

I Have No Mouth

Chapter 2

When she woke up the next morning, remembered the weirdness of the night before, Evelyn shot out of bed.

The hypnosis. Being unable to tell Vi about it.

A whole array of emotion rocked through Evelyn as she recalled the events, tried to make sense of it.

Panic at not being able to speak. Astonishment that her brain had made up something else for her to say. Pure bafflement that the hypnosis actually seemed to have worked. Then... Uncertainty. Doubt.

She reached for her phone, scrolled her contact list.

Her thumb hovered over Luke's name.

What was it Dan had said?

'You'd think he'd be a bit more grateful. Me doing all this to help him win you over.'

Heat spread across Evelyn's face.

It wasn't like she didn't *know*. She wasn't *blind*. And, even if she was, plenty of others had let her know.

Luke had a crush on her.

She knew. Had known for years. And, like everyone else, she'd happily ignored the fact. If and when *he* chose to tell her, that'd change. But, so long as Luke was willing to keep his feelings for her to himself, Evelyn was happy to let him. Her plan had been to just wait, see what Luke decided. And, if he *did* open that can of worms one day, she'd figure out what to do and how she felt *then*.

But hypnotising her to be his girlfriend?

That... was *something*.

I don't even know if that's why he wanted to hypnotise me. Dan could've just been messing with me.

And the other things Dan had said, when he'd thought she was 'under' and unable to hear him...

Just messing with me. Seeing if I was faking.

Evelyn shifted uncomfortably, staring down at her phone screen.

Dan was a weirdo. But he wasn't 'bad'. Just goofy. Someone that no-one took too seriously. A prankster whose idea of a 'prank' was a little... unorthodox. He was the type of person who'd laugh at their own, unfunny jokes.

But that's all they were. Jokes. Him goofing off.

It wasn't *serious*.

Evelyn sighed, closed her eyes.

Why couldn't Luke have just kept his crush to himself? Why didn't he just tell her how he felt, instead of using *hypnosis* of all things? How was she supposed to sort all this out now?

Steeling herself, she opened her eyes, clicked call.

The phone rang. And it rang.

No answer.

She tried again.

No answer.

Great. Either he's sleeping, or he's ignoring me.

Probably sleeping, though.

Lips pursed, she sent him a message instead.

Even then, she couldn't mention anything about hypnosis. Her fingers refused to type the words. All she could do was type a vague message about 'last night' and how they needed 'to talk'.

It was over an hour later when a reply came.

"Come over," Evelyn read. "My place. I'll tell you everything."

Butterflies fluttered in Evelyn's stomach. And not the good ones.

She felt like she was going to puke.

Her gut churned and her skin prickled.

The hypnosis thing – that was one thing. A really dumb thing. And something she'd chew him out over. But it wasn't the *big* thing. It wasn't what was making her nauseous. Having to face Luke's feelings was.

Evelyn didn't respond to Luke's message.

What am I supposed to even say?

She got dressed, made a quick sandwich for Vi – which she left out on a kitchen counter for when her sister got up – and grabbed a quick snack for herself. Then she left the house, walked the short distance to Luke's place.

"Last night," she said to herself as she walked, "Luke and Dan-" *hypnotised me*. "Hung out with me."

She shook her head, scowled.

The first set of 'instructions' Dan had given her. She couldn't remember it word for word, but the gist of it remained. She couldn't tell anyone about being hypnotised, or communicate it in any way.

Only she *wasn't* telling anyone. She was alone.

So why couldn't she say it now?

"My friends," she tried again. *Hypnotised me*. "Are morons."

I mean, that's not wrong...

Before last night, she hadn't believed hypnosis was an actual, real thing. Her mental image of it involved people being called up to a stage and then pretending – or being peer pressured into – acting like a chicken or something. She hadn't thought it was real.

Now she did.

Not being able to talk about it – having her own mind turn against her when she tried – was both baffling and unnerving.

What else could it do?

Good thing it's Luke.

While she didn't distrust Dan, neither was she quite trusting enough to give him *that* kind of power over her.

Luke, though, was a softie.

She was certain that the only reason he'd wanted to hypnotise her was to 'confess' his feelings. Something he didn't have the courage to tell her otherwise. Once they'd had a chance to air everything out, get it all in the open, he'd be as embarrassed as she was about the hypnosis thing.

No doubt, it'd be something they'd laugh about years from now.

"My idiot friends-" *hypnotised me* "-are morons."

She shook her head, a wry smile tugging at her lips.

No way am I ever gonna let them live this down.

When she arrived at Luke's house, Evelyn rang the doorbell and waited. Her heart suddenly beating harder in her chest. A flare of anticipation gripped her.

Luke's feelings. This was it.

Only it wasn't Luke who opened the door.

Her eyes widened as she saw Dan standing there, a smile on his face and a lighter in his hand.

Evelyn's eyes were drawn to the flame like magnets.

Then the flame went out.

Evelyn wobbled in place, her eyes losing focus. Her entire body seemed to relax at once, sending her toppling forward.

Right into Dan's arms.
He pulled her inside the house.

"What do we do?" Luke's anxious voice sounded in front of her, moving back and forth as he paced. "What do we do? She knows! She knows we hypnotised her and-"

"For the love of god," Dan groaned. "Shut up."

"But she knows! Oh fuck, I knew this was a bad idea-"

"She doesn't know shit," Dan snapped. "All her message said was that she wanted to talk. That's it."

"Why else would she want to 'talk'?!"

"Cute-Tits doesn't remember anything."

"Don't call her that!"

Dan let out an exasperated sigh.

Is that what Dan calls me when I'm not around?

Her chest ached, but her body didn't react. *Couldn't* react. Dan had dumped her limp body onto a sofa. Try as she might, she couldn't move from it. Couldn't raise her arms or shift her legs. She couldn't even *blink*. Her unfocused eyes gazed at nothing, unmoving. The only parts of her body that *could* move were her pounding heart and her chest; slowly rising and falling as she breathed steadily.

"Relax," Dan grunted. "She doesn't remember anything. She must've woken up today with a hole in her memory or something. That's all. Your precious 'Evie' isn't going to turn against you."

"This was a bad idea," Luke mumbled, still pacing. "Maybe it's not too late. We can wake her up and explain everything and-"

"Why?" Dan barked out a humourless laugh. "So she can friendzone you and go off to college? How long do you think it'll be before she finds some 'charming' dude to date there? And, sorry sack that you are, you'll chase after her. Have to meet the dude who's going to pound-town with the love of your life. Yeah, that's right. I know why you're going to the same college as her. *Everyone* does."

"That's not-" Luke stammered. "She's not-"

Sympathy flushed through Evelyn. If she'd been able to, she'd have come to Luke's defence.

When her body refused her, limbs heavier than stone, a bit of that sympathy died. What *she* got up to when she got to college wasn't any of *their* business. That Dan had chosen not to go to college, and Luke had chosen to go to the same one as her, wasn't on her. Neither was Luke's life-long crush on her.

"Please," Dan scoffed. "You *know* she will. If you ever want her to see you as anything more than a 'friend', this is the way. But hey, if you wanna pussy out, I'll make her *my* girlfriend instead."

"No!" Luke shouted. He coughed, continued quieter. "No. We're doing this so she'll go out with me."

Dan snickered.

Evelyn saw movement in front of herself. The instinct to look, focus on it, only reminded her of her total paralysis.

Just wake me up. She pleaded silently. *We can forget all about this, go back to being friends.*

Was being 'friends' such a bad thing?

"Right then," Dan said, standing over her. "Let's do this."

In all her life, Evelyn had never felt so violated. Two people she trusted were trying to manipulate her. And not just *trying*. They were *doing* it. And she was powerless to stop it.

"Listen up, Evelyn," Dan said, loud and clear. "Last time you were hypnotised, we

were interrupted early. The three sets of instructions I gave you then – do you remember them?”

“Yes,” Evelyn said, mouth moving against her will.

“Good. The fourth instruction is this; you will not act any differently than you usually would – unless instructed otherwise. You won’t question gaps in your memory, or changes in your behaviour. You’ll act just as you did before being hypnotised, and won’t do anything that you usually wouldn’t have.”

There were no gaps in her memory. And the only ‘change in behaviour’ she had planned was cutting Dan right out of her life after this.

“And fifth,” Dan said, sounding a little more subdued and annoyed. “From now,” he leaned closer, whispered into Evelyn’s ear, “until I say so,” he stepped back, spoke louder, “you will be Luke’s girlfriend. You’ll act as if you’re in a relationship, go on dates, take things steady. All the things couples do when they’ve never gone out with anyone before. Your first boyfriend, his first girlfriend.”

There was something in Dan’s tone that sent a cold shiver down Evelyn’s spine. Like he was aware of something she and Luke weren’t.

“In fact!” Dan said, clapping his hands happily. “That’s why you’re here right now. Why you wanted to see Luke so bad. It’s to confess your feelings for him. You love him, and want to be with him. When I wake you from this trance, that’s what you’ll believe.”

It was not.

As the ‘trance’ came to an end, Evelyn sat up in her chair. Fully aware of why she was there, fully remembering everything that was going on. She wasn’t here to confess her non-existent feelings to Luke, she was here to call them out on their hypnosis crap!

And yet, as Dan stepped away and her gaze turned to Luke, she felt heat spread across her face.

An embarrassment and shyness her body felt, but her mind didn’t.

“Oh, Luke,” she heard her own voice say. “Hi...”

“Right then,” Dan announced. “I’ll leave you two lovebirds to hash things out. If you need me for anything,” he said to Luke, “gimme a call.”

Luke nodded his head eagerly.

As soon as Dan was out of the room, Luke turned to her. Approached the armchair she was sitting on. His cheeks were rosy and his gaze hesitant.

“Hey Evie,” he said nervously. “How’re you feeling?”

“I’m fine,” her body answered automatically, a smile forcing itself onto her face. “Could we... I mean... There’s something I need to tell you....”

“I think I know what it is,” Luke said, his face reddening further even as he smiled wide.

“You do?”

The hopefulness in her own voice made Evelyn want to scream.

This isn’t me! I don’t want this!

Surely Luke could see. Surely, he’d be able to look past her body’s fake smile and blush. If he cared about her as much as everyone seemed to think, *surely* he’d see the truth in her eyes.

“I feel the same way,” Luke breathed. “For as long as I can remember, I’ve... I’ve been in love with you.”

This isn’t love.

“Really?” She heard her own voice say, felt her cheeks swell into a huge smile. Her eyes began to water. “You mean it?”

“Yeah,” Luke smiled. “I mean it.”

The next thing she knew, Evelyn’s body was diving into Luke’s arms. Hugging him tight, tears rolling down her cheeks. Though whether those tears were of fake joy, or from

Evelyn's very real horror and disgust, she couldn't say.

Thankfully, things didn't progress beyond a hug.

As shy and awkward as Luke was, it'd take him time to build up the courage to start holding hands with her. The things she was worried about, acts that chilled her when she considered them, wouldn't happen any time soon.

She hoped.

As soon as she got the chance, she left Luke's house.

Before leaving, though, they set up a 'date' later that same day. Luke meekly suggested 'hanging out' together and, Evelyn's body – playing the part of a loving girlfriend – told him that they should go 'watch a movie' together.

Plans were made. A timeslot given for him to pick her up.

And out she went. Striding away from that house, her mind reeling from the encounter.

She walked. Not home, and not anywhere in particular. She just *walked*. Wandered down streets and suburbs, her mind trying to make sense of what was going on.

It was like a dream - *more like a nightmare* - that she wasn't waking up from.

Her own body had *turned* on her.

How is that even possible?!

And how was she going to fix it?

This 'game' had gone way too far. Way, way too far.

I have to put a stop to it, before it goes any further.

She pondered the problem. Struggled to think of a solution that'd solve everything. All the while, resisting the one idea that kept coming back to her.

Getting the police involved.

It wasn't what she wanted – getting Luke and Dan in trouble over a silly prank. But this had gone way beyond a prank. What was happening to her – what the guys had done – was something else. Something *foul*. To treat her like a thing, an object, and completely disregard her will... No. It was worse still. They'd actively *robbed* her of her free will. Stolen her ability to choose. She hadn't had a say in being Luke's 'girlfriend'. It was a decision they'd made for her.

She felt violated.

It's clear they don't want to stop.

She'd gone to Luke's place to sort things out, and they'd *ambushed* her. No... She didn't *want* to go to the police about this. But what other choice did she have?

Evelyn sighed, stopped walking.

She pulled her phone from a pocket, unlocked it and started dialling. Or, at least, that's what she'd *intended* to do.

Her thumb hovered above the number nine.

Evelyn narrowed her eyes, tried pressing down. But her thumb refused to move.

Why?

What she was trying to do – it wasn't against any of the 'instructions' Dan had given her. Was it?

-Don't tell anyone about hypnosis-

But I'm not! I'm not going to mention hypnosis specifically. I'll just say the guys are harassing me. I won't say a thing about hypnosis!

-Don't attempt to communicate with anyone about it-

But she *wasn't*. She could avoid saying the word, surely. She could give them just enough to question the guys, and Luke would confess to everything. Of that, Evelyn was certain.

-Don't let anyone know-

That couldn't be what was holding her back. Could it?

-Do everything to convince people that things are normal-

But...

-If anyone suspects anything, convince them otherwise-

Before Evelyn's eyes, her hand moved. She pocketed the phone and resumed walking.

No. No, there has to be a way around this...

Maybe... Maybe if she got far enough away, avoided the guys for long enough, the hypnosis stuff would wear off. She could catch a bus or train, go somewhere far away for a lil' while.

That hopeful idea was crushed a moment later, when Evelyn tried to move; set off sprinting towards the nearest bus stop.

Her legs didn't obey her. Her body kept walking in the same direction, not turning to go where Evelyn wanted.

-Don't do anything you usually wouldn't-

Trapped.

She was trapped. In her own body.

Evelyn opened her mouth, tried to scream.

The only sound to escape her lips was a simple, soft yawn.

She was a passenger in her own body.

A little while later, she started getting hungry. Her body stopped walking, turned itself in a specific direction – that of home – and started walking that way instead.

Because it'd be what Evelyn would've ordinarily done.

Go home for food.

Try as she might, she couldn't pull herself from that path.

She could stop walking, glance around and take in the sights. Because that was something she often did on walks. But she couldn't alter her destination.

Loopholes, she realised.

If Dan's instructions were prison bars, the spaces between those words were where she'd find her freedom.

I just have to find flaws in the wording. Loopholes!

Another hopeful thought that was instantly crushed.

As she neared her house, she saw him standing there waiting for her. A smug grin on his face as he leaned against the wall.

Dan.