

# The Creep

## Chapter Two

It was an uncomfortable feeling for Martin, having a secret. It was no ordinary secret, after all. He had not so much as sworn to Stacey to keep it. To the contrary, she was the one who'd made him aware of the allure of telling it. Neither did its keeping protect someone he had any particular feelings for, lust notwithstanding. Martin was already quite sure he didn't even like Stacey. It was certainly no benefit to him. If he had his druthers, he'd notify the entire student body. No, this secret was far from ordinary. The only reason it need remain a secret was the simple fact that no one would believe him if he told them.

Martin tested this suspicion on his closest confidante, a fellow in his program named Dustin whom he'd gotten along with reasonably well. They'd come in together, played games together online occasionally, and usually partnered for bowling unless one of them thought they had a shot with a woman. Hence, usually.

"Do you know who Stacey Reeves is? Undergrad, junior or maybe senior, I think. About so tall—"

"Of course I know who Stacey Reeves is. I'm pretty sure everyone at Lakeview knows who she is. Why? Is she here?" Dustin looked around the food court in haste.

"No. I just wondered if you knew her was all."

"Know *of* her. Not like I *know* her." His fellow popped a fry in his maw, chewing open-mouthed. "Why bring her up then?"

"No, it's nothing."

"Come on. You can't just bring up the hottest white girl at Lakeview and then go taciturn on me. What's up?"

Martin pushed some ketchup around on the wrapper he was using as a plate.

"Well, I was doing one of my shows the other day, right?"

"You're still doing that? The whole creepy hypnosis thing?" Martin nodded. He didn't talk about it often, so Dustin's surprise was unsurprising. "What, she come to the show or something?"

"Yes, actually. Or, well, sort of. I didn't see her there. I guess she must have been, though. She, um, sorta came by my dressing room after."

Dustin laughed, flecks of potato splashing onto the tabletop. He winced, wiping his mouth on his sleeve, and recovered. "Sorry. You said she came to your dressing room? Seriously?"

"Yeah. She said she thought it was really interesting."

Dustin still looked skeptical. "No way."

“Yeah. She... man, this sounds weird to say out loud. She set up a meeting, and said she wanted me to try it out for her. Um, on her, actually.”

Even as he said it, he saw he was losing his audience. “Dude, I’m not even into that and I’ll still grant that’s a hot-ass fantasy, but you shouldn’t be making up stuff like that with an undergrad, even if she’s not your student. Wasn’t Dr. Knox already iffy about you doing those shows in the first place?”

“He was, yeah, but I’m not making it up! She really did—”

“Sure, sure. I tell you what, you get her to bark like a dog or whatever, you let me know.” Dustin laughed as he inhaled another bite. “Anyway, you hear about that freshmen in Paige’s W131 class? With the parasol?”

And that was that. Martin didn’t bring it up again to anyone. It would be a juicy morsel to share, if there were anyone to share it with. Yet the upside was that he could savor it all for himself.

He'd invited Stacey to meet him at seven. In truth, he canceled his last class of the day and spent the afternoon splitting his brain between making his sty of an apartment presentable (at least in the living room), and developing a plan on how he was going to proceed. For the first time, employing hypnosis to make a woman want to sleep with him wasn't some idle fantasy, but a reality that needed planning. In those fantasies, it had always seemed so simple. He'd feed his pliant subjects suggestions; they would repeat them back (and in a sexy, dream-state voice, no less). He'd wake them up, they'd beg for cock, spurt spurt done. In reality? Part of him was glad to be a member of a species for which such distortions of free will were presumed impossible. The rest of him agreed, though only because there was no point arguing against the natural order.

When it comes to solving a novel problem in a field in which they have some small familiarity, there are two sorts of people: those who thrill at a fresh challenge, eager to put their skills to a new test; and those who approach it as an obstacle, using tried and true methods and adapting as required. Unbeknownst to him, Martin was neither of these sorts. No, this problem was frustrating, and frightening, and it made him feel stupid. What did he know about making beautiful women want to fuck him? If he knew how to do that, he would have done it long since.

By the time he heard Stacey's car door slam shut in the lot, he felt like he at least had a hypnosis-ish way to fill an hour. He peered between the blinds, watching her approach. There she was, on her way in to follow through on her invitation to bend her mind into drooling over his cock, dressed like she was on her way to meet her brother for brunch. Make no mistake: Stacey Reeves looked damn good even in comfy jeans and a comfier Lakeview sweatshirt. It was only that there wasn't much she could wear to look less damn good. Her hair, still damp from a recent shower, was up in a casual ponytail, makeup as minimal as his odds of success.

She buzzed at the front door. He stood at the intercom for a moment, not wanting to appear too eager, but she reached out first. "Martin, let me in already, Jesus. I saw you watching me through your blinds."

Rather than reply, he hit the button to unlock the door. Her footsteps were light in her sneakers, but he heard her before she appeared through the peephole. With there being no sense in further pretending he wasn't waiting on her, he opened the door as she approached and stood aside to usher her in.

"Not too bad," she said, setting down her purse on his kitchen table. For once, it wasn't stacked high with old pizza boxes and junk mail.

"Thanks," he said, though as she began prowling around the room, lifting objects in pursuit of something she alone knew, he felt he might have extended her the small courtesy too easily. "Can I help you with something?"

"Looking for hidden cameras," she explained, continuing her search.

"There aren't any."

“Which is what someone hiding cameras would say,” she said dismissively, pausing to examine a picture of Martin, his parents and siblings at his college graduation.

“No, you’re right, I drilled holes in my mother’s eyes in that picture and set a micro-camera behind it, diabolically choosing a frame that tilts upwards so I can capture the sight of you walking on the ceiling.” He shook his head.

She chuckled. Ugh, how he hated that it immediately made him forgive her. “Reversing gravity is session one, eh?”

“By the way, I seem to recall you saying that *you* were going to record the session. You didn’t hear me making a fuss over it.”

“You didn’t have a choice. I do.”

“And why is that?”

Stacey gave him a quality *duh* look. “Because you didn’t push back, while I’m here stopping you.”

Martin didn’t have an answer to that. He allowed her to continue her inspection, after which she finally turned to give him her attention. “So. We’re really doing this.” In spite of her start to the evening, she managed to sound excited, if still somewhat anxious.

“If you still want to.”

She nodded. “Wouldn’t be here if I didn’t. What’s the protocol? I saw you did that girl at your show standing up. Is that how we do it?”

“Nah, that’s for theatrics, so the rest of the audience can see everything. We’ll definitely get better results sitting, or if you’re comfortable, lying down.” He gestured to the sofa. It was a hand-me-down from his older sister, lumpy yet plush as hell. It was his favorite place to sleep.

“Lying down is fine. This thing looks pretty soft.” She plopped down so hard she bounced, but looked pleased. “Yep. Good start.”

“Good. Do you need to set up?” Martin pulled up a chair from the kitchen table and set it a few feet away, far enough to be outside what he estimated a typical person’s bubble would be. “You said you were going to... oh, yep.”

Stacey was already in the midst of setting up a small recorder. The tripod somehow managed to fold up small enough to fit in her purse, and now held a video camera pointed at the sofa. She took a moment to adjust it, making sure the focus was right, then stopped to check the volume. Once it was all to her satisfaction, he went on.

“Do you need me in the shot?”

“Nah. Honestly, probably be better if you don’t enter it at all.”

“Why’s that?”

She arched an eyebrow. “Because it means you didn’t try to touch me or something while I was under...?”

Martin sighed. “Right. So, speaking of, that’s sort of what I wanted to start with for our first session. I don’t think there’s any way we can get to where you want to be—”

“Wanting to fuck you, you mean.”

“Right. That.”

“You can say it, you know.”

“Say what? You mean... what we’re trying to do here?”

“Yes.” Her frown intensified, and she bit off each word. “Trying to make me want to fuck you. It won’t hurt you.”

“I can say it if I want.”

“So say it.”

“I don’t want to.”

“How are you going to do it if you can’t even say it?”

Martin let out an exasperated sigh. “Fine. I’m going to use hypnosis to make you want to fuck me. There. Feel better? Turned on yet?”

Her lips twisted to the side. “All right, you got me there. Feel free to not say it again.”

“We’ll build to it, but hypnosis can’t get us there in an hour. Much as we’d both love to hit the fast forward button, you’re going to walk out of here tonight still not wanting to have anything to do with me. That’s especially the case considering where you’re starting—”

“Being a thousand percent totally opposed to fucking you. Or touching you, even.”

Martin made himself take a deep breath. “Yes. Can I finish? So what I wanted to work on first was trying to overcome what looks to be one of our major obstacles. Namely, trust.”

“What makes you think I don’t trust you?”

Her sarcasm wasn’t lost on him. “Sure. Now, we could discuss it and try to break down the barrier the natural way, but to be honest, that would probably only make things worse. Like being at a frat party and having a guy get up in your face going ‘drink this, drink this, you can trust me, drink this’ – only going to put your back up.”

“You really want to be making me think of being raped right now...?”

“Plus, you said you wanted me to hypnotize you, which in and of itself requires trust, so we’re not going to get very far without addressing your hangups. So that’s the plan. Now I just need you to close your eyes, and I’ll get to work.”

“OK.” She hesitated, as if unsure why her eyes weren’t closing. “You have no idea how badly I want to run out of here screaming right now.”

“See? Case in point. Shall we?”

“Oh let’s do.” She shuddered, closed her eyes, quickly peeked again, then finally let them stay shut. Martin switched on his metronome, and got to work.

“That did not work at all.”

“I realize that.”

“Again.”

“Yep.”

Stacey rolled over to glare at him. She was wearing much the same bland outfit she had to their first session. Try as he might, draped in those shapeless garments and with never a kind word, the irritation of Stacey’s presence in his apartment was overwhelming his attraction. She was right. It wasn’t working.

“You told me you knew how to do this, you little freak.” Her words were distorted by a yawn, but stung no less for it.

“I told you I would *try* to do it. Jesus, look around. See any women lining up to sleep with me? No, you don’t. Because maybe, overpowering the conscious mind isn’t exactly the flip of a switch!”

“Martin, it’s been four sessions now, and we’re not getting any closer. If I find out you’re just fucking with me, I swear to...” She paused to yawn. “I swear to god I will have you crucified. Maybe literally.”

“Right, because I definitely have no incentive to try, is that it? ‘Ol’ Martin’s got a fetish for failing to hypnotize beautiful women. His type? Any lady who will tell him no, over and over again, in the bitchiest possible way!’ Ya got me, Stace.”

“If you’re trying, then why isn’t it working? With the extensions you recommended, I’ve spent going on six hours now sprawled out on your stupid couch, listening to you drone on at me. I’ve repeated it so many times I don’t even know what the words mean any more. ‘I trust Martin Manning. I feel comfortable around Martin Manning. Martin Manning’s apartment is a safe place. I am totally relaxed around Martin Manning.’ I’ve said your goddamn name so much I... I...” Another yawn escaped. “I hate the fucking sound of my own voice saying it!”

“How do you think I feel? Do you think it’s fun, having some insanely hot girl up in my face berating me for not being able to perform miracles? I keep trying to get you to relax enough to enter a full trance, but your guard is up so high that nothing works!”

“Nothing works?! Pff.”

“You said candles were for cultists. Relaxing music was for burnouts. The metronome ‘made something in your soul itch,’ whatever the hell that means. I offered you drugs—”

“Do *not* start on that shit again, or I really will—”

“Which is fine that you said no to because believe it or not I don’t know any drug dealers, but short of whacking you upside the head with a rubber mallet, I don’t know how to make you relax enough for this to work!”

Lying on her side, the best Stacey could manage was one hand on one hip. “So it’s my fault? I’m supposed to magically forget a decade of training myself to be paranoid about men, right in front of the sketchiest dude I’ve ever been alone in a room with?”

“Yeah, keep the insults coming. Really greases the wheels.”

“If you’d earned a compliment, I’d have...” Another yawn.

When she didn’t finish her retort after, it turned out to be precisely the necessary amount of time to remember to de-escalate the situation. Yes, these sessions had accomplished nothing. Still, that didn’t mean it was impossible, did it? She was still showing up, on time, insisting she wanted this, swore she was doing the exercises he’d given her. That had to count for something. If only there were some way to bridge the divide between wanting to be hypnotized into being his lover and the simple fact that she was terrified to be vulnerable around him.

“OK. Let me just... real quick. Back on your back, eyes closed.”

“I don’t have time for a twofer, Martin.”

“No, this isn’t going to be that big. Just... if we’re ever going to get there, we need to at least try to establish norms. Maybe eventually...”

Stacey rolled her eyes, sighed, but complied, flopping onto her back. She peeked right in time to catch him trying for the hundredth time to make out the shape of her breasts through that sweater, shook her head, and closed them again. Whatever it was she muttered was lost before it reached his ears.

“Stacey, I’m going to ask you a few questions, all right?”

“OK.”

“It’s important to be honest when you answer them.”

“What if I don’t want to answer them?”

His teeth clenched. “Remember, Stacey. Relaxed, open, listening. Don’t think. React. All right?”

Slowly, she nodded, then put a fist over her mouth. She must’ve had a heck of a long day to be this tired. “Go ahead.”

Martin went on. This wasn’t the right way, he knew. She wasn’t hypnotized. At best, she was pretending to be hypnotized, humoring him. When she was even doing that. The subconscious was much harder to access when you forced it. There was no alternative, though.

“I want you to imagine your dentist’s office. Can you do that for me?”

Surprise registered, but she nodded. “Sure.”

“Good. Now imagine you’re there for an appointment. See yourself walking in from the parking lot, up to the front door. Inside. Look around the reception area. Can you picture the receptionist?”

“No. Why would I remember what my dentist’s receptionist looks like? I go there like twice a year and barely talk to her.”

“All right, all right, whatever. Walk through the reception area and into the main part. There’s a chair there, waiting for you. Go on and sit down in it.”

“I thought you said you had questions.”

Martin ignored her. “You settle into the chair, but you remember suddenly that there was something he told you to do last time you were here. Something you didn’t do. Do you remember what it is?”

She opened her eyes and shot him a withering look. “So, this is like some weird, oral hygiene roleplay or something now?”

“Come on. He’s going to be here any moment. What was the thing he asked you to do?”

It was obvious she liked it even less, but she settled back down. “Can we make it my orthodontist? My dentist and I never really had problems.”

“Orthodontist then, sure. What did *he* ask of you?”

“First off, *she*. Second off, you’re sure we don’t need to go back to the parking lot first?”

Martin impressed himself by not strangling her. Her stupid camera would have given him up; also, he still hoped he might make this work. “No. You’re in the chair, just a different office. She’s getting ready to come over to see you. What did you forget to do?”

“Rubber bands,” Stacey answered, nodding. “I was so bad about remembering those. You ever have braces?” He didn’t answer, and after a moment she realized he didn’t mean to let her reverse the interrogation and fell silent.

“OK. Now she’s about to be here. She’s going to ask if you did as you were told and wore the rubber bands. You know you didn’t do what she asked, but what do you tell her?”

“I just lie and tell her I wore the stupid things. Like he’s going to be able to tell the nanometer shift or something.”

Martin stroked his chin. He thought he could use this. “Sure you do. But she’s your doctor, right?”

“Sort of.”

“Sort of?”

“She’s an orthodontist. Less than a neurologist, but more than a chiropractor.”

He extended a middle finger to her supine form. (Then yanked back lest it appear on her recording.) “Sure. But the point is, you’re the one paying her to help you, right?”

“I guess. Insurance or whatever, but... ya know. Yeah.”

“And your... underbite?” Martin’s own familiarity with braces was secondhand via his little sister, and he remembered the rubber band thing, sort of. Stacey nodded, confirming. “Your underbite, how is she supposed to fix it if you aren’t honest with her?”



The absence of a cutting remark was a victory worthy of celebration in its own self. “I guess. Had to wear the dumb things for most of eighth grade because I didn’t wear them like she said.”

“So shouldn’t you tell her the truth? Maybe she could even find another way to help, or at least nag you so you don’t ruin eighth grade for yourself.”

“Eighth grade seemed to ruin itself just fine,” she grumbled. Another yawn followed, along with a stretch that at least exposed her tummy, briefly. Not much, but Martin would take it. “But sure. OK. Is this going to get relevant any time soon?”

“You need to think of me like your orthodontist. My apartment is that office. I’m trying to help you, but if I ask you to do something and you lie to me, I can’t help you any more than your orthodontist could.”

Her eyes opened, and she turned her head to look at him. The gaze was met with a rebuking snap of the fingers, at which she closed them again grouchily. “This is about the exercises. Duh. Man, must be more zonked out than I thought.”

“Yes, it’s about the exercises. You haven’t been doing them, have you.”

Her displeasure at having her lie revealed was plain. “I tried. Once or twice.”

“Meaning once.”

Work as a TA was often as much about grading papers as it was fielding desperate pleas of the undergrads. To date this semester, Martin had doled out nearly five hundred hours of extensions and consoled his students on the losses of no fewer than thirteen grandmothers. (Evidently grandfathers were not esteemed to have quite the tug at the heartstrings as their spouses.) The more egregious cases swung by his office hours to flash puppy dog eyes in person.

So when he saw the look on Stacey’s face, he recognized it immediately as a young woman bracing herself for rebuke. As it had before, it softened his response before less beneficent (however apt) instincts might direct him.

“At least we know now,” he replied at last. His tone, gentle after their heated kerfuffle moments earlier, caught her off guard. “Can I ask why not?”

“I don’t know. I mean... It’s *weird*. You know?”

“And this isn’t?”

A sigh triggered a yawn. “No, I know. You’re right. But this is a weird place, you’re a weird guy, so weird feels *normal* here. Sitting around chanting at myself, though...? ‘I trust Martin Manning. I’m comfortable with Martin Manning. Martin Manning relaxes me. Hypnosis relaxes me.’ All that.” She shuddered visibly. “It’s *culty*.”

“Hypnosis does have that rep. Now, I could sit here all evening and berate you for not doing it, for lying to me about it, but that won’t help anything. I crafted” (*crafted* seemed a better word than *bullshitted*) “that exercise because I thought repetition might help, and that it would make our time together more a part of your life instead of this side thing that doesn’t touch anything else. If you aren’t willing to commit to it, tell me,

and maybe I can figure out another way or something. You just have to tell me. I'm only doing this to help you."

There was a little smile on those red lips. Lipstick? He hadn't noticed earlier. Martin had thought she looked pretty today, but he thought that every time she stopped in. It was easy to forget the potency of that face. Stacey Reeves was simply that pretty. "Not *only*," she pointed out, but without her usual vitriol.

Martin, however, was in the midst of a realization that had trampled through his awareness like elephants on the stampede. "You're wearing lipstick," he said.

"Yeah..."

"And the yawning. You keep yawning!"

Her eyes opened, surprised to find him on his feet, looming. "Sorry, god, it's nothing personal. I just—"

"And look at you. You're lying on my couch!"

"Martin, what are you spazzing about?"

"We ended almost half an hour ago, but you haven't budged!"

"Am I in the way or something?"

"No! Don't you see? It's working! It's actually working!"

Stacey tried to sit up; Martin lent a hand, but kept going until she was pulled all the way to her feet. "What do you mean it's working? Did you plant some subconscious seed or something? Am I showing some kind of tick?"

"What? No. Well, yes! Stacey, when you first started coming over here, you were taking time beforehand to wash off your makeup. You were up and out of here the moment our time was up, and you were so full of anxiety that you literally bounced around the couch the whole time."

"I was *not* bouncing!"

"Stacey, trust me, when a girl like you bounces, a guy like me notices. You bounced. But not tonight! That's what I'm trying to say – tonight you were *relaxed*."

"I was?" She blinked, but then jumped in the air and let out a cry of excitement. "I was! Holy bitchballs, Marty, I was! Oh my god, no wonder I can't stop yawning! The first few nights I kept imagining you driving a knife in my chest while I was lying here, but tonight all I could think about was how comfy it was and how bored I am!"

"And people who think they're about to be murder-raped aren't bored!"

She threw her arms around him. "We're doing this!"

"We're doing it! You're going to want to fuck me in no time!"

Like that, the hug became awkward. She stepped back, grimace and grin warring on her face. "All right, not bored any more."

"My bad."

She patted his chest, though as much to push herself comfortably away from him. “I am going to start doing those exercises, buddy. Damn, I really thought this was going nowhere. You think next time you’ll be able to really put me under?”

“You’ll go under as soon as you want to go under.”

“Here’s hoping.” She took a deep breath, closing her eyes and murmuring, “I trust Martin Manning. I trust Martin Manning. I trust Martin Manning.”

“Hearing you chant it like that makes me feel very untrustworthy.”

“Yeah, same. But if it’s working, I’ll say anything if it gets us there! Well, not *anything*. Not yet, anyway! But we’re gonna get me wanting to fuck you!”

“Why—” He stopped, shook his head. Forbidden fruit, that. “When do you want to try again?”

“Saturday. I’m busy night-time, obviously, but I can come over like... ten? Is that too early?”

“Ten will be fine. You want me to walk you to your car?”

“Aw, look at you, being chivalrous. No worries. I got Smoky in my purse.”

Martin’s imagination conjured a snarling chihuahua on the cusp of asphyxiation, but then he remembered her gun. “Try not to shoot any of my neighbors, if you would.”

She stuffed her camera in her purse, though didn’t bother with the tripod. That was new. “I’ll do my best.”

“See you Saturday at ten.”

“Yeah you will, creeper.” If her grin was friendly enough to dismiss the taunt, her parting comment would make him forgive her anything. “If you wanna watch my ass on my way to my car, I won’t look back when I open the door and make you *feel* like a creeper, though.”

Stacey winked. Martin was at the front window before the door closed behind her. With a mental note to send a word of thanks to his landlord for the excellent lighting in the parking lot, he watched Stacey’s perfect ass strut across that lot without a second’s worry of getting caught. Ogling this vixen like he’d bought the right to it. If everything fell apart tomorrow, this would have been worth it.

*Don’t forget your exercises*, he texted her after. Meanwhile, Martin busied himself drafting next steps. After all, he couldn’t bear to let this all fall apart tomorrow.