

Photogenic

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I think David and I liked each other on sight. We met in the waiting area at a Riggs Bank branch downtown. We were waiting to meet with the loan officer, who of course was running behind schedule. At first we were silent, David shuffling through a stack of handwritten notes and me looking through my business plan one more time, rehearsing in my mind the presentation I was about to make.

Soon the tension and the boredom got to both of us. I looked up to see a pair of cool, gentle gray eyes studying my face. “The way I see it,” he began, “we have a couple of choices here. We can ignore each other, we can continue examining our paperwork as if we hadn’t already done that a million times, or we can pass the time in pleasant small talk.”

I liked his style right away. Very sincere, not too earnest or anxious. “Talk is nice.”

He had a beautiful smile. “Yes, it is. My name is David.”

The hand he offered me was firm but not aggressive, communicating a quiet self-confidence that I found very enticing. “Jennifer Drake. Call me Jen.”

Before long the conversation had drifted to the reasons we were sitting in a loan officer’s waiting room. I explained that I was two years out of business school, had a love of photography and wanted to start my own studio. I had a reasonable amount of cash in hand and was looking for a business loan to help get me started. David was also looking to open a photography studio, having spent several years on the staff of a well-known high fashion magazine. He’d been socking away as much money as he could, taking freelance work at every chance and living well below his means. He already had a studio site picked out and was hoping his loan would be approved so he could set up shop.

I noticed he had a portfolio with him and asked to see it. Flipping through the pages, I was struck by the nature of many of the photos. Sure, there were magazine covers of supermodels here and there but most of the photos were of ordinary people. They were not ordinary photos – every one had an unmistakable aura about it, that feeling of looking

into another person's soul. And looking at them that way, these people seemed far from ordinary.

"This is amazing work," I told him, still discovering new wonders with each page turned.

"You think so? Which ones do you like most?"

I finished flipping through the portfolio. "I'd say there are probably a dozen pictures in here that any gallery would love to display. I think my favorites are the old man in the park, the Little Leaguer, and the construction workers perched on top of the building frame. They speak to me somehow."

When I looked up, he was nodding in agreement. "Those are my favorites too. The way I see it, anybody can take a good picture of Kathy Ireland. The challenge is to take an average person and make the camera see them as extraordinary."

Just then the loan officer's door opened and a man walked out, still nervously clutching his briefcase. The receptionist motioned me into the office. "Think you can make the money man see me as extraordinary?"

His pale gray eyes locked onto mine and I could almost feel him studying me, like an art student at the Louvre. Then he broke off, smiling, and replied "If he doesn't see that himself, he has no soul."

I can't vouch for the loan officer's soul, but after a painstaking review of my application and finances he didn't seem to find my business plan too extraordinary. He was polite and professional, but his body language and tone of voice were not encouraging. He promised to get back with me in a few days.

When I left, David was still waiting. I answered his inquisitive look with a shake of the head and kept on walking, anxious to get away into the fresh air.

Fortunately I had a busy schedule for the next few days. A wedding party, including rehearsal dinner and reception, occupied most of my weekend. Monday morning I was looking through the negatives from the wedding when the phone rang. I picked it up out of habit, my attention still on the light board. "Jennifer Drake."

"Miss Drake, this is Tom Mallick from Riggs. If you have a minute, I'd like to discuss your loan application with you."

Something in his voice got my attention. "Sure, Mr. Mallick. What do you have in mind?"

He cleared his throat. "First of all, I have to confess that this is highly irregular, but I think that if you just keep an open mind for a few minutes this may turn out to be a good thing."

“Are you telling me that my loan is approved, Mr. Mallick?”

He paused a little too long. “Not per se, Miss Drake. I’m sorry, but your business plan just doesn’t meet our capitalization requirements. The committee feels that without more liquid assets the risk is too great.”

It was what I’d been expecting to hear until a few seconds ago, but it was still disappointing. “Then why are we still talking, Mr. Mallick?”

“That’s the highly irregular part. Perhaps you noticed the gentleman who had the appointment after you, Mr. Price.”

“I remember him. He showed me his portfolio. What does that have to do with my application?”

“Mr. Price is in a similar position, at least as regards his application. If I may say so, he lacks your business skills but he does seem very creative.” I remembered the cardboard folder stuffed with note paper that David had been looking through in the waiting room. “The committee rejected his application as well. When I spoke to him this morning, he asked me about you. Naturally I couldn’t reveal any details about your case, but I did admit to him that I thought the committee was unlikely to approve your application without some changes. He then asked me for your name and telephone number. It is bank policy not to give out personal information about our clients, but Mr. Price did authorize me to give his address and phone number to you and ask that you contact him. He has a proposal which, if you are amenable to it, would cast your application into a much more favorable light. I can’t commit firmly, of course, but in my opinion his proposal more than meets the criteria for approval.”

Butterflies started churning in my stomach as I took down David’s name, address and phone number. My hand was trembling a little as I dialed the phone – was that because of the possibility of getting my loan, or of looking into those fascinating eyes again? A little of both, I had to confess.

“Hello.”

“David Price? This is Jennifer Drake. Mr. Mallick said you wanted to talk to me?”

I heard him sigh deeply. “Jen, I’m so glad you called. I need to see you. Can you meet me for lunch?”

“Not today, I’m on a deadline.” A lie; I learned long ago that if people think you are busy they are more likely to respect your time. “How about Wednesday at one?”

“Sold. Do you know where the Toledo Grill is?” He gave me directions and we agreed to meet there. I tried to broach the subject of his “proposal” but he wanted to present it in person.

That night I dreamt that I was a model and David was taking my picture. I kept staring into his eyes while he told me how beautiful I was, making me feel like the sexiest woman alive. He took shot after shot, then put down his camera, folded his arms around me and kissed me. He was a great kisser and I was happy to return the embrace, letting my tongue dance with his while I pressed my body against him. I felt his hands sliding downward, coming to rest in the small of my back. I pressed myself even more closely to him and started stroking his thigh with my right hand. I could feel him getting harder and harder, so I started exploring more boldly, rubbing the bulge in his pants. His hands dropped to my bottom and pulled me closer, his hands reaching under the folds of my short cocktail dress.

I was soaking wet and ready to devour this man. I stopped stroking the front of his pants and unbuckled his belt instead, then unzipped him and let his pants fall to the floor. As I started unbuttoning his shirt, his hands grabbed onto the hem of my dress and pulled it up over my head. I wasn’t wearing a bra, so while I finished unbuttoning him he caressed my very aroused breasts. Soon one of his hands slid down my body and inside the satin panties which were all I was still wearing. I had his hot, rigid cock in my hand and was squeezing it rhythmically, getting him ready to penetrate me. Finally he laid me down on the floor, pulled off my panties, and thrust himself deeply into me. I squeezed him hard with my pelvic muscles as he worked himself in and out, and I could hear his grunts as he got closer to orgasm. My own climax was only a few seconds away, I could feel it starting ...

... and then I woke up panting, dripping wet, more aroused than I’d ever been in my life – and completely alone. I closed my eyes again and imagined his kind face, his amazing eyes, as my hand slipped down into my slit and finished what the dream had started.

The next day and a half blew by before I really got a chance to notice them. Mostly I spent the hours catching up on errands – dry cleaning, grocery shopping, cleaning up the darkroom. All of the little things that people do when they are waiting for something to happen.

The Toledo Grill turned out to be a nice place, tastefully decorated, with lots of space between the smaller tables to give a sense of privacy. American cuisine with a touch of Tex/Mex (and presumably Ohio), not overly fancy but very satisfying. David was waiting for me inside. He looked completely at ease in his khakis and knit shirt. I had dressed for business in a heather gray skirt with matching blazer and cream colored blouse. He came forward to greet me, hand outstretched.

“Thanks so much for coming. I know this must all seem a little strange.”

“I’ve been propositioned by stranger men, Mr. Price.” A little forward, but I needed to know what he had in mind. His mouth turned upward into a friendly smile.

“I’ve no doubt. But this is not that kind of proposition. And please call me David.”

He pulled out my chair for me, then sat across the small table from me. The waiter took our beverage order (Diet Coke for me, iced tea for David) and left us to our menus.

Time to get started, I thought to myself. “So, David, why don’t you tell me about the proposal you and Mr. Mallick have worked up?”

“I will, I promise. Let’s have lunch first, though. It’ll give us a chance to get a little more comfortable with each other. We can talk business afterward.”

Lunch was delicious. We made small talk as we ate, discussing everything from the weather to the dismal performance of the local baseball team. We even touched lightly on politics, just enough to see that we seem to share a lot of common ground there. And as we talked, I could almost see him visibly relaxing. His body language became broader, more open, and his smile came and went freely. I found myself relaxing too as the lunch went on. Most men I know don’t listen well, but David was a natural at it. By the time our plates were cleared I was completely at ease with him.

“Are you going to proposition me now?” I asked, still trying to get a rise out of him. I could tell he liked me, and I had been flirting more or less openly throughout lunch but he wouldn’t call me on it.

“Sure. I think I’m ready now.” He told me about his interview with Mr. Mallick, then the rejection phone call Monday morning. I knew about most of that already and I found myself only half listening, the other half studying his face. His eyes were locked onto mine, shining fiercely as he got closer to the crux of his plan. “So basically, we were both turned down for not having enough start-up money already in hand. Mallick told me that if I increased my own capital stake, they would be much more likely to approve the loan. He even suggested that I find a partner with a business background to make me more appealing to the money men. That’s when I thought of you.

“If we were to become partners and start a studio together, I’m sure we would be able to get Riggs to help finance us. I’ve got equipment, a location, and a few contacts in the business that can help us find quality work. You’ve got a first-class business mind and a great eye. If we pool our resources, we can both get what we want.”

The idea was certainly intriguing. I spent several minutes contemplating my Diet Coke, thinking about how a partnership with this man might be. I thought about the portfolio I saw at the bank, and the riveting nature of those photos struck me anew. Then I thought about my own personal dreams, the ones where I am in my studio doing my kind of photography. Finally, I sighed and met those eyes again.

“I don’t think it would work out, David.” I could see his chest fall a little as he released a held breath. “The kind of work you do, it’s breathtaking and compelling and exciting to look at. There are tons of people who dream of being able to take pictures like that. But I’m not one of them. My idea of a good time is Team Photo Day with a youth soccer league. I like doing portraits, reunions, weddings, what have you. I’m in it for the memories.”

He was nodding to himself. “I respect that, Jen. The whole point of becoming your own boss is to be able to do things your own way. I’ve been doing high fashion for several years now and believe me, the thrill is gone. I’d love to do some weddings, maybe a yearbook or two, and perhaps an occasional magazine spread. The variety keeps things fresh. It’s also good business.

“Do you realize how difficult it is to make any money doing just portraits and events? Think about it – how often do most people get married? How many class reunions do they go to? How often do they come in and actually buy a portrait package? In order to pay the bills you have to keep digging up new customers every day. And the competition for those customers is murderous with all the chain outlets.

“But I’ve got leads into a whole other tier of clients, Jen. Ad agencies. Interior decorators. Book publishers. They pay well and, more importantly, they like to form relationships with a studio. That means repeat business, which means better cash flow, which means we can do more of the kind of work we enjoy. And we can do it on our terms, knowing that the rent is covered.”

He laid out the numbers for me, sketching on a napkin as he explained what assets he had to offer. His enthusiasm was infectious – soon I was scribbling on the napkin too, figuring the relative costs and potential revenues, total assets, the whole bag. In the end, I changed my mind and agreed to the partnership. We went to a lawyer I knew and had the formal agreements drawn up. Within a month we had received the loan from Riggs and were opening our new studio.

The first year was rough. Our primary competition was the franchise studios, where all they do is snap the picture and sell packages of prints – the franchise handles promotion, processing, and just about everything else to get economies of scale. Then there were the department stores, which mostly were the same chains neatly tucked in near the store entrance and always running a dirt cheap offer to get people in the door, which then gives them the chance to do a selling job. Since we couldn’t compete on price we tried to stress value and quality, but it’s always a tough sell when the chain studio down the street can offer everything we do, but at less than our cost. The Riggs people had been right -- if I’d started out on my own as planned, my studio wouldn’t have survived the year.

Fortunately for us, David’s contacts came through. A couple of ad agencies offered us short jobs and liked our work enough to talk about it. Word of mouth brought us a trickle of additional trial assignments, which by year’s end had become a steady if narrow

stream. Although we still ended the year in the red, the trend was looking healthy as long as we could keep growing the commercial side.

On the personal front things were less encouraging, as the relationship between us stayed friendly but professional. David was a puzzle: quiet, but not shy; friendly, but not really outgoing; firm, but not aggressive; confident, but never vain. He would speak frankly on just about any subject, but seldom volunteered anything beyond what was asked. That was especially true about himself, I was to discover.

About two months into our business relationship, a woman called the office asking for David. She gave her name as Stephanie. David spoke with her for a few minutes, scribbled something in his calendar, and hung up.

“Who was that?” I asked, figuring it must be a client.

“My girlfriend,” he replied, as if this was no big surprise. “She’ll be in town tomorrow, and she’s planning to swing by here a little before closing and take me away for the evening. We’re not that busy tomorrow, it shouldn’t hurt anything.”

But wait, as the infomercials say, there’s more. When Stephanie did come over the next day, I recognized her immediately – her face and body were on magazine covers and advertisements all over town. She’d even been on the Letterman show recently. It was then that I decided David must be an alien; no red-blooded American male could be involved with Stephanie and not talk about it. Most would have “I AM DATING A SUPERMODEL” tattooed on their foreheads.

Eventually I rejected the alien theory and decided that David must be something even more unusual – a man so totally comfortable with himself that he honestly doesn’t need anyone else’s approval. He just accepts everybody as his peer, whether they seem inclined to do the same or not. There are a lot of men who think they are like that, and they spend large amounts of energy and time making sure everyone they meet agrees with them. David is the genuine article. And he was already taken. I became resigned to the situation. How do you compete with a cover girl?

As time went on, Stephanie proved to be the definitive absentee girlfriend, calling up on short notice for a date every once in a while, but seldom in touch otherwise. Weeks would go by with no contact from her, then out of the blue she would turn up and whisk David away for a night or a weekend before vanishing again. He deserved better, I thought, but really had no options to work with. David would never cheat, it’s not in his character. When I remarked on how little they saw each other, he reminded me that at Stephanie’s level models are ‘in’ for only a short time, and they need to take full advantage before a younger, prettier face comes along. There was no reason I could see for Stephanie to dump David; he was always available and never criticized. So I wrote him off as unavailable and told myself that at least I had him as a friend. I dated some other guys in a half-hearted sort of way, but none of them lasted long. They could probably tell I was just marking time.

Exactly a year after our first lunch, David and I went back to the Toledo Grill. It had become our favorite place to go when we needed to get out of the studio. The casual atmosphere and feeling of privacy were highly conducive to free thinking. We had many long strategy sessions in there – so many that the wait staff routinely sets our usual table with notepad and pencils.

We had an anniversary toast with our lunch, with the Toledo staff singing “Happy Birthday” to us. It was corny, but sweet. With our plates removed and glasses refilled it was time to get started on the day’s topic, how to improve our cash flow. We must have kicked around a dozen different ideas, but by the time we were through there were only two standouts.

The first good idea was mine. The business volume had picked up just enough that we were spending a lot of time in the darkroom instead of with the clients. The obvious answer was to hire a photo processor but the money just wasn’t there. A business seminar I’d been to recently got me thinking about outsourcing most of the processing work.

At first, David was doubtful. “If we don’t do our own processing, isn’t that a step backward for us?”

“Not necessarily. I met someone at the seminar, his name is Russell, and he owns a small photo processing business. He has all the latest equipment and systems, stuff we can’t even afford to window shop for, and he uses it to do premium quality processing. He showed me some samples and it’s amazing what he can do with even a department store negative. Let’s at least give it a try, it could really help keep down the expenses.”

“Okay, I’m game,” David replied. “In fact, it fits in nicely with my idea for a new revenue stream. How would you feel about doing boudoir portraits?”

I was so surprised I spilled soda on my notepad. I’d spent most of the year putting David and sex as far apart in my mind as I could, and now here he was talking about doing portraits of women in lingerie. He read my expression accurately.

“I know, it sounds pretty wild. It was actually Gina who gave me the idea.” Gina was an ex-coworker of David’s, one of the many people who had risked sending business our way. “She called me last week and asked if we do boudoir. Apparently it’s fashionable right now. People are putting out big bucks for high-quality sexy pictures of themselves. The chains won’t touch it and most small shops don’t have the equipment or know-how for premium processing, so the margins are healthy. There would be some start-up costs, of course – building a set, wardrobe, a little minor hardware. But if we can farm out the processing to your guy Russell we can try it out, see if we want to do it before we commit cash to retooling the darkroom.”

I didn't know much about boudoir at the time and neither did David, so we decided to do some more research. We went through back issues of trade magazines, surfed the Internet, talked to some colleagues. After a couple of days, it was clear that the money potential was for real – some of the studios I found on the Web advertised obscene sitting fees and were booked months in advance. Boudoir is a specialty done almost exclusively by specialty firms and medium-sized studios, so there were no chains driving the prices down. From a business perspective, it made sense if we could do it well. The logical next step was a trial.

Gina arranged for the subject, an aspiring model named Lauren who was trying to get the attention of a nationwide lingerie chain. Lauren's appointment was for two o'clock in the afternoon. We thought we were ready for the shoot when Gina stopped by at twelve thirty to check out our preparations.

Gina turned out to be a tall, full-figured woman in her mid 40's, with long black hair and a friendly way about her. We spent a few minutes on pleasant small talk, then Gina asked for the studio tour. David and I showed her the set we had pulled together. The dominant piece was a rosewood four-poster queen size bed complete with satin sheets and extra large pillows. We covered the studio floor with an oriental style rug and the wall behind the bed with a folding privacy screen. I had a 30-day return window on the sheets and pillows; everything else was rented for the occasion.

Gina nodded approvingly at our setup. "This looks very good for a first set. A little small, maybe, but it's a start. If you decide to do this seriously, try to enlarge the set so there is room for a sofa, a vanity and maybe a full-length mirror. Different people are more comfortable in different places. It would also be a good idea to have a couple of changes of look – different bedding, maybe a small flower arrangement, so you can change the look to suit the client."

I was impressed. "You sound like the voice of experience, Gina. Have you done boudoir?"

A big, broad grin spread over her face. "Several times, dear, but not from your side of the camera."

"Really?" For some reason that surprised me. "Why do it?"

"Why not?" she answered. "It makes you feel deliciously randy for days, and you get the added thrill of watching your man's eyes bug out when he sees the prints. Every once in a while I mail a new picture to my husband at his office; for a week afterwards he comes home on time, helps with the dishes and will jump my bones at the drop of a hat. You should try it sometime."

"Doesn't it make you feel kind of ... well, sleazy?" That was my one misgiving about this project, I wanted things to be in good taste.

Gina laughed a low, measured laugh. “Everybody has a different idea of what’s sleazy, dear. If you take an average woman, undress her and tell her to act sexy while some stranger points a zoom lens at her privates, I can guarantee you she will feel sleazy and never come back. But when it’s done well, a boudoir shoot is a private, erotic experience for the model. The key is to get the model to relax and be herself, and to think about her lover and what turns them on. Rule One is that the more you get your model to relax, the better she will look on film. Everything you say or do in the presence of the model should be calculated to make her feel comfortable and safe. Everything she wears and does on the set should be her own idea, or a suggestion that she chooses to take because it sounds good. Be professional, earn her trust, and nobody will feel used when it’s over.”

We continued into the makeshift dressing room. Gina clicked her tongue in disappointment at our negligee choices. I was crestfallen – David and I had solicited all of our female friends to lend us their most revealing nightwear, but apparently it wasn’t satisfactory. “What’s wrong?” David asked.

“What you have here is an impressive collection of odd patches, strings and peek-a-boo lace; the stuff men buy for their girlfriends and then wonder why they only wear it once. Very few women have both the figure and the poise to be comfortable in these. With wardrobe, variety is vital. Rule Two is that no matter how much skin you see, it’s still the model’s eyes that make or break the picture. If she feels even slightly insecure about what she is or isn’t wearing, it will show up in her eyes.”

Things continued in that vein for another half hour as Gina examined our setups and dispensed advice freely. She didn’t hesitate to offer criticism when it seemed appropriate, but she was very nice about it and was trying to help us succeed. In the end I was glad she had come.

With the facilities approved (at least provisionally), Gina then suggested that we do a simulated session using her as the model to rehearse the process. Gina clearly knew more about it than both of us put together, so we quickly agreed.

The first step is makeup and costume. Since the clients are almost always women, we assumed that I would be the one to work with the client on outfit selection, makeup and hair styling and that David would be the primary photographer. “But both of you need to work together on the set,” Gina cautioned us. “Never leave a model alone with David, Jen. Some women – and some men – get so turned on by the whole process that they take it too far. If that happens, your presence protects David and the business from an ugly lawsuit.”

“But I’d never do anything with a model,” David objected. “You know that.”

“Of course I do. I also know that some people take rejection very personally. You need a witness and a chaperone to keep things under control.” David nodded his agreement.

I led Gina back to the changing area, where she looked again through the collection of nightwear we had assembled, this time picking out a few things that she thought Lauren might choose. To save time we didn't do any actual costume change or makeup, we simply discussed what I would do with Gina's face given her coloring. She seemed satisfied with that.

Next she came out to the set to be photographed. David used an empty camera as a prop, moving around her silently as she pretended to pose and saying "click" when he wanted to take a picture. After a few minutes she called a halt.

"There's too much activity and not enough engagement here, David. Rule Three is to keep talking with the model. Conversation keeps her animated; if you stop talking to her, her mind will wander and that will come out in the photo. If you talk between yourselves but not to the model, she will feel like a prop and lose the mood."

So we spent several minutes more in mock shoot, only this time David spent the time between shots telling Gina how beautiful she was, asking if she was comfortable, did she want to try something different, etc. "That's better, dear. The most important thing is to keep it light and friendly, to keep your model at ease. Questions should be simple ones with short answers, no essays. Ask her about the person who will see the photos, what she likes about them, what turns them on. It's okay to suggest poses, but stick close to what she seems to like.

"And David, I know you love to play with angles, but you can't keep circling the model like a vulture. Rule Four is that the model should be in motion and the camera should be still. That way she always knows where you are and can easily control how much or how little you see. It's disconcerting to have someone moving all around while they talk to you." We practiced a little more, then when Gina said it felt right we finished preparing for the real shoot.

Lauren arrived promptly at two. She was clearly nervous but tried gamely to return my welcoming smile. As I expected, she was a very pretty young lady – barely 21, average height but small at the shoulders, bust and hips. She had rich, deep auburn hair and, as so many redheads have, a very pale complexion with signs of a tendency toward freckles. Her features were sharp and elegant, with clear blue eyes hinting at more intelligence than most people expect from a model. Figuring she probably needed a few minutes to settle down, I engaged her in small talk while David finished loading the cameras and checking the lights. We stayed in the empty reception area, I didn't want her anticipating things too much.

Once all was ready, Gina brought David out to the reception area and introduced him to Lauren. David greeted her warmly with just the right amount of eye contact, which seemed to put her more at ease. Eventually Lauren pronounced herself ready to start, so Gina and I took her back to the dressing room. I saw her head turn and the nervous look reappear as she got her first look at the set, and made a mental note to myself to rearrange things to prevent that in the future.

Lauren took her time picking through the wardrobe choices, a vaguely unhappy look clouding her face. Gina was right, I thought, she isn't finding anything she likes. After long study she settled on a classic black teddy, smooth and very sheer in the front but with enough pattern in the lace to keep her nipples and pubic area semi-concealed. It was cut for a slight woman so it fit Lauren's body nicely; Gina and I could tell, though, that she was a little uncomfortable being so exposed. "I've never worked without clothes before," she confided. "Not even swimsuits."

A few finishing touches on her hair and makeup and Lauren was ready. Gina and I walked her to the set where David greeted her warmly, telling her how stunning she looked. Lauren smiled nervously, her arms remaining close to her body and fingers intertwined. David told her to choose any position she wanted to start with, so she walked over and sat on the edge of the bed, crossing her legs and hunching her shoulders a little, which emphasized her cleavage.

From there, David and I pretty much took over with some helpful suggestions from Gina. We had Lauren make small, incremental posture changes. Soon we had established a simple rhythm – change the pose, say something comforting to Lauren, snap the picture, repeat. Occasionally I would step into frame to adjust Lauren's outfit or move a pillow between shots. Gina watched from behind David, giving her a sight line very close to the camera's. Technically it was all working smoothly, but it didn't feel quite right. Like a band in rehearsal, everyone was playing their part but it wasn't blending together. David seemed dissatisfied too. Finally he called for a break, suggesting that Lauren go back to the dressing room and pick a different outfit. As soon as she was out of earshot, David turned to me.

"Rule One," he said. "She's not relaxed, she's not comfortable. She's posing like a robot. We have got to get her to loosen up and enjoy this or there's no point continuing."

Gina nodded in agreement. "Lauren is still very new to modeling. I'm afraid she isn't comfortable with traipsing around half naked in front of strangers yet."

"Don't apologize for that," I told Gina. "If we are going to do this, the models we work with will pretty much all be amateurs. We have to be able to make them comfortable."

"That's nothing a double bourbon and coke won't cure," David offered half-jokingly. "Maybe we should get her sloshed and try again."

Something clicked in the back of my mind. "That gives me an idea. Get ready for another series, David. I'll get Lauren ready. Gina, just stay back and watch, okay?"

"What's the plan?" David asked.

"I know a way to get Lauren to loosen up, if I still have the knack. Trust me."

I found Lauren in the dressing room, still looking through the negligee collection. She had taken off the teddy and was holding a gold chemise to her front. It was clearly too big for her but it provided some cover while she looked through the rack one more time. "I'm having a little trouble finding something," she said uncertainly. "I'm not used to things like this."

"Maybe we should try a different approach. What do you normally wear to bed?"

"I have a couple of oversized nightshirts, I usually wear one of those and underpants if I'm going to bed by myself. Otherwise, well, nothing." She blushed a little bit.

"Why don't you put your own panties back on? I'll be right back."

I walked out of the dressing room, past the set into David's and my office. What I wanted was still there on a hanger – one of David's spare shirts. We each had a change of clothes in the office in case we spilled something in the darkroom. David had two shirts in the closet. The one I chose was a light sky blue, thick and soft like flannel, with subtle white pinstripes and short sleeves. It felt smooth like a light blanket, and was about 3 sizes too large for Lauren. Perfect.

"Try this," I said as I handed Lauren the shirt.

Her eyes lit up immediately and she eagerly slipped her arms into it. She skipped the bottom buttons and just buttoned the area from her waist to her bust, leaving the tail loose. She tucked her face into the open collar space and inhaled deeply. "Mmmmmmm," she said. "I love it. But is it sexy enough?"

"If you feel sexy it will come through no matter what you wear. Do you feel sexy?"

Lauren thought about it for a moment. "Not really. I mean, I feel better than I did when we were shooting, but I think maybe I was trying too hard. It didn't feel like me." She hugged the oversized shirt to her chest. "This feels like me."

"Then that's what we'll go with," I promised. "You're right, it's hard to feel sexy when you are constantly thinking about how to move, where to touch, where to look. Let's try something here and see if it helps. I want to take you through a breathing exercise, something that will help you focus your mind and decompress a little bit."

"You mean like yoga?" she asked. "I've never done it, but I have a friend who says it's very relaxing."

"Sure" I replied, stretching the truth a little. "Only without the complicated positions. We'll do this just sitting in the makeup chair." The makeup chair in our makeshift changing room was just a regular low-back office chair with a throw over it; I hoped it would be comfortable enough for what I had in mind. My chances seemed better in the

semi-privacy of this room than if I tried having her lie down on the bed in front of the camera and lights.

Lauren slipped into the makeup chair and spun to face me. “What do I do?”

I instructed Lauren to turn around. “Face the mirror for this exercise, Lauren. I want you to look at your reflection carefully, notice every detail about your face and head. And while you do this, I want you to take three deep, slow breaths. With each inhale, I want you to imagine that you are breathing in fresh, clean, healthy air that relaxes you and makes you feel good. With each exhale, I want you to imagine that you are breathing out a dark cloud of anxiety, fear, and shame. Do that for me now please and you will see your reflection relaxing with you.”

“Okay.” She took a long breath as instructed, held it a few seconds, then exhaled even more slowly. Even through David’s shirt I could see the tension leaving her shoulders and upper arms. By the third exhale her head started to droop down, but she lifted it back up again. This may just work, I thought.

“Very good, Lauren. How do you feel?”

“Much better, thanks. That’s a very nice exercise.”

“That was only a warm-up,” I told her. “To get you ready for the real exercise. Are you ready to feel even better than you do now?”

“Yes. Please.”

“Okay then. Continue to face the mirror. Now look deeply into the reflection of your eyes. Concentrate on your eyes, let them become fixed on the eyes you see in the mirror. Pretend you are trying to hypnotize yourself.” Oops – bad choice of words, I thought, but Lauren didn’t seem to mind. I lowered my voice and stood just behind her chair. My eye caught a movement in the doorway as Gina started in. I waved her back to the doorway, afraid the movement would distract Lauren. Gina backed up but continued to watch from the doorway. As long as she didn’t interfere, no problem.

“Very good, Lauren, you are concentrating well. Now, as you continue to lose yourself in your own eyes, you will soon become more aware of your breathing. You will feel your chest rise and fall, again and again, and soon you will notice that your breathing is starting to slow down. As you feel yourself breathing in, you find that each breath serves to calm you and each time you breathe out you will feel your body relaxing a little more. Pay close attention to your breathing and feel it becoming deeper, slower, easier with every breath.”

Gina had reentered the room, quietly easing herself into another chair with a view of the mirror. She seemed fascinated but I was glad she did not start asking questions at that point. I gave Lauren half a minute or so before continuing. “Yes. You are still focused

on the reflection of your eyes, and now you are aware of how much more smoothly and easily you are breathing. At any moment now, you will become aware of your heart beating inside your chest. You feel the slight thumping of your pulse as your heart does its work. If you concentrate, you will find that you can slow down your own heart beat just a little, relaxing, slowing down, little by little. Try it now, you'll see that you can do it. Keep breathing, evenly and slowly, and feel your heartbeat slowing down. Just a little at a time, slowing down, relaxing even as your body relaxes. So calm, so peaceful, slowing so gently."

In the mirror, Lauren's eyes were starting to glaze over. The faintest ghost of a smile showed at the corners of her mouth. In the mirror I could just catch the reflection of Gina's wide-eyed stare.

"You are well on your way to total relaxation now," I continued, letting my voice become even softer and speaking very slowly. "Your breathing is slow and smooth, your heart beats slowly, and you are still concentrating on your own eyes. Keep that focus. It's okay to blink, but do not let your eyes wander. As you continue to concentrate on all of these things, you can notice your body continuing to relax in sections. Even now you feel the muscles in your legs going limp and loose, relaxing, letting go. You don't need those muscles right now, the chair will support you. Notice how wonderfully heavy, so heavy they are becoming. Too heavy to bother moving them. No need to move them, not right now. The only need is to allow them to rest.

"Now that your legs are completely relaxed, you can feel the sensations of warmth, of peace, flowing through them. Soon, as you continue to concentrate, you will feel that same warmth and peace flowing from your legs into your upper body. Your hips, your stomach, your chest, your back, all feel that warmth and slowly, gently, they relax. You can feel waves of relaxation now running from your feet all the way up to the top of your chest, one with each breath, and as you breath out you can feel every muscle in your body release its tension. Again, the chair will support you. It is perfectly safe to let your muscles relax, to just let go. Let it happen as you feel yourself sinking into the chair, your whole body supported by the chair and totally relaxed, safe, secure.

"You are doing so well, Lauren. Becoming so relaxed, so peaceful. You feel the warmth and comfort that spread from your feet and legs into your belly, back, and chest, and now you realize that the feeling is still spreading, still expanding. Now feel your shoulders becoming warm, lazy, loose. The warmth flows down into your arms, making them feel so heavy, so limp and loose and lazy, all they want to do is just rest there in your lap, no need to move, no need to do anything but relax and enjoy."

Lauren's eyes were starting to tear. Every so often her head would droop down, only to be jerked back up again by the need to remain fixed on her own eyes. Gina continued to sit quietly in rapt attention. Time to finish this off.

"You feel so good right now, so safe, so beautiful. Warm waves of relaxation continue to flow from your feet up through your upper body, arms, and hands. And now, as you

enjoy that sensation, you feel the warmth spreading up your neck, to the back of your head. Feel it spreading to the top of your head, relaxing the thin layer of muscles in your scalp, in your forehead. Feel your face relaxing as the warmth spreads through it, your mouth perhaps opening a little, your eyelids closing. As your eyelids close, feel your head become heavier and heavier, too heavy to hold up any more. Feel your neck muscles straining to hold your head up, your heavy, sleepy head. When I touch your forehead, Lauren, I want you to release all of the muscles in your neck. Just let them go limp, let go of the weight of your head. I will support you so your neck can rest and relax.”

A shiver ran up my spine when I saw her eyelids drop and her face go slack. Holding a pillow behind her, I gently pushed on her forehead. With a small sigh, her head flopped back and into the waiting pillow.

“Very good, you are so relaxed now, so completely at peace. It’s a wonderful feeling, to be so at ease, so safe, so comfortable. No need to think about anything, no need to do anything, just follow my voice and let yourself go. Continue to breathe, imagining that you can see the air flowing in and out, with each breath releasing a little bit more of those last bits of tension in your muscles. Growing more relaxed, more comfortable, with each breath.”

She was well under at this point. Her head was a dead weight against the pillow I held behind her, her mouth wide open, even her fingers looked still and limp. I wedged another pillow into the seat beside her, then gently tilted her head forward to rest on her chest. Then I saw Gina’s reflection in the mirror. She too was slumped in her chair, eyes closed, head flopped to one side. I couldn’t risk disturbing Lauren by waking Gina, so I let her be while I worked on deepening Lauren’s trance state.

“You are doing so well, Lauren. You should be pleased with yourself for being so cooperative, for being able to relax yourself so completely. You can relax even more, as much as you want, in perfect safety. I’m going to help you do that now. Would you like that?”

Her lips moved a little, and I heard a kind of hiss that I took to mean yes.

“It makes me happy to help you like this, Lauren. In a moment, I am going to begin counting down from 10 to 1. When I first count the number 10, I want you to imagine yourself standing at the top of a small staircase, all alone, in a safe and comfortable place. When I count 9, and for every number I count after 9, you will picture yourself taking one step down the staircase. At the bottom of the staircase is a big, bubbling, steamy warm Jacuzzi just waiting for you. When I count the number 1, you will be at the bottom of the stairs and you will allow yourself to just sink into that Jacuzzi.

“Ten. You can see yourself standing at the top of the stairs, ready to descend the stairs and have a nice whirlpool bath. Nine, you take a step down. With each step down, you relax a little bit more. Eight. Seven. Six, relaxing more and more with each step down.

Five. Four. Three. Almost there now, you can feel how ready you are for that hot tub. Take a slow, deep breath for me now, Lauren. Two, let the breath out and feel how it relaxes you even more as you take another step down the stairs. There is only a single step to go now. One. You have finished on the stairs, and you can now let yourself sink into that warm, flowing Jacuzzi. Feel your body sinking into the warm, swirling water, taking all of your cares and worries and washing them away. Feel yourself becoming weightless, floating in the water, your head held up comfortably by the sides of the tub. I'm going to talk to Gina for a while now, Lauren, but you are perfectly safe where you are. Just ignore any sounds you might hear, they are not worth your attention. Just relax and let yourself drift in the hot tub for a little while. When you feel me touch your shoulder, you will pay attention to my voice again. Do you understand?"

"Mmmm hmmm..." Close enough for me. I walked over to Gina. Her face was completely calm, but I could see a slight fluttering of her eyelids as her eyes maintained a rolled back position beneath them. I spoke quietly into her ear.

"Gina, do you hear me?"

"Yes, Jen." Her jaw and mouth moved the barest minimum needed to form the words. So either she wasn't as deeply under as Lauren, or she had experience with hypnosis and knew she could speak clearly while in trance. Why not find out?

"Have you ever been hypnotized before, Gina?"

"Yes," came the answer in a sleepy monotone. "To stop smoking. Dr. Keller says I'm a very good subject."

"You are a very good subject, Gina. So good that you went into a deep trance just by watching me hypnotize Lauren. Do you mind that I hypnotized you?"

"No, I don't mind. It feels great. Please take me deeper."

"I can if you wish, Gina, but not right now. We have to finish our shoot, remember? In a few moments you will feel me touch your right hand. When I do, you will return to your normal waking state, completely alert and aware, feeling refreshed and energized, and you will remember everything that happened while you were in trance. Ready?"

Gina nodded, and I touched her right hand. Her eyelids fluttered open, focusing first on me and then on the somnolent form of Lauren. "You could do a stage act," she said after swallowing a couple of times. "Have you tried that on David yet?"

"This is the first time I've tried to hypnotize anyone since college," I told her. "One of my best friends in college was a psych major. I let her practice on me, and in return she taught me how to hypnotize other people. It was a very useful skill; we used it to manage stress, improve our memories, and get rid of a few bad habits. And once in a while one of us would hypnotize a couple of our sorority sisters or their boyfriends and make a few

goofy but harmless suggestions. She transferred out after our sophomore year, and I just stopped practicing it until now.”

“It must be like riding a bicycle, dear, because you had me before I even realized it was happening. What do we do next?”

“You go back to the set and wait,” I told her firmly. “I’m going to do some more work with Lauren and I don’t need you zoning out on me. Does she have a steady boyfriend?”

“Not that I know of. I think she’d tell me if she were seeing anyone special.”

“She does date men, doesn’t she?” Best not to assume anything, I figured.

“I’ve never heard otherwise.”

Lauren looked so peaceful in the makeup chair that it was almost a shame to disturb her, but we still had work to do. I needed her to feel confident, desirable, sexy – all the things she wasn’t feeling during the first part of the shoot. Her head bobbed a little when I touched her shoulder. “Do you know where you are, Lauren?”

“Mmm Hmmm.”

“You’ll find that even though you are deeply asleep, you can still speak to me without disturbing yourself. In fact, speaking clearly will only help you to relax and enjoy the sensations even more. Where are you?”

“In my hot tub. Floating. Feels so nice, so nice.”

This was working out extremely well. I remembered that one of the things we always did in school was to set up a trigger for putting people back under quickly. “Lauren, are you enjoying being in such a deep trance today?”

“Oh, yes. Wanna float some more.”

“You can, as long as you want. In a little while you will have to awaken to finish your session. But you can return to this wonderful, restful, serene state any time you wish. In fact, whenever I say the words ‘time out’ to you, your mind and body will automatically return to this state and relax as deeply as you ever have. Your body will become limp and heavy, your face will go slack as your eyes close themselves, and you will give in completely to this deep, refreshing, irresistible sleep. You won’t try to resist, you will want to give in completely, because you know you can trust me to keep you safe while you float peacefully in your hot tub. Will you do this for me?”

“Yes.”

“Lauren, I need to ask you some very personal questions now, and it is very important that you answer them truthfully and completely so I can help you be successful today. When we are through you won’t remember the questions or your answers, and you can trust me to keep your secrets safe. Will you cooperate with me by answering my questions, Lauren?”

“Okay.” She sounded like a little girl.

“Thank you, Lauren. You will find as we do this that each time you answer me, you relax even further, just floating in your soothing hot tub. The rushing water will take away the memories even as you answer. Lauren, are you romantically involved with anyone right now?”

“No.”

“Is there anyone you would like to be romantically involved with?” I was trying to find out her preferences without asking outright. Despite all the preambles, I was still afraid that such a dicey question would shock her back to full awareness.

She smiled. “The photographer is pretty cute. He smells nice, too.”

Okay, that can work, I thought to myself. “He is, isn’t he? His name is David, and I know for a fact that he finds you very attractive. He loves your hair, your face, your body. He thinks you are the sexiest woman he’s ever seen, and he would like nothing more than to make love to you again and again, slowly and passionately, bringing you to climax after climax. Picture that happening, Lauren. Picture yourself making sweet, passionate love with your new boyfriend, David. Feel him sitting with you in your hot tub, his hands caressing your breasts while you stroke his thick, rigid cock. How does that make you feel, Lauren?”

“Uhhh ... so good ... oh, I want him inside me. I want to come with him inside me.”

“And he wants that too, Lauren. Deep down, he wants that too. But he is shy, Lauren. He is afraid to tell you how he feels. He is afraid that you might reject him, because he knows that you are so beautiful, so sexy, that you can have any man you want. He wants you desperately, but he is afraid that he’s not good enough for you. You’re going to have to show him that you want him, that you won’t reject him. Seduce him with your eyes, your body, your voice. Can you do that, Lauren?”

“I can do that.”

“Good, Lauren. Very good. Now it’s almost time to continue the shoot. I’m going to count to five, and when I reach the count of five you will return to your normal waking state. You will not remember that you were hypnotized, only that you did some deep breathing exercises to help you calm down. You will feel calm and confident. When we start posing again, your only desire will be to make David want you. With every click of

the camera you will become more aroused, more confident, more irresistible, and more determined to seduce him. Look straight at him through the camera and let him see the lust in your eyes. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Very good, Lauren. At the count of five you will awaken completely and carry out your instructions. One, limbs growing lighter. Two, breathing picking up. Three, energy returning to your muscles. Four, eyes starting to open. Five, wide awake."

Lauren's face had a look of wonder on it, the warm glow that changed her whole look. "Wow," she said. "I feel incredible. What a great exercise that was."

"Ready to face the camera again?"

"Sure, let's do it."

David and Gina were waiting for us when we emerged from the dressing room. David noticed a difference in Lauren immediately – she was walking with authority, her face lit up with purpose. When she first saw him, her eyes burned into his. At the same time, her hands went to the front of her borrowed shirt and undid an extra button, letting the shirt fall open to a point just above the navel. She ran her fingers up and down one side of the plunging opening as she stepped up onto the set. David stood stock still. Finally she prompted him. "Don't you want to take my picture?"

"Sorry," he said, snapping a shot. "It's just that I had no idea that shirt could look so good."

Lauren gave him a sly, feline sort of smile. "Just you wait."

At that point Lauren took control of the session. For pose after pose she moved like a trained seductress, all grace and assurance, and all the while keeping her eyes locked onto David. She circled the bed like a dancer, offering him different angles, each of which caused the loose shirt to gap open, revealing more than it was intended to do. Then, stopping close to the camera, she unbuttoned the shirt completely, letting it fall open to reveal the valley between her breasts and the simple cotton bikini brief she had worn to the studio. As David continued taking shots, she lifted her arms and placed her hands behind her head, causing the shirt to open up even more. She turned sideways to David and slowly slipped the shirt off her shoulder, holding it loosely to her breast as the fabric slid down to her elbows, her face bathing David in a 1000-watt glare of pure lust.

Gina's jaw dropped. "Whatever she does, David, just keep shooting."

Lauren toyed with that shirt like a world-class stripper, alternately clutching it close and then letting it almost fall off, offering David view after view of her hips, her butt, her shoulders, the inside or outside of her breast, all in succession. She grew more brazen

with each new position. She was clearly getting to David, who shifted positions frequently in a futile attempt to hide the signs of his own arousal. Lauren seemed to be growing impatient – after a few more poses she walked right up to the edge of the bed, let the shirt fall to the floor, and addressed David directly.

“How am I doing, David? Am I sexy enough for you, David? Are you getting hard watching me pose like this for you, David?” The poor man was totally unprepared for this – all he could do was stare, agree, and keep shooting as Lauren fondled her own breasts not three feet away.

“How do you like my tits, David? They are small, but the nipples are very, VERY sensitive.” They were also very, very erect I noticed. “Wouldn’t you like to put one of them in your mouth? Wouldn’t you like to stroke them, tease them, kiss them?” All the while she continued moving fluidly from one pose to the next, seeming as comfortable in her naked hide as any animal. She eased herself onto the bed and continued her monologue.

“This is making me so hot, David, so hot and so horny. I’m starting to get wet thinking about it, posing for you and telling you how hot it makes me feel while you take pictures of my body. This is such an incredible turn-on, David. Is it turning you on too, David?” His verbal skills failed him completely as he watched Lauren stretched out on the bed, her hands roaming over every part of her body as she spoke her erotic thoughts aloud to him. At Gina’s urging he kept shooting, even as Lauren hooked her briefs with her thumbs and slid them off, tossing them toward David where they landed on his shoulder. I could tell from across the room that they were soaking wet.

“Keep shooting, David,” Lauren continued, climbing off the bed toward him. “I love it when you take my picture, it gets me SO horny. I’m so horny now, David, I’d like to rip your clothes off and wrap myself around your gorgeous, magnificent cock!”

For David that was the last straw; he put down the camera down and stepped backward. “I think that’s enough now, Lauren, you can go get dressed.”

“You don’t really want me to do that, do you?” she asked, her voice almost singing as she closed the space between them. “I know I don’t want me to do that. Aren’t you aroused, David? So aroused, so horny, that you can’t think of anything but how much you’d like to put your cock between my legs?” She had him backed into a corner and pressed her hand against his bulging pants, tracing the outline of his organ with her fingers. “Fuck me, David, like you know you want to. Don’t be afraid, I won’t reject you. I want you. Let go and fuck me now.”

“No.” David pushed her strongly away, but she recovered herself quickly. “This is not a good idea, Lauren.”

“It’s a GREAT idea!” she replied. “Listen to your body, David, it’s telling you how much you want me. I want to make you cum again and again and again.” She practically

threw herself at him, wrapping her arms around his neck and her legs around his waist, shutting off his objections with an open-mouthed kiss that could melt steel. I'd let this go on too long.

"Lauren, time out."

The change was astonishing. In the blink of an eye she went from clutching David to collapsing on him, totally limp. He felt it happening and went just as quickly from fighting her off to holding her up as she slumped toward the floor. Her head and shoulders flopped back as he shifted his hands to improve his grip. He stared at me in amazement. "How did you do that?"

"A little something I learned in college. I swear I had no idea it would work that well. The pictures are great, aren't they?"

"Yeah, I think so. We'll have to talk about this later." He looked again into Lauren's sleeping face. "What do I do with her?"

"I'll take her back to the dressing room. Lauren, can you hear me?"

"Yes. Floating again, so nice."

"That's very good, Lauren. You can continue to relax now. As you do, you feel the strength returning to your legs. You remain deeply relaxed, but you can now stand and walk while your mind continues to float in your hot tub. Do you understand, Lauren?"

"Yes." Her legs shifted and straightened as they took on her weight again. David let her go gently, as if he wasn't quite sure she would stay standing.

"Come back to the dressing room with me, Lauren. You can open your eyes as you walk without disturbing your relaxed state." She followed me into the dressing room, where I had her sit again in the makeup chair and told her once again to just drift and ignore everything until I touched her shoulder.

David started to ask questions as I came out of the dressing room, but I cut him off. "First things first. Where is her underwear?" I found it on the floor near where David had been standing when she threw it at him. Fortunately, our studio had a modest but functional laundry room. I ran the panties through a quick hand wash and put them in the dryer for a short cycle. That gave me about 20 minutes to get Lauren cleaned up and explain things to David.

I started out by telling him about my previous hypnosis experience, then gave him a basic idea of what suggestions I'd used on Lauren to overcome her nervousness. "I really didn't expect her to strip and attack you, David. I'm really sorry about that."

“No harm done,” he replied looking down at his pants, which were still stained with Lauren’s juices. “No lasting harm, anyway.” His wry face told me that all was forgiven, at least for now. “How much is she going to remember?”

That’s the big question, I thought to myself. “If I wake her right now she won’t remember being hypnotized the first time, but she will remember all the details of the second sitting, how she felt, what she did. She probably won’t remember how she ended up in the dressing room again.”

Gina spoke up. “We’re going to want Lauren to look at the proofs, so it would be better if she could remember at least some of the posing. She’ll be mortified if she realizes she ended up naked and on film, and I shudder to think how embarrassed she’ll be over throwing herself at David.”

“On the other hand, maybe this is an opportunity to try and break down some of those barriers. Maybe what she really needs is to remember everything up to when David stopped shooting, including how much she liked it and how relaxed she felt in front of the camera even with nothing on. That could be a major confidence booster for Lauren. What do you think, David?”

I looked up to see David shaking his head.. “I’m not comfortable with the idea of tinkering with someone’s personality. Who are we to decide what Lauren should think and do and remember? She trusted us completely, so we should trust her as well.”

Gina looked incredulous. “You mean you want her to remember everything?”

That sense of honor is one of the things that I like about David. Unsure of the outcome as I was, I knew he was right; we owed it to Lauren to trust her. “David’s right, Gina. Why don’t you come in and help me talk with her?”

Gina agreed. David went back to cleaning up the set area while I retrieved Lauren’s underpants from the dryer. When I returned to the dressing room Gina was perched on the edge of the vanity studying Lauren’s slack face. “I just can’t get over the change,” she said. “From wall flower to sex goddess in ten easy minutes. Can you teach her to do that to herself, maybe?”

“We’ll see.” I touched Lauren on the shoulder. As before, her head stirred a little and settled back down. “How do you feel, Lauren?”

“So nice ... sleepy ... “

“That’s very good, Lauren. You had an excellent session today. You were confident, beautiful, sexy, everything you could possibly have been. You should be proud of yourself.”

A soft, happy smile formed on Lauren’s parted lips.

“Do you realize what happened to you today, Lauren?”

“Yes. ... You helped me relax, taught me the exercise. Made me feel really, really sexy. Told me to seduce David.” The smile straightened out again, and a small crease appeared on her forehead. “I made him hard, but he wouldn’t take me. Why didn’t he want me?”

“He did want you, Lauren. But David knew that it wouldn’t be right to take advantage of you when you were feeling so aroused. He didn’t want you to feel bad about what happened. None of us want you to be hurt or to feel uncomfortable about anything that happened today, do you understand?”

“Okay. I still want him, though.” Best to ignore that, I decided.

“Lauren, I am going to count to five soon. When I reach five you will return to your normal waking state feeling refreshed, alert, and completely comfortable. You will no longer feel compelled to seduce David. You will remember everything that happened to you today and everything you did, and none of it will make you feel hurt or used. You will remember this day as a positive experience, a day when you made new friends and had your best shoot ever. Do you understand?” Yes, I was hedging a little. I didn’t want to get sued.

“Sure.”

“Okay. One, two, three, four, five.”

Lauren’s eyes fluttered open. She looked alternately at me, at Gina, and at herself in the mirror. “Am I really awake now?”

“Yes,” I assured her. “Wide awake, feeling good.”

“I do feel good,” she affirmed. “Better than good. That was the most amazing thing that’s ever happened to me. I felt like a queen.” I could see her mental gears turning, assimilating all the things she could now remember. “So that’s what it’s like being hypnotized. Did David know what you told me to do?”

“No. I didn’t plan to do that at all, Lauren, you have to understand that. It was an impulse, a way to get you to be a little less self-conscious. We wanted you to be relaxed and in command in front of the camera.”

She was nodding vigorously with me. “Well it worked, that’s for sure. I can’t remember ever feeling that sure of myself. I also can’t remember ever feeling so ... aroused.” Her nipples stood up again as she finished her sentence. “I really wish I had a boyfriend to take all this home to.”

“I’d lend you mine if I had one,” I told her. “Do you want to grab a shower before you get dressed?”

“I’d love to!” I showed Lauren to the full bath we had near the kitchen, leaving her street clothes neatly folded on the vanity counter. The water ran for what seemed like a very long time.

Russell was as good as his word. Two days later he hand delivered the proofs from Lauren’s shoot. The processing quality was exceptional, they all felt and looked like top-dollar portraits. He also made a point of presenting me with the negatives and assuring me that he had processed the pictures himself and shredded the wasted sheets.

Lauren was thrilled when she and Gina came by to see them. “Oh my god, is that really me?”

“It’s you all right,” Gina assured her. “Post some of these on the Internet and you’ll be the most downloaded woman in history.”

Gina picked out about six of the best non-nudes to show to the lingerie company. David offered to have a scrapbook made up for Lauren at no charge if she wanted to choose some for herself. She thanked him profusely and selected about 12 proofs, all from the post-hypnotic session, including several topless and nude photos from the end of the shoot. “I want to be able to look at these whenever some agency suit tells me I’m not sultry enough,” she explained. David blushed a little, I guess remembering his own reaction to her.

Our business concluded, Lauren seemed inclined to hang around. “Is there something else we can do for you, Lauren?” I asked, suspecting what the answer might be.

“There is one thing.” She looked over at Gina. “Gina has me scheduled to meet with the lingerie people tomorrow afternoon. They are going to want me to audition for them. I’ll have to talk to them and walk around for them in skimpy underwear, and I’m a little nervous about it. Do you think you could, well ...” Her voice trailed off, and I could see pleading in her eyes.

“Hypnotize you again?” I concluded. “To help you feel more confident for your audition?”

Lauren nodded several times. “Please? I want that job so much, and they won’t want me if I look nervous.”

I led Lauren back to the dressing room, where the good chair was. “Have a seat and get comfortable.”

After a few moments of wriggling in the chair, she pronounced herself ready. “Do I start staring into the mirror now?”

“Not necessary. Time out, Lauren.”

She resisted for a second or two, watching herself in the mirror as her body turned to rags and her head became too busy to hold up. She quickly gave in to the inevitable as her eyes closed, settling into the chair with a deep and satisfied sigh.

“Very good, Lauren. You remembered to respond to your trigger. You can use that same trigger on yourself if you wish, as often as you wish. Just go to a safe, comfortable place and imagine my voice saying ‘Time out’. Every time you do that you will go deeper into relaxation and feel greater pleasure.”

“Okay.”

“Now, Lauren, think about the pictures you saw of yourself today. Remember how totally irresistible you are, how sexy and confident you felt during the shooting here. Remembering those feelings has a marvelous affect on you – those feelings are coming back to you right now, as powerful as they were during the shooting. You feel strong, sexy, vibrant, in control, and absolutely self-assured. Do you feel it, Lauren?”

“Mmmmm, yes ...”

“Good. This is very important, Lauren. The way you feel right now is perfectly natural, perfectly okay. It is how a model needs to feel about herself in order to succeed. You will find that this feeling of power, of seductiveness, of control, will tend to return to you any time you are auditioning or working. If you ever find yourself feeling uncomfortable or nervous, you can close your eyes for a moment and take a deep breath. As you do, the feelings you are experiencing now will return to you. Each breath will make those feelings stronger, until you are completely at ease and confident. The more you practice this the more effective it will be for you. Do you understand?”

“I understand. Thank you for this wonderful feeling.”

I heard later from Gina that Lauren wowed the lingerie people at her audition. A few months later she was on the cover of a nationwide edition of their summer catalog.

The success of Lauren’s session left no more doubts in either of our minds – we were going to do boudoir, and we were going to do it better than anyone. We built a big, permanent set with several looks that could be changed quickly and easily. We also assembled a huge wardrobe of intimate wear for every body size and taste, from shiny black leather to pink flannel. I quickly discovered that my success in hypnotizing Lauren was more a reflection on her ability than mine; it took me a bit of time and some serious study to regain my hypnotic skills. Gradually I put together a good repertoire of

induction techniques and time-tested suggestions that worked most of the time. My rediscovered talent kept the models feeling comfortable, in control, and aroused enough to show on film but not so much that David would have to fight them off. The women seemed to take to David almost on sight, and his patient, deliberate, supportive manner put them at ease quickly. And Russell turned out to be a real find. His print work was so good we never did upgrade our own darkroom. Between the three of us, we got great results from every client. Yes, even Gina – she was the first person we photographed on the new set, and her husband still sends us Christmas cards.

Months passed and we kept very busy, setting our session prices by the appointment book method: when we felt the book was getting too full, we raised our prices. As much as we enjoyed the boudoir work, we wanted to be true to our original intent. We limited our boudoir calendar to one or at most two sessions per day, which still left time for the commercial and family portrait work that had sustained us through the first year. I was getting used to the idea of David as a platonic friend and partner, although on some level I was still waiting for an opportunity.

My opportunity came in an unexpected form. Stephanie, the prodigal girlfriend, called to make a lunch date with David. I heard him agree to meet her at a restaurant across town and hang up.

“It’s been a while since you two had any time together, hasn’t it?” I asked him. It had been at least six weeks by my reckoning.

He shrugged. “She’s been busy, we’ve been busy.” It’s so hard to read David, but I thought (hoped?) I heard a hint of resignation in his voice. “I’d better get going.”

Less than a minute after his car pulled away, a tall, willowy figure strode through the studio door. She had a model’s practiced walk, short black hair styled carefully so as to seem unstyled. Her long coat parted at the front as she moved, revealing a casual yet elegant knit top and slacks.

“Stephanie?” As usual, my vocabulary withered in the face of surprise. “You’re not supposed to be here.”

“I need five minutes with you, Jen. Can we talk?”

“Umm ... sure. Do you want to use the office?”

“Definitely.” She headed for the office immediately, assuming I would follow. Stephanie and I had exchanged maybe 15 sentences since we first met, so I knew something had to be up. This is either going to be very good news or very bad, I thought.

Stephanie closed the door behind me and leaned against it, looking upward. She took a couple of deep breaths and brought her gaze back down to me. “I’ve seen the way you look at David. Does he know how you feel about him?”

All I could do was stare. Was it that obvious?

“It’s okay, Jen, I’m not here to play the jealous girlfriend,” she assured me. “I just want to know how far things have gone between you two.”

“We have a very good business relationship,” I told her. “Nothing else.”

Was that disappointment in her face? “That’s David, all right,” she mused. “Too many scruples for his own good. He should have dumped me for you long ago. It would have been so much easier.”

She wasn’t going to get an argument from me on that. I kept quiet and waited for my new confidant to get to the point.

“Anyway, I wanted to tell you that I’m meeting David for lunch at Toscani’s. We’re going to have a nice friendly lunch, catch up on all the who’s and what’s. And at some point in that conversation I’m going to tell David that I’ve started seeing someone else.”

Which was exactly what I wanted to hear, but at the time it felt like a blow to the stomach. To make things even crazier, I found myself fighting back a growing moral outrage on David’s behalf. “Why are you telling me this?”

“Because we both know he won’t tell you himself. I just want you to know that if you can pry him out of his shell, now is your chance.”

“So this is strictly for my benefit.” I wasn’t buying it.

“Okay, that’s not all. By telling you, I now know that I can’t chicken out at the last minute; I have to tell him before he sees you again. David has never been anything but honest with me, and I feel like a louse for cheating on him, but ...” Her voice just trailed off.

My head was spinning, half a dozen different thoughts screaming to get out. Finally, I settled on the safest one. “I’ll take care of him. Thank you.”

Stephanie shot me a relieved look, then held up her watch. “Gotta go.” We locked eyes for a moment and shared a nod and then she was gone as abruptly as she had come in. I got to the glass storefront just in time to see her duck into a waiting sports car driven by a good-looking man in an open shirt. Neither one looked back as they disappeared into the stream of traffic.

Twenty minutes later I was still staring out the front window, a storm of related thoughts swirling through my mind. I knew I wanted to sleep with David, but did I want it for the

right reasons? Was I willing to risk a failed relationship and possibly a ruined business too? How much should I say, and when?

I needed clarity, and I needed it soon. I had an hour before I estimated David would return, another 30 minutes after that before our last boudoir appointment of the day. Time enough if I used it wisely.

I went back to the office, forwarded the phones to voice mail and put on some soft instrumental music. Then I settled into a small sofa in the office, my shoes off and my jeans open and unzipped for easier circulation. I took three deep, slow breaths, and willed my body and mind to relax. With each breath in I envisioned the tensions gathering like electrical sparks in my forehead. With each breath out I pictured that energy as blue lines rushing out of my body and disappearing into the cushions of the sofa, like lightning drawn off by a lightning rod. That imagery has always been very effective for me, and within a few minutes I felt myself drifting off into my personal sanctuary.

When I hypnotize myself I don't always have specific suggestions in mind; just the act of going into trance and coming out again is usually enough to banish stress and clear up my mind. This time would be different, though. This time I needed to ask myself some tough questions.

Still picturing myself in my safe, quiet room, I imagined that my subconscious was now in the room as well, in the form of my favorite childhood toy – a Magic 8 Ball. Like a Chevrue pendulum, my subconscious would use the Magic 8 Ball to provide yes or no answers to simple questions. I pictured the ball in my hands, pictured myself turning it over several times in my lap then asking, “Am I ready to explore the questions that are troubling me?” The ball turned over of its own accord, and shortly the answer rose from within its murky depths: *You May Rely On It*

I turned the ball over again, satisfied that I was sufficiently relaxed to continue. “Do I really want a romantic relationship with David?”

Yes – Definitely.

“Do I want it for the right reasons?”

The ball remained still for a long time before answering. *Reply Hazy, Try Again.*

Okay, reword the question. “I know that I have a strong physical craving for David. Is a sexual relationship all that I want with him?”

Relax said the ball. I sent a couple waves of extra relaxation from head to toe and felt myself settling down again. The ball's message changed to *Very Doubtful*.

“Is David interested in me?” I was trying to tap into my own intuition here.

Signs Point to Yes.

“If we start a relationship and it fails, will we still be able to work together?”

Cannot Predict Now. Okay, that was fair.

“Am I willing to risk losing the business to gain the relationship I want with David?”

A very long pause for this one. I concentrated on breathing and staying relaxed, following the music, holding onto that feeling of complete detachment. I couldn't afford to let my conscious self influence the outcome. Finally, the Magic 8 Ball rolled over and displayed its answer: *As I See It, Yes*

Just to make sure: “Did my conscious mind influence that last answer?”

My Reply Is No. I did not feel a surge of relief, just continued detachment. A good sign, I would realize later.

“Would it be better for me to take the initiative instead of waiting for David to approach me?”

No hesitation this time. *Most Likely.*

“Thank you very much.” I set the Magic 8 Ball aside and watched it fade away. The session had gone well, so I gave myself permission to let go completely until the end of the music tape. I felt myself sinking deeper into the couch, letting go, drifting ...

I woke up to the CLICK! of the tape player's automatic shut-off. All of my confusion and anxieties were gone. I knew exactly what I wanted and felt confident of achieving it, knowing I could work out a plan at my leisure. Fixing my clothing, I checked the desk. The message waiting light on the telephone glowed red, and the time display showed that I'd been out for 45 minutes – David would be back soon.

The phone message was from Claire, a boudoir client scheduled for the following week who needed to reschedule. That was easy to take care of, and it gave me an idea. Instead of offering the opening to a client (we keep a special list of those interested in taking advantage of cancellations), I crossed out Claire's name in the appointment book and wrote “Jennifer D.” in its place. I knew David would see it, but would he see through it? I felt like the foreplay had already begun.

David returned a little later than I expected, only ten minutes before our afternoon boudoir client was due.

“I’m really sorry, Jen. I had no idea it would be such a long lunch.” He seemed like his normal self, not overly flustered, just annoyed at himself for running late. I couldn’t tell whether Stephanie had told him or not, and we couldn’t afford to get sidetracked then by discussing it. My pulse quickened for a few beats as he checked the appointment book. “Yikes!” he exclaimed, tapping the name of the client who was due any minute.

“I’ll help you get the gear ready,” I offered.

“Not necessary, I can catch up while you prep her.”

The client was right on time, so I put the personal issue aside to give her my undivided attention. By the time I had her fully prepared with makeup, wardrobe, and hypnotic suggestions David was ready. In front of the client he was absolutely his normal, professional self. We kept our focus on the client and had a very successful session.

With the client on her way home, it was time to find out what had happened at lunch. With David a direct approach is usually best. “So,” I began, “what brought Stephanie to town?”

Perhaps my tone betrayed something, because I saw a shadow cross David’s face. It was gone almost immediately and replaced with his normal, relaxed expression. His eyes lingered on me for a moment or two longer than normal before he replied, “Personal business.” Then he pointedly returned to unloading the camera in his hand.

That was my signal to butt out, but I wasn’t about to do it. Unlike Stephanie, I knew that David would tell me everything once assured that I really wanted to know. I gave him my strongest you-can-talk-to-me look as I asked, “Are you two okay?”

He sighed, still concentrating on the camera. “It’s been a long time since Steph and I were really okay, I guess. Too many other things get in the way.”

“Relationships like yours are hard to maintain,” I offered. “Busy schedules, different priorities. It’s bound to be tough on everyone.”

That got him looking back at me. “I guess so. Steph said almost the same thing and I couldn’t disagree. Anyway, the relationship is over. Today was sort of a closing ceremony. Misty-eyed reminiscing, fond farewells, we’ll always be good friends, etc.”

“David, I’m sorry.”

“So am I,” he replied. “I’ll get over it, of course. Everybody does.”

“Is there anything I can do?”

“Just put up with me for the next few days until the worst is over. I’ll try to keep my mouth under control.”

“You talk as much as you need to, David. It’s okay.”

He gave me a wry smile. “We’ll see. Don’t let me go maudlin on you, okay?”

We spent the next few hours in the office doing the mundane paperwork that builds up in any small business. David surprised me by suggesting a late dinner at a blues club a few blocks away. Naturally I took him up on it. We didn’t talk about the breakup any more, but the steady rhythms of the blues music seemed to be comforting to him. We made party conversation – nothing too heavy, no business – and drank as we listened. After a little while, David fell silent.

“This is such a cliché,” I remarked. “Is this really a good way to avoid depression?”

“Shhh,” he replied. “Just listen a few minutes.”

So I did. I was always a rock and roll lover myself, so I’d heard a lot of blues songs but never really paid much attention to them. Now, with no Aerosmith or Rolling Stones in the mix, I started to feel the healing power of good blues music. The rhythms, strong but gentle, worked their way into my brain and I found myself relaxing with each slow, heavy beat. After a little while David ordered another round, bringing me out of my reverie.

“Blues is not about being depressed,” he volunteered. “The essence of blues is hope. No matter how bad things get today, we always seem to keep on going. We carry our grief for a while, then life goes on.”

“And the experience makes us stronger?” I added.

“Not always. Some of us are destined to keep repeating our mistakes. Bad karma, unlucky in love, call it what you like. It doesn’t matter. The song is still about surviving the sadness, not wallowing in it.”

“I’m beginning to understand, I think.” I let my eyes close and leaned back against my seat, letting my head fall back to rest on the cushioned booth wall. “It’s so relaxing, so comforting.” I looked back at David and he was doing the same thing, leaning back against the bench, eyes closed. Temptation rose up within me, or maybe it was just too much wine. I lowered my voice and continued speaking to him, slowly and deliberately. “So easy to just sit back, relax, let yourself drift along with the rhythms of the music. Not thinking about anything in particular, just concentrating totally on the beating of the drum, the quiet guitar riffs, the pure emotion in the singer’s voice. Let the music surround you and carry you deeper, deeper into itself, slow and easy, leaving your body behind to just rest.”

I was a drink over my usual limit, and the David’s beer glass had seen at least 3 refills by my count. These are not ideal circumstances for a hypnotic session, but my improvised

induction talk seemed to be working. His face went slack, the mouth falling open as his head turned ever so slowly to the side.

“It’s so nice sitting here like this, relaxing, listening to the soothing sounds of the music and my voice. The longer you listen to the music, the more deeply it relaxes you. The more deeply you relax, the more you can concentrate on the music. Nothing else needs your attention, nothing but my voice and the music. The music and my voice. Let your conscious self float along with the music, while your inner mind listens to my voice. Trust me, David. Let go, follow the music, and trust me.”

Within a few minutes his body let go completely leaving him slouched against the side of the booth, his breathing soft and slow, his eyelids fluttering a little as his eyes moved rapidly beneath them. For a moment I thought he had slipped into sleep.

“Can you still hear me, David?”

“Mm Hmm.”

That’s good. “You can speak clearly to me David. Speaking to me will not disturb you at all, in fact it will help you to relax even more. Every word you say, every word you hear me say, will relax you more and more. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

Alcohol normally interferes with concentration, which hinders hypnosis, so I hadn’t really expected the induction to work. With no particular plan and the wine buzz occupying more of my brain, I just watched him in silence for a few minutes. I was half in a trance myself, and the music kept trying to pull me further down. As I studied David’s slack face I became aware of a strong, moist heat radiating from between my legs. At the same time, I started noticing the sensations in my breasts as my simple knit sheath dress stretched and moved against my nipples. I pressed my thighs tightly together, although I still don’t know whether that was meant to contain the feeling or to savor it. My id was screaming at me to go down on him right then and there, but despite the wine my better judgment prevailed.

“How do you feel, David?”

“Strange,” was his answer. “Sad. Peaceful. Good. All at once.”

“These are good, normal feelings, David. It’s natural to feel sad when a relationship ends. At the same time, when two people have been growing apart over time it feels good to finally acknowledge that and go your separate ways. You and Stephanie have been growing apart, David. The real relationship was over a long time ago, it just took until today for you both to recognize it. In a few days you will find that you are more relieved than sad about the breakup. Every time you think about Stephanie you will

remember the joy of the good times but the sadness and bad memories will fade like a photograph in the sun. Trust me, David, it will happen.”

“I trust you, Jen.”

“Thank you, David. Go ahead and think about Stephanie right now. Think about her as if you last saw her a year ago, remembering the fun times, while those sad memories fade away.” I gave him a few minutes, watching a gentle smile crease his face. “How do you feel now, David?”

“Happy,” he said. “Contented. Getting a little horny.”

I almost lost it. My hand hovered just an inch over his zipper, longing to reach inside, but I held firm – not here, not now. Soon, I promised myself, but not tonight. “Yes, this music is very sensual, isn’t it? I find it very seductive. Isn’t it good to know that whenever we want to feel good like this, we can listen to some blues and recapture the feelings we have right now?”

“Yes.”

“I think so too, David. From now on, we will always find blues music to be incredibly arousing, putting us in the mood for slow, delicious sex. Don’t you like that idea, David?”

“Sure.”

“Very good. Soon it will be time to wake up from your rest, David. When I count to five you will wake up completely, feeling refreshed and content. Your waking self will remember only that you dozed off listening to the music, but your inner mind will remember all. One, two, three, four, five.”

David’s eyes popped open and he sat up with a jerk. “Jesus, Jen, I’m sorry. I’ve never done that before.”

“It’s okay, you’ve had a rough day.”

A curious expression came over him. He was studying my face closely. “Are you all right, Jen? You look flushed.”

Oops – I should have told him not to notice anything odd. My sex drive was fully engaged, and there was no way to hide it completely. “Too much wine,” I suggested. “Maybe I’d better go freshen up a little.”

The ladies’ room was mercifully empty. I splashed some cold water on my face, dampened a small wad of paper towels with cold water and squeezed it between my

thighs. It was going to take more than a little cool water to make the heat go away, but I felt much more in control as I touched up my makeup.

When I got back to the table, David had already paid the check and looked ready to go.

“Calling it a night?” I asked.

“Since I can’t seem to stay awake on my own, I might as well. See you tomorrow?”

“Sure,” I said. “Don’t worry about the time, just come in when you feel like it. I can cancel the boudoir sessions if you don’t feel like doing them.”

“No, that wouldn’t be fair to the clients. I’ll be there.”

That voice came back in my head, urging me to jump him immediately. I allowed myself a sisterly hug instead, and felt another rush of desire when I felt his arms ever so gently encircling me. “Goodnight, David.”

“Goodnight, Jen.” He took my hands in his. “Thanks for the company.”

“You’re welcome, really.”

By the time I got home the wine had worn off, but my libido was still raging. I went to bed early and gave in to the dark side, climaxing repeatedly until I was too exhausted to stay awake.

The next several days were surprisingly normal. David was at the studio every day at his normal time. If my customary “How are you doing?” was a bit less casual than usual, so was his “Fine.” Every once in a while I’d catch him staring into space with a faint smile, but he really did seem like his normal self. I’d like to think I helped him with my suggestions at the blues club. Then again, he’s a pretty stable guy to start with.

At David’s suggestion we took the weekend off instead of staying open Saturday for walk-in business. My boudoir appointment was for Tuesday afternoon, so I spent much of the weekend thinking about that and communing with my Magic 8 Ball to make sure I really wanted to go through with it. I also visited a number of music stores. By Monday I had everything planned and prepared.

I started getting butterflies on the way to work Tuesday morning. Fortunately for me, David would be out doing a location shoot for one of Gina’s clients until after lunch. That left me alone in the studio to handle the portrait sittings, which kept me just busy enough to stay focused. I saw David check the appointment book before leaving. If he suspected anything about “Jennifer D.” it didn’t show.

By the time David returned, everything I needed was in place. Since there was still a good hour before the appointment, David retired to the darkroom to do some preliminary prints. We used Russell's lab for all of our final print work, but still we often do an initial print run to weed out the non-contenders. I had anticipated that and taken the liberty of turning up the thermostat ever so slightly. I wanted him to come out thirsty.

About fifteen minutes before the appointment, when I judged David would be about done, I poured him an icy-cold glass of iced tea (his favorite beverage) and brought it in to him. "The client's here," I told him truthfully. "I'll start getting her prepped."

David took the glass from me and drank deeply. "Mmmm, I needed that. Thanks, Jen. I'll be ready in a few minutes."

Yes you will, I thought as I headed for the dressing room. Behind the closed door, I removed the small glass bottle from my pants pocket and set it on the makeup counter. It was still mostly full, despite the fact that Gina had given it to me the week after Lauren's trial session. "This is what people use who don't have your skill, dear," she had told me. "It's usually known as LPR, for liquid pants remover. It's very popular with the adult magazine and video crowd because it temporarily erases all inhibitions but doesn't interfere with speech or motor skills. It wears off quickly and with no adverse effects. Give a model 2 or 3 drops in a beverage, wait 20 minutes, and she'll do anything you tell her to for an hour."

Smiling with anticipation, I released two drops into a short glass of water and drank it down. There was a very slight bitter taste, but David hadn't seemed to notice. "That's it," I told my reflection in the mirror. "You're committed now."

One eye kept stealing glances at the clock as I changed into a satin cover-up and worked on my hair and base makeup. I pulled out the barrettes that normally hold my hair up to frame my face, then got out the blow drier and some mousse. I had practiced this look over the weekend – still the same medium brown, straight locks folded back at the sides but I gave it a fuller, windswept look. It followed every movement of my head with a natural flow, neither too glued down nor too free. Perfect. I took equal care with my face, accentuating my chocolate-colored eyes and just equalizing the tones in my face without looking too made up. A subdued lipstick added the finishing touch.

It was a good half hour after I had brought David his drink when I heard him knock at the dressing room door. "Anybody home?"

I opened the door, still in only the satin cover-up. David's jaw dropped and his eyes opened as widely as I've ever seen them. They looked me all over, more than once in a couple of places, before meeting mine again. "Surprised?" I asked.

Shaking his head, he replied, "Very sneaky, 'Jennifer D.' I never made the connection. Who's going to be our chaperone?"

“We don’t need one,” I answered. “Trust me.” Then I closed the door between us.

Slipping off the robe, I took a long look at myself in the full-length mirror. Shoulders square and strong. Breasts 38D, still holding up well against gravity with minimal help. Tummy, could be leaner but flat enough to draw hungry looks at the beach. Legs long, a little on the muscular side but kept smooth and soft by daily moisturizing. Butt, firm.

I decided a little body makeup might be in order. Just a little powder here and there, to keep from shining too much under the lights. The powder puff lingered over my bare nipples, teasing them into erection. I found it fun to watch them react. Then I thought, why not? I picked up my lipstick and slowly, deliberately painted them, savoring the sensation of smooth lipstick against sensitive skin. I’d never done that before, but it seemed like a perfect idea at the time. I felt so relaxed, so calm. In the mirror I saw that my pupils were a little bit dilated, but I didn’t care. They looked sexier that way.

Now for the wardrobe. Remembering David’s reaction to Lauren, I had chosen an apricot-colored pajama with string-tie boxers, three-quarter sleeved, in pure silk. I’d set aside a brand new thong panty as well, but changed my mind – I didn’t intend to be wearing anything for long, the shorts and top would be enough. I pulled the shorts up and tied them loosely, so they just barely clung to my hips. I slipped the top on slowly, luxuriating in the feel of the silk against my skin. With one eye on the side view mirror, I buttoned only the middle two buttons of the pajama shirt, allowing the V-shaped neckline to gap freely. If I stood just right, I could see my right breast in profile all the way to the nipple.

“Ready,” I announced as I emerged from the dressing room. David had finished his tea, I could see, and by the way his eyes were exploring me I had no doubt that the drug was working. “How do I look?”

“Wow,” he replied immediately, his eyes focused intently on my visible cleavage. “You look amazing. I always thought you’d look great without clothes on – oops, I mean ...” He actually blushed. It was so cute; I had to string him along a little.

“Play your cards right, and who knows?”

David grinned. “Shall we begin?”

I opted to start on the divan, a fairly new addition to the boudoir set. David adjusted the tripod and lighting a little, then started shooting. I let myself relax completely against the side of the divan, draping my right arm along the back and letting my left arm fall toward the floor, causing the pajama neckline to open up wide. Bending my left knee to let the hemline of the shorts slide up my thigh, I focused my eyes on the blackness in the center of the camera lens and thought, “You’re mine.”

We spent several minutes and a full roll of film on the divan as I shifted positions, exposing different parts of my body to David’s view with each move. His eyes never left

me, not even between shots. When he stopped to reload, I suggested we relocate to the bed. At the request of a few clients, we had recently added an audio system to the set; I had preloaded a very special tape while David was in the darkroom, now would be a good time to start it up. I pressed Play and slid the remote out of sight in the night stand as David signaled he was ready to continue.

I turned and gave him a full left profile, opening the V neck a little with my hand, and strode slowly toward the foot of the bed as he started shooting. His ears perked up when he heard Stevie Ray Vaughan coming from the audio system.

“The Sky is Crying,” he observed. “You have great taste in music, partner.”

The big bed gave me plenty of opportunities to move about. I tried sitting on the edge, looking back over my shoulder as the pajama shorts rode up my thighs; crawling across the bed toward the camera, letting the V neck fall straight down, which let the camera look all the way through to my crotch; kneeling up, stretching, arms held high to make the top pull away from my tummy and show how close the shorts were to falling off. David took shot after shot, getting more intense with every new song from the tape.

Stevie Ray soon gave way to Jeff Healey, starting with his cover of “Hoochie Coochie Man” – a very sexy version; I recommend it to anyone for stripping. I lay back on the bed, arching my back so David would see my distended nipples clearly pushing out against the silk shirt. Dismounting with a flourish, I stood before him and slowly, deliberately, unbuttoned the top. I danced and posed in several positions designed to make the shirt fall open in the front, making the most of the valley between my breasts and the low-riding shorts. David kept shooting, talking to me all the while.

“Yes, Jen, you are so hot, so sexy,” he was saying. “Every man who sees these photos will get rock hard thinking about you, longing for you. Try turning to your left a little. God, that’s good. You are just oozing sexuality from every pore.” He was really getting turned on. I saw his left hand reach down every few minutes to adjust the growing bulge in the front of his jeans.

I was still posing against the bed, using the corner post the way strippers use the chrome bar, sliding up and down with my back to it. “Keep moving,” he continued. “Swaying, side to side, dancing for me. Show me your hips. Let me see you swing them back and forth, slow and sexy. Beautiful, beautiful. Relax, Jen, remember to stay relaxed. Let the music lead you. Let it take your mind away. Let go, Jen. Let it happen.”

Somewhere deep in my head, it occurred to me that David’s patter was starting to sound like a hypnotic induction. Who cares, I quickly decided, this is my show. He’s as good as mine. Jeff Healey gave way to a long series of vintage Eric Clapton, which was my signal to turn up the heat.

Turning my back to David, I spread the pajama top open and let it fall to my elbows, holding the loose fabric against my nipples. I let him coach me through several poses,

front and rear, highlighting my breasts and thighs. Soon David suggested that the top was really getting very heavy, very uncomfortable, and I would feel much freer if I just let it go. He was right, I felt reborn as I let the silk pajama top fall to the floor.

“Excellent, Jen, you must feel so much better now. Keep relaxing, keep losing yourself in the music, feel yourself growing more and more aroused, more and more passionate. Your body is slowing down now, Jen, getting tired from all your exertions. It needs to rest, Jen. It needs a nice, soft bed like the one you are standing by. Feel the bed pulling at you, begging you to lay down and let it relieve your tired body.”

A thick fog had descended over my brain, I was barely conscious of continuing my striptease. David understood, I knew that, because even as he was speaking my body felt drained and weary, tired, even as the lust continued to build up inside me. Stretching out on my back, I let my hands wander all over my body. I fondled my breasts, teasing the nipples. I pressed the silk shorts against my mound, feeling the heat being generated within. My eyes became heavy and tired, so I let them close and focused completely on the feel of my own hands sliding over my skin. Loose as it was, the drawstring waste on my shorts was becoming uncomfortable, binding, so I slipped them off slowly and sensuously.

Through all of this David kept talking, his voice a constant companion even though I wasn't really paying attention to the words. I lost myself in the music, in the buzzing of his voice, the frequent click of the camera. A sudden overwhelming need came over me, energizing my hands as they moved faster across my erogenous zones. My left hand squeezed and teased my breasts more insistently than before, while my right dove in between my legs, fingers curling and parting my lips as I they probed my center. The pleasure was so intense I wanted to come. I needed to come, but I was waiting for something. What was I waiting for? Oh that's right, I was waiting for David. Waiting for him to say ...

“Come now, Jen.”

My body bucked like a cowboy on a bull, back arching and twisting, legs clenching continuously, arms thrown skywards again and again, head flung back and mouth wide open. I had never come that hard before, never. The spasms continued for what felt like an hour, again and again, sometimes seeming to die down but then getting stronger again. Slowly, I started to realize that my hands were both above my head but I still felt fingers exploring my sex, sustaining my climax with perfect pressure in every conceivable place. Somehow I wrenched my eyes open and saw David seated on the edge of the bed next to me, his left hand buried deep in me while his right worked unseen inside his own jeans. Another wave of ecstasy threatened to drown me as I grabbed his waistband with both hands and ripped his jeans open, exposing his marvelous cock.

The moment I saw David's cock, that splendid battering ram of an organ, I knew exactly where I wanted it. Pulling the pillows behind me for support, I grabbed him by the belt loops and plunged the entire shaft into my mouth. As I did his fingers found my G spot

again and started another set of uncontrollable, unbelievable, convulsions. My lips closed hard against his fuselage and I found myself alternately sucking and blowing, my lungs trying to pump enough air to sustain my tiring muscles. He was about to come, I could feel the tension rising. Suddenly my body just couldn't hold on any longer, I collapsed back onto the bed like a rag doll. Summoning every ounce of strength, I reached up with my left hand and locked it around his cock, fucking him with my fist as hard as I could. He didn't last long, maybe five or six strokes, before his cock exploded in my hand, sending spurts after spurt of thick, white liquid through my hand and far across the bed. His fingers finally withdrew from my center as his knees buckled beneath him.

Even after his climax, David's cock stayed hard. My hand was still around it when he dropped to his knees next to the bed. He started to pry my hand off, but I'd had a few moments to recoup and squeezed harder. "I'm not done yet," I told him. Rolling off the bed, I pushed him down to the floor. Holding his shoulder down with my right hand, I reached back with my left and tickled his balls, running my finger up and down the seam in his scrotum from front to back, stopping just short of his anus. His eyes bugged out and his every breath became a groan of delight. He started to shake his head, still looking up at me.

"Do you want me to stop?" I teased him, continuing to stimulate that very sensitive area.

"Ugh ... Ugh ... No!" His left hand reached up below me and grabbed onto my breast, sending a sudden jolt through my body that made me lose track of what I was doing for a moment. Soon he was kneading my breasts in rhythm to my strokes of his genitals and we were both heading quickly for another shattering climax. When I couldn't stand it anymore, I let go of him and climbed on top. We both gasped as I slammed myself down over his immense cock, squeezing with all my might. That sensation alone was enough to rock my world and I gave in completely, holding his hands tight against my breasts as I shuddered around him. Seconds later I felt the unmistakable twitch that told me he was about to come too. Pressing his hands even more firmly into my chest, I squeezed down on his shaft one more time as I lifted up and dropped down again. He bellowed unintelligibly as he came again, writhing and pumping inside me. The pulsing head found another highly sensitized spot inside me and I heard myself screaming out loud as each spasm racked my exhausted body.

Finally I collapsed on top of David, rolling off onto the floor beside him, my body still twitching as the orgasm finally began to fade. I couldn't move, couldn't speak, couldn't believe some of the things my body had just done. As my breathing slowed my eyes grew heavy again, and as I sunk into deep sleep I could just make out the last few strains of my blues tape.

I woke up lying on my side on the bed, the silk pajama top just draped over my nude body like a sheet. "David?" I didn't see him.

A few moments later he poked his head into the doorway from the office area. “Hi there.”

“Hi, indeed.” I reached up and stretched, making no attempt to keep the pajama top from sliding off.

“Are you hungry?” David asked, looking down and away as soon as he saw my exposed body.

“Ravenous!”

“I’ve got some shrimp and egg rolls in the office if you like.” He was now talking to the doorframe.

“Sounds delicious.” My body felt great, like I’d had a full workout followed by massage and steam. I put the pajamas back on since they were handy, but didn’t bother buttoning the top. The office had no windows.

David was waiting for me inside, a series of paper food cartons on his desk. He had showered and dressed in clean sweats and a T-shirt. His eyes met me at the door and then dropped to the floor immediately, like a schoolboy who knows he is in trouble. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the office clock: 8:20. I’d been asleep for almost three hours.

“What’s the matter, David?”

Willing himself to look me in the eye, David took a deep breath before speaking. “I’m sorry, Jen. I don’t know what got into me. I never—“

“Stop,” I interjected. “I know exactly what got into me,” I continued, looking pointedly at his crotch, “and I’d like nothing better than for it to keep getting into me regularly.” To underscore my point I walked right up to his desk and leaned over him, letting the pajama top fall aside and my breasts hang down in full view. He tried valiantly to maintain eye contact but failed, his eyes darting down instinctively as the silk parted and lingering for a full second before he regained control. A guilty blush crept through his face. “Believe me, David, you have absolutely nothing to be sorry about.”

“Yes, I do,” he insisted, wrenching his gaze away from me and fixing it at a spot on the floor. “Hear me out, please.”

I decided to back off. Picking up a carton of food and a napkin, I settled onto the office sofa. I buttoned one button on the pajama top and waited, eating shrimp fried rice directly from the paper carton with a plastic fork.

After a few minutes David seemed to find his words. Looking at me again, he started to explain. “I think you know I like you a lot, Jen. I’ve been a little bit in love with you since we met at the bank. I knew that Steph and I were headed for a breakup eventually, so I promised myself that when it finally happened I would reach out to you and see if you felt the same way. I almost did it at the blues club, but instead I embarrassed myself by getting drunk and dozing off on you. Not the best way to start a relationship.

“When you opened that dressing room door today and I realized you were the client, I went a little nuts. Having you pose like that has been a fantasy of mine since the day we built the first set, but I never thought it would really happen. Most of the women we shoot in there get me aroused to a greater or lesser degree, but watching you and filming you was too much. I lost every bit of my self-control.”

I knew why he’d lost it, but now did not seem like the time to say so. I just sat quietly, concentrating on his face.

“I love to listen to you hypnotizing the clients. The way you talk when you are putting people under is so erotic, I can’t get enough of it. In my fantasy, I can do that too. I use your words, your tempo, to put you in a trance and make love with you over and over. The more I saw you on that set, real and alive and irresistible, the more I wanted to live out the fantasy. I told you to relax, let go, follow the music, deeper and deeper, all that. When I could see it was working, I told you to take off your top and pose for me some more. I gave you the idea to start feeling yourself up, to take off your shorts, to let me feel inside you. I wasn’t concerned with your feelings, all I could think about was how much I wanted your body right away. I didn’t care how wrong that was until after it was done, when I saw you sleeping on the floor. I had no business using you that way, Jen, and I’m sorry.”

He looked so contrite, I couldn’t help it – I laughed. “You sneaky bastard,” I began in mock outrage. “After all the trouble I went through to seduce you, how DARE you take control of the situation and twist it to give me the most incredible, mind-blowing sex I’ve ever had? You cad, you.”

“The effort YOU went through?”

“Damn right,” I continued. “Do you think it was easy holding back a cancelled boudoir appointment for myself? Hypnotizing you at the blues club so that the next time you heard that kind of music you’d get turned on and hungry for me? Doping your iced tea with LPR to make sure that noble conscience of yours would take the afternoon off? It was hell, I tell you. Hell!”

A highly relieved David was beaming at me. “Hoist by your own petard, I see.”

“Watch it, Mister, Shakespeare makes me SO horny.”

“In that case, let me recite the first act of *Midsummer Night’s Dream* ... tomorrow, when I’ve recovered a bit.”

“I have a better idea.” I set aside my empty food carton, wiped my mouth lightly with the napkin, and approached David, walking around the desk until I stood directly over him, our faces just far enough apart to focus on. “Look into my eyes, David. Lose yourself in my eyes. Relax and let go. Feel yourself becoming tired, so tired, getting more and more sleepy as you feel yourself getting drawn into my eyes. You can’t resist me, David. You don’t want to resist, you want to obey. You feel yourself relaxing piece by piece, breath by breath, your body slowly settling deeper and deeper into the chair, your mind aware of nothing except my eyes and my voice. Let go, David. Trust me, I will take care of you. Follow my voice down, down, down into the deepest depths of hypnosis, where you can experience the ultimate pleasure.”

His eyes glazed over as they remained fixated on mine. Still repeating deepening suggestions, I slowly unbuttoned my pajama top and let it fall to the floor. David’s eyes never moved from mine.

“That’s it, David, keep sinking down into deep hypnosis for me. You know you want to, you know you have to. You will go deep into hypnosis for me any time I ask you to because you know how much it pleases me, and how much I can please you. Lose yourself in my eyes, David, let them take you deeper and deeper. Surrender your body to me.”

David’s body was totally slack, his head supported by the high back of his office chair. His eyes followed me as I moved back and forth, testing his concentration.

“Thank you, David. Thank you for surrendering yourself to me. Thank you for trusting me to take care of you. I will control your body now, David, while you relax and concentrate only on the pleasure that you will be feeling. You didn’t notice it at the time, but a few minutes ago I took off my pajama top. My breasts are right here in front of you, completely exposed, ready to assist in bringing us pleasure. Look at them now, David. Examine my breasts closely, memorize their contours, their coloring, their movement. Do you like my breasts, David?”

“Yes. Very much.”

“How does looking at my breasts make you feel?”

“It makes me want you.”

“Mmmmmm, David, it’s so nice to hear you say that. Keep looking at my breasts, David, and feel the blood rushing into your delicious cock. Feel the rising tide of pleasure as you become harder and harder, just from studying my breasts. Knowing that the sight of my breasts can get you so aroused, so ready, is turning me on as much as it is you, David. See? My nipples are getting hard while you watch, while your wonderful cock gets

harder and harder.” Placing a hand on the front of his sweats, I began massaging his growing erection through the fleece. “Harder and harder, David, your cock keeps getting longer and harder as you look at my breasts. Do you feel it, David?”

“Yes ... yes ... so hot ...”

“Yes, David, you feel hot. I feel hot too, hot and horny, all I can think about is how much I want you right now. Just as the sight of my breasts has made you hot and horny, and all you can think about is how much you want me. I can’t stand to wait any longer, as I know you can’t stand to wait either. Stand up now, David, and take your clothes off for me.”

His vacant eyes still locked onto my chest, David rose from the chair. His eyes didn’t move even as he pulled the T-shirt off over his head. The sneakers and socks came off next, then he hooked his thumbs in the waistband of his sweats and pushed them and his briefs down together. His cock was at full attention and starting to ooze a little at the tip.

“Now me, David. Undress me.” There wasn’t much undressing to do, of course – just a matter of letting him pull down the drawstring shorts. My skin tingled with delight as I felt the silk sliding smoothly down over my bottom. I backpedaled to the office couch and sat back lazily into it, my body draped diagonally across about two thirds of the length. “I want you to kiss me, David. I want you to start at my forehead and kiss everywhere I tell you. Each kiss will make you want me more and more, each kiss will get you more and more excited, but you will not come until you are inside me. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Jen.” He came forward and planted a soft kiss on my forehead. I directed him to continue with my eyes, lips, neck, shoulders, having him linger on each breast before heading further down. His lips were so smooth, so nice. By the time David reached the insides of my thighs he was grunting every breath, clearly straining, his cock almost purple.

“You can stop kissing now, David. Would you like to please me with your tongue?”

“Yes, Jen. I want to make you happy.” I gave him permission and felt his tongue working up and down my slit, probing, caressing. God, he was good. For several minutes I just wallowed in it, silently thanking the unknown women who had trained him so well in handling our anatomy. Before I realized it I was convulsing again, surprised by the intensity of the climax. My thoughts scrambled as I rode it out. David continued working, keeping me just on the edge of another explosion. His face was covered in my fluid. “Would you like to come now, David?”

“Yes, please. Please let me come.”

“Put your magnificent, giant cock in me right now, David.” Rising to his knees, David parted my thighs a little further and teased the entrance with his tip, causing my body to

react with an involuntary sharp intake of breath as he eased his way into me. “Oh, David, that feels so good. Focus on the feel of your sensitive shaft moving in and out, in and out, getting more excited with each stroke. When I tell you to come, David, you will have the most powerful, longest-lasting orgasm you have ever had.” He kept stroking, slowly and evenly, and I squeezed down on him with my pelvic muscles, savoring the feel of every ridge and bump on his shaft. David’s groans were getting louder and louder, and I realized that I was grunting with him. My eyes closed and wouldn’t open again, the eyeballs rolled up into my forehead, as yet another lightning bolt crashed through me. Between moans I managed to grunt out, “David ... David ... Come ... NOW!” I felt him jerk and shoot again and again, in synch with my own rhythm of clench and release. The feel of him bursting loose inside me pushed me even further over the edge. I heard us both shrieking, then grunting, before we finally fell silent. David collapsed on top of me, his knees still on the floor. I ran my fingers through his hair as we lay together recuperating, his arms limply encircling me as his head came to rest on my stomach.

After a long while David’s dead weight on top of me started to become uncomfortable. “Stand up now, David,” I told him. He didn’t respond right away. “David, you have been asleep. Now it is time for you to wake up. Awake now, David, and stand up.”

I felt his eyes fluttering as they opened. Realizing where he was caused him to shudder and stand up a little too quickly. David’s eyes swept over my body, over the sofa, around the room, back to my body. I could see him assembling the memory of what had happened. “You’re amazing,” he said. “You put me under just like that. All I could do was obey you. Do you have any idea how that feels?”

It must feel pretty good, I thought, because he was getting hard again just remembering. “Why don’t you tell me?”

“Umm ... Well ...” He shook his head, as if to clear it. “I can’t even begin to describe it. I’ve never been so randy in my life, but I didn’t feel any pressure to perform. I just sat back and enjoyed the ride while my body did everything you told it to. The sensations were ...” He just shrugged. “I can’t think of a word.”

“I guess that makes us even, then,” I remarked. “What next?”

David lifted me up off the couch, throwing his arms around me and pulling me to him. David’s mouth found mine and locked on in a hungry kiss that seemed to last for hours. Too tired to make love anymore, we held each other close, kissing and caressing each other, until we finally came up for air.

I got up first, locating my wrap and heading for the shower. I dressed in my street clothes while he took his turn. We shared another long embrace before parting company, each of us wanting to go home with the other but also needing time alone to absorb what had happened to us.

For the rest of the year everything, business and personal, went smoothly. The boudoir sessions were so profitable they not only put us in the black but also enabled us to hire our first employees – a photography assistant and a receptionist. We moved into a large 3-story loft building in a better part of town. The ground floor became the portrait studio, the second floor we dedicated to advertising shoots and boudoir sets. We had the upstairs level finished out into a spacious but cozy loft apartment, which David and I shared. We took walks through the park hand in hand, played on the beach, all those fun, corny, magical things that new couples do. We learned to enjoy each other with or without hypnosis, in whatever way pleased us the most.

The time flew by, and before I knew it our anniversary had come again. Continuing our custom, David made a lunch reservation at the Toledo Grill (still our favorite spot, with the blues club a close second). Jerome showed us to our usual table and served us a delicious lunch. All through the meal I noticed the staff looking over at our table, as if they were in on a secret. Had I missed something?

Eventually the plates were cleared away and the empty glasses set aside to be refilled. It was time for the business meeting. “It’s been a tremendous year, hasn’t it?” I began.

David smiled broadly. “It has. But we can do even better, I know we can.” I became aware of a crowd gathering beside our table, as the entire Toledo staff stopped working to watch us. Reaching into his jacket pocket, David said, “I have another proposal for you, Jen.”

Tears filled my eyes as I saw the little velvet box in his hand. I started saying yes before he even had it open. Jerome produced a bottle of champagne and a cake, then closed the restaurant while we celebrated each other.

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