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I welcome all comments from readers (wiseguy35@hotmail.com).

Empirical Research

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It was one of those high-inertia nights. I'd been having a lot of them lately: nights where I just sat in front of the computer, aimlessly surfing, telling myself that eventually I'd come up with an idea and start writing. Any time now. Really.

The phone rang. It was a bit late in the evening for telemarketers, so I went ahead and answered it. "Hello?"

"How many hypnotists does it take to change a light bulb?"

I chuckled. "Just one -- but it has to really want to change. How are you, Carolyn?"

"I'm fine." Her voice was as smooth and sexy as ever. "You've been keeping a very low profile; perhaps I should be asking that question of you."

"I'm all right," I said. "Really."

"Are you?" I could hear the doubt in her voice. Carolyn knows me too well. "We'll discuss that later. I was actually calling to see if you'd be willing to come over some time this week. An afternoon would be ideal, or after work if necessary."

I thought for a minute. "I'm taking a half day off on Wednesday to run some errands," I said. "I could come by then. What's up?"

"A reporter from Online Life was here today," she explained, "researching a piece on erotic hypnosis. When I mentioned that I happen to know Wiseguy, she said that she's a fan of your work, and did I think you'd be willing to be interviewed for the article? It seemed like a good idea to me, so I promised to try and arrange it."

"At your office?" I was missing something, I thought.

Carolyn's voice was nonchalant. "Why not? It's neutral ground. You can be interviewed as Wiseguy, without revealing your real name or particulars unless you decide you want to. And it's been a long time since I've had you on my couch, Mark. We might even do a little ... demonstration."

My interest was piqued. Carolyn's hypnoerotic demonstrations had inspired stories for me in the past; I'd be a fool to pass up a chance to see another. And, I have to admit, the idea of being interviewed for an online magazine was flattering to my writer's ego. "Okay, I'm game. What time should I be there?"

"I'll need to verify schedules," she hedged, "but why don't you plan to come at three?"

"Okay," I said, then added jokingly, "but when should I arrive?"

"Don't tempt me," she warned, laughing with me.

I hung up the phone shortly after with a tingle in my gut. Carolyn was a professional hypnotherapist. I'd first gotten to know her by her Internet name, under which she had a thriving web site devoted to online hypnosis and erotic stories. We'd met in person shortly after, when I was researching a story, and become casual friends. She made a great technical advisor, of course, and was easy to talk to. What actual hypnosis experience I have came from Carolyn putting me under in her office, usually to demonstrate a suggestion or try out an idea, which often ended up in a story. It was a mutually beneficial platonic relationship.

Wednesday afternoon found me parking in the lot at Carolyn's home, which had her office attached. She met me at the door with a warm smile and a friendly hug. "Come in, dear," she said, leading me to her

office area. "I may have told the reporter three thirty, so we can sit and talk until she gets here."

That would explain the absence of unfamiliar vehicles in front of the house, I thought dryly. Was it deliberate?

Carolyn sat in her therapy chair, a leather-bound armchair flanked by end tables. In the drawers of those end tables, I knew, were the various tools of her trade: fixation objects, minidisk recorder and a supply of disks, notepad and pencil, tissues, and a discreet little travel clock whose face was visible only from that chair. I took a spot on the far side of the victim couch, leaving the middle position for our guest.

I had barely settled down when I became aware of Carolyn's intense scrutiny. "You look haggard, Mark," she observed. "Why don't you take a deep, slow breath, relax, and tell me what's going on in your life?"

I didn't think I was that tense, but the breath was surprisingly soothing. "The usual crap," I answered on the exhale. "Get up, go to work, put out network fires for 9 or 10 hours, come home, eat, hit the computer and try to write a little, go to bed. Repeat ad nauseum."

"What about the weekends?"

"Laundry, shopping, picking up the house, writing ... you get the idea."

"Wow," she remarked, pursing her lips for a moment. "And here I thought you might not be getting out enough."

"Getting out is overrated," I countered. "I'm a solitary creature, Carolyn – an unequivocal INTP, remember?"

"I remember. I also remember you having a social life, and seemingly enjoying it, when you were still with Lynn."

"That was her social life, not mine. And it was a long time ago."

"Yes, it was. Almost a year, if I remember it correctly. It's time for you to get back out there and live your life, Mark. This degree of isolation isn't good for you. It shows in your body language, and it shows in your writing."

"Hey!" I protested. "I've written some damned good stuff this year: 'Triad,' 'Thrill Ride,' 'Business Class' ... what's wrong with those?"

"There's nothing wrong with the stories," she said, her voice remaining smooth and even. "But how long did it take you to write them?"

She had me there, and we both knew it. "Okay, so my productivity is way down. But the quality is high. Maybe I'm just getting slower because I'm getting better."

"Maybe. And maybe you're running low on inspiration, Mark. Your best work has always come from your life experiences, and lately you haven't been having any. That's not healthy, and I don't just mean for your writing."

"And what's your prescription?"

Before Carolyn could answer, the doorbell sounded. She rose quickly from her chair. I started to join her, but she waved me down. "Stay. I'll be right back."

As good as her word, Carolyn returned a minute or so later with a young woman in tow. She looked to be in her mid twenties, with a pleasant, girl-next-door face. Long sandy hair tied back behind her head and a pair of round wire-rimmed glasses gave her a studious look to go with the oversized satchel she carried on one shoulder. She wore faded jeans, good running shoes, and a camel-colored parachute jacket. "Brooke, meet Wiseguy," Carolyn said while I stood up to face them. "Wiseguy, this is Brooke Jenson."

Brooke took my hand and shook it. "I'm really happy to meet you," she said, with absolute sincerity.

I looked into her eyes -- sparkly gray eyes with little bits of blue and green in them -- and forgot how to speak for a moment. "Thanks," I finally stammered lamely. "It's a pleasure meeting you, too." The room felt suddenly about 10 degrees warmer to me.

Carolyn cleared her throat. "I don't think you'll be needing your jacket in here, Brooke. Wiseguy, why don't you take it for her?"

"Sure." I held the satchel while the reporter slipped off her jacket, then exchanged the bag for it. Under the jacket Brooke wore a plain yellow top that buttoned down the front. It clung just enough to give a good idea of what lay underneath: a slender physique, tight and flat in the middle but proportionately rounded above and below. I caught myself

admiring for just a moment too long and quickly turned to hang up the jacket. When I returned to my seat, Carolyn was smiling knowingly at me. I began to smell a set-up.

Brooke, meanwhile, was rummaging in her bag. She pulled out a small tape recorder, a spiral notebook and a mechanical pencil, then set the bag aside. "I'm glad you agreed to the interview," she told me. "I've been a fan of your stories for a couple of years now. I wrote to you after 'Fan Mail' came out, but I don't expect you to remember that."

"Afraid not," I admitted sheepishly. "But that was over two years ago. Did I at least answer?"

"Oh, yes. I'd written to tell you how much I enjoyed the story, and asked a question about the ending. You sent me a very nice thank-you note, answered my question, and suggested a couple of other author sites that I might like. And I did."

"That's me," I quipped. "Perverting the innocent since 1999."

She smiled slyly back at me. "What makes you think I was innocent?" All three of us laughed. Brooke had an enchanting laugh, throaty and real, with a hint of worldliness in it. She laughed with her whole body, too, not just her mouth.

"Well," I suggested, seeing how her notebook was now open to a blank page. "Is it time to break out the thumbscrews?"

"Forgot 'em," she replied. Her eyes sparkled and she started toying with one of the buttons on her top. "If you seem reluctant to answer a question, I'll just undo a button and ask again." I got to hear that delightful laugh again, then she squeezed the Record button on her tape recorder and set it down between us on the couch. "Let's start with the basics: why do you write about erotic hypnosis?"

"That's easy," I told her. "I don't -- at least, not primarily. I write about people, usually people in love, doing things to please each other. The hypnosis part, when I use it at all, is just a means to that end. When people make love, they expose and share their bodies with each other, yes? With erotic hypnosis, they are also exposing and sharing their minds. It's the most intimate, trusting, thing two people can do together."

We talked writing, hypnosis, and erotica for the next hour and some. It started out as question and answer, with Brooke taking careful notes and

the tape rolling. ("The tape is a backup," she explained at one point. "The note-taking is what really cements the information into my head.") As the time went on, though, we fell into a more conversational pattern. Brooke would toss out a question or an observation, I'd respond to it, she'd agree or disagree and add something on top, sometimes Carolyn would chime in with an opinion and we'd all respond to that. By the time we finished it had ceased to be reporter and subject and turned into three acquaintances talking together. And through it all, I was aware of Brooke's full attention on every word I said. It was incredibly flattering, sitting there, thinking out loud, while an attractive lady paid rapt attention and took it all down as if it was really worth remembering.

I found myself studying Brooke as we talked. Admiring the curve of her throat into her shoulders; enjoying the sparkle behind the glasses every time she looked at me; relishing the soft energy in her voice. She was clearly very interested in the subject herself, not just completing an assignment. Okay, I admit it: I was smitten.

Carolyn sat and watched us, injecting the occasional comment, looking insufferably pleased with herself. I wondered what exactly she had up her sleeve.

Finally, the notebook closed and the tape recorder went back into the bag, a 90-minute cassette now nearly full. "I want to thank you again for this," Brooke told me. "It's been the most entertaining interview I've ever done, and I'm sure it's going to add something special to the piece."

"Not so fast," Carolyn interrupted as Brooke started to rise from the couch. "What other research have you done for this article, Brooke?"

Brooke's nose wrinkled as she thought. "I've talked to you, of course, Dr. Fields. And another hypnotherapist, a Dr. Ellis -- he's more of a mainstream guy, he doesn't do anything with erotic hypnosis. I've done chatroom interviews with a couple of web site owners and people who've either been hypnotized for sex or who do the hypnotizing."

"That's all second-hand," Carolyn pointed out. "Haven't you done any empirical research?"

"Empirical research?"

"Experience, my dear," Carolyn explained. "Before you write about hypnosis, you should try being hypnotized yourself. Or hypnotize your boyfriend and have some fun with him. Have you tried that?"

"I don't have a boyfriend," she answered. "Dr. Ellis offered to hypnotize me, but there wasn't time and I never did make a follow-up appointment. But I'm not sure it's really that important. You don't have to be a pilot to write about flying."

"No, but it helps if you've at least been on an airplane before." Brooke didn't argue, so Carolyn pressed on. "Why don't you stay a little longer and we'll try a simple demonstration? I think you'll enjoy the experience, and it will give you a whole new perspective from which to write."

Brooke looked to me, as if for guidance. "You can trust her," I said simply. "I do."

"I feel like a character in one of his stories," she said to Carolyn. Then she turned her eyes back to me, the lenses of her glasses making the irises seem a little larger than they really were. "What's going to happen if I agree to this?"

I shrugged. "Nothing that you aren't willing to let happen."

"Of course." Brooke shifted a little on the couch and turned to Carolyn. "Okay, why not?"

Carolyn's face took on a satisfied smile. "Excellent. Why don't you take off your shoes and loosen your clothing a little if you can?"

"I can do that. Mind if I use the bathroom first, too?"

"Please do. Wiseguy can show you the way. You do remember, don't you?"

I grinned. "Barely. This way, Brooke." I offered the reporter my hand and led her through a second door in the office, which led to an adjoining bedroom that Carolyn used for her couples' sessions. "Right through there," I said, indicating the attached bathroom.

Carolyn had dimmed the lights and put on some white noise when I returned. "You're plotting something," I accused. "What?" "You'll have to stay to find out," she replied, letting me see the anticipatory gleam in her eye.

"That's Brooke's call. I'm not sure I'd want someone like me around the first time I got hypnotized."

"But I do," Brooke said, coming back in from the bedroom area. "I want a witness I can cross-examine later if I want to. Besides," she added with a wink, "after reading so many of your stories, I feel as though I've had a good look at the inside of your mind; the least I can do is offer you a peek at mine."

I wasn't going to argue with that -- I'd been willing to leave her alone with Carolyn, but it would have been a major letdown for me. Instead, I fluffed pillows while Brooke settled herself back on to the victim couch. Carolyn reached under the end table and produced a large item in a black velvet hood, which she set on the coffee table in front of Brooke.

The girl wriggled once more, settling into a comfortable position in a nest of pillows that supported her whole body. "Ready," she said.

Carolyn pulled the hood off the shape on the coffee table, revealing a small shining globe on a turnstile base. The eight-inch ball was faceted and had a mirrored finish that reflected light in all directions. She flipped a switch on the base and the ball began to rotate slowly on a hidden axis.

Brooke laughed. "A hypnotic disco ball? This has to be a joke."

"Not at all," Carolyn assured her, returning to her seat in the armchair. "You'll be amazed at how effective a tool this is in helping you to focus your attention. It's surprisingly relaxing to look at, don't you think? All those tiny facets, twinkling and turning, tend to grab your eyes and take them along for the ride, don't they?"

As she was speaking, Carolyn slipped quite naturally and easily into her hypnotic voice: a smoother, softer, very soothing version of her normal voice. That familiar tone struck a chord or two in my own mind, and I found myself relaxing automatically as I watched and listened.

"It's so easy," she continued, "to go into hypnosis. So very easy. All you have to do is watch and relax ... feel your attention focusing on the ball, watching it swirl and spin, taking you deeper and deeper into yourself. Notice how your breathing slows as you concentrate even more completely on the ball. You take a nice, slow, deep breath, holding it just a little longer than usual, and now as you let it out, you feel your entire body sinking just a little bit deeper into the couch. A little deeper with each breath. Deeper and deeper."

Brooke's body sat totally still, her eyes fixed on the rotating ball. I saw the beginnings of a vacant stare through the prism of her lenses, and I knew Carolyn would have an easy time of it.

"Even now," she intoned, "you are starting to become of aware of how very heavy and sleepy your body has become while you stare at the swirling, sparkling ball. You may not have noticed it yet, but your eyes are becoming very tired, very heavy and drowsy, and they begin to blink more often. That's okay -- you can let them blink as often as they please. As often as they need to. That need to blink, and the growing reluctance to open again after each blink, is just your body sinking inevitably into hypnosis. You're already there, Brooke, already in hypnosis ... you can let go now and let your body experience it, let your mind experience total relaxation. Each blink lasts longer than the one before. Each breath takes you deeper inside yourself. Down, deeper and deeper. Soon your eyes will be so tired and so heavy that they will blink and just stay closed. Soon, Brooke. You can feel it happening, and it feels so good to just let it happen. Let it happen."

When I go to a hypnosis show, my favorite part is always the induction. Even in a public setting and at a distance, watching someone -- particularly an attractive woman -- slowly, inevitably, sinking into trance always puts a rise in my Levis. In the intimacy of Carolyn's office, watching Brooke's face as she succumbed to Carolyn's induction was indescribably erotic. Her eyes fluttered heavily, fighting the need to close, until there was no more will to fight. They closed, and her head slumped down slightly, causing the glasses to slide down her nose a little bit. As I watched that I felt my own head bob, and realized with a mild start that I was half under Carolyn's spell myself.

Carolyn kept going, taking Brooke through a couple of standard deepeners, until the girl's body looked as if she'd been poured onto the couch. I watched and listened, vaguely aware of a raging hard-on, wondering what my friend had in mind for the demonstration.

I didn't have long to wait. "Now, Brooke," Carolyn intoned, "you are in a very deep, very satisfying hypnotic state. You can let your mind float in this state for as long as you wish, enjoying the sensations of being so completely relaxed, so completely open to my suggestions. You will always want to follow my suggestions, Brooke, because all of my suggestions are designed to bring you pleasure. If I ever give you a suggestion that you truly object to, you will simply say 'No, thank you' and that suggestion will fade from your mind without affecting you at all. Also, I want you to remember that all of my suggestions will be cancelled and

no longer effective when you leave my home, even if I haven't explicitly said so in the suggestion itself.

"Now that you've experienced this deep state of hypnosis, you'll naturally want to return to it again and again. In fact, every time you hear me say the words 'off the record' today you will immediately stop whatever you are doing and return to this wonderful, happy, deep state of relaxation. You won't think about it -- your conscience mind won't even realize that you've heard the words -- but whenever I say 'off the record' you will instantly return to the state you are in now, ready to receive and follow my suggestions.

"In a few moments, I am going to count to three. As I count, you will feel yourself rising out of your trance, returning to your normal waking state. At the count of three, you will be fully awake and alert, feeling refreshed and completely normal. However, when you wake up, you will find that Wiseguy and I have become invisible. All of your other senses will act normally, but Wiseguy and I will be completely invisible to you. Any objects we pick up or move will appear to be floating or moving themselves, just like in a movie.

"I'll begin counting now. One ... beginning to wake up ... two ... feeling the heaviness leaving your body and energy returning to it ... three ... eyes open, wide awake."

Brooke's eyes opened slowly and her head rose off of her chest. "Did I --" She stopped in mid sentence and looked around the room, confused. Carolyn and I watched in silence as Brooke pulled herself back into an upright position and looked again. "Hello?" she called out. "Dr. Fields? Wiseguy?"

"We're right here," Carolyn said, rising from her chair.

Brooke stared wide-eyed at the seat of the now-empty chair, apparently looking right through Carolyn's body. "Where?"

"She's right in front of you," I said, getting into the game. "Don't you see?"

Our victim's head snapped in my direction and continued the incredulous stare. "Wiseguy? Where are you?"

"I don't think we need this anymore," Carolyn remarked, picking up the disco ball and turning off the motor.

Brooke turned back toward the voice and gasped, her eyes bugging out as she watched the disco ball appear to float off the coffee table and back to its spot next to the couch. "How did you do that?"

"Like this," I answered. I waited for Brooke to pivot back toward me, then tossed a pillow at her.

"You're both invisible!" she cried, catching the pillow. "But that's impossible. It has to be impossible."

"Of course it is," I said. "Completely impossible. Right, Carolyn?"

"Completely," she confirmed, returning to her seat.

Brooke's head swiveled back and forth, trying in vain to find something to look at. Finally she addressed herself to the armchair. "But how?"

"I'll tell you," Carolyn promised, "but you have to promise me that this is strictly off the record."

On hearing the magic words, Brooke slumped back in her seat and went limp. Carolyn encouraged her to go deeper, relax more, making sure she went all the way back to her deepest state.

"Very good, Brooke," she commended, a satisfied smile on her face. "You are such a good, obedient subject. Now we're going to try an erotic suggestion. I want you to search your memory for me. Think back to a time when you had an especially strong, powerful orgasm. Try to remember the best, most satisfying, most intense orgasm you've ever had, and when you can remember that experience I want you to say 'ready' to me. Start now."

I watched silently as Brooke's chest moved slowly up and down. After a minute or two, her lips moved. "Ready."

"Good. In a few moments I'm going to count to three again, just like before, and you will once again return to your full waking state. Wiseguy and I will no longer be invisible; we'll be right here, fully visible in our normal condition, just as we were before you were hypnotized. Once you are fully awake, your body will take the memory of that exceptionally strong, most satisfying orgasm ever and replay it, the way a tape recorder replays sound. You will feel every sensation that you felt when you had the orgasm, every touch and kiss and caress, right up to the point where

the orgasm ended, but two things will be different: it will be twice as pleasurable, twice as intense, as when you originally felt it, and it will be a continuous orgasm instead of just a single one. You will keep experiencing orgasms, one right after another, and each one will be stronger and more intense than the one before. You will realize after the second orgasm that the cycle will continue until you remove both your shirt and your jeans. Once both your shirt and your jeans are removed, you will have one final orgasm that will be twice as intense and pleasurable as the one before it, and lasts twice as long as the others, and then the sensations will stop. You will then return to your normal physical state, fully awake, and the suggestion will be finished.

"One ... beginning to wake up ... two ... feeling the heaviness leaving your body and energy returning to it ... three ... eyes open, wide awake."

Once again, Brooke opened her eyes and slowly sat up. "There you are," she said, looking from Carolyn to me. "That was ... oh!" Suddenly her mouth fell open and her eyes widened behind the lenses. She looked sharply down into her own lap, then back to me. "Oh, my!"

Her breathing grew heavy, and her body seemed to relax back into the couch. "It feels like ... unh! ... somebody's ... oooh! ... giving ... me ..." Her words fell off into moans, and her body started gyrating on its own, moved by unseen forces. Brooke gave up trying to speak and lay back, letting the sensations take over.

It was very exciting to watch. I took in every detail while Brooke panted and moaned next to me, her body heaving, legs open wide. She had a very brief lucid period after the first one -- just enough time to look at Carolyn and say, "Wow." Then the replay started again and Brooke lost herself in it just as before, moaning uncontrollably. "Okay," Brooke panted as the second wave subsided. "I get the point. You can stop ... now ... ahhhh! ... Oooohhh!!"

Carolyn grinned sheepishly at me as Brooke became incoherent once again. I shrugged, returning the grin, and watched the continuation of the show. Brooke writhed and wriggled on the couch, but this time her hands were working desperately at the buttons on her yellow top. As Carolyn had instructed, she knew now what to do to complete the suggestion. It must have been difficult for her to undo all the little buttons while her body was in full orgasm, but she managed it. In the aftermath of her third climax, she yanked at the last couple of buttons and flung the top at me. "There!" she grunted with a huge sigh.

Carolyn and I just watched, smiling with our secret knowledge. Brooke eyed me quizzically for a second, then her face changed to surprise and chagrin as a fourth climax hit. Her mouth moved, but whatever she wanted to say turned into a long, impassioned groan as she fell back against the pillows again.

She was starting to sweat, I noticed as I watched the rise and fall of her chest. She was wearing a simple white bra, the seamless kind that doesn't show under clingy tops. Her fingers worked hurriedly at the buttons on her jeans and got them loose enough to show a flash of white panty by the time the storm passed. Brooke gave me an exhausted, pleading look, put her feet in my lap, and managed two words: "Help, please."

I grabbed her jeans at the cuffs and pulled, and she managed to wriggle out of them without losing her panties. She had just enough time to say "Thank you" before the grand finale hit. I held on to her legs, mostly to avoid getting accidentally kicked, and admired the way her muscles moved while she rode out the last climax. Her scent and her touch and her passion had me painfully close to the edge myself.

Carolyn sat back and watched us both, looking thoroughly pleased with her handiwork. After a while Brooke was breathing normally again; she lifted her head and peered over at me through the tops of her glasses, then withdrew her legs and swung back around to a more-or-less sitting position. Another quick breath or two, and she pushed her glasses back into place and sat up, holding her panties by the waistband to keep them from sliding off. She looked back over at me, smiled gratefully, and said, "Thanks."

I shrugged, started to say, "My pleasure," but thought better of it -- given the circumstances, it just wouldn't have come out well at all.

Carolyn leaned forward in her chair to address us both. "Shall we continue?"

Brooke was incredulous. "You mean there's more? I'm not sure I can take it -- I'm almost out of clothing as it is."

There was that Cheshire cat grin again. "Trust me," Carolyn assured her, "you'll enjoy this part. But it's strictly off the record."

Once again, Brooke did a fast fade and slumped back into the couch like a dishrag. Carolyn saw that as well as I did, but despite the good reaction she lowered her voice and went into another deepening speech. Her

words flowed smoothly and easily, and I found myself responding to them even as I watched for their effects on Brooke. I remembered those words from earlier sessions, when it was me going so deep for her.

Time passed. Through a light fog, I became aware that the deepener had ended and Carolyn was giving suggestions again. " ... and this time when I count to three, Brooke, you will open your eyes and sit up, acting as if you were fully awake, but remaining deep in hypnosis as you are now. When your eyes open next, you will no longer be a reporter researching an article; instead, you will be a character in an erotic story, a beautiful and irresistible hypno-domme, and your deepest desire will be to hypnotize Wiseguy. You'll find it so easy to hypnotize Wiseguy; he will have no choice but to fall deeply into hypnosis and to obey your every command. You will hypnotize him deeply, then lead him into the bedroom and use him for your mutual pleasure, just as if you were both characters in one of his stories. One ... two ... three."

For the third time, I watched Brooke open her eyes and slowly sit up. Her head turned slowly in my direction. Her eyes sparkled and her lips formed a predatory smile; she stood up slowly and deliberately, her eyes never leaving my face. "That's right, Wiseguy," she said, her voice falling into the same smooth, low tone that Carolyn had been using. "Look right into my eyes. Deep into my eyes. Don't move or speak or nod your head or make any sound unless I ask you to. I know that you can hear me, just as you know that you can hear and understand me. If you keep looking into my eyes and listening to my voice, nothing can keep you from entering a very deep, pleasant state of hypnosis in just a few seconds."

The frames of Brooke's glasses became the limits of my world, the fences that held me captive within their bounds. I sensed her leaning over me, letting me fall into her eyes. "Your eyes are locked onto mine now; you can't look away, even if you want to. In a moment I'm going to tell you to try and look away, and you'll find that you can't. Go ahead now and try, try to look away from my eyes. Try to look at my breasts; they're so close to you now, but you can't see them because you can't look away from my eyes." I tried -- I really did try -- but, as Brooke had suggested, I couldn't make myself look away. "And now you've tried to look away, and you know that you can't, so stop trying. It's okay to stop trying now, and just give in. I'm going to count down from five to one now, and as I do you will find your eyelids growing heavy, droopy, drowsy, and sleepy. With each count they will grow heavier and heavier, more and more tired, wanting more and more to just close and obey, until I reach the count of one. When I reach one your eyes will close and stay closed, too heavy and sleepy to even think of opening them, and you will go deep into

hypnosis for me. Five ... eyes so sleepy already, eyelids so heavy ... four ... blinking so heavily, so hard to keep them open ... three ... two ... almost impossible now, impossible to stay awake, your eyes feeling as though heavy, heavy weights were pulling them shut ... closing completely now as I count to one. Sleep now. Deep asleep, deeper and deeper ..."

My eyes grew heavy and slammed shut on command, as if we'd done this a hundred times before. Brooke kept talking, but the words became fuzzy and far away as I slid helplessly into trance. I floated that way for a while, barely aware of the buzzing of female voices, barely aware that I even had a body. I watched, as if from a vantage point somewhere deep in my own head, as my body opened its eyes, stood up, and allowed Brooke to lead it by the hand into the bedroom.

Brooke spoke again, and the fog lifted partially. I became aware that I was naked, although I didn't remember undressing, and that we were standing together next to the bed. Brooke was my Mistress, and it was vitally important that I please my Mistress. She turned her back to me and waited while I carefully moved her hair aside and opened the two little hooks at the back of her bra. I kissed her shoulder as I slid the straps down her arms, letting the bra fall to the floor. My arms went around her and my hands found her breasts, each one fitting neatly into a palm. I kneaded them lovingly, teasing the erect nipples with my thumbs, while I tantalized her with tiny kisses along the side of her neck. It pleased and aroused me to hear her moan softly and relax against me.

She turned again to face me, placed a hand behind my head, and started a long, soft kiss. I felt my lips melting into hers, our tongues meeting and teasing each other, and my need to please her redoubled. My hands wandered down her back and slipped inside her panties to caress her backside, pulling her in closer, letting her feel the iron of my cock pressing against her. Her lips left mine, kissed their way up my cheek toward my ear, and whispered a command: "Take them off."

I dropped to my knees and peeled the damp fabric down her legs, letting the scent of her arousal wrap itself around my brain, inflaming me all the more. My nose led me to the source of the scent and I buried my face in her thin, trimmed thatch, kissing her mound, burrowing deeper. She moved back and sat on the bed, spreading her legs to allow me access. I adored her with my tongue and my lips, kissing and caressing and gently nibbling at her folds, luxuriating in her taste and texture. The sound of her moaning and the increasing pressure of her thighs around my head spurred me on. Then my mistress spoke, and I found a new, more powerful motivation: everything I did to her body, every kiss and lick and

stroke, I felt on myself also, as if she were doing the same thing to me. I ran my tongue up and down her fold and felt a loving tongue running up and down my fuselage; I sucked gently on her nub and felt the same electrifying contact on the head of my aching hard cock. I continued, relishing each touch, feeling the growing, aching need to come, but knowing somehow that I wouldn't, couldn't, until Mistress gave the command.

Brooke's body began to gyrate, and I recognized both the sounds and the rhythm of her movement from when I was holding her on the couch: she was coming, with an intensity that caused her to fall backward onto the bed and forget everything except the sensations I was causing. I felt her climax in my own body, waves of pleasure that ran from my groin like the rings caused by a stone thrown into a pond -- all the pleasure and excitement of a real orgasm, but without the physical release.

I kept at my task even as Brooke writhed in pleasure, happy to keep on adoring her until I received other instructions. Those instructions came in the form of strong hands gripping my head and pulling me upward. My face was coated in her juices, which mingled with her other tastes as I kissed my way up to her face once more. Her hands let go of my head and found the steel-like shaft between my legs. There was a tearing sound, and then the unmistakable feel of latex rolling over my member. My hips moved on their own, trying to fuck her hands as they made sure the condom was seated, then followed as she guided my piston into her center.

Every nerve ending in my body sang out as we locked together. Her legs clamped around my bottom and pulled me in tightly while her hips tilted to receive as much length as I could give her. Even through the condom I could feel the slight bump inside her that marked the sweet spot; I clenched my muscles to press that spot.

My efforts were well rewarded by Brooke's ecstatic cries. "Oh ... yes! ... yes!! ... COME ... NOW!!!" At her command, the dam burst and I felt the hot rush of my seed flowing into the end of the condom. Every muscle in my body clenched and released together, time after time, while my cock jerked and fired. I looked down into Brooke's face; our eyes met, and in that moment of shared orgasm I felt that our spirits were joined as intimately as our bodies. Then she said something, my body became suddenly heavy and tired, and the world slipped away.

It was weirdly disorienting waking up on my back, in a strange bed, naked, with an equally naked woman nestled against me. It took a few moments for my brain to engage and remind me of how I'd gotten that way. She was already tucked inside my arm; I hugged her gently, kissed the top of her head, and let my hand idly caress her side.

Brooke stirred under my touch, rose up to one elbow, and brought her lips to mind for a long kiss. "Welcome back," she said softly, her face hovering above mine. "Did you have a nice nap?"

She was mostly lying on top of me, so I put both arms around her and stroked the smooth skin of her back. "Very. Any time I can wake up like this, I'm happy. You?"

She kissed me again before answering. "Very nice. This is the first time I've ever done this -- gone to bed with someone I'd just met, I mean. But I feel so comfortable with you. It's as if I already knew you through your stories, so we're not really strangers."

"Maybe so. One thing I've learned from artie is that writers can't help but embed a piece of ourselves in everything we write."

"I'll have to be careful with this article, then, or my editor will know I've been getting too close to my sources."

We kissed again, luxuriating in the feel of our bodies against each other, until a discreet knock on the door interrupted us. "You're welcome to stay as long as you like," Carolyn said through the barely-open doorway, "but I thought I should warn you that I have another appointment at 6:30, so the outer office will not be empty much longer."

I thanked Carolyn for the heads-up while Brooke stretched forward and groped for her glasses, which had been hastily tossed aside at some point. That put her breast within easy reach of my mouth -- too easy to pass up the opportunity for a quick taste. She laughed a little and sat up; I cupped one hand around each breast while she put her glasses back on to look at the clock. "Mmmmm," she said, pressing her hands against mine. "Tempting. But we only have twenty minutes, and I need a shower before I can get dressed again -- I seem to have worked up a sweat, somehow."

"Have dinner with me, then," I suggested. "It's a little backwards from a normal date, but ..."

Brooke grinned. "Now you're talking." She climbed off of me and headed for the bathroom, pausing only to set her glasses on the night stand next to the clock. I gave her a minute or two head start, then slipped in behind her and offered to scrub her back. Somehow we managed to get cleaned up and dried off with a little over five minutes to spare.

We emerged from the bathroom to find our clothes collected and laid out neatly for us. "Don't worry about the linens," Carolyn called in from the next office while we dressed. "The service will take care of them in the morning."

With a little hustle, we were dressed and had the room and office picked up before Carolyn's client arrived. "Thank you," I told Carolyn as we hugged in the doorway. "It was a most inspiring demonstration."

"It was meant to be," she replied with a wink. "Now go do something fun, both of you."

Our first stop was a corner booth at a nearby Silver Diner. At one point I became aware of Brooke studying me with an odd look on her face. I looked the question at her, and she chuckled. "I just realized I don't know what to call you," she explained.

"Mark," I said, grabbing the little customer survey card from its holder. "My real name is Mark." On the blank side of the card I wrote my full name, address, and phone numbers, then slid the card across to her. "Drop by any time. Tonight, even."

Chuckling some more, she tore the card in half and wrote her particulars on the other half. "How about if I take a raincheck on tonight? I really do need to get started writing this piece or it'll never get done."

"Okay. I may do a little writing tonight myself."

Her face lit up. "Am I about to be immortalized in a story?"

I shrugged. "Possibly."

Brooke's eyebrows crinkled down a little bit. "If you're going to do that, I may have to confess a few things first."

She looked just the slightest bit guilty. I thought about everything that had happened in Carolyn's office: the conversation before the interview; how

quickly Brooke had agreed to be a guinea pig; the ease with which Carolyn was able to induce a deep trance; Brooke's obvious willingness to accept some very personal suggestions, and to have me present for them.

I smiled and squeezed Brooke's hands. "Spent a fair amount of time dissecting my personality in that first meeting, did you?"

A bit of extra color rose to her cheeks, and she looked down at the table. "Not dissecting, exactly. But we did spend a lot of time talking about you: what kind of person you are, and how that seems to come through in your writing. How there's been this undercurrent of pain, of loss, in a lot of it."

"So you two hatched this little plot together." It was an accusation, but I tried to soften it as much as I could.

"It wasn't like that," she insisted. "It was mostly just talking. She said you were having some trouble with writer's block, and that maybe seeing a little bit of real-life hypnosis might help you break through it. I told her I'd think about it, and that was it until this afternoon."

"So that remark about feeling like a character in one of my stories wasn't a signal of some kind?"

Brooke gave me a profoundly puzzled look. "What remark?"

"Right before you agreed to be hypnotized," I reminded her. "You said, 'I feel like a character in one of his stories'."

"I didn't say that," she maintained. "You did. That's why I asked you what was going to happen if I agreed."

It was classic Carolyn: hypnotize Brooke, propose the plan while she was under, and plant a posthypnotic suggestion to say the code phrase if she was willing to go through with it after meeting me. Then, to make her convincing, have Brooke forget she'd been hypnotized that day. But why leave Brooke convinced that the key remark had been made by me? The answer formed in my mind along with the question: so that I would know Brooke had given consent for the plan. All I could do was shake my head and marvel at Carolyn's ingenuity and at how well she knew her subject.

"What's funny?" Brooke asked.

"Nothing." I raised my glass of iced tea. "To Carolyn," I offered.

Brooke clinked her glass against mine. "To Carolyn."

We parted company in the diner parking lot. I went home whistling happy tunes, fired up the computer, and started writing. The characters came to life for me, and the words flowed easily from my mind. I was in the zone, and paid no attention to the passing of time until my doorbell rang. Seeing that it was after ten at night, I crept quietly to the door and peeked through the peephole. A thrill ran through me when I saw who was on the other side; I flung the door open to greet her.

"I was getting ready to write," Brooke told me, "when it occurred to me that maybe my perceptions of our time together were distorted by the hypnosis."

"Really?" I prompted, closing the door behind her. "And what should we do about that?"

She set down the overnight bag she was carrying and looked at me earnestly. "In scientific studies, they always set up a control -- an identical copy of the experiment, but without the extra element they are trying to test. That way, they see how the different factors interact without the researchers' intervention."

I nodded in agreement. "So you were thinking that we should duplicate the same set of factors as this afternoon, but without either of us being hypnotized, and compare the results?"

"Exactly," she agreed, closing the space between us for a hot, lengthy kiss. "My research just wouldn't be complete otherwise."

So I carried her to the bedroom, where we continued our research.

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1/9/02