

Lifestyle Journalism

KALLIE

Chapter One

As the door to Melanie Adams's obscenely luxurious penthouse apartment opened, Emma Park watched her friend smile, and then cock an eyebrow.

"So it finally happened, huh?" Mel sighed theatrically. "You finally pissed someone off badly enough to get yourself hypnotized."

Emma rubbed her tired eyes. "That bad, huh?"

"Oh yeah," Mel said. "Major eyelid drooping. Future Pulitzer Prize winner Emma Park, brainwashed into an obedient trance-slave to the rich and powerful. Such a tragedy!"

"Ugh," Emma groaned. Smiling ruefully, she pushed past her taller friend. "Up yours, Mel."

Mel laughed good-naturedly and closed the door behind her. "Make yourself at home, babe."

Emma immediately did so. She threw herself down on Mel's couch and let out an exhausted sigh as she looked out over the city from the huge, floor-to-ceiling windows

of Mel's penthouse. Mel was a perfect match for her high-class surroundings, with her well-trained figure, noble, aquiline nose, and fierce cheekbones. It was a little embarrassing to see her in such good shape when Emma knew she was such a wreck.

"You know," Emma piped up after a moment. "If anyone was going to have hypnotized me, it probably would have been your mom. She's the only rich hypnogarch around here who actually knows I exist."

Mel rolled her eyes. This was familiar territory, and the use of 'hypnogarch' was deplorably cheesy.

"As you well know, dearest Mommy scrupulously follows all relevant laws, regulations, and ethical guidelines regarding the use of hypnosis and mind control to subvert the free will of others," Mel recited, heading off to the kitchen. "Coffee? Or wine?"

"Coffee," Emma replied gratefully. "I need so much coffee." She yawned. "And yeah, I know. She doesn't break any rules - at least, not in any way anyone can prove. But don't you think it's funny how all those regulations seem to get changed whenever she needs to get someone wrapped around her little finger?"

Mel rolled her eyes again, reaching back to throw out her wavy, pale blonde hair to further accentuate her weariness of the topic. This was *seriously* familiar territory. They'd been having this argument ever since they were teenagers. As college roommates, it had been constant.

"Money opens all kinds of doors, Emma. We both know that! It's the way of the world, babe."

"Yes," Emma agreed, making no effort to hide her frustration. "Yes, it certainly is. The same money that bought you this penthouse, for example."

"That's right," Mel replied, her tone mildly reproving. "And I was raised not to look a gift horse in the mouth. Here's your coffee."

"God, you're a lifesaver." Emma sat up and took the cup of coffee Mel offered her, smiling warmly. For all their differences, they were best friends, and always would be. She took a few sips, grateful for the caffeine. "I'm just glad you haven't taken after your mom. That's all I'll say."

"I haven't *yet*," Mel corrected, sitting down next to her. "No need to learn the family business while my parents are still in rude health. Hypnosis is hard! For now, I'd rather take it easy in my cushy, work-from-home consultant job with ridiculous perks and absurdly few hours. Another gift from Mommy."

She paused, and looked thoughtfully at Emma, sipping her coffee.

"How about you?" Mel asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Any thoughts about... I don't know, moving up in the world?" Mel asked hopefully. "Nobody can be a muckraker forever, Emma."

Emma narrowed her eyes. "Why do I get the feeling you invited me over just to talk to me about this?"

"I worry about you!" Mel shrugged and spread her arms. "I worry about what you do."

"What I do is important," Emma replied defensively.

"I know, I know," Mel assured her hastily. "But, babe, jokes aside? You look like hell. I know how much you care about your work. I really do. I admire it! But as your friend, I'm seriously worried about you."

Emma sagged. She'd heard that before - from Mel and others. She knew they weren't wrong. Her life was all late nights and early mornings, chasing leads and following up on attempts to gather evidence. She was exhausted, she lived on takeout, and she couldn't remember the last time her spine hadn't hurt. Her kind of journalism - digging deep for stories, looking out for the little guy - made for a miserable lifestyle. But it mattered. Some of her past exposés had been printed in major newspapers, and the independent piece she was currently working on was bigger still. She couldn't give it up. She just couldn't.

"It's not that easy, Mel," Emma replied quietly. "You know it's not. I need to do this."

Mel just nodded.

"Jokes aside, I don't have a problem with you or your family," Emma continued. She needed to say it out loud; to remind herself why she was putting herself through this. "I don't have a problem with any mind controller who follows the rules. The rules are there to keep people safe. It's why we have them."

Her friend reached out to rest a comforting hand on Emma's shoulder.

"Hypnosis is the way of the world," Emma went on. "I get it. I do. But that doesn't mean subjects deserve to be exploited or seen as weak! There are abuses of power happening each and every day, but since the rich and powerful rely on mind control, they turn a blind eye to them. Everyone does. But not me. I won't."

"I understand," Mel said, in a low voice. "Your journalism is important. OK. But... can't you at least take a break. You could really use one, Emma."

Emma stared down into her coffee. She wasn't stupid. She knew this job was taking a toll on her. Her deep, brown eyes were heavy and sunken, her face was thin and sallow even as junk food added to her waistline, and her dark hair hadn't been cut for so long, it was becoming difficult to tie it up into the neat, manageable bob she usually preferred without knots forming or strands coming loose. A break did sound nice, but it was never that easy.

"I can't," she replied miserably. "I'm onto something big, Mel. I've been investigating the fitness scene. It's rife with abuse - human trafficking, illegal mind control, permanent enslavement. Someone needs to bring it to light, and if I take a break now, the trail goes cold."

"Damn it," Mel whispered under her breath. She paused for a long time, as anxiety and dread soured the air between them. "You know," she began again, hesitantly, "it's not just burnout I'm worried about."

"Yeah?"

"I was joking earlier," Mel said, "but not completely. Emma, I'm scared that one day, you'll put your foot in something serious. You'll piss off a powerful mind controller without ethics to hold them back, and they'll... they'll take you away from me."

"Hey." Emma tried to smile at her. "You worry too much."

To her surprise, Mel remained dead serious. "No," she replied. "I don't. Don't you ever worry about the kind of people you might be pissing off?"

Emma lapsed into silence for a long moment. "Well," she said eventually. "I still can't stop."

Mel buried her head in her hands, rubbing her face for a few seconds. When she raised her head again, she had a carefree but distinctly forced expression on her face.

“OK!” she announced brightly. “If I can’t get you to stop and I can’t get you to take a break, there’s only one way for me to be a good friend.”

Emma blinked, taken aback by her friend’s abrupt mood shift. “Uh... what’s that?”

“I’m going to help you, of course! I have a source for you.”

Emma blinked again, before she immediately snapped back into work mode. She whipped out her phone and pulled up her notes app. “You do? Tell me everything.”

“I happen to know someone deeply involved with the fitness scene you’re investigating,” Mel explained. “She’s a personal trainer. Very exclusive - she only works for the rich and powerful. Exactly the kind of mind controllers you’re digging into.”

“Oh shit.” Emma was taking notes frantically, excitement pushing her tired eyes wide open. “That sounds really promising, Mel.”

“You’d never get to see her on your own, but she and I have a good relationship,” Mel continued. “We met through my work. I could get you some meetings with her. You could pick her brain for all the information she has.”

“Mel, that’s amazing!” Emma threw her arms wide and went in for a hug. “You’re too good to me, seriously.”

“Wait!” Mel held her at bay with a hand. “There’s a condition.”

“Oh.” Emma eyed her friend suspiciously. Was this just another way to try and get her to stop working? “What is it?”

“Dinner!” Mel winked at her, and puckered up her pretty, cupid’s bow mouth to blow a kiss. “Here. With me. Every night, while you’re working this case.” She poked a playful finger into Emma’s stomach. “I know you, babe. I know you’re eating nothing but takeout while you’ve got your head buried in this story. I can at least make sure you get some healthy, home-cooked meals instead.”

Emma blushed faintly, embarrassed at having suspected her friend of any foul play. “Jeez. I really don’t deserve you, Mel.”

“Nonsense!” Now, Mel hugged her. “You deserve me for being so cute.”

As they hugged, Emma laughed gratefully. Once they pulled away from one another, Mel rose to her feet.

“Alright!” She put her hands on her hips. “Our little dinner dates are going to start today. That means I am going to go get cooking, and you are going to put your phone down, go into my spare bedroom, and nap until the food is ready. Understood?”

Emma was in no mood to disagree. She stood up and threw her friend a mocking salute. “Yes ma’am.”

With that, she headed off toward the spare bedroom. She didn’t need to ask; it wasn’t exactly her first time crashing at Mel’s place. Mel watched her go with a smile on her face, and waited until the bedroom door was shut. Then she sighed, took a moment to prepare herself, and reached for her cell phone.

“Hey, Amara?” she said in a firm, businesslike voice once her call connected. “This is Melanie Adams. I need to talk to you. And yes, it’s regarding the girl you called me about earlier.”

A few days later, Emma was waiting on the doorstep of Amara Rodriguez, fitness coach to the elite. As good as her word, Mel had gotten in touch and arranged a meeting. Emma was grateful - both for that, and for the home-cooked meals. It was a nice change from takeout.

The door opened within moments of Emma pressing the doorbell. "Emma Park?" asked the formidable-looking woman on the other side of the threshold. When Emma nodded, she beckoned her inside. "Come on in."

Amara's apartment wasn't that far from Mel's, and it was similarly luxurious and spacious. That was no surprise, given her apparent clientèle. The big difference was that a huge portion had been converted into a cavernous home gym, replete with exercise machines, mats, and weights. To her surprise, Amara led her in there, rather than over to her living room.

"Just to be clear," Emma joked lightly, "Melanie booked me in for an interview, not a workout... right?"

Amara laughed. "No offense, Miss Park, but from what she told me, you could use both."

Emma laughed too. "Wow, you got me. Just 'Emma' is fine, by the way."

"And call me Amara."

Emma nodded. Amara Rodriguez made one hell of a first impression. As a personal trainer, she certainly looked the part. She was tall and handsome, with a finely sculpted,

muscular body that was obviously a source of pride. Amara looked like she'd just been working out; she was wearing a sports bra that left her abs on display, and tight-fitting leggings that highlighted all the lines of her form. There was a perfect sheen of sweat across her rich, brown skin which only made her look even hotter.

"Well, Amara," Emma said, pulling out her phone, "anything I should know before we get started? Or can I consider everything from now to be on the record?"

"Sure." Amara turned to face her and nodded. Emma took a moment to admire her hair; dyed green, and cut in a short, asymmetrical, punky style. "Mel and her family have been good to me, so you're welcome to ask anything you'd like - although of course, I'm obliged to protect the privacy of my clients."

"That sounds like a good place to start." Emma shifted gears immediately. This wasn't her first interview. "Your clients are overwhelmingly wealthy and influential. Is that fair to say?"

"It is."

"And what does that involve, exactly?" Emma asked. "Being a personal trainer to such powerful people?"

Amara laughed. "A personal trainer is a personal trainer. It doesn't necessarily matter how big your bank account is."

"Then why do they all come to you?"

"I suppose I simply have a good reputation, in certain circles."

"A good reputation for what?" Emma pressed. "If you had to guess, anyway."

Amara shrugged, flexing her powerful shoulders. "Discretion, perhaps."

"That's interesting," Emma replied quickly. "It's just exercise, right? Why does it need to be so discreet?"

"It can be very personal, to some people," Amara answered. "Some people want their exercise - their progress, their goals, their struggles - to be private. It's only natural."

"I see."

It was a completely reasonable answer, but even so, Emma couldn't shake the feeling that Amara was hiding something. There was a certain playfulness behind her words, like she was a cat toying with a mouse. The real question was: why? Why hide?

"For example," Amara added, while Emma was still considering, "what are your fitness goals, Emma?"

That took the journalist completely aback. "Excuse me?"

Amara smiled down at her. "Indulge me."

Emma wasn't sure what to say. Confessing just how out of shape she was to such an amazon would be embarrassing, but equally, she didn't want to be rude. Amara was doing her - and Mel - a favor here.

"I haven't really thought about it," Emma replied sheepishly. "Honestly, just getting some real exercise at all would be a win. I can't remember the last time I made it to a gym."

Amara arched an eyebrow. "Well, you're in one now."

“What?” Emma barked a nervous laugh. “Oh no, I... I’m just here for an interview.”

“I’m here to help you.” Amara folded her arms. “As per Mel’s request. But she made it sound like you needed more than one kind of help, and I can see that she’s right.”

Emma cringed. It was still that bad, apparently.

“You feel fatigued because you’re not eating right,” Amara went on, staring down the journalist with a professional eye. “Your spine hurts because you never stretch. You’ve clearly gained some weight, because your clothes don’t fit like they should, and even though you’re exhausted, you can’t sleep because you never move your body.”

“Jesus,” Emma exclaimed. “Is this how you talk to all your rich, powerful clients?”

“Yes,” Amara replied at once. “They pay me to be truthful.”

“And the truth is, I’m a total write-off?” Emma laughed.

“Absolutely not,” Amara told her, with perfect confidence. “You look good, Emma. You just need to take care of yourself a little better. From what Mel tells me, you have an amazing work ethic, and if you could put a little of that towards some self-care, it would make a world of difference. I could put you through three workouts a week, and in a month you’d feel like a million bucks.”

Now, Emma found herself blushing a little. “Maybe someday,” she said wryly, “if I get the time for it. And the money to afford your time.”

“You’ve already got my time,” Amara pointed out.

“You...” Emma found herself spluttering. “You’re not serious. Right?”

“Deadly,” Amara insisted. “Consider it a matter of pride. I won’t have a woman show up at my door, and then leave without being in better condition.”

Emma started shaking her head uncertainly. “I-I’m really just here for the interview.”

Amara wasn’t to be deterred. She started tapping her foot. “Let me sweeten the pot for you. I know you’re not just working on a puff piece about the lifestyles of the one percent. You want some real answers.”

That was more than enough to trigger Emma’s journalistic hunger. “Yes.”

“Then I’ll give them to you,” Amara said seriously. “But you’ll need to work for them. One set of exercises. One question. One answer, full and true.”

Emma hesitated. She didn’t like the idea of being drawn into some silly game. But her instincts were telling her that Amara knew something, and that unless she played along, she wasn’t going to share any of it.

Besides, Amara had made working out sound tempting. Maybe getting some exercise for a change wouldn’t be so bad.

“You’re on,” Emma laughed. “Just don’t make fun of me if I get winded and fall over or something.”

“Never,” Amara promised. “All I want to see is your best. Gym newcomers have to work twice as hard as everyone else, just to get started. They deserve twice the praise.”

That attitude was helping to soften Emma’s self-conscious embarrassment. “Well, um, how do we get started?”

Amara clapped her hands together. "That's what I like to hear! First: clothes. I keep outfits for every size, and I'm a good guesser. Get limbered up a little, while I go grab you something."

Emma started stretching as best she could, and Amara soon returned with clothes similar to her own: some stretchy leggings and a light, breathable tank top. The only difference was that it was all bright, girly pink. Emma threw Amara a look.

"It's all I had in your size," Amara said apologetically. "But hey - maybe you'll come around to it."

Emma rolled her eyes, but didn't argue. She quickly got changed into Amara's clothes and went back to warming up.

"So," she said, "what's first?"

"Let's begin with some squats," Amara winked at her. "A set of ten. Who doesn't want a better ass?"

Emma giggled. "Sure. You might have to show me the proper form, though."

"We can worry about that later," Amara said, as Emma planted her feet apart and straightened her back. "For now, I just want to get you moving. Pay attention to your breathing, though. That's important."

"OK. Right." Emma took a deep breath. "Let's go."

Under Amara's watchful eye, she started squatting. She bent her legs and lowered herself as much as she could, doing her best to keep a steady pace and her back straight. After another moment, she raised herself back up again, feeling her muscles

burn at the unfamiliar exertion.

“Good,” Amara said. “Count out loud.”

It was easy to listen to Amara. She spoke with a natural authority that left Emma with no doubt she was a personal trainer who got results. Emma nodded.

“One,” she said, and started her next squat.

“Two,” she counted a few seconds later.

“Three.”

She wasn’t sure of her form, but Amara was right there to correct her with a gentle hand pushing against her lower back.

“Four.”

“Five.”

“Good,” Amara said. “Remember to breathe. Deep breaths. In at the top, out at the bottom.”

Emma nodded and did her best to obey. “Six.”

“Seven.”

“Eight.”

“Almost there!” Amara cheered.

“Nine.” Emma could hear how out of breath she already sounded.

“One more!”

“Ten!”

Emma pulled herself upright, and then bent double to catch her breath. Her thighs were killing her - but in a way that wasn't completely unpleasant. Amara clapped her on her shoulder and smiled down at her, warm pride showing on her face.

“Great job!” the muscular woman said. “I knew you could do it.”

“Thanks.” Emma couldn't help but smile at the praise. “So now I get my question. Right?”

“You earned it.” Amara nodded.

Emma was feeling a little fuzzy after the short workout but managed to slip back into journalism mode with relative ease. She mentally reviewed what she'd been intending to ask.

“Do your clients ever hire you to train other people?” she asked. “People besides themselves, I mean.”

This was one of several threads she was chasing. Unethical mind controllers often liked the idea of having their victims ‘trained’. Altered, through exercise and conditioning.

“Yes,” Amara replied at once. “Frequently, in fact.”

Emma licked her lips, and clapped her hands. “Alright! Let's go again.”

Amara laughed. "You're ready?"

"I want my next question."

Amara gestured for her to get started, so Emma once again put her legs apart and started performing squats. This time, she made sure to breathe just like Amara had taught her. It helped. Once she'd finished her ten squats, she wasn't nearly as out of breath, and she was finding it easier to sink into the rhythm of the exercise, letting her body perform the increasingly-familiar motions without her head getting in the way.

"That's ten!" Emma exclaimed, as she finished the set.

"Nice!" Amara looked truly pleased. "You're doing great, Emma."

"Yeah." Emma laughed. "By the time I get out of her, I'm gonna be in way better shape."

"That's the idea." Amara winked. "Another question?"

"Uh-huh." Emma already knew what she wanted to ask. "What do you think about hypnosis, Amara? More specifically, what do you think about people who get hypnotized?"

She'd done a little digging. Amara was very discreet about who exactly she worked for. Perhaps a little too discreet. Emma wanted to understand exactly where she stood.

Amara smiled. "Emma, I'm a personal trainer. I specialize in telling people what to do. In my experience, a lot of people greatly benefit from that. Only, sometimes, those people don't realize what they need. Hypnosis can be one way of getting people on the right path, if they can't find it on their own."

"The weak-willed?" Emma commented. "I see."

"I wouldn't phrase it quite like that," Amara replied. "But some people are leaders, and other people are followers, yes. Mind control is society's way of figuring out who's who."

Emma frowned. It wasn't an uncommon perspective, and didn't reveal a whole lot. Amara seemed to think of mind control as 'fair game', the same as most people. Emma didn't mind that too much, although she wished people weren't so nonchalant about potential abuses of power.

"OK," Emma said. "Time for another set."

She began her next set of ten squats. Her body was protesting louder with each repetition, but it was getting easier and easier to push herself. The breathing technique Amara had shown Emma was working wonders. She just had to focus on her breathing, and on counting to ten. That was all. One, two, three. In, and out. In, and out.

"Nice going!" Amara commented when Emma was finished. She handed the journalist a sports bottle of nice cold water, and Emma drank from it gratefully.

"Next question," Emma said quickly, wiping her mouth off with the back of her hand. "Do you know of any instances of people like you - personal trainers, I mean - using hypnosis as part of their work?"

"Yes."

As soon as she heard that, Emma grit her teeth and was ready to begin another set. If this was a game, she was determined to win. She needed answers. Almost effortlessly, Emma slipped back into the same rhythm as before. One, two, three, four.

In, and out. In, and out.

“OK,” Emma panted, after her next ten squats were complete. “Have... have you ever used hypnosis like that?”

Amara tilted her head, looking at Emma intently. “Yes.”

A shiver ran down Emma’s spine. “How?”

To her immense frustration, Amara just smirked at her and lifted a single finger. “That’s another question, Emma.”

“Damn it,” Emma grumbled under her breath. “Fine.”

She immediately went to perform another set, but as she assumed the starting position, she became conscious of the way her body was starting to hit its limits. Amara noticed too, and swiftly stepped forward to stop her with a hand on her chest.

“Wait,” the personal trainer said, frowning. “You’re going too fast, and you’re gonna hurt yourself. Take it easy. Slower. Find your rhythm.”

Emma was impatient, but she knew good advice when she heard it. She nodded, and then blinked in surprise when she felt Amara’s other hand reach around to rest on her shoulder. Amara started applying gentle pressure, guiding the pace of her squats and her breaths.

“Here,” Amara encouraged. “Like this. One.”

Emma let Amara take over. She was the expert, after all. With Amara setting the pace, it was even easier to shut her brain off and focus on exercise.

“Two,” Amara counted.

As she indicated for Emma to sink down into the squat, she applied a light pressure to her chest, letting her know to exhale.

“Three.”

Amara’s pace was slower than before. Much slower. Exercising slowly like this was strange. Emma was discovering the oceans of time at the top and bottom of each rep, when all she had to do was hold, breathe, and wait. She wasn’t sure if it was easier or harder.

“Four.”

With Amara taking control, though, it was certainly easier not to think. Thinking was the enemy, Emma was quickly discovering. If she stopped thinking, it was easier to simply do.

“Five.”

Listening to Amara was much simpler than thinking. When she was thinking about the exercises, she had to push herself past the aching and exhaustion. But if she listened to Amara, she just had to breathe when she was told and let her body take care of the rest.

“Six.”

A smile flickered across Emma’s face. What was going on in her head? Thinking about not thinking? That was a little like how hypnotists loved to talk.

“Focus, Emma,” Amara warned. “You need to concentrate. Don’t lose your

breathing.”

“R-right,” Emma said apologetically. She hadn’t realized how much her mind had been wandering. “Um. Sorry.”

Amara just nodded. “Seven.”

This time, Emma made sure to stay focused. She let her mind sink into her own body, until all she was thinking about was her form. Her movements. Her breathing. She became one with the strain that was flooding her body.

“Eight.”

Those numbers were starting to lose all meaning. Emma felt as though she might have been doing squats forever. And she might have gone on doing them forever more, without Amara there to stop her.

“Nine.”

As she heard Amara count that number, Emma felt herself on the cusp of something. Something big. But she didn’t know what. She just knew she had to keep going. Keep focusing. Just a little more. She could do it, with Amara there to guide her.

“Ten!”

After that, there was nothing. Amara stopped moving her. She was left completely still, simply waiting for what was coming next.

“Emma,” Amara prompted. “You’re done.”

Emma twitched, like she was just waking up. She certainly didn’t feel particularly

awake, though. “O-oh! Right.”

She looked around. Amara was standing there, very close to her, with a strange smile on her face. “Feeling OK?” the personal trainer asked.

“Yeah.” Emma giggled self-consciously. “I think all this exercise is really taking it out of me.”

“That’s only natural,” Amara replied, nodding.

Somehow, Emma felt like she was both awake and asleep at the same time. That last set of squats had felt special. Meditative, maybe. She could remember feeling, just moments ago, a sense of perfect clarity, but now her brain was sinking into fog. Her body and mind both felt so heavy.

“You had a question?” Amara prompted again.

“R-right.” Emma blinked. She’d almost forgotten what she was even here for. How was that even possible? “I... uh...”

She couldn’t remember.

“Something about hypnosis?”

“O-oh yeah.” Emma’s cheeks turned pink. This was so unprofessional of her. “So, um... hypnosis and exercise. How, uh, does that work?”

Amara’s strange smile widened. “Well, ultimately exercise is all mental. It’s all about willpower. Discipline. Motivation. Some people struggle with that. They might find it easier if someone else takes over.”

“You just hypnotize someone and then make them work out?”

“That’s right.” Amara nodded. “You can see the appeal, right? I get the sense you know just how hard it can be to make yourself get to the gym every week. What if all it took was for someone else to snap their fingers?”

“Willpower...” Emma glanced at Amara’s prominent bicep muscles. “You don’t seem to struggle with that.”

Amara grinned. “I guess not. Maybe that’s why I’m such a good hypnotist, Emma. If it comes down to a contest of wills, I know I’ll never lose. Not everyone can say the same.”

Emma shivered. “Wow. That’s...”

It felt like a red flag, although she was struggling to figure out why. She felt so, so tired.

“Wanna give it a try?” Amara offered.

Emma shook her head slowly. “Uh... no thanks. I’d rather stay in control of my own head.”

Amara shrugged, her grin widening. “Suit yourself. Any more questions?”

Somehow, that left Emma dumbfounded. Of course she had more questions. But she was struggling to call any of them to mind. She felt like she’d had the perfect thread of questioning right there on the tip of her tongue, and now it had completely unraveled.”

“I... I...” Emma struggled. “Uh... yeah.”

“Well, you know what that means,” Amara replied.

Emma nodded. More squats.

Again, when Emma prepared herself for the next set, Amara stepped up to guide her. Already, it felt perfectly natural to have the personal trainer’s hands on her body, showing her how and when to move.

“Even slower this time,” Amara warned. “This is your last set. Time to warm down.”

Emma didn’t question her. She just nodded.

“You count this time,” Amara added. “But count down. From ten.”

Emma nodded. “Ten,” she counted.

As before, Amara set her pace. Amara showed her when to breathe. Once again, Emma slipped into that thoughtless, almost robotic state, simply going through the motions she knew she was supposed to.

“Nine.”

“I can tell you’re slowing down,” Amara told her quietly. “You’re getting tired.”

Emma’s ears pricked up, but she was too focused on her squats to answer, or to even really comprehend what Amara was telling. The personal trainer’s words simply passed, unfiltered, into her empty, open, receptive mind.

“Eight.”

“It’s why you can’t think,” Amara continued. “You’ve used up all your energy, Emma. None left for thinking.”

“Seven.”

“But you’re still working. Still using yourself up. You can feel your thoughts slowing down with each rep.”

“Six.”

“Meanwhile, your body is filling up with endorphins. It’s overwhelming your nervous system. Making you feel dizzy and light-headed.”

“Five.” Emma could feel it. It was just as Amara described.

“But you’re still going. Still exercising. You can’t stop. Not until you’ve finished your set. Even though it’s making it harder and harder to think with each rep.”

“Four.”

“It’s making you dumber and dumber with each set.”

“Three.”

“You know, when most people finish a hard workout,” Amara whispered, “they just drop. They go limp. Mind and body, all at once.”

“Two.”

“That’s what happens when you push yourself to your limit, Emma. Just like you’re doing now.”

“One.” With what little mind Emma had left, she expected to stop there - but Amara didn’t release her.

“One more, Emma,” Amara urged. “One more, and then you can drop.”

Emma was just a puppet in her arms. She couldn’t refuse. Deaf to her own body’s protests, Emma obediently completed another squat.

“Z... zero?”

“That’s right.” Amara was grinning like a wolf. “Now drop.”

Only some basic, fundamental instinct kept Emma upright. But her head fell against her chest and her arms slumped limply at her sides. It was just as Amara had promised. Most of all, her mind was completely and totally empty.

“Listen to me, Emma,” Amara said. Her grin faded; she was all business. “You’re hypnotized right now. Do you understand that?”

Emma just nodded. She had no other reaction.

“Good,” Amara continued. “But you won’t remember that. You’ll just remember being tired after your workout. Too tired to finish our interview. Understand?”

Emma nodded again, eyes blank.

“But you’ll remember enjoying the exercise,” Amara went on. “And you’ll remember that you agreed to come back for another session to finish asking me your questions.”

Emma’s open mind absorbed that information without question.

“And you’ll remember something else,” Amara added. “Not consciously. But in your subconscious, where it truly matters, you’re going to remember this one thing very, very clearly: working out makes it hard to think. Working out makes you dumber.”

Emma shivered, but nodded.

“Say it.”

“Working out makes it hard to think,” Emma intoned. Her voice was empty of emotion. “Working out makes me dumber.”

“That’s right,” Amara affirmed. “Working out makes you dumber. The more you work out, the dumber you get.”

“The more I work out, the dumber I get,” Emma echoed.

“But,” Amara said firmly. “Working out feels good. Working out makes you dumber, but it feels good.”

“Working out makes me dumber, but it feels good.” Emma shivered.

“And that means getting dumber feels good.”

Even that didn’t register to the hypnotized Emma as dangerous. She simply let that thought become part of her. “Getting dumber feels good.”

“Getting dumber feels good, and working out feels good,” Amara insisted. “It feels good *here*.”

She reached around Emma and started slowly, gently, rubbing a few of her

fingertips against the front of Emma's pink leggings. Against her pussy. Emma shivered and gasped, but didn't wake.

"Working out feels good here," Amara told her. "Getting dumber feels good here. Doesn't it?"

"Y-yes," Emma whimpered.

"Working out turns you on. Getting dumber turns you on."

"Working out turns me on," Emma chanted, her emotionless trance-voice now slightly soiled with pleasure. "Getting dumber turns me on."

Her body was on edge after all that exercise, and responded eagerly to Amara's touch. Within moments, she was distinctly wet.

"And hypnosis - that makes you dumber too." A slight, crooked smile returned to Amara's face. She was a professional, but she enjoyed her work. "Which means hypnosis turns you on."

"H-hypnosis turns me on," Emma echoed breathily.

"You want to be hypnotized."

"I... I..." That suggestion finally prompted a moment of resistance - but only a moment. Amara's skillful fingertips soon massaged it away. "I... want to be hypnotized."

"Good." Abruptly, Amara lifted her fingers away. "Then I think we're done here - for now."

Amara stood in front of Emma, raised a hand, and snapped her fingers to bring the

hypnotized journalist back to wakefulness. Emma blinked a few times, then looked at Amara and blushed - embarrassed by the way her mind seemed to have wandered.

And, of course, by the sudden wetness between her legs.

A few minutes later, Amara said goodbye to Emma and closed the door to her apartment after her. Emma had apologized profusely for the way their interview had gone off the rails, and had eagerly agreed to a follow-up in just a couple of days.

If the poor journalist had been thinking straight, she might have noticed that she was feeling a little *too* eager.

But she wasn't, of course. And this was just the beginning. Emma's transformation had barely begun.

Amara was looking forward to taking her deeper. She was a great personal trainer and an even better hypnotist, but it wasn't just aptitude that had led her down this career path. She loved getting into someone's head and making them hers.

Emma wasn't going to be hers, of course. Not in the end. This was client work, and Amara had to make sure her client got exactly what they wanted.

She picked up her phone and fired off a quick text message to her employer.

First session - total success

Chapter Two

A little over a week after Emma's first encounter with Amara Rodriguez, she once again found herself stepping into the personal trainer's apartment. Amara greeted her, as ever, with a warm, friendly, encouraging smile.

"Hey, Emma!" she said brightly. "Ready to work up a sweat?"

"You know it!" Emma replied, just as brightly. She followed Amara into her home gym and immediately started changing into the bright pink workout outfit Amara had lent her.

This was the fourth time she'd come to see Amara, and already, it was all becoming a habit. She showed up, got changed, asked Amara a few questions, worked out, and left. Emma wasn't sure how to feel about that. It wasn't supposed to be a habit, after all. Her interview with Amara should have been a one-time thing. But somehow, every time, she ended up exhausted and disoriented, struggling to remember what she had been meaning to ask. She barely remembered the second half of any of their sessions. It was getting frustrating.

But it wasn't all bad. Amara seemed happy to keep meeting up with her - just as long as Emma kept up their bargain. Exercise in exchange for questions. Even that was

starting to feel like a win-win. The day after her first session with Amara, Emma's body had ached like hell, but after a week, the benefits of regular exercise had already started to appear. She felt more energetic, less sore, and more confident. Mel's home-cooked dinners were helping with that too, probably. As it turned out, a healthy lifestyle felt pretty great!

Emma didn't even mind that she was struggling so much with her investigation into abuses of mind control and hypnosis in the city's fitness scene. Somehow, whenever she sat down and tried to focus on her work, she ended up feeling far too light-headed and distracted to make any real progress. Muckraking was starting to feel boring, somehow, and whenever she reviewed her notes at the end of the day, they were always riddled with typos and mistakes.

That should have been eating at her, but... it wasn't. Emma just felt good. It was irrepressible. Perhaps it was the power of exercise. Perhaps she was simply warming to the idea of taking a break from her work, as Mel had proposed. Either way, Emma wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth.

"OK, Emma." Amara clapped her hands; Emma knew that meant they were ready to get started. "How are you feeling?"

"Good!" Emma replied, truthfully. "I think I'm getting the hang of this whole exercise thing. I actually went out for a morning jog yesterday."

"That's great! I'm proud of you." Amara smiled. "We'll make a regular gym bunny out of you in no time. Although, it would be remiss of me not to mention that, if you truly want to level up your exercise game, there's one thing that really does the trick: hypnosis."

A shiver ran down Emma's spine. "Yeah?"

“It’s what most people pay me for,” Amara told her, smiling. “And it’s part of my regular service. Hypnosis is great for self-improvement. It makes it easier to focus. Easier to push yourself. If you wanted to, I’d love to start incorporating it into your workouts.”

“I... I dunno.”

Emma found herself a lot more indecisive than she would have been a week earlier. She was a lot more alert than the average person to the dangers of being hypnotized by a stranger, but Amara didn’t feel like a stranger. Emma trusted her. In particular, she trusted her exercise advice. Maybe hypnosis would be a big help. It wasn’t like every single hypnotist in the world was some rich asshole trying to turn people into helpless drones, after all.

But there was something else. Another factor, putting its finger on the scales: Emma had started finding hypnosis incredibly, incredibly hot.

Hypnosis wasn’t exactly an uncommon kink. Far from it. Given how the rich and elite wielded it as a tool of power, it was an easy thing for people of a certain persuasion to end up fetishizing. That was new to Emma, though. Somehow, recently, whenever she was blowing off some steam in private, she found her thoughts turning in that direction.

She couldn’t stop thinking about how it would feel to slip under someone’s hypnotic spell. The particular fantasy that kept haunting Emma was all about having the smarts and quick-thinking she was so proud of stripped out of her head, and being turned into one of those dim-witted, brainwashed bimbos that sometimes clung to the arms of powerful hypnotists. She fantasized about being stared at, posed, and put through the motions of dancing, or exercising, or performing, always while she was naked, or else wearing something pink and skintight.

It was embarrassing. But it also made her cum like nothing else, and a tiny little part of her was shivering in anticipation at the thought of finding out what hypnosis actually felt like.

“It’s OK if you don’t want to,” Amara added. “I know you’re wary, and that’s totally understandable. I won’t push it on you. It’s just that I think it could really help, especially with the concentration problems you keep having with our interview.”

Emma blinked and looked at her. “It could help with that?”

“Of course,” Amara assured her. “There’s nothing like hypnosis for giving you a little clarity of mind.”

That was all the excuse Emma needed to succumb to temptation. She remained a little skeptical but, deep down, part of her wanted to give hypnosis a shot. She wanted to indulge this new desire of hers. If it did help with her work too, that was just a silver lining.

She’d just have to make sure Amara didn’t notice how aroused hypnosis was making her.

“OK,” Emma said, a touch breathlessly. “OK. Yeah. Let’s give it a shot.”

Amara reached over and clapped her on her shoulder. “Atta girl.”

Emma blushed.

“So, um, what do you need me to do?” she asked, hoping to hide her embarrassment. “Do you have a pocket watch I should be staring at? A metronome? Do I look deep into your eyes?”

Amara laughed. "Only if you think they're pretty. I like to do things a little differently. Have you heard of kinesthetic inductions?"

"Hypnosis with movement." Emma nodded.

"That's right," Amara said. "Let me show you. Close your eyes."

Emma was a little unprepared for how quickly things were moving, but nonetheless she obediently closed her eyes. A moment later, she felt Amara take her hand and lead her a few paces away, to stand on one of her exercise mats.

"Good," Amara told her. "Now, focus on your body. Just like when you work out."

Emma nodded. That was easy. Amara was even talking to her like she did when she was working out, in that voice that was so confident, so soothing, so easy to obey.

"Good," Amara repeated. "I want you to visualize where you are right now. The room around you. The way you're standing. The way I'm standing. Picture it all, in your mind's eye. Can you do that?"

Emma nodded again. "In your apartment," she murmured. "In your gym. You're holding my hand."

"Very good," Amara said. "Keep your eyes close. I want you to notice the way that, already, your mental image is starting to fade. We forget things so quickly with our eyes shut. Where exactly are you standing? What's right in front of you? Which exercise machine is that, over there in the corner? Maybe you remember. Maybe not."

As soon as Amara mentioned it, Emma's mind's eye was starting to blur. Where was she standing? Amara had guided her to walk a short distance with her eyes closed. How many steps? How far had she moved? She wasn't quite sure.

Emma started to feel a little dizzy. She squeezed down tighter on Amara's hand.

"I'm here," Amara said soothingly. "Don't worry. I've got you."

She reached out and rested a hand on Emma's side, steadying her. An immediate wave of calm washed over Emma. Amara's touch was familiar. She was used to Amara touching her and guiding her when the personal trainer was showing her how to exercise properly.

This was no different. She just had to let Amara guide her.

Amara tugged gently at her hand, and Emma took careful, tentative steps after her, moving where she was guided. With each step, it became more difficult to picture exactly where she was standing, and, with that reference point gone, everything else started to dissolve into mist.

"It's getting harder to picture, isn't it?" Amara seemed like she could read Emma's mind. "That's OK. I want you to simply let that happen, Emma. Take some deep breaths, and let your mental image of this room fade away."

Emma did her best to obey. Once she accepted what was going to happen, it all started to fade away much, much faster. Soon, Amara's touch was her only lifeline.

"It's only natural," Amara continued. "Images fade. Memory fades, and it's OK to forget. Forgetting means less distractions. Less distractions means it's easier to stay focused. And we want you nice and focused, don't we Emma?"

"Yeah."

Emma nodded too. That was a mistake. Nodding triggered a wave of dizziness. She

felt like she was about to lose her balance and stumble, but Amara steadied her - this time, by placing her hand firmly on the top of Emma's head.

"Focus, Emma," Amara encouraged. "It's OK. You're not going to fall over. I've got you. Nice, deep, calming breaths."

"OK."

Amara's words were already having a deep effect on Emma. As soon as Amara told her to be calm, she was calm. Emma realized she was rapidly slipping under hypnosis. That thought excited her, making her heart race even as her breathing slowed.

"Keep your eyes closed," Amara repeated. "Look around, in your mind's eye. What do you see?"

Emma made one last attempt to reconstruct the room around her. She failed. It was gone. She simply didn't know where she was, where Amara was, where anything was - and without those reference points, it felt like the walls around her had all receded into infinity, leaving her standing in a void.

"Nothing," Emma replied. Her voice sounded like it was coming from very far away.

"That's right," Amara said. "There's nothing. Where are you? Where are you, that there's nothing?"

It took Emma a long time to answer that question. "I'm... nowhere?"

That didn't seem right, but it *felt* right.

"You're nowhere," Amara confirmed for her. Amara's voice seemed to be coming from everywhere at once, and unlike Emma's, it was intimate and close. "And all this

nowhere? All this nothing? It's all inside your head."

"Yeah..." Emma breathed. She felt so much more empty.

"There's nothing inside your head."

"Nothing... inside my head..." Emma echoed dreamily.

"And when you're nothing and nowhere," Amara continued, "there's no up."

She used her hand to tilt Emma's head upwards. The sensation of her orientation changing was disorienting, but strangely, Emma didn't feel dizzy. She had Amara. Amara was her anchor.

"There's no down." Amara tilted her head down. "There's no left. There's no right."

As Amara moved Emma's head around, Emma was haunted by the phantom sensation that she was spinning, even though she knew she wasn't. She was standing still, in place. But the spinning wouldn't stop.

"And if there's nothing," Amara went on, "if you're nowhere, then there's nothing beneath your feet at all, is there?"

"N-no," Emma whispered.

The void was deepening. Maybe she was spinning after all. She didn't know. She couldn't tell. There was nothing.

"And that means," Amara concluded, "there's nothing to stop your fall."

Before Emma could comprehend the meaning of her words, she felt Amara rest a

hand on her chest and push. Hard.

Emma fell backward, far too disoriented to catch herself. She was nowhere and nothing. She was spinning, and there was nothing beneath her feet. Nothing to catch her fall. Even as her brain screamed at her that she was falling, Emma turned as limp as a rag doll. To her, she was simply falling into a void, and the void went on forever and ever.

She never hit the ground. Amara was right there to catch her, wrapping up the journalist in her powerful arms and supporting her entire weight. But for Emma, the sensation of falling never stopped. It went on and on. There was no end to it. Nothing. She simply kept sinking.

Carefully, Amara tipped her back upright. Emma found her footing again, but only by instinct. Her head was blank.

“Open your eyes,” Amara instructed.

Emma obeyed, blinking a few times as she was dazzled by the sudden brightness. Having her eyes open did nothing to stop the sensation of infinite falling. Her vision was strangely distorted; it was like she was looking at Amara from down a very long telescope. Everything besides the personal trainer was indistinct; out of focus.

“You know that you’re completely hypnotized now,” Amara told her. It wasn’t a question.

“Yes,” Emma answered. An electric shiver raced down her spine.

“Good.” Amara was smiling. “This is what falling feels like, Emma. Falling into trance. I want you to memorize it for me. And whenever I tell you to ‘fall’, it’ll all come rushing back. Understand?”

“Yes.”

“Good girl.” Amara clapped her hands together sharply. “OK, Emma. Time for our interview.”

Emma blinked again, the loud noise helping to shock her back to awareness. But the sensation of falling was still there in the pit of her stomach, and the void that had been all around her was now inside her head. It was all so strange. Could she really interview someone like this?

Amara had said it would help, though. Emma couldn’t muster enough willpower to disagree.

“O-OK.” Emma set her hypnotized mind to the task of trying to come up with a question. “Um...”

“Why not start with something nice and casual?” Amara suggested. “Just to get warmed up.”

“Right.” Emma was grateful for the advice, but she still found herself drawing a blank. Her thoughts were unbelievably sluggish, and the simple knowledge that she was hypnotized right now was a thrilling distraction. “Like... uh...”

Amara laughed gently. “Why don’t you ask me my favorite color?”

As soon as Amara suggested it, it clicked into Emma’s head as the perfect question. “What’s your favorite color?”

Amara tilted her head to one side, amused. “Pink.”

Emma blinked. She'd never seen Amara wear pink; her workout clothes were always black. "Really? I'm surprised."

"Pink is just such a lovely, bright color," Amara explained. "I love looking at it. Don't you? Doesn't it just make you feel happy? Bubbly? Full of energy? It's perfect for working out."

Emma nodded, eagerly absorbing Amara's words. Clearly, she had been right about hypnosis. Concentrating on what Amara told her was proving effortless.

"Just look at you, in those pink clothes," Amara added. "You seem a lot happier whenever you put those on. It puts a smile on your face. Maybe even makes you a little giggly. Pink is great."

Again, Emma nodded. She felt like she knew exactly what Amara was talking about.

"How about you?" Amara asked. "Got a favorite color?"

Emma was surprised by the question. She'd never really thought about it before. But one obvious answer came immediately to mind.

"Pink," Emma replied, still in that distant, vacant tone of voice.

Pink made her happy. Pink made her bubbly. Pink made her full of energy. It made her smile and giggle.

"Oh?" Amara cocked an eyebrow. "Guess I nailed it with your workout gear. Looks like we won't need to find you anything else after all."

"Right," Emma agreed. Pink was perfect. Why would she need an outfit that wasn't pink?

“Next question?” Amara prompted.

“Yeah.” This time, Emma tried her hardest to come up with something. She couldn’t let Amara give her all the questions. That would be embarrassing. “Um... what... what do you like so much about exercise?”

It was lame, she knew. Another softball. But better than nothing.

“That’s easy,” Amara answered. “There’s so much to love about it. It’s good for you, right? Exercise is very healthy, and I love feeling healthy. Who wouldn’t? Who doesn’t love knowing that they’re giving their body the best? Not just exercise - diet, too.”

That made perfect sense. Emma nodded.

“Just look at you, for example,” Amara went on. “I can tell how much better you feel, now that you’ve been living a healthier lifestyle. I’m sure you can too, deep down. Regular exercise, better meals... it’s honestly a little bit addictive.”

Her words struck a chord with Emma. It was like she couldn’t even imagine Amara being wrong. She could feel it too. Addictive.

“And the raw sensation of exercise? That’s definitely addictive,” Amara added. “It’s physiological. All those endorphins, bubbling up in your brain while you work out. I just can’t get enough of it.”

Emma nodded eagerly. She’d noticed that as well.

“It makes it so easy not to think. Overthinking is such a problem, isn’t it?” Emma nodded emphatically at that. “It’s so hard to ever truly shut our brains off. Thinking too much causes so much anxiety. So many problems. Sometimes, it’s nice to make

ourselves dumb instead.”

Emma shivered. Something about the word ‘dumb’ echoed deliciously through her body.

“I can imagine it’s the same for you,” Amara suggested. “It must be nice for a brainy journalist like you to stop thinking for a change.”

“Oh yeah,” Emma replied, with genuine enthusiasm. “It’s... it’s nice to be dumb.”

“Yeah?” Amara’s smile curled. “You like getting dumber?”

“Getting dumber feels good.” The words came to Emma’s lips effortlessly, like a mantra. And there it was again - that delicious shiver.

She was starting to love being hypnotized. After all, hypnosis made her dumber.

“Good.” Amara laughed gently. “But that’s not all, you know. I also love the attention.”

Emma’s ears perked up. “The attention?”

Amara nodded. “Absolutely. Working out gets you a lot of attention. Who doesn’t love a girl who’s in good shape?”

She flexed slightly, demonstrating. Emma’s eyes widened.

“But,” Amara added, like it was an afterthought, “you must already know all about that.”

Emma was sure she didn’t. “What do you mean?”

"You love attention, don't you?" Amara said. "After all, you're a journalist. Journalism is all about being in the public eye, right? Getting readers? Making big headlines?"

"I... guess." Emma had never thought about it that way before, but she supposed Amara had a point. It did always feel good when one of her stories broke big. It was rewarding. "Yeah."

"It's natural," Amara affirmed. "Attention feels good."

"Yeah." Emma was quickly growing more comfortable with that.

"You love attention."

"Y-yeah," Emma conceded. "I love attention."

That brought forth another shiver of excitement. She was discovering so many new things to love recently.

"And exercising is a great way to get it." Amara shrugged. "Well, there you have it, Emma. That's why I love working out. Health, attention, and getting to dumb down a little." She grinned. "I'm sensing you get what I'm talking about."

Emma did. She really did. She understood Amara perfectly.

"Anyway, that's probably enough warm-up," Amara said. "How about you ask me one of your real questions, Emma?"

"O-oh! Um. Right."

Emma frowned. Despite how focused she felt, she was still having trouble remembering what she was supposed to be asking Amara. Her head was swimming with fantasies and thoughts - about exercise, attention, hypnosis, and so much more. Her investigation was starting to feel like a distant priority.

Her investigation. It came back to her in a rush. Emma decided to go for the big question, now that she had hypnosis helping to sharpen her mind.

"I... I think that some personal trainers are exploiting people using hypnosis," Emma said slowly. She needed to get this right - even if she still felt like she was falling. "Using the pretext of exercise to turn them into perfect, brainwashed slaves for whoever is truly controlling them. Amara, have you ever mind-controlled someone against their will like that?"

She wasn't expecting Amara to admit to anything, just hoping that she might volunteer some information, or give something away in how she reacted. The last thing Emma had expected was for Amara to answer:

"Yes. I'm doing it to you, right now."

Emma twitched, alarmed. "E... excuse me?"

"You heard me." Amara sounded deadly serious.

"That's... that's funny." Emma giggled nervously.

"I'm not joking," Amara insisted. "I'm brainwashing you against your will, right now."

A shiver of danger raced down Emma's spine. The sensation of falling that she was still feeling in the pit of her stomach turned much worse, and her head was throbbing

with sudden vertigo.

“But...” Emma said, frowning. “You asked. I... I let you.”

“Yes,” Amara replied calmly. “That’s what you think. Because I made sure you’d think that way.”

“B... but...”

Emma felt like the floor was once again collapsing beneath her feet. She wanted to argue, but her thoughts kept turning back to one, deeply troubling question:

If Amara was telling the truth, how would she even know?

And the worst part was, she couldn’t run. She couldn’t fight. She couldn’t assert control.

She was hypnotized.

She was so deeply focused that all she could do was stare at Amara, dumbfounded, as Amara continued to reshape her reality.

“Fortunately,” Amara continued, “you don’t need to worry about it. Because you don’t really care.”

Emma frowned. How could Amara say that? Of course she cared! This was exactly the kind of thing her work was devoted to.

Amara noticed the way Emma was starting to twitch and shiver. “Calm down,” the personal trainer said soothingly. “Remember, Emma. This is just an interview.”

Somehow, that made perfect sense to Emma, and she was instantly calm. The obvious, glaring contradiction in her circumstances and her reactions didn't even register with her.

"Right." She replied dumbly. "Just an interview."

Of course. She'd carried out hundreds of interviews. What was there to be so worked up about?

"Just an interview," Amara repeated. "You know how interviews work, right? You ask the questions. I give you the answers."

"Right," Emma said again. It was obvious, when Amara explained it to her like that.

"I just gave you an answer," Amara explained slowly. "Would you like to ask me a question about it?"

"Uh..." It took Emma a long moment to think of something. Even the events of a minute or two ago were becoming foggy. "Yeah. Yes. Um... why... why don't I care?"

It felt like a very strange question. But it was the only one that seemed to fit, given the answer Amara had supplied her with.

"Well, let's see," Amara replied, smirking. "You told me that you came here for your investigation, but that was a week ago, and you keep coming back. You don't seem to do a whole lot of journalism with me. You just spend most of your time here working out. Isn't that right?"

Emma mentally reviewed their last few sessions. It was. "Yeah."

"That's where all your time and effort is going," Amara nodded. "Working out. So,

isn't that what you're really here for?"

Emma's brow twitched, but Amara's logic was undeniable. Or at least, she couldn't make herself think quickly enough to find fault with it. "Yeah..."

"You're really here to work out," Amara affirmed, cementing that thought into Emma's mind. "Not for your investigation."

"Y-yeah..." Emma agreed, with only slight reluctance.

"So," Amara concluded. "You care about working out. Not about your investigation. Not about your journalism."

"I..." That was a harder pill to swallow. Emma's head started to turn from side to side in instinctive denial. "I... don't..."

"Relax, Emma," Amara chided. "Remember. It's just an interview. Relax, and fall."

Emma fell. Emma was always falling, and once again, she was still.

"If you cared so much," Amara told her, "wouldn't you spend all your time interviewing me, instead of working out?"

"Yeah..." Emma agreed dreamily. It was so easy to accept what Amara told her. Much easier than thinking for herself. Hypnosis made her too dumb to think, and she was so deeply hypnotized.

"So," Amara pressed. "You don't care."

"I... don't... care."

Hairs raised on the back of Emma's neck as she finally agreed, warning her of the danger. But moments later, she felt amazingly free. It was like a weight had been lifted from her shoulders. She didn't care.

"You don't care about your investigation," Amara repeated. "Not compared to working out, anyway."

Emma nodded. It was getting easier to accept with each passing moment.

"And that's why you don't need to worry about being hypnotized," Amara concluded. "About being brainwashed. It doesn't matter to your investigation. You care about working out. And hypnosis is very, very good for helping you to work out."

"Right," Emma agreed. It all seemed so much simpler now, and she was grateful to Amara for explaining it to her. She was learning so much from this interview.

"Speaking of which," Amara said, grinning. "I think it's about time we get to the real reason you're here."

She reached up and clapped her hands together in front of Emma's face. To the hypnotized journalist, the sharp, loud sound was like a thunderbolt, jolting her back to awareness. Immediately, the details of the conversation she and Amara had been having started to recede from memory - but that bubbly new lightness remained.

Emma didn't care. She was just here to work out! It was such a relief.

"So how was hypnosis?" Amara asked.

"Great!" Emma replied brightly. She didn't remember much of their interview, but that wasn't very important.

Hypnosis was good for working out. And hypnosis made her dumber. And getting dumber felt good.

“Glad to hear it,” Amara said. “Ready to get down to business?”

Emma nodded. This was what she was here for. Her pretty, pink outfit was filling her with energy, and the knowledge of how healthy she was being put an extra spring in her step. She loved working out.

Especially because each exercise left her just a little bit dumber.

“Well, before we get started, I have an idea,” Amara said. “You’ve got your phone, right?”

“Sure.” Emma slipped her phone out of one of her pockets, before giggling absently. “I... don’t know why.”

She had a strange feeling that she’d brought her phone here to take notes on her interview with Amara, but that seemed silly. The interview wasn’t important. She was here to work out.

“Fortunately, I do,” Amara laughed. “Do you have an Instagram account?”

Emma nodded. She’d started it for her work, although it had more or less fallen into disuse. Which made sense, since she didn’t really care about her work very much.

“Time to put it to good use!” Amara mimed holding up a phone to take a high-angle selfie. “You love attention, right? Show your fans a nice peace sign!”

A couple of weeks later, Emma was in Mel's apartment, working out. That was nothing unusual. Emma had ended up practically moving in with her best friend. It seemed to make sense - Mel had the space, enjoyed her company, and Emma was already obligated to be there every evening for dinner. Why bother heading back to her own place each night?

The exercise was normal too, now. Emma's thrice-weekly sessions with Amara were no longer enough. Not even close. Working out had become an obsession for Emma, and accordingly, she had taken up jogging, bought an exercise mat and a set of home dumbbells, and had a whole series of exercise routines she kept to diligently, morning and night.

Working out was her calling. Emma understood that now. It felt good, on so many levels. Better than her old work ever had. These days, she barely even thought about journalism.

"Emma!" Mel called out, from the kitchen. "Food's ready, babe!"

Emma quickly finished up her set and headed over to the dining table, where Mel was serving up a meal of grilled chicken breasts, lentils, and some green vegetables. Fortunately for her, Mel seemed more than happy to cater to her newfound love of health foods.

As Emma sat down, she whipped out her phone and took a couple of quick pics of her meal. They'd go down great on her Instagram. Emma's socials had really been blowing up, ever since she started posting about her fitness journey. Making connections with other, similarly-minded girls was so much more fun than all the boring, serious stuff she'd been using social media for before.

“Um... hey, Emma?” Mel called out. “Earth to Emma? Your food’s gonna get cold.”

“Oops!” Emma giggled, putting down her phone.

She’d been distracted, checking on the comments and views on the pre-workout selfie she’d posted earlier. It was funny; Emma had never really used Instagram much before, but now, she constantly caught herself scrolling for hours and hours, hopelessly lost in the thrill of all that attention.

Emma loved attention.

“Emma, are you doing OK?” Mel asked. Emma realized her friend was staring at her with concern in her eyes.

“Sure!” she replied brightly. “Don’t I look like I’m doing good?”

Mel nodded. Emma knew there was no disputing that. She was in the best shape of her life. Thanks to all that exercise, her body had become sleek and toned, shedding all the puppy fat she’d been carrying around before. She was starting to look like a model.

“I just...” Mel pressed hesitantly. “You seem a little... distracted lately.”

Emma giggled again. “I guess.”

It was hard to deny, but Emma wasn’t troubled by it. She felt great.

Mel wasn’t to be dissuaded by Emma’s upbeat mood. “Hey so, how’s your investigation going?”

“Uh...” Emma blinked. “My... investigation?”

"You know, that fitness piece," Mel prompted. "Abuses of hypnosis. Stuff like that."

"Oh!" Emma giggled. She hadn't so much as thought about it in days. "I guess it's... like... what do you call it? On the back burner!"

"I see." Mel tilted her head, staring at Emma intently. "I'm surprised. You seemed so passionate about it!"

"I guess." In truth, Emma barely even remembered. "But, like, priorities change. I figured you'd be totally pleased! You were telling me to take a break."

"True," Mel conceded. "I'm glad you're taking some time off, babe."

"Uh-huh!" Emma agreed. "Anyway, I think I was kinda wrong about some stuff."

"Yeah?"

"I was soooo worried about hypnosis." Emma giggled. "But now I, like, know better! Hypnosis is great."

Hypnosis made her dumber, and getting dumber felt good.

"Right..." Mel said pensively. There was an odd look on her face. "I... you'll still be careful, right? People still know you as a serious journalist. I really wouldn't want someone, um, taking advantage. Say, when you're out jogging, or on your way to Amara's."

Emma just giggled yet again. "You worry so much!"

"I guess I do, babe, when it's about you." Mel's face relaxed into a smile. "Anyway, I'm glad to have you around more often. It's nice. And I sure don't mind the view."

Mel winked, and Emma dissolved into yet more giggling. She knew what Mel was alluding to. Her dress sense had certainly taken a turn. She was currently wearing a pink sports bra, and a pair of pink and white dolphin shorts - and that was it. Nothing else.

All the better to get the kind of attention Emma craved. It was the same reason she'd started getting serious about makeup. Whatever made her Instagram selfies blow up harder.

And of course, attention from Mel was nice too. Very nice.

"O-K!" Emma chanted as she finished her meal, before bouncing up out of her seat. "I'm gonna get ready to take another jog around the block. I've still got, like, a little more energy to burn off."

"Sure thing, babe," Mel replied. "Just... remember what I said, alright? Be careful."

Emma giggled. "You got it, bestie!"

She could tell Mel was worried, but she wasn't really sure why. As far as she was concerned, it was all very simple.

Exercise felt good. Exercise got her attention. And exercise made her dumber.

Getting dumber felt good.

It was as simple as that.

What was there to worry about?

“Four!” Emma chanted, counting her sit-ups as sweat dripped from her brow to stain the pink exercise mat underneath her. “Five! Six! S... s... um...”

“Seven,” Amara reminded her, smirking.

“Right.” Emma giggled. She was turning into such an airhead. “Seven! Eight! Nine! Ten!”

“Alright!” Amara reached down to help haul Emma to her feet. “Great session today. Good job.”

“Yay!” Emma bounced in celebration, before reaching for her water bottle and taking a nice, big mouthful. As she did, she looked at herself in one of the mirrors lining the walls of Amara’s home gym - and liked what she saw.

After weeks of healthy living, she’d decided it was time for a small makeover. Emma had gone blonde, and she loved it. She’d been buying lots of new clothes, too. All pink, of course. Nice, bright colors like pink and blonde were perfect for her new mindset. And accessories like her pink water bottle and pink hairband really helped with her Instagram engagement.

Emma was rapidly becoming a social media diva. She just couldn’t help it. She loved the attention.

For that matter, she could see Amara checking her out in the mirror too. That made Emma giggle and preen. She loved all kinds of attention, and she knew lots of girls who loved her new, athletic body.

It was kind of a shame that Amara seemed reluctant to put the moves on her. The tall, buff personal trainer was incredibly hot, and Emma's sex drive had been through the roof lately.

"OK!" Amara announced. "Let's do a quick breathing exercise to cool down."

"Sure!" Emma replied brightly. She was up for anything, and she knew what breathing exercises meant.

Hypnosis.

"Emma," Amara said slowly. "*Fall.*"

Emma's eyes fluttered as she let the bliss of trance take her. It was such a thrill, knowing that one little word from Amara was all it took nowadays.

Emma loved hypnosis. Hypnosis made her dumber.

"I want you to take some deep breaths for me, Emma," Amara began. "And as you do, feel your heartbeat gradually returning to its steady, normal rhythm."

Emma nodded sleepily. She was already so deep. All of this was completely familiar; they did it at the end of every workout session now.

"Now," Amara continued, after a few moments, "I want you to take an extra-deep breath for me. And as you do, I want you to think about all the things that have been distracting you from your work-out goals over the past few days. Whatever those might be - stray thoughts, random pieces of information, unhelpful memories - I want you to feel them all gathering up in your chest as you inhale."

Emma nodded again. This, too, was a familiar exercise. At the end of all their workouts, Amara helped her to forget things. This time, a whole bunch of old memories came to mind; for some reason, Emma kept catching herself reminiscing about high-school English class. She'd read so many books back then! Books with big, long words she didn't understand anymore. She gathered up a bunch of thoughts about politics, too. It was annoying how they buzzed around in her mind whenever she caught the news.

"And now, breathe out," Amara instructed. "And as you do, imagine all of those thoughts that you've been gathering up being pushed out of your body. Imagine them blowing out of your lips, and feel them slip out of your mind at the same time."

Emma breathed out, and all those thoughts and memories left her, turning into nothing more than thin air.

She sighed happily and giggled a few times. She loved getting dumber like that. It made it so much easier to focus on working out! Plus, the way Amara used hypnosis for it was so hot. It was like one of her naughty little fantasies come to life.

Emma felt like, maybe, a long time ago, something about that might have bothered her. But at this point, she really couldn't remember.

And she liked it that way.

Amara clapped her hands to wake Emma out of trance. "Perfect," the personal trainer said. "I think we're done for the day. Unless you want to ask me any more questions, that is."

Emma tilted her head to one side, curious. "Um... questions?"

"You know," Amara prompted, "for your investigation."

Dumbfounded, Emma simply blinked. “What investigation?”

A grin slowly crept across Amara’s face. “Actually, don’t worry about it.”

“OK!” Emma accepted that at once. She loved not worrying about things.

As Amara watched the former journalist gather up her stuff, she reached for her phone. It was time. Emma was absolutely perfect. Amara sent one, simple, fateful message to her employer.

She’s ready.

Chapter Three

“Five!” Emma chanted as she worked out, in a bright, bubbly, irrepressible voice that filled Amara’s entire gym. “Six! Seven!”

“Nice form!” Amara called out.

The personal trainer was watching from the sidelines as Emma worked through the last of her exercises. She didn’t need to count for Emma anymore - the loud, bouncy, exceptionally vapid pop music that accompanied her workouts was all she needed to keep rhythm. Nor did she need to provide much instruction. For all the brains and smarts Emma had lost, how to exercise properly had become second nature to her.

“Eight!” Emma was performing a set of bouncy, skipping knee lifts. Each number she counted was accompanied by her chest heaving as her pink, skimpy outfit completely failed to keep her breasts in place. “Nine! Ten!”

With that, she was finished. Emma bent over and rested her hands on her thighs, gasping for breath. Even exhausted from an hour of intensive exercise, she was the very picture of brainless beauty. Her figure had become slim and athletic without losing any of its curves, and her bleached, blonde hair was tied back in a ponytail to keep it from smearing her makeup. She looked like an athletic barbie doll.

Amara hardly approved of working out in makeup, but the client's requests always came first. And even she couldn't deny how enticing Emma looked, with eyeliner making her eyes look bigger and even more vacant, and glossy, bright pink lipstick that seemed to beg for kisses, or fingers, or more.

For Emma, the makeup was as mandatory as breathing. Anything to look her best for her adoring fans.

Right on cue, as she recovered her composure, Emma was lifting her selfie stick and forming a perfect duck face expression for the camera. As soon as she posted to Instagram, her phone started blowing up with replies and likes. She was becoming quite the influencer.

That was no surprise. Thanks to Amara, it was practically the only thing left in her head for her to care about.

"OK! That's a wrap," Amara announced, clapping her hands. "Remember to hydrate, Emma. Now, I need to tell you something. This is the end of our final session together."

Emma was already sipping greedily from her pink, sequined water bottle, but once she heard that she rushed over to Amara and looked up at her with a pleading, pouting expression on her face.

"Awwww!" she whined. "Why's it, like, gotta be our last?"

Amara's nostrils flared. Hearing the formerly intelligent, driven ex-reported speak in vapid, valley girl drawl was quite the trip. The tall, muscular trainer took it as proof of a job well done.

"I'm afraid that's just how it's gotta be," Amara replied.

“But why?” Emma’s pout only grew more pronounced and more adorable.

“Because someone else is going to take over your training,” Amara explained.
“Starting today, in fact.”

“Oh.” Emma greeted that news with nothing more than a glassy-eyed stare. Then, right on cue, Amara’s doorbell rang.

“They’ve arrived,” Amara said. “Wait here.”

As always, Emma did what she was told. She waited in Amara’s home gym for a couple of minutes as Amara opened the door, greeted Emma’s new trainer, and finally, led her inside to where Emma was waiting.

It was Mel.

Emma blinked several times upon seeing her. Her fogged-over, dumbed-down brain couldn’t fathom why her best friend Mel would be here right now. All she could do was giggle, smile, and offer her friend a wave.

Exercise made her dumb. And she’d done so much exercise.

Mel returned the wave, but with a strange, unreadable expression on her face. As she turned to speak with Amara, it was immediately clear that this was a different Mel from the one Emma was used to. She seemed firmer, more focused, and unusually businesslike.

“You’re sure she’s perfect?” Mel said to the personal trainer. “I don’t doubt your skill, Amara. But the specifications I gave you were exacting for a reason.”

"I'm sure," Amara replied. She, too, was all business. "And you'll have plenty of chances to see for yourself. If there are any issues, I'll address them."

Mel nodded, satisfied. "Good. Then, here's your payment."

She handed Amara a thick, brown envelope. There was no mistaking what was inside, or that it was a substantial amount of money. Amara leafed through it, then nodded.

"Let's hand her over," she said.

The two of them approached Emma. The bimbofied girl looked between them uncertainly. She couldn't tell what they were talking about, but it sounded serious, and for some reason, it set off all kinds of inexplicable alarm bells in the pit of her stomach. Lost memories of a previous life tugged at the corners of her mind, and gears in her head turned as she strove to figure out what was going on.

Nothing came to mind. She was far, far too dumb.

A vapid giggle escaped Emma's lips. She couldn't help it.

"Emma," Amara said in a firm, clear voice. "You must be exhausted after all that exercise. Let's do some hypnosis. Why don't you *fall* for me?"

That one little trigger word was all it took. There was no resistance whatsoever as the last remnants of Emma's thoughts slipped out of her mind. Thanks to Amara's conditioning, she lacked any willpower to resist, and her empty, bimbofied brain was always perched on the precipice of trance. Besides, Amara had taught Emma to welcome hypnosis eagerly. Her shoulders slumped and her arms fell limp at her sides, and her eyes flitted and flickered back into her head. Within moments, she was completely hypnotized.

Mel studied her carefully. “*Fall*?” She tilted her head. “Just *fall*?”

“Sometimes, more complex and naturalistic triggers can have their uses,” Amara replied. “But we don’t need to be discreet. And her response is keyed to my voice, so there’s no risk of her falling into a trance for anyone else.”

“Right.” Mel nodded. She looked like she was committing that to memory.

“Which reminds me,” Amara continued, pulling out her phone. “And... there. I’ve emailed you a dossier regarding her brainwashing. Trigger phrases, expected responses, the techniques I’ve used - things like that. Everything you should need.”

“Thank you.”

Emma could hear everything they were saying, but their words passed in one ear and out the other. They meant nothing to her.

“Now, Emma,” Amara said, turning to the entranced girl. “Listen to me very carefully. You can’t help but listen to me when you’re in this open, helpless, hypnotized state. You know that everything I tell you will sink deep into your subconscious, and become part of you. Isn’t that right?”

“Uh... huh,” Emma replied in a dull voice.

“Good,” Amara continued. “Now, I want you to think about how you feel when I tell you to ‘fall’. From now on, the same thing will happen when Mel - and only Mel - says that word to you. When she tells you to ‘fall’, you’ll slip into a trance just like this one. But you won’t respond that way to anyone else. Not even me. Do you understand?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Perfect,” Amara said. She turned to Mel. “Well, fundamentally, that’s it. She’s all yours.”

That comment brought a hint of color to Mel’s cheeks. She reached out and caressed Emma’s face gently. “Mine,” she breathed.

Amara hesitated for a long moment before speaking up. “I... wouldn’t normally ask. It’s not my business to know. But I-“

“You want to know why I’m doing this,” Mel finished. “Right?”

Amara nodded. She looked faintly embarrassed at her own lack of professionalism. “Usually, there’s nothing complicated about it,” she explained. “For someone of your social standing, they usually want me to take care of a rival, or an obstacle, or a pretty face who happened to catch their eye. Not a, uh, close friend.”

“I suppose I don’t mind telling you,” Mel said. She looked to Emma, the ghost of a smile playing across her face. “And I owe you an explanation too, don’t I, babe?”

Still, Emma comprehended nothing.

“Emma is very important to me,” Mel began. “She’s not just a pretty face. Not just someone I wanted to possess. She’s special. I care for her deeply. That’s why I needed to save her.”

Since she wasn’t looking at her, Amara raised an eyebrow. Regardless, Mel sensed her skepticism.

“I know, it sounds a little crazy. But there are exactly two things Emma needs saving from: herself, and everybody else.” Mel laughed ruefully. “Ever since college, I’ve

watched her work herself half to death. She can't stop. What she does is too meaningful. Too important. But it's killing her. Not enough sleep, not eating right, no time to enjoy things or connect with people."

"I see," Amara said evenly. "You needed to help her relax. Loosen up."

"That's right," Mel agreed. "And then there's everybody else. You're the one who gave me the heads up, Amara. Emma's too much of a crusader for her own good. She treats the world like it's as fair as it should be, rather than like it's as unfair as it really is. She wants to expose unethical mind controllers - and we both know that's a sure way to get yourself in a world of trouble."

Amara nodded. There were rules and laws, yes, but those never seemed to work when you were dealing with someone who could get inside your head, and pay everyone else to look the other way. Emma wouldn't have been the first well-intentioned journalist to run afoul of a powerful hypnotist with a mean streak.

"Emma's already pissed off the wrong people," Mel continued. "It's only a matter of time before one of them decides to take care of her. When I thought about what they might do... I couldn't just sit by and let that happen. That's when I knew. It had to be me."

She reached out and stroked Emma's face again.

"I know it might seem like the same thing," Mel said. "But there's a big difference: I'll make sure she's happy. I'll make sure she stays good, and sweet, and kind. I won't let anyone else twist that wonderful heart of hers. Now that she's like this, she won't be in any danger. She's harmless and she's under my family's protection, and she won't even have to suffer with the guilt of having lost her calling as a journalist. As far as she'll ever know, she's living her best life."

"It was the only way, huh?" Amara nodded, her expression neutral. She wasn't one to judge. "She's really that stubborn?"

Mel sighed. "You don't know the half of it. It's why I love her so much."

"I understand," Amara said. "Thank you for indulging my curiosity. It won't happen again. Now, you mentioned wanting to add the finishing touches yourself?"

"That's right," Mel replied. "It's personal. I want it to be me."

"Memory alteration." Amara made a face. "It can be... sensitive. Are you sure you're up to it?"

"That's why I'm doing it here: so you can supervise." Mel's demeanor betrayed no uncertainty. "But also? Yes, I'm sure. I've been taking lessons. Dearest Mommy knows what she's talking about."

That was all Amara needed to hear. She knew exactly what Melanie Adams's parents were capable of.

"OK." Mel sucked in a deep breath. "Let's get started."

She stood directly facing Emma, with a look of intense concentration on her face. Amara retreated to one side and posed herself leaning against the wall a short distance away, from where the hulking woman could keep a watchful eye on what happened.

"Emma," Mel began. "Can you hear me?"

"Uh-huh," Emma murmured. She yielded to Mel's voice just as naturally as she had to Amara's. Amara had primed her to listen to her friend, and even if she hadn't, in this

state, the bimbofied girl was utterly defenseless.

“Good.” Mel’s heart was pounding. “I want you to listen closely and do exactly as I tell you. Understand?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Emma.” Mel made herself exhale, and take another breath. “I want you to remember.”

Hearing that made Emma twitch a little. Amara had never once asked her to remember. Only to forget.

“Remember,” Mel repeated. “Reach deep into your memories, and remember. If any old images or feelings or experiences come to you, I want you to let yourself feel them. Let them wash over you.”

A frown appeared on Emma’s face. Despite how much Amara had taken away from her, when she made herself remember, there were still little flickers of memory that flitted around her like flies.

“Good,” Mel encouraged. “Sink deeper into those memories for me, Emma. *Fall* into them for me.”

Emma’s face once again went slack, but she kept twitching from moment to moment. There was something uncomfortable about the memories that kept assailing her. They didn’t fit the version of herself she now knew. It was like they belonged to someone else, even though they were unmistakably hers.

“Now tell me,” Mel urged, “how did you end up here, Emma?”

"I... I..." Emma didn't know how to even begin answering that. When she tried, the mass of contradictions that filled her mind gave her a throbbing headache. "I... uh..."

"What do you do for work?" Mel pressed, even though it clearly gave her no pleasure to do so. "What's your occupation? Your calling?"

"I..." Emma whimpered. She didn't want to think about this.

"What did you do in college? How did we meet each other? What did you aspire to be when you were growing up?"

"I..." Emma's head felt like it was splitting open. "D-don't..."

"Emma," Mel said firmly. "Relax. *Fall.*"

Again, Emma went slack. Some of the tension and worry drained from her face. Watching from the sidelines, Amara was impressed. Mel was a natural. She made leading Emma through trance seem effortless.

"When I tell you to remember," Mel asked, "how does it make you feel?"

It took Emma a long time to formulate an answer. Trying to remember was hard. Her memories didn't seem to fit together properly, and trying to slot them together made her head hurt. But more than that, the memories themselves were incredibly unpleasant. She remembered long hours of hard work, for days on end, accompanied by sleepless nights. She remembered fatigue, anger, and sadness. She remembered feeling exhausted and alone. It was such a far cry from her new, happy, carefree existence.

Why would she ever want to remember a life like that?

“Like... sad,” Emma murmured. “Stressed. Tired.”

Mel nodded like that was exactly what she had expected to hear. “I see. So, what if I could make it so you never had to remember that stuff ever again?”

Emma only hesitated for a moment before she nodded. Wanting to forget all about those strange, unhappy memories seemed only natural.

“But,” Mel added, “if you forget about all that, you’ll need new memories to replace them with, won’t you?”

Emma nodded slowly. That seemed to make sense.

“Fortunately, I can take care of that for you,” Mel said. “And that way, you can forget about anything that makes you feel sad. That’s what you want, isn’t it?”

“I... yeah,” Emma agreed eventually.

“Good.” Mel reached out to take Emma’s hands. “Then listen to me, Emma. Since this is what you want, I’m sure you’ll find it perfectly easy and natural to accept the new memories I give you. And, of course, those will naturally replace all those old, sad memories you’d like to forget about. Understand?”

“Uh-huh.”

Mel took another deep breath. This was the critical moment.

“Emma, you remember us meeting in high school,” Mel recounted. That part, at least, was true. “You were always very air-headed. More concerned with your appearance and fitness rather than having good grades. Even though you were always a sweet girl, you kept getting yourself into trouble.”

Emma nodded slowly as her empty mind absorbed the new life story Mel was feeding her. Memories of a studious high-school life, already long buried, finally faded into nothingness.

“That’s probably why you gravitated to me,” Mel continued. “You always needed someone to tell you where you needed to be and what you needed to do, and I was happy to do it. Being submissive towards me always felt perfectly natural. And you loved the way I always had my family’s money to spend on new makeup and new skincare products.”

Emma kept nodding. None of it was true, but that no longer mattered to her. Her mind was an open book, and Mel was free to write whatever she liked in its pages. Mel couldn’t give her the whole picture, of course, but her hypnotized psyche rushed to fill in the gaps. Within moments, she was convinced it was the only life she’d ever known.

She’d been a vapid, vain, teenage bimbo, always following Mel’s lead and letting her friend take care of her.

It made perfect sense.

It was the only thing that made sense.

“After that, you followed me to college.” Mel squeezed Emma’s hands tighter. “You would have been lost without me, after all. But you couldn’t handle it. You weren’t smart enough. You had to drop out. But I let you move in with me. I took care of you. Always have, always will.”

This time, Emma twitched a little. Things like passing her exams and graduating were proud memories; letting them go wasn’t so easy. But in the end, she couldn’t fight Mel. After all, it hardly seemed possible that she’d been such a good student in college,

given that she'd been a bimbo in high school and was a bimbo again now. It didn't make any sense.

Dropping out to depend on Mel seemed so much more likely.

And within moments, that was her new life story.

"But why did we always stay so close?" Mel stepped closer to Emma; her breath was hot on the hypnotized girl's face. "Because we had feelings for each other, Emma. We were in love all along. Eventually, we confessed our feelings and started dating. You moved in with me for good and that's how it's been ever since. You've been following my lead and letting me take care of you. Letting me dominate you. You love that we have that kind of relationship."

Emma exhaled sharply as she processed this latest revelation. It was a huge suggestion to swallow, but at the same time, it wasn't so hard for her to believe that the deep affection she'd always held for her most important friend was actually something more.

Soon, the fact that she loved Mel started to feel more and more right. It was surely why she'd always been at Mel's side. Why she'd always been content to let Mel be so dominant with her. Why she'd always enjoyed it so much.

She was in love with Mel. And better yet, Mel was in love with her.

Emma started to blush.

"That's who you are," Mel finished. "Emma, you're my devoted, loving, sweet, submissive, bimbo girlfriend. And you never need to remember anything else."

That suggestion soon settled across Emma's mind. It became her. Both Mel and

Amara could see her gradually accept its weight.

She never needed to remember anything else. And she never would.

“OK,” Mel said, her voice full of unmistakable tension. “It’s time to wake up, Emma.”

Mel snapped her fingers.

Emma blinked as she awoke. Trance always left her a little disoriented - not that it bothered her. Nothing much did. This time the brainfog was even deeper than usual, as her brainwashed mind reeled from the new set of memories it had just been given. But after a few moments, a little light returned to her eyes and she looked up at Mel with a look of recognition on her face. Before long, that look blossomed into a big, warm, adoring smile.

“Mel!” Emma exclaimed. “Oh my gosh! You’re, like, actually here! I always totally miss you when I go for my workouts.”

Before Mel could brace herself, the bimbo threw herself at her girlfriend and wrapped her up in a tight hug. And then, better yet, Emma put her lips to Mel’s in a passionate, loving kiss.

Somehow, despite their respective situations, Mel ended up blushing even harder than Emma.

“Looks like you did a good job,” Amara commented wryly, approaching the couple. “Emma, it’s been fun. And Mel... it’s been a pleasure doing business with you.”

Mel understood exactly what Amara meant. Their business was concluded. She extracted herself from Emma’s arms, nodded respectfully to the personal trainer, and then started heading for the door.

“Come along, babe,” she told her bimbofied girlfriend, who was already trotting at her heels. “It’s time for us to go home.”

“Hi babe! I’m back!”

At the sound of Mel’s key in the lock of their apartment, Emma’s head had already whipped around like she was an excited puppy. Hearing her girlfriend’s voice after that put a huge, happy, vapid grin on her face.

It was totally unfair that Mel had started going out to work five days a week. But at least it meant Emma got to look forward to her coming home every evening.

“You still busy?” Mel asked, as she came into view of the living room.

“Nuh-uh!” Emma replied. “Just, like, finishing up.”

“Good,” Mel purred as she set down her bag. “That means you’re all mine.”

That prompted a wave of deliriously giddy giggles from Emma. If there was one upside to Mel going out all day, it was that it made it easier for Emma to get her own work done. When Mel was around, she always got so distracted.

Plus, when Mel got home, she was always happy to reward Emma for being so hardworking.

Thanks in part to that incentive, Emma’s new career was flourishing. She’d spent all

afternoon busy with it, and she had just been about to finish up and get changed when Mel had arrived.

Currently, she was dressed in an absurdly skimpy, obnoxiously pink workout outfit - although calling it that was something of a stretch, given how wildly impractical it was. Above the waist, Emma was wearing nothing but a pink sports bra that somehow seemed to behave more like a push-up. And below it, she had on pink yoga pants that featured an obscene cut-out around her ass and her front, revealing that underneath, she was wearing a slutty, lacy, unbelievably sheer thong.

Still in pink, of course.

Emma was also wearing a full face of makeup, complete with glossy lipstick and glittery freckles, and had done her bleached, blonde hair in pretty, braided pigtails especially for the occasion. All in all, it would have been a completely ridiculous getup to exercise in.

Which was why, despite the exercise mat beneath her feet and the dumbbells placed strategically nearby, she wasn't exercising. She was doing a photoshoot. A little further away, an array of lights and cameras had been set up specifically to capture every part of Emma's body in the best possible light as she contorted herself into all kinds of alluring poses.

All the better to show off her deliciously athletic physique.

It wasn't that Emma had given up working out, of course. Her regular morning and evening workouts were still sacrosanct. It had been weeks since her last session with Amara, and she was still pushing herself as hard as ever. It had simply turned out that her Instagram influence had easily converted into a sizable number of OnlyFans subscribers who were interested in a little more than just workout advice and inspirational quotes. They wanted to lust after Emma, and Emma was happy to indulge

them.

Emma was a model. And she loved it. All the attention got her unbelievably hot, and it was bringing in a surprising amount of money. Next month, she was planning a trip to the Bahamas, just so she could do some beach shoots and show off the ridiculously slutty bikini she'd ordered. More than anything else, though, she was very grateful to have such a meaningful career doing something she was good at. Most people weren't so lucky.

"Hey, Emma." Mel suddenly crossed the room and folded her arms around her bimbo girlfriend's body. "You haven't been showing off more than you should. Right?"

Emma relaxed gladly into Mel's arms, and then let out a gleeful giggle when she felt Mel's hands reach down and slip into her thong, squeezing her ass possessively. She loved it when Mel got like this.

"Um..." she tittered, a smug, crafty look coming over her face. "I liiiike... totally don't know what you mean!"

"Is that so?" Mel dug in with her fingernails. Emma squealed. "Did you really forget so easily, my airheaded darling?"

Emma couldn't reply. She was helpless in Mel's arms.

"Well, let me remind you." Mel couldn't help but smirk indulgently at her beloved. "This? This is all mine."

She squeezed Emma's ass even tighter, and the bimbo's squeals devolved into moans.

"These are all mine too."

Mel worked her hands up between the two of them and started to squeeze and grope Emma's tits through her bra. She wasn't gentle, and it made Emma moan even louder.

"And this," Mel continued, as she reached down once more and slipped a hand into the front of Emma's thing, "is definitely mine."

When Emma felt two of Mel's fingertips pushing against the entrance of her already-wet pussy, her moans fell away in favor of breathless gasps, and she started grinding her hips to try to achieve more stimulation. Mel's smirk widened.

"You got that, babe?" she asked firmly.

"Y-y-y-yeah," Emma managed in a weak, shuddery voice. Whenever Mel acted this way with her, it made her mind go totally blank - not that it was ever very full to begin with.

"Good girl," Mel replied gently. She kissed Emma on the forehead and stopped groping her.

It was a long-standing agreement between them. Emma could show off for and tease her OnlyFans subscribers as much as she wanted with her photoshoots - but no nudity. That was for Mel's eyes only.

Emma didn't mind the possessiveness one bit. Being Mel's was more important to her than anything.

"Hey," Mel said abruptly. Emma felt her arms close tighter around her shoulders. "I need to ask you something important."

“Um... like, sure.” Emma wasn’t sure what to make of that. She giggled. “Although important stuff usually, like, isn’t my strong suit.”

Mel didn’t laugh. She just looked into Emma’s eyes and asked: “are you happy?”

Emma blinked. It was a strange question - but not a difficult one, despite the weight in Mel’s voice. “Yes!” she answered, looking up at Mel with big, round, innocent eyes. “I’m totally happy! I love you, I love my life, and I love my job. What else would I even, like need?”

A warm smile spread across Mel’s face. “Good. Good.”

Eventually, the two of them pulled apart. Emma was left a little confused about what had just passed between them. “Um... how about you?” she asked uncertainly, just because it felt like she should say something.

“Me?” Mel seemed surprised.

“Yeah. Um...” Emma giggled. “How is it, like, working with your mom?”

Mel barked a short laugh. “It’s certainly, ah, educational.”

Emma didn’t really know why Mel had given up her nebulous consulting career to start working under her parents, nor did she really understand what Emma’s parents did. But she did know that they were a pretty big deal.

“You know, I always thought I’d hate learning the family business,” Mel mused. “I put it off as long as I could. It seemed like too much hard work. My ultimate nemesis. And, well, it is. It’s not just *business* business, after all. They’re teaching me hypnosis, and slowly passing down some trade secrets. Which politicians and rivals they have their hooks in. What their triggers and weaknesses are. Stuff like that.”

Emma listened rapt. Most of it went completely over her head. She didn't know anything at all about business. But the thought of Mel getting even better at hypnosis certainly made her heart flutter.

Hypnosis was another thing that got her unbelievably hot.

"But it turns out, it's actually pretty rewarding," Mel went on. "Fun, even. I guess it's all the mind control. Somehow, something ended up giving me a taste for it."

She winked at Emma, who giggled and then pressed herself against her taller girlfriend's side.

"I'm, like, glad you're having a good time!" she chirruped. "Plus, you look totally hot in that suit."

That got a real laugh out of Mel. "Thanks, babe," she replied. "Good to know. By the way, you're gonna take care of dinner, right?"

"For sure!" Emma replied brightly. "I've got the chicken, like, mar... uh... mari... um... prepped already. It's gonna be soooo delicious! Low fat, low carb, high protein, and totes Instagrammable."

"Sounds good," Mel said, amused.

"Oh yeah, um..." Emma perked up. She'd just remembered something. "Someone called earlier... uh... the power company, I think? They said something about like... billing? Or, uh... our account? I... kinda didn't really understand."

She flashed Mel a sheepish look. Mel just smiled at her fondly.

"I'll take care of it, babe," she promised. "I'll take care of everything - later."

Without warning, she pulled Emma into her arms again. Emma, giggling, didn't resist.

"And, like, dinner?" the bimbo asked.

"That can come later too." Mel planted a hungry, passionate kiss on Emma's lips. "For now, I want something else."

"Yeah?" Emma giggled breathlessly and batted her eyelids at her girlfriend. "Like... um... what is it?"

"This."

Mel shoved Emma hard, sending her tumbling backward onto their couch. She gasped in surprise, and before she could recover, Mel was all over her. Still dressed in her smart suit, she was peeling Emma's yoga pants away from her body and pulling her thong aside so she could push two of her fingers into her girlfriend's pussy.

"F-fuck!" Emma moaned, still fighting for balance. "B-babe... ohmigosh, what's g-got into- ah!"

"I guess being surrounded by hypnosis talk all day really got me worked up." Mel licked her lips and kept her fingers moving inside her girlfriend. "Are you complaining?"

"N-no." Emma's moans were mixed in with giggles as the sudden, dazzling pleasure turned her head bubbly and light. The way her hips were bucking made it perfectly clear just how welcome Mel's attentions were.

“Good girl.” Mel licked her lips. “Now spread your legs for me.”

Emma obediently let her legs fall apart to each side, creating space for Mel to climb onto the couch and plant her face between Emma’s thighs.

As soon as Mel’s tongue made contact with Emma’s cunt, the bimbo’s moans jumped up an entire octave and grew loud enough to fill the entire apartment from wall to wall. She threw back her head and arched her back, as the pleasure suddenly coursing through her body made her its puppet.

Mel’s body was thrumming with pleasure too. Seeing the woman she cared about so much this way was incredible. But she still wanted to see more.

“Mellllll!” Emma whined, her voice a high-pitched, valley girl drawl. “T-this is toooooo muchhhh...”

Her girlfriend simply ignored her, all her attention focused on enjoying Emma’s body. Mel kept pushing her tongue deeper into the folds of her girlfriend’s cunt, gripping her thigh tightly with one hand to keep her from squirming out of reach. Over the last few weeks she’d gained plenty of experience going down on Emma, and she knew exactly where to touch and lick to bring her to the brink of orgasm immediately.

Mel’s other hand was roaming over the rest of Emma’s body, squeezing and groping, delighting in all the ways she had changed thanks to Mel’s hypnotic influence. All the puppy fat was gone from the bimbo’s form, leaving her with a sleek, athletic figure that hinted appealingly at the toned muscles underneath. But she hadn’t lost any of her feminine curves, as Mel could tell for herself when she brought her hand down to cup and grope Emma’s incredible ass. It was deliciously soft, and she loved the way her touch made Emma squirm, her abs flexing and tits bouncing on her chest.

It was a body to kill for - and it belonged to Mel.

“I-I’m gonna cum!” Emma moaned. She was writhing like crazy, but Mel’s hands were always there to steady her.

“Already?” Mel teased, her voice made wet and lewd by the way Emma’s wetness was dripping from her lips. “Wow. I really do need to keep an eye on you, if you’ll cum this fast for any girl with a sweet tongue.”

“Nnnoooo!” Emma protested. “I-i-it’s jjuust you!”

Mel smirked. That was exactly what she wanted to hear.

“Good girl,” she told her bimbofied girlfriend, her words punctuated by kisses she planted on Emma’s clit. “I have a treat for you.”

That made Emma perk up, even through the fog of pleasure she was currently drowning in. “U-ummm... yeah?”

“I’ve been thinking about it all day,” Mel said. “About hypnosis. About how much you love it.”

Emma nodded eagerly. Hypnosis was unbelievably hot.

“Normally, I just use hypnosis to help with your training,” Mel lifted her head so she could better watch Emma’s reactions, using her hands to keep her bimbo girlfriend stimulated. “But... what if, right now, I made you *fall* for me?”

The trigger word had an immediate, dramatic impact on Emma. Her straining muscles went limp at once and she collapsed against the couch, her mind rapidly turning open, blank, and receptive. But this time, Mel had no brainwashing or suggestions to offer her.

Only pleasure.

As soon as Mel's tongue made contact with Emma's cunt again, she was drowning in it. In trance, there were no distractions. No stray thoughts. No shame or embarrassment. Nothing to taint the pleasure that her girlfriend could bring her. As a result, it was so much purer, and so much more intense.

"Fall," Mel repeated breathlessly. *"That's it. Fall."*

Now that she was hypnotized, the way Emma squirmed and writhed wasn't nearly as dramatic. But Mel could still see the telltale signs of what her cunnilingus was doing to her girlfriend. As she pushed her tongue into Emma's cunt, the former journalist's back started to arch once more, just barely. Her limbs twitched and stretched as electric shocks of pleasure raced across her body, and her blank, glassy eyes started to roll back into her head.

Emma was in heaven. Perfect.

"Emma," Mel instructed, as she devoted herself to licking Emma's pussy. "I want you to feel all of this. I want you to give in to the pleasure. I want you to let it build in your body."

"Uhhhh... hhh-uh," Emma slurred. Mel was incredibly turned on hearing the way her voice was empty of thought but thick with pleasure.

"Good girl," Mel purred. As she kept eating Emma out, though, she noticed her girlfriend starting to stir. "Emma," she said firmly. *"Fall* for me again. Just keep *falling*."

Once again, Emma slumped against the couch. The trigger word was irresistible. Mel was just getting more and more turned on at the way her mere words could turn

her bimbofied girlfriend into a helpless, obedient pleasure-puppet.

"*Fall*," she urged, watching as each fresh use of the trigger word plunged Emma deeper and deeper into bliss. "I want you to *fall* and *fall* for me, Emma. You can keep *falling* forever."

Emma's moans had collapsed into low, weak, entranced, utterly incoherent murmurs. She was so limp and empty that she seemed almost unconscious, but Mel could still sense how deeply drowned in pleasure she was. She could feel her body responding to her touch; her cunt dripping onto the couch, and the small muscles in her thighs twitching as her body begged for more. Mel knew her girlfriend was experiencing the unimaginable ecstasy only hypnosis could bring.

It was time to bring it to its climax.

"Now," Mel panted, "as you *fall*, you can feel the pleasure building in your body. You can feel yourself approaching the edge. Ready to cum, as soon as I say the word."

Once again, Emma's body started to tense up. Mel's words were making her even more needy and sensitive, and even through trance, the effect was palpable. Mel couldn't keep a wild grin from her face.

"More," she urged. "Building to a peak. Building with each passing moment, more and more. You're so ready to cum, Emma."

Emma couldn't contain it. Her moans were growing again, and she was beginning to squirm. Her mind had been switched off, but her body was desperate.

"The pleasure is so great it's unbearable," Mel whispered. "But you still can't cum. Not until I say so. Not until I let you *fall* into bliss."

Emma's incoherent moans were starting to sound like begging, and her makeup had become ruined by sweat. A part of Mel wanted to keep teasing her for even longer, simply to see how deep she could push Emma. But in the end, she couldn't help indulging her girlfriend.

"OK," Mel said finally. "Cum for me."

The hypnotically-enhanced orgasm hit Emma like a thunderbolt. She started thrashing wildly beneath Mel, but the lingering effects of trance kept her moaning and screaming to a dull, muted whine. Mel, though, could tell exactly how hard she was cumming from the way Emma's thighs suddenly clamped around her head, keeping her trapped between them in a desperate bid for more pleasure.

Mel was impressed with how long the orgasm lasted. But once it finally ended, Emma slumped limp once more, her eyes closed, chest still heaving as she panted for breath. She had passed from trance into a kind of pleasure-struck daze. Mel clambered up next to her and carefully pulled Emma into her arms.

"L-love... you..." Emma babbled, as she half-consciously snuggled into Mel's body.

"I love you too," Mel replied fondly. Evidently, dinner was going to have to wait, but that was fine.

This may not have been the happily ever after Emma had once aspired to. But she was safe, happy, peaceful, and loved.

And for Mel, that was enough.

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