Todd grunted and trotted out of the room, returning a minute or so later with the aluminum cube I'd packed my things in.

I unlocked the case and pulled out my favorite stage prop: a black box with an electric motor that quietly spun two 24-inch spiral hypnodiscs. An engineering major had made it for me in exchange for ... well, let's just say his girlfriend was a frequent test subject.

"This," I told them, "is what I use to get the volunteers into hypnosis. I need to be able to sit this in front of them, pretty much stage center, and plug it in. Once the induction is over, though, it would be helpful if we could quickly and easily unplug it and take it away."

The tech director considered the box for a minute, then handed me a small cardboard cube from the model. "Show me where you want it."

I set the box more or less stage center, in front of the chairs.

He considered the position a moment. "Could it be a little bit further upstage? Say, here?" He slid the block back about half an inch, inside a thin white outline on the black stage floor.

It looked reasonable. "We could. I'd want to move the chairs back a little bit so the people on the ends can see it well, but that shouldn't be a problem."

He grinned. "Great. There's an elevator right there that the magician used a lot. If you place your box there, we can lower it right through the stage when you're done with it."

"Really? That would be fabulous!" I could already picture the hypnodisc sinking into the floor on cue.

Rudi was rooting in my box, and had my lavalier in her hand. "Were you going to use *this*?" she asked, her eyebrows furrowed.

"Um ... yes," I answered, suddenly very unsure of myself. "Is that okay?"

"It's your show," she said. "It's just that we have much better stuff here. UHF instead of VHF: better range, better clarity, less chance of interference."

I could feel my stock dropping all over the room. "It is a pretty old set," I confessed. "I've been meaning to get something better, I just never got around to it. We can use your gear."

Rudi seemed relieved. "Cool. We can mic you with a lavalier, and give you a wireless handheld for the people in the chairs. That be okay?"

"Great."

Todd was looking at my hypnodisc. I could see the wheels turning in his head. "You know," he finally said, "a lot of people aren't going to be able to see this very well. I wonder ..." He exchanged glances with Stu Redman.

"The monitors?" the older man asked.

Todd nodded. "I'm thinking we zoom in on that, put the image on all the monitors, then cut away as it starts to drop. That would be cool."

They saw me looking confused, and Todd stopped to explain. "A lot of the tables don't have a really good view of the stage, so we have TV monitors hung from the ceiling."

Now it made sense. "That sounds like a good idea; it may even help me get more volunteers from the back of the room."

Todd kept nodding. "We should probably use the monitors for the whole show," he suggested. "Otherwise to the people in the back it'll just be a bunch of people sitting there." To Redman he added, "We'll need to get Regan; she'll want to do a run-through."

Redman turned to me. "Would you be up to doing a quick run-through so we can check the angles and lighting? Doesn't have to be a whole show, just enough to get a feel for it."

I froze for a second as the reality set in: I was actually going to have to do a show. *You knew it was likely*, I reminded myself. *Better start getting used to the idea*. "Sure," I said, trying to disguise the dryness in my mouth. "I'll need a couple of people to sit with me on stage, and a few sprinkled over the house."

"I'm thinking we'll invite the late lunch crowd to be our test audience," Redman suggested. "A couple will probably be willing to sit on stage for test purposes."

I checked my watch: 12:40. "That works. When do we start?"

Redman motioned to his underlings, who jumped up and left the room. "It'll take us maybe an hour and a half to find Regan and set things up," he said. "Where can I find you then?"

"In the restaurant, finishing my lunch," I told him.

"Done deal."

The place was packed when I walked back through the door into the main dining room. Even the bar was standing room only. I found the hostess, showed her my room key, and asked about the wait time. "Just a few minutes," she assured me, and hustled off. I saw a couple get up and leave, and within moments the table was bussed and set for one. The hostess came back to me. "Right this way, sir."

I looked at my key: sure enough, the letters VIP stood out prominently in the middle of the card. Rank does have its privileges.

Less than a minute after the hostess left me, telling me that Allie would be my server, a young woman in uniform appeared and placed a cold Corona in front of me. "You're psychic," I joked -- I'd been thinking that a beer might be good for calming the butterflies.

She smiled. "I wish. This is compliments of the two ladies at the bar." She pointed a discreet finger to guide my eye toward my benefactors. One was cute and blonde, wearing a halter top and skirt, and looking at me unabashedly; her friend had long, curly locks of deep auburn and wore a low-backed sundress, but I couldn't see much more with her back to me. I lifted the Corona and saluted them. The blonde smiled and lifted her glass.

Not to be outdone, I gestured toward the table and mouthed the words, "Join me?" The blonde's face lit up even more, and she tugged at her friend's arm. The redhead resisted at first, then reluctantly followed her friend through the crowd. I watched them weave their way toward me and decided that today was definitely my lucky day. The blonde was getting more cute the closer she came, with short hair bouncing around a round, youthful face, perky breasts jiggling just enough in the halter to make it clear there was nothing underneath it, and a lean tummy peeking out between the top and skirt. Her

friend had long curly hair, a sharp, intelligent face, and curves that filled out the cream-colored sundress very nicely. A guy couldn't ask for two more attractive lunch companions.

The blonde was smiling broadly as she closed the last bit of distance between us. "My savior," she hailed. "You have no idea."

I grinned and pulled out a chair for her. "My pleasure. I'm Jack, by the way."

She took my hand and shook it lightly as she sat down. "I'm Claire," she told me. "And this is my friend, Monica."

Monica smiled and took the seat I offered her. "Pleased to meet you, Jack," she said.

"And not a moment too soon," Claire piped up. "I think I was about to faint from hunger."

Monica rolled her eyes and almost chuckled. "We've been waiting for a table for a while," she explained. "But you know that; you must have been waiting, too."

Pangs of guilt shot through me; had I pulled rank and not realized it? I shrugged. "I wasn't bothered too much; it gave me a chance to check out the room. And people watching is always interesting."

Allie reappeared with two more menus and place settings for my companions, then vanished again with their drink orders -- banana daiquiri for Claire, iced tea for Monica.

"So where are you from, Jack?" Monica's deep blue eyes were focused on me.

"Chicago. But I've knocked around a few places before that: New York, Pittsburgh, a brief stint in San Francisco. What about you?"

"Indianapolis, by way of Michigan."

"We're just a few hours apart. Isn't that interesting?"

Claire was grinning again. "You and I are practically neighbors, then," she said. "I was born and raised in South Bend, and I live in Gary now."

I nodded. "Other side of the lake," I remarked. "So naturally we had to come two thousand miles from home to run into each other."

Our three-way chuckle was followed by a pleasant lull as we contemplated the menus and ordered lunch. Monica started the conversation again as Allie walked away. "So what do you do in Chicago, Jack?"

Ah, I thought to myself, *the Big Question*. A common enough question, really, but in my experience the answer seems to polarize people. Some hear "hypnotherapy" and get spooked, imagining Lord knows what; others get intrigued and want to know all about it. Very few take it in stride. I've learned to be low-key about it.

"Hypnotherapy," I tossed out with practiced nonchalance, and waited for the reaction. Claire nearly jumped out of her seat, eyes gleaming and chest rising with a sharp breath; she was definitely excited. Monica raised her eyebrows just a hair and seemed to cock her head slightly. *Make that one slightly intrigued*, I judged, *and one VERY intrigued*. So I elaborated. "I have a small practice on West Roosevelt, near the University."

"Really?" Monica said. "That must be interesting. Do you treat a lot of students?"

"Enough that I have a special rate for them. I've even been known to let two or three share the fee to get help together with stress, study skills, smoking, or whatever."

"A Samaritan, then."

I shrugged. "Or a benign pragmatist. If I help a student kick the smoking habit, they'll save my session

fee several times over by not buying cigarettes. And a lot of parents would rather pay for a couple of sessions with me than for Junior to repeat freshman calculus. But if you press me on it, I have to admit I have a soft spot for the academic environment; I still remember what it was like to be a cash-strapped, overstressed underclassman."

Monica looked at Claire and smiled. "Another thing we all seem to have in common."

"Oh?"

"Monica is a high school guidance counselor," Claire explained, sipping her drink, "and I teach third grade."

"Ah," I said. "So we can all relate to being cash-strapped and overstressed."

"It must not be too bad," Claire remarked after a shared laugh. "We did all manage to afford this place."

"I'm still not sure how you talked me into this," Monica said. "If my seniors hear about this place, the razzing will be merciless."

Claire grinned wickedly. "Just think, if we come back in a few years you might run into one of them at the bar."

"I would die on the spot," she declared, laughing.

Lunch was delicious. I had steak fajitas, a luscious baked potato with salsa, and a side salad. Monica had a nice-looking garlic chicken breast with rice and cooked vegetables, and Claire had opted for a burger with salsa and onion rings.

While we ate, I kept an eye on the clock and on the stage area. One of Redman's techies was on the prowl, setting up chairs on the stage and marking spots on the floor with colored tape. He put a black pedestal in front of the chairs, presumably on top of the elevator Redman had mentioned. Occasionally the tech would stand in one place, talk into an FRS radio, and find himself engulfed in a blaze of light.

Meanwhile, I noted a well-dressed Latino woman moving from table to table, talking to the patrons, occasionally gesturing toward the stage. People either nodded or shook their heads; whichever, she smiled and bowed to them slightly before moving on to the next table. By the time we were finished eating, it was our turn. The woman approached our table from behind Monica and Claire, smiling. She looked to be in her mid forties, with deep brown eyes and cinnamon-colored skin. The gleaming name tag on her white business suit said she was Anita de los Santos, Entertainment Director.

"Good afternoon," she began. "How was your lunch?"

"Wonderful, thank you," Monica said. Claire and I nodded in agreement.

"*Gracias*," she replied, and gestured toward the stage. "As you can see, we are setting up the stage. In a few minutes, we will be having a technical rehearsal for our featured act tonight. These things are much more effective if we have a small audience to participate; would you mind staying for a bit to assist us?"

"What's the act?" Claire asked.

"A stage hypnotist," she replied. "*Señor* Trancer."

Monica smiled at me. "That should be interesting for you, Jack. You can give us your professional opinion on his technique."

I grinned bashfully. "I could, but I'd hardly be objective; it's my show."

Claire swatted me with a napkin. "You fraud!" she objected. "You told us you were a semi-impooverished therapist."

"I am," I insisted. "I also do stage shows sometimes. This week I'm filling in for a magician who pulled

a long-term disappearing act."

Anita de los Santos stepped back and held her hands out, palms toward us. "*Lo siento, Señor* -- I have not seen your photo yet. So your friends will stay for the rehearsal then?"

Monica and Claire exchanged looks and nodded. "We'll stay."

The entertainment director thanked them graciously and went on to the next table. Two sets of eyes fixed on me, wanting an explanation.

"It's complicated," I said. "When I was in college, I was a psych major in a dorm full of business and engineering dweebs. I started doing hypnosis shows at a nightclub off campus to keep myself in beer money; by the end of school I not only had all the beer money I needed, but a good amount tucked away in savings as well.

"Being with all those MBA types, I learned a few things about managing money. When one of them called me a few years later looking for investors for a dot-com startup, I had a modest chunk saved up and decided to kick in most of it. The company took off like a rocket; when it went public, my stock options were worth maybe ten times what I'd originally invested."

"A familiar story," Monica noted.

"Right," I agreed. "And like most of the dot coms, this company was way overvalued. Another thing I'd picked up from all those MBA types was that a company that doesn't make money doesn't keep its value. The more red ink I saw on the balance sheets, the more certain I became that it couldn't possibly last. A few of us started selling, slowly and steadily, just a few months before reality set in. Six months later the company was dead, but those of us who had already sold our stock were in good shape. I'd been practicing hypnotherapy for several years at that point as part of a group practice. I used a good amount of that money to open my own office, become my own boss. The rest I invested in a new business proposal my surviving dot-com partners put together."

"And that was?"

I waved at the room. "This place. I own two and a half percent of Uninhibited."

Monica nodded slowly. "I see. So you come down here and perform every so often?"

"No -- I haven't done a stage show since I finished grad school." I told them about Marvin Levy and the arrangement I'd made with him. "So you see, for me this is a sort of working vacation."

"A busman's holiday," Monica agreed. "You must be feeling pretty confident, to walk up on stage for the first time in however long as the main attraction."

I chuckled. "Truth to tell, I'm scared to death. My show was always 90 percent improvised; I have no idea what I'm going to do on that stage tonight. But I figure if I make sure everyone up there is having fun, then the audience can't help but be entertained."

"A healthy attitude."

"I was hoping you'd say something like that," I confessed, "because I could really use a few volunteers for the dry run we're doing."

Claire lit up. "You want to hypnotize us?"

"For a few minutes, just to run through some of the mechanics of the show."

Monica had a sly smile on her face. "Do you think buying us lunch gives you the right to play with our minds, Jack?"

I was taken aback for a second. Then Claire broke up laughing. "She's pulling your leg, Jack. Of course we'll guinea pig for you."

At two fifteen there were maybe fifty people left in the room. My hypnodisc was sitting on the pedestal, power cord connected to a black extension cord that disappeared into the hole. Rudi had fitted me with a lavalier and I had a separate handheld cordless mic in my hand. Lights came up as I took the stage.

"Ladies and gentlemen," I started, "thank you for sticking around. We're going to do a dry run through the basic mechanics of my show for tonight. I'm going to ask for a few of you to volunteer to come up here on stage with me and be hypnotized, mostly so the tech crew can work out a few things that have to happen during that part of the show. We may do one or two things for demonstration purposes, but that's really about it.

"Ordinarily, I'd spend about 20 minutes talking about what hypnosis is and isn't, what may or may not happen up here, and throw in a few jokes designed to get everyone into a good mood. Since we're trying to do this quickly, though, I'm just going to ask if a few you would please just come on up and trust me."

Nobody moved. They were all looking around at each other, waiting for someone to be first. I made eye contact with Monica and Claire; on cue, they stood up and approached the stage. That made it okay for others to follow, and soon I had a dozen volunteers to work with.

The lights dimmed as I switched on my hypnodisc then started a fractional relaxation induction using the hypnodisc as a fixation point. A tight spotlight kept the audience side of the disc illuminated. My on stage volunteers watched the disc and responded to my voice, letting their eyes grow heavy and their bodies relax. Ten of them went into a usable trance depth, which isn't bad at all for a random group. My lunch companions went way down: Claire's eyes were drooping almost before I said anything about it, and Monica ended up slumped against the guy next to her. A quick look around the room revealed a lot of my audience sitting slumped with their eyes closed as well, even those who didn't have a good view of the disc. The monitor system had worked well, I guessed.

I turned off the disc. The spotlight vanished, and I heard a very slight hydraulic hum as the disc and pedestal sank into the stage floor. I wondered briefly about the risks of falling into the hole, but I needn't have -- within a few seconds the hum came back and the floor closed up again.

It was time to go to work. I gave my volunteer group more deepening suggestions, watching for signs of further relaxation, making sure they remained safely seated in their chairs. Monica almost fell out of hers until I suggested to her that the chair had a magnetic force to it that held her body upright, allowing her to shift position to stay comfortable but not allowing her to fall out.

I addressed my volunteers. "In a few moments you're going to hear me count up from one to three. When I count to three you'll find that your eyes come open and you feel completely awake, but you'll still be deeply hypnotized and still obeying my every suggestion. You will also notice each time I say the word 'dark' that a nasty, obnoxious, really foul odor seems to surround you and that it's coming from somewhere in the audience. The odor will get worse and worse, and you'll know that I can do something about it if you just get my attention and ask. The odor will remain until you hear me say the word 'light', at which time the odor will instantly vanish and be replaced with a very pleasant, spring-like fragrance that you'll find very pleasing and enjoyable. One, two, three."

My volunteers opened their eyes. Most of them had that distant, not-fully-awake look. "So how's everybody doing?" I asked.

They looked around at each other, smiling, saying variations on, "Great. Fine."

"Everybody seeing okay? I don't want to blind anyone, but I also don't want it to be too dark up here."

Almost in unison, all but two or three of my dozen volunteers wrinkled up their faces. "Ugh," said the guy next to Monica. "Something died over here." Monica nodded enthusiastically, one hand covering her nose and mouth.

"Something's really rank in here, Jack," Claire announced. "You can't do a show up here until they clean whatever that is out."

Pretending to think, I looked out at the control booth. "Do you think we can get some more air up here? I think the fan control is next to the light switch."

The chorus of sighs behind me told me the pleasant scent had kicked in. "That's much better," one of my volunteers offered.

I turned to Claire. "Does that seem better to you?"

Her head bobbed up and down emphatically. "Much. You need to keep that on for the show."

"Okay, I think we can do that," I agreed. "Now I'd like everyone to look up at me please, and ... sleep." On cue, every head dropped. I looked back out at the back of the house. "Is that enough?"

Redman's voice came over the speakers. "I think we've got the idea. We need to talk about a couple of things, but we're looking good."

"Okay, then. Ladies and gentlemen in the audience and on stage, I want to thank you for helping us out this afternoon. For those of you with your eyes closed now, I appreciate your being willing to try this with me and I hope you'll do so again when we have a real show. In a few moments I'm going to count to three and when I do you'll open your eyes and be wide awake, completely alert, and no longer hypnotized. You'll also feel better than you've felt in ages: well-rested, energetic, in a really good mood, able to do anything you want to do as well as you want to do it. All other hypnotic suggestions I've given you today will be completely cancelled and no longer effective, and you'll remember everything that happened here in as much detail as you want."

I gave them the three count and watched them come out of it. They stretched, smiled, and looked at each other, then started to get up and leave the stage. I thanked each one as they left, shaking hands with those who would. Monica and Claire lingered while I said my goodbyes to the others.

"Well?" I asked them. "What do you think?"

They exchanged a look before Monica answered. "I think you're going to have a very successful show, Jack."

"I feel supercharged," Claire added, her body almost quivering. "I want to go hike across the whole island and back."

We all laughed. "If that's what you want," I joked. "But make sure you're back for the show, won't you? I could use a couple of friendly faces in the crowd."

"We'll be there," Monica promised, clasping my hand momentarily.

I followed Stu Redman back to his conference room for the post mortem. Rudi and Todd were there, along with Anita de los Santos and several other people, all in black work clothes.

"First question," Redman began, addressing me directly. "How was that for you?"

"Great," I told him. "The disc dropped down nicely, and I appreciate your closing the hole right away -- I have a tendency to pace during the show, and it would be really awkward if I stepped through the stage floor. How did it work out on camera?"

Todd chortled. "Ask Regan," he said, jerking a thumb at a slim, dark-haired girl in the corner.

The girl blushed and hid her face momentarily. "I was focused in tight on it while you were talking," she explained, "and then the next thing I knew Todd was poking me in the shoulder, telling me to wake up."

"I can fix that," I told her. "See me before the show and we'll make sure that doesn't happen again."

Looking back to Redman, I continued. "During a real show, I bring the people up and down a lot. I'd like it if the lights could dim as they close their eyes, and come up again as I bring them up. Is that doable?"

Todd answered for him. "Can do, but I'll need a more obvious cue than people opening their eyes. Do you do that counting thing each time?"

"Yes. I also tend to do an arm motion if that helps, something like this." I showed him the way I tend to lift my right arm as I bring the people up to waking trance, and drop it as I put them back down.

Todd nodded firmly. "I can follow that."

Anita cleared her throat for attention. "I couldn't see the second row of people very well at all."

Redman agreed. "Me neither. I was thinking we could break out one level of risers for those back chairs, to give the audience an unobstructed view of everyone's faces. That okay with you, Mr. Torrance?"

"Jack," I corrected. "And it would be great if there's time, and if it won't mess up the acts before me."

"No problem -- tonight it's two standup comics, then you."

"Good. One more thing: can we get the serving staff to stay out of the room during the induction? People moving around are a major distraction, and I need as little of that as possible when I'm trying to get people into hypnosis."

"That we can do," Anita said.

Redman knocked once on the table. "I think we're set, then."

The room cleared. I was about to make my way out as well, when I felt a hand on my elbow. "*Apenas un momento, Señor,*" Anita said. "If we could talk briefly, please?"

"Okay." When everyone else had left the room, I closed the door and faced the woman. "What can I do for you?"

"Your act," she began. "If you please, would you describe for me what you intend to do?"

Her face was very serious. What this a test of some kind? "My show is almost entirely improvised," I told her. "Exactly what I do depends on what the mood of the audience is, what the volunteers seem likely to enjoy, and what pops into my head. Why?"

"Humor me, please."

She seemed determined. "Okay," I sighed. "The thing I did just now, with the odor, is something I use a lot early on. It helps me to gauge how deeply the volunteers have gone, and who the more creative minds are likely to be. Sometimes I make them forget their names or feel a pinch when I touch my face. The ones that do really well on that will get the more challenging suggestions later; the ones that don't, I send back to the audience and replace them if I see somebody who's really zonked sitting in the crowd."

"And then?"

"And then I move on to more involved scenarios. I'll set up a scene like a talk show or a support group, sometimes a beauty pageant or game show. The best subjects I'll assign special quirks to, like a thick accent or an odd physical trait. Everyone is given a character type to assume that fits the scenario. Then I suggest some basic parameters, like motivations or objectives they want to gain in the scene, and I let them use their own creativity to express whatever comes to mind. Sometimes I'll do something like an AA meeting for down-and-out fairy tale characters, for example -- have Snow White and Rapunzel dish the dirt on the dwarves and the ever-traveling prince, maybe. I've been known to tell the people that

they're ambassadors from imaginary countries trying to educate Americans on their culture, and then invent really bizarre cultural things for them to try and justify. I wing it, depending on what's available and what comes top of mind."

"I see," she replied, frowning in a way that I found very annoying.

"Is there a problem, *Señora*?"

"You are getting angry," she observed. "I don't want that, *Señor*. If you please, I am simply trying to understand and to help you. This is not a normal family comedy club, Sr. Torrance. People come to Uninhibited because of our reputation for being ... *como se dice* ... 'edgy.' They want to be titillated, teased, aroused. It is not enough for our patrons that you be funny; your show must also be sexy."

That didn't sound good. "What do you have in mind?"

She shrugged, smiling slightly. "That is your decision, *Señor*, not mine. But you might have some of the more attractive people dance a strip tease, perhaps, or become *mui arrecho* when you say a certain word."

I shook my head strongly. "Hypnosis is not mind control," I told her. "I can't make people do something in front of an audience that they wouldn't normally do. And I won't try to get people to embarrass themselves -- it's not fun for them or for me, and I'll never get volunteers for the later shows if I abuse the people in the first one."

"And they will not come to the later shows if you bore them," she insisted. "Do not underestimate your audience, *Señor*. This place has an aura, a reputation. People here are anonymous, unknown; free to be wild and crazy and sexy and do things they'd never dream of doing at home. The normal rules do not apply."

"We'll see," I grumbled.

She smiled and left me alone in the conference room.

Several hours later I was sitting in the dressing room, rifling through a wooden recipe file. That file, and the little index cards inside, made up the closest thing I had to a script for my show. On each card was a brief description of a stunt or trick I'd either thought of or used in a show. They were divided into categories -- warmups, features, and closers -- and ratings.

The warm-ups were the simple things I used early in a show to find out how good my volunteers were going to be. The bad smell/good smell gag I'd used in the run-through was there, along with a dozen other minor tricks that were good for weeding out the spoilsports and the just plain unimaginative.

Features made up the meat of the show. For a two-hour show, I'd pick two or three from that section of the file and run my volunteers through them. They are mostly exercises in imagination; brief outlines of scenarios in which I'd appoint people to play certain types of characters, set up the situation, and then let them interact according to their instructions.

Closers were the best and most elaborate of the gags in my little box of tricks. They involved even more complex scenes where I could let the best of the volunteers really let go and invent things out of whole cloth. I only had a few but each was a guaranteed crowd pleaser, sure to end the show on a high note.

I don't pick specific cards and plan the show around them, though. Too much depends on how many good volunteers I get, what types of suggestions work best for them, what the gender and age mix is, etc. No, I typically just read through the cards noting which ones I haven't used recently (which in this case was all of them, since I hadn't done a show in almost a decade), just to have the ideas top of mind.

I sat there with the first set of cards in my hand, leafing through them. Most of them had little notes on them: lessons learned from past performances, ideas on variations to try, things like that. And, of course, the rating. I rate my gags based on the movie rating system -- basically, a gag rated PG would be allowed in a movie rated PG or higher. Most of the gags in my box were rated PG, PG-13, and R. The R cards were in the back section, secured with a thick rubber band, and turned around so the blank side faced front.

When I started doing shows, most of the audience was either my fellow college students or adults who lived and worked in the area. It was a pretty steady crowd, with lots of regulars and a smaller transient set. I started out heeding well the advice of my mentor: "Always treat your volunteers like members of your family -- with respect." I kept the show clean enough that teens could see it, and made a point of never asking anyone to make animal noises, take off clothing, or reveal anything personal about themselves.

The first half-dozen shows went beautifully. Then the club owner, a huge man named Solly, pulled me aside. "Kid," he told me, "you're pretty good. But your audience is shrinking. I'm gonna have to cut back on your slots and get some fresh blood in here or this crowd is gonna start spending their dollars at that new strip joint across town."

That hurt. Solly cut me down from two shows a week to two shows a month. And even then, I became increasingly aware of the growing number of empty seats. Solly's other acts were getting more and more racy, catering to the tone of the new competition. He started doing wet T-shirt contests, bikini contests, comedians known for their blue material. The message was clear: get with the program, or get out.

So I got with the program. I started warning my audiences that they may find themselves doing things they wouldn't normally do, then spicing up my material accordingly. I had people taking off clothes, thinking their sexual organs had suddenly gotten huge (or tiny), thinking the audience was naked, suddenly feeling sexually drawn to the person next to them. And audiences loved it. The more I pushed the envelope, the larger my crowds got and the more shows Solly let me do. Since I was paid a percentage of the bar take, my income was rising as well. And amazingly, even after getting people to debase themselves, I still had no problem finding volunteers. In fact, by the end of the first year I had a small cadre of hypno-groupies -- people who'd come to show after show, coming on stage as often as I'd let them, practically begging me to make them do a striptease or have an orgasm whenever someone said "blue" or grope some guy they'd never met before. More than a few of my volunteers went home with me after the show, having realized that I held a compelling sexual attraction for them beyond that of any other man.

Then I started getting invited to do frat parties. The brothers would slip me an extra twenty for every girl I got to screw one or all of them while under hypnosis. I told myself that I wasn't hurting anyone -- everybody knows that hypnosis can't make you do something you wouldn't normally do, right?

The turning point for me came when my mentor, the highly-regarded stage hypnotist who'd taught me, came to visit. We had a wonderful dinner together, catching up on each other's lives, talking about work and family. Then he came to one of my shows and sat in the front row. Half an hour into the show, he got up and walked out.

It was a cold slap in the face for me. What the hell was I doing? And why were these people letting me do it? I never did come up with a good answer to the second question, but I knew I needed to change. I told Solly I was through, consigned all the R-rated cards to the back of my file, and spent the summer mending the damage I'd done to my most important non-family relationship. When the fall came again, I found a struggling comedy club on the other side of town from Solly's and made an arrangement with them: four shows a week, nothing above PG-13, on a straight percentage basis. They went for it, and with my newly-aligned moral compass always in front of me both the club and I prospered.

And now, as I sat there in the dressing room at Uninhibited, I was removing the rubber band from my collection of R-rated gag cards. What would my old professor say to this?

There was a soft knock on the door. "Come in."

A slender young woman in black jeans and a black shirt came in: Regan, the camera operator. She came in just far enough to allow the door to close. "Hi," she said timidly, "I'm Regan. You said to come by before the show?"

"I remember," I assured her, trying my best to look comforting. "We were going to help you stay awake during the induction."

She nodded.

"It's really very easy. All we need to do is get you back into hypnosis, and then give you a suggestion or two that will keep you nice and alert while everyone else is drifting off. Are you ready to do that now?"

A small shrug. "I guess so."

I gave her a paternal smile. "Don't guess," I said. "Be sure. Are you ready to go into hypnosis so that I can help you?"

She returned the smile. "I'm sorry. Yes."

"Good." I had her stand facing me, with the makeup chair behind her. "This will be quick and easy, and you'll remember everything that happens."

She nodded her understanding. "Now," I continued, letting my voice drop into induction mode, "all you

have to do is exactly what I tell you, without thinking about it too much, and you'll find it very easy to get back into hypnosis. I want you to stand here with your feet close together. I'm going to touch your forehead with my thumbs, and trace them down the sides of your face. While I do, I want you to keep looking directly into my eyes while your eyelids follow my thumbs."

Without waiting for a response, I placed my thumbs together with the tips touching in the center of her forehead, just below the hairline. Her hazel eyes locked onto mine obediently and her feet slid together. Slowly but steadily, I separated my hands and traced a line along the top of her head, then down her temples. As my thumbs passed over the temples, her eyelids tried to follow them and began to close. At the first quick flutter I closed my hands, grabbing her head, and firmly pulled it forward while barking the command, "Sleep!"

Regan collapsed forward onto my chest. I wrapped my arms around her, holding her up against me, and gently steered her into the waiting makeup chair. "That's right," I told her, "Sleep now, Regan. Let your entire body relax and slow down, your mind floating and drifting, as I settle you comfortably in the chair." She was pretty well gone already, but I spent a minute or two on a basic deepener anyway. When her arms hung limply at her sides and her chin rested on her chest, I figured she was deep enough.

"Regan, you have an important job this evening: you need to run the camera for my show. It will be your job to focus tightly on my swirling hypnodisc, making sure it shows up and fills the screen on the monitors so that everyone can see it clearly. While you are doing that, you might find yourself slipping back into hypnosis, as you did earlier today. And that's okay. But from now on while you're working at the camera, no matter how deeply you find yourself slipping into hypnosis, you'll always be able to maintain full alertness. Even though I may be telling everyone to close their eyes, your eyes will remain open except when they blink, and you'll easily be able to maintain your concentration on your job. You will only go into hypnosis if you want to, and if you are not actually working at the time."

I looked closely at her, blissfully zoned out before me. There was a time when, faced with someone of her age and physical charms, I wouldn't have hesitated to get at least a peek at what was under the black work clothes. It would be so easy, and nobody would have to know.

The strength of the temptation shocked me a little. I'd been hypnotizing attractive young coeds for years, after all -- fully half my practice comes from the University. And not once had I ever even fantasized about taking advantage of one of them. I thought I was safely beyond that point. Then Anita de los Santos's words came back to me: *This place has an aura, a reputation. ... The normal rules do not apply.*

Perhaps not, but this girl wasn't a thousand miles from home looking for adventure. She was an employee -- my employee, technically. "And now, it's time to wake up and go to work. As I count to three you'll feel yourself returning to full wakefulness. When I reach three you'll feel refreshed and energetic and confident, remembering everything that happened in this room clearly and completely. One, two, three."

Her eyes opened and blinked a few times.

"How do you feel?" I asked.

She stretched and smiled, her eyes shining. "I feel great. And awake. And I remember everything you said. Will it work?"

"Of course," I assured her, returning the smile. "Did you think that's never happened before?"

That got me a chuckle. "I guess not. I'm going to get to work now. Thanks."

She scooted out of the makeup chair and through the door, waving as it closed behind her. I went back to browsing through my cards.

As show time edged closer, I found myself getting restless and pacing around the green room. There wasn't much to look at in there. On one end hung lineup board listing the names of the acts: Coco Brown, the opener; Tony Colangelo, the feature; and me, the headliner. On the opposite end there was a snack table stocked with coffee and pastries under a wall-hung monitor showing the video feed of the show in progress. The heavysset Jamaican woman performing now would be Coco Brown, I deduced. When she was replaced by a short Italian guy in jeans and a Van Halen sweatshirt, I couldn't stand the solitude any longer; I wandered into the main room, trying to get a feel for the mood of the crowd.

My attention was immediately diverted, however, when I got my first uncropped look at the stage. The cityscape background was still there, artfully backlit in red and orange to give it a warm look, but there were no chairs and no risers -- nothing but the comic and his microphone stand. Where were my chairs?

At far house left, about half way back, I heard a familiar voice. "Jack! Over here!" I looked around and spied my lunch companions, Claire and Monica. I put the chair mystery out of mind -- Stu Redman must have something up his sleeve, I figured -- and headed for them.

"Hi," I said, sliding into the booth next to Monica. "It's good to see a pair of friendly faces."

"You probably won't see us from the stage," Monica remarked ruefully. "Without your pull, this was the best table we could get."

I jerked a thumb at the stage. "You could join me up there."

She smiled. "We'll see."

"Whatever you're comfortable with," I said. It would be nice to have two guaranteed gems on stage, for sure, but I didn't want to be too pushy. For one thing, I didn't think I'd have a hard time finding volunteers; for another, I could feel the seeds of something between me and the guidance counselor trying to take root. Indianapolis isn't that far from Chicago, after all. "But if nothing else, can I get you to stay and have a drink with me after the show?"

Both nodded their heads. Which was fine; I'd included Claire in the invitation too. If things went well, I felt sure we'd be able to send her off gracefully.

I looked at my watch. "I'd better get back to the green room," I told them. "I'm on in about ten minutes."

Monica leaned in and gave me a peck on the cheek. "For luck," she said.

"Break a leg," Claire chimed in.

I grinned at both of them. "I hope not -- it would make for a really strange ending."

Rudi the sound tech was waiting for me in the green room, staring anxiously at the clock. "It's about time," she scolded me. "We should have been done with this ten minutes ago." Without waiting for my response, she held up a tiny black lavalier microphone with a white cord. "Inside the shirt, or outside?"

I noted the white cord, which matched my shirt. "Let's go inside. I might want to lose the jacket once I'm up there."

She nodded. "Smart. Okay, drop the jacket and lift up your shirt."

I complied quickly. Rudi handed me the mic and let me feed it inside the front of my shirt, clipping it to front. She secured the cord to my skin with two pieces of flexible cloth tape and hung the transceiver on my belt in the back. As I tucked my shirt back in, she touched a button on her own transceiver unit. "Level check on three. Start talking, Jack."

"There was a farmer had a dog, and Bingo was his name-oh ..." She motioned for me to keep going. Thirty seconds always seems like an eternity when you have to keep talking.

Finally, she gave me the OK sign and handed me a cordless hand microphone. "There's a slide switch on the side if you want to turn it on and off. If you see a blue light flashing at you from the booth, it means the lavalier isn't picking you up well enough and you'll need to use this for yourself, too."

"Got it," I said, feeling the switch and flipping it up and down a few times.

"One more thing: when you get on stage, look for a circle of pink spike tape. That's the elevator. Key the hand mic three times when you want us to raise it, and three times again when you want us to lower it."

I gave her the thumbs-up. "Thanks."

"Get in here earlier next time." Then she winked and left me alone.

I made my way back stage and cautiously crept forward, hiding myself just inside the center opening of the cityscape. On the way, I was impressed to notice how much smaller and lighter this transceiver was than mine; I could barely feel the weight of the little pack behind me. No wonder Rudi had been appalled at the idea of using my old rig.

The comedian finished his act and then, as arranged, introduced me. "Ladies and gentlemen, it is my contractual obligation to present to you the headline act for this evening." He paused for the small titter from the crowd. "Seriously, you folks are in for a treat. I saw this guy doing his act in Detroit a few months ago, and it was awesome. He had this beautiful heirloom pocket watch and he was swinging in front of the audience, telling everyone they were getting sleepy, sleepy, sleepy, until he had everybody in a trance. Then he started to put it in his pocket, but he had his hands full and he accidentally dropped it. The watch fell off the stage and shattered. He looked down at the pieces and said, 'Shit!' It took the staff all night to clean up the mess."

I groaned softly. Such an old joke. But he told it well, and the audience laughed and applauded for him. "Ladies and gentlemen," he concluded, "let's give an Uninhibited welcome to the very talented Jack Trancer!"

As I took the bare stage, I sensed motion around me. From each wing, a pair of Redman's stage hands was pushing a curved, two-stage set of risers with chairs. I suddenly wondered whether anyone was taping the show. As I moved, a spotlight found me and led me to my mark at downstage center. I waved to the audience with my right hand and waited for the generous applause and music to die down.

"Good evening," I said as the noise quieted. They seemed pretty loose -- probably a combination of the preceding comedians and an open bar -- but I always start with a joke or two to get things moving.

"Thank you. First of all, let's hear it one more time for my good friend, Tony Colangelo." I didn't know Tony Colangelo from Adam, of course, but he'd given me a good set-up so it was incumbent on me to return the favor -- that's why they post the names in the green room. "Someday I'm going to get him alone for a few minutes, and then maybe I can finally start to live down that Detroit thing."

They responded well, laughing loudly. "The scary part of that story is, I almost said, 'Fuck me!' instead. That would've made for a whole different kind of show." That got me another good, extended laugh as everyone imagined my alternate ending. *Not bad for an ad lib*, I thought.

I was feeling good. Sure, this crowd may be three times of the size of any I'd ever faced before, but they were relaxed and happy and ready to have fun. Time to get to work.

"Ladies and gentlemen," I began, "thank you all for coming to see my show tonight. I'm always pleased when I get a good sized crowd like this because so many people think that what I do is really fake. By quick round of applause, how many of you think that hypnosis is fake?"

They were a little hesitant. "It's okay," I assured them, "I won't be offended. How many think this is all bullshit?"

The applause got a little stronger from the back corners of the room. I smiled and nodded and waited for it to die down. Then I looked straight out at the loudest part of the room. "So what the hell are you doing here?"

Laughter and applause rolled through the room.

"I ask that question all the time, ladies and gentlemen," I told them. "No matter where I go, no matter how many shows I do, there are always people who think that this is all fake. They think I have people planted in the audience that I pay to come up here and pretend to be hypnotized. I can hear them sometimes, telling everyone at their table that I'm full of shit. But sometimes, my friends, their girlfriend or boyfriend comes up here anyway and is absolutely awesome. And you know what happens then? They come up to me after the show, they want to shake my hand, they tell me how they always knew there was something to this." People started chuckling. "And then comes the part I always love to hear: 'My girlfriend was hypnotized tonight,' they say. 'Could you teach me to do that at home?' So in the space of two hours I've gone from being a bullshit artist to the hypno-pimp."

I paused while they laughed some more. "But seriously, I don't plant people in the audience that I can pick to come up here and play along. In fact, I don't pick people -- whoever decides to come up here tonight, that's who we're going with. I hope that at least some of you will give this a try, because if you don't ... well, let's just hope there's something good on cable tonight.

"If we get the right kind of people, everyone will have a really good time, especially the volunteers themselves. If we get a few of the wrong kind, then there's a good chance this show will just suck out loud. So to be fair to all of you, let me tell you what I'm looking for and what I'm looking to avoid.

"Hypnosis is a very natural thing. People go into hypnosis all the time when they read, watch TV, drive, listen to music, whatever. It's a state of focused concentration that lets people tap into the creative, spontaneous, intuitive part of their mind that we like to call the subconscious. Just about anybody can be hypnotized if they want to be, and nobody can be hypnotized if they don't want to be. That's just the way it works. Now hypnosis does require concentration; if you're the kind of person who can tune out distractions when you're trying to get something done, then chances are you'll be great up here. If a dripping faucet keeps you awake all night, then you'll probably have more fun if you stay in the audience.

"I say this all the time, too: hypnosis is not mind control. If you come up here and get hypnotized, you won't find yourself doing anything that you personally find immoral or humiliating or wrong. Now having said that, I should warn you that most people are willing to go a lot further than they think in a setting like this. This is an adult show; I'm basically working from the same guidelines as an R-rated movie. If you have hang-ups about nudity or adult content, or if you're here with the pastor of your church, it might be wise to enjoy the show from the audience.

"And finally, a short list of definite no-no's. If you're drunk, please don't come up here. It's very hard to concentrate when you're drunk, and I don't want you disturbing the people around you because that ruins the show for everyone. If you're just looking to prove that I can't hypnotize you, don't bother -- like I said, I can't hypnotize anyone who doesn't want to be hypnotized. Save the seat for someone who sincerely wants to play. And if you're the kind of person who doesn't like people laughing at stuff they do, or if your friends tell you that you don't have a really good sense of humor, please stay in your seat. I don't want anyone up here who isn't having fun, and I don't want anyone to leave here feeling like they were misused in any way.

"Having said all that, let's bring up the house lights. If you'd like to be part of the show tonight, please make your way carefully and safely to the stage and have a seat in one of the chairs behind me."

The lights came up, and I got my first good look at the audience. There was some shuffling and a murmur of conversation, then chairs moved back and people started making their way toward the stage. I looked back at the far table where Claire and Monica had been. They were still there, looking at the people who were heading toward the stage. I was a little disappointed, but not too much -- it looked as though I'd have plenty of people to work with, and I could always bring them up later if some of the people on stage didn't work out.

Then I saw another familiar face, front row center, looking smugly at the people as they settled onto the stage: Anita de los Santos. *Come on*, I dared her in my mind, *get up here. Let's see how mui arrecho you can get!* But she didn't come up.

Soon I had eighteen volunteers seated in chairs on the risers, looking at me expectantly and, in a few cases, just a little nervously. It was a good-looking mix: a dozen women and six men, all members of the resort's prime demographic. I looked them over for signs of intoxication or belligerence -- they all looked fine. One of them, a young Asian girl in a green tank top and black miniskirt, looked familiar, but I couldn't quite place her. A former client, perhaps? No matter.

"Ladies and gentlemen, let's give a hand to these people who have volunteered to entertain us all tonight." I waved down the house lights while the crowd applauded politely. With my left thumb, I flipped the switch on my handheld microphone up and down three times. A second or two later I heard that faint hydraulic hum, and my hypnodisc rose from the trap door in the stage. A spotlight caught it as it appeared, making for a nice dramatic affect.

"This, ladies and gentlemen, is my hypnodisc," I explained. "The most effective, most powerful means of inducing hypnosis that I've found in my career. In a few moments that disc is going to start slowly spinning, and you'll be able to watch and see how the people on stage find their eyes drawn to it. Those of you in the audience will be able to watch the disc too, if you wish, through the monitor system. But be warned: most people find my hypnodisc fascinating, so fascinating that they find themselves slipping into hypnosis along with the people on stage. If that happens, don't worry; you'll still be able to see and enjoy the show, and you may even have an opportunity to join me on stage and become part of the show. Even if you stay in the audience, you'll find that letting yourself be hypnotized is a great way to enjoy the show, and you'll feel absolutely wonderful when the show is over."

I walked over to the hypnodisc and turned on the switch. "Ladies and gentlemen on the stage, and in the audience, watch closely now. Try to clear your mind now and focus your attention on the center of the spiral. Notice how the colors alternate and weave together, drawing you further and further into its depths. It may even seem to some of you as if you are falling into the swirling depths, even as you remain safely in your seat, relaxing and gazing ever deeper into the middle."

All of my volunteers were staring obediently at the hypnodisc. Several of them were showing signs of eye fatigue already; a few had already gone into a light trance and didn't realize it yet. "That's right. As you continue to look into the spiral, your mind blank, your attention fixed completely on the spiral, you will soon find that your body begins to relax. The more your focus your attention on the spiral, the more your body can relax; the more your body relaxes, the more you can focus your complete attention on the spiral. You may even find that as you concentrate on the spiral, and your body relaxes, that your eyes want to blink. It's okay to blink; that is just your eyes relaxing, letting the spiral take you gently into hypnosis. Each time you blink, it's a little bit harder to open your eyes again; each time you open them, they only want to blink again."

Almost all of my volunteers were blinking heavily now. "With each blink, you find that your eyes become more difficult to open, more sleepy, more heavy. And that's okay. You can let them close down now, closed and relaxed, as your body becomes ever more relaxed. I'm going to count down from five to one, and with each count you'll find that your eyes become twice as tired, twice as sleepy, twice as hard to keep open. You can let them close down now, or as soon as you'd like, letting them close and

relax completely when I reach the count of one." I watched my volunteers while I counted down. All but three of them closed their eyes before the count of two. The holdouts closed them down at one, on my command.

It was hardly necessary for most of them, but I led the volunteers through a good, strong deepener anyway. When I got through with that, my best prospects were slumped against each other, barely remaining seated, and the holdouts were looking pretty well along as well. I switched off the hypnodisc and signaled for the crew to lower it down while I set up the first test.

"Ladies and gentlemen in the audience," I said in a low voice, "if you look around the room you may notice that there are a number of people around you who are also deeply hypnotized. I know it's tempting, I know why you're going to want to do it, but please do not disturb those people. They are not missing the show; in fact, they may find themselves becoming part of it later on. Just let them be.

"To the people on stage, you may notice as you sit there, drifting ever deeper into hypnosis, that there is movement around you or noise coming from the audience. None of that needs to disturb you; in fact, every sound you hear or movement you sense will just help you drift even deeper into hypnosis. Some of the suggestions I'm going to give you will be meant for a short time, and some for the entire evening. All I ask is that you take every suggestion I make quite literally, and allow your natural creativity to come to the foreground. No matter what happens on stage, you'll always feel totally comfortable, remaining safely seated in your chair, having a good time.

"In a few moments I'm going to count from one to three. When I reach three, I want everyone on stage and everyone in the audience to open your eyes, remaining deeply hypnotized and ready to follow my suggestions. I'm going to start out by asking you a very simple question. When I ask the question, you'll instantly know the answer and you'll be very eager for me to call on you to give me the answer; however, the second I put my microphone near your face, the answer will completely disappear from your mind. No matter what anyone says to you or shows you, the answer to my question will be completely gone from your mind and it will stay gone. If someone tries to tell you the answer, what they say won't make any sense to you. If you see the answer written somewhere, the letters won't make sense to you either. The only way you'll be able to remember the answer to my question is if I snap my fingers right next to your ear.

"Now, everyone on stage and everyone in the audience, let us begin. One, breathing a little faster now; two, feeling some energy returning to your body; three, eyes open, still deeply hypnotized." I looked at my two rows of volunteers. They returned my gaze expectantly, waiting obediently to see what would happen next.

"I'd like to start off by getting to know you all a little bit," I said, walking over to stage left. Sitting on the end of the first row was the Asian lady who'd caught my eye earlier. "We'll start over here. My first question for you all is, what is your name?"

On cue, every hand on stage went up into the air. I held the mic out to the young lady. "What is your name?"

She opened her mouth to speak, but nothing came out. A look of shock, surprise, and embarrassment came over her pretty face. "Remember that look," I said to the laughing audience. "That's exactly what we want here."

I left her looking dumbfounded and tried the guy next to her. "Your name, sir?"

I got another blank look. "Somebody must know," I remarked, and went down the line. Of my eighteen volunteers, six managed to tell me their names.

Just for fun, I want back to my first victim. "Have you remembered your name yet, Miss?"

She looked up at me with confusion and perhaps a touch of fear. "No."

I pretended to think about it. "Hmmm. Did you know it when you came in?"

"I think so."

"Let's see if we can get you some help. Does anyone in the audience know this young lady's name?"

From house left, in the shadows, someone yelled out, "Laurel!"

"Ah, thank you. Someone over there says your name is Laurel. Is that right?"

Again, the blank look. "What did you say?"

She was getting a little spooked. "Never mind," I said, "I'm sure it will come back to you just like that." As I said "that," I put my left hand next to her ear and snapped my fingers.

The effect on Laurel was electric. She jumped up in her seat and shouted, "Laurel! My name is Laurel!" Then she grinned at me as if she'd just guessed the answer to the \$64,000 question.

"Are you sure?" The audience laughed.

"Oh, totally. I can't believe I forgot that for a minute."

"That's great," I told her. "Can I ask you another question? What do you do for a living, Laurel?"

Her mouth opened, then her eyes opened wide. "I ... I ..."

The audience loved it, of course. I let her stew for just a few seconds. "Never mind, Laurel. It's probably the lights up here. In fact, I'm going to lower my hand and as I do, the lights will come down. As the lights come down, I'd like everyone on stage and in the audience to just let your eyes close down, let your body relax, and sleep." I drew out the word "sleep" as I lifted and then dropped my arm. On cue, the lights dimmed and my volunteers' heads dropped.

It was time to begin the weeding out. Addressing the six people who had remembered their names, I had them wake up and carefully make their way back to their seats in the audience. That left me an even dozen for the next test. I opted for the bad smell gag that I'd used in the run-through. It worked very well on eight of them; four didn't react as much, so I dismissed them too. It was time for one more test.

"People on stage, and also in the audience, in a moment I'm going to count to three again. At the count of three you'll open your eyes and sit up, feeling comfortable and relaxed, remaining deeply hypnotized. You'll also feel very happy and talkative; you'll want to tell me whatever random things happen to pop into your mind. At some point while we're talking I'm going to snap my fingers twice into the microphone and when that happens, you're going to find that all of your clothing has dissolved and fallen away. In fact, you and everyone you look at will be completely naked, including me. One, two, three."

The lights came up. I took a few minutes to get to know my volunteers a little bit. Besides Laurel, who turned out to be a paralegal on vacation with friends, I had: Brad, a computer service guy; Jennifer, a department store clerk; Jim, an auto mechanic; Nicole, a medical student; Brenda, a car saleswoman; David, an architect; and Sophie, an HR director. "Thanks very much for coming up here tonight," I said to them. "I think you'll find that the time passes just like that." Looking straight out into the house, I snapped my fingers twice into the mic. I heard gasps from the volunteers behind me, and from quite a number of places nearby in the crowd as well.

I decided to have some fun with my volunteers. Approaching the lip of the stage, I squatted down to talk to the people there. As soon as I did, a fresh round of squeals and howls came from the crowd, as the people on stage reacted to what they thought was my naked butt in a squatting position. "You think that's good?" I said. "Watch this: when I snap my fingers again, my penis will grow to enormous size -- I'm talking two feet long and three inches thick." I snapped, then stood up. Slowly, I turned to face my

volunteers.

At that point I was looking for two things: their reaction to my enormous penis, for its entertainment value, and their body posture, for what it would tell me about how much farther I could push the limits.

The reaction was great. All of the women stared at my crotch with a sort of disturbed fascination. The men looked anywhere else they could -- mostly at the women, seeing them naked in their minds. Just for fun, I walked around a little and let my imaginary manhood sway. The audience hooted and clapped and laughed. Meanwhile, I evaluated my volunteers for the rest of the show.

Laurel was definitely a keeper. She was clearly taking in the sights, but her body language was very open. She had her hands at her sides, legs loosely together and tucked under the chair, apparently quite at ease with being naked. Brenda, on the other hand, had one arm clenched around her breasts and the other hand shielding her crotch, legs pressed tightly together. I'd keep her, but take it easy on her. Brad seemed to be Laurel's male counterpart, sitting back comfortably enjoying the view, not seeming too concerned about his own exposure. David was flushed red, holding his hands in his lap, looking straight ahead. Everyone else fell somewhere in between, with Brenda being the only woman actively trying to cover her chest. That was a good omen for me.

"I'm sorry," I said to my volunteers, "obviously this is making some of you uncomfortable. At the next snap of my fingers, my penis will return to its normal size." Winking at the audience, I added, "Nine inches, semi-erect." I snapped, and the reaction of my volunteers was good. The women looked lustfully, the men wistfully, at my resized member.

And then, as I paced the front of the stage, I noticed one more pair of eyes fixed on my crotch: those of Anita de los Santos. She eyed my package like a hungry man contemplating a fresh T-bone steak. This was too good to pass up.

I stepped off the front of the stage into the audience area. A spotlight came on and surrounded me almost immediately. I walked over to Anita de los Santos and held the microphone near her face. "How are you this evening?" I asked casually.

"I feel wonderful, *Señor* Jack," she said.

"You seem to be very interested in something," I remarked, swinging my hips a little bit.

She smiled, looking again at my crotch. "You have a fine *pene*, *Señor* Jack. It is no wonder that you enjoy showing it off."

The audience roared. "Thank you," I said. "Everyone in the audience, and everyone on stage, please let your eyes close down now and sleep." I waved the lights down low as heads all around me dropped onto chests -- including the head of Anita de los Santos and the man next to her.

"For the people in the audience," I said, "when I touch your shoulder I'd like you to open your eyes and look up at me, still remaining deeply hypnotized, and answer my questions. You'll find that talking to me helps you to sink even deeper into hypnosis." I placed a finger on Anita's shoulder and watched as her head rose up to look at me.

"What is your name?" I knew, of course, but the audience didn't.

"Anita."

"Anita, are you enjoying my show so far?"

"Very much, *Señor*."

"Thank you," I said. "My show is always enjoyable when I have enough people with strong, creative minds on stage helping me. You seem to have a very creative mind, Anita, and I know that you'd like nothing more than to become part of my show, would you not?"

"Yes," she said quietly.

"Good. Anita, in a moment I'd like you to help me by very carefully going up on stage and sitting down in one of the empty chairs. As soon as you sit down in the chair, you're going to let your eyes close down and your body relax completely, letting your mind sink a hundred times deeper into hypnosis. Do that now, please."

She stood up slowly and made her way to the stage, taking an empty seat downstage right. I asked the tech crew to give me a little more house light, and took a look around for more likely prospects. My eyes sought out Claire and Monica. I could just see them, sitting with their heads down, obviously well out of it. But they were so far from the stage, with so many obstacles to get around, that it would be too hard to bring them up. Next time, maybe.

From my left, a female voice squeaked, "Over here!" I followed the voice and spotted two excellent-looking candidates at a table by themselves: a cute brunette in a leather mini and tube top, and a slim dark-haired guy in jeans and a polo shirt. I thanked my informant and sent them to the stage as well. That gave me eleven on stage, which would be enough to work with.

First things first. "People in the audience, I am about to count up to three. As I count to three, you'll feel yourselves coming out of hypnosis. By the time I reach three you will be completely awake, eyes open, no longer hypnotized. You'll find that you can easily remember your name and the answer to any other question you may be asked. In fact, you'll find that all of the suggestions I've given tonight thus far are completely cancelled for you. You'll also find that you feel happier, calmer, more energetic than you've felt in a long time. When you are ready to go to sleep tonight, you'll find that you can easily close your eyes, feel your whole body slow down, and sleep deeply and easily for as long as you're supposed to, then wake feeling refreshed and ready for a new day." I counted them up and watched as the ones I could see lifted their heads and looked around, smiling and stretching. I couldn't see them, but I knew Claire and Monica would be doing the same.

I made my own way back to the stage, the spotlight following me. "People on the stage, when I count to three you will sit up and open your eyes, feeling energetic and happy and wanting to talk, but remaining deeply hypnotized and obeying my every suggestion. You will also wake up with a new identity; instead of the person you were when you came up on stage you will be a well-known fairy tale character, taking part in a Jerry Springer show where we explore what it's really like to have lived a fairy tale. You will see me as Jerry, hosting the show. People think everyone lives happily ever after when these stories are over, but you've been there and you know that's not the case. In fact, being a fairy tale character sucks for a variety of reasons that you'll be very eager to tell the audience about. Every time someone else gives a reason their life is tough, you'll think of an even better reason why you had it worse than they did."

I walked over to Anita de los Santos and touched her on the shoulder. "For the person whose shoulder I am touching now, you will realize that you are none other than the old woman who lived in a shoe. Your life is hell because you have more children than anyone could possibly count, and not one of them calls you on Mother's Day. They're all grown up now, but they don't do a damn thing to help you out and they keep asking you to babysit for them while they go out on the town."

Brad came next. "When you open your eyes, you will be the huntsman from Snow White. You're pissed off because you saved that ungrateful bitch from certain death, only to have her run off and leave you for some no-name prince. And those dwarves were no picnic to deal with, either."

I continued in this vein, giving each of my subjects a character. Jim and Jennifer became two of the Three Little Pigs, bitter because their smarter brother won't let them live in his brick house. Nicole and Brenda became the wicked stepsisters of Cinderella, with all the emotional baggage that comes with it. David I christened Rumpelstiltskin, and Sophie became the Princess from "Princess and the Pea." To my newest recruits, whose real names were Amy and Will, I gave the identities of Hansel and Gretel.

And Laurel, who was looking like the crown jewel of the lot, took on the persona of Little Red Riding Hood.

The stage lights came up as I counted to three. "Thank you all for coming, ladies and gentlemen," I said to the audience. "Today's theme is, 'Happily Ever After'. As you can see, we have some very famous people up here with us who are all living happily ever after, and --"

"Bullshit, Jerry!"

I turned around to see Laurel glaring at me. "I'm sorry, what was that?"

Laurel leaned into the mic. "I said bullshit, Jerry. Everybody thinks we have this wonderful, happily-ever-after thing going on, but it's all a lie. My life sucks."

I feigned surprise. "But you escaped from the wolf, didn't you?"

"Sure," she said, "and don't think it wasn't fun seeing the woodsman put an arrow through that sadistic bastard, either. But did you ever wonder what happened when I got home? My folks went ape-shit! They grounded me for three months, and they made me wear a damned beeper any time I left the house."

Nicole broke in. "Ha! At least you had a starring role. We got five minutes at the beginning of the story, and then stood around like extras at the end while that bitch Cinderella took all the glory."

Brenda nodded emphatically. "When was the last time you saw a kid dressed as one of us for Halloween, eh?"

Laurel had an answer. "So? At least nobody tried to *eat* your ass! I had a homicidal wolf chasing me around the house!"

Soon I had everyone chiming in. Brad moaned about being left for a no-name pretty boy with a fancy title; Anita complained bitterly about her lot in life, and tried to convince Laurel that if she'd visited her Grandma sooner she'd still be alive today. Sophie kept shifting in her chair, unable to get comfortable, and bristled when Jim and Jennifer kept referring to her as Miss Fancy Pants. Hansel and Gretel got into a major sibling tiff over who was really responsible for their ordeal in the first place. David, as Rumpelstiltskin, sat back and cackled at the whole thing, then launched into an impassioned speech about how nobody appreciates a good villain anymore. And through it all, the audience cheered and clapped and laughed themselves silly. I let it go until it appeared a fistfight was about to break out between Rumpelstiltskin and the woodsman, then commanded them all to sleep and waved the lights down.

I had a great group; now it was time to see how far they'd let me take them. "As you sit, drifting deeper and deeper into hypnosis, your fairy tale past fades away from your mind for the time being and you are simply you. In a few minutes I'm going to count up from three again, and when I do you will open your eyes, becoming alert and animated, but still deeply hypnotized. You will then realize that you are all neighbors from the same trailer park in Mississippi, and that a few nights ago something truly frightening and remarkable happened: an alien spaceship landed in the middle of your trailer park. The aliens came out of the ship and crashed a party you were all having, abducted some of you and used you for all kinds of sexual experiments. When they'd had their way with all of you, they got back in their ship and flew away, leaving no traces of their visit other than the affects on all of you. You will recognize me as a network news anchorman here to get your side of the story, because the government is trying to cover it all up and claim it never happened. We're on live TV, but you won't let that bother you because you know that they can bleep out anything they need to and cover you with those blue dots if they need to. As you listen to each other tell about the events of that night, you'll always remember more things that fit into the general story that comes out, and what you remember will get more and more outrageous as the interview progresses."

Once again, I picked a few of my best victims for special instructions. Touching Laurel, I told her that the aliens had made a physical change to her body that she desperately needed to show me to prove they had been there. Brad, I decided, would have an extremely foul mouth -- so foul that every sentence he spoke would contain at least one word that can't be said on television. "However," I added, "the aliens noticed this and planted a V-chip in your head. Whenever you start to say a cuss word, the V-chip kicks in and shuts off your voice until the cuss word is over, then turns it back on automatically. That really pisses you off and makes you want to cuss all the more."

And for Anita, I had a special suggestion. "The aliens implanted a special chip in your brain as well," I told her. "Every time you hear one of the other people on stage describe something that the aliens did to them, the chip in your head will react by giving you a strong sexual stimulus. Each time the chip reacts, you will become more and more *arrecho* until you can't help but start touching yourself and having orgasms in response to it."

Then, to put the icing on the cake, I touched David. "You are a representative of the United States government. Your job is to listen to everything these people claim happened and then provide a perfectly reasonable, rational explanation for it that has nothing to do with aliens. No matter how bizarre the stories, you will always be able to remain calm and come up with an explanation that sounds normal to you because you know for a fact that there never were any aliens and these people are just making it all up in a transparent attempt to get money from the tabloids."

Having set the table, it was time to wake the diners. I faced the audience for the opening. "Ladies and gentlemen in our studio audience and all across America, the people you see before you have a truly horrific story to tell. Rather than engage in a long preamble, let's just have them tell it. Who will go first?"

Jennifer put her hand up quickly, so I started with her. "We was outside havin' a barbeque," she began. The audience laughed immediately; Jennifer had taken the Mississippi part to heart, and was speaking in a thick Southern drawl. "When all of a sudden like, there was these lights in the sky."

Jim leaned over in front of Jennifer with a goofy grin on his face. "Hi, Maw!"

She swatted him. "Shut up and wait your turn! As I was sayin', there was these lights. I didn't know what they was at first. Jim Bob and me just looked at 'em and wondered, y'know? We ain't never seen nothin' like that before. And they kept gettin' closer, and dancin' around and all, and me and Jim Bob was just confused by it all, we didn't know what it was."

"A space ship!" Brad shouted from behind her. "It was a m---f--- space ship! Get to the f--- point, you stupid b---!"

I feigned confusion. "Is there something wrong with your voice, sir?"

Brad leaned into the microphone. "Of course there's something wrong with my m---f--- voice, you a--- hole. Those g---d--- c---sucking aliens put a m---f--- chip in my head!"

"They did what?"

Brad sighed heavily. "They knocked me out with some kind of m---f--- stun ray, they cut a big f--- hole in my head, and they put a m---f--- chip in my g---d--- brain. They're f--- controlling my f--- language!"

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Anita squirming in her chair.

"Um, excuse me?" David was gesturing for the microphone.

"Ah," I said, "our representative from the government. Did you have something to say in response, sir?"

David nodded. "This man is clearly delusional. The odd quirk in his speech is most likely a hysterical reaction to being punished for swearing as a child. Assuming, of course, that he isn't faking it

altogether."

Brad growled. "Why you c---s--- son of a b---!"

"Then what about this?" Laurel butted in, her voice also bending into a pleasing Southern drawl. She pulled down the left shoulder strap of her tank top to reveal her breast, and then it finally hit me why she had seemed familiar: the newly-exposed breast was adorned with an ornate dragon tattoo. Its tail snaked down the breast, circled the areole, and ended at the nipple, which was pierced by a curved gold needle with an arrowhead on each end. "Is this a hysterical reaction? The aliens put this mark on me to show that I'm good breeding stock. They paralyzed me with that ray of theirs, took me up to their ship, and they poked and prodded my naked body with all kinds of weird machines and needles. Then they put this mark on me and put me back, but I know what they're planning to do -- they told me so."

"*Dios mio!*" Anita was panting heavily, her hands wandering over her own body.

David looked casually at the offered breast. "Really? It looks to me as though you simply got drunk and went to a tattoo parlor."

"We was experimented on, too." My newest recruits, Amy and Will, were leaning toward me. Amy nodded, holding Will's hand as he spoke. "We was doin' the deed, if you know what I mean." Amy blushed and looked downward at the admission, while Will simply grinned and continued. "I guess them aliens was fascinated by it -- they ain't never seen two people bonin' before, I suppose. These lights came on all bright and stuff, and I could tell we was bein' watched. Amy Jo here said to stop, and I did, but then this red ray hit us and Amy Jo started moanin' and twitchin' and my little general got to throbbin', and all of a sudden I was hornier than a ten-peckered owl. I started puttin' the stones to Amy Jo like we was makin' one of them porno movies. And then all of a sudden it felt like I was pullin' out, but I wasn't -- I was bein' picked up by somethin' and floating in the air. Amy Jo was lookin' up at me all strange and said don't stop now, and I told her I couldn't help it, and she started cummin' like nobody's business."

From my left, I heard Anita groaning. "Did you say something, Miss?" I held out the microphone to her.

"*Yo no lo puedo ayudar;*" she heaved. "*Estoy por acabar!*"

"Yeah," Will agreed, "that's what she sounded like, 'cept Amy Jo don't speak no Spanish. And then I felt this tube thing slide over my pecker, and some kind of little electric shock like, and my eyes rolled back up my head and I started spurtin' like a goddanged fire hose."

He was interrupted by Anita, who was crying out incoherently in Spanish. Both hands were inside the waistband of her skirt and working furiously as she babbled and moaned.

I let her go until the audience's reaction began to quiet along with her own gasps. Then I held the mic out to David. "What do you make of all this?"

He scowled. "That woman is clearly a nymphomaniac," he diagnosed, then paused while the audience collectively screamed with laughter. "As for the rest of them, I'll be conducting a careful search of the trailers after this interview is finished. I'm sure a few drug-sniffing dogs will turn up the real cause of all this in no time flat."

Half my volunteers had a ready response for that, but I know a good ending line when I hear one. I waved the lights down and sent them all back to sleep.

While the audience showed their appreciation loudly and generously, I pondered the minor dilemma I had just crafted for myself: how the hell do you top something like that? You don't, I decided -- you accept the gift, let it be the climax of the show, and go for a nice, gradual transition to the ending. Instead of concluding with another elaborate scenario, I opted for the stage hypnotist's equivalent of a fugue: a number of loosely-related ideas intertwined and played against each other.

First I had everyone let go of their Mississippi trailer-park personas and the alien scenario, and become their normal selves again. I touched each of my stars in turn and removed the specific suggestions I'd given them. After giving them a little time to drift deeper, I set up for the finale. "People on stage, in a few moments I am going to count to three again. When I do your eyes will open and you'll sit up in your chair feeling refreshed, energetic, friendly and talkative, but still deeply hypnotized and obeying my every suggestion. You will be in every respect your normal self, sitting around with your new friends, waiting for the next part of the show to begin. The only unusual thing, and this will not strike you as unusual at all, is that you will be firmly and completely stuck to your seat. You can move around as much as you need to remain comfortable, but you won't be able to get out of your seat no matter how much you may want to.

"I'm going to be talking to the audience. When you hear me say the words 'Ladies and gentlemen,' that will seem to you to be the most rude, foul, offensive thing you've ever heard anyone say. You will be so outraged, so offended at my words that I know you'll want nothing more than for me to deliver an immediate and sincere apology to the audience for insulting them so. Each time I say 'Ladies and gentlemen' it will seem even ruder and more offensive, but no matter how offended you may be personally, I know that you will never try to attack me or harm me in any way." There was a murmur of nervous laughter from the audience. I looked back at them and said, "You can never be too careful," which got them chortling freely.

That set up the basic structure; now it was time to fill in the various melodies for my fugue. I started with something simple for Brenda: "For you and you only, when I say 'Ladies and gentlemen,' you will not find that at all offensive or rude; in fact, you'll think it's the funniest thing you've ever heard in your life. Each time I say 'Ladies and gentlemen,' it will seem funnier and funnier to you and you won't be able to keep yourself from laughing. If anyone around you seems angry, offended, or upset, you'll find that even more hilarious than what I say and you'll laugh at them, too. For everyone else, if you see or hear someone on stage laughing at me or at anyone else on stage, that's going to piss you off even more. You may argue with that person, or tell them anything you want, but you will not try to harm them in any way."

I touched David. "You are the official sign language interpreter for the show. Whenever anybody other than me speaks, your job is to say exactly the same thing in sign language for the benefit of any hearing-impaired audience members. If you don't know the official signs for anything that's okay, because I know you'll be able to just make up signs as fast as the people can talk."

I moved along to Brad. "You read way too much Dr. Seuss as a kid, and when you get angry or offended you tend to start talking as if your lines were actually written by Dr. Seuss. You'll use lots of rhyming words in long strings and occasionally make up nonsensical words for nouns or verbs."

Then I picked on Amy and Will. Remembering that they had been sitting together, I decided to use that. "You two are teenage lovers who haven't seen each other in three weeks. You won't care what else is going on up here, all that matters to you is that you're finally together again and you can make out behind the cover of the people sitting in front of you. You'll neck and kiss and pet each other as much as you want, bearing in mind that you cannot get out of your seats for any reason. You'll continue necking and making out like high school kids until I tell you to sleep."

Laurel was next. "As leader of the group, you'll consider it your job to make me stop using those nasty, rude words. And you have exactly the means to do it: the tattoo on your chest gives you the power to hypnotize anyone by having them look closely at the dragon's tail. You'll want to use that power on me to make me apologize to the audience for my behavior." There was a swell of low-pitched cackling from the audience. I winked at the crowd and said, "You like that? Watch this."

Walking over to Anita, I touched her on the shoulder. "You," I told her, "were not supposed to be part of the show at all; you're actually a Victoria's Secret model, and you're only here because your agent

screwed up and booked you on the wrong night. You will not be offended by anything I might say; in fact, you think this whole hypnosis thing is a crock and your only fear is that the audience might either fall asleep from boredom or walk out. To keep that from happening, you will strip down to your underwear and pose for the men in the audience. You'll keep posing, ignoring everything else that happens on stage, until I tell you to sleep again. The more you notice the men watching or reacting to you, the more blatantly sexual your poses will get, but you will not under any circumstances leave your chair."

And finally, one last instruction -- another ad lib: "For all the other women on stage, any time you see me touch my face you will feel a very sensual, very pleasurable sensation of pressure on your G-spot. That's going to feel incredibly good to you, and you'll continue feeling it for as long as I keep touching my face."

I counted three and brought them up. Eleven faces looked over at me expectantly. "How are you all doing?" I asked pleasantly. They smiled back at me, uttering variations of "Fine."

"That's good. We just have one or two more things to do." I turned to the audience. "Ladies and gentlemen, for my next demonstration ..."

A chorus of loud objections rang out behind me. Jim was the loudest. "That's wrong, man!"

Nicole nodded emphatically. "You can't say things like that in public."

I played confused. "Things like what?"

Nicole wasn't cutting me any slack. "Like what you just said."

"But all I said was, 'Ladies and gentlemen.'"

More groans. "Oh, you're awful!" Jennifer complained.

Through a gap in the recriminations, a giggle cut through. Everyone looked sharply at Brenda, who was snickering into her hand. "What the hell is your problem?" Jim demanded.

"I can't help it," Brenda said, giggling between words. "This is all too funny."

"You've got a screw loose, babe." The audience burst into laughter at David's sign language for "screw loose" -- the classic finger-to-the-temple gesture.

Meanwhile, on my left, I caught a flash of yellow as Anita's blouse came off. She wore a cream-colored push-up bra underneath. I quick peek to my other side showed Amy and Will in a lip lock. His hand was caressing her breast through her tube top while hers played along his thigh.

Standing so I could be seen by the group and the audience, I rubbed my chin. "I don't know what I could have said that was so wrong," I said, while every woman on stage drew in a sharp breath and let out a surprised moan. "As I was going to say, ladies and gentlemen ..."

"Hey!" I turned to find Brad shaking his fist at me.

"This language you are using,
Is both foul and most abusing.
You had best acquire some tact
And start cleaning up your act
Or else someone will react
And an angry fist impact
With your google or your zatch,
Or your zogget's biddlespatch!"

The audience ate it up, giving a rousing round of applause for Brad's improvised poetry.

"Wow," I said, rubbing my forehead (and listening to the women start moaning in pleasure). "Since you put it that way, I guess I'd better apologize." I put my hand down and faced the audience. "Ladies and gentlemen, I ..."

"*Jack!*" Laurel's voice cut sharply through the general din. "Come here. I want to show you something." She patted the empty seat to her right.

I came over and sat down. "Now watch closely," she said, pulling down her top to reveal the dragon again.

"That's a very nice tattoo," I said innocently.

She smiled. "Thank you. It's a mystical dragon. Look at his tail, Jack." With her left hand, she lifted the breast up a little and moved it, causing the little stud to wink in the light. "Look very closely at his tail, Jack. See how it shines in the light. Let your eyes focus and concentrate on the shiny golden tail. Feel it pulling you in, captivating you." A gentle hand snaked around my neck and pulled my face in a little closer. *Damn*, I thought to myself, *this girl is a natural!* "Feel your eyes becoming sleepy, Jack, sleepy and heavy. Give in to the dragon's power, Jack. Go so sleep now."

I blinked heavily a few times, then feigned falling into a deep trance, falling toward her. She caught me and pushed me back into the chair carefully, making sure I was well balanced, and took the microphone from my hand. "You will now obey the commands of the dragon, Jack," she told me. I heard her voice filling the room over the PA system. "The dragon is angry because you have used language that decent people should not have to hear. And that's a shame, Jack. You are a talented and funny and exciting man; you don't need to resort to vulgarity to entertain people. When I count to three you will wake up, and you will immediately apologize to the people in the audience for what you said. From now on, whenever you find yourself about to say" -- she leaned in and whispered "ladies and gentlemen" in my ear -- "your subconscious mind will automatically substitute a socially acceptable phrase instead." She paused a moment while the audience laughed. "And, Jack," she added, without the microphone. "Tonight, after the show, you will come to room 816 and knock on the door. There the dragon will captivate you again, and you will be rewarded with great physical pleasure. One ... two ... three."

I opened my eyes to the laughter of the audience -- I guessed my lavalier had picked up Laurel's final command. Laurel herself was covering up again.

There was a localized round of hooting from stage right. I looked over to see Anita posing lasciviously in her seat, now in nothing but a cream-colored satin panty. Amy and Will were well into things, too -- her tube top had come down to her waist, and Will's hand had the miniskirt hiking up to meet it. Amy's hand was inside Will's zipper, and their panting was becoming audible.

Laurel looked at me expectantly. I stood up and address the audience. "L-- I mean, people in the audience," I began, letting them laugh some more at the effects of Laurel's suggestion. "I don't know what to say. I guess, with the nature of the place, I figured some of the rules could be broken and that you were expecting that sort of thing. Obviously I was wrong, and I feel I have to apologize to each and every one of you. I'm very sorry, and I won't ever use those words again."

The audience went nuts -- those that weren't busy cheering on Anita or Amy and Will, anyway. I turned back to my volunteers and scratched my cheek a little, sending the women into another fit of panting and moaning. Laurel had an extra self-satisfied sparkle in here eye; she met my gaze and smiled in a way that reminded me of the Mona Lisa. I had a pretty good idea what she had in mind for me back in her room. *Sorry, Laurel*, I thought to myself. *If all goes well, I've got an appointment with my guidance counselor tonight.*

"Oh, Jack?"

It was Nicole, beckoning me to come over to her. I sat on her left in an empty seat, my body turned to make it visible to most of the volunteers and as much of the audience as possible. "Yes?"

"You've got something under your eye," she told me.

The audience cackled, seeing through her ruse immediately and anticipating the result. "This eye?" I held a finger just under my right eye, but not touching yet.

She nodded. "It's just under the eyelid there."

I touched a finger to the area she indicated. "Here?"

Nicole groaned and pressed her legs together. "That's the spot," she sighed.

I pulled my finger away and looked at the tip, as if expecting to see something.

"It's still there," she said quickly. "Try some more."

I rubbed the area a little more, as Nicole and the other women who could see me squirmed and panted. Amy was far too occupied with Will's pants and whatever his hand was doing under her skirt to notice, and Anita was ignoring me as ordered while she posed on her chair for a very appreciative group of guys. "That's it," Nicole told me. "It doesn't seem to want to come off, but keep trying."

"Is it working?"

"Oh, yes," she assured me, "you're doing great. Just ... keep ... it ... up ..."

I pulled my finger away. "Maybe I should just get a cloth or something."

"No!" she urged. I put my finger back and rubbed some more. "You're getting it," she insisted, her words coming in gasps. "Just ... a little ... more ... yes ... yes! ... YES!!"

I held my finger in place while she writhed and moaned heavily. Laurel was doing the same, a few chairs away, as was Jennifer. Brenda just stared at me with a look of utter shock on her face.

Finally, Nicole's breathing started to slow. "Is that good?" I asked innocently, sending the audience into screams of laughter.

"That's great," she told me, her eyes wide and sincere. I thought people might be falling out of their seats in the crowd below.

I got up and faced my stars again. "People on stage, some of you seem a little out of breath. This is probably a good time for you to close your eyes and sleeeeeep..." They dropped down again on cue, Amy and Will in mid clutch, Anita in mid pose. I took the opportunity to notice that Anita had very nice breasts. So did Amy, as far as that went. Laurel's were the nicest of the bunch, though. Not to worry -- I was sure Monica's would be lovely as well. *Face it, Jack*, I congratulated myself, *you have superb taste*.

"For my volunteers on stage, as you let yourselves drift deeply into hypnosis one more time, let all of the suggestions I've given you tonight up to this point fall away, completely cancelled, no longer effective at all. The words 'ladies and gentlemen' will no longer seem offensive or funny to you, and you will no longer react to them as if they were. If you were posing, or necking, or thinking of yourself as having special hypnotic powers, or being my sign-language interpreter, those things are no longer true and you no longer feel any need to act that way.

"In fact, as you remain safely seated, focusing on your breathing, you'll find that you can remember everything that happened on this stage clearly and in complete detail, and, most importantly, *with an extremely good sense of humor*." I paused while the audience chuckled knowingly. "You'll know that everything you did on stage tonight was done in the spirit of fun and spontaneity, and with no intent to embarrass anybody, and you will remember it all fondly and happily as a fun and exciting experience, with *no need for any sort of retaliation or legal action at all*." That's a standard joke I used to use; that night, it seemed even more appropriate and not entirely humorous except to the audience. "Hey," I told the crowd in an aside, "you can never be too careful."

Turning back to the volunteers, I continued. "In a few moments I'm going to count to three one last time. On the count of three, you will open your eyes and sit up straight, totally awake and alert, feeling better than you've ever felt before, relaxed, comfortable, and no longer hypnotized. You will remember everything clearly and pleasantly, and feel no embarrassment whatsoever at anything you may have done or at your current state of undress, if that's the case. As my thank-you gift to you, you'll find that when you are ready to go to sleep tonight, you will be able to simply close your eyes and feel yourself sinking easily, naturally, completely into a deep and refreshing sleep. You'll be able to stay asleep until it's time for you to wake up, and when you do wake up you'll feel completely alert and awake and energized, ready to take on the world. And if you have plans for after the show with another person, perhaps plans of an intimate and loving nature, you'll find that whatever you do with that other person is more enjoyable and more pleasurable than it's ever been before, and can last for as long as you want it to." The audience roared. "These people gave their all tonight for your entertainment," I told the audience with a wink, "some in more ways than one. Don't you think they deserve it?" From the volume of their applause, the crowd agreed.

"People on stage, at the count of three, as I said you'll open your eyes and be completely awake. The show will be over, and the applause you hear now and after you wake up will be all because of your creativity and willingness to play tonight. As wonderful as you've been tonight, you deserve a curtain call. After I've counted to three, I'm going to call on each of you by name, one by one. When I call your name I want you to come to the center stage. Men, when you reach center stage you'll strike a muscle pose, like a body builder, and then take a bow and make your way safely back to your original seat in the audience. Women, when you reach center stage you'll show the audience your breasts, then take a bow and return to your original seat in the audience." Approaching Anita, I gave her a special instruction. "For the person I'm touching now: when I call your name, you'll already be showing your breasts. After you take your bow, you will gather up your clothes and go to the restroom to put them back on. As you pass each table, you'll pause and strike one more pose for the people at the table, and let them know they can purchase your outfit at the gift shop in the hotel lobby."

One more three count, and they came up easily. Anita seemed more than a little surprised to find herself on stage, almost naked. Amy blushed, giggled, and pulled her tank top back up. One by one, I called each of my volunteers for their curtain call. The men did a beautiful job of muscle flexing; the women lifted their tops on cue, even Brenda. Brad, Laurel, and Anita got standing ovations from the crowd for their participation.

As the lights came up, I waved goodnight to the crowd and made my way backstage again. Rudi was waiting for me.

"Nice job," she said as I stripped off the lavalier. "Anybody ever sue you for anything you made them do?"

"Not yet. But then again, I don't usually take things as far as I did tonight. Your entertainment director was pressing me to push the envelope."

Rudi grinned. "I doubt she'll make that mistake again."

My next stop was the dressing room, to wash off my stage makeup. I was cleaned up and back in my polo shirt when there was a knock on the door. I opened it up and found myself face to face with a once-again-dressed Anita de los Santos. Behind her was a nondescript man in a gray suit that I recognized from her table at the show.

I wasn't quite sure what to say. She saved me the trouble of going first. "*Señor* Torrance," she said coolly, "I'd like you to meet my husband, Diego de los Santos."

Oh, shit. I shook the man's hand, smiling at him, while he studied my face. "Pleasure to meet you, sir. Your wife has a, er, highly creative mind."

"That she does," he agreed. "And, fortunately for both of us, a most attractive body."

I felt the color rising in my cheeks. "Yes, of course. Look, *Señor*, I don't know what you may be thinking ..."

They looked at each other, smiled, and broke into evil laughter. I just looked at them, puzzled, hoping something would make sense.

"You should see your face, *Señor* Jack," Anita said. "So nervous. But all is well. I had a wonderful time, and Diego got to see dozens of men wishing they could be with me, and now that we've played our little joke with you, we shall go home and see how well your magic works off stage."

I could feel myself starting to breathe again. "I'm glad you're not upset."

She gave me a sly smile. "I've never been known as *una apretada*, *Señor*."

"I'd certainly never say so," I said, grateful for her sense of humor. "*Buenos noches, Señor y Señora.*"

"Good night, *Señor* Jack."

I headed out the side exit to the dining room, feeling as though I'd dodged a nasty bullet. But I composed myself quickly; out there at that back table I was expecting to meet up with Monica.

Claire was alone at the table when I got there. She saw me coming, jumped up and ran over to hug me. "You were *amazing!*" she said. "I haven't laughed this hard in years!"

"Thanks," I said, taking a seat at the table. "Where's Monica?"

"That whole alien thing was incredible ... and the whole thing with the apology, and the girl with the tattoo ... and that guy's sign language was hilarious. Were those women really having orgasms? It would have been so much fun to be part of that."

"I'll try to get you a front row table next time," I promised. "Where's Monica?"

Claire stopped and swallowed. "She ... uh ... left."

Something very cold gripped my spine. "Oh? When did she leave?"

She looked at me with sympathy. "Toward the end of the alien thing."

My guts clenched as if struck. In my mind I pictured my old professor, grabbing his hat and storming out the door of the old nightclub. I had to put my head down because the room was starting to tilt and spin.

A gentle hand laid itself on my shoulder. "I'm sorry, Jack. Monica can be pretty uptight about these things, that's all. I thought you were brilliant."

I lifted my head and looked at her. "So did Solly."

"Huh?"

I shook my head. "Never mind." Suddenly I was very tired, and in no mood for socializing. "Look, I'm gonna go."

She grabbed my arm a little tighter. "Are you sure? We can still go have that drink. You look like you could use one."

"Some other time, maybe. I need to walk around for a bit."

She nodded grimly. "Whatever you need. I'm going to go sit in the bar for a while anyway. If you change your mind, you can find me there."

There was a large patio outside the restaurant overlooking the beach. I strolled out there for a bit. It was a beautiful night -- warm but not hot, with a nice breeze rolling in off the water. A few people waved when they saw me, others ignored me. I responded to the wavers with a fake smile and a wave back. What would I do, I wondered, if I ran into Brad? Or Nicole? Or Laurel?

Laurel.

I remembered her instructions, given while hypnotized and believing she had hypnotized me. How many people was she fending off because of that little stunt?

It wasn't really my fault, of course -- I hadn't told her to feel any particular attraction to me, or to try and seduce me. So on some level, she really did want me to come to her room. But she certainly hadn't meant to broadcast the fact to the entire audience. I decided I'd better see how she was. Just to check on her, I told myself.

Room 816 was easy enough to find. The Do Not Disturb sign was hanging on the doorknob. I stood there for a minute, trying to decide what to do.

Suddenly the door flung open in front of me. Even before it opened, I heard a familiar voice. "I told you to fuck off, you ... oh." Laurel stood before me in a gray satin bathrobe, looking with surprise into my eyes. Her cheeks flushed red as she stared at me.

"How are you?"

She answered slowly. "Okay, I suppose." She stepped back silently, holding the door open.

I took the tacit invitation and stepped inside, letting the door close behind me. Laurel broke eye contact and fiddled with the robe. "I didn't think you would come."

"I'm guessing a few others have applied to take my place, haven't they?"

Her eyes rolled. "God, yes. I had to unplug the phone. And this really creepy guy showed up at my door and wouldn't go away. When I saw shadows under the door just now, I thought it was him trying again."

"I'm sorry," I told her sincerely.

She shrugged. "It's not your fault. Inviting you up here was my idea, not your suggestion. I didn't even think about you wearing a body mic until after the show, when the phone started ringing."

"I'm still sorry. If you'd like to change rooms, I have some pull with the management; I can probably help make that happen."

Laurel shook her head. "Doesn't matter, I'm going home tomorrow anyway."

We looked at each other in silence, the sexual tension almost tangible. Then she smiled awkwardly, and we both chuckled. "You didn't come here to sleep with me, did you?"

"The thought did cross my mind," I answered honestly. "But it's probably better if we don't."

She nodded. "I'm a little weirded out by all the calls and the guy at the door; I'm not exactly at my best."

"It's fine. Is there anything else you'd like me to do?"

She thought a moment before answering. "Is there a way you could put me to sleep and keep me from hearing anymore knocks on the door until, say, eight in the morning?"

"I can do that," I assured her. "Are you ready to go to sleep now?"

"Pretty much," she said. "I was just going to turn out the lights and take this robe off when you came by."

"Then I'll say goodnight." I extended my hand to her as if to shake hands. She gave me hers, a slightly confused look on her face. I started pumping her hand steadily, watching her eyes, matching each blink with a downward press. In just a few seconds she was visibly wilting; in under half a minute her eyes closed down and she fell forward. I caught her neatly and supported her body while gave her deepening suggestions until she was totally limp in my arms.

"Laurel," I said to her, "I'm going to count to three. On three I want you to open your eyes and stand on your own. I want you to follow me to the door and lock it behind me when I leave, then turn off the lights, take off your robe, and go to bed. Once in bed you'll fall easily into a deep, natural sleep that will last undisturbed until eight o'clock in the morning. Any sounds you hear other than the fire alarm will not disturb you; in fact, they'll help you to sleep even more deeply and restfully. At exactly eight o'clock in the morning you will wake up feeling completely alert, refreshed, and at peace. One, two, three."

I got one last glimpse of the dragon as Laurel's robe opened. Then I slipped through the door and waited until I heard the lock turn and the chain slide into place. Once the little sliver of light under the bottom edge of the door clicked out, I walked away.

My finger hovered in the air in front of the elevator panel. Up or down? My mind was still too active to even think of sleep, so I opted for down. I wandered the terrace a little more, strolled aimlessly through the lobby, and eventually found my way to the bar. *Why not*, I decided. *Nothing like drowning a few sorrows.*

I got a Long Beach Iced Tea at the bar and took it to a dark little booth in the corner. I hadn't looked for Claire; it didn't even occur to me that she might still be there until, with a swish of peach-colored satin, she sat down next to me.

"Feeling any better?"

I looked into her face and didn't see anything more than sincere concern. "I suppose so," I said. "That's not the first time somebody's walked out on one of my shows."

"Don't take it so hard," she said, squeezing my hand in hers. "Monica is a little extra sensitive right now. She just got done with an ugly breakup, and she thought you were taking advantage of people too much and didn't want to see it. I'm sorry, Jack."

"Me, too," I said bitterly. "I wonder how many others are, too."

"She'll get over it," Claire told me. "I think seeing that Spanish lady get all worked up, Monica got a little spooked. She was probably afraid she'd find herself listening to your voice, close her eyes, and then suddenly she'd be up in your room, naked, with an overpowering urge to jump your bones."

Yeah, I thought, *that would about fit with my stage persona*. I looked at Claire, who was trying so hard to be a friend, and smiled weakly. "Wow. You aren't afraid I'd do that, are you?"

"Afraid? No," she said, lowering her voice and gazing deeply into my eyes. "I want you to."

My mouth felt suddenly dry. Without bothering to even look, my hand groped for the nearest glass and I took a long pull of my drink. It was fruity and sweet, with the telltale bitter flavor of alcohol underneath.

"You *want* me to? Why? And why would I?"

Claire nodded, still meeting my gaze. "I've got two goals for this week, Jack. One of them is that I want to take a vacation from being Miss Prim and Proper Grade-School Teacher. What you did up there with those people was so hot, I'm going to be having dreams about it for months. But why stop at dreaming if I can have the real thing?" She leaned forward, lowered her voice, and put a hand on my leg. "I want you to put me under, Jack, and free me from myself for a while. I want to wake up in your room with no idea how I got there, no clothes on, and no desire other than to fuck your brains out."

Slowly, she took one of my hands in hers and brought it to her chest. "That's my motivation, Jack. Here's yours." She was wearing a satin dress and, I quickly discovered, no bra -- an erect nipple poked into my palm through the fabric as she pressed my hand against herself. "I know you want Monica. I'll even admit that she's probably closer to your type than I am. But I'm right here, offering myself to you. A bird in the hand, so to speak."

She was indeed. My cock was straining already as the blood rushed into it. I thought about Monica, alienated, maybe for good. I thought about Laurel, peacefully sleeping away her last night in this place. But the immediacy of Claire, the obvious willingness, was too much to pass up. I'd denied myself three times already that night -- once unwittingly, twice deliberately -- that was enough.

I pulled my hand away from her breast. "Are you sure?"

She nodded again, staring me down.

"Okay." With my left hand, I took Claire's right hand and held it firmly. With my right, I held up an index finger, just above her eye level, about a foot away from her face. "Watch my finger," I told her, as I began moving it slowly from side to side. "Focus your concentration on my fingertip, and see if you can follow it without moving your head. And as you do, see if you can remember what it felt like just an hour or two ago, as you focused your attention on my hypnodisc and felt yourself getting sleepy, drowsy, tired. Remember your eyes becoming so tired, so heavy, so sleepy."

If someone has been in hypnosis recently, they'll go back very quickly if you can get them to remember the sensation. So it was with Claire -- a few seconds of induction and she was already there. The hand that I held felt totally relaxed and limp and her eyelids were drooping. "And as you remember exactly that feeling, notice that your eyes are becoming ever heavier now, ever so hard to keep open, so sleepy that soon it will be impossible for you to keep them in focus." As I spoke, I started moving my finger even closer to her face, making that last statement a self-fulfilling prophecy. "Soon you will be so deeply hypnotized that your eyes will no longer focus; when that happens, you can just let them close down now and you'll drift off into a deep, deep hypnotic sleep, deeper than ever before, deeper than you thought possible."

She was blinking heavily, her eyes becoming more and more reluctant to open again, and finding it harder and harder to focus on the finger. When I got to within about six inches of her face I could see her lose focus. "Sleep!" I commanded and tugged lightly on her hand. Claire fell forward, her body

totally limp. I caught her head and set her in a comfortable position. It took only a few minutes and a standard deepener to get her to a point where I could see her eyes fluttering in REM under the lids. Her skin paled a bit as her breathing and circulation slowed.

"In a few moments, Claire, I'm going to count to three. When I reach three you will open your eyes and look straight ahead of you. You'll also feel some energy returning to your body, enabling you to sit up straight. You'll remain deeply hypnotized, however; in fact, the more you move and look around the more deeply your mind can continue to relax and go deeper into hypnosis. I will then ask you to follow me. You will stand up and walk with me back to my room, remaining quiet and staying with me at all times even as your mind slips deeper and deeper into hypnosis. One, two, three."

Her face took on a beautiful blank stare as she sat up in the chair. I took her limp hand in mine and stood up. "Follow me."

We walked hand in hand to the elevators in the main lobby. More than a few people noticed something odd about Claire -- the blank stare, the economy of movement, all had an odd movie-like feel -- but none stopped to ask about it.

I led Claire into the nearest elevator and pressed the button for the twelfth floor. The car went smoothly and directly up and the doors opened with a discreet "Ding!" My charge followed me out of the elevator to the door marked 1201 and inside.

I tossed my jacket on top of my suitcase and plopped into one of the two easy chairs while Claire stood waiting before me. Oh, Claire, I thought, contemplating her still form, what to do with you?

What do you mean, what to do?

I knew that voice. That was the voice I'd been listening to for most of the show; the one that likes to play the angles, see how far people will go; the one who used to enjoy zapping perhaps-willing women at frat parties; the one that, until a few hours before, had been securely locked away in a dungeon in the back of my head. The user.

For answer, I turned to my better half: the voice that looks for solutions; that treats people with respect; that minds the ways and teachings of my old professor. The teacher, if you will. The teacher would send Claire back to her room with instructions to sleep well and wake in the morning feeling satisfied and relieved.

Bullshit, protested the user. *She wants this. You heard her say so.*

True. But liking the idea of something in the abstract is a long way from liking it in reality. Why would anyone want to be compelled to have sex with a stranger?

She told you why, you moron. Accept that and go with it. She wants you. And you want her.

No, I wanted Monica.

But if you can't be with the one you love, buddy, love the one you're with.

The teacher knew it was a bad idea, but I stood up and put my hands on Claire's shoulders, sliding the straps of her dress aside. I stepped behind her and slowly lowered the zipper, allowing the dress to fall to the floor. My hands reached around to cup her breasts, my nose burrowing into the nape of her neck and filling itself with her scent. Somewhere in the distance the teacher was warning me to stop, don't do this, but his voice was drowned out in the rushing of blood to my groin. In a matter of moments I had Claire completely stripped, her clothes tossed aside on top of my jacket, her face still staring blankly ahead while she waited for instructions.

"Claire," I told her, "in a few moments I'm going to count to three. When I reach three you will wake up, completely alert and aware, no longer hypnotized. In fact, your conscious mind will have no memory of anything that happened while you were hypnotized. The more you try to remember

anything that happened after the hypnosis show, the more impossible it will be for you to remember. All you will remember is that you can't remember. Those memories will remain in your subconscious, known only to your subconscious, until I hypnotize you again and tell you that it's okay to remember.

"And now, Claire, you're going to experience the fantasy you asked for. As I count to three not only will you emerge from your hypnotic sleep, remembering nothing that's happened since the hypnosis show, but you will also discover that you are naked. You won't remember how you got that way; in fact, it won't matter how you got that way because you will see me as the most sexually attractive man you've ever seen, and you will have an overwhelming desire to have sex with me. Even now you can feel yourself becoming aroused, the blood rushing to your erogenous zones, making your entire body sensitive and needing to be touched, stroked, and kissed. Each breath you take, each beat of your heart, increases your arousal and desire. The more you try to resist the feeling, the more you try to think of anything other than having sex with me, the stronger that need for sex will become. Any place that I touch you will send pleasure signals throughout your body as if I'd touched your most sensitive, intimate places. You will orgasm easily and often, as often as you'd like to, with each orgasm making you want more and more. This irresistible desire for sex will continue until I tell you to sleep; when I say, 'Sleep, Claire' to you, you will stop having sex and you will return immediately to a deep hypnotic sleep like the one you are in right now."

I walked slowly back to the easy chair, tossing my shirt aside on the way, and sank into it. "One, feeling a strong sexual arousal and desire building inside of you; two, feeling the energy returning to your body, the desire for sex increasing with each breath you take; and three."

From my spot in the easy chair I had a great view of her body and face as she came out of it. I saw her eyes flutter open, stare, and then come into focus. Her shoulders rose up. Her hands flexed and then, coming into contact with skin, felt around as she looked down to confirm that her clothes were gone. "What the ...?"

And then she looked at me. Her pupils dilated and her eyes took on an extra sparkle and the color returned to her cheeks. A soft, pink glow started to spread from the golden thatch below her belly up to her chest. All of this gave witness to her thoughts and yet she struggled to ask questions. "Where ... how ... ?"

I smiled, drinking in the sight of my confused, naked, horny girl. "None of that is really important right now, is it?"

She glared at me, showing both lust and anger. "It won't work, you know."

I shrugged that off, smiling all the more. Was this real resistance, or just Claire's subconscious embellishing the fantasy? There was only one way to tell: watch. If she truly didn't want to do this, I hadn't said anything that would stop her from picking up her clothes and walking out. If, on the other hand, she just wanted to feel compelled, then she'd make a show of fighting the urge and then give in gloriously. My shaft thickened, anticipating and hoping.

Her hands moved, one to cover her mound and the other her breasts. But within moments she was fondling rather than hiding. I had my answer.

I rose from my chair, peeled off my undershirt and tossed it onto the clothes pile. Then I came right up to Claire, my face inches from hers. "Let me do that." I took my left hand and gently pulled her forearm away from her breasts, and then with my right I cupped a breast and let my thumb play over the engorged nipple. Claire gasped and shuddered and fell forward into my arms. I held her firmly while she rode out her first climax.

In a few moments her breathing slowed a little. Her arms slipped out from between us and gripped me tightly as her lips found mine. The kiss melted my fillings and sent all of the blood rushing to my groin. She kept kissing, almost trying to climb into my mouth it seemed, while her hands explored my upper

body. I returned the favor, and in a few moments I could feel fingers clawing at my pants. Claire dropped to her knees, pulling my pants and underwear down with her, and kissed her way down to my waiting member. Her tongue caressed it, sending shivers up and down my entire body. I felt her lips on the tip and knew there was no way I'd last more than ten seconds in her mouth.

I stepped back -- or at least I tried to. With my pants and underwear still around my ankles, all I succeeded in doing was falling backwards onto the floor. My head hit a corner of the easy chair and the room tilted for a second or two. By the time I recovered my wits, Claire had my legs pinned down and my cock in her mouth, and was doing things to it that only an inspired fellatrix could. I couldn't reach her, and the longer it went on the less I really wanted her to stop, but if I wanted this to last much longer, I was going to have to do something immediately.

So I did the only thing I could do under the circumstances: I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and triggered myself into hypnosis. *Feel the pleasure*, I told myself, *but hold your release*. I pictured a fire hydrant, with a fireman turning his wrench on the release valve at the top to shut off the water flow. I pictured a steel submarine door slamming shut, the latch wheel spinning clockwise to seal it. And I allowed the pleasure of an orgasm to flow through me, my whole body tingling with the sensations of it, while holding my flow. And I kept breathing, easily and deeply.

Three seconds, three minutes, three hours; I'd be hard pressed to say which is closer to the amount of time we spent that way. I'd have come twice over if not for my own conditioning. Instead, I lay there wallowing in the pleasure until Claire came up for air. I opened my eyes in time to see her climbing up my body and preparing to lower herself onto my iron spike. I reached up, found her breasts, and gave each a nice squeeze as she settled herself over me. She trembled again when she felt me slide home like a key in a very moist lock. "Come for me," I told her, and she did, rocking and grinding while she gasped and moaned her way through another climax.

She was tiring; I could tell by the way she let my arms support her upper body. How much more would she want? How much more could I take? I had no idea, but I was having the time of my life finding out.

Taking advantage of a post-orgasmic lull, I lowered Claire's body onto mine and rolled us over. My face landed between her breasts, so I gave each a few minutes of kissing, nibbling, and caressing until she started squirming under me. Then I kissed my way down her belly. She got the message and spread her legs for me.

The holy of holies was heavy with her scent and her juices. I dove in with relish, partly because she'd been so lovingly attentive to me a few minutes before, partly because she tasted delectable. I explored her lips, her canal, her button, while her legs squeezed my head and her breath came in ragged gasps. She came again, hard and fast, and for a moment I thought my neck was going to snap with the force of her gyrations. *It would serve you right*, I told myself, *but what a way to go!*

Claire was nearing exhaustion. Her eyes were glazed and unfocused, her body moving without any real purpose to it. One more, I figured, and she'd be done. All the more reason to treat myself this time. Rising to my knees, I scooted forward and lifted Claire's bottom. "Oh, God, yes!" she panted, and tried to help by raising her legs up, but they were too tired and heavy for her. I grabbed a pillow off the bed, folded it over, and tucked it under the small of her back for support, then drove myself home. The initial contact jolted Claire into action -- her legs hooked around me weakly and pulled us together. I used a free hand to caress her belly, tracing circles on her skin, feeling her muscles tense in preparation for another climax.

Okay, I said to myself, sliding back into trance a little, *now*. In the back of my head, I felt the countdown begin at five. I ran my fingers through Claire's yellow pelt, petting her, preparing her, through four and three. At two I found her button and gave it a gentle nudge. At one I said, "Come for me," and felt the tight clenching of her muscles as she did. Then I reached zero and all of my circuits went haywire as I finally had a full-blown orgasm of my own. I know I called out incoherently, my

voice mixing with Claire's, as my seed gushed into her. We stayed locked together on the floor until all of the energy left me and I collapsed onto her again, both of us semi-conscious at best.

We lay there panting and recovering for a few minutes before I felt her hands beginning to caress my back again. Enough is enough: I rose up and looked into her glazed eyes. "Sleep, Claire."

Her arms flopped onto the floor and her eyes closed with a deep, satisfied sigh. I found the energy to get up, wandered to the bathroom, had a glass of water and took a very quick shower to rinse off the sweat and musk. I brought an extra towel with me back to the floor where Claire lay entranced and wiped her off as best I could. Then I turned down the bed, lifted her in my arms and laid her in it.

"Claire," I said as I slipped into bed beside her, "in a moment I'm going to count to three. When I reach three you will relax even more, leaving hypnosis and drifting into a deep, refreshing, natural sleep. Nothing will disturb you during this sleep. You will stay asleep until you hear the alarm clock. When the alarm sounds, you will awaken and remember everything that happened tonight, including the things I told you not to remember earlier. As you remember these things, you will experience one more orgasm more intense than any you've felt tonight, and then you will be completely awake and aware and no longer hypnotized. The compulsion to have sex with me will be gone as well; from now on you will only have sex when you want to, and with whom you want to.

"One ... two ... three."

Claire took a deep breath and rolled toward me, a happy smile on her sleeping face. I set the alarm for 8:30 and put myself to sleep as well.

I never did hear the alarm go off; instead, I became aware of a warm, soft body pressing against mine and clutching me while a voice moaned heavily. There is nothing more beautiful to see than a woman in the throes of a really strong orgasm; I opened my eyes just in time to see Claire's face at the peak of hers, right on schedule. My hand stroked her side idly, waiting for the end.

"Good morning," I told her as her breathing began to return to normal.

Claire's eyes locked onto mine and I could see the passion continuing to burn in them. "You realize I'm taking that alarm clock with me, right?"

We laughed together, then lapsed into a pleasant silence. Claire toyed idly with the hairs on my chest, her face resting on my shoulder. "That was amazing," she told me. "You played my body like an artist last night."

"Not really," I corrected. "I played your mind; your body just came along for the ride."

Claire groaned and tweaked my nipple. "Keep that up and I'll give you detention."

"Do third graders teachers give detention?"

She rose up over me and grinned. "Only to the very naughty boys." She lingered over me, looking down into my face. "Now you've got me curious about something," she confessed.

"Oh?" She was straddling me now, and I was becoming acutely aware of how closely her mound hovered over my groin.

"I'm wondering how much of last night was the hypnosis and how much was real physical reaction."

My cock started growing almost immediately, stretching up, seeking her. "And how do you propose to satisfy this curiosity?" As if I hadn't already guessed.

For answer, she leaned down and planted a sweltering kiss on my mouth. Our lips parted and tongues met, and that was all it took to put my other head in charge. I probed her center with my fingers, stroking her inside button while sucking at an offered nipple until she was not only ready but eager. Then I let go and let her plunge herself down onto my saddle horn. I clenched down hard, pressing

against her from the inside while she rode me. In a few minutes she sat up straight, flung her head back, and grunted her way to orgasm. Watching her chest heave with her exertions and feeling the convulsions around me was all the added stimulation I needed to join her.

We lay together in silence, still coupled, with Claire on top of me as we recovered our breath. After a while I felt gentle fingers playing with my hair. I opened my eyes to see Claire's face hovering over me again. "Teach me."

"It's too late," I told her, still riding a post-coital high. "You're already an expert."

She giggled. "I prefer to think of myself as a talented amateur. But that's not what I meant and you know it."

I sighed and waited.

"I saw what you did on that stage. I felt it myself in this room last night. I hadn't had one of those big, all-over, screaming orgasms in months, Jack, and last night I had at least three. I want to be able to do that."

Alarm bells were going off all over in my head. "Claire," I said, "you need to understand some things. Hypnosis is not just about getting people to shed their clothes and have orgasms. If you don't know what you're doing, you can hurt people."

"So make sure I know what I'm doing, Jack. Teach me."

Firmly but carefully, I rolled over and slid her off to my side. "It's not that simple. For starters, you should have at least thirty or forty hours of classroom training before you start hypnotizing people on your own. If you're going to try to do therapy, you should study more and get properly certified by one of the major associations. And Indiana has its own requirements and regulations you'd have to follow."

She was shaking her head. "I'm not talking about doing hypnotherapy, Jack. Maybe later, but not now. Suppose I just want to do party tricks and seduce men?"

I looked her body over pointedly. "You do not need hypnosis to seduce men."

She had the grace to blush slightly. "Thank you, I think. But you haven't answered my question yet, Jack. Will you teach me?"

I looked into her face and read the eagerness in it. The user was all for it, of course; what better way to spend the week than showing the pretty lady a few tricks? And if I got to tap her highly attractive keg a few more times in exchange, so much the better.

The teacher, perhaps ironically, was reluctant. In a week, assuming we had that long, I could teach Claire enough to be dangerous but not enough to be responsible. It could be like handing a disposable lighter to an 8-year-old boy and sending him for a walk in the woods. She might only be interested in sexual hijinks, but an abreaction could happen at any time with anybody. Did I want that on my conscience?

I could see she was waiting for an answer. "Can I think about it?"

Disappointment crossed her face, but she wiped it off quickly. "Sure. You think about it. In the meantime, mind if I borrow your shower?"

"Be my guest."

I couldn't resist admiring her naked body as she slid out of bed and padded toward the bathroom. She caught me via the reflection in the mirror, winked, and disappeared behind the door.

When she came out a few minutes later, I was still lying in bed contemplating her request. "Next," she said, smiling. "That is, unless you'd rather watch me get dressed."

I gave her my best leer. "Right now I think I'd enjoy watching you do just about anything."

She chuckled and dropped her towel on the bed. I watched until the most interesting parts were covered, then hit the shower myself. When I came out, she was just hanging up the phone.

"I'd stay for the show," she said, "but I need to slip downstairs and change. I didn't plan this very well -- I'm going to look very strange walking through the halls this way."

She had a point. The evening dress and heels were a bit dressy for a morning stroll, and her total lack of makeup proclaimed to all that she'd spent the night in someone else's room. "I'd offer you something of mine, but I don't think it would look any better."

"Cute," she commented. "Will you be bringing your sense of humor to breakfast? Monica said she'd meet us in the dining room."

Hearing that name brought me back to earth quickly. "Is that a good idea?" I asked. "I mean, is she okay with this?"

Claire shrugged. "Good question. There's only one way to find out. Are you game?"

Curiosity won out over caution. Twenty minutes later I walked into the dining room with a refreshed Claire at my side. She'd changed quickly into a pair of white shorts and a terry tank top.

Monica was already seated at a round table near the middle of the floor, sipping amber liquid from a juice glass, when we spotted her. Claire led the way over, pulling me along by the hand.

"Good morning," Monica greeted us. Her smile was cool, polite, and slightly distant. Her eyes met mine and lingered for an instant longer than was necessary before moving on to Claire's. A test?

"Good morning," I echoed as I held out Claire's chair. I took the seat to Claire's left, across from Monica. "Sleep well?" It sounded so stupid I almost winced.

Monica's brow crinkled a little bit. "Very well," she said, "from the moment my head touched the pillow. That's unheard-of for me in a strange bed; I should probably be thanking you."

Okay, so she was inclined to give me a break. I shrugged. "My way of giving something back to the audience." Then I grabbed a menu before I had a chance to put my foot in it again.

We opted for the buffet, which was lavish enough that we could eat from it all week and never have the same thing twice. A uniformed chef cooked a Western omelet for me while I watched. Some hash browns and an English muffin filled the plate and looked like more than enough for me. Claire stuck close, having an omelet herself with some fresh fruit and a croissant. Monica opted for French toast, a thick slice of smoked ham, and her juice.

That awkward morning-after feeling faded slowly as we ate in companionable silence. It almost felt like a normal breakfast. Then Monica asked an innocent question: "So, are there any plans for the day?"

Claire grinned and nudged me. "That depends on Jack," she said slyly. "I made him a proposition, and I'm waiting for his answer."

Monica said nothing, but her face had "Oh, really?" written all over it.

"Not that kind of proposition," I hastened to say.

Claire laughed. "Not necessarily, at least." Then, to Monica, she explained, "I've asked Jack to teach me hypnosis."

Monica's eyebrows rose even higher. "Why?"

"Why not?" A touch of extra color seeped into Claire's cheeks. "Seeing Jack's show opened my eyes to what a creative mind can do. Maybe I'm looking to expand my horizons."

"That's fine," Monica replied. "It's just an odd way to expand. What would you use it for?"

"Who says I need to use it for anything? Knowledge is its own reward, isn't it?"

"But it's not just knowledge, is it, Jack?" Monica was looking at me now. "Hypnosis is a skill that has to be practiced. You can't just walk up to people and start swinging a watch in front of their faces."

"Of course not," I agreed. "It's definitely something you learn by doing."

"And if you don't know what you're doing, it can be dangerous."

Where was she going with this? "Sure," I said carefully, "just as trying to drive a car without proper training can be dangerous."

"Exactly. And that's why you have to be tested and licensed before you can drive a car by yourself."

Claire leaned forward. "You're missing the point, Monica. I'm not talking about learning hypnotherapy in five days. I just want Jack to teach me the basics. I'm intrigued by it. If it turns out that I have a talent for it, and it's something I want to do seriously, then of course I'll get licensed, or certified, or whatever it takes. But for now I just want try my hand at it, and Jack seemed like he might be receptive to helping me do that, so I asked him."

Monica was staring into the tablecloth, deep in thought. "You can't learn this in the abstract, I wouldn't think," she said after a moment. "Who will you practice on?"

"I'll find somebody," Claire answered defensively. "There were a lot of people at that show last night; there are bound to be more who are curious about it and wouldn't mind participating."

"You're probably right," Monica conceded, nodding slowly. "Would you like a study partner?"

Claire's face lit up. "You'd do that? You'd let me practice with you?"

"And me with you," she responded. "We could take turns. Assuming, of course, that the teacher approves. Would you be willing to teach both of us, Jack?"

Two faces watched me. Claire's was excited, hopeful, gleaming; Monica's was cool and thoughtful, with a half smile.

"Okay," I conceded.

Claire almost fell out of her chair as she lunged over to hug me. Monica just smiled. "When is our first lesson, Professor?"

I looked around. The breakfast crowd was pretty much gone, and the lunch crowd wouldn't be arriving for another hour or so. "No time like the present."

I'd caught Monica by surprise. "Here and now? Would you give me a few minutes to get my notebook?"

"Here and now," I confirmed. "Or at least, here and after you both get back from the restroom. And you won't need a notebook; you'll be learning by doing."

I shoed them off to the restroom. While they were gone, I sought out the restaurant manager, showed him my VIP key card, and told him I'd be borrowing the table for a little private instruction. He was very accommodating and promised to keep the staff at a distance while they set up for lunch.

My charges returned promptly, taking their seats with nervous little smiles on their faces.

"I could start with a long lecture on what hypnosis is," I told them, "but you've both experienced hypnosis recently, so you already know empirically what it is. Besides, lectures bore me. So instead, I thought I'd start out by teaching you the Dave Elman induction. It's a classic induction that works well for just about everybody, and only takes a few minutes to do. Sound good to you?"

They looked at each other and nodded. "But no note-taking?" Claire said. "How are we supposed to memorize the words?"

"You don't," I replied. "Hypnotic inductions aren't magical formulas that put people into a trance; they're proven ways of helping people put themselves into trance. Learning the exact words is less important than understanding the sequence of events -- the mechanism, if you will -- used in the induction.

"In the Dave Elman induction, for instance, there are five steps that you take the client through to lead them into a nice, deep trance in about four minutes. Step one is eye closure, getting them to close their eyes and relax the eyelids so that their eyes won't readily open. Step two is physical relaxation of the body, basically expanding the feeling of the eyelids into the rest of the body. Step three is fractionation, having them open and close their eyes on cue, going deeper each time they do it. Step four is deepening using an arm drop routine. Step five is relaxing the mind through a backwards counting exercise. If you take someone through that sequence, regardless of the exact words you use, you'll have completed a Dave Elman induction and your volunteer should be nicely hypnotized."

Monica was sitting to my left, Claire to my right. I scooted closer to Monica and addressed her. "So, are you ready to be hypnotized now by me, or would you rather have Claire do it after I demonstrate the induction?"

It was a classic double bind, of course -- either way, Monica was agreeing to be hypnotized. She searched my face, looking for clues of intent. I was careful to give her none; either she'd trust me or not. After a long moment, she lowered her eyes to her lap. "I'll go first," she conceded.

"Good." I scooted closer and adopted a brusque, slightly authoritarian tone. "If you follow my instructions, nothing can stop you from entering a deep state of hypnosis in just a few minutes. I'd like you to start by putting your feet on the floor and hands in your lap." Monica uncrossed her legs and put one hand on each thigh.

I was going to tell Claire to watch closely, but it wasn't necessary -- she was leaning forward in her chair, looking rapidly from Monica to me. She wasn't going to miss a thing. "Good," I repeated, addressing Monica. "Now, I'd like you to close your eyes. Go ahead and let them close down, and as they close I'd like you to relax the muscles around your eyes completely and totally, totally relaxed, so relaxed that when you try to open them, they will not open." I put just a little bit of extra stress on the *relaxed* and *they will not open*. Monica's eyes closed and the tiny muscles around them smoothed out, providing my cue. "That's good. Now when you try to open your eyes, you'll find that they are so relaxed that they will not open. Prove to me that they will not open."

The muscles in Monica's forehead twitched. I pointed that out to Claire wordlessly and continued. "That's right, they will not open. Stop trying to open your eyes now, Monica. Stop trying and just relax. Take that relaxed feeling that you have around your eyes and let it flow down through your entire body, from the top of your head to the tips of your toes. Relaxing, letting go, breathing deeply, each breath bringing deeper relaxation." Monica's shoulders sagged and she leaned a little more into the back of the chair. Claire took note of these things as I indicated them.

I held up three fingers and mouthed the words *Step 3* in Claire's direction. "Now, Monica, I'm going to count to three. On the count of three, and only when I reach three, your eyes will open. After they open, your eyes will close down again and you'll sink twice as deep into relaxation, twice as deep into hypnosis. One ... two ... three; eyes open, eyes closed, going twice as deep." Her eyes popped open, staring straight ahead, and dropped closed again immediately and on cue. "Very good. Now we'll do that again: one, two, three; eyes open, eyes closing, going twice as deep, twice as deep. And now we'll do it again: one, two ..." I deliberately paused, breaking the rhythm. Someone who isn't very deep, or who is faking it, will follow the pattern and open their eyes too soon. Monica's remained closed.

"Three; eyes open, eyes closed, ten times as deep this time."

Monica's head sagged. She was already way down there, but for teaching purposes I needed to complete the sequence. *Step 4*, I indicated to Claire. "Now, Monica, I'm going to help you relax the rest of your body. In a moment I'm going to lift your hand. I want you to let me do all the work while you relax and go deeper. When I drop your hand back into your lap, you'll feel a wave of deeper relaxation flow through your whole body and you'll go twice as deep." Lightly, gently, I took hold of her right wrist and lifted her arm. It was dead weight. I only lifted it a few inches, then dropped it down onto her lap, saying, "Twice as deep," as it landed. Monica's shoulders drooped more and her head lowered almost to her chest on the first drop. After the second arm drop her left arm fell out of her lap and hung loosely at her side. The third sent her slowly teetering forward. I caught her by the shoulders and gently set her back in the chair. "Always able to remain safely seated," I told her, "always comfortable, always going deeper with each breath."

Claire was staring open-mouthed at her friend, one hand playing idly with the small jeweled pendant she wore. I had to wave a little to get her attention before indicating that *Step 5* was about to begin.

"And now that we've relaxed your body, Monica," I continued, "we're going to relax your mind even more deeply. In a few moments, I'm going to tell you to start counting backwards from 100. As you count, I want you to imagine yourself writing the number on a chalkboard and say the number out loud to me. Then, as you erase the number, I want you to say, 'Deeper asleep.' Then you'll write the next number, saying it out loud, and saying 'Deeper asleep' as you erase it. Each time you erase a number, your mind will go deeper and deeper into relaxation. Soon the numbers will relax completely out of your mind, and you'll be able to just let them go. Begin counting now."

Monica's lips moved slowly. "One hundred," she mumbled. "Deeper asleep..."

"Deeper and deeper," I said, talking over her. "Mind going blank, relaxing more and more with each number."

"Ninety nine ... deeper asleep ..."

"The numbers fading, becoming harder to remember, fading away from your mind. ..."

"Ninety ... eight ..."

"Disappearing, mind blank ..."

"Deeper ... asleep ..."

"Going deeper and deeper as the numbers relax all the way out of your mind, and *sleep*."

Her lips stopped moving. I looked over at Claire, who was staring intently at her friend's still form.

"And that," I said softly, "is the classic Dave Elman induction."

"Wow," Claire replied, echoing my quiet tone. "I've never seen Monica that zoned out. Even when she's asleep, she's not that out of it."

"She's not out of it," I corrected. "Monica can hear and understand everything we say. She's just too relaxed to pay a lot of attention to it unless she needs to. And right now, all Monica needs to do is relax and listen to my voice, drifting and floating, going deeper with each breath." That was for Monica's benefit, of course. "Right now, Monica, I'm going to talk to Claire for a few minutes. You can just ignore everything you hear until I tap you on the knee like this. When I tap you on the knee, you'll begin paying attention to my voice again."

Then I winked at Claire. "Any questions?"

She grinned back at me. "Can we have some fun with her?"

"In what way?"

Claire pointed to a busboy, who was busy wiping down the buffet table. "How about having her go over

to that busboy and French kiss him?"

It was tempting, no doubt about it. To the user, Claire's idea was the perfect payback for walking out on my show in the middle of the best part. But the teacher took control. "No," I told her. "For one thing, she probably wouldn't do it. For another, this is a serious lesson, not a stage show. And for a third, how would it be if Monica gave a suggestion like that to you?"

Claire thought about it, looking at the busboy and licking her lips. "It would be incredibly hot," she answered. "Like last night, only more so."

The user filed that away for future reference. "But would Monica see it that way?"

My student shook her head. "No. Monica's too straitlaced."

"Exactly. So all that would really do is ensure she never accepts another suggestion from you."

Claire shrugged and gave a mock bow. "You are right, Wise One," she intoned, hands folded.

I tapped Monica's knee. "Soon, Monica, I'm going to count up to five. As I count up to five, you will find yourself coming out of hypnosis and back to your full waking state. You will remember clearly everything that happened while you were being hypnotized; so clearly, in fact, that you can easily perform the Dave Elman induction yourself, remembering all of the steps and the words that I used with them. This will enable you to hypnotize someone else as easily as I hypnotized you." I did a slow five count, giving Monica plenty of time to climb up from the depths she'd reached. At five, her eyes opened and she shook her head slowly, struggling to get reoriented. "How do you feel?" I asked.

She took a moment or two to answer. "Vaguely wonky still. As if I'd been jarred out of sleep in the middle of the night."

"It felt good, though, didn't it?"

"Yes," she agreed, still staring a bit into the distance. "Very good. Seductive, even."

"Excellent," I said. "Now let's see how well you've learned. I want you to use the Dave Elman method to hypnotize Claire."

Claire's eyes opened wide. "Just like that?"

"Sure," I replied. "Why not?"

"It's okay," Monica assured her. "I'm not going to try to make you kiss the busboy."

Claire's face took on a hurt look. "You were supposed to be ignoring that!"

"I was," Monica answered, a relaxed glow washing over her face. "It was strange, hearing and remembering but ignoring."

"And now," I inserted, bringing Monica back to the present, "you're ready to perform your first induction."

"Yes." Turning to Claire, she scooted her chair closer. "Are you ready to be hypnotized now?"

Claire looked from Monica to me, then back again. Her lips twisted into a tiny smile. "Sure. Do me."

Monica repeated the induction almost perfectly. I crept silently around to Claire's left, pointing out the signs of deepening trance to Monica as she followed the formula. By the end of the induction, Claire looked like a rag doll held in position by a wire run through the back of the seat.

Monica looked a question at me. "Give her the same suggestions I gave you," I told her as quietly as possible, "and bring her out with a five count."

She parroted my suggestions perfectly, giving Claire full memory of the trance and of how the method was used on her. Claire came up more quickly, opening her eyes at five and beaming at both of us. "It's

my turn now, right?"

Her eyes were sparkling as she waited for my answer. "Of course," I said. Claire started to approach me, grinning. "No," I corrected. "You'll be hypnotizing Monica."

Claire's lips closed in a micro-pout, then she scooted her seat over nearer to Monica. "This hardly seems fair, since you were just done a few minutes ago," she said to her friend, "but are you ready to be hypnotized again?"

Monica smiled. "He can't coach you if he's in a trance," she pointed out. "And yes, I'm ready."

Claire was able to point out the signs to me this time, having seen them herself already. The induction went quickly and sent Monica into a very impressive depth of trance. As I watched, free to observe without having to concentrate on progressing, I found myself growing hard at the sight of Monica's slumping form. *Such fun we could have*, I thought to myself.

I let Claire finish the induction. She turned to me then and asked, "Now what?"

I smiled. "Sleep, Claire."

A look of total surprise flashed onto her face, only to be immediately replaced as she relaxed into hypnosis. "Sleep," I repeated. "Deeper and deeper with each breath, with each beat of your heart." I took her down all the way. "Now, Claire, I want you to tell Monica that she will listen to my voice and obey my suggestions."

Claire's mouth opened. "Monica," she intoned, "I want you to listen to Jack's voice now and obey his suggestions."

"Monica and Claire," I said, "your first lesson is almost over. You have both learned to use the Dave Elman induction to place each other into a deep state of hypnosis. It is now time to receive your homework assignment. Between now and dinner time tonight, I want you to practice hypnotizing each other using the Dave Elman method. I want each of you to hypnotize the other at least three times in three different locations. And as you practice, I know that no matter how tempting it may seem, you will only give each other suggestions that will deepen trance or end it - you will learn about other suggestions later, after you've mastered inductions."

I then reached over and touched Claire's knee. "This suggestion is for Claire and Claire only: after you awaken from hypnosis, you will feel an overwhelming need to go over to the busboy and give him a long, passionate french kiss. That need will continue to grow, becoming the most important thought in your mind, until you do it. Once you've kissed the busboy you'll thank him and the need to kiss him will be completely gone and the suggestion ended. Your conscious mind will not recall this suggestion until after you've kissed the busboy and thanked him."

I gave them a nice, slow five count and brought them out of it. Monica stretched and yawned, her face looking beautifully relaxed and content. Claire stood up and stretched, her eyes scanning the buffet table.

"Looking for something?" I asked innocently.

"No," she said, totally unconvincingly. "Is that the end of the lesson?"

"Yes," I confirmed. "You have the rest of the day to do your homework. Let's meet back here at, say, seven?"

Monica nodded, grinning at me with our secret knowledge. Claire's head just bobbed slightly, her eyes still scanning the buffet. Finally the busboy appeared, broom and dustpan in hand.

"That's fine," Claire said. "Excuse me a second." She walked briskly around the table and over to the working busboy.

He saw her coming, stopped sweeping, and started to speak. I couldn't hear the words, but it had the look of "May I help you?" or something similar. The look on his face when Claire wrapped her arms around him and pressed her body into his was priceless. Then she kissed him. Their lips stayed locked for a good 30 seconds. The busboy went from total surprise to getting into the spirit of it, letting his hands run down her sides and cupping her bottom.

She let him go and took a step back. I could see her jaw move in thanks, and then the lift in her shoulders as she gasped with the memory returning. Her entire face and neck were flushed crimson when she turned back to us and then fled in the direction of the restroom.

"That was evil," Monica scolded me.

"I know." Our eyes locked, and I thought I detected half a smile on her lips.

I spent my day in unashamed, blissful idleness: surfing the 'net from my room, playing a little blackjack in the casino, surveying the lovely people idling on the beach. I deliberately avoided my charges, although I did spy them practicing on each through the little telescope on my deck. Claire sported a tantalizingly thin leopard print one-piece. It looked like a tan-through; if not for the busy print, it probably would have been see through as well. Monica in a simple black racing suit was also a treat for the eyes. The lady had class.

I went down a little early for dinner, flashed my VIP key, and got a premier table right away. While I waited for my students, I indulged in a little idle people watching.

A pair of women, both brunettes, at a distant table caught my eye. One was thin and spare, taking little nibbles from a salad; the other had broad shoulders and hips, and a mouth that moved constantly while chewing generous hunks of steak. Friends or lovers? I took in their body language: legs crossed toward each other, making a subtle circle of inclusion; hands stretched across the table, almost but not quite touching; long, unbroken stretches of direct eye contact. Definitely lovers, I decided.

Another table held a foursome. Two of them I quickly dubbed Barbie and Ken because of their impossibly good looks and country club clothes. Their companions were real people: a mousy-haired girl with big breasts and a heavysset, balding guy. She wore a peasant blouse and skirt, he a plain polo and jeans. What drew my attention, though, were their faces. They smiled and nodded a lot as Barbie and Ken dominated the conversation, but their eyes kept searching each other out. Something wasn't right there.

My reflections were interrupted by the arrival of my students, looking relaxed and at ease. "You two look well rested," I remarked as I rose to greet them.

Claire smirked. "Gee, I wonder why."

We were all hungry, so I waited until dinner had been ordered, received, and mostly eaten before starting the discussion. "So?" I began, "How did your assignment go?"

"Well," Monica answered. "We practiced once each in our room, then on the beach, then in the sauna after working out a little."

"In the sauna was amazing," Claire jumped in. "I dropped like a stone almost from the word go. Monica, too."

"It was very easy to get comfortable wearing nothing but a big, soft towel," Monica agreed. "After that we went back to our room and tried it a few more times. I think it's safe to say we have the Dave Elman induction down pat."

An impulse hit me, and I went with it. "Do you think so?"

Monica nodded, her eyes opening wider.

"All right, then," I challenged. "Show me."

Looking mildly confused, Monica shrugged her shoulders and turned to Claire. "Are you ready to be hypnotized, Claire?"

"Not Claire," I said. "Me."

Monica's eyes darted over to me. I could see the doubts running behind them, then getting pushed

abruptly aside. "Very well," she conceded, scooting her chair closer to mine. "Are you ready to go into hypnosis now, Jack?" She smiled awkwardly at what was becoming a trite ritual.

"Ready," I assured her, projecting confidence.

"Okay," she said. "I want you to start by closing your eyes, Jack. Just let them close down, and I'd like you to relax the muscles around your eyes. Let them relax, completely relax, until they simply will not open no matter how hard you try. ..."

She had a smooth voice and a well-practiced manner. Before long I was drifting, following her velvet voice, feeling the waves of relaxation as she lifted and dropped my hand. I counted the numbers down and got maybe as far as 96 before they disappeared completely. Then Monica counted up to five and I was awake again.

My eyes opened and I saw her looking at me with ill-concealed anxiety. "That was very good," I told her, smiling. She sighed and smiled back.

Claire practically jumped out of her seat. "My turn!"

Claire's technique wasn't quite as good as Monica's -- she spoke a little too quickly, a little too urgently -- but having just been in hypnosis, it was easy for me to recall the state and go back. Go back I did, way down, losing the numbers almost immediately. I drifted, with no sense of time or place, until Claire counted me back up.

Monica's face looked tense and she'd moved back away from me when I opened my eyes again. I started to process that, to recall the last few minutes, but I was interrupted by Claire. "How do you feel? How did I do?" She was squirming in her seat, eyes bright and mouth open, like an overexcited puppy.

"Fine, and fine," I said. "You need to slow down a little on your delivery. Give the person time to assimilate what you're saying and react to it. It helps sometimes if you drift into trance a little yourself as you do the induction. But you did well."

It was time for the evening's entertainment to begin. The familiar voice of Stu Redman came over the sound system to introduce Brain Drain, an improvisational comedy group. Monica excused herself, leaving Claire and me to enjoy the show.

Being a Chicagoan I've seen a lot of very good improv acts, and Brain Drain would be completely at home on stage with any of them. Four men and four women, they had everything that good improv needs: energy, balance, freshness, irreverence. The show was wonderful. Claire and I were still chuckling at parts of it as we made our way to the elevators. She pulled me along gently and I followed, quietly enjoying the way her muscles moved in her capris and halter.

About six other people got into the same elevator. I pushed the button for 12 and watched Claire. She stood by as people pressed buttons for 3, 7, 5, and 2 (*Take the damned stairs!* I grumbled silently). Her finger hovered over the 9 button for a moment. I felt a pang of disappointment when she pressed it.

In a few moments the elevator was empty except for the two of us. The counter reached 9 and the doors opened with a bong.

"I had a great time," Claire said, standing in the doorway. "Thank you." She held her arms out, inviting a hug.

I stepped forward to meet her. Her arms went around me, and her face turned up to mine for a kiss. It was a fairly chaste kiss -- a brief meeting of closed lips. But the effect on me was electrical. My pulse quickened, my cock sprang forward into full erection, and I found myself in the grip of the strongest sexual desire I'd ever felt. My hands gripped Claire tightly and pulled her back into the elevator. My mouth opened and I thrust my tongue between her lips to find hers.

She backed away from me. I pursued her, pinning her into the corner by the control panel, and dropped

to my knees. She gasped and tried to back away, but there was nowhere for her to go. "Hold on, Jack!" she protested. "Not here! Somebody might walk in on us."

I ignored her - the only thing I cared about was how quickly I could get her pants off. I reached around her, found the STOP switch, and flipped it. The floor beneath us shuddered as the elevator came to an abrupt halt. My hands grabbed the waistband of her Capris and yanked them down, taking a pair of black G-string panties with them.

Her voice said, "Wait," but her body was already responding to me. The scent of her juices filled my nose and drew me in, shutting off almost all conscious thought. I buried my face in her center, licking the moisture off every surface, probing for the places that I knew would bring a hitch to her breath.

Claire moaned, "Oh, my god," and I felt her knees start to weaken. Standing quickly, I spun her around and bent her over, letting her grab the bar on the other side of the elevator car. With one hand I undid my belt and zipper and let my pants fall to the floor; with the other I reached around Claire, pushed up the halter, and kneaded a breast, feeling the plump nipple poking out at me. My boxers dropped onto the pile around my ankles, freeing my sword to find its sheath.

I plunged myself into Claire from behind, keeping her bent over, and pulled myself in as deeply as I could. Claire squealed and pushed back against me, squeezing my cock with her muscles as it worked in and out. Her breathing grew ragged. "That's it," she gasped. "Just ... a ... little ... bit ... uuunnnhhhh!!"

I couldn't hold back any more. My body lurched forward and my cock convulsed as I joined her in orgasm. We stood there, jammed together with Claire's face pressed against the side wall, until the climax loosed its grip and my knees buckled. I dropped to the floor and rested my head on Claire's exposed bottom, holding her legs loosely with my weary arms. And in the aftermath, the memory of Claire's voice came flooding back into my conscious mind: *The next time I kiss you, Jack, you'll feel an overwhelming, immediate urge to pull my pants down and have sex with me. You won't care about anything else until that need is satisfied. You won't remember this suggestion until after we've finished having sex, then it will come back to you and you will remember everything.*

I looked up to see Claire staring at me from above. "Jesus Christ, Jack," she panted.

"Well, what did you expect?" I could feel a tinge of anger rising through the post-coital high.

She blinked twice. "I expected that you'd get incredibly horny and that once we got to your room we'd have amazing sex."

"Then that's what you should have suggested."

"I'm sorry, Jack," she began, hitching up her pants.

I wasn't letting her off that easily. "You should be," I insisted. "That was a stupid, dangerous, irresponsible suggestion. We could both be in a lot of trouble tomorrow over this."

"Huh? Why? Nobody saw us."

Silently, I pointed to the plastic bubble in the elevator ceiling. Our faces reflected back at us, elongated by the shape of the bubble.

Claire's jaw fell and her face turned six shades of red. "Oh, shit!" Then she burst into a fit of giggling, hiding her face from the camera we assumed was inside the bubble.

I stepped over to the control panel, flipped the switch from STOP back to RUN, and shook my head ruefully, imagining the security guard's face during our performance. As the doors opened on the twelfth floor, Claire kissed me goodnight again. I punched the ninth button for her and let the doors close between us.

The ringing of the telephone nagged me out of a sound sleep the next morning. At first I groped the empty space to the right of the bed, where my nightstand is at home; then I noticed the sound coming from the other direction, and found the offending device. "Hello?"

"Good morning."

It took me a moment to place the voice. "Monica?"

There was a tiny pause. "I woke you, didn't I? I'm sorry."

The cobwebs were slowly clearing. "It's okay," I told her. "What's up?"

"I wanted to see if you were all right," she said tentatively. "No ill effects or anything."

"From what?"

There was a long silence. I winced as my higher brain functions began working again and I realized what was going on. "Forget I asked that," I said. "I wasn't entirely awake yet. Yes, I'm fine. No ill effects for either of us, as far as I know." *Except maybe one*, I thought, remembering the security camera bubble.

"That's good," Monica replied, sounding a little relieved. "We don't have a breakfast date set, do we?"

I looked at the clock: 8:50. "Not yet. I could meet you two down there at 9:30 if you like. Is that too early?"

"No, that's fine. We'll see you there. And Jack?"

"Yes?"

"I'm glad you're all right."

My girls were dressed down this time in shorts, tee shirts and sneakers. "Opting for comfort over fashion?" I queried, smiling.

They both shrugged. "It seemed like a good idea at the time," Monica volunteered.

We helped ourselves to the buffet again. Claire was a little hesitant at first, but after we'd filled our plates with no sign of the busboy from the previous morning she seemed to relax. We kept the conversation light and casual while we ate; it wasn't until our empty plates were neatly stacked beside us and our coffee cups mostly drained that we got down to business.

"Time for Lesson Two," I announced. Both women sat up in their chairs and focused on me. "I was going to teach you a few more inductions and have you practice them." Fixing my eyes on Claire, I continued. "However, given recent events, I think it more important that we have a serious discussion about formulating and using suggestions."

Claire had the good grace to blush a little bit.

"For your purposes, there are really two kinds of suggestions you need to be concerned with: hypnotic suggestions and post hypnotic suggestions.

"Hypnotic suggestions are things you say to someone while they are in hypnosis that you want them to act on while in hypnosis." I focused for a moment on Monica. "For example, I might say to you that *your right arm feels very light and tingly*, so light that it begins to lift off the arm of your chair." Monica's right arm lifted slightly off the chair, and her hand flexed. Her attention, however, stayed on me. Looking to Claire, I continued. "Or I might wonder if you've noticed yes how *your eyes are becoming heavy and tired* as I continue to speak." She blinked heavily, also without seeming to realize it. "In fact, if you *focus on my voice*, you'll find it very easy to *relax into hypnosis* without even realizing that you're doing it. I don't need to tell you to *close your eyes and sleep now* because you

already know that you can *go deeper and deeper* all by yourself, all the while taking in everything I say to you. You may even find that as you *take a deep breath* and *send a wave of relaxation from your head to your toes*, you can easily *remember all that I say to you* even as *your mind slips deeper and deeper into hypnosis*."

I paused to admire my work: two entranced ladies, hanging on my every word. Oh, the possibilities...

But no. Not yet, anyway. "Erickson was famous for his use of indirect suggestions with his clients. An indirect suggestion is a simple command embedded in an innocent-sounding sentence. The conscious mind sees the sentence as an abstract statement, but the subconscious mind picks up on the embedded command and acts on it. I used a number of indirect suggestions a few moments ago to place you into hypnosis. With your conscious mind busy listening to the informational content of what I said, the embedded suggestions went directly to your subconscious; you may not have even realized you were going into hypnosis until it had already happened. And as you listen to me, going *deeper into hypnosis with every breath you take and every word I speak*, you'll realize that indirect suggestions are a powerful way to communicate with the subconscious, whether the person is already in hypnosis or not, which is why I use indirect suggestions a great deal in doing therapy. In entertainment, however, I tend to use direct hypnotic suggestions.

"Direct hypnotic suggestions are often used to deepen the hypnotic state, like this one: each time I touch your hand like this..." I reached over and gently pressed down on Monica's hand, then Claire's.

"... you will go deeper into hypnosis." I pressed their hands again and watched them drop deeper.

"Direct hypnotic suggestions can be very simple, as with the example I just gave you, or very complex as with the suggestions I use in my show.

"Post hypnotic suggestions are instructions given to someone while in hypnosis that are intended to take effect when the person is awake, sometimes much later. For example, any time I give Claire the command, 'Sleep, Claire' she goes back into deep hypnosis for me.

"There are some basic rules to keep in mind when formulating good suggestions. The first rule is, keep it positive. The subconscious is like a child; it tends to disregard negative words, so a suggestion like, 'You don't want to smoke' is likely to be accepted as 'You want to smoke.' A better suggestion might be, 'Every day you find the desire to smoke reducing, becoming less and less a part of your life.' In my show, I tell people that they are stuck to their seats instead of telling them that they can't get out of their seats in order to keep the suggestion positive.

"The next rule is, be specific. The subconscious is very literal, and needs to be told exactly what you want it to do or believe in order to get the results you are looking for. The subconscious disregards anything it doesn't understand, and any suggestion that is vague enough to be interpreted in multiple ways will probably be interpreted in a way other than you intended. In college, I once suggested to a girl that she would come every time her boyfriend touched her pussy. A few days later, the boyfriend told me that my suggestion hadn't done anything for their sex life, but that every time he petted her cat his girlfriend would stop whatever she was doing and stand next to him. Her subconscious interpreted slang differently than I intended her to.

"Being specific also means remembering the details. If I were to give you a suggestion to get up and walk over to the buffet table, you might find yourself stumbling around trying to find the buffet table with your eyes still closed. To make that suggestion safe and effective, I'd have to say that you will open your eyes, stand up, and walk to the buffet table. And to be sure you didn't start before I wanted you to, I'd tell you to do it on the count of three. I count to three a lot with people because it leaves no room for doubt as to when I want them to do something. And as important as knowing when a suggestion should start is knowing when it should stop. If I tell you that whenever I snap my fingers you will become thirsty, and leave it at that, then you might stay thirsty for hours or days no matter how much you drank. But if I say that you will remain thirsty until I snap my fingers again, or until you take

3 sips of water, then there is a definite ending to the suggestion.

"The most important thing to remember is that no matter how deep in hypnosis a person may be, she will never accept a suggestion that violates her personal moral code. If I were to tell one of you to go and French kiss the busboy, and you had a strong objection to doing so, you would come out of hypnosis immediately and the suggestion would have no affect on you at all. When I used that suggestion with Claire yesterday, I knew she would obey it because she'd told us herself that she found the idea exciting.

"It may seem to you that during my show I had people doing things they would never do normally, but it's really a matter of context. What people find morally acceptable depends on the circumstances. For example, an average woman might strongly object to being asked to enter a room, strip naked, and allow a man she's never met before to touch her breasts and genitals; however, if that room is a doctor's office and the man is a doctor conducting a physical examination, then the suggestion becomes acceptable to most people. Similarly, people who know they are part of an adult-oriented hypnosis show at a resort known for encouraging hedonistic behavior might find themselves willing to do a number of things that they wouldn't do under other circumstances."

Enough lecturing; it was time for a practical exercise. "In a few moments, I'm going to count to three. When I reach three you will lift your heads, open your eyes, and look at me, still remaining deeply hypnotized. You'll be able to look at me and follow my suggestions without disturbing your hypnotic state. One, two, three."

Both heads lifted and looked at me. To a casual onlooker, they would seem to be merely paying close attention to me. From my shirt pocket I produced two hotel pens and six blank index cards, the latter taken from the spare section at the back of my file box. "I am now placing in front of you a pen and an index card," I told them. "When I count to three, I want you to pick up the pen and write down on the index card three post hypnotic suggestions that you are certain you would follow if I gave them to you. When you finish writing, you will put the pens down and wait for your next instructions. One, two, three."

I watched as they picked up the pens and wrote, slowly and deliberately, on the cards. When they had both put their pens down, I pulled the cards over to me and labeled them, then tucked them in my shirt pocket. "Very good. Now I'm putting another blank index card in front of you. At the count of three, I want you to pick up the pen and write on the card three suggestions that you are not sure whether you would accept or not. When you are done writing, put the pen down and wait."

Again I gave them a three count and watched while they wrote. It took a little longer this time, but soon I had both women sitting still and waiting for me. I labeled and pocketed the second set of cards and handed out a third. "Now, at the count of three, I want you to pick up the pen and write three suggestions that you are certain you would never follow, no matter what the circumstances. When you finish writing I want you to put the pen down, close your eyes, and allow yourself to drift deeper, ignoring everything you hear until I touch you on the shoulder."

At the final three count they picked up the pens and wrote, taking no time to consider the words. When both girls had their eyes closed, I added the last cards to my collection. I'd look at them later; people were starting to wander into the dining room looking for lunch. Walking around the table, I touched Claire on the shoulder and spoke quietly into her ear. "When I let go of your shoulder, I want you to count to five and bring yourself out of hypnosis, completely awake, remembering everything that happened except what you wrote on the index cards. Whenever you try to remember what you wrote on those cards, all you will remember is that you should not remember. Once you are awake, you will get up and leave us. You can go anywhere you like except my room. After we have dinner this evening you will come back to my room with me for a private lesson using the index cards."

I let go of Claire's shoulder and watched as she brought herself out of trance. Her eyes fluttered open

and found me. She let out a heavy sigh and stood up slowly. "That's it for now?"

"That's it."

She glanced briefly at the still figure of Monica. "I guess I'll see you at dinner, then. Tell Monica I'll wait for her upstairs." She gave me a brief kiss and headed on her way.

After watching her go, I placed a hand on Monica's shoulder. "From now on, Monica, whenever I say to you, 'Sleep, Monica' you will immediately and easily go back into hypnosis, just as you are right now, without even realizing you are doing so. When I let go of your shoulder, I want you to count to five and bring yourself out of hypnosis, completely awake, remembering everything that happened except what you wrote on the index cards. Whenever you try to remember what you wrote on those cards, all you will remember is that you should not remember. Once you are awake, you will get up and go back to your room, where Claire is waiting for you. At exactly four o'clock this afternoon you will come to my room, room 1201, for a private lesson using the index cards."

By the time I returned to my seat, her eyes were open and watching me. "There are so many things I want to ask you right now," she said, "but I feel as though an invisible hand is pulling me out of the chair." She stood up and smiled a little nervously. "Room 1201, four o'clock."

I smiled back, projecting reassurance. "See you then."

As Monica walked away, I found myself studying the sway of her hips and quite enjoying it.

I spent the middle of the day strolling around the grounds, enjoying the scenery and letting my mind wander. By 3:30 I was back in my room. I took a cold bottle of apple juice from the mini fridge and sat down at the desk. Taking the index cards from my shirt pocket, I laid Monica's out in front of me in a column in the order in which she'd filled them out.

Forget my name.

See, hear, or smell something that isn't really there.

Become sexually aroused.

Those were the things her subconscious felt she would definitely do. My eyebrows rose at the list on the second card:

Disrobe in private.

Get drunk.

Act out a sexual fantasy.

The user liked the possibilities there, of course. The "absolutely never" list read like a challenge:

Disrobe in public or on stage.

Act like an animal.

Masturbate in view of someone else.

I rearranged the living room a little bit, moving the coffee table away from the couch and one of the two easy chairs closer to it, and armed myself with a red pen. Then I settled into one of the chairs and

pictured my guidance counselor lying on the couch, relaxed and deeply hypnotized, her breathing growing faster and deeper as her hands played over her body, aroused from within by my words ...

A soft knock on the door brought me back to reality with a start. "One second," I said, willing my raging hard-on to subside quickly. It wasn't time yet, but I assumed it was Monica at the door.

Wrong. I opened it to find a tall, well-sculpted man in a security guard's uniform standing before me. "Mr. Torrance?"

"Yes," I replied cautiously.

That was when I noticed the manila envelope tucked under his right arm. He offered the envelope to me. "Sgt. Parks, sir. I was instructed to give this to you by Mr. Santiago, the night manager. He said to inform you that there are no other copies."

Even as he was adding the last sentence, I knew what it had to be. I thanked the sergeant and let the door close as I opened the envelope. Inside, as expected, was a T180 VHS video tape. The label, made on one of those thermal labeling machines, read "ELEV B2, 11-7." There was also a business card for Galeno Santiago, Assistant Manager, Hospitality.

My watch said it was only 3:47, so I had to take a quick peek. I flipped on the TV and opened the cabinet below it. The tape slid easily into the VCR. I tapped a few buttons on the remote, and was rewarded with a sharp black-and-white picture of the inside of an elevator, taken from a high vantage point near the back of the car. Bright white letters in the lower right corner indicated the date and time: the night before, at 11:02pm and counting. Another set of indicators in the lower left showed the floor and direction. My thumb pressed the fast forward button as I reconstructed the evening in my mind: we'd met for dinner at seven, and had a slow and leisurely meal; then came the after-dinner wrap-up and the final set of inductions; Brain Drain had taken the stage at about 9:00 and done two sets with an intermission between them. I figured Claire and I had hit the elevator at around 11:30, maybe 11:40.

I was close -- the tape counter read 11:47:18 when I spotted us entering the picture. I goosed it forward a little more and watched the others shuffle in and out of the elevator in double-time until we were left alone, dropping back to normal play just in time to see the kiss that had started it all. For a security camera, the quality was impressive. The range of emotions on Claire's face -- mischievousness, then surprise, then worry, then raw arousal -- came through clearly. In fact, most of our anatomy was clearly visible. *Nothing like starring in your own home-made porno flick*, I reflected wryly.

Another knock came from the door. It was time for Monica's visit. I powered off the equipment and closed the cabinet before letting her in. She was still dressed in the white running shorts and short tee that she'd worn at breakfast.

"Very impressive," she said, surveying my suite with wide-open eyes. "I think your living room is larger than our whole space."

"Rank has its privileges, I suppose." I shrugged and gave her my most self-deprecating smile.

She stood awkwardly in the middle of the room, hands folded in front of her. "I'm a little nervous," she confessed.

"I can see that," I said, trying to make my voice as reassuring as possible. "Any idea why?"

Her lips pursed and her eyes looked into the distance for a moment. "A feeling of uncertainty, I suppose. Wondering what's going to happen up here without my chaperone."

I tried disarming it with a joke. "Well, I'm not going to bonk you on the head, tie you up, and do unspeakable things to you."

I didn't quite get the reaction I was expecting. She looked sharply at me, her eyes meeting mine. "But you wouldn't have to, would you? You can just say two words and here I'd be, putty in your hands, just

like those people on stage."

Ah, so that was it. "You don't really believe that, do you? I thought I'd made it clear this morning that everyone has limits, and that no suggestion is strong enough to make anyone break those limits. Even the reinduction trigger is subject to that rule, Monica -- if you don't trust me, it won't work."

She was nodding, but not necessarily agreeing. "Yes, that's what you told us. That also agrees with everything else I've heard or read about hypnotism, barring some very strange fiction that Claire likes to read online. But it also flies in the face of what I saw the other night, Jack. Not to mention Claire throwing herself at that bus boy yesterday. Which am I supposed to believe?"

"I explained that to you already. Claire wasn't averse to following the suggestion -- she even said herself that would be hot."

"Yes, I know. And, to be fair, Claire does seem to be looking to walk on the wild side on this trip; she told me as much before we'd even left home. But am I supposed to believe that every woman on your stage that night was a closet exhibitionist who secretly yearned to expose herself to a room full of people? Even here, doesn't that seem just a little too easy an explanation, Jack?"

"There was nothing easy about it." *Whoa, Jack*, I cautioned myself, *don't get defensive*. I blinked twice and started over. "Look, Monica," I said, "I could stand here and tell you about how my opening monologue was designed to encourage people to come up who wouldn't mind flashing a little skin. I could give you a long lecture about how a lot of people are just looking for a chance to do wild things without anyone being able to judge them for it, because they 'just couldn't help it.' I could explain the sequence of steps I used to make sure those people would be okay with what I asked them to do before I ever asked them to do it. But in the end, it's not an intellectual thing. It's a gut thing. Instead of standing here debating whether a hypnotized person has free will or not, why don't you let me prove it to you right now? Will you trust me to do that?"

Monica was looking off into the distance. "I do trust you," she finally said. "I'm just not sure I trust myself."

I stepped forward and took her hands in mine. "Then let me show you that you can."

She looked straight into my eyes and nodded.

"Sleep, Monica."

I caught her in my arms as she crumpled. With a skill born of practice, I scooped her up in my arms and laid her out on the couch, giving her deepening suggestions all the while. And in the back of my head, I was calculating risks.

Years before, I'd had a similar conversation with my old mentor. We'd had a lot of spirited discussions - he was a firm believer in learning through discovery rather than through lecture - and I was certain that, common teachings aside, a deeply hypnotized subject could be talked into anything given the chance. So my old professor proved his point with a practical demonstration, and I learned the lesson in dramatic and lasting fashion. Now I'd use the same method to pass on the lesson to Monica.

"Now, Monica," I said softly, "you are very deeply hypnotized. You may feel as if anything I say, you must accept and obey. In a few moments, I am going to count to three. On the count of three you will open your eyes, stand up, and walk out to my patio. When you reach the patio you will take off all of your clothing and drop it over the railing." Monica began to twitch, her body suddenly looking uncomfortable. "Then you will take the elevator to the lobby level and walk into the dining room to the stage." She fidgeted more, and her head started to move back and forth. "Once on stage, you will sit down and masturbate in front of everyone there."

Monica's eyes popped open. "I will not!" she insisted, rising to a sitting position.

I smiled and counted to three. Monica sat there and stared at me, fuming.

"Tell me something," I said. "Do you feel the slightest urge to go stand on my patio and strip?"

"No," she answered emphatically.

"Or to go down to the dining room and masturbate?"

"Absolutely not."

"And you're not hypnotized anymore either, are you?"

That stopped her cold. "No," she replied cautiously, "I don't think I am."

"Exactly," I responded. "So, who was really in control?"

Monica sighed and her eyes narrowed. "I was," she conceded. "And wipe that smirk off your face, Jack. What would you have done if I'd started walking toward the patio?"

I did my best to look innocent and shocked. "Stop you, of course."

"Hmmm." She studied my face. "Before or after I'd taken my clothes off?"

Was that a tiny gleam in her eye? "I'll take the fifth on that," I joked, "on the grounds that it's a moot point because I knew you'd never do it."

"And what made you so sure of that?"

"These," I answered, holding her index cards in the air. "Do you remember these?"

"No," she said, looking at the cards in my hand. "In fact, I distinctly remember that you told me not to remember what's on those."

I nodded. "It's something my old professor did with me. Each card has three things written on it, three hypnotic suggestions. This card has three things your subconscious is positive you would do if asked; this one has three things your subconscious isn't sure whether you would do or not; and the last one has three things your subconscious is positive you would never do. Would you like to see them?"

I held out the cards to her eager hand, and watched as she read them. As Monica read her writing, a bright pink flush formed on her face and worked its way down her neck. "My subconscious," she remarked after reading all three cards, "is a blabbermouth."

"That's one of its more appealing qualities. I'm guessing that your mind chose to interpret the request in the context of things I might ask of you in a show. But you can see that I took two of the things on your 'never' list and told you to do them, and it immediately broke the trance. You felt no desire whatsoever to carry out the instructions."

"Which proves what you were saying all along," she finished for me. "There are limits to what hypnotic suggestions can do."

"Exactly," I agreed. "Ready to finish the lesson?"

She shifted a little, getting more comfortably seated on the couch, and then nodded.

"Sleep, Monica." I watched in satisfaction as she dropped on cue, slumping down into the cushions on the couch. I never get tired of seeing it.

"And now, Monica," I told her, "I'm going to give you more suggestions to follow. The suggestions I give you will be completely acceptable to your subconscious mind; if you feel that you can't follow a suggestion, you can simply say 'No' to me and I'll adjust the suggestion until you are comfortable with it."

I watched her body closely for physical signs of agreement. Her head moved up and down

infinitesimally. "That's good. Before we demonstrate a suggestion from that second card, we'll start with something you already know you can do." I approached Monica and sat down on the couch next to her. "I'm going to lift your arm now. Let me do all the work. And as you feel me lifting your arm, I'm sure it will feel perfectly natural to you that your arm becomes stiff and rigid, as if there were a steel bar supporting it from underneath. Stiff and rigid, pointing straight out from your body. And now that your arm is in position, stiff and straight, I know that you can let it slowly drop back down beside you no faster than your mind can recall a time in the past when you've been extremely sexually aroused, perhaps even the most aroused you've ever been. And when you have that moment in mind when you were the most sexually aroused you've ever been, you'll find that your arm becomes loose and limp and relaxed again, coming comfortably to rest next to you."

I watched while Monica's arm slowly lowered itself, her mind searching its memory for the right moment. Then, all of a sudden, it relaxed and dropped the rest of the way. I could see the color rising in Monica's cheeks again and I knew she was thinking of her moment. "That's right. And you may even notice that recalling that time of arousal causes you to become aroused again, even now. And it's okay to let yourself become increasingly aroused, to feel that lust and desire overcome you, and to let that feeling become magnified, become twice as strong, each time I say your name. And the more times I say your name, the more aroused you become, until it's perfectly natural, perfectly normal, for you to begin wanting to touch yourself in the places that are most pleasurable to you. You may even find that it's more comfortable for you if you take your shirt and shorts off so that you can more easily reach those places that you long to touch. And once you've done that, once you've taken off your shirt and shorts and begun to touch yourself in those most pleasurable places, it's okay to allow yourself to experience a very intense, very powerful orgasm. Only when you've had that intense, powerful orgasm will you return to whatever state of arousal may be normal for you under the circumstances.

"And now, on the count of three, I want you to open your eyes and return to your normal waking state. Your subconscious knows what it's been told to do, and will take care of that naturally and automatically, letting your conscious mind remember only that which it needs to remember for you to enjoy the experience to its fullest."

I counted her up slowly and watched her face as she came out. The flush of arousal remained, coloring her cheeks and down her neck. To help her subconscious suppress the memories she didn't need, I used a simple misdirection. "How many students did you say you work with at school, Monica?"

Her mind ran to fetch the information, even as her body reacted to the sound of her name by quickening its breathing and deepening its color. "About 350."

I nodded. "Does it seem a little too warm in here, Monica? You look a bit flushed."

She fought back a moan as her arms folded themselves across her midsection. "It is a bit," she said.

"I'm sorry, Monica. Let me find the thermostat and turn up the air conditioning a bit." I got up and headed for the bedroom, leaving her squirming on the couch.

The thermostat really was in the bedroom, although for my purposes it didn't really matter. I had no intention of adjusting it; I just wanted Monica to feel that she was alone and in private. "This may take a few minutes, Monica," I called. "This thing has more buttons and settings than a small battleship."

I heard her moan softly and then I made a most happy discovery: the full-length mirror on the closet door, if angled properly, would give me a view of the couch in the living room. Moving quietly, I pulled it open just enough to put Monica in the center of the reflection. She was pawing at her clothing already.

"Did I tell you how much I like the name Monica?" I asked rhetorically, watching her arch her back in response. "All my life I've been surrounded by Monicas. I have an aunt named Monica; my first girlfriend was named Monica; my old professor's wife was also named Monica." At that point she

practically tore off her tee shirt and flung it to the side. I could see the flaming red patch of skin covering her chest and abdomen, testifying to the extent of her arousal. "Now, I suppose, since that whole Lewinsky mess, nobody is going to be naming their little girl Monica for a while. And that's a shame, because Monica is such a beautiful name."

Very beautiful, I thought to myself as I watched her kick her shorts across the room. She was wearing a very pretty lace bra and matching G-string panties. There was already a dark spot in the middle of the panties. As I watched in the mirror, one of her hands slipped down inside them while the other pushed one bra cup out of the way and kneaded a breast. Her eyes were closed and her face slack. Just for fun, I walked back out into the living room and sat in a chair facing the couch. "Is that better, Monica?"

Her eyes opened wide and locked on me, then slammed shut again as her entire body shuddered and heaved. She squealed and grunted her way through the climax, having just enough presence of mind to pull her hands out and back to her sides but not enough to remember to cover her breast again. She had a lovely, pink, erect nipple and a perfectly formed breast. Thanks to the sheerness of the G-string fabric, I could also tell that she was a natural redhead with very neat trimming habits. I sat quietly, taking all of this in and becoming increasingly aware of my own erection, while Monica rode out her orgasm. Then, when she started to move again, I triggered her back into hypnosis.

"And now," I told her, "as you feel the afterglow of a most satisfying orgasm, you can allow the arousal to fade away, back to your normal level. You'll find that hearing me say your name will no longer cause you to become more aroused unless you want to be.

"And there are a few things I'd like you to remember now about the experience you've just had. First, I'd like you to notice that I used a number of indirect suggestions to achieve the result you experienced. I used constructions such as 'you may notice ...' and 'it's okay to ...' to turn a direct suggestion into an indirect one. And because the suggestions were indirect, your conscious mind ignored them but your unconscious mind heard them and accepted them easily. I also linked an obvious, unavoidable event to a suggestion that was really completely unrelated, creating a cause and effect situation where there really was none. For example, I told you that your arm would go down only as fast as you could think of a time when you were sexually aroused; normally, of course, your arm and your memory have nothing to do with each other, but by linking them together I made sure your unconscious mind would accept both statements as inevitable.

"You may also notice that I created a situation in which you would feel the least possible reason to resist doing what I wanted you to do. Because you wrote that you might be willing to undress in private, I first created an emotional state for you in which undressing would be a reasonable and natural thing to do -- a state of advanced sexual arousal. Then, I left the room while the suggestions took effect, giving you as much privacy as possible while still being close enough to observe you and give verbal cues.

"And finally, of course, I used a posthypnotic trigger: that saying your name would increase your state of arousal. I'd like you to remember those points, consciously and unconsciously, whenever you are in a position to give someone else suggestions. You'll find that as you practice formulating suggestions and giving them to people you'll learn to recognize when using indirect suggestion is more likely to get you the results you want than using direct suggestion. Both kinds of suggestion are appropriate and useful.

"And now, I'd like to show you just how powerful and creative your mind really is. At the count of three, I'd like you to open your eyes and look at me. You'll be able to talk to me, and to answer my questions, while remaining deeply hypnotized and following my suggestions. One ... two ... three. Eyes open, looking at me, still deeply hypnotized."

Monica's eyes opened slowly and came to rest on me. "On the second card," I said, "you wrote that one thing you might do under hypnosis is to get drunk. Did you mean that I might be able to have you drink a lot of alcohol until you become drunk?"

She nodded at. "Yes."

"Do you get drunk very often?"

"Not often," she answered. "Sometimes at a big party, I'll lose track and drink too much."

"Does it bother you when you get drunk?"

"Not at the time. I get very flirty and loose when I drink too much, and I have a lot of fun. But it makes me miserably sick the next day."

I nodded, all kinds of interesting ideas popping up in my mind. "I'd like for you to choose a time in your past when you got extremely drunk, and had a tremendous amount of fun doing it. When you can remember such a time, I'd like you to tell me about it."

Monica paused. I could almost see the wheels turning behind her eyes while her subconscious shuffled through her memories. "My twenty-fifth birthday party," she told me. "Claire arranged it all: a private party room with an open bar at a hotel, a suite for us to crash in when we needed to, a DJ, the works. And somehow, she and her boyfriend Robb talked me into trying shots of tequila with them. Before I realized it, I was laughing at everything that anyone said and holding on to people because the room kept spinning around. I woke up the next morning in the suite, in the same bed with Claire, Robb, and Robb's friend Shawn. We were all naked, and none of us could remember who did what with whom. Our hangovers were so bad we almost didn't make checkout time."

I took a deep breath and willed my erection down before it ripped through my pants. "Thank you," I said. "Let your eyes close down now and drift even deeper into hypnosis."

Clearing my throat, I continued the lecture. "For the past several minutes you've been responding to direct suggestions. Direct suggestions can be just as effective as indirect ones as long as you are working in the short term. For behavior modifications, indirect suggestions typically work best. And now, we'll use the power and creativity of your mind to demonstrate a post-hypnotic suggestion. In a few moments I'm going to count to three. At the count of three you will wake up, feeling completely refreshed and alert, totally comfortable and at ease even though you are not dressed. It will feel perfectly natural and okay for you to be undressed in my presence. Your subconscious mind will allow you to consciously remember only as much of this session as you need to for maximum enjoyment of the results. And every time I say the word 'drink' to you, you will immediately feel as though you've had a shot of tequila and it is taking full effect. Each time I say 'drink' you will feel the effects of an additional tequila shot. These will be special tequila shots, though: no matter how many shots you have, you will never become sick from these drinks. If you have enough drinks to make you pass out, you will slip into a deep hypnotic sleep instead of becoming unconscious. Then you will listen to my voice and accept more suggestions."

I counted her up slowly and watched as she woke up. "Feeling a little cooler?" I asked, again to distract her mind from the trance itself.

She looked down at herself, noted her bare breast, and tucked it back inside her bra. "Yes, I'm very comfortable right now."

"Good. Can I get you something to drink?"

Her face blanked for an instant. "It's a little early for me," she said, indicating the clock. "But I won't object if you want something."

"I was actually thinking about a soft drink," I corrected, watching the quick eye flash as the second "drink" kicked in. "I usually don't drink alcohol in the afternoons either. How about a Sprite?"

"Sure, why not?" Monica was smiling broadly and sinking into the couch. Her pupils were beginning to dilate.

I poured some cold Sprite from the mini fridge into a glass and brought it to her. "Drink this," I told her. "It'll help wet your whistle."

She drank some, but tilted the glass too quickly. A long line of Sprite dribbled down her neck, between her breasts, and down her flat belly. "Whoopsie," she giggled. "I wet the wrong whistle."

Ever gallant, I grabbed a towel from the bathroom and offered it to her. "You can do it if you want," she volunteered. So I gently dabbed her front with the towel, starting at the neck and working my way down. Monica arched her back and opened her legs, stretching sensuously while I patted her down with my towel. When I reached her groin area, she grabbed my neck and pulled me down to her face. "If you're going to do that," she said, "you can at least kiss me."

I wasn't at all averse to that idea, so I kissed her. It was long and hot, her lips and tongue sliding over mine. And while we kissed, I rubbed the towel up and down over her crotch. "You're a great kisser," she told me, slurring her words a little bit. Then she buried her nose in my chest and inhaled deeply. "Mmmmm, you smell good, too."

"Careful with that drink," I cautioned. "You wouldn't want to spill it before you get a chance to drink it."

Monica blinked heavily, her eyes losing focus. "You better take it," she slurred, thrusting the glass in my direction. "And shee if you can get the room to shtop shpinning around sho much."

"Okay," I said, taking the glass from her. "Is there anything else you'd like?"

"I really wanna seduce you," she mumbled. "Why don't you carry me to your bed, lover?"

God, was I ever tempted! My cock screamed at me to do it, to take her to bed and help her out of the rest of her clothes and screw her in every position we both know. But no, that wasn't the purpose of the lesson.

"Drink. Drink. Drink."

I watched Monica's eyes roll back into her head and her body slump into a corner of the couch. "That," I told her, "was your lesson in posthypnotic suggestion. If you remember the structure of the suggestion I gave you, it will be easy for you to formulate suggestions to use with other people. The one thing I did not do with you, which we talked about this morning, was to give you a time when the suggestion would stop working; that was because I intended to take you back into hypnosis and remove it, which is what I will do now.

"On the count of three, Monica, you will wake up feeling completely sober, refreshed, relaxed, and comfortable. All of the tequila shots will have worn off completely, and the word 'drink' will no longer have any special significance to you. You will always feel completely comfortable in my presence, even without your clothes, and as always your subconscious mind will allow your conscious mind to remember only what it needs to for maximum enjoyment of the experience. One, two, three."

Her eyes came back into focus, and she sat up on the couch. I picked up her clothes and then took a seat in the nearest armchair, the shirt and shorts in my lap to help hide my erection. "Any questions?" I asked.

I could see her rifling her memory. "Why are there long blocks of time that I don't remember?"

"I told your subconscious to limit what you remember to only enough for you to fully enjoy the experience. So if there's something missing, it's something you think might spoil the fun if you remembered it right now."

She looked mildly suspicious. "You didn't leave any triggers in my mind for later, did you?"

"Just one," I assured her. "The one that lets me put you back into hypnosis quickly. We may use that a

few more times before the week is out."

She thought about it, then nodded. "Any homework?"

I hadn't thought about it, but an idea came quickly to mind. "Just this: between now and tomorrow morning, decide on three suggestions you think will work if you try them on Claire. One you'll do with indirect suggestion, one with direct, and one as a posthypnotic suggestion. Don't tell Claire what they are."

Monica gave me one more nod.

"Class dismissed," I said, handing Monica her shirt and shorts. She took them and dressed with a strange, speculative smile on her face.

Standing in my doorway as I let her out, she turned back to me. "You could've had me in your bed so easily," she said. "I even asked you to do it. Why didn't you?"

I looked into those clear, blue eyes and said the first thing that came to mind. "I'll be asking myself that same question for a long time, I think."

Dinner turned into an extended tease for poor Claire. She tried valiantly to get us to talk about Monica's afternoon session, but with zero success. Each attempt we deflected into safe territory. It was fun, in a mildly sadistic way.

Finally dinner came to an end, and Monica and I decided to give Claire a break. Monica stayed behind to catch the evening's entertainment while Claire and I headed for the elevators. Claire was in a mint green open-backed cocktail dress that shimmered as she moved and managed to cling to all the right places without looking tight.

The doors opened at the seventh floor and the elderly couple with whom we'd been sharing the car left. "Alone again," Claire noted with a wink.

I pulled her gently back until her bottom was pressed lightly against me, my hands resting on her hips. Then I put my mouth by her ear and said, "Sleep, Claire." She fell back against me, head lolling to one side. I held her firmly, keeping her on her feet. "You can feel yourself sliding deep, deep into hypnosis. Your body is relaxing more and more with each breath, unconcerned because you can feel my arms holding you up. And as you sink deeper into hypnosis with each breath you take and with each beat of your heart, you may begin to notice that you can stand on your legs and support your own weight, even as you continue to relax every other part of your body."

Her legs responded, taking her weight. All I had to do was provide a little balance assistance. "When you hear the elevator doors open, Claire, I want you to open your eyes and follow me to my room, remaining deeply hypnotized even as you do."

The red numbers changed to 12, the elevator dinged, and the doors slid open. Claire opened her eyes and stood still, staring forward. It took me a half second to realize I'd said "follow me," so she was waiting for me to go first. I stepped out from behind her and walked out of the elevator. Sure enough, she followed close behind.

Once inside the entrance to my room, she stopped again. "Claire, I want you to walk over to the couch, take off your shoes, and lie down face up on the couch. Once you are lying down you can close your eyes, adjust your body position until you are completely comfortable, and drift a hundred times deeper into hypnosis. You can ignore every sound until you feel me touch your shoulder."

I watched, enjoying the view while Claire walked over to the couch and followed her instructions. I waited to see her relax and drop way down, then went about my business. I put out the Do Not Disturb sign, turned on a table lamp, and sat down to review Claire's cards from that morning.

Go back into hypnosis on command

Forget what happens during a trance

Follow you to your room and have sex with you

Have an orgasm on command

Strip in public

Be tied up for sex

Lesbian sex

Smoke

Commit a crime

The first card gave me nothing new to work with -- Claire had already done all of those things the night we'd met. The second offered some possibilities, and made me briefly wish that I'd taken Claire first so we could go down to the beach. The final card told me that as far as she was concerned, I could pretty much do anything I wanted.

But this isn't about what you want, the teacher admonished. You're supposed to be teaching this girl about types of suggestions and the limits of what hypnosis can do.

My eyes followed the slow rise and fall of her chest as she lay entranced on my couch, and I felt the user sneer. *She's no innocent. She loves to play and to be played with. She'll be disappointed if she wakes up still wearing that dress.*

There was a thought. I leaned over and touched Claire on the shoulder. "Claire, I want you to come up now to a level where you can hear and respond to my suggestions physically. When you are ready, I want you to stand up but remain deeply hypnotized."

I waited a minute or two, watching some color return to Claire's face as her metabolism revved up a little. Then, with the slow, hesitant movements typical of subconscious control, she slowly sat up and rose to her feet.

"That's right," I told her. "And now, Claire, I'm going to demonstrate for you direct hypnotic suggestion. You've already accepted and followed a number of direct suggestions tonight: to follow me from the elevator, to lie down and sleep, and now to stand up while remaining deeply hypnotized. For the next demonstration, you won't be needing your clothes, so I'm going to help you to take them off now."

As good as my word, I unfastened the dress and let it fall to the floor at her feet. She wore nothing

under it except for a cream-colored thong, which I also eased down her long legs. Lifting one foot at a time, I picked up the clothing and hid it behind my chair, out of her sight. Then, enjoying the view, I had her lie down again in the same position as before.

"And now, Claire, we'll use direct suggestion to create an illusion. Your subconscious knows that you are naked now, but when you wake up from this trance your conscious mind will believe that you are still dressed in the clothes you wore to dinner. Everything that you see, feel, hear, or sense in another way will confirm for your conscious mind that you are actually fully dressed. I will snap my fingers once, and when I do that, you will feel as if your clothing had suddenly dissolved, just like you did during my show when I had you imagine your clothing had dissolved. This time you really will be naked, of course, but your conscious mind will believe that it's a hypnotic illusion, and that you are actually still completely dressed. No amount of evidence will be able to convince your conscious mind that you are truly naked."

I counted her up and watched while her eyes fluttered open. "What the ..." Claire sat up slowly and looked around. "Where did the elevator go?"

"Would you like a drink?" I asked, channeling her thoughts in a different direction to encourage amnesia for the trance.

It worked. She blinked twice and then shook her head quickly, as if to clear it. "Just some water."

"Sure," I agreed, retrieving a bottle from the mini fridge. "It'd be a shame to risk spilling anything on that dress that might stain."

Claire looked down at her body and ran a hand over the imaginary fabric. "This is my bar-hopping dress," she explained. "Draws men like flies to honey."

"So I see," I replied, grinning inwardly. "What are you wearing underneath it?"

She grinned wickedly. "Play your cards right, and maybe you'll find out."

"I can find out anyway," I assured her. "Just like this." I snapped my fingers loudly.

Claire's eyes went wide for a moment, and then she grinned again. "Nice try, Jack, but I already know this trick. I'm not really naked."

"You're not?"

She shook her head slowly, her eyes shining in triumph. "No. It's just an illusion. You told me under hypnosis that when you snapped your fingers I'd feel as if my clothing dissolved, but it's really still there. You did that one at your show the other night, remember?"

"Yes, I do," I agreed. "Would it change your mind if I told you that you were wearing a cream-colored thong under the dress and nothing else?"

The smile faded momentarily then came back strong. "Good recovery, but no. You must have peeked inside my dress while I was zonked out before."

"I see. And if I were to mention that large freckle you have on the underside of your left breast?"

She cupped the area in question, still watching my face. "I'd assume you remember that detail from the other night, of course."

I shrugged. "I guess you've got me," I confessed. "Why don't you go use the bathroom while I figure out where to go from here?"

Claire got up, smoothed out her nonexistent dress, and headed for the bathroom. While she was in there, I laid out her dress and thong on the couch next to where she'd been sitting.

When Claire came back out she headed straight for the end of the couch and sat down. "What's next,

Professor?"

I was impressed. The conscious mind can't be confused by what it doesn't see, so to Claire the clothes draped over the couch were simply not there. "So there's no way I can convince you that you're sitting there in your birthday suit?"

"Nope," she answered with certainty. "I know you too well, Jack. Can we get on with the lesson now?"

"Of course. Sleep, Claire."

Deepening suggestions were hardly necessary for Claire anymore, but I gave her a few anyway while I hung her clothes up in the closet. I also gave her the same lecture I'd given Monica about the use of direct suggestions. Then, on a whim, I picked her up in my arms and moved to the bedroom, where I laid her out on the bed.

"You already know that indirect suggestions can be very powerful, Claire, because you've experienced it yourself already. Indirect suggestions bypass the conscious mind by using framing structures to embed a command inside of an innocuous comment. For example, you may not have noticed yet that I am tying your hands and feet to the bed now." As I talked, I placed her hands and feet in spread eagle positions and pressed them down firmly. "Can you really enjoy the sensations in your wrists and ankles of being firmly tied and unable to move? If you try to move them, you'll find that the more you try to move them, the more firmly they will be tied down. If you wish, you can try to move your hands and feet now." Claire's arms and legs twitched weakly. "That's right. You can stop trying now, and accept that your hands and feet are securely tied down until I tell you that you are free."

While Claire's subconscious digested that, I slipped back into the living room and retrieved the video tape from the elevator. Uninhibited was kind enough to provide a VCR not only in the living area, but also in the bedroom, doubtless for the convenience of VIP guests. I slid the tape into the bedroom VCR, turned on the television, and queued the tape to the point where Claire and I were just entering the elevator.

"In a few moments, Claire, I'm going to count to three. On the count of three, it's okay to open your eyes and awaken completely, no longer hypnotized, but still obeying all of my suggestions. Your conscious mind will remember only that you have been hypnotized and are learning about indirect and posthypnotic suggestions. You will realize that you are totally naked and have been since shortly after entering the suite. You will also realize that you are now tied to my bed, and that realization will be very sexually arousing to you.

"Once you are awake, I'm going to show you a video that may remind you of an intense sexual experience that took place recently. You'll want to watch the video very closely, because you'll find it extremely interesting. As you watch the video and realize who the people in it are, you may find that you can feel all over again the same physical sensations that you felt during the experience itself. You may even feel those sensations much more intensely, even to the point of having a powerful orgasm when the woman in the video orgasms. And you can, Claire, have another, equally powerful orgasm each time I say the words 'Please come again' to you. For the rest of the week, whenever we are together and I say the words 'Please come again' to you, it's okay to let yourself relax and experience an intense, extremely satisfying orgasm without worrying about what anyone else might hear or think."

Holding the remote in my hand, I pulled up a chair next to the bed so that I could watch Claire and the video easily. "One ... two ... three. Eyes open, wide awake."

Her eyes opened and immediately registered surprise. "Comfortable?" I asked, mostly as a distraction.

She looked over at me, and I could see the realization sinking in. "Oh, my god," she said, tugging with her arms against the imaginary ropes, "What are you doing?"

In a matter of seconds, as she tugged some more, her nipples swelled up and stood high. I reached over

and played with the nearest one. "Somebody's enjoying this," I remarked, tweaking the nipple gently and watching her squirm.

"We could be enjoying it a lot more if you weren't wearing all those clothes," she suggested.

"Don't be in such a hurry. Here, let me get you another pillow." I grabbed a spare pillow from the bedroom closet and propped Claire's head up a little. "How about a little video to put us in the mood?"

"Looks to me like you're already in the mood," she replied, nodding her head toward the obvious bulge in my pants. "Why wait?"

"Oh, I think you'll like this," I assured her. "It's obviously low-budget, but the acting is superb. Watch."

I touched the Play button on the remote, and the screen came to life. Claire's eyes opened wide. "That's us!"

"Yes, it is. This is the security camera tape from last night. The night manager was kind enough to remove it from circulation and give it to me."

I was going to continue, but Claire wasn't listening. Instead, she was staring intently at the TV screen, her mouth open in a little circle. As she watched, her eyes and mouth opened wider and wider.

"Some people say that watching yourself on video is extremely arousing," I said softly, while my hand idly played stroked her thigh. "One might even imagine that you are there now, feeling me peeling your clothes off in a frenzy. It feels good to let your body relive those sensations now, Claire, does it not?"

Claire didn't answer me -- she didn't have to. Her breathing became labored and gaspy, and I could see the pulse racing in her neck. Her back arched and her arms yanked at the unreal ropes but couldn't get free. With an upward thrust of her hips, Claire spoke. "Oh, my god!" I looked at the TV and saw her mouthing those same words, with my face buried between her legs.

The word STOP flashed in white at the bottom of the screen, apparently an indicator that I'd hit the Stop switch on the elevator panel. Claire's moans grew louder and more frequent. A quick brush of my finger along her slit told me there was plenty of moisture down there. "Soon," I told her, "you'll feel my rock-hard penis plunging into you from behind. Can you really enjoy the sensation of me entering you, working myself in and out, putting pressure against all of your most sensitive places? It's okay to let go and enjoy the feeling, Claire." She groaned and arched her back again, spreading her legs wider and thrusting her hips upward. "Careful," I said. "Don't have a thundering orgasm too quickly because you're going to have several orgasms before this evening is through, and you'll want to enjoy each one completely."

The embedded commands in my words pushed Claire along the way. She started babbling incoherently, her eyes locked on the image of us humping away in the elevator, her hips thrusting against the imaginary cock inside her.

"And you know," I continued, timing my words carefully to the image on the screen, "that that first orgasm, that first tremendous orgasm, is building ... building ... coming *NOW!*"

Claire on the screen and Claire on the bed threw their heads back and cried out together. "Ah! ... Yes! ... Yes! ... AAAAAHHHHHHHHHH!! ... UUNNNNNNNHHHHHH!!"

I let her ride it out until the vocalizations slowed to a mumble, then turned off the tape and sat down on the edge of the bed facing her. One hand idly stroked the smooth, flat skin of her belly while I continued my lecture. "As you can see, indirect suggestions can be extremely powerful, even when the person is not in hypnosis at the time. By using vocal structures such as 'It's okay to ...' and 'One might even ...' and 'Can you really enjoy ...' one can send a message directly to the subconscious, bypassing the conscious mind. Maybe you'll remember this lesson vividly when it comes time for you to construct suggestions of your own."

Claire nodded hard, her body still recovering from the extended orgasm.

"That's right. Another kind of suggestions is the posthypnotic suggestion. You already know that a posthypnotic suggestion is one given to a person in hypnosis that is intended to affect them after they are awake. People often think of posthypnotic suggestions in terms of triggers: a certain word, or phrase, or event that triggers the suggestion and causes the person to behave in a certain way. For example, you know that if I say a certain phrase you will go back into hypnosis right away. What you may not remember consciously, although your subconscious certainly does remember, is that I gave you another trigger this evening that has quite a different effect."

Her face turned to mine, her eyes beginning to focus again. "What trigger?" she panted.

I smiled. "Please come again."

That look of total surprise came over her again. Claire threw her head back and cried out again. "Oh ... shit ... I can't ... believe ... oooooooooohhhhHHHHHHHHH!!!!"

I paced her with my hand, stroking her in time to her gasping breaths. "It feels so good, doesn't it, Claire, to lie there, helpless, having orgasm after orgasm?"

Almost recovered, she stretched herself sensuously under my hand. "Why don't you untie me and let me show you?"

"It wouldn't be the same, really," I said to her. "After all, a man needs a certain amount of recovery time after he has an orgasm. But you can come again and again, can't you? Please come again, Claire."

This time there was less surprise on Claire's face as another rocking climax took her. Tiny beads of sweat formed all over her body, enough that I could trace shapes in it with my fingertip. The pulse in her neck was racing and still her muscles fought against the nonexistent ropes.

"This morning," I continued, "while you were in hypnosis, I asked you to fill out three index cards. On the first card, I asked you to write three things you are positive you would do under hypnosis if asked. You wrote down three things you'd already done. On the second card, I asked for three things you aren't sure whether you'd do or not. Your subconscious mind can allow you to remember what you wrote on that card ... now."

Claire blinked twice and looked at me in wonder. "Orgasm on command," she recited. "Strip in public. Be tied up for sex."

"Exactly," I said, grinning. "As the song goes, two out of three ain't bad."

"But you cheated," she complained, pulling on her arms. "You put me to sleep and just tied me up without asking."

"Did I? Take a look at your right wrist, Claire. Do you see any ropes there?"

She turned her head and looked. "Yes. Plain white rope, wrapped around my wrist."

Interesting, I thought. *Another supporting hallucination*. "And to what is that rope tied, other than your wrist?"

She craned her neck to see. "I can't tell," she admitted, "but it feels like something very solid."

"You think so?" Slowly, deliberately, I slid my hand under her arm at the elbow and moved it away from her, toward the hand. Claire gasped as she watched my hand slide all the way past her wrist and hand despite the ropes she saw. "You see rope because your subconscious was told that you've been tied to the bed, just as you thought you were still wearing your clothes earlier when, in fact, I'd already taken them off of you. You felt and saw the clothes on your body then, just as you can see and feel the ropes on your wrists and ankles now."

I watched the look on her face as the realization sank in. "Your subconscious is very creative and powerful," I told her. "Thus endeth the lesson. You're free, Claire."

Just like that, Claire lifted her arms and held her hands in front of her face, staring at the unmarked wrists. Her legs shifted and closed together, her feet wiggling to celebrate their freedom. Then fire lit up her eyes and she glared at me hungrily. "You are *so* going to get it!"

My laugh died in my throat as Claire grabbed me by the shirt and yanked me across her body onto the bed. In no time at all she had my pants and boxers off and one hand pumping my already throbbing cock. I opened my mouth to speak, only to have her other hand clamp down tightly over it. "Uh-uh," she told me. "Not a word out of you until I see those eyes of yours rolling backward."

Given my prolonged state of arousal, it didn't take very long before my hips started gyrating on their own and I felt myself passing the point of no return. I grunted under Claire's hand and let my eyes roll up in my head.

"Gotcha!" she cried out in triumph. Her hand came away from my tingling cock and she plunged herself down on top of me in one smooth, fast motion. The sudden warmth and strength of her muscles around me overloaded my system -- I came like a fire hose, growling into her hand like a wild thing while every muscle in my body stiffened in celebration of a long-awaited release. Claire mimicked me, stroking the hairs on my chest in time to my labored breathing. Only after the waves had subsided did she finally pull her hand away from my mouth. "There," she said with a heavy sigh. "Now what have you got to say for yourself, Professor?"

I mustered the energy for one more evil grin. "Please come again."

v

Sunlight was streaming into the room. I opened my eyes to find a naked blonde bending over me, nudging my shoulder and talking. Her body smelled of soap and shampoo and her skin had that pink glow that comes from a hot shower. "Huh?" I grunted, buying time.

She sighed, and a pair of erect nipples wiggled before my face. "My clothes, Jack. Where did you put my clothes?"

For a long moment my mind was blank. Then I remembered a mint green dress and cream-colored thong. "The closet," I mumbled. "Hanging up in the closet."

Claire giggled. "A sex fiend with a neat streak -- who knew?"

I was awake enough to laugh with her now. "By the way," I said to her retreating backside. "You have a homework assignment." And while I watched her dress I told her about the need to come up with three suggestions to give Monica. "Sorry for the short notice, but it's due after breakfast."

"That's okay," she replied, fitting her breasts into the support shelf in the dress. "I think I can come up with something. When's breakfast -- the usual time?"

I squinted at the clock: 8:52. The usual time was half past nine. "That's fine."

The dining room staff had noticed us, it seemed -- when I got down there at 9:25, our usual table was already set for three and had an elegant *RESERVED* sign standing in the middle. The hostess greeted me by name and ushered me to the table, removing the sign as she left me.

Stu Redman's crew had been active as well. A large sign at the main entrance announced to everyone walking by that tonight's featured show was *JACK TRANCER, MASTER HYPNOTIST*. Several more signs, adorned with spirals and sketches of slack-faced people staring blankly ahead, decorated the walls inside.

Beneath one such sign sat Barbie and Ken and their companions from the previous morning. Ken was holding forth on the subject, apparently inspired by the poster. "It's all hooey," he assured his small audience. "They plant people in the audience to go up and pretend to be in the guy's power."

Barbie nodded enthusiastically. "Real people won't do those kinds of things," she asserted. "My uncle uses hypnosis in his psychology practice, and he says stage hypnotists are charlatans."

Their friends were skeptical. "So you're saying that nobody really gets hypnotized in these shows?"

Ken shrugged. "Oh, sometimes they do -- if you get a big enough crowd, you're bound to find a few weak-minded people who'll get taken in. But it's just a show."

Oh, yeah? I thought, struggling to maintain my poker face. *Come up on stage tonight, and we'll see how much of a charlatan I am!* Then my students arrived, driving thoughts of the stuffed-shirt couple to the background.

"Good morning," Monica said, her smile broad and slightly teasing. "I see you're doing a bit of advertising now."

I threw up my hands in mock protest. "Not my doing. I may have mentioned to the tech crew that building up anticipation helps a lot, but all these signs were their idea."

"But you approve."

"Sure," I admitted. "If people come in here tonight expecting to be hypnotized, my job becomes a lot easier." Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Ken stand up and make for the buffet. I rose up as well, a naughty idea forming in my brain. "Shall we eat?"

Ken was standing in front of the omelet chef's station, watching the preparation of his breakfast. Motioning to the girls to stand back, I deliberately backed into him, causing him to drop his empty plate.

"What the f---" He wheeled around at the same time I did.

"I'm sorry," I said, with all the fake sincerity I could muster. "I was looking somewhere else."

He looked me over and apparently decided I wasn't a threat. "No biggie," he replied, and started to turn back to the chef.

"I don't think we've met," I continued. "My name is Jack." And I extended my hand in the classic gesture.

He responded automatically by reaching his hand out for mine, as I intended. I grasped his wrist gently but firmly with my free left hand and lifted it up to within about eighteen inches of his face. Ken's face blanked as his mind tried to deal with the unexpected break of the ritual pattern. "That's right," I said quickly, lifting my right hand to point to his. "Keep watching that hand, focus on that hand, and as it moves slowly toward your face, you'll be able to notice the change in focus and the way your *eyes* want to *close down now*." As I spoke, rapidly but softly, I pushed his hand a little closer toward his face and let it go. At the words "close down now" I swept my right hand down, causing his eyes to follow it and close on command. "That's right," I continued, noting that his arm was now cataleptic and moving on its own. "And now you can allow your hand to slowly creep in and touch your face no faster than you can let your entire body relax and your mind float free. And I don't know which will happen first, whether your hand will touch your face first or your mind will drift off into a deep state of profound relaxation and peace, or maybe they'll happen at the same time, I don't know. But I do know that you can *experience deep hypnosis* as easily as you can allow your hand to drift closer and touch your face *now*."

Ken was mine. His body stood motionless, except for the gentle drift of his right hand toward his face. I kept up a barrage of indirect suggestions to get him deeper, tying his physical experiences to deepening trance, until his hand touched his cheek. "And now that you have experienced hypnosis yourself," I told him, "you know that your unconscious mind can remember what your conscious mind can forget, and that's that *you are in hypnosis now* and *you can be hypnotized easily* any time *you wish to be hypnotized again*. But like the series of movements you make when you shake hands, you can just let your unconscious remember that and *make it happen*, and your conscious mind can just remember that you made a new friend at the buffet. Just as I know your unconscious mind can remember to be interested in hypnosis, and you may even find that you want to *come to the hypnosis show tonight and volunteer to be hypnotized*, even though your conscious mind may forget to remember why. And now you can allow your hand to drop down to your side only as fast as you can *decide to participate in the hypnosis show tonight* and return to your normal waking state."

Ken's eyes moved rapidly under closed lids, and his hand began to sink toward his side. When his eyes began to open I grabbed his hand and finished the handshake. "Jack Torrance."

His eyes snapped back to full alertness and he completed pumping my hand, putting too much pressure on it. "Theo Kane," he responded. "Pleased to meet you."

I needed a distraction to help cement amnesia for the trance; the unnecessary squeeze seemed gave me an idea, so I took a guess. "You played ball, didn't you?"

He grinned broadly. "Tight end for USC, until I broke an ankle and missed my whole senior year. You follow the team?"

"Not as much as I used to," I lied. "Hey, your omelet's ready."

"Oh, yeah. Nice seeing you." He took his omelet from the chef and lumbered back to his table.

The chef grinned at me and started making my usual. Monica and Claire looked a dozen questions at me, but asked none until we got back to the table. There, Monica nodded her head toward the other group. "Are you going to tell us what that was about?"

I tried on an innocent shrug. "I thought that for today's lesson I'd show you some other ways of inducing trance. The handshake induction I did with him is a famous technique that Erickson used a lot. It got so that at conventions, nobody wanted to shake his hand because they knew what he would do."

Claire looked puzzled. "But how does it work?"

"The unconscious mind is the seat of all learning," I explained. "Everything you've ever seen, sensed, or experienced is in there. It also coordinates all of our habitual actions -- those things that we do automatically, that if we actually stopped to think about them would be too complicated to explain. Like steering a car in a straight line. When we first start to drive, we have to think about that consciously, making all the little adjustments needed to keep the car on a straight course; later, that activity filters down to the unconscious level and we do it automatically, freeing up our conscious mind to think about where we're going and how to get there."

"Or to fiddle with the radio and watch for speed traps," Claire injected.

I chuckled. "That, too. Each of us has a number of complex tasks that we've learned and installed into our unconscious minds. Each is a pattern of physical responses to external stimuli, and the unconscious plays out the pattern every time it perceives the stimulus. For example, the handshake: it's almost universal among North Americans that when someone puts out their right hand, you extend yours and shake it.

"But if something happens to interrupt that pattern -- for example, my taking his wrist in my *left* hand and manipulating his arm in a different way from the expected -- then the learned pattern is broken. That sends the person's mind into a trans-derivational search: the unconscious mind doesn't know what to do, so the conscious mind has to think of an appropriate response. That state is a form of trance, and the unconscious will accept just about any suggestion that it hears during the second or so that it takes to recover. The suggestion could be as simple as *sleep*, which usually results in a light to medium trance state and the ability to give more suggestions. With that guy, I gave him a series of suggestions designed to overload his conscious thought process. With too many things to think about at once, his unconscious took over and he did what I told him to do."

Monica raised a finger. "Isn't the unconscious the same as the subconscious?"

"Sure. They're both just words for that inner mind we all have, the part that stores all of our memories and experiences. I tend to use both because I've had teachers that used both, but it's all the same thing."

She lowered her voice for the follow-up question. "And why did you give him those suggestions to come to the show tonight and volunteer? I thought you didn't pick volunteers ahead of time."

"Duly admonished," I allowed. "Before you came down, he was holding forth for his little group over there, telling them how stage hypnosis is always fake and the people in the audience are shells planted there to be entertaining. When the handshake induction worked on him so easily, I knew he'd be good on stage. I may have him eating some crow later tonight."

Monica gave me kind of an odd look, but didn't pursue whatever she was thinking.

By the time we were through eating, the dining crowd had thinned out as usual. Monica wiped her

mouth, set the napkin aside, and put her hands in her lap. "Is it time to review our homework now?"

I thought about it for a second or two. "No," I said, surprising them both. "I'd like to change the venue, and Claire hasn't had much time to work on hers because she got a late start. How about if we meet in the lobby in, say, an hour and do today's lesson on the beach? And bring your suggestions in written form."

"The beach?" Claire looked puzzled. "Why?"

"Why not?" I countered. "It's a comfortable place with people around, but where nobody really pays any attention to what you do. Besides, this is my fourth day here and I've yet to set foot on it. You don't want me to go home looking like I stayed indoors the entire time, do you?"

Laughing, they agreed to my plan. The user smiled.

When we met in the lobby an hour later, the girls were in terry cloth jumpers, sandals and shades. Monica had a beach blanket with her, and Claire a small cooler. Both had large canvas bags as well.

"You brought that with you from Indiana?" I asked, pointing to the cooler.

She giggled. "No, silly -- I borrowed it from the front desk. They have all kinds of things if you just ask them."

"Oversized beach blankets, for instance," Monica added.

"You two think too much."

A smooth clay path took us away from the hotel, past the tennis courts, and down to the beach. As the grass gave way to sand, the clay was replaced by a wooden boardwalk lined with kiosks. Shades, beach balls, sun block, cold drinks, folding chairs ... anything you might want on the beach could be bought or rented right there on the way.

We found ourselves a semi-secluded spot high on the beach near the bluff and spread out our blanket there. Rolled into the blanket was another surprise: three contraptions that looked like they might once have been part of a folding deck chair. It took me a few minutes to figure out how they worked, but in the end we got it. They were backrests for sitting up while relaxing on the beach. Smaller and easier to carry than a chaise lounge, but by varying the angle you could get pretty much the same comfortable positions.

I plopped down in the middle of the blanket and watched while the girls stripped off their jumpers. Monica was in her black triangle bikini. Claire wore a sky blue bikini with a very brief bottom, almost but not quite a thong. Both of their bodies glimmered with applied sunscreen. "You planned ahead," I remarked, rubbing some of the oil on my own arms and chest.

"You don't know the half of it," Claire assured me. "We put on extra sun block before getting dressed, just in case our bathing suits mysteriously dissolve while we're out here."

"I'm shocked," I jokingly protested. "Do you really think I'd do something like that?"

"You'd try," Monica teased. "And after yesterday, we're taking no chances."

The user, of course, was thrilled -- if they were prepared for the possibility of ending up nude, then they were convinced on some level that it could happen. Therefore, a well-worded suggestion could make it so. Pleasant as the thought was, though, that wasn't why I'd brought them to the beach.

I got up and turned around, sitting with my back to the water so I could face both of them. Monica sat on my left, Claire on my right, both looking expectantly at me.

"Before we get into the homework on suggestions," I began, "I'd like to change gears a little bit, maybe

slow things down a little. There is a well-known hypnotic induction that starts out by having the person imagine they are sitting on a beach watching the sun set. I'm not going to ask you to imagine that now because that would be ridiculous; after all, here you are, really sitting on the beach, so you don't have to imagine it. You can feel the warmth of the sun on your skin, the softness of the blanket beneath you, the texture of your bikini top stretching as you breathe slowly and deeply in and out. And as you listen to my voice, and the background sounds of the surf, and feel perhaps a very slight breeze blowing against your skin, you can also notice how time seems to just stretch out until it becomes quite meaningless to you. You can float and drift, relaxing and letting your mind wander where it will, while the part of you that learns and remembers listens to my voice and takes you deeper inside, deeper and deeper. That's right. You may even be noticing soon how sitting on the beach brings you the same feelings as being in trance: a soothing, quiet, sleepy sort of feeling in which your conscious mind can float free, paying no particular attention to anything, while your unconscious listens and attends to every word I say. And you can let go and let yourself go all the way down ... now."

Everything about their body language said that they were totally relaxed. They were so accustomed to going into trance for me that it almost didn't matter what I said, as long as I used the same tone of voice that I normally use for inductions. I could probably read them my laundry list in that tone and see their eyes glaze over.

"What you just experienced," I told them, "is a simple technique called pacing and leading. Pacing means making a statement that is obviously true about what the person is experiencing at that moment, preferably something they may not have consciously noted yet. Each time I made a pacing statement, your conscious mind checked to see if what I said was true and found that it was. After several pacing statements, I can then put in a leading statement -- something that I want to be true, but that probably wasn't until I mentioned it. A good rule of thumb is to make three pacing statements, then follow with one or two leading suggestions. If you follow that structure, you can lead someone into a trance before they even entirely realize that you're doing it. If you practice pacing and leading, you can improvise a hypnotic induction for just about anyone.

"Another new technique that I used with you just now is accessing a previous trance. If someone has been in a trance before -- and by now you realize that we've all been in trances before -- you can get them there again simply by saying things that cause them to recall what that trance experience felt like. Since you were both in very deep trances for me yesterday, I made reference to that and it brought you quickly back to the same state today. If I want to, I might tomorrow ask you a question or two about how you are feeling right now, and in order to answer the question you would have to go back into this state you're in now, which would be what I had in mind by asking the question. And doesn't it feel wonderful to be so deeply hypnotized, on the beach, going deeper and deeper with each word I say? That's right."

Reaching to my right, I put a hand on Claire's knee and squeezed. "And now, Claire, I want you to just drift along in hypnosis. Until the next time I squeeze your knee like this, it's okay to just ignore anything you might hear or feel."

Then I turned to Monica. "And you, Monica, can allow the energy to seep back into your limbs as you return to your waking state. One ... two ... three, wide awake."

I enjoyed the view while Monica stretched, her muscles moving smoothly under the skin. I could imagine her eyes fluttering open and focusing behind the dark glasses. Her hands went straight to the bikini top and patted it. "Feels like I'm still dressed," she remarked.

"Of course you're still dressed," I replied, feigning exasperation. "What kind of pervert do you think I am?"

She lowered her glasses enough to let me see the twinkle in her eyes. "That remains to be seen," she quipped. "But you did have a golden opportunity yesterday, and you willingly passed it up. That counts

for a lot."

"Thanks ... I think." I lowered my own glasses and winked at her. "Now, let's see what kind of pervert *you* are. Your homework, please?"

Monica frowned slightly as she removed an index card from her bag. "These are going to seem awfully tame compared to yesterday," she warned me.

I took the card from her and read the contents. "They look perfectly doable," I judged. "And there's a little room for some fun in there. I think this will work out fine." Reaching out to Claire, I squeezed her knee. "And now, Claire, you can feel the energy returning to your body as I count up to three, allowing yourself to become fully awake by the time I reach three. One ... two ... three. Welcome back."

Claire stretched her limbs out and adjusted her bikini straps. "If nothing else," she joked, "I'll go home well rested."

"How long do you think you were in trance?" I asked, smiling.

"I'm guessing not too long, because I'm not turning red or blistering," she answered. "But other than that, I couldn't say whether it was two minutes or two hours."

"Time distortion," I noted. "Shows how good you are at achieving deep trance. And now, if you'll lend me your sunglasses, we'll let Monica have her way with you."

Claire squinted as the sun shone into her newly-uncovered eyes. Monica moved over and knelt right next to her, with her back to me, and removed her own sunglasses. "Are you ready to go into hypnosis now?"

"Ready," Claire confirmed.

"Good," Monica said, letting her voice soften into a tone vaguely reminiscent of mine. "I'd like you look directly into my eyes, Claire," she said. "Notice the change in focus as you let them make contact with mine. You may still hear the sounds of people playing around us, and feel the sun warming your skin. And as you *take a deep breath* in and *relax*, you may begin to notice how *your eyes are already becoming tired*, wanting to *close down ... now*."

The teacher was very pleased with the way Monica had learned to use pacing and leading and indirect suggestion. Consciously or otherwise, she'd even chosen an induction that would make the most use out of the eye fatigue that would quickly set in as Claire stared up into Monica's face, with the sun streaming down behind it. The user, meanwhile, was very pleased with the close-up view of Monica's delightful back and shoulders, and the lovely shape of her rear end as she knelt before me.

Claire's eyes had closed already. "That's right," Monica told her, "Closed down, way down. You already know how to *go deeper and deeper*, just as deep as you were a few minutes ago. And you can, *Claire*, *count down from five to one* no faster than you can allow yourself to *drift as deep as you can* possibly go ... *now*."

Claire's lips moved slowly. "Five ... four ... three ..." As she counted, Monica continued giving her deepening suggestions and Claire's body took on all of the signs of deep trance. "Two" was a bare whisper, with her lips hardly moving. Neither of us heard the last number.

Monica turned and looked at me inquiringly. I grinned and mimed silent applause, then pointed to the first suggestion on her list. She nodded and faced Claire again. "And now, Claire, as you float comfortably in hypnosis, feeling the warmth of the sun on your skin ... it's a warm day today, ninety degrees ... and I wonder when you'll notice the air around you becoming *colder and colder*. Can you enjoy feeling the temperature around you falling to *eighty degrees*? How will you feel when the temperature reaches *seventy degrees*? In a moment you may even feel a cold breeze across your skin as the temperature falls to *sixty degrees*." As she said it, Monica pulled a newspaper from her bag and

began waving it, fanning Claire's body, creating the breeze even as she mentioned it.

Claire's body reacted to the falling temperatures. Her nipples stood up, poking up visibly under the cups of the bikini top. Her arms and legs pressed more closely against her body, huddling for warmth.

Monica unfolded the newspaper and blocked the sun, putting Claire's face and upper body into shadow. "And as the sun sets and night falls, I wonder how your body will feel at a temperature of only fifty degrees."

Goosebumps formed on Claire's arms and legs and spread quickly across the visible surfaces of her body. Her arms wrapped themselves tightly around her chest and her chin began to quiver. "Take her back up now," I told Monica.

Nodding, she folded the newspaper and set it aside. "Nights are short in Puerto Rico," she said. "Even now, you may notice that the sun has come back and the air around you is warming. As the temperature rises past sixty degrees, past seventy degrees, you can feel yourself becoming warmer and warmer. How much more comfortable will you feel at eighty degrees?"

Claire's goosebumps smoothed out and her body took on a much more relaxed, comfortable posture. "Keep going," I suggested. "Let's try the other extreme."

I could see the wheels turning in Monica's face. "Okay. And now, Claire, as you become increasingly aware of the heat of the sun on your body, you may be surprised to know that the temperature continues to rise to ninety degrees. Can you notice an increased tendency to sweat as the temperature reaches one hundred degrees?"

On the blanket, Claire was fidgeting again. Beads of sweat formed all over her body.

"As it gets hotter still, one hundred five degrees, can you sense the humidity in the air? And how will you try to remain comfortable as the temperature reaches one hundred ten degrees?"

Rivulets of sweat were now running down Claire's front. Her arms went behind her back and neck and pulled, freeing the strings on the bikini top. She wadded it up on one hand and began patting herself down, using the bikini to absorb sweat. Monica looked back at me sheepishly. "Oops!"

Claire was starting to pull at her bikini bottom. "You'd better bring her back down," I advised.

Monica grabbed her newspaper again and started fanning Claire. "And now, Claire, a pleasing afternoon breeze comes across your body, cooling the air around you to ninety degrees again. It feels so good now, so comfortable, that you can just lie back and enjoy it without removing any more clothing. The air is exactly the right temperature now; even as the breeze subsides you can remain comfortable exactly as you are."

Claire looked like someone napping after an exhausting workout. Her skin glistened with unwiped sweat. Her breasts moved slowly with each deep, easy breath and her arms lay rag-like at her sides. Monica must have seen me looking; when my gaze turned back to her she was smirking slightly. "Would you like to rub some more lotion on the places she wiped? Sunburned breasts are very uncomfortable."

"I'm not big on fondling the unconscious," I replied, disappointing the user. "She can do it herself in a few minutes. Why don't you proceed to the next suggestion?"

Monica smiled. "You just keep surprising me, Jack." Addressing herself back to Claire, she continued with the exercise. "And now, Claire, for a direct suggestion. In a few moments I'm going to count to three. On the count of three you can open your eyes and find yourself feeling completely awake and aware, but remaining deeply hypnotized. It will seem to you as if the beach is completely deserted. No sight, sound, feeling, or smell will reveal to your conscious mind that there is anyone on this beach except you. You'll be able to get up, call out, look around, or do anything else you want to but you will

always remain on this beach blanket and your subconscious will always respond to my voice, even though your conscious mind won't hear it. One, two, three."

Claire's eyes opened and immediately squinted against the bright sun. She sat up and looked around. "Where the hell did everyone go?" she asked the air.

Monica waved her hand in front of Claire, but the girl paid no attention. "You need to apply more sun block to your chest," Monica said.

Claire looked down at her own chest and ran a finger across her skin. "Uh-oh," she muttered. "Good thing I woke up." She pulled her bag closer, pulled out a bottle of sun block, and applied a liberal amount to her bare breasts and chest area. Then she looked around again. "Monica? Jack?"

With no answer, she stood up and looked as far as she could see in all directions. "Monica! Jack!" she called out, cupping her hands around her mouth and projecting. She took a few steps forward, causing Monica to scramble back without looking first and land in my lap. That created a minor dilemma for me: I should have been watching Claire for signs of any problem, but too much of my mind kept paying attention to the feel of Monica's rump pressing against my groin, and noticing that her bikini bottom had slipped down a little as she scooted. And these thoughts were beginning to have physical consequences that Monica would be noticing shortly if things didn't change.

But they did. Claire gave up shouting and returned to her seat, allowing Monica to roll out of my lap and back to hers, adjusting her suit along the way. She looked back at me, grinning, and mouthed the words, "Was it good for you too?"

"And now, Claire," Monica said, "you can let your eyes close down and drift back into deep, deep hypnosis."

We exchanged a look. "Last one," I prompted.

She nodded and perched again right next to Claire. "The next time I count to three, Claire, you will come out of hypnosis and wake up completely, feeling refreshed and energetic and completely at ease. All of your senses will report correct information again, and you will realize that we are back and that there are other people on the beach as well. However, every time either Jack or I say the word 'touch,' you will feel as though someone you can't see has tickled you in a very sensitive place. You'll know that it isn't me or Jack doing the tickling, but you won't have any idea who it is or where it's coming from. One ..."

I reached out and tapped Monica on the back. "You have to give it a definite end point," I counseled. "A signal or a time limit that ends the suggestion."

She nodded. "more thing, Claire," she continued, using the word she'd already spoken. "You will feel that tickling every time Jack or I say the word 'touch' until Jack tells you that you are no longer ticklish. Once he tells you that, the word 'touch' will no longer make you feel as if you are being tickled." She looked back at me and I nodded approval. "One, two, three -- wide awake."

While Claire was waking up, I grabbed the cooler. "Who wants a drink?" I asked, as a distraction. "Claire?"

"I'll take a Sprite," she said. "My mouth is dry."

I handed her a cold can. A drop of chilly water ran down the side of the can as she took it and landed squarely on a nipple. "Ack!" she yelped at the sudden cold. Then her eyes widened and she looked at Monica accusingly. "What happened to my top?"

Monica blushed. "I, uh, made you feel like it was a hundred and ten degrees out here. You took it off and used it as a sweat rag, then tossed it aside somewhere."

Claire felt around her seat area and found it wadded up in the sand next to our blanket. "Yuck," she

grouched, "it's got sand all through it. I can't put this back on."

"That's horrible," I joked. Then I had to dodge a sand-infested bikini top as it was flung toward my face.

"For what it's worth, Claire," Monica added in, "Jack didn't even try to touch you."

At the magic word, Claire suddenly bounced upward, spilling icy cold Sprite onto herself. "Something just grabbed my ass!" she squealed. "And holy *shit* is that cold!"

"That should feel good," I said. "When it's hot out like this, I love to let something cold touch my skin."

Claire jumped again, this time to one side as if someone had goosed her armpit. "Hey!" she said, looking in Monica's direction.

"Don't look at me that way. I didn't touch you."

"Eek!" Claire rolled off the blanket and lifted up one side to look underneath.

"What are you looking for?" I asked.

"Whatever it is that keeps tickling me!"

I feigned confusion. "I didn't see anything touch you." While Claire yelped again, I looked to Monica.

"Did you see anything touch Claire?"

Monica shook her head. "No touch that I could see. And I didn't touch her, and you didn't touch her. Did you touch yourself, Claire?"

Claire was writhing on the sand, giggling and spilling her soda everywhere. "Stop it!" she cried out loud. "Whoever you are, wherever you are, stop it now!"

We worked in a few more touches until Claire was laughing too hard for coherent speech, at which point I took pity on her. "This is very odd," I said, "because I know for a fact that you are no longer ticklish."

Claire finished laughing and let her body sprawl, half on the blanket and half off. She rolled over onto her back and looked up at me gratefully. Her chest was heaving, and her nipples stood fully erect and begging to be played with. I couldn't resist flicking a little sand off of one of them. "Somebody enjoys being tickled more than she's willing to admit," I mused with a smile.

"I will get both of you for this," our victim promised. "But first, I'm going to rinse this sand off and get another drink." She rose to her feet, dropped the glasses, and ran for the water. Monica and I watched her take a few splashing strides and then dive into the surf.

Monica and I sat quietly for a moment or two. Then her eyes met mine. "Well, Professor?"

"I'd say you pass," I assessed. "But you're probably in for some interesting paybacks when we continue. Are you nervous?"

She shook her head. "Not really. Claire's not the vindictive type, for one thing; she won't do anything worse to me than I did to her. And, worst case, there's nobody on this beach that we're likely to see again after this week is over, other than you."

I wanted to follow up on that, but Claire rejoined us at that moment. I handed her another Sprite. Claire took a long pull from the can, then sat down cross-legged in front of me facing Monica. "Here," she said, handing me the bottle of sun block over her shoulder. "While you're in the neighborhood, you can do my back."

So I spread the lotion on her back while Claire spread some on her front, replacing what had been washed away by her brief swim. Then she pointed at Monica. "You're starting to look a little pink in the middle, Mon," she said. "You'd better slap some more on." She took the bottle back from me and held it

out toward Monica.

Monica's hand came out to take the offered bottle, only to have Claire pull the bottle away. She grabbed Monica's wrist and lifted the hand up to Monica's face. "Watch this hand," she commanded firmly and quickly. "Notice the changing focus in your eyes as your hand drifts slowly up to touch your face, letting it happen honestly and easily, knowing that as soon as that hand touches your face your eyes will close *down* and take you into deep, deep hypnosis ... *now*." Monica's hand drifted toward her face as Claire spoke. At the final *now*, Claire pushed the back of Monica's hand just a little, causing it to touch Monica's face.

Monica crumpled and fell forward into Claire's waiting arms. "That's right," she crooned, "Deeper and deeper. Letting each breath take you deeper into hypnosis. Feeling yourself sinking down, drifting down, all the way down." As she spoke, she gently guided Monica's limp body down onto the blanket, propping her up on the backrest. Monica's legs were folded loosely together, her arms hanging limply at her sides. Her head lolled over to one side, eyes closed, lips slightly parted.

"Very impressive," I said, watching Claire closely as she took a sitting position next to her victim. "May I see your suggestions, please?"

Claire pulled out her index card from inside her bag. "Hold on a second," she said, retrieving a pen as well. "I want to make a last-minute substitution." She scratched something out and wrote briefly, then handed me the card.

She'd scratched out the first suggestion too thoroughly for me to make it out, then scrawled next to it the replacement: *Take off her bikini*.

"Are you sure you want to do that?" I asked. "She might not go for it."

"She will," Claire said confidently. "Miss Monica keeps her wild side pretty well hidden, but it's there. And it's been coming out to play a little down here. Besides, she did it to me; her conscience will dictate that I can now do it to her."

I shrugged. "We'll see. If she wakes up and tells you off, that could be the end of the whole course."

She winked at me. "Not a chance. I've learned from the master himself." Turning back to Monica, she let her voice drop back to a fair imitation of my hypnotic tone. "And now, Monica, as you lie back drifting deeper and deeper into hypnosis, I wonder if you can notice that you have sand inside your bikini. Gritty, rough, abrasive, uncomfortable sand. Some people say that a bathing suit with sand inside it is incredibly uncomfortable to wear, and that it's far better to be on the beach naked than to be stuck wearing an itchy, scratchy, sand-encrusted bikini."

Monica frowned. Her hands began to move toward her body, which twisted slightly as if trying to get comfortable.

"That's right," Claire continued. "You may already be starting to feel the sand scratching against your skin in your most sensitive areas. It gets into everything, doesn't it? And one might even find, Monica, that the more you try to get comfortable the more uncomfortable you will find it having all that sand in your bikini. Eventually, you'll realize that it must come off in order for you to be able to relax and be comfortable. Only when the bikini comes completely off will you be free of the itchy, scratchy, irritating feel of sand against your skin."

They were very well-worded indirect suggestions, and the effects were dramatic. Monica's hands slipped into her suit, trying to brush out the sand she imagined was in there. As Claire continued bombarding her with indirect suggestions of increasing discomfort and of the futility of trying to remove the sand without removing the bikini, Monica grew increasingly fidgety. After about a minute of fidgeting, Monica finally reached behind her, unfastened the bikini top, and flung it aside. As I'd suspected that first night, Monica's breasts were spectacular: firm, teardrop-shaped, made by God to fit

into a man's hand and be adored.

"That's right," Claire said. "And now that your breasts are free of that irritating, itchy bikini, you can notice how much better they feel. And I wonder when you'll decide to have that same comfortable feeling between your legs instead of the itchy, scratchy, sand that's inside your bikini bottom. It would feel so good to just pull off that bikini bottom now and get the sand away from your privates."

I thought for sure this would be it -- that Monica would wake up, grab her jumper, and head for the hotel. Instead, she lifted her hips off the blanket and slid the bikini bottom off, tossing it aside into the sand next to her top. My eyes opened wide as I beheld her flaming red tuft, neatly trimmed into a racing stripe that led to the delights below.

A sharp slap hit my knee and startled me. "Didn't your mother teach you not to stare?" Claire was grinning at me with that lusty sparkle in her eye.

"My mother is probably rolling over in her grave right now," I said, feeling the color rising in my cheeks even as my cock rose in my trunks. "She always hoped I'd give up this hypnotism thing and find honest work."

"And here I am, putting temptation in your path."

I shrugged. "I'm not complaining."

"I should hope not." With a wink, she turned back to Monica. "Feels much better now, doesn't it? You can feel so much more comfortable now, relax so much more now, go so much deeper into hypnosis now. And you know that from now on until we leave this island, any time I say the words 'Time out, Monica,' you'll come back to this wonderful place right away. Each time I say 'Time out, Monica,' you can easily and immediately come back into hypnosis just as you are right now."

That was suggestion number two, the posthypnotic trigger. I gave Claire a thumbs-up sign and watched while she moved on to direct suggestion.

"In a few moments, Monica, I'm going to count to three. When I reach three you will wake up feeling completely alert and refreshed. You will know that you're naked and that Jack can see you, and that will be okay with you. It feels good to be naked and to let Jack look at your body; in fact, you will even find that it brings you pleasure to let Jack look at your body. You will also realize that Jack's show is wonderfully entertaining, and a great opportunity to learn more about hypnosis. You will want to make sure that we go to Jack's show tonight, and you'll want to stay for the entire show. And finally, Monica, when Jack says that our lesson is over for today, you'll feel a strong need to go back to our room and take a nap for at least an hour."

I looked quizzically at Claire -- the first and last suggestions she'd given were not on the card at all. She mouthed "trust me" and counted Monica up. As Monica's body began to move again, Claire said the magic words: "Time out, Monica."

The guidance counselor's body dropped back against the back rest immediately, and her arms slumped to her sides. Claire counted her up into alertness again, gave her just enough time to start to sit up, and then dropped her again. "Damn, that's fun," she said to me. "Do you get as big a charge out of that as I do?"

"Sometimes." I picked up the sun block bottle. "When you bring her out of it this time, continue the gesture of handing her this bottle. Her conscious mind will link that to the time just before you induced her, closing the loop, and she'll have complete amnesia for everything that happened in between."

Claire took the bottle from me, then counted Monica up one more time. As Monica stirred, Claire held out the sun block bottle again.

"Thanks," Monica said, taking the bottle. "Give me a minute, and then we can start." She squirted a dollop of the lotion onto her hand and began rubbing it into her skin. Her hand slowed when it touched a breast and Monica looked down at her body. "I seem to have lost something."

"I told you I'd get you back," she said, grinning.

Monica's eyes widened. "You did it already? How? When?"

"Don't you remember?" Claire teased. "How strange."

Monica looked at me again and giggled. "I supposed I deserve this after all," she granted. "I never realized how good it felt to be naked outside. You don't mind the view, do you, Jack?"

I just smiled. "You don't see me reaching to retrieve your bathing suit, do you?"

"See? I knew you were a pervert at heart."

We all had a good chuckle while I, to prove my virtue, did retrieve Monica's bathing suit. "I don't think I'll put it back on," she said, looking at it. "It's full of sand."

I nodded. "In that case, let's wrap things up before anybody starts to burn."

Both girls sat back and looked at me. Neither made any attempt to cover anything. I crossed my legs, hoping it would help to conceal my raging hard-on a little better, and forced my mind back into lecture mode.

"You've both now experienced giving and receiving the three basic types of hypnotic suggestions we discussed yesterday. You did very well at forming your suggestions positively, being very specific with what you wanted the other person to do, and keeping within each other's moral boundaries given this very, shall we say, unique environment.

"You've also learned a couple of different ways to induce trance, which is a good thing. If you only know one way to get someone into hypnosis, you can only hypnotize maybe a fifth of the population. Now you have several options, so you can pick and choose which ones you want to try. Tomorrow I'll give you a couple more to add to your repertoire. Any questions?"

Monica raised her hand. "Why did this work?" she asked, indicating her naked body. "I know I told you yesterday that I'd never strip naked in public."

"How do you feel about it?" I asked, mostly for Claire's benefit.

"Fine," she admitted. "I don't really mind it at all. Not with you, anyway. But that feels strange to me."

I nodded. "Only you can tell for sure, of course, but I can give you my best guess: as often happens with these things, it's the environment. We're out here on the beach, where people tend to be pretty uninhibited even normally. On this beach, a good half to two thirds of the people on it are either topless or completely naked, so it's a context in which nudity is not taboo. Nobody even seems to really look. And within the context of the beach, we've put ourselves in a spot that's more or less apart from everyone else anyway, which adds a degree of privacy. With nobody else near us, it's really just the three of us that are in a position to notice and appreciate our nudity. Through our talks and exercises we've reached a certain level of intimacy where we can feel comfortable with each other."

Monica nodded thoughtfully. "So does that mean that if we asked, you'd take off your trunks?"

Claire was grinning lecherously. "It's only fair, Jack."

I thought for half a second. "Sure, probably," I answered. "But we've been out here long enough now that we really should get out of the sun. Today's lesson is over."

Monica's face glazed for a second. She stretched and yawned, giving me a breathtaking view. "You're

right, of course. All this sun is making me sleepy, too. I'm in the mood for an afternoon nap."

We packed our things quickly, the girls slipping back into their terry jumpers for the trip back inside. We shared an elevator as far as the ninth floor, where Monica got out with another yawn and agreed to meet us for dinner at seven. The doors closed behind her, leaving me alone in the elevator with Claire.

"What was that nap suggestion all about?" I asked.

"Simple," she said, pressing her body against mine as the elevator lifted us upward. "All that sitting around half-naked, getting tickled, and shucking Monica out of her bikini made me unspeakably horny, and I could tell it was doing the same to you. Now, with Monica off to take a nice little snooze, we can go back to your place and do something about it."

That was the best suggestion I'd heard all day.

The green room was quiet except for the sound of my pacing. Rudi, the sound tech, had already been and gone. I wore another of her lavalieres under my shirt and had the cordless hand mic in my jacket pocket. According to the wall clock I had just a few minutes before I should advance to the wings.

A tentative knock on the door caught my attention. "Yes?"

The door opened a crack. "Mr. Trancer?"

I knew that voice, but couldn't place it right away. I approached the door and opened it the rest of the way to reveal a man on the other side. A quick memory search brought up the name. "Will, isn't it?"

Blushing slightly, he nodded. "That's right. My girlfriend and I were in your show over the weekend." He looked up and down the hallway furtively. "I was wondering ... can we talk for a minute?"

"By all means." I stood back, waved him in, and closed the door behind him. "I should warn you that I only have a few minutes before I need to get backstage."

"I know," he said, nodding. "I'll be quick. You know how sometimes, after a couple has been together for a while, things can get ... routine? Maybe even boring?"

It didn't take a psychic to see where this was heading. "In bed, you mean?"

"That's right. Amy and I were pretty much at that stage when we got here. But something you said to us that first night made a huge difference when we got back to our room. It was ..." He blushed again.

"Let's just say it was great. Wild. Better than our first time."

I was nodding with him. "And you'd like to keep it that way?"

A relieved grin came over him. "You guessed it. I've seen you in the restaurant with those two girls; it looks like you're teaching them how to hypnotize each other. Could you teach me to put Amy under and tell her the same things you did, any time I need to?"

Just what I needed -- another hypnotist wannabee. "When do you go home?"

"Saturday morning."

I pretended to think about it. "There really isn't time to teach you all you'd need by then," I told him.

"But if you bring her by here right after the show, I think we can do something for you."

"Really?"

"Sure," I assured him. "It's my way of saying thanks for helping to make that show a success. And of making sure you'll stick around for this one."

He chuckled. "Wild horses couldn't drag us away. Thanks." Then his manner turned hesitant. "I don't know what you charge for that sort of thing."

"I'm on vacation," I told him. "I don't charge anything when I'm on vacation. But there is something you could do for me, if you don't mind."

His face brightened. "Name it."

"You've seen my two students. They're getting way too good at hypnotizing each other; there's no challenge anymore. They need someone new to work with."

His eyebrows rose. "Me?"

"Unless you think Amy would mind."

"Probably not," he allowed. "She'd probably like it if she got to watch. She thinks hypnosis is pretty hot."

"Great," I said. "You could come join us after breakfast. Say, ten thirty?"

"Done deal."

We shook hands, and he left. I checked the wall clock once more then made my way through the inner hallways to the backstage area.

My risers were ready to go. I took my place just behind the edge of the fake cityscape and waited. Being a weeknight, there was no opening act; I'd be introduced over the speaker system when the time came.

Right on schedule, the house lights dimmed. "Ladies and gentlemen," the PA announcer called, "Prepare to be mesmerized! Uninhibited is pleased to present for your enjoyment our very own Master Hypnotist, Jack Trancer!"

A spotlight picked me up as I darted downstage and helped me find my mark. "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen," I began. "Before we get started, how many of you were at my show this past weekend?"

About half the people in the audience applauded. "That's great. So it sounds as though at least half of you have some familiarity with what hypnosis is, and what kinds of things I do in my show. Knowing that, how many of you are thinking of coming up on stage tonight and being part of the show?"

I was impressed - the applause was only a little quieter than the first time. "Great," I repeated. "Now, how many of you are only saying that to get your dates to come up here and get hypnotized?" A wave of nervous laughter swept around the room. "That's what I thought. For those of you who weren't here last show, and for those of you who were and just don't remember..." I waited a moment for the chortling to subside. "... let me explain about what hypnosis can and can't do, and what I'll be asking you to do tonight."

I launched into a speech similar to the one I used in my first show, interspersing it with joke lines designed to put my audience at ease. By the time I was done the people I could see were looking pretty relaxed, and a lot of heads were contemplating the empty seats with interest despite my slightly stronger warnings (for Monica's benefit) about the kind of adult behavior that might take place.

The house lights came up, and I asked for potential volunteers to step up on stage. Theo Kane, my blowhard from the dining room, was among the first to claim a seat, with his girl "Barbie" in tow looking dubious at best. I did my best to be reassuring, of course, and it was most gratifying to see that there were still a lot of people trying to get to the stage even after the chairs were full.

The induction went smoothly. My spiral ascended and descended on cue, and when the lights came up at the end of it most of my volunteers and a large portion of the audience were looking thoroughly zoned out. An excellent start.

I put my volunteers through a few preliminaries to weed out the ones with less potential. Four of my volunteers remembered their names after being told to forget them, so I sent them back to their seats. Three more, including Barbie, didn't react to a suggestion that they were being tickled by an unseen hand and were dismissed with thanks. One, a stocky bald guy, woke up unexpectedly when the girl next to him, a dazzling blonde in a skin-tight dress, got so relaxed that she landed in his lap. I gave him his choice and he opted to sit back down in the audience.

That left me with ten solid performers. In the front row I had Theo Kane; Paul and Rebecca, a married

couple taking a vacation from their kids; Liz and Tammy, nursing students on summer break; Warren, a self-described computer geek; and Roxy, my blonde bombshell, who described herself as "an actress." Every guy in the audience cheered for her immediately. The back row held Sima, a hair stylist; Jay, a photographer; and Nadine, a book editor.

Time for the fun to start. I moved Theo to the empty seat next to Roxy and had my three in the back row move together. Then I took them deeper into hypnosis, making sure Roxy would be able to stay in her seat. "At the count of three," I instructed them all, "I want you to open your eyes and sit up, feeling completely awake, but still remaining deeply hypnotized and following my every suggestion. You'll also feel very comfortable and willing to talk about anything that comes to mind. But when I snap my fingers like this, all of your clothing will dissolve and you'll be completely naked. Everything you see and feel will confirm that you and everyone else in the seats around you are naked." I walked over to my married couple. "For the people I am touching right now, you are deeply in love with each other and don't care who sees it. In addition to every other suggestion you're going to get tonight, every time you hear the audience applaud, you will feel an overwhelming desire to kiss. Each time you kiss, the kiss will be longer and more passionate than the time before." Then, for good measure, I went over to Theo and touched him. "For the person I'm touching now, you will also have a special instruction that will last for the entire show: you feel a strong sexual attraction to the girl next to you that gets stronger each time she speaks. You don't know her, and she doesn't know you, so you'll want to tell her things about yourself. You want her to know you well, so naturally the things you tell her be of an increasingly intimate nature. No matter how she responds, you'll continue trying to woo her this way until the show is over." And to make things complete, I touched Roxy. "For the woman I'm touching now, the man next to you is going to be coming on to you tonight. You'll be mildly flattered by that, but the truth is he isn't even remotely attractive to you. You'll try to turn him down without hurting his feelings, but as he tells you more and more things about himself you're going to get the idea that this guy is some kind of weirdo and you need to keep him at a distance."

I did my three count and watched my performers open their eyes and sit up, apparently wide awake. "This is the part of the show where I like to find out a bit more about my volunteers," I explained. "I know that to you it probably seems like the whole beginning of the show went by just like that," I said, snapping my fingers into the mic, "but I'm sure by now you realize there's a lot going on." I watched my volunteers for their reactions to their sudden nakedness. Roxy didn't bat an eyelash, of course; she looked down at herself, smiled, and wiggled a little in her seat. My married couple showed surprise, then as the audience began to applaud they locked eyes on each other and began kissing. The nursing students got a stunned look on their faces and checked each other, confirming that they were in fact naked, then started laughing. Theo's hands went to his lap, but aside from that nobody looked uncomfortable or overly embarrassed - a good sign.

I put the mic between my married couple's faces. "So how long have you been married?" I asked conversationally.

Rebecca broke off the kiss to answer. "Six years."

"How old are your kids?"

"Four and one," she replied.

"Who's watching them while you two are at Uninhibited?"

Paul smiled. "My sister. She totally disapproves of our choice of vacation spot. I think she's afraid we're down here getting naked in groups."

Rebecca cleared her throat. "Umm, honey?" With a hand, she waved vaguely at their bodies.

Paul gulped. "Oh. Right." The audience laughed and clapped, and Rebecca pulled Paul's face back to hers for more kissing.

"Jack?" The voice was coming from behind me: Liz, one of the nursing students.

"Did you have a question?" I asked, putting the mic in front of her.

She nodded. "What happened to our clothes?" More laughter from the crowd.

I scratched my head. "To tell the truth, I don't entirely understand it myself. It just seems to happen when people get on stage. I think it has something to do with the intensity of the spotlights."

She looked puzzled. "Then why didn't your clothes melt off, too?"

"They do," I assured her. "It just takes a bit longer. In fact, I can feel them starting to dissolve now. When I snap my fingers, you'll see that I'm also completely naked -- and extremely well hung." I snapped, and Liz stared at my body as she saw my clothing disappear.

"That's weird," she said. "Isn't that weird, Tammy?"

Tammy was leaning forward staring at my crotch. "I think it's cool," she said. "Are you married?" The audience roared and clapped.

I plopped into the seat next to Roxy and held the mic in front of her. "You don't seem fazed in the least by all this," I remarked.

She shrugged. "I'm used to being nude in front of people," she explained. "It sort of goes with the territory."

"That's right, you're an actress. What kind of films do you act in, again?"

"Adult films," she said, to enthusiastic applause from the men in the audience.

Theo leaned in to the mic, still holding his hands in his lap. "I like porno films," he offered.

Roxy gave him a practiced smile. "That's nice." Then she looked back to me, turning her body slightly away from Theo.

I put everyone back into deep hypnosis and set up the next gag. "When I next count to three, you will open your eyes and feel wide awake while remaining deep in hypnosis, obeying all of my suggestions. You will be fully dressed again in your normal clothes, and so will I. All of the other suggestions I've given you so far will still be in force, plus you will realize that the people on stage are all former members of the cast of a daytime soap opera called 'Passion's Prisoners' that has recently been cancelled after a 10-year run, and that you are on stage at a convention held for fans of the show. Those of you in the audience are die-hard fans of the show. The fans don't realize it, but throughout the entire history of the show there was more sex, scheming and backstabbing going on among the cast and crew off camera than there ever was on the actual show. Your contracts required you to keep all that hushed up while the show was still on the air, but now that it's gone you can't wait to tell the fans what really happened on that set when the cameras were off. Each time one of you tells the audience something that happened, you're going to think of something even more outrageous that you'll want to share when your turn comes."

Reaching over a couple of bowed heads, I put a hand on Sima's shoulder. "For the person I am touching now: you were the makeup supervisor for the show for its entire run. You had to put the makeup on everyone all by yourself because after paying the actors' bloated salaries there was never enough money in the budget for an assistant. Several of the cast members here today had bizarre, demanding requirements that drove you nuts on a daily basis, and now's your chance to show them up for the bunch of prima donnas they are."

For Nadine: "You started with the show as a script girl and worked your way up to head writer, which is what you've done for the last three years. For ten years you've been listening to this bunch of overpaid, scenery-chewing amateurs tell you what the characters you conceived should think, say, and

do, and you've kept quiet about it to keep your job. Now you don't have to any longer."

And for Theo: "You were the male lead, the star of the show, for its entire run. In that time you've done love scenes with every female on the cast, and you've seduced every female on the cast and crew off-camera as well, except for the girl next to you right now."

Then I put a hand lightly on Roxy's shoulder. "To all of the women on stage except the one I'm touching right now: the man in the light blue shirt at the end of the front row is the male lead, the star of the show. Every single one of you has allowed him to seduce you, and each one of you discovered when he did that he's really a lousy lover and a totally self-absorbed, shallow personality."

Now that I'd sprinkled the stage with gasoline, it was time to drop a match. I brought them up and turned to the audience. "Ladies and gentlemen, I want to thank you all for coming to this question and answer session with the cast and crew of 'Passion's Prisoners.' It's always a sad thing when a popular show gets cut for no apparent reason, and-

"It was cut," Nadine interjected, "because nobody with an IQ over fifty could stand to watch the thing anymore." There was a general murmur of protest from the audience.

Paul sneered. "Well, if we'd had scripts that were halfway believable, that might not have been a problem."

Nadine fumed. "My scripts had wit and style," she insisted. "You so-called actors delivered my lines as if you were reading them off of cue cards."

"They were reading them off cue cards," Sima chimed in. "Heaven forbid these spoiled rotten assholes should have to actually memorize their own lines, after all."

"Excuse me," Theo broke in, adopting the air of an authority figure. "If you were a member of the profession, you'd understand how difficult it is to memorize dialog less than hour before filming, which is when we usually received the edited pages. A serious actor needs time to digest the words and make them his own." My hypnotized "fans" in the audience applauded and cheered.

"Is that why you act even worse than you fuck?" Rebecca charged. There was a collective gasp from the fans, but the rest of the audience went wild. Paul and Rebecca groped for each other and established another passionate lip lock.

Theo looked indignant. "I'll have you know that every woman I've ever bedded has begged me for more."

"That's right," Tammy confirmed. "More length, more width, more skill, more duration."

Warren motioned for my attention. "The real reason the show went under," he told the audience, "was interference from the network. They kept trying to dictate how the story should unfold and forcing cast changes on us, like bringing her in." He pointed to Roxy.

Roxy looked daggers at him. "I resent that," she said. "The only reason I joined this turkey of a show was because the producer thought I could help turn it around."

"Was that before or after you started fucking him?"

"That's a lie!" she spat. "I never slept with the producer." She shifted in her seat and looked directly at me. "It was the executive producer." The got another split reaction from the crowd, with the fans murmuring and the rest laughing.

"So what?" Sima called out, looking at Warren. "Is that any worse than you insisting on imported Norwegian hair gel for your two scenes every show? I could have hired an assistant for what they spent on your head."

"I happen to have a delicate scalp," he snipped. "And having your claws digging into it didn't help

things. Besides, considering I had to wear my own clothes because they blew the entire costume budget on her," he added, jerking a thumb at Roxy, "you can hardly begrudge me proper hair care."

"Bullshit!" Roxy cried. "I spent half my scenes either in bed with someone or just coming out of the shower. Last season I did a whole week's worth of episodes in the same white bath towel. People thought I was a whore and a compulsive bather."

"Well, they were half right." Thunderous applause rose from the audience - the fans and the rest seemed to agree on this one.

Theo Kane leaned over to Roxy. I got the mic there just in time to pick up his line: "I spend a lot of time in the shower too. It's my favorite place to jerk off."

The audience loved that. I ended the gag there and took everyone back down, removing the soap-opera scenario from their minds. I looked my volunteers over, quickly rifling through the possibilities in my head. Warren had impressed me, so I decided to make him the focal point of the next bit. I had him open his eyes long enough to move over to the left end of the front row. I moved Paul and Rebecca to the back and brought my book editor, Nadine, up to the front next to the nursing students.

"People on stage," I said, "when you open your eyes next, you will be part of a game show called 'Find A Date.' It's a lot like the old 'Dating Game' show, but our game only appears on cable TV channels so we have an adult-oriented format. In fact, you know that each of you will receive a bonus if the show is sexy enough to pump up the home video sales, so you'll want to do everything you can to help make that happen."

I touched Warren on the shoulder. "For the person I am touching now, you are the contestant on today's show. Your job is to answer my questions and to watch and listen while the three women contestants try to impress you and get you to select them for your date. The date is actually a week-long vacation at a clothing-optional Caribbean resort like this one."

Next I turned my attention to Liz, Tammy, and Nadine. "For the women I am touching now, and now, and now: you are the female contestants on the show. Each of you, when you open your eyes, will look at the man on the end of the row and find that he is the sexiest, most incredibly attractive man you've ever seen in your life. There will be nothing you want more than to have him pick you so you can spend a week having sex with him. You will do anything to top the others and gain his attention. When you are asked a question, you'll come up with an answer that will show Warren just how much you want to be with him. If you're not the first to answer, you'll come up with an even better answer than the person before you did, even if you have to make up facts to support it. It's okay to let your creativity run wild on this."

There were just a few more touches to add. "For those of you on stage whom I have not touched and given instructions to yet: you are the celebrity panel for this game. It will be your job to help Warren evaluate the female contestants to see which one he should choose. When I call on you, you will either ask the contestants a question or pose a challenge to them that they must do to show how they might behave on the date or to show how much they want it. You know that your bonuses are riding on how sexy the show is, so you'll want to ask questions or pose challenges that will keep people watching."

I counted everyone up and turned to the audience. "Welcome back, everyone, to Find a Date for Warren. Before we get started, let's meet our lucky bachelor." I sat down next to Warren and held the mic between us. "Tell us a little about yourself, Warren."

He leaned forward a little into the microphone. "I'm 28, and I'm a UNIX sysadmin." Then he sat back as if he'd said everything worth hearing.

"What do you do with your spare time, Warren?" I asked, putting on my best smarmy game show smile.

He leaned forward again. "I, uh, don't get much of that. I mostly just work and hang out on IRC."

That figured. "So tell us, Warren: what would your ideal woman be like?"

Warren contemplated the mic with trepidation. "She'd have to be smart," he said. "Someone I don't have to explain every little thing to." When the mic didn't bite him, he began to warm to it. "And she shouldn't talk too much. I hate senseless gabbing." I started to take the mic back, but Warren grabbed it for one more thought. "And she needs to be hot. And she should dress like it."

The audience chuckled. "Anything else?"

He thought. "Well, it would be nice if she was easy."

I let the audience's laughter subside before continuing. "Well, Warren, we're going to find out tonight which of these three eligible bachelorettes comes closest to being your ideal woman. Ladies, why don't you introduce yourselves to Warren?"

Nadine shifted forward and leaned toward Warren, letting the neck of her tank top gape open in Warren's direction. "Hello, Warren," she said in a sultry voice. "I'm Nadine. The only thing I love more than curling up with a good book is cuddling with a good man."

Liz took the mic next. "Hi, I'm Liz. I'm ranked third in my nursing school class this year, and I love to play chess for high stakes. Pick me and we can play doctor together." She toyed with the buttons on her blouse as she spoke.

Tammy was chuckling. I waited for her before handing over the mic. "I'm Tammy," she announced. "I'm valedictorian of my nursing school class so far, and I beat Liz at chess all the time. Pick me and we'll do a lot more than play."

A round of appreciative Oooohs swept through the crowd. "Now it's time for our celebrity panel to pose either a question or a challenge to the bachelorettes. I think we'll start with a man who needs no introduction, Jay."

The audience applauded for Jay, which prompted Paul and Rebecca to attach faces again. Jay leaned into the mic and looked at the girls. "How do you let a guy know that you're really interested in sleeping with him?"

Nadine started. "I seduce him by listening to everything he says as if he were the most fascinating man on earth. I sit very close, letting his body touch mine in as many places as possible, and I caress him in seemingly innocent places until he's putty in my hands."

Liz came next. "I don't play silly games like that," she said. "If I'm interested in a guy, I let him know up front by telling him so. I'll invite him over, and when he gets there I'll be dressed in nothing but a silk kimono. I'll hand him a glass of wine and lead him directly to the bedroom."

Tammy didn't hesitate. "When I'm interested in a guy," she said, making firm eye contact with Warren, "I walk right up to him, put my hand inside his pants, and say, 'If you can get hard in 10 seconds, I'm yours for the night.'"

Warren's eye widened at Tammy's answer. She handed me the mic with a satisfied, catlike smile.

I went to Sima for the next challenge. "Kissing is very important," she said. "I think each of them should show Warren how well they can kiss."

"All right," I agreed. "Bachelorettes, let's see how you kiss."

Nadine stood up, walked over to Warren, and bent over, letting the tank top open to give him a completely unobstructed view. Then she lifted his chin toward hers and planted one right on his mouth. The audience murmured appreciatively as she sauntered back to her seat.

I couldn't resist. "How was that, Warren?" I asked, putting the mic in front of him.

His head bobbed up and down. "That tasted like more."

It was Liz's turn. She walked slowly across to Warren, swinging her hips and loosening the top couple of buttons on her blouse. Instead of bending over him, she sat down on the empty chair to his right, letting the blouse open to his view. She snaked her left arm around his neck and gently pulled him to her. The kiss lasted a good 10 seconds before she broke it off. Smiling, she stood up and fixed her blouse on the way back to her seat while the audience applauded.

Tammy was up before Liz finished sitting. She locked eyes with Warren on the way over in a look that made lusty promises. Once in front of him, she hiked up the bottom of her dress enough to give him a flash of black panty and settled herself in his lap, straddling him. She pressed forward, grinding her crotch against his, and encircled him with her arms until his face was buried in her cleavage. Then she lifted his face to hers and locked lips. For a good thirty seconds she toyed with his hair and rocked in his lap while their open mouths remained tightly pressed together. She pulled away at last, then came back with three quick kisses. Her eyes met Warren's one more time before she stood up and returned to her seat, pausing to acknowledge the whooping and cheering of the audience.

Warren looked dazed. It would have been nice to give him a few seconds to recover himself, but I had a show to run. I held the mic in front of Roxy. "Do you have a challenge or question for the bachelorettes?"

"Sure," she replied. "I think each girl should show Warren her best physical asset, up close and personal."

I was about to pull back the mic, but Theo leaned towards it. "Mine is my ass," he said. "I can crush a beer can with it."

"Thank you for sharing," I told him, pulling the mic away. "Ladies, you've been challenged to show Warren your best physical asset."

Nadine wasted no time. She traded me her tank top for the mic and sauntered over to Warren. "Here they are," she said, waving her chest close to his face. "I'm a 32A, and as you can see I don't need a bra for support. That means I can wear very tiny bathing suits. In fact, a lot of the time I only wear the bottoms." She came back to me and traded back, slipping the tank back on.

Liz stood and contemplated Warren. Her fingers worked casually at the clasp on her skirt and it fell to the stage. Then the blouse joined it, leaving Liz standing there in a white lace bra and panties. "I have a world class ass," she announced, sauntering slowly toward Warren and putting it on display. As soon as she was directly in front of Warren, she pivoted on her heels and bent over, sliding the panties slowly over her hips to her knees. "Don't you think so, Warren? I do half an hour on the StairMaster every other day to keep it nice and firm." She looked back at his face, wiggling her rear end tantalizingly in front of him. "You can touch it if you want, Warren. Go ahead. Feel how smooth and strong it is, and imagine the fun we can have with it."

Warren reached a tentative hand up and stroked her right cheek. "Mmmmm," Liz purred. "Nice touch." Then she stood up, pulling the panties back up in the same motion, and returned to her seat. The crowd applauded loudly when she sat down without redressing.

I tried to hand the mic to Tammy, but instead of taking it she positioned my hand to hold it for her. She hooked the straps of her dress with her thumbs and pulled them away from her shoulders. "I can't decide," she said. "Some guys like my breasts," she continued, lowering the straps and letting her dress fall to the floor, exposing an exquisite pair of breasts and a black G-string. Caressing her breasts, she turned to Warren. "Aren't they nice? I'll bet they'd each fit perfectly in one of your strong, soft hands."

Tammy stripped off her G-string and tossed it into Warren's lap, to wild cheers of appreciation from the

audience. She took the mic from me and caressed it suggestively while she casually strolled over to Warren. "I had a lover once who swore I had the sweetest, best-tasting privates he'd ever experienced. I keep myself nicely trimmed and ready for you." Then she turned slowly about. "And, as you can now see, I have a splendid bottom. It's round and soft, like a woman's bottom instead of a horse's." She sat in his lap and took his hands in hers. "Wouldn't you love to feel this pressed against you, while your hands squeeze and caress my breasts?" As she spoke, she put Warren's hands on her breasts and encouraged him to squeeze.

The crowd went wild, of course. Cheers and whistles and loud protestations of love accompanied Tammy back to her seat. She sat down without dressing, simply handing me the mic and smiling at Warren.

In show business, and especially in comedy, it pays to follow the rule of threes. Three contestants, three questions -- it was time to wrap things up. "Now, Warren," I said, approaching him. "You've heard each of these lovely women tell you how they show interest in a man, you've sampled their kissing skills, and you've seen their best physical assets up close. Now it's time for you to choose. But first, let's see what our audience thinks. People in the audience, how many of you think Warren should go on the date with Nadine?"

There was a smattering of weak applause from the crowd. They never pick the first person. "Okay. And now, how many want Warren to choose Liz?" That got me a lot of noise from a small pocket in house left and a slightly better noise level from everywhere else. "And now, how many want him to pick Tammy?"

It was no contest. Tammy got a standing ovation from a good two thirds of the men in the audience.

"I'm not sure," I joked to Warren, "but it seems as though the audience has a slight preference for Tammy. Which girl do you choose?"

Warren looked at each of them in turn. "Nadine seems very smart," he assessed, "and she looks hot. Liz looks even more hot, though, and she does have a very nice ass. But Tammy not only looks hot, she acts hot and she's not afraid to let everyone know it. I'll take Tammy!"

Tammy stood up and raised her arms in celebration, drawing another round of applause from the horny crowd. She and Warren met center stage and embraced, sharing another hot kiss. As the applause died down, the unmistakable sounds of a woman in orgasm issued forth from the back row of my risers: Paul and Rebecca, still acting on their earlier instructions, were locked in an embrace. Paul's hand was under Rebecca's skirt working busily as she gasped and moaned. The crowd applauded more, which only made things worse for them.

Above the din I heard a loud SLAP behind me. I turned in time to see Theo Kane rubbing his left cheek. Roxy was glaring at him and sitting rigidly on the far edge of her seat from him. "Is something the matter?" I asked her.

Still watching Theo suspiciously, she leaned toward the mic. "This sicko tried to put his hand up my dress! I want another seat."

I promised to look into it and triggered everyone back into a deep trance state. Since Paul and Rebecca had taken things about as far as I dared, I removed the suggestion that had them reacting to the audience. I had Liz and Tammy put their clothes back on. Then I turned to the audience and took a quick look around. A good three fourths of the ones I could see were sitting quietly with their heads down, just like my volunteers on stage. I didn't need any more people for the stage so I was about to wake them up with thanks and let them enjoy the last bit. Then I had a thought: I hadn't really used the audience in the soap opera bit, so why not do a finale that included them?

"People on stage," I began, "when I count to three you will open your eyes feeling wide awake, but remaining in deep hypnosis and responding to my every suggestion. You will also know that you are all

adult film stars here at a press conference to promote your latest projects. I want each of you right now to take a moment and let your imagination suggest to you what that project is. Members of the press will be asking you questions about yourselves and your films. No matter what they ask, you will find the questions to be perfectly acceptable and will be happy to answer them; however, being porn stars, you have reputations to protect so your answers will have little or no grounding in reality. Instead, they'll be designed to reinforce the idea that you're having wild, hot sex whenever you want with whomever you want. When you hear someone else answer a question, your mind will supply you with an even more outrageous answer than the one you just heard and you'll want to share it with everyone."

Remembering the slap, I put a hand on Roxy's shoulder. "For the person I am touching now, the man to your right is your costar in your latest project, a how-to guide for new lovers. You haven't actually begun filming yet, so you've never had sex with him, but you now find him extremely attractive and anything he says or does will only make you more and more attracted to him. In fact, by the time we've had two questions from the reporters you're going to be bored with the press conference and start amusing yourself by trying to get him as turned on as you can."

I could have gone a lot further in seeding ideas with the volunteers, but I wanted to see what they came up with on their own. Instead, I addressed my hypnotized audience members. "For everyone in the audience who has their eyes closed now, when I count to three you will open your eyes and feel wide awake while remaining in deep hypnosis and following all of my suggestions. Each of you will realize that you are a reporter for a trade magazine serving the adult film industry, here to ask questions of the porn stars on stage. You took this job because you are a big fan of adult movies yourself and have a genuine admiration for the people who act in them. As a result, you'll ask questions that an interested fan might ask. It's perfectly okay if those questions are of a very personal nature because these are porn stars - they talk about their sex lives and body parts all the time. When you have a question to ask, you'll raise your hand so I can call on you and then you'll say who you want to direct the question to and what it is. You'll speak loudly and clearly so the stars and I can hear you. You'll want to listen to the questions that come before you so that your question will be fresh and different and more personal than the ones that came before you. Also, before you ask your question you'll give your name and the name of the magazine that you write for. The interesting thing is that while you all work for different magazines, by an amazing coincidence you all have the same name: Izzy Cumming. This will seem perfectly normal to you."

I counted everyone up and launched immediately into the bit. "Thank you, members of the press, for coming to this briefing. As you know, Uncut Productions has a number of new and exciting projects underway using the best and brightest stars in the adult entertainment industry. Before we start taking questions, let's have some of our stars describe their new projects to you."

Since we all knew what her project was anyway, I started with Roxy. "Theo and I are doing an instructional video series," she explained, "to teach new lovers all the different methods of sexual expression. In the first tape, Theo and I demonstrate a number of typical sexual encounters that a couple might have. This is the first video series to cover all aspects of a sexual experience without skipping. You'll see everything: setting the mood, deciding to have sex, undressing, getting each other aroused, foreplay, intercourse, orgasms, all the way to cooling down afterwards." Roxy put a hand on Theo's thigh and stroked it. "I'm getting slick just thinking about it," she added.

Sima was trying to get my attention, so I handed the mic to her. "My new video is called 'Tantric Tease'," she said. "I keep one guy hard as nails for three hours and don't let him come until the very end."

Liz took the mic directly from Sima. "Tammy and I are in a new bondage film," she said. "It's about a BDSM superhero called The Silver Mask. We play roommates who get captured by a white slaver and sold to a right-wing Congressman with a secret fetish chamber in his basement. We get drugged, tied up, ball-gagged, chained and handcuffed ... pretty much everything, alone and in pairs."

I was going to start the questions there, but Paul and Rebecca had been so good and they wanted the mic, so I let them have it. "Our new film is called 'Swap Meet'," Rebecca said. "It's about four couples who do a group yard sale, only it turns out they're all swingers."

There were some murmurs of appreciation from the audience. Most of my "reporters" had their hands up, so I advanced to the stage lip and chose my first one, a twenty-something guy in a Hawaiian shirt.

"Izzy Cumming, Nuts to Butts magazine," he began. "I want to ask Theo how he prepares his body to do an extended lovemaking scene like the ones in his new video."

"I have a very strict diet and exercise regimen," Theo explained after I relayed the question. "If I know I have a long shoot coming, like the ones we have planned with me and Roxy, I'll add in an extra tablespoon or two of yohimbe to my liver and oyster shake that morning, and I'll probably only put it to my girlfriend once before I head in to work instead of two or three times."

The audience cheered his bravado. My next reporter was a cute young thing in a pink dress. "Izzy Cumming, Crotch Shots," she said. "This is for Paul and Rebecca. Do you swing in real life?"

Paul took it. "Absolutely," he said. "Rebecca and I are constantly chatting people up for sex with each other. In fact, we were wondering if you had any plans for later."

I let the audience cheer for a minute, then went on to the next question. "Izzy Cumming," a bearded man in a polo shirt and jeans announced, "Hardcore Weekly. For Roxy: is it true that you've had three breast augmentations?"

Roxy was busy whispering something into Theo's ear, so I got her attention and repeated the question. She looked daggers at the guy who'd asked the question. "Absolutely not," she declared. Then she stood up, flipped the straps off her shoulders, and peeled her dress down to the waist. "I'll have you all know that these boobs are one hundred percent natural and always have been." Hefting her bare breasts, she turned to Theo. "Theo, do you see any scars under these?"

He stared intently at Roxy's orbs for a good long time before replying, "Nope. Nothing."

"Here," she offered, "Feel them for yourself. Do these feel fake to you, Theo?"

Again, Theo took his sweet time fondling Roxy's mammaries before answering. "They feel totally real to me," he assessed. "Not to mention fantastic."

Roxy sat down without fixing her dress and put an arm around Theo, who didn't object. With her other hand, she absentmindedly toyed with a breast. With the house lights up slightly, I could see "Barbie" back at her table looking daggers at him.

Another guy, this time in a button-down shirt. "Izzy Cumming, Lingus. The trades are still talking about that show-stopping kiss between Liz and Tammy during the Adult Video Awards show. Is it true that you've sworn off men and are committed lesbian lovers?"

Tammy took the microphone. "Guys are so childish," she said, throwing an arm lazily around Liz. "Liz and I have been friends and roommates since college. We got into the business together, and we love to work together. But we're not lesbian lovers. That's totally silly. Isn't that right, Liz?"

"That's right," Liz confirmed, grinning. "We're bi."

"And if you'd like a little demonstration," Tammy offered, "you can come up to our room later. And bring a friend."

As the audience cheered Liz and Tammy joined in a long, drawn-out, open mouthed kiss. Meanwhile, Theo now had his arm around Roxy and was fondling her breast while she blatantly groped and squeezed on the bulge in his pants.

I still needed a good, strong ending, so I took one more question from a busty blonde in a tube top.

"Izzy Cumming, Nude Nation. This is for Roxy: is it true that you can make a guy come in less than 10 seconds?"

I couldn't have asked for a better setup. I relayed the question to Roxy and stood back. "Of course," she declared. "Watch this." With one smooth motion Roxy rose up on her seat, slipped one hand inside Theo's tenting pants, and put her mouth near his ear lobe. She licked him and whispered something while her hand worked unseen magic. The others on stage started counting out seconds.

They got as far as six. Then Theo's legs jerked outward and he cried out, "I'm coming! I'm fucking coming!" His hips thrust upward hard enough that he almost fell out of the seat, and a dark stain began to spread across the tan fabric. The audience and the rest of the volunteers cheered and applauded Roxy. The starlet, grinning with satisfaction, withdrew her hand and wiped it on Theo's pants leg before pulling the tight dress back over her breasts.

I let the applause die down before ending the bit. "Ladies and gentlemen of the media, that's all we have time for today. Now I'd like to invite everyone on stage and everyone in the audience to close your eyes and sleep ."

I was in the dressing room, staring absently into the mirror while I pulled off the lavalier. The tape from the cord took some chest hair with it but I barely noticed.

"Interesting show," noted Rudi, the sound tech. "It was ... different from the first one."

Yes it was, I agreed silently. "The people make the show," I explained mechanically. "Each group is different, so each show is unique."

She was nodding. "If I'd known you were going to have that much talking across the stage, I would've put a couple of shotguns above the risers. That would have saved you all that hopping around with the hand mic to keep up with them.

I shrugged.

"Do you want me to do that for Friday night?" Rudy asked, insistent.

"Sure," I replied, handing over her equipment.

Rudi gave me the thumbs up. "Will do!" Then she hustled out the door.

I barely had time to get my shirt tucked back in when there was another knock on the door. "Mr. Torrance?" It sounded like Regan, the camera operator.

"It's okay," I told her, "I'm decent."

One side of her face cleared the door. "I just wanted to let you know that there's a couple of people in the green room waiting. They said you told them to meet you there."

I'd almost forgotten about Will and his girlfriend. I thanked Regan and finished getting the makeup off my face.

They were sitting on the sofa in the green room when I came inside. "Great show, Mr. Trancer," Will said, rising from the couch. "This is my girlfriend, Amy."

"I remember," I assured them, taking Amy's hand in mine. She was a petite brunette, short-haired and cute. She wore a white halter dress and moderate heels. Her cheeks blushed just a little when she met my gaze. To put her a little more at ease, I started off with small talk. "Beautiful weather we've had down here, don't you agree?"

We talked temperature and humidity until I'd managed to match her breathing rate and then bring it down to a more soothing level. I pulled up an ottoman and sat beside the couch on her right, facing her,

mirroring her body posture as well. When I sensed we had rapport established, I moved to the topic at hand. "Let's talk about what you'd like me to do for you, Amy."

Her brow wrinkled. "I thought Will explained ." She looked back to her boyfriend as if for help.

"He explained," I assured her. "But I need you to tell me yourself. You can do that now, or you can go into hypnosis first if you'd rather."

She gulped quietly. "I think I'd be more comfortable talking about it if I was hypnotized first."

"We can do that," I said, letting my voice slow down and soften into my trance voice. "Or, really, what I mean to say is that you can do that. Because I really can't make you go into a trance ... that's right ... unless you want to. Going into trance is something you already know how to do. It's as simple as focusing on my voice, feeling your body relax and grow heavy ... that's right ... and perhaps even allowing your inner mind to remember the sensations you experienced when you were on my stage, going deeper and deeper ... as your eyes close down, and you can just let them go ... now."

Amy's eyes grew distant and glassy almost from the start as her mind responded to my soft cadence and embedded suggestions. I did a few Elman-style arm drops until she was nice and deep, and then asked her to tell me what she wanted me to do for her.

"Make me sexy," she said quietly.

I looked at her slumped figure, curvaceous and well-toned, and a dozen emotions boiled up inside my chest. The entertainer gave way to the therapist. "You are already sexy," I said softly. "You have a lovely body and a powerful mind. Any man who does not find you sexy is unworthy of your attention. Go deeper, now, and tell me what you really want me to do for you."

She sunk a little further into the couch with a sigh. "I want you to help me have better sex with Will."

That, I could do. "Okay," I said. "In order to help you have better sex, we first need to determine what good sex feels like for you. With your permission, Amy, I'm going to lift your arm." She nodded very slightly. I took her arm and lifted it, supporting the elbow, until it was raised to a level just above her shoulder. "And now, Amy, you can let that arm sink slowly and easily down to the arm of the couch only as fast as your unconscious mind can recall the best sexual experience of your life - that sexual experience in which you felt most aroused, most satisfied, most alive." Her arm floated briefly, then started to slowly sink down. "That's right ... allow yourself to remember that experience. Feel the arousal, the joy, the satisfaction. When your arm reaches the arm of the couch, you'll be able to feel yourself in that experience at the height of your arousal, just moments away from climax."

Her arm continued its descent. Will watched wide-eyed as Amy's breathing became labored. Her eyes darted and fluttered under closed lids. Her nipples pushed hard against the halter dress, and in a few moments the unmistakable scent of a highly aroused woman began to reach my senses.

"That's right," I encouraged, lifting her arm back to its original position. "The more your arm lowers itself, the more aroused you become. The more aroused you become, the better sex you're going to have. Lower and lower, more and more aroused, climaxing only when your arm touches the arm of the couch."

I gave her a hell of a ride: each time her arm came close to the arm of the couch, I lifted it back up and reinforced the suggestion of increasing arousal as it went down. After a few repetitions, Amy's arm dropped faster and faster as her body writhed with extreme arousal. I caught the arm one last time, holding it just barely above the arm of the couch.

"Amy," I said, "you are now more aroused than you've ever been in your life. When you have your orgasm, it will be ten times better than any orgasm you've ever had before. It will be completely and totally satisfying in every way. Would you like Will to be able to make you feel this way, and to make you come like that, whenever you want to?"

Her head bobbed. "God, yes! Please, yes!"

"Good girl. Imagine that Will is with you right now. Imagine that this is Will squeezing your shoulder right now." Making sure Will was watching, I took one hand and squeezed Amy's right shoulder. "From now on, Amy, any time you feel Will squeeze your shoulder like this, you'll return immediately to the state of arousal you feel right now. You'll remain fully awake and alert, but you will become completely aroused, absolutely aroused, ready for the best orgasm of your life. You'll be able to orgasm as often as you like, as many times as you like, until both you and Will are satisfied. Will that be okay with you, Amy?"

I lifted the arm a few inches. "Then when your unconscious mind has accepted this suggestion permanently, let your arm lower to the arm of the couch and give you the best orgasm of your life."

Her arm sank steadily, and this time I didn't stop it. As soon as she felt the arm of the couch Amy's back arched and her body thrashed about wildly with the strength of her orgasm. "That's right," I said. "Let your entire body feel the orgasm. This is the best orgasm you've ever had. You can let it last as long as you want it to and then return to your deep trance state."

By the time Amy quieted down and became still again, almost four minutes had passed. Her skin gleamed all over from perspiration. And Will looked completely beside himself.

I spent several more minutes with Amy reinforcing her new trigger. I also took her through some reframing and worked on having her become more adventurous in the bedroom. Then it was time to count her up.

"Welcome back," I said as her eyes blinked open. "How do you feel?"

She peeked inside the top of her dress and moved her legs. "Like I've had the ride of my life," she replied. "What happened?"

"I'll let Will explain it - or better yet, Will, why don't you demonstrate?"

He gave me a puzzled look. "Now? Here?"

I shrugged. "Sure. Just be ready to head to your room immediately. Or lock the door behind me."

As I headed for the door, Will got up and sat beside Amy on the couch. He pulled her to him for a kiss.

"Don't," she chided. "I'm all sweaty."

"You ain't seen nothin' yet," he said, and squeezed her right shoulder. I stayed long enough to see Amy gasp in amazement, then dive hungrily at Will.

Sometimes I just love my work.

Monica and Claire were the only guests left in the dining area when I finally got there. Both fixed annoyed looks at me. "Some of these people would like to go home," Monica noted, "and we're keeping them from doing it."

"My fault," I allowed. "I was accosted in the green room."

Claire made a show of looking me over. "I don't see any sign of broken bones, so I guess it wasn't that blonde guy from the buffet."

"Oh, no," I assured them. "This was something totally different. A little hypnotic barter." I explained in quick terms about Will's request.

Monica eyed me suspiciously. "And what service will you get from him in exchange?"

I grinned. "A fresh volunteer for the two of you. He's meeting us after breakfast tomorrow and has agreed to let you both practice on him."

We left the dining room before the staff felt the need to throw us out. Claire pushed the buttons for both 9 and 12, looking slyly my way. I just watched and waited.

The door opened at 9 and Monica stepped out. "Goodnight, Jack."

Claire started to follow her, then stepped back with a mischievous grin on her face and allowed the doors to close. "Maybe later," she said, coming closer and taking my hand loosely. "First, let's see what else your imagination can come up with tonight."

Truth to tell, my imagination was pretty much shot. But I did have one trick up my sleeve - something I'd seen another hypnotist do in a video but never tried myself. Claire, I figured, would be great for this.

Taking a firmer grip on her hand with mine, I pulled her toward me and said, "Sleep, Claire." A surprised look tried to come out, but the trigger worked too quickly. Her eyes closed and she slumped against me. I pulled the STOP button on the elevator and briefly remembered the camera in the ceiling. *This'll just take a moment*, I promised it silently.

"That's right, Claire," I intoned, "letting go completely. Wonderfully deep now. In a moment or two, I'm going to count to three. When I reach three you'll come out of hypnosis and your conscious mind will have no idea that you were in hypnosis. Your conscious mind will only know that seeing my show tonight has put you in the mood for some really hot, passionate sex and you want it with me, right away. You will also know that I'm tired and might not have enough energy to really please you the way you want to be pleased. So when we get to my room, you'll decide to hypnotize me into having sex with you. You'll use whatever induction you like, and give me any suggestions you want, but everything you say to me will actually affect you instead of me. Every suggestion will affect you instead of me, but you'll keep giving me suggestions anyway because you'll think they are affecting me when they are actually only affecting you. One, two, three."

On three I also pressed the STOP button back in, restarting the elevator. Claire blinked and stepped back just as the chime sounded and the doors opened on the twelfth floor. "Here we are," she said, tugging at my hand to get me to follow more quickly. A seductive smile and a wink flashed across her face as well.

I opened the door to my suite and put on a show of tiredness: kicking my shoes off, tossing the jacket

over the back of a chair, and plopping on the couch with a heavy sigh.

"Poor baby," Claire cooed, folding herself onto the couch next to and slightly above me. "Are you too tired to play tonight?"

"Could be," I admitted, looking up into her face.

Claire took my face in her hands and began to gently massage my temples. "I know that feeling," she said to me, dropping her voice gradually into a smooth, soft tone. "It's okay, Jack, to just relax now. You can let your mind clear and just focus on my eyes. Feeling our eyes locking together, unable to look away now, and just relaxing ... more and more ... as my fingers slowly caress you. Noticing, perhaps, how with each circle I trace your eyes become heavier and heavier ... sleepy ... so sleepy ..."

I felt fine, of course, but Claire's words had a strong and profound effect on herself. She began to blink heavily, struggling to keep her own eyes open even as she encouraged mine to close. "You can barely keep your eyes open now," she continued with half-closed lids, "but you won't let them close until I count to three. On the count of three, Jack, your eyes will become so heavy they close by themselves as you fall into a deep, wonderful trance for me. One, eyes getting sooo heavy now ... two, you can barely keep them open now, fighting so hard, and now letting go all the way at ... three ."

Her eyes closed and Claire's body collapsed on top of me. "That's it," she murmured softly, "Deeper and deeper. So deep you'll do anything I tell you to do without thinking. Trusting me completely."

"Completely," I responded in a monotone. "What do you want me to do?"

She remained slumped against me, her body totally relaxed. "You feel hot," she told me. "Both warm and increasingly aroused. Your clothes are becoming very uncomfortable. They need to come off. With each breath you take, your clothes are becoming more and more uncomfortable." Her body began to wiggle, responding to her own suggestions of discomfort. Then her legs unfolded and she slowly stood up. I kept a hand on her to steady her until I was sure she was standing well. "That's right, standing up now. With every piece of clothing you take off, you become more comfortable and also more aroused. More and more aroused, thinking only of how great it will feel to be naked and ready for hot, passionate sex."

As Claire kept compounding the suggestion, her body moved on its own to shed her clothing. Her skin flushed pink from the neck down to her thatch and her nipples stood out, begging for action.

"That's right," she said as the last piece of her clothing hit the floor. "Totally aroused now, thinking only of how much you want sex. Wondering just how good it will feel to walk over to the bed and lie down on your back, right now." She stretched her arms outward, then glided over to the bed and followed her own instruction. "Very good, Jack," she continued. "You're so aroused, so eager for sex, but there's only one problem: your hands and feet are tied to the bed, Jack. Ropes go around your wrists and ankles and pull them toward the corners of the bed." As she spoke, her arms and legs spread wide toward the corners. "Tied up now, the ropes comfortable but absolutely holding your hands and feet firmly to the bed. The more you try to pull them free, the more strongly they are held in place and the more aroused you become. Try and pull yourself free and as you feel the ropes holding you down, you become ten times more aroused."

It was quite a spectacle. Claire lay on the bed, spread eagle, her arms and legs twitching against imaginary ropes of her own creation while her body responded to the escalating arousal. Her voice grew raspy and soft moans began to interrupt the flow of her speech as Claire continued.

"You're so aroused now," she moaned, "more aroused than you've ever been before without having an orgasm. But you won't orgasm until I tell you to, Jack. Only when I say, 'Come now' will you have the strongest orgasm you've ever had. And now, Jack, I'm going to give you a little massage. As you feel my hands roaming over your body, you'll realize that your entire body is now an erogenous zone, as sensitive and arousing to the touch as your most erotic spot is normally. Feeling my touch, growing

more and more aroused, until you beg me to let you come."

I stood there, fascinated, watching Claire, until urgent signals from my groin reached my brain: Major orgasm imminent, the message said, get your clothes off and get in the saddle!

I stripped down in a hurry while Claire moaned and gasped with intense pleasure. From the way her body moved, I figured she was feeling her own imaginary touch. So I added my own to the mix, running my hands softly up and down her thighs in a sensual caress that sent her into a long, sustained sigh. "That's good," she told me, "give in to the feelings, Jack. Beg me to let you come. Beg me, please. Please."

Her voice, and her scent, almost put me over the edge right there. I eased myself into her, holding her hips and tilting for maximum penetration. Claire's back arched deeply, pressing her breasts up to the sky. I put my hand on one and squeezed it gently. "Beg me, Jack," she pleaded. "Bed me to make you come. Please!"

She needed to hear it, and I wasn't going to hold out more than a few seconds anyway. "Please," I said, "make me come. Please, Claire, make me come."

"Come now," she replied. The words were barely out of her mouth when every muscle in her body clamped down, including - especially - the ones locked around my penis. For a good minute and a half Claire rocked and moaned and panted. I didn't last three seconds into her orgasm before mine hit, putting spots in front of my eyes. It was all I could do to hold the position while Claire rode it out.

Finally, the rocking subsided and her breathing began to slow. "Very good, Jack," she sighed contentedly. "You are no longer tied to the bed. And now, at the count of three, you'll come out of hypnosis and directly into a deep, satisfying, natural sleep. Nothing will bother or disturb you until it's time to wake up in the morning. One ... two ..."

Neither of us heard her say three.

I awoke in the morning to a loud pop and a sudden sting against my bare buttock. I flipped over quickly to find a naked Claire standing over me, prepping her towel for another shot. "You're beautiful when you're angry," I said, grabbing a pillow for self defense.

She took another shot, which I deflected using my pillow. For her next shot she leaned forward off balance. I caught the towel and pulled her down with it. She landed on top of me in an exquisite pile of freshly-showered, sweet-smelling woman. I did a quick roll and pinned her to the bed. "Let me go," she pouted. "After what you did last night, you deserve it."

"What I did?" I challenged, pretending surprise. "I seem to recall that you tried to hypnotize and take advantage of me, my dear. And you got what you wanted in the end, so to speak."

She took my pillow and swatted me with it. "That's for the bad pun. And for the reverse whammy, which was evil."

"Come on," I protested, seeing how her nipples perked up at the memory of last night's session. "Don't try to tell me you didn't enjoy that."

"Of course I did," she admitted. "That's not the point."

"Then what is the point?"

She looked me straight in the eye. "This vacation is going to end soon, Jack. And I have no illusions about what's going to happen when it does. As much as I love what we do together, I wanted to know what having sex with you feels like when I'm not in a trance at the time. To see if it's real, I guess. Does that make sense?"

I had to agree, it did. So I let go of her wrists and slid my hand softly down to her chest, where I found a breast and caressed it gently. "Does this feel real?"

She closed her eyes and smiled as her nipple responded to my touch. "That's nice," she said. "It might feel even more real if you used your mouth instead of your hand."

Always willing to oblige, I let my lips and tongue pay homage as my hand swept further down, enjoying the soft feel of her skin. Her legs parted and my fingers found their way between them.

"It's getting more real by the minute," she sighed contentedly. Her right hand found something it could lock on to and started caressing back, getting me hard and ready.

"Keep doing that," I warned, "and it's going to be real quick."

"You say that as if it's a bad thing," she joked. Then, as I tried to switch to the other breast, she hooked a leg and managed to roll us both over. Her mouth met mine as her hand moved around my shaft. In a moment her tongue pressed into my mouth while her hand somehow managed to stroke the base of my penis and gently rub my balls at the same time.

All that stimulation in one place was more than my conscious mind could handle. I gave up and relaxed, resigning myself to a fast and sloppy, but extremely pleasurable, ending.

Claire sensed my surrender and mounted me easily. "No pressure," she said, "no tricks. Just come whenever you're ready, and so will I."

It didn't take long of Claire riding me before all of my bodily energy gathered in my groin. My eyes rolled back and everything else went limp as I came. Claire kept with me, rocking her hips and clutching her own breasts. Just as I was starting to soften she heaved a couple of huge gasps and pressed down against me. Her hands shot out to my chest to hold herself up as she bucked on top of me. Finally she swung a leg over and flopped down next to me, letting her fingers play with the hairs on my chest. An elfin grin came over her face as she asked, "Was it real for you, too?"

Monica sat at our usual table, a half-empty glass of apple juice in front her, when Claire and I arrived for breakfast. We were twenty minutes late, and I felt sure the color in Claire's cheeks would reveal the reason. Monica, thankfully, was discreet enough not to make a point of it.

We got food at the buffet and sat down to start eating. More to break the silence than anything else, I addressed Monica. "You never did say what you thought of the show last night."

"I'm not entirely sure," she said thoughtfully. "It had a very different feel from what I saw of the first show. Do you always dwell so much on pornography?"

That was not the reaction I was hoping for. I reran the show in my mind for a second or two, though, and saw her point. "I see what you mean. No, not usually. I think a lot of the porno references came from having a porn actress in the group."

"You were pandering to her?"

"Not really, no. But remember, the show is heavily improvised. I don't know what I'm going to be doing until I get up there and see who I've got to work with. It may be that knowing I had Roxy there made porno-related ideas more likely to occur to me. Was that a bad thing?"

Monica shrugged. "It made the show seem a bit one-dimensional."

"The audience didn't seem to mind," I insisted. Then I wondered why I was getting so defensive about it.

"I'm sure they didn't," she hastened to agree. "My expectations were just higher than that, maybe."

The user was getting annoyed but the teacher had to agree with her. "You're right, though. It's better not to let one idea dominate the show like that." Then, sensing something in Monica's face, I probed further. "Anything else?"

She contorted her face, searching for words, looking anywhere but at me. "It's hard to pin down," she told me. "Something about the tone of the show. It seemed ... a little malicious."

"Oh?" I waited quietly to hear more.

"The first show -- what I saw of it, anyway -- felt more like everyone was playing together. People having fun, and maybe getting a little out of hand. Last night it felt to me more like you were making fun of the people on stage, especially that blonde guy. It seemed like an elaborate practical joke."

It was hard to argue with Monica's assessment. "You're probably right," I admitted. "That guy was badmouthing hypnosis earlier in the day, and I was trying to make him eat his words. I'll try to keep things light and fun for the last show."

We ate in relative silence, the user seething quietly both at Monica's critique and my own easy acquiescence with it. I knew she was right; in retrospect, it was pretty obvious that I'd let my desire to humiliate Theo Kane color the show. The best part had been finding a date for Warren, thanks largely to the surprising spontaneity of Liz and Tammy. *You owe them one*, I told myself.

"Jack?"

I snapped back to reality to see both girls looking at me. "Sorry. What did I miss?"

Claire scolded me with a look. "Only the complete battle plans for our shopping excursion to San Juan. Can we take it from your lack of attention that you won't be joining us?"

"You mean, schlep all the way to the other side of the island in order to wander through the tourist traps and boost the local economy? It's tempting, but I'll pass."

"Predictable male response," Monica said with a smile. "Will there be a lecture before our volunteer arrives, Professor?"

I pushed my empty plate aside to join theirs. "Overload inductions," I announced.

"An overload induction," I explained, "works by overwhelming the conscious mind with different inputs or things to consider, to the point where it gives up and cedes control to the subconscious. Most people are able to consciously attend to between five and nine things at one time; exceed that threshold and you can induce a trance very quickly and easily. For example, right now you are mostly just aware of the sound of my voice as I explain to you about overload inductions. But at the same time, while you listen to my voice, you can also concentrate for a moment on your breathing. Breathing slowly and steadily, just as if you were already in a trance, or pretending to be. And you can also imagine, at the same time, just how you might look to someone passing by while you're relaxing in the chair, and then doing whatever needs doing to make yourself appear even more relaxed. All the while, still thinking about your breathing, making sure that each breath in lasts just as long as each breath out. Really, of course, each breath in will probably be a little shorter than each breath out, but you can focus on that nonetheless, and perhaps at the same time notice the weight of your shoulders against the back of the chair, and still listening to my voice as you relax more and more.

"And while you're listening quietly to the sound of my voice, it may be that you'll notice you've forgotten to think about your breathing. That's all right; you can just start thinking about it again now while you listen to the sound of my voice and imagine what you look like from the outside and notice the weight of your shoulders against the back of the chair. And since that's only four things, you should be able to also listen to the background music playing from the ceiling speakers. That's five things now to think about. And I wonder if you can think of all five of those things and then, at the same time, notice how your feet feel on the floor, and perhaps how your arms feel as they rest in your lap. That's

seven things now: the sound of my voice ... your shoulders pressing against the back of the chair ... the way you look as you relax more and more deeply ... the music in the background ... your breathing ... your arms ... your feet on the floor."

I could see the concentration in their faces as they struggled to retain awareness of each sensation. Monica's eyes had closed on their own, while Claire's stared blankly in my general direction. "I wonder if your mind is powerful enough to think of an additional thing - adding in an awareness of the temperature of the room, and then just testing to see whether you can add yet another input to your senses, so that you're thinking of NINE things all at once. Thinking about all those eight inputs and then maybe adding an awareness of how your eyes feel while you're thinking of all those other things: the feel of your shoulders against the chair ... your breathing ... the music in the background ... how you look from the outside ... the temperature of the room ... your feet on the floor ... your arms ... the sound of my voice ... and how your eyes feel.

"Your shoulders ... your breathing ... the music ... how you look from the outside ... the temperature ... your feet ... your arms ... the sound of my voice ... your eyes. Of course when anybody thinks of all these things, what they are really doing is scanning through them, one after another, so quickly that it feels as if you're thinking of all of them at once. Using your mind like a computer, sharing its available resources between the different tasks you are attempting to perform all at once. And that's why some people can only think of five things - that's the limit of their mental resources. Others can actually think of nine things. And I wonder how well your memory is working now as you struggle to remember those nine things: the feel of your shoulders ... your breathing ... the music ... how you look ... the temperature ... your feet ... your arms ... my voice ... and how your eyes feel."

They were both straining. The effort of concentration was plain on their faces; they hadn't even realized they were already in trance. "And now you can think of how good it will feel to simply allow yourself to think of only one thing, the most important thing. It will be so easy, now, to think of just one thing instead of nine things. And that one thing, that most important thing, is to think about how deeply, wonderfully relaxed you can be right now."

Both heads dropped on cue, landing softly on their chests. I had to smile; they were so easy.

"Another form of overload induction," I continued, lecturing to their subconscious minds, "is the multi-evocation, or dual induction. In a dual induction you have two hypnotists working together to induce trance in a third person. The technique takes advantage of the organization of the brain and of the brain's innate inability to pay full attention to two sources of input simultaneously.

"Here's how it works: one hypnotist sits or stands on the person's left side. That hypnotist will be speaking to the left brain and will use a standard induction. Pacing and leading, progressive relaxation, counting down ... any of those inductions speak primarily to the left brain.

"The other hypnotist sits or stands on the person's right side. That hypnotist will be speaking to the right brain, which is the creative center. That hypnotist will give suggestions about imagery, getting the right brain to imagine sensations, images, sounds, or whatever comes to mind that is relaxing and distracting."

As I spoke I became aware of a presence behind me. A quick peek revealed Will standing back watching my entranced students. I motioned him to a chair. He took the chair and sat carefully, as if trying not to disturb the women. I held up an index finger and mouthed, "Just one minute," then continued.

"As the two hypnotists speak, they need to be watching the person and also each other. They should borrow words and phrases from each other as much as possible, taking advantage of multiple meanings and puns, to further confuse the conscious mind of the volunteer. When the hypnotists see that their volunteer is surrendering, they should coordinate their speech so that they are both telling him to go

deep, and then end together on the word 'now'. It's a highly effective technique that will work for anyone except the unwilling and tends to produce a profound trance state very quickly.

"And now," I concluded, "I'd like both of you to take a deep breath and count yourselves up from one to five, coming completely out of hypnosis at the count of five feeling refreshed, energetic, and ready to do a dual induction on the volunteer who's just joined our table."

I think Will was too distracted watching them to notice what I'd said. In a few seconds Monica's eyes opened, then Claire's. Both blushed slightly and smiled when they saw Will staring at them.

I introduced everyone, then exchanged seats with Claire so that Will sat between the women. "Will," I explained, "has kindly agreed to be your practice volunteer for this morning. I'd like the two of you to do a dual induction on him. Claire, since you're sitting on his left you'll use direct suggestion and a standard induction. Monica, you'll have to ad lib more because you have the right side: watch Will's reactions to your suggestions and see if you can determine which sensory input he responds best to, then emphasize that sense."

Monica nodded. "So if I say to see himself lying on a beach and his eyes move, then I should stress images?"

"That's the idea, yes. Visual is the most common orientation, but use at least sight, sound, and body feeling at first until you get an idea of how he responds."

Will looked back and forth between the two, then at me. "What do you want me to do?"

I smiled. "Just relax and enjoy the ride."

Both women looked to me. I gave them a nod. Claire started immediately. "Pick a spot somewhere," she told him, "and focus all of your attention there. Notice the colors, the textures, the shapes that make up that spot. And as you focus all of your attention on that spot, take a deep breath and begin to relax."

Monica joined in on the word relax, only she used it to start a sentence. "Relax and imagine, perhaps, that you are actually looking so intently at a picture of that spot hanging in a museum. Look closer and see the brush marks left by the painter's brush, and notice how the colors seem to break apart into smaller sections of color. You can hear, perhaps, the soft hum of air conditioning and the droning voice of a curator in the next room ..."

They spoke at the same time, making it very hard to follow both - which is the point in a dual induction, of course. Claire gave him straight directions to relax, focus, breathe, while Monica's images included the same ideas of relaxation, stepping back, disassociating him from the here and now. I could see in Will's face the struggle to listen to both. That lasted less than a minute, then his face went blank as he gave up the battle and just let both sides bombard him. The hypnotic flush came over his face and his eyes glazed over. The girls looked to me, got the thumbs up sign, and wound up their inductions with suggestions for eye closure. Their voices came together for the final instruction: "... and as they close, letting go and going deep now."

Will almost fell out of the chair. His body slumped forward like a crash dummy at the moment of impact. Monica and Claire each took an arm and sat him back up, both giving him deepening suggestions at the same time. I let them go for a minute or so, until it looked as though Will would melt through the mesh seat bottom. "That's enough now. Someone tell him to just drift and ignore everything he hears until someone touches his knee."

Monica took the lead and gave him the suggestion, adding that no matter how relaxed he might become he would always remain safely and comfortably seated. A nice touch.

A spit-eating grin lit up Claire's elfin face. "How'd we do?"

"Outstanding," I praised. "He never saw it coming. Excellent coordination, both of you."

"Thank you," Monica said. "But what do we do with him now?"

It was my turn to grin. "We call his girlfriend over." I looked around and spotted Amy watching us from another table. All it took was a wave to bring her over to us, dragging a spare chair with her.

"Wow," she said, nodding at Will. "He's really out of it."

"They did well," I agreed. "And now you have a rare opportunity, Amy. Last night, I hypnotized you and left a posthypnotic suggestion that Will can trigger whenever he likes."

Amy blushed and nodded. "It works," she affirmed. "Several times already."

I smiled at her. "So now it's your turn. Is there something you'd like to be able to get Will to do on command? Something you would both enjoy, maybe?"

She looked up, and we could all see the mental wheels turning. "He's got an easy way to get me all sexed up whenever he wants," she remarked. "I suppose it's only fair to make it work both ways, right?"

"Sounds reasonable to me," I said. "So you'd like us to give Will a trigger that will turn him on the way yours does?"

"Hmmm." She thought about it for another few seconds. "Maybe not exactly like mine. I can always get Will into bed just by flashing a little skin his way. What I can't seem to do is get him to pay attention to me when I just want to talk. Sometimes it's like if I'm not naked I'm not interesting. Does that make sense?"

Both girls were nodding emphatically. "Absolutely," said Monica.

"I have an idea," Claire said. "Every time you touch him a certain way, he becomes fixated on you and will ignore anything else that tries to get his attention."

"There needs to be an end signal, though," Monica added. "Could the same signal be the start and the end?"

"Sure," I replied. "As long as the suggestion is worded clearly. It should be something unlikely to happen by accident, though - something like your trigger, Amy. A deliberate squeeze on the shoulder." To illustrate, I reached over to Amy and squeezed her shoulder. Her eyes widened for a split second, then a puzzled look came over her. "Relax," I explained. "The trigger only works when it's Will doing the squeezing. Helps to avoid embarrassing accidents. Will that work for you?"

Amy nodded, and all three women exchanged a knowing grin.

The user felt a little like he was betraying a fellow man, but I knew better than to argue. "Make it so," I told them.

Monica touched Will on the knee. "Your mind is totally open to our suggestions, Will, is it not?" Will murmured something unintelligible through mostly closed lips. "You can speak to us clearly without disturbing your relaxation, Will. In fact, you'll find that speaking clearly helps your mind to relax even more with each word you say. Your mind is totally open to our suggestions, Will, is it not?"

"Yes," he replied.

"You love Amy, don't you?"

"Yes." A faint smile came over his lips.

"And you'd do anything to show Amy how much you love her, wouldn't you?"

"Yes."

She had a great rhythm going; Will's positive answers were coming faster with each question.

"And when we love someone, it's important to pay attention to them, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"So will you accept a suggestion that will help you give Amy the attention she needs to feel loved by you?"

No hesitation. "Yes."

Monica motioned Amy to come closer to Will. "From now on Will, Amy will sometimes squeeze your shoulder like this." She nodded to Amy, who put a nice gentle squeeze on Will's right shoulder.

"Whenever Amy touches you that way, Will, it will remind you that Amy is the most interesting person you've ever met in your life. You'll want to pay full attention to everything she says and does. It will be extremely important to you to give Amy your full attention. Anything else that might try to distract you from her will be less important, and you'll be able to easily ignore those distractions and focus all of your attention on Amy. This will be a perfectly natural, normal thing for you to do and you'll enjoy doing it. You'll continue to give Amy your full, undivided attention until she squeezes your shoulder again. It will always be okay to pay attention to Amy, even if she hasn't squeezed your shoulder, but when she does squeeze your shoulder you will always make sure to pay complete and total attention to her until she squeezes your shoulder a second time. You can do this without ever consciously thinking about it, can't you, Will?"

"Yes."

"That's very good. It will make you feel so good to respond to Amy's touch and to pay attention to her." She looked at me, got a nod, and continued. "And now ..."

Claire waved a hand and got Monica's attention. Monica stopped and let Claire take over.

"And now, Will," Claire said, "I'm going to count from one to five. When I reach the count of five you will wake up feeling refreshed, alert, and absolutely wonderful in every way." Her eyes darted over to me for a moment, and I saw mischief in them. Curiosity kept me silent. "And from now on, whenever you squeeze Amy's shoulder to use her posthypnotic trigger, you'll find that the same suggestions Jack gave to Amy last night also affect you just as strongly as they affect her. Every suggestion Jack gave to Amy last night will affect you as well." She paused while Amy giggled.

All I did was shake my head and smile ruefully while she counted Will out of trance. The poor guy was in for one hell of a surprise. And, probably, a long and happy relationship.

It occurred to me as I watched Claire and Monica board a resort shuttle to do their tourist thing that my vacation was more than half over and I'd done precious little relaxing. With my students headed for the other side of the island, this seemed the ideal opportunity to make up for that.

The beach beckoned to me, so I changed into trunks and a T-shirt, grabbed a towel and headed out. On my way I hit the gift shop and picked up John Sandford's latest. I found myself a quiet, sparsely-populated corner of the beach and settled in for some serious goofing off.

As I read, I would occasionally glance up at the people passing by on their way on or off the beach. In a more or less steady stream of young bodies in various states of undress, none stood out in particular.

Except one, that is. Midway through Chapter Five she strolled through my field of vision. I noticed the flowing mane of honey-colored hair and well-toned body showcased in a gold metallic bikini. What intrigued me more was the pair of men who followed her like native bearers, loaded down with seemingly enough paraphernalia for a family of four. The woman pointed to a spot nearby and instantly the men jumped ahead to prepare it. They spread out blankets and set up two folding chaise lounges with a small resin table between them. She contemplated both chairs before choosing one, settling into

it with a seductive wriggle. She leaned forward and both men practically leapt to untie her bikini top. One hand stretched out imperiously and was instantly filled with a small squeeze bottle. She applied the oil to her breasts with fluid, sensuous movements as the men sat on the blanket at her feet like well-trained pets.

I realized I was staring, which was not only impolite but unnecessary. At Uninhibited, after all, topless women are as common as Catholics in Rome. I went back to my book.

A few minutes later a shadow eclipsed the book. I looked up to see one of the bearers standing at my feet. "Excuse me, sir," he said, making eye contact and then looking immediately down. "The Mistress has sent me to convey her greetings, and to invite you to join her for a drink."

The idea of meeting "the Mistress" intrigued me enough that I slipped a bookmark into my novel and followed him back to the blanket. My escort dropped to his knees beside the occupied lounge and bowed. "He is here, Mistress."

"Well done, Jared." Her voice flowed smoothly with a richness that commanded respect.

Then her eyes turned to me and her right hand lifted. I took her hand in mine, bent over and kissed it - she seemed so regal that the gesture felt natural. "Jack Torrance," I said, meeting her gaze. "It's a pleasure to meet you."

"Thank you, Jack." Her smile conveyed both approval and a sense of shared amusement. "I am Mistress Angelica. Please, be seated." Her wave indicated the empty chaise to her left. I settled into it just in time for her other lackey to place two glasses filled with pink slush on the table between us. Mistress Angelica took a sip from hers and smiled at him. "Well done as usual, Henry. Now you boys go for a swim so Jack and I can speak."

They replied, "Yes, Mistress" in perfect unison and headed for the water.

The first thing that struck me about Mistress Angelica was the absolute comfort and assurance with which she carried herself. She sipped her drink and watched her boys run without any outward sign of awkwardness at being topless with a stranger. The second was that she was clearly older than I'd first thought - much closer to 45 than 35, judging from the skin around her eyes and hands. But she was a spectacular 45 to be sure.

"Ann."

I blinked. "I'm sorry?"

"Ann," she repeated, smiling over her sunglasses. "My name. You're not one of my pets, so there's no need to stand on formality."

I nodded. "Thank you. I haven't called anyone 'Mistress' since, well, ever."

"I didn't think so. You seem like one of those who like to be in control."

"Is that why I'm here?" I asked. "To be re-educated?"

Another genuine smile. "It did cross my mind to seduce you," she confessed, "but from the way you're not staring at my chest I have to conclude that your needs in that area have already been met. Perhaps by those young ladies who are so often in your company?"

"You'll understand if I don't answer that."

"Of course I will. My apologies, Jack. Anyway, as you seem impervious to my feminine charms and I don't happen to have a pocket watch on me, it would seem that enthralling you is out of the question."

"Not that you aren't quite tempting," I assured her. "But I'm not sure I would compare favorably to your pet studs anyway."

"Now you're being modest," she teased. "I saw that girl with the tattoo proposition you on stage, Jack. Look me in the eye and tell me you didn't go to her room that night."

Ah, Laurel. I chuckled softly. "Actually, I did. So did half the men who saw that show. Unlike them, I was just checking to see if she was all right. She was, aside from being stalked by people wanting to take my place. I helped her go to sleep and ignore the phone and door until morning, and left the lady with her honor intact."

Her eyebrows rose, and her expression turned to one of intense curiosity. "Did you really? How unexpectedly noble of you."

I wasn't quite sure how to respond to that. Some of my ambivalence must have shown on my face, because Ann backed off quickly.

"I'm offending you again. Please don't be irritated, Jack. I'm impressed, really. If that had been me giving the show, and a young man making that offer, I would have made him mine for the rest of his vacation."

Now I was beginning to understand. "Management frowns on that sort of thing," I pointed out, keeping my voice light.

She sighed. "They do at that. But human nature is what it is, yes?"

I left Ann soaking in the sun, drinking daiquiris, and took my book back to my room. From there I looked out at the beach from my balcony for a while, contemplating the people. I could still make out the Mistress and her minions. I even watched them spread lotion on her back while she rested.

That had been an interesting conversation. A predator learns to recognize potential competitors, evaluate them, and if necessary neutralize them. Ann had seen the user on stage and felt the need for a closer look. I'd find out soon enough, I reasoned, if she thought I was a threat.

I had a few quiet hours to enjoy my book. Just as I was beginning to think about dinner, the phone rang. Claire's voice had a breathless tone. "Miss us?"

"I was beside myself with longing," I joked. "Couldn't concentrate for anything."

"I'm sure. Have you done anything about dinner yet?"

"Nothing. I was waiting to see when you two got back."

"Well, we're back, but we're in no fit state for socializing. Monica's in the tub now, and when she recovers enough to get out I'm next. Then I think we're both going to crash."

I pushed aside the mental image of Monica in the bathtub. "Shopped yourselves into exhaustion, did you?"

"Total exhaustion. Physical and financial."

"Here's an idea for you, then. Why don't you come up here and borrow my tub? Tell Monica to join us when she's ready and I'll order room service for the three of us."

"That does sound nice," she replied thoughtfully. "We haven't eaten since lunch, so we'd be hungry if we weren't so tired. Okay, you're on. I'll drag myself to the elevator in a minute or two."

I left the door ajar and finished my current chapter. It was more like ten minutes before Claire shuffled in looking spent. "It's only fair to warn you," she said, "if this was just a ploy to get me up here and naked, you wasted it. I'm too bushed to boogie tonight."

I had to laugh. "If I'd had any ulterior motives," I assured her, "they're gone now." I pointed to the

bathroom. "Go. Enjoy. Relax."

She turned on the water and stood in the bathroom doorway, peeling off clothes. "If I fall asleep in here, don't let me get all wrinkly, okay?"

I gave her the Boy Scout salute. "I will inspect you for wrinkliness carefully and often," I promised with a joking leer. She stuck her tongue out and threw her bunched-up panties at me.

While Claire was getting settled into the bath, I opened the minibar and pulled out a bottle of local rum. It was a pale amber color, the kind you can sip straight or on ice without being a hardcore drinker. I poured some over ice and brought the glass to Claire.

She was lying in the tub with her eyes closed, luxuriating in the warmth of the water. "No wrinkles yet," I quipped.

She started at my voice. "You shouldn't sneak up on people like that," she admonished me.

"Sorry. I brought you this." I set the glass on the flat edge of the tub in easy reach.

"Mmmmmm," she said, taking a sip of the booze. "That hits the spot." She waited a moment while I enjoyed the view. "Thank you, Jack."

I kept looking. "You're welcome."

She gave me another five seconds and then cleared her throat. "You can go now, Jack."

I grinned at her until she had to smile back, then left her in peace. Back in the sitting area I found the room service menu and ordered enough arroz con pollo and sides for three with plenty of bottled water. It would take half an hour, by which time I figured I'd have some hungry ladies on my hands.

A knock sounded on the door about fifteen minutes later. I started to answer, then had a thought and detoured long enough to close the bathroom door first.

Monica wore a pink satin robe, slippers, and probably very little else. She set a paper shopping bag on the floor and settled gracefully into an easy chair. "I should probably have worn more," she noted, adjusting the robe.

"I'm not complaining."

"I noticed that." With a twinkle in her eye she added, "I also noticed that Claire left our room empty-handed, so I may still be overdressed by comparison."

Monica shared some of her impressions of San Juan while we waited for Claire and dinner. "The people were incredibly nice," she said. "Not just the ones that wanted to sell us things, either - everyone from the policeman we met in the park to the other people in the café where we had lunch to the children on the street. And the city is so colorful, Jack! Splashes of color everywhere, on the buildings and in the people's clothes and on the everyday things all around. It's beautiful."

She went into more detail on some of the places they'd been. I listened closely, trying not to notice the way the opening in her robe was beginning to plunge a little further south with each excited movement of her arms.

Room service saved me by showing up early. Two waiters brought in trays and set them on the coffee table. A small bucket held six bottles of water in ice. I signed for the meal and a healthy tip.

I was about to knock on the bathroom door when it opened. Claire stood there, sopping wet and naked with a towel clutched to her front and her nose sniffing the air. "Food?"

I grinned. "It'll still be here when you're decent."

"No guarantees!" Monica called out with a laugh as she moved to the couch and took a plate.

Claire joined us in a matter of seconds wearing one of the hotel's soft terry robes from the bathroom. "I'm jealous," Monica remarked. "All we got in our bathroom was towels."

"That's because our bathroom isn't in the penthouse," Claire reminded her. "Jack rates the VIP treatment."

"Ownership has its privileges," I joked. "But I think they sell those in the gift shop, too."

Claire lit up and looked at Monica. "Speaking of which: you didn't give it to him yet, did you?"

"Of course not," she protested. "I wouldn't do that without you."

"Did you bring it?"

Monica patted the right hand pocket of her robe. "Shall we give it to him now?"

"Let's eat first."

My curiosity was aroused, but they refused to provide any further hints until we had eaten most of our food. The girls stretched, sat back from the table, and looked at each other. "That was very nice, Jack," Monica said. "Thank you."

I shrugged. "The least I could do."

Monica reached into her pocket and pulled out a small gift-wrapped box. "Claire and I got you something in town. A small thanks for spending so much time working with us."

"You didn't have to do that," I began.

"Shh!" Claire admonished me. "We wanted to. Now say 'thank you' and open it."

"Thank you," I parroted. Inside the colorful wrapping was a white cardboard box. I lifted the lid and found, nestled in tissue paper, a shiny brass pocket watch on a chain. The cover was a round magnifying glass, and the back bore an engraving of the Puerto Rican flag.

"We know it's a horrible cliché," Monica said. "But it's also about the only hypnotic tool we haven't seen you use on anyone."

"It's beautiful," I told them, holding the watch aloft. "I love it. Thank you."

"Go ahead," Claire urged me. "You know you want to."

With a short chuckle, I held the watch higher and started it slowly swinging back and forth. "It's the perfect size and weight for this," I told them as all three of us watched it sway back and forth. "See how smoothly it swings? How it catches the light and reflects it back in all different directions? It would be so easy to just watch it swing and drift off so easily into trance ."

I hadn't really intended to start doing an induction with it; I was simply trying it on for size, seeing how well it would work for that purpose. But as I spoke I had unconsciously dropped into voice, and the girls were responding. Their eyes followed the watch in unison while their bodies sat still and quiet. They weren't in trance yet, but they were headed that way.

"That's right," the user continued. "Feeling your eyes growing sleepy, tired, drowsy, droopy. Noticing that with each blink, your eyelids want more and more to just close down and stay down. So hard to keep opening them again. It would be so easy to just let them close and let your mind and body relax as I count from five down to one. Your eyelids become more and more heavy with each count, but not until I reach the count of one will you close your eyes and let yourself go completely into the deepest trance you've experienced yet. Five, eyes becoming so heavy; four, heavier and heavier, wanting so much to just close; three, feeling your mind drifting away, blank and open; two, eyes so heavy now it's almost impossible to keep them open, impossible not to let them close down as I reach ... one. Sleep now."

Their eyes closed and their bodies dropped back against the couch cushions. Both robes gaped open, showing me plenty of cleavage and deep, easy chest movement. "Deeper and deeper still," I coached them. "Letting your mind go completely blank, empty and relaxed. And when you are deeper than you've ever been before, letting your hand just rise up into the air and stay there as if held up by a hundred helium balloons."

I had no idea even as I talked them down what I was going to do with them once their hands went up. I wasn't even sure why I was hypnotizing them - the user had just come forward and done that in response to Claire's prodding. Then my eye fell on the bucket, which still held those bottles of cold water, and I remembered something I'd done a long time ago on stage.

Both women had a hand floating in the air. "You can let your hand sink slowly and gently back to your lap now," I said, "and when you feel your hand return to your lap you can sit up straight, exactly the way you were sitting when I first started swinging the pocket watch, but with your eyes remaining closed and your mind remaining in trance."

In a few moments they were back in their original postures, eyes closed, awaiting my next suggestion. "In a few moments I will count to three. When I reach three you will wake up feeling exactly as you did when you first began to watch the watch. You will believe that I have just started to hypnotize you but haven't done it yet. Your conscious mind will firmly and completely believe that you have not been hypnotized tonight, while your subconscious obeys the rest of my suggestion. When I stop swinging the watch, you'll notice that you feel thirsty and would like a bottle of water. When you drink the water, you will find that you only take one mouthful at a time and that it's the best-tasting water you've ever had. You'll want to keep drinking the water, one mouthful at a time, until the bottle is empty. Aside from being the best-tasting water ever, this water will have one other effect: your body finds this water extremely sexually arousing. Each mouthful you swallow will cause you to become more aroused, as if you were being subtly fondled by an expert lover. When half of the bottle is gone, your inhibitions will disappear and you'll want to let your free hand wander all over your body, touching yourself anywhere that it feels good to be touched, and it will seem normal to you. When the bottle is three quarters gone you'll begin to feel as if you are receiving incredibly skillful oral sex and you'll be even more open about fondling and touching yourself. That feeling will intensify with each drink of water until the bottle is empty. When you take the last swallow from the bottle, and only then, you will experience the strongest, most intense orgasm of your life. It won't matter who may hear you or see you, you'll just relax and enjoy the orgasm to its fullest. When the orgasm is over, you will no longer be thirsty and no longer feel compelled to drink more water - but if you decide to have another bottle tonight, it will affect you exactly the way the first one did."

I reinforced the suggestion a few times, then counted them up. As I counted I began to swing the watch again. "Yes," I said, continuing the earlier thread, "It would be so easy to just drop into trance now ." With a jerk, I dropped the watch into my other hand and saw them blink awake with a start. "But that's not what we wanted to do tonight, is it? We're still having dinner."

"It would have been okay with me," Claire assured me. "After all, we haven't been hypnotized today. I wouldn't want to go cold turkey."

"Trance junkies," Monica quipped. "Maybe we should check into Betty Ford after this trip."

"That's normal," I said. "People learning hypnosis spend a lot of time in trance. And why not? It feels good, doesn't it?"

"Absolutely," Claire agreed. "But what would really feel good right now is some of that water."

The bucket contained six of the sixteen-ounce bottles. I pulled out two and handed one to each of my companions. They twisted the caps off eagerly and gulped down the first swallow.

"Wow," Claire said. "This is amazing water. Is this something different from what they usually have?"

"Mm-mmm" Monica hummed, taking her second swig. "It's the same bottle they have in the restaurant and all the vending machines. Maybe we've just never had it this cold before." She took another swig and continued. "This is so weird. Part of me wants to just drain the bottle it's so good, but I keep stopping."

"Savoring it?" I suggested.

"Exactly," Claire agreed between swallows. "After a day like ours, good food and cold water is like great sex."

"Yes," Monica concurred. "That's exactly what it feels like. Hot, passionate sex." As she took another swallow, her free hand clenched the satin robe and rubbed against her stomach.

I grabbed a bottle for myself while they continued to extol the virtues of the hotel water. It wasn't long before both ladies were reaching inside their robes.

Monica was the first to notice. "Claire, you're feeling yourself up!"

"Am not," she shot back as her free hand roamed inside the robe. "I'm just adjusting my robe." And she pulled a handful of terry cloth upward, opening a gap in the robe that exposed as much skin than Elvira's favorite gown. "You're the one fondling your own boob."

Monica tried to look shocked as she swallowed more water. "No, I'm not." Then she looked down at herself. "Okay, I am. You shouldn't have made that 'like great sex' remark in front of someone who hasn't had any in ages." Her hand flew to her mouth. "Oops - you didn't hear that, Jack."

"It's affecting him, too," Claire pointed out. "Look at his crotch."

All three of us looked, though I didn't have to. I already knew I was visibly aroused. "What can I say? It's really good water."

"There's more to it than that," Monica said. "Oh, Jesus!" Her bottle was below half empty and her hand was now below the waist, where the robe was open enough for me to see the white triangle of shimmering cloth between her legs. Her eyes locked accusingly onto me as she took another swig. "You did something." With her next sip she dribbled some onto her chest. Her hand automatically swung into action, rubbing the water into her breasts. The robe barely held on.

Claire, meanwhile, was no longer even trying to fight it. Her robe lay wide open as she unabashedly fingered herself. "I am so going to get you for this, Jack," she promised.

"Aren't you enjoying yourself?" I asked innocently.

"That's not ... the point," she panted, taking the gulp that brought her bottle below three quarters gone. Her eyes opened wide at the sudden change in sensation. "Holy shit!"

Monica was holding her mostly-empty bottle against her exposed breast between sips while the other hand wriggled inside her panties. Her eyes were closed and her head lay back against the couch. My penis begged me to put it inside of her and hold it there while she came. Instead I relaxed and let myself enter a light trance, knowing it would help quiet the urgings of my groin.

Monica finished her bottle first. As the last mouthful ran down her throat she threw the bottle aside and grasped the couch as if holding on for dear life. Her back arched, her legs spread wide and her breath came in loud, furious bursts. I admired her body as it quivered with the power of her release.

A gasp and a shriek from Claire got my attention. Her bottle was now empty as well, crushed by the power of her grip. Her grunts became synchronized with Monica's, creating an odd sort of erotic stereo effect.

Monica was the first to speak afterwards. "I should be very upset with you, Jack," she sighed, "but I just don't have the energy right now." Slowly, she stood up and gathered the robe together.

"Come on," I cajoled as she belted the robe. "You know that felt damned good."

"Oh, yes," she agreed, nodding emphatically. "Great. Stunning. Magnificent, even. But in the future, Jack, I'd like you to ask me before you seduce my mind. Fair enough?"

"Okay," I agreed grudgingly.

"And now," she announced, "I think I'll go to bed."

"Here," I said, grabbing another bottle from the bucket. "Have one for the road."

She regarded the bottle suspiciously, shook her head, and opened the door. I watched as she stopped in the doorway and looked back. Her eyes met mine, then dropped to the bottle in my hand. I could see the wheels turning in her mind. All of a sudden she darted back into the room, took the bottle from my hand, and caught the door before it closed.

"Enjoy," I said.

She paused long enough to shoot me a sly smile. "I intend to."

"We're corrupting her," Claire remarked lazily. She was still draped over her end of the couch, robe mostly off, contemplating the empty water bottle. "A week ago she'd have been mortified at the idea of someone watching her come by herself. Hell, she'd have freaked at the idea of ME watching her and we've been friends for years."

"It may not be us," I replied. "I'm told this place has that effect on people. The anonymity, the warm weather, the lack of any kids around, all contribute to an insidious hedonistic vibe. The normal rules definitely do not apply here."

"So it seems." Gingerly, she pulled herself back upright and slipped the robe back onto her shoulders. "I can't believe I didn't pass out on the couch."

I set the bucket, with its two remaining bottles in front of her and took one for myself. "No, sir," she declared, pushing the bucket away. "I think I've had enough."

I shrugged and took a pull from mine. "You sure? It is good water. Be a shame to waste it."

Her eyes narrowed into a glare. "What's the matter, Jack, wasn't the first show enough?" I sat back, startled at the sudden edge in her manner. "Don't give me the innocent look," she continued. "I saw you staring at her. You couldn't take your eyes off her. I might as well have been part of the furniture for all you noticed."

Oh, shit. She had a point -- I'd been so fixated on Monica's responses, Monica's body, that I'd paid very little attention to Claire. "I'm sorry," I began.

"No you're not," she spit back. "I knew from the start it was Monica you really wanted. You're so transparent, Jack. I just hoped that after all we've done together, maybe I'd rate a little higher." She sniffled and used the lapel of the robe to dab at her eyes.

She resisted at first, but then let me pull her over into my arms. "I never meant to hurt you," I told her. *Now there's an original thought*, my inner demon taunted. "It may not seem like it, but I really am sorry."

"I don't know why you bother with me," she muttered into my chest. "You could've had her tonight, or even last night, if you had half tried. She wants you so much it's pathetic."

As big a revelation as that was, this was clearly not the time to pursue it. I gave it one more try. "Claire, you are one of the most exciting women I've ever known. I love ... love spending time with you." *What the fuck were you about to say?* the demon screamed. "I don't know how I can make this up to you, but I hope you'll give me the chance to."

I held her sobbing figure for a while longer until she quieted down. Without a word she got up and went to the bathroom. She emerged a few minutes later still flushed, with her robe firmly belted around her and closed all the way to the throat. I dared not say a word. She marched around the couch, grabbed the last water bottle and strode toward the bedroom area. "You stay right there," she warned me before disappearing behind the dividing wall.

You couldn't have paid me to go into that bedroom just then. I did, however, shift my position on the couch enough that I could use the mirrored closet door to peek in on her.

Claire was sitting on the edge of the bed with her robe open. One hand held the water while the other roamed her body. Every few seconds she'd take another swig from the bottle and the roaming hand would become more insistent and intimate. Then she spied the closet door and caught me peeking. She stormed back into the sitting area, robe falling off, and stared me down accusingly. "So now you want to look, do you? Now that nobody else is here to gawk at, you're willing to pay attention to me? Is that how it works, Jack?" She drained it to the three-quarters-gone level and braced herself against the wall as the sensations hit. "Jesus!"

I jumped up to keep her from falling as she took another swig. She folded into my arms and immediately grabbed for my crotch. "If you don't take me back there and fuck me senseless," she warned, "I'll never forgive you."

An impish impulse hit me. "Does that mean you will if I do?"

She groaned loudly and clunked me over the head with the water bottle. I lifted her up and carried her back to my bed, laying her down gently and taking the water bottle from her. "That's mine!" she cried out.

"I know," I replied, shucking off my clothes. "You're not going to need it for a while."

For the next twenty minutes I supplemented Claire's imaginary oral sex with the real thing, kissing and licking and sucking all of her pleasure points. She writhed and moaned in ecstasy, unable to climax but too far gone into bliss to really notice. Finally, when her voice was becoming hoarse, I gave her the bottle and held her close while she shuddered through the ensuing orgasm.

"Hey," she breathed some time later. "We didn't take care of you. You should have slipped inside me before I came."

"This wasn't about me," I said quietly. "Sleep, Claire."

Friday morning I woke up groggy to a strange silence. The clock's red letters said 9:20.

"Hey," I grunted, reaching around for Claire. "We forgot to set the alarm." But my arm flailed weakly against empty space -- she wasn't in the bed. She wasn't in the sitting area or the bathroom either. Her clothes were gone and her borrowed bathrobe hung from a hook.

With only ten minutes before our normal breakfast time, I didn't pause long to reflect on it. A fast shower and a faster dressing left little time for that sort of thing.

I needn't have rushed. When I reached the dining room, our usual table was empty and still marked with a discreet little "Reserved" sign. A waitress greeted me with a warm smile and removed the sign. "Your companions are late this morning," she observed.

"So it seems." I ordered coffee and settled in to wait.

It was nearly ten when they finally came down. Claire was in a tank and shorts, Monica in a casual sundress. "You've been waiting a while," Monica noted, nodding to my empty coffee cup.

"Somebody turned off my alarm clock," I remarked, glaring mildly at Claire. "By pure fluke I woke up

early enough to be down here at the usual time anyway."

"Sorry about that," Claire said. "What do you say we attack the buffet before they close it down?"

It seemed like a good idea. We got our food and focused on that more than conversation. With the plates emptied and pushed aside, we sipped from our juice glasses and finally started to talk.

"Tonight is your last show of the week, isn't it?" Monica asked me.

"That's right. Tomorrow afternoon I go back to the real world."

She nodded. "Our shuttle leaves in the morning. Which means we are going to be very busy today getting our things together."

"Yes," Claire agreed. "We have a lot to work out." A tension crept into her voice as she spoke. Monica's face had also tightened a hair.

I chose to play the obtuse male and pretend I didn't notice. "Then I'll make the final lesson a short one." They turned their attention to me and I assumed lecture mode.

"This week you've learned a lot of ways to induce a trance, how to formulate direct and indirect suggestions to get the result that's wanted, and how to bring someone out of trance with suggestions for wellness. It may seem to you that with all you've learned it should be no problem to get someone to quit smoking, lose weight, stop being afraid of heights, or whatever. Wrong. All we've done this week has been a series of parlor tricks -- using hypnosis to lower inhibitions or get people to behave in a certain way for a short, immediate period. To help people make lasting changes you have to know hypnoanalysis, which is the process of finding out why people adopted the behavior in the first place. There is a reason why smokers smoke -- sometimes more than one -- and until that reason is addressed and dealt with, the smoker will continue to smoke no matter how many times you suggest that he stop.

"Aside from training, there is a legal issue you need to remember. You both live in Indiana, which happens to be a state that closely regulates the practice of hypnotism. It is illegal for you to practice hypnotism in Indiana without a state-issued certification, which you can only get by completing a state-approved training program. Monica, that means that if a student comes to you in an emotional state and you decide to do a quick induction to calm her down, you have just committed a crime. Claire, if you run into a stressed-out colleague and teach her self-hypnosis, that's a crime. What we did last night would technically be illegal if we did it at either of your homes because I'm not certified in Indiana."

Claire giggled. "So what you're saying is, use this power only for ... nothing?"

"That's right. You can probably get away with it in the privacy of your home, for your own entertainment. Or, take the 500 hours of training and get certified. Then you can use this power for whatever you like, within reason."

"It's going to be harder than I thought," Monica offered, "not using this as a counseling tool. So many of my seniors are suffering with stress over their grades, their relationships, their life after high school."

"I think my office partner knows someone in Indianapolis," I volunteered. "When we get back, I'll ask and send you the information. You can refer out when you need to."

I felt pretty confident that they had that message. "One more thing," I told them. "Even though you're not going to run around hypnotizing people at random because it's wrong and will get you into legal trouble, I want to make sure you know how to deal with an abreaction.

"An abreaction is a release of strongly emotional material that can occur during trance," I explained. "In therapy it is usually an essential part of the process, but in a casual environment an abreaction can scare people. For example, I once saw an amateur hypnotist tell someone that at the snap of his fingers she would smell peanut butter. When he snapped his fingers, the poor lady he was doing this with screamed and ran from the room. It turned out she was extremely allergic to peanuts, to the point that

getting a good whiff of them was enough to cause a reaction. I found her huddled in a corner covered with hives.

"Now that was an extreme case. Most abreactions take the form of a major crying jag. You can tell by watching someone's face: if their nose turns red and they are not looking very relaxed, an abreaction is coming. Since you're not doing therapy, your best response to an impending abreaction is probably to try and head it off. You might tell the peanut lady, 'When I snap my fingers you realize that all peanut scent is completely gone and you are totally safe' and then snap immediately. Cancel the suggestion that seems to be causing the problem and make sure you tell the person that they are safe.

"Another approach is to use a very minor, reassuring type of touch, like putting your hand over their hand and pressing down just a bit. Accompany that touch with a suggestion like, 'As you feel the warmth of my hand on yours, you can take a deep breath and clear your mind of all unpleasant thoughts. You are safe and secure with me and nothing can bother or disturb you here.' Same idea, making them feel safe and negating the upsetting suggestion."

"Why not just wake them up right away?" Claire asked.

"That's a very bad idea. An abreaction is a strong emotional response. You can't just shut that off and pretend it didn't happen. If you simply end the trance right then, the person will still be feeling that emotion and may be very distressed. If someone is going to trust you to take them into trance, you owe it to them to make it a pleasant experience. As a hypnotist it's your responsibility to provide comfort and have them come out of trance feeling calm and positive about the experience."

They were both nodding quietly. "Lecture over," I announced. "Any questions?"

"One," Claire spoke up. "What are you going to do in the show tonight?"

I laughed. "Haven't a clue. I'll figure that out when I see who comes up to play and how good they are."

"Or how bad they want to be?" she grinned back.

Monica rose. "I hate to break up the class, but we do have a lot to do before tomorrow morning, Claire. See you at dinner, Jack?"

I nodded. "Wouldn't miss it."

With a sigh, I watched them walk away from what had become our table. By this time the next day we'd be heading home. For the first time it really began to sink in that my busman's holiday was almost over.

I emerged from the elevators at the lobby level just before six and came face to face with myself. Someone had been very busy, it seemed - the wall opposite the elevators held a life size cardboard cutout of me in my performance tux. Behind me was a crowd of people slumped into chairs, a cleverly made compilation of the volunteers from both shows so far. Above our heads floated words:

JACK TRANCER, Master Hypnotist

Last Show This Season, TONIGHT

"Isn't that cool?"

A short, stocky man in Bermuda shorts was making his way toward me with an excited look on his face. It took me a moment to recognize him. "Marv?"

"Damn straight, old buddy," he confirmed, pumping my hand with the enthusiasm of an overzealous salesman. "You didn't think I'd miss your grand finale, did you? You should hear some of the things people are saying, Jack. They love you!"

I shrugged. "It's nice to be appreciated."

Levy chortled and smacked me on the shoulder. "That's a good one," he said. "From what I hear, you're getting lots of appreciation from a couple of very hot little groupies." I started to object, but he cut me off. "Don't sweat it, Jack; we didn't ask you to sign a contract so there's no hands-off-the-guests clause. You just gotta watch your ass, if you know what I mean."

I didn't -- not fully, anyway -- so I opted to change subjects. "I take it this was your idea?" I said, motioning to the cardboard cutout and the pictures.

"You got it. Nothing's too good for the guy who bailed me out." He glanced at his watch. "Look, Jack, I need to go do some stuff, but I gotta thank you for this. You really saved my ass."

The look on his face was so sincere that it moved me. "You're welcome, Marv. It's been a fun week."

He grinned. "Glad to hear it, buddy. Don't leave the island tomorrow without talking to me first, okay? Break a leg!"

The lobby was thick with people waiting to get into the dining room. Every table in the place was occupied. As I wove my way through the crowd I could see house staff hastily arranging chairs along the walls and setting up folding tables where they could find room.

Claire and Monica were already in place at our table, but as I drew closer I noticed that my seat was also occupied. From a distance all I could make out was a pair of beautifully shaped and tanned shoulders and a mass of flowing honey-colored hair. What the hell was she doing there?

Monica spotted me first just as I got within earshot. All three women turned and waved to me. "Can you believe this crowd?" Claire said, waving her hand at the room.

"It's impressive," I allowed. There were only three chairs at the table, so I stood in the space between Claire's seat and Monica's. "Good evening," I said to Ann. Her answering smile had a smug quality to it that made me just a little uneasy.

"We rescued Mistress Ann from the throng in the lobby," Monica explained. "Since you two know each other, we thought you wouldn't mind."

At that moment a hostess appeared with a fourth chair for me. I thanked her and sat down. "Not a bit," I confirmed. "I didn't realize you all knew each other."

"We didn't," Claire offered. "Not until this afternoon at the pool, anyway. But we're making up for lost time, aren't we?" The other two women concurred, and now all three had that knowing look on their faces.

So be it. I decided to ignore the look and see if the secret would surface on its own. The women dominated the conversation throughout dinner but kept the topics constrained to innocent things. In the end I had to leave the table no wiser than when I'd first sat down. Pushing the mystery to the back of my mind, I excused myself and headed for the green room.

One of Redman's techies spotted me as soon as I slipped through the first doorway. "Stu needs to talk to you, like, now," he said, pointing down the hall toward Redman's office.

That didn't sound good. I found Redman's office just in time to encounter Regan, the camera girl, and two other techs I didn't know filing out. She acknowledged me with a bashful nod.

"Houston," Redman said wryly as he waved me in, "we have a problem."

I sat down and waited for him to explain.

"The biggest problem with this place," he began, "is that it's got enough space in the house to seat 700 people comfortably for a show but usually has closer to a thousand people actually staying here on any given night. Tonight there's about 1200 people in residence and two thirds of them at least are trying to get seats for the show."

"A nice problem to have, in some ways," I noted.

"Yeah," he agreed, "but most times it's a pain in the ass. Tonight I have to pull out all the stops. The food service crew is folding back leaves to make the tables smaller so they can cram more into the space and lining the walls with extra chairs. When they've packed every body they can into the room the staff is going to take room service orders for everyone else and send them back upstairs. My crew will have to pipe the show into the closed-circuit system so those people can watch it on TV."

I was starting to understand. "That changes things a bit."

"Yeah, I thought it might. I know you tend to talk to the stage people specifically and the audience specifically, so you'd better know there's going to be a third group of people watching and listening as well."

I thought about my hypnotic spiral and induction patter getting piped into rooms all over the hotel. The user imagined people staring into the TV, relaxing, letting go ... and enjoyed that image a little too much.

"Let's give the spiral a rest tonight," I suggested. "I'll do a different kind of induction."

Redman looked surprised. "Okay. What do you need?"

"Nothing. Just make sure there's enough walking room for people to get to and from the stage steps safely."

"Done."

Rudi was waiting for me in the green room with my lavalier and hand mic. As usual, I lifted my shirt while she taped the wire to my skin. Partway through that process I heard the door open, followed by a lilting female voice. "I knew security in this place was tough, but nobody said anything about a strip search!"

The speaker was a young brunette with sparkling blue eyes and a slightly goofy expression. She wore a red sequined gown that clung tightly enough to her curves that I doubted she could hide anything under it. The overall look was classy, though. "It's a new policy," I deadpanned. "All performers are now wired with these remote electro shock systems. If you make an off-color joke, the stage manager presses a button and you get 5000 volts of immediate feedback."

She looked crestfallen. "There goes my whole act, then. I guess I'll just stand on stage having convulsions for fifteen minutes."

"In that dress," I retorted with a wink, "you'd still get great reviews."

"Well aren't you sweet?" she replied, her face expressing innocent pleasure. "I mean, in a lecherous sort of way."

I was starting to like this lady. "You humble me with your extravagant praise," I said with a mock bow. Then I offered my hand. "I'm Jack Torrance."

She took my hand a little doubtfully. "Janey Matullo. I'm opening for you. You're not going to break down my door with a hatchet later, are you?"

"Wasn't planning on it. But it's early yet; the ghosts don't usually start speaking to me until after the show."

"That's all right, then." Before she could get out another line, Rudi handed her a cordless mic and pointed to the clock. "I have to go," Janey said. "But it was really nice bantering with you, Jack."

"Same here," I replied with a wink. "See you on stage."

I listened to most of Janey Matullo's act from the left wing. She was very good. Her voice had an innocent, sing-song quality to it that almost, but not quite, masked the humor in her words. People

would hear her, then realize that what she'd said was not quite normal, and burst out laughing.

"There's a yellow light flashing at me from back there," she said, pointing to the light booth at the rear of the house. "That means I'm almost out of time. Either that, or something very large is about to turn left."

She let the laughter subside, then continued. "If you can read English, you already know that the main act tonight is that hypnotist fellow. Hypnotists are very interesting people. I dated a hypnotist once. At least, I think I only dated him once. There are a lot of nights after that I don't remember too well." She paused for the audience to quiet down again. "I met Jack backstage before the show tonight, so I can tell you truthfully that he's a very nice guy. He introduced himself, and we shook hands, and then I gave him my wallet, my hotel key, and my unlisted home phone number."

Janey stood stock still while the audience cheered and laughed. On the backstage monitor I could see that she was staring into the crowd. She let them fall silent and stared for another beat or two, her face showing total confusion. "Why was that funny?"

That sent them off again with an even louder roar. Janey broke into a sweet smile and giggled a little herself. "Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Jack Trancer!"

The applause drowned out Rudi's transition music. I broke into a trot to catch Janey before she retreated so I'd have a chance to applaud her myself. She took her bow then waved at the crowd as she left the stage.

I could tell this bunch was ready to have fun, so I shortened my opening to just a few quick jokes and launched into my usual caveats about volunteering. "Having said all that," I concluded, "by show of hands, how many think they would like to be part of the show tonight?"

Hands shot up all over the room from a good two thirds of the audience. "Wow," I told them, "that's amazing. I'm humbled that so many of you want to participate tonight. As you can see behind me, though, I only have about eighteen chairs. So rather than have a mad dash for the few chairs I have to offer, let's have everyone try a little exercise first. I'd like to ask everyone right now, whether you intend to come up here tonight or not, to participate in this. Yes, even you skeptics. If we all do it together, then nobody looks more foolish than anybody else." I let them chuckle and shift for a moment.

"Now I'd like everyone to please put both of your hands straight out in front of you like this." I extended my arms to show them. "Turn your left hand so that the palm faces up and your right hand so the palm faces down. Now everyone close your eyes and take a nice, deep, slow breath. Breathe in all the way. That's it. Hold it. And now breathe out, easily and slowly, and feel how your body relaxes a little as you do. That's great.

"Now I want you to imagine that with your left hand you are holding the handle of an empty bucket. Feel the texture of the handle in your hand. Notice the size of the bucket, the weight of the empty bucket, maybe what the bucket is made of. And as you focus your attention completely on that bucket, imagine that I dump into the bucket a big handful of lead fishing weights, enough weights to cover the bottom of the bucket and make it suddenly feel heavier in your hand. Now I drop another big handful of lead weights into your bucket, making it heavier.

"And as you feel the weight increasing in the bucket, I'd like you to turn your attention to your right hand. Imagine that I'm placing a loop of string around your right hand, and that the string is tied to a

big, bright, round, helium balloon. This balloon is huge; at least a foot or two in diameter, and it's in your favorite color. The helium in the balloon makes it tug at your hand because it wants to float up and fly away. Feel it pulling and lifting, the string firmly looped around your hand, holding it."

The house lights came up a little bit to let me see more clearly. All over the dining area I had people showing at least a little bit of sag in their left hands and rise in their right. A good number of them were responding well, with a couple of inches of change. Over the next minute or so I added more balloons to the right side and more weights to the left, encouraging them to feel the weight, feel the pulling and tugging and lifting, imagine it fully. As I talked to them, I saw arms rising into the air and sinking down to the floor. Soon I had somewhere approaching a hundred people with their arms pointing almost straight up and down -- including, I was amused to note, all three of the women at my table.

"All right, everyone, now I'd like you to open your eyes and see how powerful your minds really are." There was a pause as people looked around at each other, then a slowly building wave of applause. Still a good number of hands remained in the air. "If your hands feel like they're still holding the bucket and balloons, it's okay to just let go. The bucket will fall away and the balloon string will slide right off your hand right now." All hands went down and there was another round of applause.

"That was a very well-known test of hypnotic ability," I explained. "Notice that I said 'ability,' not 'susceptibility.' Going into hypnosis is a skill that you have, something that your mind can do, not something that I do to you. If you're willing and open to the experience, we can have a lot of fun together exploring what your mind can do. If you're not, you can still have fun watching those who do come up and that's perfectly fine, too.

"I noticed that at the end of that exercise a lot of you had your arms like this." I put one arm straight up and the other straight down to demonstrate. "You are the people that truly make this show work, and you are the kind of people I need up here. So now I'm going to ask those of you who responded well to the first test, those whose arms were separated by at least a foot," again I demonstrated, "to try a second exercise.

"This one you can do with your eyes open. I'd like you to extend your arms in front of you again like this, with your palms facing each other about a foot apart. Watch your hands closely. Focus on the sensations you're feeling in your palms right now. Imagine that right now, you can feel a sort of suction forming in the space between your palms. Feel that suction pulling at your palms, pulling your hands together. Imagine that suction drawing your hands together, getting stronger and stronger, pulling, stronger and stronger, your hands getting closer and closer together. As your hands get closer together the suction gets stronger and stronger. Stronger and stronger, closer and closer, until suddenly the pulling is so powerful that your hands just come together right now."

About half of my good-responder group were now sitting in the audience with their hands clasped together, many of them looking very surprised. "And now imagine that the powerful suction locks your hands together. Locks them together so tightly that it is impossible to pull them apart. No matter how hard you try to pull your hands apart they stay locked together, stuck together. The harder you try to pull them apart the more they are locked together. Try now to pull them apart and feel them lock together even more tightly." All over the room I saw shoulders and elbows twitching as people tried unsuccessfully to separate their hands. "Stop trying now. Stop trying and let your hands stay locked together."

I had plenty of excellent prospects to work with. "Now," I announced, "I'm going to need two guys with good reflexes and strong arms. Preferably from near the front so you can get up here quickly. Do I have any volunteers?" A bunch of hands went up, some singly and some clasped in pairs. I selected two guys

whose hands were clasped together and asked them to join me on stage. After separating their hands, I learned that their names were Gary and Steve.

"Ladies and gentlemen, Gary and Steve are going to help me select volunteers. Right now, if your hands are still locked together; if you're okay with participating in nudity and adult content; if you're sober and have a good sense of humor; if you have an open mind and want to be part of the show tonight, then please make your way carefully and safely to the stairs on this side of the stage."

While the line formed, I muted the lavalier and gave Gary and Steve their instructions. "For this to work best, I want people whose hands are really solidly locked together. Go ahead and test them; take their forearms gently and try to pull their hands apart. If they budge a little and then resist, or if they separate, thank the person for coming up and tell them to go back to their seat. If their arms don't move, bring them up to me. I'll do an instant induction and drop them into a deep trance. You might have to catch them, so be ready. Once you have them, guide them to a chair and make sure they're seated safely, then go back to the line and test the next person. Try to alternate men and women as much as possible. Got it?" Both men nodded their assent.

Gary brought me my first volunteer, a pretty brunette in a low-cut black sheath dress. "Look right here," I ordered, pointing to my eyes. My right hand lifted her clasped hands high while my left took a ready position near her elbow. "Let your eyes become heavy, droopy, drowsy. Heavier and heavier." She began to blink heavily and lose focus. "When I count to three your hands will separate and drop to your sides. One, two, three -- sleep!" At three I pulled her sharply forward and down with my right hand. She tipped forward and went limp as I caught her.

"That's great," I said, "Relaxing completely. Able to stand straight and tall, straight and tall, while your mind goes deeper and deeper." I stood her up and she managed to stay that way. "Now in a moment you're going to feel my assistant Gary take your right arm. When he touches your arm I want you to open your eyes and let Gary lead you to a chair. Once you sit in the chair your eyes can close and you can go a thousand times deeper." I gestured to Gary. He came forward and shepherded the woman to a seat.

Steve brought up the next prospect, a bookish-looking guy in a Hawaiian shirt. I repeated the process on him and sent him with Steve. Things went smoothly as we filled the seats, until Gary brought up volunteer number fifteen. I froze for a second when I came face to face with Monica.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" I asked, suddenly nervous.

Her eyes captured mine. "I'm sure. Go ahead."

There really wasn't time to discuss it. Putting my nerves aside, I dropped Monica the same way as the others and finished the rest of the inductions.

"For all of the people on stage now," I said after dismissing the rest of the line. "I'm going to talk to the audience for a few minutes. As I do that, I want you to just let yourselves relax even more. Let your minds drift and let any thoughts that wander into your mind just slip right out again, easily and naturally. Each breath you take relaxes you more and sends you deeper into hypnosis. When you hear the audience applaud you will know they are applauding for you, and that knowledge will send you even deeper.

"Now for all of you in the audience who still have your hands stuck together, in a moment I'm going to count to three. When I reach the count of three your hands will separate all by themselves and become

completely normal again. You can then give a round of applause for our volunteers on stage, and for Gary and Steve for helping to get them there. One, two, three."

The beginning of the show is still something of a blur. It felt as if a couple of years went by while I stood there, half listening to the crowd applauding my volunteers, half wondering what the hell Monica had in her mind. The user was going nuts with the possibilities, knowing what a star Monica could be. Then the teacher came forward, wanting to second- and third-guess every idea that came up. The crowd went silent and, ready or not, I had to get moving.

As I took my subjects through the preliminaries, which were aimed at fractionating them into deeper trance state as much as assessing their abilities, I felt the teacher and the user coming to an accord. Monica wanted to challenge us, did she? Fine – we could handle it.

"And now," I said, "I want you all to imagine that you are not on stage or in the audience anymore, but rather that you are on the beach. Really imagine that, make it as real in your mind as possible. Feel the ocean breeze against your skin. Hear the surf in the distance. Notice the warmth that seeps into your body from the sun and sand and let that warmth relax you even more.

"And now, as you enjoy the rays of the sun, you can open your eyes and really see the beach and the ocean stretching out before you. The sun is strong and you realize that you need to apply some more sunblock to avoid getting a sunburn. Notice now that there's a bottle of sunblock in one of your hands and go ahead and apply that to your body."

Visual hallucinations are difficult for a lot of people. Normally I'd never try something that advanced so early in the show, but I already knew that these people were among the most responsive in the entire audience because they had been tested before they ever came on stage. The spotlights helped to reinforce the idea of a strong sun, which also added some believability to the illusion. Sure enough, all but a couple of them discovered imaginary bottles of lotion and began to smear it on themselves. "That's right," I continued, "make sure you apply it everywhere, even where you don't think the sun can reach right now. Cover your arms, your legs, your chest and stomach ... everywhere. If your bathing suit is in the way you can just reach inside it or let the lotion soak in through it."

So far, so good. While the bulk of the group sat there "applying lotion" to themselves, I quietly dismissed the few who hadn't taken the suggestion. With a stage full of good, creative minds I could afford to be extra picky.

"Very good, everyone. But now that you have your fronts well oiled, you realize that there's no protection on your backs. It's very hard to apply lotion to your own back, of course, so we'll use a little teamwork. When I count to three you can all stand up and begin applying sunblock to the back of the person to your right. If there's nobody on your right that's okay, you can just enjoy it for now and we'll deal with that later. One, two, three."

My volunteers stood and, right on cue, began rubbing imaginary lotion into each other's backs. The sound of scuffling chairs and hushed giggles told me I had a few people in the audience participating in the illusion as well. "Be thorough," I told them. "Make sure you get the sunblock everywhere. Really work it in to that person's skin so they won't get an uncomfortable burn. You'll have to touch them in places that maybe you might not normally, and you may feel someone touching you in places where you might not ordinarily permit it, but this is for your own benefit; relax and let it happen."

Hawaiian shirt guy was really getting into it. His hands roamed all over the brunette's shoulders and spine, working their way inevitably downward. Monica was doing the same to him, though a little

more slowly. When the guy behind her, an older guy in a business suit, grabbed a handful of her bottom she paused a moment but kept on going.

“Great,” I continued. “It feels so good to have someone caressing your body, rubbing that lotion into the places you can't easily reach. And as you relax more and really start to enjoy that feeling, you realize that there's something funny about this lotion. There's something in this lotion that makes your skin tingle in a very pleasant, sensuous way. In fact, as you notice that tingling feeling it spreads even through the front of your body. You find yourself becoming aroused by something in the lotion, something that's soaking into your skin even now and making you so aroused, so pleasantly aroused. You can't help but feel more and more turned on with each passing moment. Even if you don't have someone rubbing lotion onto you right now the lotion on your hands and on your front is soaking in through your skin and getting your incredibly aroused.”

My volunteers' hands slowed down. Instead of just applying lotion they were now caressing each other. A lot of them began breathing more heavily and a heard a few little sighs and purrs of arousal. Monica leaned backward into the busy hands of her businessman even as her hands cupped the cheeks of Hawaiian shirt guy and squeezed.

Since I had two people stage left who weren't getting the full treatment, I had everyone stop and then resume applying “lotion” to the person on the opposite side. Hawaiian shirt guy was in heaven, of course, with his hands on Monica and the brunette's hands on him. On the other end a blonde in a yellow tank and white shorts accepted the hands of a Japanese guy on her back and yet continued to apply 'lotion' to her own front.

I waited until the panting and purring got loud enough for the audience to hear easily, then continued. “And now you can stop applying the sunblock to the other person and sit down again in your seat. You can still feel the lotion arousing you, but as you sit down you also notice another strange effect: the skin underneath your swimsuit, where you put the lotion but the sun doesn't reach it, is becoming itchy. That's right, itchy and uncomfortable, getting more and more uncomfortable by the second. The skin that's exposed to the sun feels great, but any skin under clothing just feels as if something sticky and rough is rubbing up against it in a most uncomfortable way.”

The yellow tank was the first thing to come off. She wore no bra, which drew appreciative applause from the audience. When some of the others saw her lose the top and become obviously more comfortable they began to follow suit. The Japanese guy stood up long enough to drop his pants and reveal plain white boxers; Hawaiian shirt guy opened the shirt up and let it fall to the elbows but was reluctant to let it go. Monica, in a white sundress, resisted the urge to strip but did hike up the bottom of her dress to reveal plenty of leg and pulled at the top part to expose more of her chest to the air, though not necessarily to view.

It was too early in the show to have people getting completely naked, so I cut things off quickly. “And now a sudden light rain comes down and washes the itching away, leaving your skin feeling so cool and clean and fresh and comfortable. Let yourselves enjoy that feeling as you sit down safely in your seats and sleep.”

I gave those who had taken off clothing an opportunity to retrieve it and put it back on. That disappointed some onlookers, especially when the blond on the end retrieved her tank top, but it kept the user and the teacher in balance.

With everyone seated and back in trance, it was time to start getting to know my volunteers a little bit. Hawaiian shirt guy turned out to be a copier salesman named Jim. The brunette he'd been feeling up

earlier was a writer named Yvonne. The businessman next to Monica was Barry, a real estate agent, and next to him was his wife and partner/broker Lacey.

At stage left, I learned that my uninhibited blond was named Traci and she had come up with her sister-in-law Jordan. The Japanese man was Yoshiro, a grad student. Another interesting find was Hector, a local who worked as a bartender at the resort. His fiancée Bianca was with him on stage and looked quite fetching in a red halter and tight black pants.

It was right about then that I realized I still had too many people on stage. I'd already forgotten some of their names, and coming up with enough ideas to give everyone fair time in the spotlight was going to be a challenge. As I rifled through the index card file in my mind, my eye fell on Yvonne and I had a flash of inspiration.

I had Yvonne stand up and quickly grabbed a spare chair I'd spotted just offstage. I set it down further up stage so that she could sit apart from the rest of the group and turned it to face upstage center. "In a few moments I'm going to count to three," I told my volunteers. "When I reach three, I'd like you all to open your eyes and watch the stage in front of you. You'll remain deeply hypnotized and waiting for me to give you more suggestions.

"Yvonne, when you open your eyes you'll see a computer sitting on a desk in front of you and your favorite word processing software ready to go. You've been hired by the resort to write the pilot script for a new soap opera to be broadcast on the resort's premium adult TV channel. These other people on stage are the cast of the show and they are waiting for you to finish the script. To save time the producers have decided to have them rehearse the script as you write. So when I tell you to begin, you'll start writing and you'll speak the words aloud as you type them on the computer. This is just a first draft, so you don't have to worry about editing right now; we'll do that later. As you read the script the actors will follow your directions and act out the story for you. Sometimes I'll put my hand on your shoulder like this and say, 'Pause.' When I do that you can hold your thought until I touch you again, then continue exactly where you left off.

"Everyone else on stage, you are the actors in this show. From time to time I will ask you to come forward and take on a role, and if I do you'll follow my directions. Just let your mind relax and let your creativity come forward as you play the role Yvonne assigns you and follow Yvonne's suggestions.

"One more thing, for Yvonne and everyone else. This is a soap opera for an adult channel, so naturally it's going to be a lot racier than you'd normally see on television. The sexier you make the show the more likely it is to get picked up by a cable network, and that means long-term contracts for all of you.

"We'll start the show with Hector and Bianca on a dinner date. This is the night that Hector plans to propose to Bianca and he wants it to be special. One ... two ... three."

Yvonne looked straight ahead as if into a computer screen. Her hands rose to keyboard level and began typing. "The scene: a fancy, romantic restaurant. Hector and Bianca are seated in a cozy corner booth by a nondescript host."

"Pause," I said while touching Yvonne on the shoulder. Knowing that the volunteers' chairs were secured for safety reasons I was going to have Hector and Bianca do the scene standing. But Redman's techies were on the job – by the time I had my volunteers on their feet a pair of chairs had appeared in the perfect spot and the stage hands vanished back into the wings. So I took the role of the host and escorted Hector and Bianca to their seats.

“Bianca,” Yvonne continued on cue, “is worried because this restaurant is clearly very expensive.”

“This place seems expensive,” Bianca echoed. “Are we celebrating something?”

Without missing a beat, Hector responded. “Yes, we are. Tonight is the third anniversary of the night we met.”

“What neither of them realizes,” Yvonne said and typed, “is that they are not alone. Bianca's jealous ex-boyfriend, Julio, has gotten a job behind the bar and is watching their every move. His plan for revenge is about to unfold.”

I grabbed Yoshiro and assigned him the role of Julio. “She thinks she can dump me and get away with it,” he sneered from the side of the stage. “I'll fix her. I'll show everyone what a slut she is.”

Yvonne typed some more. “Very carefully, Julio distracts the couple's waiter long enough to pour a tiny bit of clear liquid into the drink he knows is Bianca's favorite. Nobody sees him do it and the waiter delivers their drinks without any idea that Bianca's has been spiked.”

I played the waiter myself and mimed serving drinks.

“Bianca is nervous,” Yvonne continued, “so she takes a long sip of her drink. She makes a little bit of a face because the taste is just a bit off, but she's too distracted to pay any real attention.” It was great seeing Bianca play that out as Yvonne said it. “Hector is nervous as well. So nervous that his hands are beginning to sweat. He excuses himself to go to the restroom and get himself composed for the big moment.”

Again, using pre-tested volunteers paid off. Without my having to prompt him Hector got up and walked a few paces away and upstage. He made hand-washing motions at an imaginary sink and inspected himself using the mirror his mind provided.

“Meanwhile,” said Yvonne, “Bianca starts to feel the effects of the Spanish Fly that Julio slipped into her drink. She becomes flushed and aroused; with every passing moment she gets more and more hot as the drug takes over her system. Julio sees Bianca breathing heavily and knows that this is his chance to take advantage.”

Yoshiro took his cue and approached Bianca's chair. “You look hot, Bianca,” he said.

She certainly did. Bianca's cheeks had an extra glow and she was squirming in her seat. “Julio! What are you doing here?”

“I'm here for you,” Yoshiro said without skipping a beat. “You want me, Bianca. I can tell you want me. Your body is on fire right now with desire for me, isn't it?”

Bianca paused just for a moment, and Yvonne prompted her. “Bianca feels confused,” she said. “Her body is aching for a man – any man – and Julio is certainly that. But her heart belongs to Hector. She struggles to resist the urges of her body, but the drug is too powerful.”

“I don't ... love you,” Bianca said to Yoshiro. “Not anymore.”

“But you want me,” he countered. “Your lips yearn to kiss me. Your breasts are begging for my touch. Don't deny it, I can see how badly you want me to take you into the cloakroom and make you scream

with pleasure. You can't resist.”

“I don't ... I can't ... “

“Bianca stammers,” Yvonne narrated, “but when Julio takes her hand her body gives in completely. She lets him lead her to the cloak room, the drug making her more and more eager to have Julio with every step.”

Yoshiro suited the deed to the word. He held out his hand and Bianca, with an air of reluctance took it. He led her to a spot near where he had started out. “Now, my little slut, you will give yourself to me.”

Yvonne picked up the narration. “Julio spins Bianca around and begins pawing her body roughly. He kisses her and feels her up, then --”

“Pause!” The user was enjoying this, but the teacher needed to make an adjustment to the story line. I bent over and whispered a suggestion into Yvonne's ear.

She continued: “Then, just as Julio is unfastening Bianca's top, the cloakroom door bursts open and Hector appears. He recognizes Julio and immediately realizes what has happened.”

Hector glared at Yoshiro with impressive menace. “Julio! I thought that was you skulking around. What did you put in her drink?”

“Spanish fly,” Yoshiro spit back. “She'll fuck every man in this restaurant and beg for more, starting with me.”

“Hector and Julio fight,” Yvonne said. I paused things long enough to remind the men that this is a show, and that actors don't actually hit each other. They put on a stage fight worthy of a no-budget schlock film until Yvonne spoke the conclusion. “Julio is staggered by Hector's blow,” she said, “and realizes he's beaten. He swears revenge and leaves.”

Yoshiro wiped the imaginary blood from his mouth. “You win this time, Hector,” he sneered, “but don't even think this is over.” He stalked off in the exact direction Hector had come from, taking the first empty seat he came to.

“Bianca's body is still aching for sex,” Yvonne continued. “She needs it now, and Hector is right there.”

“Hector,” Bianca panted, “I need you to make love to me right now.”

“I want to,” he replied. “Let me take you home.”

“There's no time for that,” she insisted. Bianca's halter was half untied already thanks to Yoshiro; she pulled the second tie and flung the whole thing aside. Her hands caressed her breasts as she locked eyes with Hector. “Take me now, Hector.”

“Hector looks at his love,” Yvonne narrated, “and realizes how much she needs him to do this for her. They kiss and make love on a pile of coats.”

I let Hector and Bianca embrace and kiss a few times, and the teacher even agreed to let them engage in a little R-rated foreplay. When they laid back on an imaginary pile of coats and Hector started to unzip

Bianca's pants, though, I called an end to the scene and returned my actors to their seats. As the stage hands came out and removed the 'restaurant' chairs I picked up Bianca's discarded halter and laid it in her lap.

At my prompting, Yvonne started a new scene starring Traci and Jordan.

“Traci is in the locker room at the gym, getting changed for her workout ...”

Traci took her cue without my prompting. She stood and came forward, opened the door to an imaginary locker, and stripped off her tank to appreciative applause that got louder a moment later when her white shorts hit the stage floor to reveal the tiniest thong I'd ever seen.

“... when, quite unexpectedly, Jordan appears a few lockers down.”

Jordan paused just a moment before taking a position a few feet away from Traci. She faced the audience, unbuttoned her blouse, and put it in the 'locker' in front of her. Then the two women's faces turned toward each other.

“Traci is incensed,” Yvonne continued. “Just yesterday she'd caught Jordan in bed with Bob, Traci's husband. She can't believe that Jordan would have the nerve to show up here.”

“You ignorant whore!” Traci called out to her sister-in-law. “How dare you show your tramp face in here after what you did yesterday?”

“Jordan,” Yvonne said, “has always despised Traci and feels that Traci is the wrong woman for Bob. A cat fight seems inevitable.”

Jordan gave the slightest of nods and then glared at Traci. “You know what they say – a man doesn't stray if he's happy. Maybe if you'd wave those perky little tits at Bob a bit more often he wouldn't feel the need to upgrade.”

“Your sagging, floppy jugs have been seen by more guys than the last big action movie, Jordan. So why is it that none of them seem to stay interested after they've plowed your south forty a few times? I'll tell you why – it's because they can't stand your gold-digging, what-have-you-done-for-me-lately power games. You're not even an upgrade from a blow-up doll.” I heard some Oohs and Aahs from the audience.

“You mean like the one your husband keeps in his closet,” Jordan sneered back, “to keep him in blow jobs while he waits for you to deign to let him touch you once a month? It wouldn't surprise me if Bob was paying for it on the side.”

“You would know, Jordan. How much does he pay you?”

Jordan lunged at Traci with her hands out like claws. Again I took the precaution of pausing things to remind my actors to fake any punching or clawing they might want to do. Traci neatly sidestepped her attacker and tried to yank her backward by her bra strap. Jordan's bra, however, had not been built for that kind of stress – the front closure popped open and the bra ended up in Traci's hand while Jordan's impressive breasts bounced free. The user enjoyed the view; the teacher made a mental note to get Jordan a gift card for the resort's lingerie shop to replace one expensive-looking bra.

Traci and Jordan grappled each other and wound up rolling around on the floor. I let them do that for a

few moments and then whispered another instruction to Yvonne.

“Just as the fight gets ugly,” she said, “the other women in the locker room rush over to separate the fighting pair.” Every woman on stage except Yvonne got up and descended on the melee. They separated Jordan from Traci and held them by the arms while the fighting women struggled to get free. “Traci and Jordan exchange murderous looks, but the fight is over. They grab their clothes and leave by separate doors.”

Traci picked up her tank and shorts and returned to her seat holding the bunched-up clothing against her chest. Jordan took a look at the bra and tossed it aside as if into an unseen garbage can, then slipped the blouse back on but didn't bother to button it. I gave them each a suggestion to cease acting out those roles and sleep.

Once the rest of my volunteers were seated I set up the next scene. “Now we cut to Bob talking about his infidelity with his close friend, Monica. Jim will play the role of Bob, and Monica will play his friend, who is also a marriage counselor.”

“Bob,” Yvonne began, “has come to the apartment of his friend Monica. They are sitting on the sofa having drinks while Bob confesses the details of his encounter with Jordan.”

The improvisational skills of Redman's crew seemed limitless. Yvonne had barely finished the word 'sofa' when one appeared, rolled in on silent casters by a fast-moving techie. The word 'drinks' produced a simple coffee table and a pair of empty highball glasses almost as quickly. A spotlight lit up the sofa as I positioned Monica and Jim on either end.

“I never meant for it to happen,” Jim confessed. “The last thing I'd ever want to do is to hurt Traci. But she's been away so much lately, between work and the gym. I was worried that something was wrong. And then Jordan came over, we had a drink, and she really seemed like she wanted to help. I talked, and she listened. It felt good to have someone who really wanted to listen, you know? Next thing I knew she was leaning in close, and her hand was on my leg, and it had been so long since Traci touched me that way that my body responded to her. We kissed, and somehow my hand slipped inside her shirt. Instead of stopping me she unzipped my fly and put her hand in there and after that ... well, it just happened. And Traci walked in on us and saw us both naked and Jordan on top of me, but I was so turned on I couldn't stop even then. It was like a nightmare.”

“Monica listens to Bob's story,” Yvonne continued, “and feels herself getting increasingly turned on. She's wanted for years to seduce Bob, but always figured he would never give in because of his love for Traci. Now, though, with Bob feeling so vulnerable and ashamed, this was an opportunity Monica couldn't resist.”

Monica didn't miss a beat. She scooted up close to Jim, took his hand in hers, and caressed it. “It's okay, Bob,” she told him. “It's not your fault. The body wants what it wants, and sometimes we just have to *relax and let go*, Bob, and let the body have what it wants.”

The teacher admired the smoothness with which Monica had embedded the suggestion. The user watched with eager excitement as Monica's intentions became clear. “I can take the hurt away for you, Bob,” she said, her voice growing smooth and soft. “All you have to do is trust me and let go.”

Monica gestured with two fingers toward her eyes. “Focus on my eyes,” she directed him. “Let all of your thought and energies concentrate just on my eyes. Let your field of vision narrow so that all you see, all you can focus on, are my eyes. You don't have to do anything; you don't have to say anything;

you don't even have to *consciously* listen to my voice. Clear your mind and as you stare deeply into my eyes, allow yourself to take a long, slow, deep breath ... that's right ... and as you let it out slowly, staying so focused on my eyes that you may not even notice just how deeply your body is relaxing.”

Jim didn't stand a chance. His eyes locked on Monica's and I could see him visibly sagging. “That's right,” she continued, “just keep focusing completely on my eyes ... so focused now that even if you try to look away, you find that your eyes cannot move from mine. Go ahead and prove that you are so focused, your eyes can't look away from mine no matter how hard you try.”

I was close enough to see the muscles around Jim's eyes twitch with the effort of trying, and failing, to look away. Then, to the user's delight, Monica's hand went to the buttons on the front of her dress and slowly opened them, spreading the fabric apart as she went. “See? No matter how much you may want to look away, you can't do it. In fact, you are so focused on my eyes right now that you probably haven't even noticed that I've unbuttoned my dress. My breasts are out in the open, right in front of you. You'd like to look at my breasts, wouldn't you? I know you want to, but your eyes are still locked onto mine. You can try to look down, try to look at my breasts, but the more you try the more you find that instead your eyes become heavy and sleepy ... droopy and drowsy ... and still completely unable to look away from mine. As I count down from five to one, keep trying to look at my breasts, but the more you try the sleepier and sleepier you become and the more impossible it is for you to look away from my eyes. Five ... wanting so much to see my body ... four, your eyelids becoming so heavy, so hard to keep them open ... three, struggling now just to keep my eyes in focus as the heaviness spreads through your whole body ... two, so hard now, you're so hard, and you're trying so hard to look at my breasts but your eyes just won't do it, and they become so sleepy it's just impossible to keep them open any longer as I reach ... one. Your eyes close, and you can just relax and let go.”

As Jim's eyelids drooped and closed, the user and the teacher asked the same question: where in hell did she learn that one?

But my student wasn't finished. She took Jim through a short deepener and then revealed to all of us her plan. “I want to help you,” she assured him. “Allow my voice to penetrate deeply into your inner mind, until it becomes natural and automatic for you to follow my suggestions. Follow my suggestions exactly and you can be free of the guilt you were feeling a few minutes ago.”

This sounded interesting.

“The guilt that was bothering you so comes from the memory of having betrayed Traci. To eliminate the guilt, we are going to replace that memory with a pleasant one ... a happy one ... a memory that you can keep without any guilt or shame because it will be right and wonderful for you. When you're ready to follow my suggestions completely and be free of the guilt, just ask me to free you.”

It took maybe three seconds for Jim to respond through barely moving lips. “Free me.”

Monica took Jim's hand again and caressed it. “I want you to go back in your mind to your encounter with Jordan. Be there again, make it as real as possible, except for one thing: instead of Jordan, you are now with Traci. Keep your eyes closed, and let your every thought and wish and feeling confirm to your mind that you are with Traci.” She slipped his hand inside her open dress. “Let this be Traci's breast that you're feeling, and notice how warm and soft it is.” With her other hand she pulled down Jim's zipper and snaked her hand inside. “Let this be Traci's hand reaching inside your pants, making you so hard, so eager to make love to her. Let the lips you kiss now be hers, and give yourself to her now.”

Still holding his hand against her breast and her own inside his pants, Monica closed the distance between their faces and planted a long, open-mouthed kiss on her costar. Jim returned it and then some, and his hand grew ever bolder in exploring Monica's chest while she stroked his hard-on.

That was enough for me. I put a hand on each of them and commanded, "Sleep!" Monica flopped on top of Jim and I held her just long enough to make sure she wouldn't roll off, then did the same for Yvonne and called the scene over.

The applause while I extricated Monica and took her back to her seat was deafening. She slumped down in her chair, dress still gaping open but showing only a very generous amount of cleavage from a straight-on viewing angle. Yvonne also drew accolades from the crowd as I led her back to her chair. Jim, I suspected, was the envy of every straight guy in the room.

"Ladies and gentlemen," I announced, moving into the next bit, "those of you who saw my show last Tuesday may recall that we put on our own version of The Dating Game." A healthy round of applause told me that a good percentage of the crowd had seen it, or at least heard about it. "Our lucky contestant that night was a guy named Warren. In the interest of fairness, I'm thinking that tonight we should find a date for one of the young ladies up here on stage. Let's see now, who shall it be?"

I had actually intended to pick someone from the back row who hadn't been in the last bit, but the audience mistook my musing for an actual question. "Traci!" a bunch of them called out. I also heard loud cries for Monica and for Jordan. Flashing skin buys instant popularity, it seemed. I figured, why not? I brought Traci, Monica and Jordan to the front and took an applause poll. It was close but Monica just won out over Traci, with Jordan taking third.

"Okay, then, our contestant tonight will be Monica. But rather than go through the ritual of asking a lot of questions, I think we should just focus on the really important thing: who deserves that dream date with Monica?"

I had four guys come forward and line up: Hector and Barry, plus two guys from the back row that had sat out the soap opera bit, Eugene and Lou. "Gentlemen, you have been chosen to compete for the honor of a dream date with Monica. You all saw how she handled Jim earlier, so you know she's a hot-blooded woman who knows what she likes in a man. Rather than ask you a bunch of questions, then, it's going to be up to you guys to prove who is the most worthy of her affection. That's right, gentlemen, this competition is going to be decided on one factor only: machismo. Allow yourselves right now to become the most macho of all men. You think macho, you walk macho, you talk macho. Everything you say will be intended to impress Monica with how macho you are, and everything you hear your competitors say will only convince you even more that you must prove your superior machismo. You can say and do anything that comes to mind to make your case except that you cannot touch each other and you cannot leave your place on stage. In the end, Monica will choose the most macho man to be hers."

I turned to the audience. "But what does it mean to be macho? I think there are three basic qualities that define machismo. First of these is strength. Let's find out from our macho men how strong they think they are."

Mic in hand, I walked over to Hector, my first in line. "Hector, tell us something that will impress Monica with your strength."

Hector pushed up a shirt sleeve and displayed a very impressive bicep. "See this? I am the arm-wrestling champion of the resort." He drew a round of applause as he flexed his arm to show off the

muscle.

Barry did not have an impressive physique, but the way he looked at Monica (who still hadn't buttoned her dress) spoke volumes about his desire. "Strong muscles are nothing without endurance," he said. "These arms are not made to play games; instead, they are built to sweep you into them, carry you to my room, and make love to you until dawn. That is my strength."

Eugene was not impressed. "Strongest thing about this dude is his after shave," he sneered. "I'm a personal trainer, Monica. My body is my living. Every muscle I have is conditioned for strength and endurance ... and I do mean, *every* muscle." The pelvic thrust with which he punctuated that statement was clearly unnecessary, but the audience enjoyed it.

"Muscles are easy," Lou said on his turn. "Real strength is about more than just what you can lift; it's what you can handle. I face rejection, hostility, and indifference every single day in the car business, and every day I find the strength to get out there and face it some more. It never gets to me because I'm strong enough to believe in myself. And I believe that I'm the guy who can rock your world tonight." Not a bad try from a guy with an obvious spare tire.

"All right," I continued after the applause died down, "we've established that these men are strong. But to be macho, a man must also have poise and grace. I can't think of a better way for these men to demonstrate their poise and grace than to put on a macho posing exhibition. Gentlemen, on the count of three you will all strip off your shirts and put on an exhibition of posing that will show off your muscles and grace and form. One, two, three."

Redman's techies impressed me again. From the speaker system came the hard thrashing sounds of an old heavy metal song:

"He's pumping iron; everywhere rock haaaaaaard ..."

My contestants tossed their shirts behind them and began doing their best imitations of body builders in competition. Barry struck a fierce pose to show off his chest and shoulders; Hector did the classic Atlas pose, with arms up as if holding up the world. Eugene and Lou got into it as well. Every few seconds the guys changed poses, their eyes constantly looking towards Monica. She watched them all and gave encouraging looks to each in turn.

"And as the music continues," I suggested, "your poses get increasingly outrageous and unorthodox." Hector dropped his pants and did buttock clenches in Monica's direction through his gold silk boxers. Barry put on a unique exhibition of facial poses while his right arm went to his chest in the movie gladiator salute. I spied Lou, also sans pants, doing pelvic thrusts in time to the music at a woman in the front row and Eugene, possibly the best in the group, turning his back to the audience and doing the classic 'making out' pose with an imaginary girlfriend. The music wound down and the posing ended.

"Well," I said to the audience, "we have certainly seen some unusual interpretations of poise tonight." I let them chuckle. "Now, let's see if our men have that third vital quality of the truly macho man: passion. Monica, on the count of three I want you to come over here and, one at a time, kiss each of these men. After each kiss you can tell us how passionate and macho that man's kiss was."

On my three count Monica walked up to Hector, looked briefly into his eyes, and kissed him. Hector stood still, perhaps aware in his subconscious that his fiancée was on stage. Monica broke off shortly. "Too timid," she assessed, in a fake accent that reminded me vaguely of Anita de los Santos. "He kissed me like I was his sister. This is not macho."

She approached Barry. He lifted his hands to her face and guided her mouth to his. This kiss lasted longer and included some head movement. “Very nice,” Monica said. “But a bit chaste. I didn't feel the desire in his touch. Better, but still not macho.”

Eugene could barely hold still while she approached him. His arms went around Monica immediately and pulled her body into his. One hand went immediately down to her bottom and grabbed at her. She pushed back hard and almost fell over, but I was on hand to steady her. “No!” she complained. “Too much grabbing, too much pressing. It's a kiss, not mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Very not macho.”

The crowd's reaction was mixed. I heard a lot of male voices groaning, and a lot of female voices cheering. Then they fell silent for Lou's turn. He opened his arms and embraced Monica, but gently and without the blatant groping that had come from Eugene. “That was the best so far,” she told us all. “He has confidence. Confidence is *mui macho*.”

The audience cheered and I heard a couple of men's voices calling out, “Come here, try me!” Monica took her seat and the crowd fell quiet.

“Ladies and gentlemen, before we ask Monica to make her choice, let's find out what you think. By round of applause, who is the most macho?”

“Is it Hector?” A healthy chunk of the audience seemed to think so. They clapped and shouted their support for him.

“Is it Barry?” Nope – a few isolated cheers came from a side table was all he got.

“Is it Eugene?” Lots of men seemed to think so. Overall, though, he didn't get as much support as Hector had.

“Or is it Lou?” He also got a lot of support. There's something about a pudgy guy willing to put himself out there that gets people on his side. In the end, though, the choice was obvious.

“Monica,” I announced, “our audience has spoken. They say that the most macho of the men on stage is Hector. But the final say is yours: whom will you choose to be yours for the night?”

She accepted the mic from my hand. “The audience is mistaken,” she said. “These men all have macho qualities. So do many of the others who did not participate. But there is one man who is so strong, so poised, and so passionate that he has every one else dancing to his tune, including me.” Monica moved close and put an arm around my neck. “You are *el mas macho*, Jack. I choose you.” And before I could respond she planted a kiss on me that short-circuited my brain for a moment.

The cardinal rule of improvisation says that when your fellow actor hands you an offer, you take it. So I put my arm around Monica's waist, shifted my weight just a little and maneuvered her into a dip. A loud chorus of approving whistles and cries accompanied us as we kissed and kissed. Then I retrieved the microphone and held it close to our mouths. “Everyone, sleep.”

I carried Monica back to her seat and settled her into it. Then, while the audience was applauding, I turned aside and got the attention of one of the techies. She came out, we had a very fast exchange, and she headed back to the wings to relay my plan to Rudi in the booth. During the macho competition I'd had an idea.

While my talented people in black made their moves I moved over to Traci and put a hand on her shoulder. "This next suggestion is for Traci only. Traci, I'd like you to open your eyes now, stand up, and come with me to the front of the stage. You can leave on the seat any clothing you're not wearing because you won't need it just yet. Come with me now."

Traci's pretty blue eyes opened. She stood up, took my hand, and came forward with me as instructed. She was perfect for what I had in mind, and not just because she was almost naked.

Two techies came running on stage with a pair of tall wooden barstools. They placed them at upstage center, about four feet apart, and retreated to the wings. "Close your eyes now, Traci," I told her. I faced her directly toward the audience and stood behind her. The handheld mic went into my pocket so I'd have both hands free. With a hand on each of Traci's shoulders, I continued. "For Traci and only Traci, right now, stand up straight and tall for me, please. Straight and tall, arms at your sides, feet together. That's right. Traci only, I want you to imagine right now that your body has become absolutely stiff and rigid, muscles locked in this position, completely rigid and unmovable, as if your whole body were suddenly made of hard plastic, like a mannequin. Completely stiff, completely rigid, completely unmoving, until I tell you otherwise."

I used my hands to gently rock her back and forth, side to side, to make sure she was nice and rigid. "Very good," I told her. "You can stay perfectly stiff like that, and I promise to keep you safe. Now, this next suggestion is for Eugene only: Eugene, please open your eyes and come join me at the front of the stage now."

When Eugene reached my side I turned Traci to face him and tilted her backward until she tipped over. I still had a grip on her shoulders and used that to keep her from falling, then shifted my grip to allow me to lift. I had Eugene lift her feet and we laid her out across the two barstools, her feet on one and her neck and shoulders squarely over the other. There were some scattered Ooohs from the audience.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is what we call the Bridge. Notice that despite having absolutely nothing to hold her back straight or her arms at her sides, Traci is able to maintain this position and, in fact, is quite comfortable." I took out the hand mic and held it to her face. "Traci, tell our audience how you feel right now."

"Dreamy," she said in a soft, spacey voice.

"How comfortable are you right now?"

"Very comfortable. I feel like I'm floating."

"Thank you, Traci. Let your mind drift deeper as your body remains perfectly stiff and rigid."

From up in the booth a green light flashed. Rudi was ready.

"The Bridge," I explained to the audience, "is a very popular demonstration because it's just about impossible to fake. Anyone trying to do this in a waking state will find it very difficult to achieve this position and it would require extensive practice and conditioning to be able to hold it for any length of time. But here at Uninhibited, we've discovered another very convenient use for this technique. Hector, and only Hector, please open your eyes and join me at the front of the stage now."

I placed Hector at Traci's head and Eugene at her feet and had them lift her off the barstools to shoulder level. "Hector and Eugene, I want you to feel the muscles in your arms and shoulders locking in place,

fixed and unmoving, absolutely locked in that position so that Traci remains safely suspended in your grip. Only when I ask you to change position will your arms and shoulders move.” The techies cleared away the barstools and I had the Hector-Traci-Eugene assembly turn slightly.

“Now, for everyone else on stage except Traci, Hector, and Eugene: it's limbo time!”

The sound system came to life and the familiar limbo music filled the room. “Everyone still seated on stage, we're going to conclude tonight's show with a limbo competition. If you wish to play, you can open your eyes and form a line to your right. Traci is the limbo pole; if you can go under her without touching the floor with anything but your feet, you can keep going. If you touch the floor you can still continue, but you have to remove an item of clothing first. If you run out of clothing you're out and have to sit down. If any of you are wearing high heels I strongly recommend you simply take those off now before you join the line. Anyone who does not wish to play can remain seated and sleep, but those who do want to play can begin now.”

The line formed stage right. I was pleased to see that only a few people opted out, and mildly surprised that Monica was not one of them. We'd get her out of that dress yet, it seemed.

The first pass through was easy. With Traci's body at shoulder level and no clothes hanging below to interfere, everybody made it under with ease. Working first with Hector and then with Eugene, I repositioned Traci to chest level and made sure they had a firm grip before locking their muscles in place again. This time Jim, the tallest of the gang, failed to make it under without putting a hand on the floor. He tossed off the Hawaiian shirt and rejoined the line.

The third pass involved another grip change that put Traci at lower chest level, and that's when things got interesting. Everyone but Yvonne and Bianca slipped up and had to lose a piece of clothing, which kept the techies hopping to collect the items and take them out of the way. The teacher made a point of telling everyone that they could choose to quit any time they wanted, but Monica kicked off her sensible flat shoes and continued. The user applauded her bravado.

With Traci at gut level Jim gave up while he still had his shorts and his dignity. Barry and Lacey, both down to underwear, kept going. Yvonne lost her dress and continued in nothing but a sheer black teddy. Monica almost made it, but lost her balance at the last second and landed rump first on the floor. She bowed to the cheering crowd, spread the dress open and stood up without it. When she returned to her seat instead of the line I could almost feel the disappointment from my fellow straight men.

The real star was turning out to be Bianca. She had started topless, having finished the soap opera that way, but had yet to lose anything else. She led the way in the next pass, which had Traci at hip height, and again managed to snake through without faulting. Barry took one look at the height and sat down without trying. Lacey was game, but fell and lost her bra. Yvonne and Jordan also slipped and became the first ones eliminated by running out of clothing.

I had Hector and Eugene kneel and raise Traci back to mid chest level, which was now a few inches lower than the last round. Only Lacey and Bianca remained. Bianca went first, knees bent sharply, focused intently on keeping her weight balanced. She almost made it, but when she ducked her head to clear Traci she tipped backward and landed on her bottom. Still, she was laughing as she peeled off the tight black pants to reveal a baby blue G-string.

Lacey gave it a solid try, but she clearly lacked Bianca's experience. Half way under her feet flew out and she flopped on her back. With more grace than one might expect in that situation Lacey picked herself up, slipped off her panties, and tucked them into my pocket on her way back to her seat. I

tossed them to a waiting techie and approached Bianca.

“You seem to be the last one standing,” I observed, “but I'm not sure I can give you the prize when you fell on your last attempt. Do you think you can do it if I give you one more try?”

Bianca gently pushed the mic aside. “Watch me.”

Damned if she didn't do it, too. She approached slowly and deliberately, inching her way underneath Traci's still body. This time she managed the head tuck without losing balance and came through triumphant.

The limbo music faded away to the audience's loud cheers. I had Hector and Eugene set Traci down on the floor and let them take a bow for their help with the stunt. Then I returned to Bianca's side. “And how about a round of applause for our limbo champion?”

Bianca leaned into the mic. “What do I win, Jack?”

Oops. I hadn't given any thought to a prize. From out in the crowd, I heard a female voice shout, “Give her an orgasm!” It sounded like Claire.

“Would you like that?” I asked Bianca. She nodded. “Okay, then. Bianca, in a moment I'm going to have the audience count from one to ten. With each number they count, you'll feel yourself becoming increasingly aroused so that when they reach ten you have a tremendous, uncontrollable, absolutely wonderful orgasm that lasts as long as the audience continues to applaud. Audience, count with me: one ... two ... “

Bianca laughed at first, but by the time the audience reached five her hands began to roam all over her almost-naked body. Between seven and eight she dropped to her knees panting and moaning. At nine she nearly fell over but caught herself with her arms, and at ten she collapsed on the floor into a writhing, gasping fit of overwhelming pleasure. The audience clapped and cheered, fueling Bianca's continued bliss.

While they were doing that I restored Traci to normal mobility. “Ladies and gentlemen,” I asked, “should we give the same reward to our limbo pole?”

The response was overwhelmingly positive, so I did. Traci's eyes popped open at the count of ten and she joined Bianca in writhing around on the stage floor. Eventually the applause and the orgasms subsided. I helped both exhausted women to their seats and got everyone another round of applause.

To end the show I gave the group my usual suggestions for well-being, remembering everything with a good sense of humor, being proud and happy at their creativity and willingness to have fun ... basically to make them feel good about what they'd done and thank them for their help. Since they were all in varying states of undress, I then had them come forward one at a time, take a bow, and retire to the wings to dress. The women's clothing was in the right wing, the men's in the left. Once everyone was dressed they got one last group bow and returned to their seats. The audience cheered and clapped for every one of them and then gave me a standing ovation.

Redman left me out there in the spotlight while the audience cheered and I thanked them every way I could think of. Finally, after I'd lost count of the thank-yous and acknowledged the crew and the audience a dozen times, the lights went out and the working part of my holiday was over.

My head was spinning as I made my way back toward the green room. An innovative crew, a great bunch of volunteers, and a little inspired teamwork by the user and the teacher had made for an outstanding show. I couldn't wait to get rid of my gear and find out what Monica had thought of the experience.

I would have to, though. As soon as I stepped through the door to the green room I was momentarily blinded by camera flashes. I heard champagne corks pop and people cheering, and I felt myself being tugged toward a table in the middle of the room. My vision cleared from the flashes and familiar faces became discernible: Marv, the guy who'd gotten me into this in the first place; the manager of the cafe where I'd been eating breakfast all week; Anita de los Santos, the resort's entertainment director and draftee into my first show; Janey Matullo, the comedienne who'd opened for me that night; Rudi, Todd, Regan, and half a dozen more of Redman's technical crew; and Stu Redman himself.

On the table was a large round cake bearing a classic spiral like the one on my hypnodisc. Regan held out a large knife, handle first, but Janey Matullo grabbed it out of her hand. "I'll take that," she insisted, and then flashed that subversive smile of hers. "You don't give long, sharp objects to a guy named Jack Torrance."

While she cut cake Todd and Redman poured champagne for everyone. Anita de los Santos handed me a full flute and kissed my cheek. "You were wonderful, *Señor* Jack."

"*Gracias*," I replied as we clinked glasses. "But I had the easiest job of anyone. The volunteers, and all these people in black, are the ones who really made the show work."

"That's right," Rudi called out. "Techies rule!"

"Absolutely," I agreed, then I raised my glass. "To the techies."

"The techies!"

Redman chuckled. "Next time, tell us beforehand when you think you'll want props and music. You'd be amazed what we have in the property shed."

"Wait a minute," I objected, smiling. "Who said anything about a next time?"

That was Marv's cue, of course. "You're kidding me, right? Jack, buddy, you killed this week. Upwards of a thousand people are going to go home and tell all their friends about the amazing hypnosis shows they saw at Uninhibited! People are asking the front desk when you'll be back so they can book reservations. You can't quit now."

"But what about the magician?"

Marv's hand moved in a dismissive wave. "Forget the magician. I don't care if he appears in a puff of

smoke and threatens to make the whole island disappear. This slot is yours for as long as you want it, Jack. And don't even pretend you didn't enjoy yourself.”

He had me there.

The general laughter hushed as Redman cleared his throat loudly. “I hate to be the party pooper here, but half the people in this room are getting overtime right now and we still have a lot of cleanup to do. So if you wouldn't mind taking your cake to go, Jack and I have some final things to take care of and so do the crew.”

We all groaned, but he was right. In a minute or so everyone had filed out except for myself and Redman. I laid the hand mic on the table and, with a bit of finagling, the lavalier with its transmitter and white cord. “So,” I asked Redman, “what's left for us?”

“Nothing,” he admitted as he picked up the equipment and headed for the far door. “Just keeping a promise.” Then he nodded toward the room behind me and said, “The room's all yours.”

I turned around just in time to be gang hugged by Monica and Claire. “You didn't think we'd miss the party, did you?” Claire said.

“Of course not. Here, have some cake.”

I gave them each a piece. Monica took a small bite and set the rest down. “It's good,” she said, “but I'm trying to keep my girlish figure.”

“Too late,” I told her. “I've been watching your figure all week, and there's nothing girlish about it.”

Claire almost spit out her cake laughing. “He should know. He and a few hundred other people who saw it tonight.”

My guts turned a little wobbly at the reminder. I had to ask. “How are you doing with that? Any regrets?”

Monica smiled and embraced me again. “None,” she assured me. “I get it now. When I saw your first show I thought it was all about impressing the audience with how smart you are, to make people debate themselves for you. And then the second show seemed to be mostly about getting that one guy in hot water with his girlfriend. But now that I've been up there with you, I understand -- it's really about showing how clever and creative you can get people to be, within their own bounds. You didn't ask me to do anything I would have minded doing, and while I seemed to almost automatically go along with things I knew deep down that I always had a choice. It was liberating and fun, and exactly what I wanted from my vacation.” She punctuated the speech with a long, passionate kiss.

“Hey,” Claire cut in, “I want some of that action, too.” Monica chuckled and stepped back to let Claire take her place. Her arms slipped inside my jacket and started roaming.

“What are you doing?”

She giggled. “Making sure you're not still wearing a live microphone. Remember the elevator?”

Oh, yes. How could I not remember the elevator?

“Being so aroused, so focused on what you wanted ... “ Claire's voice completed my thought for me.

At the same time I became aware of Monica's hands on my arm and her voice speaking into my other ear. “Relax and let go ... “

“Feeling your mind relaxing, drifting, floating ...”

“Allowing yourself right now to slide so easily into trance...”

“Sliding so easily in and out of me as you go deeper and deeper ...”

“Just relaxing easily, going so deep now...”

Just as I was starting to process things, they walked around me and switched sides. Claire began whispering about how good it felt to be deep, and Monica talked about imagining myself floating and drifting, calm and peaceful. My head started buzzing and I felt myself slipping away. If I was going to stop this, it would take some active and immediate resistance.

“It's okay, Jack, to let go now ...”

“Feeling so warm, so comfortable, so ready to sleep ...”

“And how good will it feel, Jack, to just let it happen?”

“ ... so easy to let your mind drift and float on our words ...”

“ ... so easy to let yourself be hypnotized so easily by my voice ...”

“ ... to drift and float ...”

“ ... deeper and deeper ...”

I can't honestly say whether I made a conscious decision or not. Their voices swirled around me and I felt that pleasant, dreamy fog flow through my mind and it didn't really matter anymore whether I wanted to be hypnotized because I already was. And I was okay with it. I'd have been okay with just about anything if it involved the continued stroking, both verbal and physical, I was experiencing then.

My mind let go and I became a back seat passenger in my own body. My muscles relaxed and I almost went down but they caught me and supported me by each taking an arm and draping it over her shoulder. Monica spoke and I felt my legs becoming stronger, able to support my weight, able even to walk.

My eyes opened and I noticed that we were, indeed, walking. Through the back door of the green room, through the back offices of the tech crew, and then through a service door to the elevator lobby. A few people eyed me strangely, and I imagined to them it must look as though Claire and Monica were taking a drunk to bed.

The elevator rose slowly. Both voices kept pouring into my ears, but I was beyond processing or remembering what they said. I just know that everything grew more and more distant as the numbers counted up to twelve. That, and that my body had a raging hard-on from being caressed by two incredibly beautiful women.

Claire took the key card from my shirt pocket and opened the door for us. Once inside they positioned me in front of the dressing mirror and made sure my legs would support me before letting my arms go. My eyes were so heavy, but somehow they managed to focus on my image in the mirror. I watched passively as Clair and Monica stripped my clothes off. My body moved automatically at their touch, just enough to allow them to slip the clothes free, and no more. *I'm a life-sized Jack action figure*, I thought to myself. *Anatomically correct and everything*. That anatomy became fully available for inspection as Monica slid my boxers down to the floor and carefully lifted my feet out of them while Claire helped me maintain balance.

“Now, Jack,” Monica was saying, “it's your turn. Claire is going to stand very still now; I want you to strip her, slowly and sensually. You can let your mind go deeper into trance with every item you remove from Claire's body. You can let your body become more aroused each time you touch her, and your body can express that arousal by touching Claire in ways that will arouse her as well. “

Claire wore a black cocktail dress and heels. She turned her back to me and I felt my body moving as commanded. My hands opened the zipper slowly and gently spread the fabric apart at the same time. When it was fully open both hands slid inside the dress just above the bra strap and pushed it off her shoulders. I let my hands brush against her bra cups as I did it and then sweep down, lightly riding over her smooth stomach and just teasing her panty line. The dress fell to the floor around her feet. Claire lifted one foot and then the other to allow me to pick up the dress, and while I had her feet in hand I removed her shoes as well. As I rose to my feet I kissed Claire all the way up her leg, over her buttock, and up to the middle of her back. I slipped my hands inside the band of her bra and then forward, letting them cup her breasts while they pushed the bra up and out of the way. I rolled each already-erect nipple gently between my fingers for a moment and then lifted the bra over her head without ever bothering to unhook it. I kissed the inside of her neck and slid my hands back down the front of her body, again pausing at the breasts for a gentle squeeze, and inside the front of her panties. It was moist and hot down there already. I ran my fingers through the little tufts of fur and pressed ever so gently against her mound. Her sharp gasp told me I'd done it just right. A couple of smooth caresses got her moaning and wanting more. My hands grasped the panties and pulled them down to the floor.

“All right, Jack, “ Claire said, moving behind me. “Now it's Monica's turn. You've wanted her all week, and now this your chance to explore her body. Take her clothes off even more sensually than you did mine. For the rest of the night, Jack, anything you do with the intention of arousing Monica will also arouse you. Every sign you notice of Monica's arousal also arouses you.”

Monica was in front of me facing the mirror. I came up behind her and let my hard cock push against her bottom through the dress. There wasn't much to take off because I'd already seen she wasn't wearing a bra or slip under the sundress, just panties. My hands felt their way around her sides to the buttons on the front of her dress, deliberately resting against her breasts as they started with the top button. At the same time I nibbled softly on her ear and planted tiny kisses down the side of her neck and along her shoulder. By the time I came to the right strap on the dress I had several buttons open, so I flicked the strap off the shoulder with my tongue, kissed my way over to the other shoulder, and did the same there. Then, and only then, did I reach inside the dress and cup her breasts in my hands. She was flushed and breathing heavily already, and feeling this made me painfully aware of how badly my body wanted to come.

I took her dress and shoes off the same way I'd done Claire, but I let my hands linger over her groin as I worked the dress past her hips. When she was down to just panties I turned her around and removed them with my teeth. I could see through her trimmed red thatch that her clit was already standing out for attention, so I nuzzled it with my nose and heard the catch in her breath that I'd hoped for. I was

about to explode, but then Claire put a hand on my neck and whispered something into my ear and the pressure backed off.

When I stood up I was face to face with Monica and felt Claire's hands on my back. Monica's eyes met mine. "Do you want me, Jack?"

I was too deep for an elaborate answer. "Very much."

"Then have me, Jack. Show me how much you want me. Do what you've been wanting to do all week, and feel it throughout your body."

She put her arms around my neck and pulled me in for a delicious kiss. Her body pressed against mine everywhere from crotch to chest. My hands roamed over her shoulders, her back, her bottom. I grabbed two handfuls of well-toned buttock and lifted Monica onto my waiting shaft. She slid down easily and wrapped her arms tightly around my neck for support. I lost balance a little and pressed her back against the mirror as my hips moved to start pumping her up and down. Claire whispered into my ear but I was too focused on Monica's body and the mounting tension in my groin to note the words. Something about wanting to come, but holding my release.

My legs wanted to give out, so I grabbed Monica even more tightly and turned for the bed. She held on and kept moving in rhythm with me the whole way over – maybe six steps, truth be told – and barely broke stride when I lowered her onto it. Her legs held me in the saddle and she lay back against the bed. Her chest was heaving and glistened with a thin layer of sweat. I stood there with Monica on the bed and kept pumping away. Claire's hand roamed across my back and bottom and even reached between my legs now and then to tease and further arouse me. Monica gasped and rocked and clawed at the bedsheets with the strength of her orgasm. Claire took that moment to speak into my ear again, and this time I heard it clearly: "Three ... two ... one ... now."

My body went nuts. I felt a burst of erotic energy explode from my groin and rip through my entire body, like a dozen orgasms all happening at once. I heard a male voice babbling and moaning and realized it was me. My heart pounded in my chest and my lungs heaved, and then it slowly subsided and I realized one other thing: my cock was still hard.

"You don't get off that easily," Claire teased. "My turn."

Monica's legs let go and dropped slowly to the floor while she panted her way through the tail end of her climax. Claire took my erect cock in her hand and led me by it to the foot of the bed. She lay back the way Monica had and stretched, while her legs reached out and rubbed against my thighs. "Would you like to come like that again, Jack?"

"Yes." As I said, I'm a lot less glib when I'm somnambulating.

"Then do me. Make me come and you'll have another orgasm every bit as strong as the one you just experienced with Monica. Do it now."

I dropped to my knees and crept up to the edge of the bed. Claire squealed in anticipation and draped her legs over my shoulders. She was ready and then some. I carefully spread her outer lips apart with my thumbs and went to work on her with my lips and tongue. Her scent filled my head and I felt that energy building again in my crotch. Then there was the sensation of soft, feminine hands on my back and Monica's voice in my ear. "That's right, Jack ... you know so well how to please her, and everything you do gets you more and more aroused. You can feel her body responding to you and

every time she does you feel the pleasure building for both of you. Feel it, Jack. Make her come.”

I hardly needed the encouragement, but Monica's words put even more focus into my efforts. Soon Claire was writhing under me and clutching at the bedsheets. Monica leaned in to my ear and said, “Three ... two ... one ... now.” Once again I felt that amazing surge of pleasure and energy and time just seemed to stand still while my body soaked it all in. I had a sensation of drifting and floating a few inches above my actual body, watching Claire enjoy her orgasm while Monica watched me have mine.

Claire's legs were a limp, dead weight hanging on my shoulders and my back muscles began to protest a bit. “Getting tired, Jack?” Monica asked softly. “How good would it feel right now to lie down on the bed and let your body relax?”

She didn't need to say it twice. My body stood up all on its own and climbed onto the bed. At Monica's further suggestion I put myself in the middle of the bed on my back. Amazingly, my penis remained hard as ever and sticking straight up despite two amazing orgasms. I dimly realized something was odd there but my conscious mind was in no condition to analyze it.

Claire had composed herself and rolled over next to me. Her fingers toyed with my chest hair while she planted little kisses on my face. “Somebody isn't finished yet,” she noted, and gave my package a little squeeze.

“I think we can take care of that,” Monica said. I couldn't see what she was doing but I heard a tearing sound like a foil packet being opened. “Let's dress you up for the finale, shall we?”

My cock strained upward involuntarily as Monica rolled a condom onto it. I was so slick that it went on easily.

Claire rose up and moved down toward my groin. “I'd better make sure that's seated properly,” she joked. Monica moved back a little and Claire gave the condom a good, solid test by wiping saliva all over it with her tongue and then plunging her mouth down over me. She licked and sucked and drove me to distraction. I started to move and Monica shut me down. “Relax, Jack,” her melodic voice instructed. “Let your arms and legs become so heavy that it's just too much trouble to move them. It's just too much trouble to even think about moving them. Just let your body focus on the pleasure Claire is giving you. Perhaps you haven't yet noticed that already you can feel another orgasm building, and you know that it's going to happen very soon because you feel so good.”

My mouth moved to speak but instead ended up involved in a deep, long kiss from Monica. My hips began to flex on their own and my cock begged for release. Monica's lips moved from my mouth to my ear and again I heard her count down, “Three ... two ... one ... now.”

Claire held on to my hard cock while I rode out another orgasm. It stayed hard and firm in her hand. As my breathing slowed again she winked at Monica and they changed positions. This time Claire began kissing me and caressing my upper body and Monica lowered herself cowgirl-style onto my still-straining cock. She gave a shiver as she seated herself on me and I could feel even through the condom how warm and wet she was.

“Once more, Jack,” she said softly as her eyes fixed onto mine. “Look into my eyes and wonder, really wonder, how soon you will notice that energy building up again inside you. How much more pleasure are you prepared to experience as you realize that even now your body is responding to me again?”

It was. I could feel it building in my groin, getting stronger with each rock of Monica's hips against

mine. Her muscled clenched around me and multiplied the sensations. I became dimly aware that Claire was kissing me and noticed that she was lying face down on my right arm. I managed to turn my hand a little. My fingers felt soft blond fur and lots of warm moisture.

“Oh, so you *can* move a little,” Claire breathed. “That's fine, Jack. If you want to, you can even let that arm and hand become light and controllable and touch me all you like. Every touch feels so erotic to you, so arousing. You love the way it feels to make me come.”

Claire's mouth engaged with mine and my fingers probed her slit energetically. Monica's rhythm increased and her breathing grew a little more ragged. She blinked heavily at me and began to count. “One.”

Claire's mouth released mine for a moment. “Two.” I felt my cock tingling and the energy in my loins doubling.

“Three.”

“Four.”

Three times that night I'd been at the point of believing myself about to burst. Now I felt that way again, only I had a feeling this was not the end.

“Five.”

“Six.”

I found Claire's swollen clit and massaged the folds around it with all the finesse my hand could muster. Her hips pressed down against me and her rhythm picked up along with Monica's.

“Seven.”

“E ... e ... EIGHT!”

Claire released my mouth and grabbed onto my upper body with all of her strength. The only thing coming out of her mouth for a while would be gasps, cries, and the occasional “Oh, God!”

“Nine!” Monica's mouth opened wide, her eyes rolled up and her back arched. “Ahh! TEN! TEN! TENNNNNNNNNNNN!”

For just a moment I thought my heart had stopped. My cock jumped and my balls pulsed and all of my mental circuitry overloaded. Ten seconds, ten minutes ... I couldn't begin to tell you how long I pumped my seed into that condom, I can only say that I'd never felt anything like it before.

The white spots started to clear from my sight just in time to see Monica's exhausted, triumphant smile. She slid off of my finally-shrinking cock, the condom still mercifully intact, and nestled herself against my left side. Claire was still panting on my right. All three of us were soaked in sweat.

Monica hugged me and planted another long, passionate kiss on me. “Sleep now, Jack.”

And just like that, I did.

I woke up to the sound of women giggling. My eyes struggled to open and then squinted against the light. I lifted and shook my head and just made out two short women in powder blue uniforms pushing a cart back into the hallway. "So sorry, sir," one of them said. "There was no answer to our knock. We'll come back later."

The door closed and my head cleared enough to wonder what the hell they were giggling about. This was Uninhibited, the adult resort. Hadn't they ever seen a naked guy lying spread eagle across a bed before?

Then it registered that I was alone. I got up and looked around the suite, but the only evidence I found of my lovely bedmates was their lingering scent in the sheets. No note, no nothing. But at least I figured out why the housekeepers were giggling. As I walked past the long mirror, I noticed a flash of color in an unusual place.

There were lip prints on my penis. In two shades of lipstick.

By the time I made it down to breakfast they were clearing away most of it. The omelet chef offered to retrieve his pans but I told him it was fine and just grabbed a plate full of stuff from the remains of the buffet. I plopped down at my usual seat and imagined Monica and Claire sitting across from me. *You learned well*, I thought, and raised my glass of juice in tribute.

"Mind if I join you?"

The smooth, melodic voice belonged to Mistress Angelica.

"If you like. Where's your entourage?"

"Enjoying some downtime," she explained as she sat beside me. "Yours?"

I looked at my watch. "About 35,000 feet up, somewhere over the southern US, I imagine."

"You miss them." An observation, not a question.

I shrugged. "We didn't get to say goodbye."

A sly smile crept across Ann's face. "Maybe you just don't remember."

I almost smacked myself in the forehead. "It was you," I said. "You got them alone and programmed them to do all that."

Her laugh was disarming. "You give me too much credit, Jack. I'm not that magnanimous. No, whatever those ladies did with you last night was entirely their own idea." A pseudo-innocent, wistful expression appeared on her face. "That's not to say that I mightn't have offered a few pointers. A brief discussion of male multiple orgasms, perhaps a few other interesting techniques from my own experience. They're such quick learners, those two."

All I could do was shake my head and sigh. “That they are.”

“By the way,” she added, reaching into her bag, “they paid me a short visit on their way out. They said they didn't have the heart to wake you and asked me to give you this.”

The envelope contained a single sheet of resort stationary.

Dear Jack,

You look so sweet and innocent when you're asleep. Please don't be upset with us; we both hate tearful goodbyes and, well, we're not terribly coherent this early in the morning anyway. You should see the mound of crumpled-up pages in the wastebasket right now.

Besides, we established when we first met that we're practically neighbors. So wrap up your business, catch your flight, and next weekend we can get together again. Both of our home addresses and phone numbers are at the bottom of the page.

There's just one catch, Jack: we love you dearly, but we're terrible at sharing. Last night was a one-time event; call it a product of that liberating Uninhibited ambiance you told us about. Going forward, as long as we're both in your life only one of us can be in your bed. We've discussed this at length and decided that we can be happy either way, but neither of us is quite willing to make the sacrifice voluntarily. That leaves the choice up to you.

Have a safe trip and think of us fondly.

Your hypno-groupies,

Claire & Monica

“You have quite a task ahead of you.”

I'd forgotten that Ann was still sitting there. “You read it, then?”

She had the good grace to blush. “Nosy of me, I know. Curiosity is my besetting sin. And right now, Jack, I'm curious as to what your answer will be.”

Our eyes met. “So am I.”

Throughout the week, while lecturing and playing with both ladies, I had managed to avoid thinking about what would happen when the vacation was over. Now, thanks to the girls' absence and their dropping the burden of choice on me, I could think of little else even as I sat through a postmortem with the tech crew and visited with Anita de los Santos to book my return visit for the next season. I went for July again, knowing school would be out but unsure of whether that would really matter by then.

Marvin Levy talked into my ear throughout a long lunch and I retained maybe every third word. He

made sure I had a thick stack of papers – a performance contract for my lawyer to examine along with current financials on the resort – to take with me for the trip home. Soon after that I was back in the white SUV on my way to the airport and home.

Monday came too soon and brought no resolution to my romantic dilemma. I thought I'd managed to shove it back into the background well enough, but Ellen dispelled that illusion as soon as our last morning client left.

“Your body is here,” she noted, “but you seem like your mind is somewhere else. Still in Puerto Rico, maybe?”

“Yes and no.” And with no further prompting, I told her about my vacation, about Claire and Monica, and about the choice they'd left me. I left out the more salacious material, but Ellen knows me well and I could see in her face that she was inferring a lot of what I didn't say.

“Sounds as if a good time was had by all,” she remarked. “Judging by the way your color and breathing change when you talk about these women, I can understand why you're distracted.”

“Gee, thanks,” I groused. “Any other profound insights you'd like to share?”

“Sure,” she replied, letting her voice soften a little. “Deep inside, Jack, you already know what your heart wants. Sometime soon you'll realize that your inner self has already decided what to do and is just waiting for you to finish intellectualizing. The answer will come naturally when you let it.” A discreet chime sounded, alerting us that Ellen's first afternoon client had arrived. She stood and headed toward her office, but paused for a moment in the doorway. “By the way ... is Monica a redhead?”

Huh? “Yes ... but I didn't say anything about hair color.”

Ellen laughed. “Maybe not verbally, but I know that look of yours.” With a wink and a flip of her own red hair she left me alone and even more confused. I hate it when she does that.

The girls themselves were no help either. During the week I spoke with each of them on the phone, hoping to catch a subtle hint of a preference, but they'd prepared for that.

“We spent a lot of time talking about this,” Claire told me. “The bottom line is that Mon and I are not going to jeopardize our friendship by competing over a man. We promised each other that wouldn't happen.”

Monica was equally noncommittal. “We're making it harder on you, we know,” she explained, “but this was the best way we could think of to be fair with each other. Please try to understand that.”

And I did, for the most part. Any college campus is a breeding ground for romantic triangles and worse; I'd counseled a lot of students in my day who lost friendships in the name of love or lust. It would be nice to think that we get wiser with age, but not always.

For a while I toyed with the idea of choosing neither. Why risk alienating one when I could stay friends with both, after all? We could hang out on weekends, indulge in a little nonsexual hypno-play now and then, and look for romantic satisfaction elsewhere. It didn't take me long, though, to realize that was just a cop-out. The longer I tried to delay making a choice, the more built-up sexual tension

would come into play. And the nonsexual hypnosis idea wouldn't fly either – after using hypnosis almost exclusively as foreplay, we were supposed to be content to forget the number six? No, choosing neither would ultimately mean losing both.

Saturday morning came and I still hadn't had the breakthrough that Ellen seemed to expect of me. Well, I reasoned, if my busman's holiday had taught me anything it's that my mind tends to come together under pressure. So with both phone numbers in the cell I got in the car and hopped onto Route 90 East. That met up with 94 and the Dan Ryan and then headed straight for Gary. I now had 25 miles or so to make a decision: get off the highway in Gary to see Claire, or take 65 south to Indianapolis and Monica.

With my conscious mind focused on the road, I turned to the user and the teacher. *Well, guys ... which will it be?*

Monica embodied class, grace, and responsibility. She was kind and loving and had just a touch of the mischievous underneath that respectable front. She tended to bring out the best in people, I thought. From the teacher's perspective, Monica could be the ideal woman. No wonder I'd spent a week trying to get into her pants.

Claire, on the other hand, was the user's favorite. She loved to play and wasn't afraid to ask for what she wanted, even to the point of telling a total stranger that yes, she'd quite like him to hypnotize her and screw her brains out. She was a little reckless but fun to be with and awesome in bed. No wonder I'd spent a week actually getting into her pants, even while pining for Monica.

That reminded me of the night with the erotic water bottles. Me staring at Monica while ignoring Claire. Claire, upset close to tears, calling me out on it. “I don't know why you bother with me,” she'd said. I hadn't answered her then, but now, in a surprise moment of clarity, I knew.

I took the Clark Street exit into town.

-wg
7/25/07