



Firsts
Rosalie Stanton

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Rosalie Stanton



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About this Title

Genre: Erotic Contemporary

Savannah is looking at entering college as a virgin. After getting her heart shattered by one of the high school's notorious playboys, she turns to her best friend, Thorn, and implores him to help her solve the tiny problem of her virginity. What she doesn't know is Thorn has been in love with her since the second he laid eyes on her, and asking him to touch what he can't have is nothing less than torture.

After succumbing to her advances, Thorn makes it his mission to convey everything he hasn't been able to put into words into touch, hoping Savannah will feel in his hands and mouth what she has never seen in his eyes.

Publisher's Note: This book contains explicit sexual content, graphic language, and situations that some readers may find objectionable.

Chapter One

A giant clock hung over the kitchen sink, ticking seconds away without care to the gravity of what had just been said.

She couldn't be serious. She couldn't stand there, sitting on the kitchen table, looking at him with those eyes, and asking him questions like that, while being serious.

"There is no bloody way you're serious."

Savannah frowned and shrugged in a manner much too cavalier after what she'd just suggested. It only furthered his conviction; seriousness had left the building. She couldn't appear that casual about something this huge.

Only of course she could, because this was what Savannah did: turn his world upside down.

"I don't see the big deal," she replied. "You've been my best friend since diapers, Wesley."

"Thorn," he corrected, though mostly out of habit. He'd known the second he'd assumed a nickname that Savannah, much like his mother, wouldn't give him an inch. And she hadn't. Point of fact, she'd laughed so hard the second he'd introduced the name that milk had shot out of her nose, something he'd honestly thought impossible until he found himself drenched. "And if you can't see why this is a big deal, it just goes to show why we shouldn't do it."

She rolled her eyes. "It's just sex."

"It's more than that."

"What is this, 1953? Are you my mother?"

Thorn made a face. "I just wish you wouldn't be so casual about it."

"Oh my God, you are my mother."

"Would you stop that?" he barked. "I'm not shagging you, so let's just drop it."

Savannah frowned, taking the sun with her. He swore the world lit up with her smile. Made sense the lights would go out with the opposite. She clearly hadn't expected him to object, and fuck, why should she? Savannah existed as every man's wet dream, and now she was presenting herself on a plate for his pleasure. She'd offered him something he'd wanted since they were five, even if he hadn't known it then. She'd offered, and he was turning her down.

Because it wouldn't mean anything to her aside from getting her cherry popped. She wouldn't feel what he felt, and he loved her too damn much for it to mean nothing.

“Why?” she asked a minute later, swinging her legs under the kitchen table. So many afternoons had been spent like this: a walk home from campus, an exchange of study notes from the classes they'd skipped, a junk-food binge, and a syndicated episode of *Seinfeld* before she went home for dinner. They did it every day: the best-friend thing to do.

Best bloody friends. She wouldn't cram Oreos down her throat around a bloke she fancied.

“Why? Why, she asks.” Thorn shook his head with a laugh, collecting a glass from the cabinet and filling it with water. “How long you got?”

“Am I repulsive?”

His turn to roll his eyes. “No,” he replied, casting a hand through his chestnut hair, “and you know it, so don't play that line.”

“Hey, I don't know how you men-shaped people think! Look, I know the idea has its ick factor. You typically don't wanna have sex with anyone who's thrown up on you—”

“It was just once; I had the flu.”

She wrinkled her nose. “Still...gross.”

“Well, your fault for dropping in unannounced and refusing to grab the waste can.” Thorn shook his head again, turning around. “And no, love, the idea doesn't repulse me. I'm just not doing it.”

She looked puzzled. “It doesn't repulse you?”

“No,” he replied, a bit too harshly. “But it does repulse you.”

“It so does not repulse me!”

“Yeah. That's why your offer swept me off my feet.”

“Would I have offered at all if it did?”

Thorn sucked in his cheeks and took a step forward. “Don't know. You have any other blokes you hang around? You said it. You want your first time to be with someone you trust.”

“Yes, and doesn't that make me a horrible person?” she drawled.

“But without the baggage.”

“A girl's first time shouldn't be about getting it perfect,” she pointed out. “It should be about getting it... I don't know, but perfect isn't going to happen. It's messy and awkward, and while I can't speak for my whole gender, I can tell you right now I'm not gonna know what to do other than lie there.”

At that, he had to laugh. “Way to sweeten the deal, sweetheart. If this is you trying to talk me into it—”

“Jackass.”

“Watch it!”

“The point is, if I get it over with—the painful, icky part—I can have a real first time with the candles and the romance.”

And someone who's not me, Thorn thought grimly, raising his glass to his lips. “No,” he said. “That's final, you hear? I'm not gonna be your test-drive.”

Savannah sighed dramatically, her lower lip poking out. “This is important to me, Wesley,” she said. “I really want to experience this with someone I trust.”

“And you should.”

“So it should be you.”

“I'm not helping you shag Daniel,” he said at last, harsher than he intended. “And that's the rub, innit? The berk wants into your knickers, and you're not showing off the goods unless someone approves them first. Sorry, love, not your guy. Find someone else to fuck.”

He regretted the words before he said them, which made the deafening silence that followed the longest of his life. Thorn inhaled sharply and kept his eyes on the ground. God, he could be such a git...but that was just part of the gig. He was in love with his best friend. An owner's manual simply didn't exist for these kinds of problems.

Funny... He thought himself a handsome enough bloke. Worked out every day, always ate his greens, cut red meat out of his diet, and despite the racy social circles in which he and Savannah ran in school, he existed, for all intents and purposes, as a popular student. Popular enough to appear resented by other blokes, coveted by cheerleaders, and all the other clichés into which he fell. The accent probably did half the work for him; if anyone caught a glimpse of his grades or understood the books he read, he'd be the laughingstock of the whole town.

Savannah never saw it. Never saw Wesley Manor as a sexual being. Of course she wouldn't; she'd known him practically her whole life. Back to when he and his pop had moved to the States and next door to Angela Evans and her golden daughter, Savannah. Thorn hadn't been very old then, but he remembered hating everything about America until he saw Savannah. Her pretty round face, her blonde, curly pigtails, and the chocolate ice cream smeared across her mouth.

They'd become friends almost immediately, latching onto each other.

As a child, he would tell people he and Savannah would one day marry; he well remembered the condescending looks and the chuckles from his elders, those who said, "Of course you will," before resuming their adult conversations. But Thorn had been quite serious. He'd lived for Savannah since the second he laid eyes on her chocolate-covered cheeks. They'd gone through everything together, starting with G.I. Joes to sneaking into R-rated movies. When Savannah's sun-colored hair had darkened to a pretty brunette, he'd helped her find the right product to turn her wavy blonde again. Everything they'd done, they'd done together. Thorn had had Savannah at his side every step of the way, and not once, not until they'd gotten to high school, had Thorn doubted he and Savannah lived in the same boat. That she loved him as fiercely as he loved her.

And she did...as a friend. She loved him as a friend. It ended there. The second they'd become freshmen, Savannah's heart had become the property of Daniel O'Malley, resident big-headed stereotype. Flash a smile, offer an arm, fuck a girl silly, and cast her aside. Thorn had never known hate until he'd met Daniel, a world-class womanizer, and no female, intelligent or otherwise, saw it until she got a close-up look. Thorn had warned Savannah left and right, but a girl in love couldn't be talked down, even if the asshole barely acknowledged her existence. For two years, Savannah had embarrassed herself with a variety of techniques to get Daniel's attention, all failing until last year when she'd lost the braces, dyed her hair blonde, learned how to apply makeup, and essentially morphed into every man's fantasy.

Every man's.

Including Daniel's.

God, those months had been the longest of his life. Imagining her and Daniel together, filing Savannah's face into the roster of women Daniel had used and abused. Picturing her smiles aimed at the last person in the world who deserved them. Tormented by images of the enormous ponce's hands touching what belonged to Thorn.

The only reason Thorn had dated Paige had come from an attempt to one-up Savannah, and God, talk about rotten mistakes. But he'd needed a distraction, and she'd provided it. Provided it and taken his virginity in the process... Something he wasn't particularly proud of, but he couldn't do anything about it now except learn from his mistakes. Sex for the sake of getting back at Savannah had only made him miserable. And Paige, God's gift to drunkards and desperates, had become exceptionally clingy.

But she'd known. Paige couldn't tie her shoelaces, but she'd known he only dated her to get over someone else. Thank the bloody gods she'd never figured that someone else had Savannah's face.

He'd only gone that far with Paige because he stood convinced Savannah had gotten it from Daniel, who operated only to fulfill his own pleasures. Daniel used the girls who hung on his every word; if he didn't get laid, he didn't see a reason to spend money on them. But Savannah hadn't given it up, and ultimately she'd found herself single.

She hadn't felt ready.

Neither had Thorn, but only because he'd made the leap without her. His body belonged to Savannah. She just didn't know it.

"That was really uncalled-for," she said at last, jarring him back.

Thorn drew in a deep breath and nodded. "I know, love. I'm sorry."

"This is important to me."

"I know."

"We're both consenting adults..."

Thorn chuckled at that. "Wouldn't much matter across the pond, but now that you mention it, you've been eighteen all of, what, three weeks?"

"Still eighteen. I am of age, and I'm going to college in the fall, and I want this done."

"Good for you."

"Hey, you'll still reach twenty before I do, so unless you want a bunch of old-man jokes, I'd can it." Savannah inhaled deeply. "It has to be you."

"Why?" he demanded. "If you don't trust the bloke you're thinking of shagging, seems the reasonable thing would be not to shag him."

Savannah's eyes darkened. "I am not asking you because I want to shag...erm...have sex with anyone. I just think it'd be easier with you."

"Why's that?"

"Duh! Have you been listening? Because I trust you, dickhead."

Thorn smothered a grin, glancing down before amusement could tickle his eyes. "Thanks ever so," he replied, not insincerely. "But sex changes things, love. You don't think it will, but it does, and I don't want things between us to change."

That wasn't even a little honest, but better this lie than a different one, or worse, the truth.

"And you speak from your massive experience."

"Don't need experience to know it. And that's not the point."

"I heard Paige talking about you."

His jaw tightened. "Good for you," he growled through his teeth.

"We never talked about dating other people, did we? I mean, I didn't date anyone until Daniel and then you were with Paige. It wasn't weird, was it? We've been friends so long, and we never really discussed the...what-happens-when-we-start-dating thing."

Thorn had to keep from growling at the git's name. He'd spent three long, agonizing weeks with Savannah's head buried on his shoulder, her body trembling with heart-crushed sobs. After the first weekend drying her tears, he'd confronted Daniel in the locker room, given him a shiner and a cracked rib, and due to the big sod's ego, managed to evade punishment. The coach hadn't interrogated anyone, and no one had offered explanations. Thorn had long ago resigned himself to the fact that Daniel was only popular because his friends were too terrified to not kiss the jerk's ass. The locker-room run-in had only confirmed his theory.

He hadn't told Savannah about that...about socking Daniel. No one had. To do so would demand explanation, and while the "he made my best friend cry" excuse was one he had on reserve if ever asked, it would still leave many questions unanswered. On Daniel's part, the enormous wanker had merely shown up for school three days later with a black eye and an excuse not to participate in physical activities until his bone mended.

"We never talked," Thorn agreed. "But I knew you fancied Daniel, so when he asked you out"—I wanted to bash his teeth in—"your answer wasn't a shock."

"No," Savannah replied slowly. "But your asking out Paige was."

He sighed and fell silent. Couldn't contest the truth, and telling her he'd only asked out the empty-headed cheerleader because she had a head full of blonde hair and a reputation as fast and easy didn't make him sound like much of a prize either. And at the time, doing such had sounded like a good idea. As if he could get Savannah out of his head with a girl who had a future in the sex trade. He'd hoped she'd appear jealous, but she hadn't. She'd just made a snarky comment about his poor taste in women before returning to her ever-growing list of why Daniel stood out as the best thing since sliced bread.

"Yeah," he said at last. "Just seemed like the thing to do at the time, I suppose."

"And it wasn't."

Thorn made a face. "Fuck no."

If he didn't know better, he would have sworn her eyes brightened with relief. "Oh well...I, ummm...but you slept with her."

Many times in the month since he and Paige went their separate ways, Thorn had felt inexplicably dirty for everything that had transpired, and the reasons behind it, but never had the

shame heaved so potently that he couldn't look a person in the eye. His motives for dating the ditz in the first place might as well have been strewn across his brow; he'd never been very good at hiding things from Savannah—nothing except the big thing—which made explaining himself a trying venture. “Yeah,” he confessed, voice softer.

“And you can't stand her.”

“No.”

“But you can stand me.”

He rolled his eyes. “Savannah...”

“I'm just trying to follow your logic here. You don't like Paige. Even when you were dating her, you didn't like Paige.”

“Wanted to strangle her with her hair,” he agreed.

“But you still had sex with her.”

“I'm never gonna live that down, am I?” Thorn sighed and shook his head. “Look, I mean what I said. We've known each other since Dad and I moved here. You're...the best friend I've ever had, and I don't wanna bollocks it up by sleeping with you. And sex does change things, Savannah, no matter what you say. I don't wanna do this and lose you.”

Her eyes softened at that, a gentle sigh rolling off her shoulders. “You won't lose me, Wesley.”

“You say that now. If we do this—”

“If we do this?” she asked, her voice hitting a note. “You've gone from 'no way, no how' to if we do this.”

Thorn winced inwardly. Bollocks.

“Sex changes things,” he repeated lamely. “And I don't want things to change.”

Not like this.

“Did things change with you and Paige?” Savannah countered.

“Well, no.” He frowned. “I couldn't stand her before, and I couldn't stand her after. It didn't—”

“Then I don't see—”

“We weredating . There's a difference.”

“And you couldn't stand her—”

“Right,” Thorn said shortly. “And I love you. Didn't fucking matter if Paige never spoke to me again, did it? But if this blows up in my face, I couldn't stand it.”

He stood staring at her, chest heaving, a dull ring piercing his skull. He was distantly aware that he'd said something he shouldn't have, but it didn't matter in that moment. Knowing Savannah, she wouldn't hear the sentiment behind it; she wouldn't pick up on the sincerity, the desperation, the truth in his words. Savannah couldn't fathom him in any other fashion but as her gal pal, only with one rather large exception. In her world, confessions of love didn't mean what they meant in his.

True to form, she smiled again. “I love you too, Wes,” she said in that totally platonic girl way. Thorn's spirits died. He exhaled a deep breath, hid his misery under a quick grin, and tried not to whimper when she continued. “That's why it has to be you. Nothing will change, I promise. It'll just be... We do this, and it'll be fine. We'll just...have done it and go on with our lives. It'll be fine.”

It crushed him to think she could actually do that. Share herself with him, open herself, give him her body to make his, and walk away the next day as though nothing had changed. But the sadder reality told him plainly she wasn't going to let him wiggle away from this; once she got an idea in her head, it seemed damn near impossible to get her to let go. It was one of the things he loved most about her.

On most days.

Days unlike this one, when the idea on which she fixated would destroy him.

To touch her but not have her...God , it'd kill him.

But he knew from experience he couldn't say no to her. If she didn't get him to cave now, it'd be later. Tomorrow or the next day...

She wanted him. If only for a night.

“Right,” Thorn said suddenly, shaking his head. “All right.”

Her face lit up. “Really? You'll do it?”

A small smile tugged his lips, even as his heart sank to his feet. “Yeah, I'll... If you... Yeah.”

She clapped and leaped off the table with an excited bounce. “Oh, Wes!” She grinned broadly, throwing her arms around his neck. “Thank you, thank you, thank you!”

His smile broadened of its own will. He hugged her to him and stole a quick whiff of her raspberry shampoo. God, she always smelled so good. “Not a bad gig, now that I think of it,” he murmured, not feeling a word. “Sex with no strings. Every bloke's dream, yeah?”

She snorted and whapped the back of his head playfully. “Jerk.”

“Gotta play the hand you're dealt, love.” He tugged her closer. “Uhhh...Savannah.”

“Yeah?”

“You understand we gotta be pretty physical if we're gonna shag, right?” He ran his fingers down her back, lingering on her bra band and plucking it once to give his words backing. “Gonna see your goods and all that.”

If he didn't know better, he would have sworn she gasped. “Yeah, well,” she said quickly. “You've seen me in a bikini, so...”

Thorn practically purred, arms tightening around her. Fuck yeah, I have. “Mmm...but I'll be seeing things I've never seen. Touching things I've never touched. Holding things I've never held.” His fingers began sliding down her back before resting at her sides, pausing, and slipping upward again. He couldn't stop himself; in easy seconds, he practically had a breast cradled in each palm. He heard her breath catch, felt her heart thundering against his fingers, felt every inch of her body tensing. And fuck, it was intoxicating. “Kissing things I've never kissed...”

She inhaled sharply. “Kissing? Is...? Do we really need to...? We need kissing?”

This time when he grinned, every bit of it was genuine. “Come on, Savannah,” he purred. “If I'm gonna be inside you, a little kiss couldn't hurt.”

“Wesley—”

Everything switched to autopilot. He felt nothing but the drive: pure adrenaline pumping through his veins. Thorn drew back, cupping her cheeks and softly brushing his lips against hers. And instantly the doors blockading his desire swung open, and he about fell to his knees. After so many years coveting her, wanting this, watching her flirt and play and look at him like he was anything but a living, need-having man, he had her taste in his mouth. Her soft, perfect mouth against his, resisting before a sigh rushed through her body and her lips parted. His tongue seized the invitation, delving inside warm, wet perfection, and he nearly tumbled apart when she moaned. She tasted like chocolate milk, smelled of her magnolia body spray, and felt so damn good in his arms, there was no way he'd make it out alive with even a shard of his broken heart.

Christ, why did she have to taste so good?

“Mmm, Savannah...”

She sucked his tongue back in her mouth, whimpering when he tried to pull back.

Thorn smiled inwardly, hands falling back to her shoulders and pushing her away. A murmur of complaint shuddered through her throat; it took a few seconds for her eyes to clear, for the haze to fade, and for the hard, heavy pants to leave her body. He fought to hide a satisfied smirk.

“You're right,” he said at last, head quirking as she blinked prettily and tried to return to herself.

“Huh?”

“This won't change anything.”

The furthest thing from the truth, yes, but it was worth it for the momentary look of confused resentment that flashed across her face. It wasn't much, but in that instant, it meant the world. It proved, in whatever way, that this wouldn't leave her unmoved.

He just hoped it was enough.

Chapter Two

Savannah had spent the better part of three hours pacing her bedroom floor before diving for the phone and dialing up her other best friend: her best friend with girl parts. The crisis looming over her head stood definitively as a girl crisis. For this, she needed girl advice.

"I'm an idiot," Savannah said the second her friend picked up the phone.

"Did you do something, or is it the usual reasons?" Allison chimed in without hesitation.

Savannah scowled at the phone. "Thanks very much for that."

She chuckled. "I do what I can. What's up?"

"You remember what I said I was going to ask Wes to do?"

"Oh God." A thick pause. "You didn't, did you? Tell me you didn't actually ask Thorn to have sex with you."

Her nose wrinkled. "I said I was going to," she replied weakly.

"Yes," Allison agreed, shifting noisily on the other end of the line. "And I seem to recall telling you it'd be a massive mistake. Sex with your best friend? That has catastrophe written all over it."

"Look, it seemed like a good idea."

"You didn't do it, did you? Have sex with him?"

"No," the young blonde replied meekly. "We're going to do it on Friday when my mom's out of town."

"Oh my God, he agreed to it?" the other girl demanded. "He actually said he would sleep with you?"

"Why do you have to say it like that?" Savannah asked. "I'm not repulsive."

"No, of course not...but, honey, he's your best friend."

"Yes," she agreed slowly. "Thus why the plan is brilliant."

"I thought this call was an SOS about said plan."

Savannah sighed and glanced down. She sat cross-legged on her bed in her brilliantly clean

room. Honestly she hadn't gotten her room this clean in ten years. Her mother would have a heart attack...a double heart attack if Savannah revealed she'd gotten the cleaning bug in a vain attempt to keep her thoughts off Wesley and the meltworthy, delicious,oh-my-God way his lips had made love to hers. Every time she thought it was safe to breathe, her mind dragged her back to that moment. It seemed she'd lived her life in a fog, as though the Wesley she'd known as a child had never matured until today.

Honestly, how had she lived as Wesley's friend for nearly fifteen years and never noticed his killer cheekbones or how his eyes were so blue, she could practically drown in them? How had she never noticed his soft, sinful lips, his wiry, muscular arms, his flat stomach, or his tight chest?

How had she never seen him as gorgeous?

Wesley had never truly stood as a man in her eyes. A boy, yes...her nice, boy-part-having friend. Sure, she'd given it a thought or two over the years, namely when laughing off her mother's insistence that she and Wesley would find themselves married one day. It had seemed ridiculous once... She and Wesley just weren'tthat way . Best friends, yes, best nonsexual friends. It was just the way of things, and the reason he was the perfect candidate to pop her cherry.

So when nonsexual best friend Wesley had kissed her like he'd wanted to devour her, it had brought things she'd never before considered into light. And she found herself thinking of things like his lips and his hands and the fact that her body would roll under his...

"It is," Savannah replied at last, breathless.Oh. God . She sank, stomach weighted with tension. "An SOS. A big SOS."

"What's wrong?"

"He kissed me."

Something heavy collapsed on the other line, but the echo was drowned out by Allison's excited squeal. "He kissed you?" the redhead demanded. "Omigod! Omigod!"

"Shhh!"

"How was it? Was it amazing? I bet it'd be amazing. Oooh..."

"It was..." Savannah's voice faded, her brow furrowing. "Wait... You'd bet it'd be amazing? Why would you bet it was amazing?"

"Ummm...'cause he's sex on legs? Honestly, Savannah, you're the only one who's never noticed."

Until now. Her face couldn't be redder.

“There were definite...amazing qualities. Like...the whole kiss.” She sighed and shook her head. “And the way he touched me.”

“There was touching?”

“Nothing inappropriate...just a...Wesley's-never-touched-me-like-thisthing.”

“Mhmm,” Allison mused wisely. There was definitively a hint of a smirk in her tone. “So what's the big deal? Besides Thorn, I mean. Paige says he's huge.”

“Allison!”

Her friend giggled wildly. “Sorry...but really. She says he's like half-horse or something.”

“Could you stop?” she demanded. “Wesley was supposed to be safe. I wanted him to be the one I... Because he wasn't a guy, just my friend with guy parts, and suddenly he'scompletely guy, and I'm just now...” Savannah exhaled deeply, her heart hammering so hard, she swore she was going to go into cardiac arrest at age eighteen. “I think... Oh God.”

“Oh. My. God.”

Every cell in her body froze. “What?”

“You like him!” Allison squealed. “I mean,like like him!”

“No, I don't.” The words sputtered through her lips so quickly, she might as well have ripped her heart right out of her rib cage and placed it on a stake for all to see.

And just like that, the illusion crashed. Everything crashed.

“Oh my God.” Savannah gasped. “Oh my God.”

“You so do! You like him!”

“I can't... Oh God.”

“Hey,” Allison said, her voice softer. “It's okay to like him, you know.”

“But he's my best friend—”

“Which makes it awesome. The best relationships are based on friendship.” A pause. “Not that I have any, y'know, experience...but Mark and me? Bestest of best buds, and I'm, well...invisible to him, but one of the reasons I like him is he's my... Well, he'smy Thorn. And if I can't have mine, you might as well have yours.”

Savannah winced. “Allison...”

“Hey, just saying.”

“Yeah, but even so... Wes doesn't like me...like that. I mean, I practically had to beg him to have sex with me, which... Oh my God, I begged him to have sex with me!” Her cheeks flamed. If the world had any mercy whatsoever, a giant hole would open beneath her and swallow her up and make her dumbass plan obsolete. “Oh my God...”

“Savannah—”

“I can't... There's no way I can face him!”

“Ummm... I think you'll kinda have to if you're gonna be having sex.” A pause. “Well, I guess that depends on the position—”

“Allison!”

“Just saying!” she squealed. Then, softer, she said, “So...what are you gonna do?”

“Avoid him like crazy tomorrow and see what happens.”

“So basically chicken out?”

Savannah nodded. “In a big ole way.”

“Yeah. You know what you should've done?”

“Listened to you?”

“I'm just saying. You wouldn't be in this position if you had.”

Savannah sulked, her shoulders sinking. God . How was it she got herself into these situations? How was she going to face him?

Maybe a comet would wipe out humanity before she had to worry about it.

One could hope.

* * * *

In the months since Daniel had shattered her heart, Savannah had come to an understanding about love, life, and herself. The fog had dissipated, and after her tears had dried, she'd realized what a prized pig her first love had turned out to be. How he'd used her. How he'd played her fragile, teenage, first-love emotions to a conclusion he'd thought would end with her in a tangle in his bed before he shoved her out the door. And even though she'd loved him—in her own,

naive way—a small, Wesley-voiced part of her had always known what he really was, and thus had held her back from completely giving herself over. The reason she hadn't allowed him to get to second base with her stood as testament to that much, as did the reason she'd fabricated a curfew, the reason she'd called Wesley after every date so he could talk her down and calm her into sleep. Some part of her, some small, secret part, had always known. Always.

It had never seemed real. She hadn't wanted to see it, but it hadn't seemed real. She'd wanted to believe the fantasy.

In the end, she hadn't even liked Daniel. She'd loved him blindly, but she hadn't liked him.

Not the way she liked Wesley. She hadn't chatted for hours with Daniel every night the way she did Wesley. She hadn't looked forward to seeing Daniel at school as she did Wesley. She hadn't trusted Daniel with anything, whereas she trusted Wesley with everything. Daniel hadn't been able to make her laugh like Wesley could. Daniel had no grasp of a greater world; when their literature class had read *Hamlet*, he'd spent the entire unit thinking Ophelia was an STD. Wesley lived as a walking encyclopedia; he had a reference for everything, but he didn't rub it in anyone's face. He barely let that side of himself out.

Unless they were together.

How in God's name had she never seen it before? How had she not seen Wesley as an amazing man? She'd always known he was wonderful, of course, but as a friend...not as a man. Not as someone with whom she could see herself as a part of a couple, even though she'd never truly considered anything else.

It sure as hell made for an awkward day at school. Normally Savannah and Wesley were inseparable. Whether they passed notes in the hall, mouthed words to each other in shared classes, or expressed an entire thought with the mere arch of a brow or narrowing of the eyes, they rarely made it through the day without speaking. On occasion Allison had served as middleman to deliver messages in code. Perhaps the extremes were severe, but neither Wesley nor Savannah cared. They enjoyed their relationship in all its facets: the serious and the excessively goofy.

Not seeking Wesley out felt strange enough; actively avoiding him felt downright weird. But Savannah couldn't fathom meeting his eyes today. Pretending life as she knew it had not turned on its head would only confuse things more, and Lord knew she needed none of that.

Especially after last night.

I'm in love with my best friend.

She'd tried convincing herself of a thousand different things after her phone conversation with Allison, but the more she debated, the more the hole around her deepened. Every time she thought about Wesley now, blood filled her cheeks, her head became light, and her heart pounded so hard, her chest hurt. And now she'd cocked everything up with something that had

seemed innocent when the notion first flitted into her head...and then she'd bothered him about it until he caved.

He'd warned her... Sex changed things.

I thought we were supposed to actually have it before things changed.

She saw no good way to proceed. Ignoring Wesley just made her miserable, though the only thing worse than ignoring him would entail confronting him. God, she sucked with men. Big-time. Not the ones she loved, at least. That way lay paved with heartache and despair; Wesley had made his feelings completely clear last night. He didn't want to have sex with her. She lived as his friend, nothing more, and he didn't want that relationship to change. He'd only agreed due to her persistence.

Their amazing relationship would become something else entirely after Friday. The notes and the whispers would vanish, as would the glances and everything else that made life bearable. She'd changed everything without realizing it.

Without realizing exactly what would change and what she would lose.

Savannah sighed harshly. She'd arrived home about an hour ago, and the phone had yet to ring, which troubled her since she'd watched it from the moment she kicked off her shoes. On a normal day she would have headed to Wesley's house directly after school, but she'd managed to ditch the last ten minutes of class to get a jump start home; she figured he would wonder when she didn't meet him by his locker. Then again, ignoring him all day had to stand as the mother of all mixed messages. Perhaps she could look forward to a reverse cold shoulder in retaliation. He wouldn't acknowledge she ignored him in his mutual ignoring of her. Then he'd be angry, they'd fight, she'd have to tell him, and everything would go kablooeey, and then...

The sharp chimes of the doorbell interrupted her increasingly depressing thoughts, replacing concern with panic.

Oh Gawd ohgodohgodOHGOD!

Only one person would be here now. Allison never came over after school; she knew, as did their other friends, that weekday afternoons belonged to Wesley. They always had.

And she'd ignored him all day. All day.

"It's all right," Savannah murmured to herself, shoulders hardening, a cool, stabilizing breath rushing through her lips. "It's Wesley. Best friend Wesley. We've done this a thousand times... Okay, not so much the smoochies and the touchies and...but..."

Her feet practically floated across the carpet. The doorbell chimed again.

"He won't be mad. You wigged. He'll understand."

Right. Yesterday she'd wanted him to sully her virtue. Now she felt burdened by the horror of being in love with him. Wesley—plain, platonic, best-friend-shaped Wesley—had become a man in her eyes. Her man. He'd comforted her through heartache, shared her laughter at pointless jokes, and stood at her side with her through every step, big or small, of her life since childhood. She'd wanted to do the next big step with him. Simple as that...only she wasn't prepared for this.

She hadn't seen that the little boy who had once stolen all her Barbies had become a man, a man who could steal something much more valuable.

She wasn't ready.

God, why did I ever talk to Allison?

Savannah might have come to these realizations without her friend's help, but she would have much preferred having her epiphany well in the future. Or rather, anytime save the day after she'd talked him into having sex with her. Sex with her best friend plus mushy feelings would make her the last person in the world he'd ever want to hang around.

This. Totally. Sucked.

Better that you know, her mind advised. Right?

Savannah snorted inelegantly and shook her head. Yeah. In what universe?

The doorbell chirped again. He knew she was home; if she hadn't gone to his house, options seemed rather sparse, and at any rate, she couldn't hide in here forever. Therefore, drawing in a deep breath, she grasped the door handle, whispered a quick prayer, and prepared for the worst.

"Good." Wesley greeted without preamble, pushing his way into the foyer and kicking the door closed before she even registered she had succeeded in opening it. The anger she'd expected was nowhere from sight; hurt and confusion remained strangers, exchanged for excitement and...nervousness? Nothing in his eyes suggested he'd even noticed the fact that she'd spent the day avoiding him.

Or the fact that she hadn't waited for him. As though meeting at her house had been their intention all along.

"Good?" Savannah echoed dumbly. "What's good?"

"You're here," Wesley explained, an unfamiliar light brightening his eyes. "I've wanted to do this all day."

And before she could blink, his hands had closed around her arms and his lips pressed hard on hers. Every molecule in her body froze...well, almost every molecule. God, no force great enough existed to prevent her from melting under his kiss. Savannah moaned hard, her eyes

fluttering shut as her mind switched to autopilot, her lips parting on the cusp of a gasp. Oh yes . This—this wrong, confusing, wonderful thing—would undo her. One simple touch and she felt completely lost. She would have sworn the ground shifted when his tongue whispered into her mouth.

Only the ground did move. Wesley's coaxing hands pushed her back until her ankles hit the bottom stair, and only then did coherency break through the fog.

"Where are we going?" Savannah managed to whimper before he captured her with her another kiss. Oh never mind. As long as he kept doing that magic with his mouth, he could take her wherever he wanted.

Wesley pulled away just long enough to nod at the second floor. "Mmm. Your room."

His lips closed on her too quickly for his words to break through the fog, and by the time she understood, he had coaxed her upward step-by-step. Upstairs. Oh God . That wasn't the plan. That wasn't anywhere near the plan. Well, okay, as far as the first plan went, this rolled right on track, but everything seemed different now. Hadn't she intended to blow the whistle on this whole insane thing?

Wesley. Sex. Naked. Touching her. Kissing her. Moving inside her. Oh God.

Oh God.

"My mom—"

"Won't be home for hours," he countered, hands dropping to the hem of her T-shirt. "Thought we'd wrangle in a little practice for the big night."

"P-practice?" Savannah blinked dumbly, crashing hard against her bedroom door. Then he was kissing her again. Hot, desperate kisses betraying need she didn't understand and couldn't analyze with a head full of lust clouds. Logic screamed against her, but she couldn't push him away, not when her insides were sparking with fire she'd never before experienced. Not when her skin sizzled under the path his fingers took. Not with her pussy hot and drenched. Monsoon season approached. God, she'd never felt this wet. She hadn't thought she could get this wet. "Oh..."

"Mhmm," Wesley murmured, peppering kisses down her throat. "Occurred to me this afternoon."

"This...afternoon?"

He chuckled. "You're too distracting, love. Couldn't think of anything but you all day."

"I don't think this is necess—oh God."

“Yeah, it is. First time for girly pinches a bit. Thought we'd loosen you up.”

“Wes—”

“Shhh,” he whispered. “It's all right. You'll enjoy this.”

His lips smashed on hers again before she could offer another protest, his tongue massaging hers and his hands sparking magic across her skin. He murmured provocatively against her lips, and she couldn't stop. She didn't want to stop.

Good-bye, reservations.

Savannah's knees softened, the butterflies in her stomach twisting into a mixed metaphor. “Wesley...”

“Thorn,” he reminded her. He reminded her every day, of course, but for whatever reason, she didn't feel like laughing today. Wesley had truly vanished, with Thorn firmly in his place.

Perhaps that was for the best. Wesley served as the name for the one she knew; Wesley was the one she loved. If she thought of him as someone else entirely, perhaps she could proceed without totally shattering.

When Savannah looked at him again, however, all hope vanished. Calling him Thorn didn't make his eyes any less Wesley's.

Something she intended to tell him once he stopped kissing her like that.

“Bit drafty out here, love,” he noted, managing to twist the doorknob behind her and catch her with his free arm in a move that made him seem entirely make-believe. Real men didn't appear that suave. Where had this Wesley hid all these years?

“We're...”

Wesley perked his brows. “On your back, woman,” he demanded, kissing her again.

“Didn't you...” She gasped, wrangling her lips from his. “Uhh...” He recaptured her before the thought could mature, his tongue performing illegal acts with hers until she managed to pull away again. “Notice anything...different today?”

“Course I did,” he replied, whipping her shirt over her head. “Figured you were a bit skittish.”

Oh boy. Skittish didn't begin to describe it.

“And you're...uhh...not mad?” His hands cushioned her breasts. Wesley's hands cushioned her breasts. Her nipples stabbed his palms, only to find themselves prisoners of his fingers. She

had never understood women who described pinching as a turn-on until that second, because—gah—every squeeze radioed electric shock waves to her clit.

Wesley smiled against her. “Not mad,” he whispered, slipping her bra straps down her shoulders. “But I did bloody tell you.”

She blinked dazedly. “Tell me?”

“Mhmm. Sex changes things.”

“But we haven’t—”

“Yeah. I know. And it’s already changed things.” Her bra band tightened before falling away completely. “It’s all right, kitten. We’ll be all right.”

The words didn’t match his tone, but her mind wrapped around the pet name too quickly to give his attitude much mind. Kitten. If her heart wasn’t putty before, she certainly stood no chance now. Wesley’s hands framed her breasts again before anything else worked through the haze, his fingers kneading her now-naked flesh as his thumbs played with her nipples and his body guided her toward the bed. And when her legs hit the mattress, strength sapped from her entirely, and there seemed to be nowhere to go but back.

Full reality crashed without warning, shoving romance aside. There were things one couldn’t truly understand until thrust into the moment; sex had never felt real to her. Not once. Not in health class, not in movies, not in gossiping the details with the few people she knew who’d already taken the plunge, not in dating Daniel, and not even yesterday when her ever-so-brilliant plan had forced her eyes open. But now, with Wesley’s hot body above her, his denim-clad erection pressing hard against her pussy, his mouth ravaging, his hands roaming, sex had become very real.

“Wes...”

“It’s all right,” he promised her softly, trailing kisses down her throat. “You’ll like this, Savannah. I promise.”

“I’m—”

“You’re trembling.” Wesley pulled back slightly and favored her with a rakish grin. “Did a number on you, didn’t I?”

“What?”

He must have heard something she didn’t in her voice, for his smile faded to a frown. “You know we don’t have to do anything, don’t you, love? If you’ve changed your mind since yesterday, just say the word.”

Her breath caught in her throat. She could back out now. She didn't have to search for an opportunity, didn't have to stop him; he handed it to her on an ornate platter. She could tell him she had changed her mind. She could do the same thing and call the whole thing off.

What happened next redefined Savannah's understanding of out-of-body experiences.

"No. No, I haven't changed my mind."

Wesley's smile returned, his hand brushing stray strands of hair from her face. "All right," he practically purred. "Now relax, kitten. I'm gonna make you feel so good."

Reality had left the building. Savannah watched herself through colored lenses, chest crashing with unforgiving breaths, body trembling, blood burning, and every nerve primed with anticipation...though nothing could have prepared her for the tiny sparks that spread rampant at the first flick of his tongue against her earlobe. Every circuit in her body fired. Oh mama.

"Ohh..."

"Just getting started, love."

"I like the ears."

"Yeah." His smile broadened. "Thought you might."

A rain cloud floated into her parade, no matter how small. "From Paige?" she whispered. Stupid question, of course; he'd only had sex with one other girl. And even with Wesley's multiple assurances that he couldn't stand his ex, the fact remained there lived out there someone he'd already touched like this. Someone else who had felt what she felt now. Wesley might be Savannah's first, but she wasn't his.

It hadn't mattered to her twenty-four hours ago. Now it mattered a lot.

As it was, Wesley evidently decided to ignore the question, which was likely healthier for everyone. Instead he peppered kisses down her throat, taking a breast in his left hand and pinching her nipple just as his tongue curled around the other areola. "You have such pretty titties," he appraised softly. "Always thought so."

Savannah blinked blearily. "A-always?"

"Well," he clarified with a smirk, "what I've seen, at least. You chicks do fancy wearing knickers when you go swimming—"

"It's a bikini!"

"And you get all...chilled..."

Savannah's jaw fell open. "You ogled my boobs?"

Wesley shrugged unapologetically. "I'm a healthy, red-blooded, heterosexual bloke," he reasoned. "Can't help what I notice."

The words made no sense. Wesley had noticed her before? Like that? He'd noticed her sexually? Well, perfect. He'd already given the thought of them hooking up some consideration, then, and he'd probably laughed it off just as she had so many times. He was good-looking, popular, and coveted by most of the school. He could have anyone he wanted.

And he hadn't wanted to do this. With her.

"Don't make a thing outta it," he continued before swallowing her breast completely. There, yet another thing. Her boobs seemed so laughably small, he could fit one entirely in his mouth. Paige had tits out the wazoo. And as he'd noted, he was a healthy, red-blooded, heterosexual male, and those guys typically had the mind-set of "the bigger the better."

"I-I..." she heard herself saying, against her better judgment. "I just...I never thought you'd..."

"See you?" Wesley countered, after releasing her flesh with a wet plop. "I do have eyes, y'know."

"But I'm—"

"My best friend." He nodded. "I know. And that's why I never said anything."

He disappeared before she could question him further, pressing hot kisses up the slope of her other breast to give the neglected nipple its fair share of attention. And God, every flick of his tongue had her body threatening to liquefy. The sensation faded too quickly, his mouth dragging down her abdomen, and only when his tongue circled her belly button did his intentions become clear.

"Wesley!" Savannah bolted upward, only to be ushered down again by persistent hands. "Wes, we really don't have to—"

"I know."

"I didn't ask you to—"

He chuckled, pulling back and unbuttoning her jeans. "I know."

"So why—"

"Because," he retorted, dragging down her zipper, "I told you." He grasped her denim by the waistline and nodded at her. "Lift."

Her hips obeyed of their own volition, and just like that, they had crossed another unrecoverable threshold. Naked with a man for the first time—naked with Wesley—and there was nowhere to look, nowhere to hide. Wesley drank her in greedily, breathing harshly, eyes roaming over her face, breasts, and finally landing on the thatch of curls guarding her pussy.

“Beautiful,” he whispered.

“What?” Words no longer made sense.

“You're beautiful.” He shifted, situating himself so he lay at the apex of her legs. “So beautiful.”

“I... What?”

Wesley continued as though she hadn't spoken. “Especially here,” he murmured, running his fingers over her mound. “Right here. So lovely.” He met her eyes and offered a crooked smile. “Relax, kitten. I'm not gonna hurt you.”

Savannah nodded jerkily, though her body refused to soften, her apprehension instead manifesting into hard, unforgiving tremors. “Wes...”

“It's all right.” He pressed a finger to her vaginal lips. “You're so wet. Enjoying this, are you?”

She didn't know, to be honest; her nerves wouldn't still long enough. Her body burned, her clit ached for attention, but beyond the physical, she felt completely cut off. Beyond the physical awaited emotions like love and fear and the dread of imminent heartache, and it was difficult to gauge how she felt with so much still in the air.

Apparently her silence had Wesley concerned, for he favored her with an arched brow and reminded her, “We don't have to do anything.”

“I know,” Savannah said quickly.

“You haven't changed your mind?”

“N-no...”

He smiled softly and turned his eyes back to her center, spreading her pussy lips with two fingers. “Good,” he murmured. “Cause I'm gonna enjoy this.”

The first flicks of his tongue shot through her like a bullet. Savannah gasped and threw her head back, her eyes screwing shut. She waited, quivering helplessly beneath his mouth. Waited...and then slowly allowed herself to relax. Her shaking legs stilled without warning, her body falling pliant. And then she lay completely at his mercy.

“You're so soft,” Wesley murmured, swallowing audibly and dragging the tip of his tongue around her clit. “Just tell me if I do something you don't like.”

Savannah laughed nervously and shook her head. Something she didn't like? Was that even possible? God, she didn't think so. Every touch sent electric jolts through her body, twisting her insides into something unrecognizable. Tiny, hot pinpricks danced along her sweat-laced skin. She was burning up and freezing at the same time, doing her best to muffle gasps of pleasure as Wesley explored her with his mouth.

And when he murmured approvingly, she nearly fell to pieces.

“You like this?” Wesley asked, though he had her clit sucked between his lips before her voice found words. “Tell me you like this.”

“Ohhhh!”

He grinned. “Suppose I can take that as a yes, eh, love?”

“Uh-huh.” She nodded for emphasis, her hips lifting off the bed. “Oh...Wes.”

“More?”

“Yes!”

Apparently he didn't need to be told twice. Wesley inhaled sharply and dived, his tongue abandoning her clit to the soft, gentle strokes of his finger so it might explore her tight vaginal opening. Reason flew out the window, if it had been present at all; she transformed entirely, her reservations and fears replaced with frenzied need. She wanted—needed—more of everything. More Wesley. More tongue. More friction. More now .

And God, he was everywhere.

“Love this,” Wesley murmured between licks. “Fuck...Savannah...”

She barely heard him.

“Why do you have to taste so good?”

His lips wound around her clit again before the words translated into meaning, her pussy left to his fingers. He didn't enter as deeply as he had with his tongue, but the first feel of something sturdy prying her open triggered a deep, euphoric unknown within her belly. The tremors intensified without warning; her hands fumbled desperately for something to hold on to, but there was nothing but the mattress.

Nothing but the mattress and Wesley's face between her legs.

“You wanted this, didn't you?” he demanded harshly. “That's why you asked me.”

The words made no sense, but she found herself agreeing anyway. Anything to keep the onslaught coming.

Encouraged, Wesley continued. “You wanted me here. Doing this. Fucking your cunt with my mouth.” He dragged his tongue up her slit again, sliding it between her lips and driving her out of what was left of her mind before allowing his tongue to slip inside her once more. Then he paused and demanded, “Tell me you wanted this, Savannah. Tell me.”

“I—”

“Tell me you wanted this.”

A foreign sensation had started building in her belly.

“Tell me—”

“Thorn, please!”

He growled at that and suckled her clit greedily between his lips, wagging his head. “Again,” he demanded, releasing her just long enough to assault her soaking flesh with long laps of his tongue. “Say that again.”

She blinked and moaned, a hand fighting its way through his hair to push his face down.

“Say my name.”

“Wesley!”

He hissed and shook his head. “Not,” he said, punctuating his words with harsh licks. “That. Name.”

“Oh God, please!”

“What do you need, Savannah?”

Tears pricked her eyes. Why was he tormenting her? “More!” she pleaded. “More, please!”

His tongue ignored her pleas, exploring her skin and buzzing enough nerves to fan the fire without coaxing the explosion. She needed something; she felt so close to something, and she needed it. And he knew she needed it. He withheld it to be cruel.

“Then say it,” Wesley snarled.

It? It? Itwhat?

“My name. What's my name?”

And then it hit her. A moment of clarity. She understood.

“Thorn.”

His lips latched onto her clit and sucked hard, and something inside her came apart. It spread like wildfire, only nothing in this was proverbial. Her every inch sizzled and burned, parting way for white, blinding-hot streaks of something fast and wonderful. Pleasure beyond her imagining—beyond anything she'd read or gossiped or dreamed—touched and singed and tore her senses to shreds. It brushed everything, numbing and bringing her to life all in one stroke. The room disappeared; the bed disappeared; everything disappeared but Wesley. She felt herself tense, felt a flood between her legs that she couldn't stop, and Wesley's eager mouth slurping at her with such intensity, her insides tightened and another brilliant flash shot through her before she could finish processing the last. Inhuman gasps clawed out of her throat, but she only noticed them when they began to subside. Her fingers grasped at Wesley's scalp, wound around his hair to either drag him closer or push him away. It was too much; it was not enough... It was wonderful, and she never wanted to feel anything else.

“Mmm,” she heard him murmur. “Savannah...”

Her legs shook and fought for balance they didn't need. It seemed she fell, even though she had nowhere to fall.

I'm going to pass out.

It was her last thought before the world turned black.

* * * *

Savannah couldn't get enough of Wesley's smirk, though she would never admit it. Case in point, she had to hurry to wipe the dumbass, goofy grin off her face before he caught her smiling like an idiot when he returned with the glass of water she'd requested. Her body wouldn't stop sizzling.

Multiple. Orgasms. First shot.

Women would kill for what she'd just experienced.

“Look who's up,” he teased, handing her the glass. “Got the feeling back in your legs, love?”

She snorted. “Egomaniac.”

Wesley looked at her dumbly. “Well, yeah,” he replied. “I just made you pass out by eating

your cunt. Think I've earned my ego for the day.”

“Beginner's luck,” she countered.

“Is that a challenge? Someone ready for—”

Savannah's eyes went wide, and she shook her head rapidly, heat flooding her cheeks. God no. She couldn't even begin to process what had just occurred. A repeat performance would surely kill her...if not emotionally, then definitely physically. Her muscles strained, and her legs wobbled. Anything more and she'd be bedridden for a week.

“We'll do that again tomorrow,” Wesley said, his voice softer. When she looked up, puzzled, he nodded. “I told you, kitten. Girls are—”

“Tight. And it hurts.” He called me kitten again.

“Right.”

“That helps?”

He nodded again. “Did just now. If I'd tried putting in a digit before you were wet enough, it would've smarterd.” A pause. He grinned that shit-eating grin again. “Not that you needed much stroking, hot as you were. God, I nearly drowned in you.”

Savannah blushed and wiggled. He sounded so cavalier. How could he be that casual after what had just happened?

Duh. 'Cause he's been here before...and he doesn't love you.

Something in her chest broke. Hard.

“Savannah?” He frowned and stepped forward, dropping to his knees before her. “What's wrong?”

Yeah. Talk about conversations she refused to have, though her attempts to change the subject likely broached an even-bigger house of mirrors. “So...Paige teach you that?”

Wesley balked. “What?”

What?

Savannah wrinkled her nose. Might as well start digging that grave. “The...tongue thing. I guess...she taught you...that.”

The grin disappeared without warning. Wesley's gaze dropped to the floor.

“Well, I mean she—”

“Yes,” he said shortly. “She taught me. Figured if she was giving, she ought to be getting. I agreed. I’m an equal-opportunity bloke, after all.”

Savannah swallowed hard. “Giving?”

Okay, that needed no clarification, and it did little more than piss him off.

“What do you want from me?” Wesley demanded. “A sodding list of references?”

“What?”

“Is this how you’re gonna be tomorrow? Asking if everything I do is because Paige taught me—”

Her eyes went wide. Anger? She’d known it was stupid to ask, but she hadn’t prepared for anger. “No!” she blurted. “But—”

“And no, that’s not how I did it to her. I never...so much...with her. I knew the way she liked it. And I know you, Savannah. I wanted it to be...something.” He shuddered and shook his head. “Just something...”

Nothing happened for a long beat. Savannah licked her lips, cheeks still burning, eyes intently locked on the floor.

And then, before she could stop herself, she heard her voice say, “And did you...teach her how you...like it?”

Hello, mouth. Remember foot?

Wesley’s nostrils flared. “Yeah,” he replied testily.

Savannah paused, then forced her eyes to his. Her heart pounded in her ears. Her skin scorched. At that moment, he seemed so far away.

Go on. Might as well jump completely into the frying pan.

If she was going to do this, she might as well do it all the way and take as much with her as she could before he shattered her heart.

“Would you...” She swallowed hard. “Teach me? Teach me how you like it?”

Thick, suffocating silence spread between them, and Wesley’s jaw went slack.

Chapter Three

Thorn didn't understand women. Period.

He'd been told he never would; he didn't have the wiring for it; that was the way it was, and he just had to accept it. Thorn typically didn't put much stock in what he was told, but right now, at that moment, the unrealized became completely fulfilled. Having a girl as a best friend didn't give him special powers or keen insight; he didn't understand women, and that would never change.

And even if the skies did open and impart mystic wisdom to his poor, tortured conscious, he would never, ever understand Savannah Evans.

The past twenty-four hours had been a nightmare of ecstasy: dreaming of what he would see and caress, the body he'd lusted after since he knew how to lust. The idea of having Savannah in his arms, a slave to his touch, feeling everything he felt through his hands and mouth... He hadn't wanted to do this—not like this, at least—but he'd needed it all the same. Too much time had been wasted on the sidelines, watching Savannah but never braving the waters to touch her, to let her know the depth of his feelings, all out of fear of losing her.

Losing her, it seemed, was a risk he had to take. Either he made love to her, or she made love to someone else and drifted into territories where he could not follow. Either he stood still and waited for her to realize she was his equal and they belonged at each other's side, or he declared his feelings and scared her away. He would lose her if he did nothing; action, at least, gave him a fighting chance.

He'd gone into the day with a new attitude, reevaluating his concerns and forcing himself to twist his situation into an opportunity rather than an emotional funeral. It was the chance of a lifetime, not a direct path to certain doom. For the first time in their relationship, she might feel what he felt. The fire in his chest finally had the opportunity to channel and explore her, touch her, and maybe, just maybe, she would feel his love and realize what he'd always known.

And if not... Well, he'd had his shot. At least he could try to move on.

An inward snicker. Not possible. He could never get over Savannah.

That had served as his motivation in coming here. Aside from the practicality in his spoken objective—warming up her body, introducing her to what wonders it could do, and giving something as intangible as sex some form and reality—he'd felt certain she would have to feel him. If he poured out his adoration through the worship of her flesh, her eyes would open, and she would finally realize what he'd realized the second he'd met her.

But she hadn't felt a thing. Not a goddamn thing. Every other word out of her mouth played as a reminder of other motives. She didn't want him; she wanted a quick fix to her virginity, and as

her best bloody chum, he was the ideal solution...and he had been here before. When he touched her, she asked if Paige had liked the same thing, as though Thorn would regard her, Savannah, the same way he regarded his easy lay of an ex. Savannah remained as blind as ever, focused on her objective; she didn't want the burden of virginity any longer, and he had the appropriate parts to relieve her of the inconvenience. There was nothing more to it than that.

It was fucking maddening...

And then she did things like this and had him redefining everything he thought he knew.

"T-teach you?" Thorn repeated shakily, his hands balling into fists. He had to progress very carefully; the world could shatter with a bat of her gorgeous eyes. "Like...you want..."

"I figure I'll have to do this eventually," Savannah explained hurriedly, her gaze darting to the floor, a warm blush spreading across her cheeks. "So...umm...I thought...if you want me to..."

He laughed nervously. "Savannah, I—"

"If you don't want me to, I won't," she amended quickly.

The laughter kept coming. He couldn't switch it off, nor could he keep himself from saying something stupid. "Not want a gorgeous girl to wrap her lips around my prick? You really are new to this, aren't you?"

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

He'd officially lost control over words. They lived on their own.

Savannah's face fell, hurt replacing nervousness, and Christ, it was his kryptonite.

"Never mind," she said. "I just thought... You did it for me, so—"

"Kitten—"

Her head whipped up, her eyes blazing brilliantly. "Don't you 'kitten' me, you big...jerk guy! I don't... I thought you'd want something. I thought... I don't know what I thought, but I wanted to do something for you, and that seemed like the best thing, and if you can't be decent about it, then..." Savannah's face fell again when words ran empty, gaze redirecting to her bare, bronzed legs. She hadn't bothered dressing in his brief absence, and at the moment, he didn't know whether he should consider himself lucky. It was awkward enough between them without taking nudity into consideration. "I just thought..."

Thorn sighed harshly, running a hand through his hair and hating himself. "Sweetheart," he said, his voice softer. "Savannah. Will you look at me?"

The request only hardened her stare. She didn't budge.

Well, if she wouldn't come to him, he'd go to her. He found himself kneeling before her the next instant, hands rubbing her thighs of their own volition, waiting for her to relax before raising a hand to her face.

"I'm an ass," he said plainly.

She snickered.

"A good-looking ass, yeah, but an ass."

Another snort. "Conceited much?"

"My beauty's a burden, love, not a perk."

This time she laughed outright and looked up at last. He smiled when he had her eyes. Maybe there was a chance he could talk himself back from a full-blown train wreck...providing his dick didn't do his talking for him. "You made my brain short-circuit," he said honestly. "Can't rightly offer a bloke a blow like that and expect him to be anything but...well, this."

Savannah pouted at him a minute longer. "Jerk."

"Yeah."

"I am new at this."

Thorn smiled and tucked a lock of hair behind her ear. "I know," he replied. "And as much as I want to say yes, I don't want you to feel like you gotta do anything for me. I'm just happy to—"

Her eyes widened. "I don't feel like I have to."

"No?"

"No, I just..." She licked her lips, and he bit back a moan. Just imagining those lips around him, that tongue caressing him, licking him, drawing him in deeper, deeper. Oh God. "I want to."

Every muscle in his body tightened. His cock had hardened to the point he thought he'd bust his zipper. Her flesh against his...her skin...her scent...around him, sucking..."You want...Savannah... Oh God."

"What?"

Rational thought fled the room. His hands closed around her face, and his lips crashed hard against hers. A long moan raced through her body, igniting his every nerve. She responded so wildly to his touches. Her kisses tasted hungered and desperate, mouth stealing aching, hot drags

off his lips as her hands reached and grabbed. She explored him with boundless curiosity, fingers trailing up his arms and over his shoulders, down his chest and across his thighs. Her thumb brushed against his denim-clad cock once, and when he gasped into her mouth, she did it again with gusto. No part of her lacked fire or passion; she touched and discovered, leaving his skin feverish in her wake, and for one perfect moment, she belonged to him. Touching him, her beautiful, bare body his for the taking. She belonged to him. He could pretend.

He could pretend...

Savannah's mouth broke from his just long enough to gasp his name before sucking his lower lip between her teeth. Her hands fisted his tee, jerking it harshly over his head and exposing his chest to her wandering fingers. She touched everywhere, every inch of flesh she could find. Christ, he'd never known how responsive his nipples were until she dragged her nails over them, and upon his surprised gasp, she broke away with a devilish smile and playfully licked his tip

"Fuck!"

Savannah giggled, this time wrapping her tongue around his head. "Someone's sensitive," she teased before favoring him with a provocative lick.

"Playing with fire, love," he replied, thrusting his hips forward. He loved the way her eyes widened; it fueled him, provided him with bravado. When she didn't back down, his courage solidified, and he took the hand resting precariously at his pelvis and pressed it against his crotch. "Touch me."

The smile melted to the snow-white innocence he loved so much. "Oh..." she said softly, gulping. "You're, umm...hard."

"Mhmm. And you"—he reached between them and pinched one of her nipples—"are very naked."

The blush returned with awareness. "Oh. Right."

Thorn grinned. "When you turn red like that, you make me wanna lick you all over," he drawled lazily, resting his hands on his waistband. The words had the desired effect; her skin positively burned. "Though a bloke wonders...doyou like what you see?"

"Huh?"

"Me, Savannah. What do you see?"

She swallowed hard and blinked, her gaze falling over him for the first time. The first real time. And just as quickly as they had strengthened, Thorn felt his boosted nerves falter under her scrutiny. She'd seen him in various states of undress before; they frequented the beach during the summers, various pools at various houses for parties, and had helped each other choose the appropriate attire for school dances too many times to count. She'd seen it all...

But never with that look on her face.

“Wow,” Savannah murmured absently, the hand against his crotch tightening. He bit back a moan. “You’re...ummm...toned.”

“Bout time you noticed.”

There were those wide eyes again. Thorn couldn't help but smirk.

“I was...supposed to notice?”

He shrugged. “Polite thing to do and all.”

“Oh...right. I guess if I'm asking you every five seconds if my outfit makes me look fat, I oughta repay in kind.”

“Doubly so, because that question is so fucking ridiculous, I oughta be commended when I answer with a straight face.”

She arched a brow. “Which is never.”

“Fucking ridiculous,” he fired back. Then, softer, he inquired, “So...you like what you see?”

Savannah licked her lips, and again he bit back a moan. “You're all kinds of yummy.” When Thorn grinned, she averted her eyes and flushed. “I can't believe I said that.”

“Oi! Not true, then?”

“No! Definitely true. I just... I dunno; it just sounds weird coming from me. We're...us, Wes. We've just—”

“We're discovering all kinds of new things,” Thorn supplied. “Don't suppose you still want to give me a blow?”

Savannah wiggled at his words, which was his intent. Well, mostly. Mostly. She'd offered, and it wasn't the sort of thing a guy turned down, especially at the hands of the girl he loved. However, had she changed her mind within the past minute or so, he wouldn't press the issue. He'd been a slave to his hormones too many times in the past to honor something sputtered in the heat of the moment. Forcing her to live up to her offer wouldn't do either one of them any favors.

“Take your jeans off.”

Thorn's eyes widened. On the other hand...

“Savannah, you really—”

“Don't have to do this? I know. Believe me, memo received. But I said I wanted to, and I do.” She grinned that devil's grin, and his heart melted. “I...I might not be very good, though. Will you help?”

A nervous laugh bubbled off his lips. “Wouldn't worry about that, love,” he replied, popping his jean button open before dragging down the zipper. “Coupla things, though.”

She nodded, not tearing her eyes away from the tented denim. His flesh strained for freedom, but he didn't draw himself out just yet. Once his cock was free, there was no going back. If by her hand or his, he was going to come. The slightest touch would be his undoing.

If she didn't first make him bust a nut.

“I'm not circumcised.”

Savannah nodded again. “Okay. I don't think that...matters, really, as I haven't touched one at all before.”

“Well, whatever you have seen in films or the like—”

“Films?” She met his eyes. “What kinds of films do you think I watch?”

Thorn snickered. “You and Allison rented at least one, if memory serves. Last little girls' slumber party, remember?”

“I'm too old for slumber parties.”

“That's what I said, but you went anyway. And got quite an anatomy lesson.”

“That's gross.” She didn't, however, deny it. Denial got her nowhere; she'd spilled the beans almost immediately after the porn viewing, embarrassed but definitely interested in what she'd seen. It had been a painful conversation at the time; strangely enough, remembering it didn't have the same effect.

Maybe because he sat on the brink of a blowjob.

A quiet minute ticked by before she spoke again. “So...yours doesn't look like that.”

He grinned. “Like what?” he repeated harmlessly.

Savannah scowled. “Like the guys in *Bang for Your Buck*.”

A wallop of laughter boomed through his chest. “You remembered the title?”

“It was memorable!”

“I’ll bet it was.” Thorn paused. “No, my dick is uncut, as God intended it. I just didn’t want you to ask why it looks weird and ruin the mood.”

“I wouldn’t ask!”

“Sweetheart, if there’s one thing I’ve learned about you, there’s nothing in the world you won’t ask.” He seared her with a look. “Second, and more important. How do you feel about swallowing?”

She looked confused for a second. “Swallowing? I—oh.” Her gaze dropped back to his crotch. “Oh. Oh! Oh! You mean like...your...stuff?”

Thorn stifled another laugh. “Right,” he agreed. “Some girls don’t like it. Some girls do. I don’t want you to find out at the last minute that you can’t stand the taste.”

“Is it icky?”

“Don’t make a habit of licking my hand after a wank.”

Savannah made a face. “Gross, Thorn.”

He smirked again but answered seriously, “It depends on my diet. Can’t rightly tell you much more than that. Just whatever I eat alters the flavor.”

Another lengthy break settled between them. “I think...I think I wanna swallow.”

Fuck, those words. “Savannah...”

“If I change my mind—”

“I’ll warn you, if I can.”

“Would you rather I not swallow? If you don’t want me to, I won’t.”

Thorn nearly laughed again before taking in her expression. It amazed him that a woman such as she wouldn’t already know the answer to these things. She might not have experience, but she lived as a citizen of a highly sex-charged environment, not to mention in public school, and some things he reckoned most every girl knew. But Savannah was not “most every girl.” She’d had a thoroughly chaste experience up until now. She hadn’t dated at all until Daniel, and the great git had destroyed her. Savannah beamed purity through and through. She hadn’t spoiled; her virtue hadn’t suffered; and she didn’t have an answer for seemingly redundant questions.

She’d come to him because she trusted him, and he refused to forget that. Not for a second.

"It doesn't matter what I want," Thorn answered softly. "Do what's right for you."

"But—"

"I'm gonna love it, kitten. No matter what you do." He offered a gentle smile and kicked off his shoes. "Where do you want me?"

"Huh?"

"Lying on the bed or standing here? Or I can sit and you—"

"Oh boy."

"Savannah?"

"What do you like best?"

Such an innocent question. "You. Wherever."

"Wes—"

Thorn kept his smile even to ease her, which seemed to work as he slipped his jeans down his hips. His eager cock sprang free, straining toward her and growing painfully hard at the way her eyes turned to saucers and her mouth hung open. It was surprise more than appraisal, but his body didn't care about the difference at the moment. He just wanted her. Now.

"Oh God..."

In quick seconds, he had her on her feet and claimed her seat on the bed. For the first time since he'd reentered the room, Savannah appeared completely aware of her nudity. She glanced down and thrust an arm across her breasts and pressed her thighs together. Her gaze, however, remained glued to his erection.

"I don't know what to do," she admitted ashamedly. "I feel so—"

"I know, kitten. It's all right. Here." He snatched a pillow from the head of the bed and placed it on the floor between his knees. "Kneel before me."

He would have sworn the ground trembled with every step she took. "I... You're big." Savannah flushed and looked away. "I heard you were, but I didn't—"

"You heard what?"

"Well, your ex isn't exactly known for being tight-lipped, Wes. Woodward and Bernstein have her on speed dial."

Thorn's jaw clenched. "Gobby bint," he growled.

"But you are big." Savannah slowly eased herself onto her knees, her wide gaze raking over his steely flesh with curiosity, wonder, and yes, yes, that was definitely lust. "Much bigger than your fingers."

"Savannah—"

Her index finger brushed the underside of his erection, starting at the base and caressing a slow path upward. She stopped before reaching the tip, and if she heard his exasperated sigh, she either ignored it or didn't realize at what it was targeted. "So this is foreskin," she mused thoughtfully, rolling back his flesh to expose his head. "Yeah. None of the guys in the porno looked like this."

"I'd think—"

"Bigger than your fingers..." Savannah licked her lips, and he didn't bother to bite back his moan this time. The girl had to have an inkling of what she was doing to him. "It hurts. I know that much. But it didn't hurt when you...with your fingers. But you're so big here..."

"Savannah..."

She blinked and glanced up, then ducked her head. "Sorry. Pardon my rambling."

"Keep rambling. Keep doing whatever you want; just keep touching me."

She grinned. "Like how?"

"Wrap your hand around me... Oh fuck yeah." Thorn's eyes fluttered shut. She felt so good. Such a hot little hand... He had to be careful, or this would be over before it started. He'd never gone this long with an erection without doing something about it, and with Savannah's warm breaths fanning his skin, her fingers around him, her glorious mouth just a few aching inches away... He had to hold on. "Don't be afraid to squeeze either. Like...yes, oh, Savannah..."

"This doesn't hurt?"

"Won't hurt unless you stop." His teeth ran over his lower lip, his hips arching off the bed. "More."

"More?"

"Savannah, please. I need—"

And then the head of his cock disappeared between her lips, and words fell away on a long whimper.

For the best.God yes.

Words were overrated.

She had no idea what to do, but whatever she did seemed to work.

Wesley had vanished the second she took him into her mouth, replaced with a babbling mess of moans and purrs. She'd read somewhere that she'd find the most sensitive nerves around the head of a man's cock, so she favored him there with a series of long licks before trailing her mouth down his length, too eager to explore his every part. He was so responsive, more responsive than she could have imagined. Every move she made earned a gasp or a sigh, no matter how great or small. His fingers weaved through her hair, caressing her in a way that inspired comfort rather than the ego-driven control she'd dreaded. With good reason, no less; he had no control, none at all. She held everything in her shaking but capable hands.

Savannah flushed at the thought and pulled back, her hand instinctively pumping his length in the absence of her mouth. "Is this good?" she asked.

She had a feeling he would have laughed one of those nervous laughs if he'd had the chance. As it was, he moaned hard in response and thrust his hips upward. "Fuck...more, please."

"More, what?"

"Your mouth. God, your tongue."

Savannah grinned. "You like my tongue, huh?"

"Love it. Fucking love it. All around... Savannah,please ."

Her grin broadened, but she made no move to alleviate his torment. She didn't think he minded this sort of cruelty, and after the incoherent state he'd rendered her to with his mouth, she didn't feel prone to quick guilt trips.

Especially not now. Not when this served as the only chance she'd have, and she was determined to relish every second.

"Am I doing this right?" she whispered.

"Too right," he replied, thrusting forward. "Inside. Take me inside."

Their gazes clashed for a second before she tore hers away, heat flooding her cheeks and her confidence tripping over itself. It hadn't occurred to her she would do this with an active audience, ludicrous as that sounded. Her attention had warped around his anatomy too strongly to give his eyes much notice. "Oh God. I don't know if I can with you watching me."

His face paled. "Please," he whispered. "Wanna... I won't if you...but please, lemme watch."

"Wes—"

"I wanna see it. Wanna see my prick sliding in and out of that sweet mouth. Please, Savannah..."

Strange how quickly decisions formed and altered. Her resistance dissolved before it could fully develop. No way could any woman deny him anything. Therefore, drawing in a deep breath, she nodded shakily. "Inside like this?" Her lips closed around his cock, drawing him in as far as she could before her throat began to resist and her gag reflex kicked in.

Wesley barely noticed. "Ohyeah ," he purred, hips nudging upward, his cock sliding deeper inside. Savannah forced her throat muscles to relax. "You're so...perfect. Warm...hot...surrounding me."

"Mhmm."

Everything else felt natural. There didn't seem much of a science to this, but even so, she felt tense, shaking hard and terrified she'd do something wrong, regardless of how impossible it sounded. However, as the seconds ticked by, as Wesley's body turned to putty in her hands, her fears began to subside. Remaining rigid proved difficult when her every move earned a purr of approval.

"Harder," he pleaded softly. "Savannah, please...suck me harder."

She trembled and nodded, steadying herself on wobbly legs, her thighs squeezing together as best they could. God, she was wet again. His voice, the look on his face, the feel of his cock in her mouth... She'd already broken personal boundaries with what they'd done today, but with Wesley begging for more, her body knew no limits.

So she did. She sucked him harder, faster; she maneuvered him in and out of her mouth with clumsy but earnest tenacity. She drew his musky scent into her nostrils, took his balls in her hand, and tenderly rolled them against her palm. Her teeth whispered against his length, but he didn't seem to mind, instead coaxing her other hand to close firmly around the base of his cock and shift in time with her mouth. Up and down, curling her tongue around his head before sucking him inside again. He babbled and praised, wrapped her hair around his fingers and made a prayer of her name. His skin felt fevered; his legs trembled; and every time he looked at her, something she'd never before seen flickered across his face.

"So good. So good around me. Such a sweet mouth."

Savannah grinned, her mouth slipping up his shaft again and lingering at the head.

"Oh yeah. Squeeze me, baby."

Quick to oblige, Savannah fought to maintain eye contact until she became too aware of herself and had to break away once more. Everything built toward overload. The sounds he made, the way his legs shook, the harsh breaths shattering through his body. Her lips took initiative, rolling back his foreskin until she completely exposed his head and rendered him her tongue's prisoner. An electric charge seemed to jolt through his body, eliciting an excited hiss as his eyes widened and his hips thrust upward.

“Savannah!”

“You like that?” she asked in a voice that barely sounded like hers, licking the sensitive underside of his tip. “More?”

He growled, and her lips fastened around him, hand stroking, pumping, drawing him closer. Closer...closer...

Wesley's mouth fell open, but no sound came forth. He trembled hard and gasped, and the next thing she knew, a warm, bitter, salty sensation exploded in her mouth, and everything else fell on instinct. She swallowed and stroked, squeezed the head between her lips as her gaze absorbed his face. He shone beautifully. God, she'd never seen anything so stunning. His eyes rolled back, a long moan rushing through his lips, every feature alight with pleasure she could barely comprehend. Yet she had done that. That look on his face existed solely because of her.

Savannah sighed and pulled back, his spent cock falling from her lips. For long seconds, nothing lived but his heavy breaths, his trembling body relaxing at last. And when his eyes opened and found hers with sleepy adoration, her heart twisted and fell.

“You're wonderful,” Wesley murmured. “Wonderful.”

She blushed. “Wes...”

“So wonderful. God, Savannah...you're... I...” He grinned and cupped her cheek. “You're perfect. I don't... I can't...”

“Stop.”

“I mean it.”

Savannah's blush deepened, and she forced her eyes away. “I...”I love you . “Ummm...thanks?”

He chuckled, shaking his head as if she'd said something adorable. “Anytime, love,” he said, winking. “And I mean that.”

Somehow she didn't think he meant it in the same way she was hoping, so she smiled and hit his leg and did what she supposed a best friend would do in this situation.

“Perv.”

His brows waggled, and the tightening in her chest worsened.

There was no way she was walking away from this in one piece.

Chapter Four

The bell had rung more than ten minutes ago, but Savannah didn't feel the need to hurry. Her hand couldn't stop shaking for reasons beyond her; every time she dialed the combination to her locker, the damn thing refused to twist and open.

Her mind refused to stop racing.

"So do you know who she is?"

It Savannah took a few seconds to realize the voice belonged to Paige, and she was the target. They didn't consider each other exactly school-chatty buddies and hadn't done anything but glare at each other during Wesley and the bimbo's thankfully short-lived relationship. Were it not for the fact that the hallway stood otherwise vacant, Savannah would have likely ignored the blonde whore completely.

Instead Savannah swallowed hard and tried to choke back the sudden rush of Wesley-touched-you-the-way-he-should-only-touch-me bile. "Who are we talking about?" she replied.

Paige rolled her eyes. "Umm...duh? Thorn."

Of course. Who else in the world would they have in common?

Savannah inhaled sharply and turned her gaze to the ground as her clumsy fingers managed to pry her locker open at last. The day had gone by very much like the one before. She felt cut off from herself, thinking about how yesterday had served as both the best and the worst day of her life. After the gob-smacking epiphany of how she'd never felt as complete as she had when under Wesley's tender hands, when his lips touched her skin...followed by the pukeworthy knowledge that Paige had experienced it all first.

In the long, depressing run, Savannah supposed it didn't matter. It would finalize tonight. He'd make love to her, complete their deal, and then they'd go back to the way they'd always been.

Impossible. They could never again live the way they had.

"As usual, Paige, I have no idea what you mean. Now if you'll excuse me."

"Oh come on!" Paige squealed. "You and Thorny are, like what, joined at the hip? It was you who broke us up, y'know."

Savannah's heart skipped a beat. "It was?"

"Not exactly news here."

"I barely talked to either of you while you were dating."

"Umm. Yeah. And for some reason that pissed him off." Paige rolled her eyes. "Decide whether or not you wanna fuck him, Savannah. In the meantime, you owe me for not making you even more of a social pariah. It totally doesn't matter now, but I wanna know who the girl is."

"What girl?"

"The one Thorn's been hard for since forever?" She blinked. "His supercrush? Don't tell me he hasn't told you."

"Paige—"

"What? You guys haven't talked in like three days. That's a bajillion years in freak time." She made a face. "I figured he finally admitted who the mystery girl was and you threw your typical little hissy fit."

Savannah sighed hard and slammed her locker shut, then tossed her backpack over her shoulder. "Really can't imagine why he let a winner like you go," she snapped. "Nice catching up and all, but maybe next time we could, you know, not."

"So you don't know?"

"Knowwhat? There is nothing to know!"

Hell must have frozen; no other way Paige McKenzie could have narrowed her eyes in such a way as to make Savannah feel like the weakest link on an obvious joke. Only a few seconds of recovery lapsed before the pinhead started talking again, though it might as well have spanned a lifetime. "You really don't know," she said, barking a laugh. "Oh wow. And here I thought you guys were, like, close. Thorn's been hot for some girl for forever. It's sick and pathetic, but he won't give it up. He never said anything, but I knew. I always know about these things."

Savannah swallowed hard. Oh God.

"Oh."

Paige shrugged a shoulder. "If he hasn't told you, he won't. It's a big secret. He totally dated me to make her jealous. Oh well. Guess it didn't work. At least I got to ride that monster cock." She paused and favored Savannah with a mean look. "Whoops. Sorry. Forgot I was talking to the virgin. You have at least seen one, haven't you?"

Savannah's jaw hardened, her hand tightening around her backpack strap. A few days ago, the comment would have smarted—would have confirmed the rumors she always suspected Daniel had spread about her—but now... God, she barely felt a thing. She was too preoccupied raging about Wesley. What Wesley had done with this girl...this girl he swore sideways only

held his loathing. How could he have touched Paige the way he'd touched her? Paige knew how Wesley looked, knew how he felt and tasted. She'd done the girlfriend thing and had taught him things Savannah could barely stomach to consider. Things that should have been solely reserved for her.

The ways he could have touched trash like Paige made her skin crawl.

Still, somehow, Savannah managed to stave off her anger long enough to form at least one coherent thought. If nothing else, she wanted to get it out before the world around her blackened. “Why bother?” she replied. “Rumor has it there's nocock in this town you haven't seen. Don't see why you'd need my input.”

And without another word, she spun on her heel and stalked down the hallway.

She hadn't seen Wesley all day. All day.

How she could miss someone who wasn't truly gone was beyond her, but this had to stop. He had to know. Things couldn't go back to the way they had been. They just couldn't.

Not when she was so helplessly in love with him.

* * * *

This had to end.

He didn't know why he'd thought things would be different—Christ knew nothing ever went the way he thought it would—but after yesterday, after what they'd shared, he'd expected something from Savannah at school. A wave, a look, a small private smile for the secret brewing between them. Any goddamn thing would have sufficed, but the woman hadn't so much as looked at him all day. As though what happened hadn't meant a thing to her. As though what they'd shared was forgettable, bloodless, and wrong.

Whatever it was he'd planned was obsolete. The sparks he'd felt yesterday...yeah, those had been real enough. There was something in her kiss that could ignite the world into flames, something in her touch... God, the way she worshipped him with her mouth. Hadn't she known what that meant to him? How it changed everything, much more so than just sex ever could?

She hadn't felt like a novice testing her gag reflex when she took his cock into her mouth. It had felt like more. He knew what it felt like, and he knew he hadn't imagined it.

It felt like...

Well, fuck. Thorn sighed hard and ran his hand through his hair. He felt royally buggered.

After tonight, everything ended. The smart sort of bloke might put an end to this miserable plan before the damage was beyond fixable.

But he never claimed himself as the smart sort...

He fought the urge to snicker. With sex involved, no man gained smarts. Toss Savannah in the mix and rational thought sprinted out the proverbial window. Too much time had passed, so much rode on the steps he took, the decisions he'd made, and what happened the next time they were together. He could lose her; fuck, he could really lose her. And if he allowed this barmy plan to bugger up their relationship, he'd never forgive himself.

Savannah in her lily-white innocence. Her methodical, clinical approach to losing her virginity. Her brilliantly flawless plan.

She would shred what remained of his lovesick heart.

Savannah's mother, Angela, would leave around five. Thorn's original plan entailed showing up an hour later with takeout and a romantic comedy to ease the mood, but nothing seemed certain anymore.

Perhaps he shouldn't have been so forward the day before, but he'd gone mad with want and not doing anything only made him antsy. He had so much he wanted to do with Savannah—to Savannah—and allowing the only chance he might have to touch and taste her slip through his fingers was out of the question. He'd had an opportunity, and he'd seized it.

He'd tasted perfection yesterday...and today she hadn't even met his eye.

Could she be ashamed? Embarrassed? Did she regret it?

Fuck, the girl drove him mad.

The silence exploded with the chime of the doorbell, shattering the quiet torment through which he'd dragged himself. Thorn inhaled sharply and craned his head toward the hall, his heart jumping clear into his throat. Only one person in the world he could think of would stand at his door.

She'd come here. She'd come to him.

"This is it, Thorn," he murmured, thundering hard, heavy steps down the hall and to the front door. His chest ached, and his temples throbbed. He felt he'd aged eighty years over the span of two days, thanks to her wonky plan and his idiotic willingness to go forward with it, and now, standing at the end of the tunnel, he had no idea how to proceed. Either she'd come over because she wanted it over with or because she wanted to back out. Or perhaps she'd decided she needed a clean break from their relationship altogether, as what had happened yesterday had proven too heavy.

Maybe she'd realized the truth in what he'd told her from the beginning: sex mutated relationships one way or the other, and no amount of saying it would be all right would make

them magically immune to change.

Thorn sighed heavily and threw the door open, a thousand defenses and rebuttals waiting on his tongue.

Everything flew away the second his gaze crashed with hers.

“Savannah?” he said quickly, hurrying forward but stopping just short of taking her in his arms. She choked a sob and shook her head, her puffy, red cheeks trembling under the weight of her tears. Every thread in his body unraveled and something within him shattered. “Savannah, sweetheart—”

“I don't know what to do,” she said. Her voice rode on a breath.

Bugger this. He would not stand stupid when Savannah needed him. Thorn took a brazen step forward, arms open and ready, but he hadn't prepared for the torpedo of shaking girl that exploded against him. And before he could catch a breath, her small hands had captured his face, and her tear-drenched mouth had pressed to his. Her kisses wrangled hard and desperate, a force of their own. She bit his lips and soothed the ache with her tongue, shaking her head at a voice he couldn't hear.

There lived so much wrong in what continued to happen between them, but he couldn't stop. She moved too fast for him to keep up, her touch too harsh to be charged with nerves alone. Her every inch had braced itself for something horrible, and the only reason she stood here at all was to get it over with.

This ended now.

Thorn's hands closed around her forearms, gently pushing her back. “Savaanooohhh—”

Her mouth burned his again before he could breathe.

“Savan—”

She shook her head again and raked him with her lips. Then her face cracked and washed away the flimsy mask of fortitude with a fresh incursion of tears. And while he knew to expect it, Thorn still shook hard enough to make him wonder if he had shattered with her. Fuck, he hated watching women cry. When it came to Savannah, he experienced everything. Everything. He felt every tear she shed tenfold.

“I can't do this,” she whimpered, arms falling uselessly to her sides. “I'm so sorry, Wes. I just can't do this.”

“That's all right,” he said, a mixture of regret and relief rolling off his skin. “It's all right. Told you that, didn't I?”

If anything, his words only made things worse. Savannah's sobs became harder, and the tension in her shoulders tightened. Her head still shook as though she'd forgotten how to stop.

"I can't."

"I know, baby. It's all right."

"No, it's not all right." She sniffled miserably and looked away. "It's all changed. Us. You and me. Everything's changed."

An ironic smile tugged on his lips. No sense arguing what they both recognized as true, so he didn't pretend for the sake of pretending. Instead he shrugged a shoulder and said, "Hate to say 'I told you so,' but I bloody did."

Savannah looked confused, as though wondering how he could joke about something like this.

He wondered how she couldn't. It was his best defense.

"I can't just go back to the way things were, Thorn," she said softly. And he knew she meant it. If nothing else, the way her voice wrapped around the nickname he never got her to say hammered the final nail into the coffin.

"I know." He blew out a breath. "Had it figured. Is that it, then? Are we done?"

She blinked, and her lower lip did the trembly thing that drove him nutty. "Are we?"

Now he felt confused. Either she wanted to end things or she didn't.

"You just said—"

"It's different now."

"Yeah, I got that memo, ducks. But—"

"Aren't you going to ask me why?" Her voice climbed several octaves in a way he'd come to identify as something solely female. In most girls he knew, it signaled the first of many drastic mood swings, and while Savannah definitely did not stand immune to sudden fluctuations in temperament, he typically thought her more reasonable than most. Granted, and considering of course, the time prior to their relationship leaping off the deep end and into the territories of the unknown. Sex did change everything. "I mean," she continued, "you seem to be taking this pretty well."

He stared at her for a second. "You're outta your head."

"About time you noticed!"

"I noticed since the beginning! For God's sake, Savannah, how many times did I tell you this was a bad idea?" He threw his hands in the air before she could respond and turned away quickly. If he grew careless, the monsoon of emotion he'd struggled to keep at bay would break through his walls, and then they'd really be buggered. "But I went along with it. You said it was important to you, and that was enough to make it important to me. So here we are. Because I didn't say no, here we are."

"It was supposed to be easy."

"Sex isn't easy." Probably the dumbest thing he'd ever said, but in this case, it rang as true as anything else. Sex might be as easy as sodding pie; it seemed the emotional shite got them well and truly head fucked. Therefore he decided to stick by it.

"Well, it's supposed to be!"

"It can't be. Not with us." Another lie, but why stop now? He was on a roll.

To his surprise, Savannah didn't argue. But then, after a second, he realized, of course she wouldn't. Sex wasn't easy with them, not with the way things had progressed between them. She was here because of it. She'd decided to end things because of it.

"Did something happen today?" he whispered. "Something that made you realize—"

She held up a hand and shook her head.

"No?"

"It was yesterday," she said.

"Yesterday."

"Actually the night...after we talked, and I asked you to...and you agreed. Allison and I were on the phone." Savannah sighed; it seemed half her body weight rolled off her shoulders with that sigh. "You're my best friend, Wes."

They were back to Wes now.

"You're mine," he agreed softly.

"That's why this was supposed to be perfect." Her eyes had fastened on the space between their feet. "I just hadn't... God, I can't believe I'm saying this..."

"Savannah?"

"Not because it's unbelievable, just... It's the sort of thing girls don't do. Or aren't supposed to

do. And you'd think I would've learned my lesson by now.”

He didn't know why, but his heart suddenly roared.

“But you've earned my honesty, and I don't want...” Savannah shook her head and met his eyes, and what Thorn saw there would have knocked him dead had he not been so certain, at that moment, he had a world of things to live for. “I've told you everything. Always have. And...well...”

The air thickened. He wanted to prompt her but didn't dare interrupt.

“Ah, what the hell? Everything's so warped now, you might as well...” Savannah licked her lips, but her gaze didn't budge. She ostensibly wanted him to see her eyes. “I realized there was a reason I asked you to do it, Wes. Beyond... You're the only person who it could've been. I... God, I just can't—”

He couldn't help himself. “Savannah, please—”

“I love you.”

The space between them grew too great, the dull ringing in his ears paralyzed him, nailing his feet to the ground. A thousand different times, a thousand different ways, a thousand different places, he'd envisioned her saying those words. Nothing could compare to this, to the fulfilled wonderment that she truly stood here, in his house, looking at him with eyes that didn't lie. Warmth flooded his veins, spread through his fingers, and tickled its way toward his worn, long-agonized, and gun-shy heart before believing it could be real. This wasn't a dream. He would not wake up in an empty room. Savannah's eyes burned real. Her voice lived real. The words felt real.

“Oh God,” he whispered. “Savannah—”

“Oh God.”

“You love me? You really love me?”

“I can't believe I said that. Oh my God, I really said that.”

“You love me?”

She nodded slowly, pained, as though unable to say the words again.

He'd fantasized about it yesterday when he'd buried his tongue inside her. He'd wondered in the aftermath, when she blushed and mused aloud and danced around things he'd never seen her dance around. He'd choked back the words himself a dozen times while kissing her and most forcibly when her lips wrapped around his prick. Yesterday he'd begged the universe to give him this very thing, only to be denied. But now—Godnow—he understood. It couldn't have happened

anyway but this. Perfection existed here. Right here. It wasn't whispered in the dark or off the buzz of lovemaking. This lived real in the real world. Savannah stood right here, and she loved him.

"I know this isn't what you were looking for," she said quickly. "And that's, well, that's why I came by. I wanted to call things off before I got myself in even deeper, because, hey? Lovesick Savannah is kinda—"

A warm smile spread across Thorn's face, new life pulsing through his skin. "Savannah..."

"Disastrous. And...ummm, well, I told you because I obviously can't... We can't be friends anymore, Thorn. I can't be the sort of friend who stands by while you date skanks like Paige."

"Savannah—"

"And pretend it doesn't kill me. But you deserve the truth, and now that you have it, I'll just pick up the tattered pieces of my dignity and go home."

Thorn shook his head. "Can't let you do that, love." Her brow wrinkled, inspiring a chuckle. "I really can't believe," he continued, "after all these years, after everything we've been through...how you never knew."

"Knew what?"

He sighed. "Savannah, I've been in love with you since kindergarten."

And then he couldn't stand the distance between them. He watched her race through emotions he couldn't name, watched realization, understanding, and euphoria spread across her skin, and he had to taste her.

In a blink, he had her against him, her mouth a slave to his. Everything else fell aside.

She loves me.

If this were a dream, he never wanted to wake.

Chapter Five

“You love me?”

He barked a laugh against her lips, tugging her shirt over her head. They had somehow made it down the hall she knew so well and danced dangerously close to crossing the threshold of his room. Wesley's room. She knew what would happen there, yet her mind had joined her heart, steadfastly refusing to focus on that when she only heard his words over and over again.

It didn't seem real...didn't seem possible.

“I fucking worship you,” Thorn replied, and for how hard he was trembling, for the desperate openness in his eyes—those eyes that peeled away layers with such ease, it unnerved the strongest of wills—she heard the truth in his words. Hell, she felt the truth. It just didn't seem real. These things only happened in movies. The comically confused protagonists of some Nora Ephron feature. These things did not happen in real life, and they most certainly didn't happen to her.

“For how long?” Savannah whispered. She vaguely knew her tee had disappeared gone and her jeans would soon follow. It seemed he had his heart set on getting her naked.

“Told you,” he replied, his mouth dropping to nip at her bra strap. “Since the first day I saw you.”

“We were three!”

Thorn shrugged a lazy shoulder, and it hit her that he had officially become Thorn to her. Completely, wholly, thoroughly. Wesley was a boy she'd known, a boy she loved; Thorn was the man he'd grown into, and the one she'd fallen in love with. The change happened so rapidly in her head, she nearly didn't catch it, but when she did, it shook her to the core.

She'd tried to label Thorn as the side of Wesley who would touch her. Wrong. Thorn and Wesley lived as one in the same... Wesley had grown up into Thorn.

“I saw you, and I was yours, baby,” he murmured, fingers deftly popping open the snap of her jeans. “I always knew it'd be us.”

“But you never said anything.”

He laughed again, though it sounded forced this time. “Couldn't very well, could I? Savannah... I'm serious. I loved you the second I saw you, and every day since then, I've just fallen deeper. But you never looked at me like that.”

“I never knew.”

“And I love you too much to bollocks up a good thing. I didn't wanna tell you I was crazy about you and have you run scared.” Thorn shook his head. “Kick off the shoes.”

She obeyed without thinking. “So all this time...”

“Every sodding second.”

“Paige said you were in love with someone.”

Thorn arched a brow. “She did, did she? When did you two chat?”

“She came up to me in the hall today,” Savannah replied. “She said...she said there was always someone else, and that she thought you'd told me about it, and that's why we weren't talking.”

“Never would've pegged her for having any sort of perception.”

“It was me? You were in love with me?”

He made a face. “Why the hell do you think I hooked up with Paige in the first place?”

Savannah wiggled but didn't say anything.

“I couldn't stand it,” Thorn continued, jerking her jeans down her legs. “You with Daniel. Do you have any idea what that was like? Hearing you fawn—”

“I never fawned!”

“Over that prized wanker like he was your own personal messiah? And Christ, the things I imagined...what he was doing to you, touching you the way only I should touch you.” His hand slipped up her leg until he had her sex cradled against his palm. “Like this.”

“I...” Savannah shuddered hard. “I never let him touch me like that.”

Thorn's jaw tightened. “Know that now,” he acknowledged roughly. “Didn't stop the images. I hated him, Savannah. I fucking hated him. Hated the way he played you like a fiddle and how you just let it happen. Hated the way he hurt you. Hated the tears you shed over that ponce. Those months you were with him... I lived and died every night. You belonged to me, and he had no fucking right to touch you.”

Savannah just stared at him. “I didn't know you loved me,” she said softly.

“I know.” He bunched the crotch of her panties to the side. “But if it wasn't him, it was someone else. Someone else touching you like this...” The slight flicker of his thumb against her clit nearly made her knees buckle. “Someone else touching you, tasting you, worshipping this

pretty pussy... Christ, love, I've driven myself right outta my mind."

She trembled and braced her hands on his shoulders. "You know the reason I called you every night, right?" she asked softly, her teeth worrying her lower lip when he slipped a finger inside her. She was slick but unprepared, and though the whollywoman part within her rejoiced, the fragile, timid virgin couldn't help but feel the pinch. "I...uhh..."

Thorn sank to his knees, pressing her firmly against the bedroom door. "Want me to stop?" he asked, then leaned inward and drew her clit between his lips.

"Ohhhh..."

"That's it, kitten. Relax."

Discomfort receded in place of pleasure; suddenly she didn't feel enough of him. "That...that's good."

He smirked. "So that's a no on the stopping, then?"

Savannah blinked, squeezing his shoulder. "You really love me?" she repeated, hating how needy her voice sounded. It just seemed too unreal to be grounded in reality.

His fingers slipped out of her without warning, his mouth releasing her clit. Savannah's eyes widened, and a long whimper hissed through her lips, but he was on his feet, pressed against her before she could think to question his intent. His thick erection nudged her needy wetness, his fingers on her swollen bundle to calm the ache.

"I love you," Thorn said firmly. "I've always loved you...so much it hurt at times. Being with you, touching you, laughing with you, never thinking you'd want anything more with me."

It sounded absurd now that she had ever not wanted this. Still, Savannah knew it had happened...and it killed her to think there she might never have realized what had always stood right in front of her. "I really was the girl Paige was talking about?"

He nodded. "There's only ever been you, Savannah. That's why...I lost my head a bit yesterday when you asked me...when you kept prying about what I'd done with her. It was never this. That relationship was just—"

"Sex."

His jaw tightened. "I'm not proud of it."

"Good." She added a nod for emphasis; the thought of him with anyone else knotted her stomach. "Because it makes me sick."

"Yeah, well, I had to live through you fawning over—"

“For the last time, I did not fawn! There was no fawning!”

Thorn arched a brow, and she had the good sense to drop the topic. No amount of wishing otherwise would erase the months of Daniel worship, even as skeazy as she'd found him during, and especially after, their relationship. She supposed they were even; Thorn had slept with someone else, but he hadn't given away a part of himself or tormented her with details or speculation of what his and Paige's kids would look like. He'd given away his body; she'd given away her heart. They'd emerged on even ground.

“Okay,” she conceded, sighing. Thorn pushed the door open, nudging her backward almost as an afterthought. And just like that, they had crossed the threshold into his bedroom. Her chest ached with how hard her heart raced. “I called you every night, though...”

“I know,” he agreed, nuzzling her throat.

“I couldn't sleep unless I heard your voice.”

Thorn pulled back. “Well, as long as we're confessing things... Remember Daniel's stint in the ER?”

She nodded with a confused frown; it took a good ten seconds before realization dawned. “Oh my God.”

“Can't tell you how right it felt pummeling that git.”

“You put him in the hospital?”

He shrugged. “Bastard made my girl cry. Of course I put him in the hospital. Wanted to put him in the sodding ground, but I figured a cracked rib or two would do just as nicely...and I wouldn't have to serve any hard time because of it.”

Savannah barely had any time to process that revelation; the next thing she knew, her legs had collided with the edge of his bed, and she lay on her back, watching as Thorn yanked his tee over his head and did away with his jeans. She grew dimly aware he'd left her in her underwear, though it was a fact that only came to light when he coaxed her up to undo her bra. Then she just had her panties; her panties served as the only fabric keeping them from being fully naked together.

This was really happening. Oh God.

“You did that for me?” she asked, voice dazed, her eyes transfixed on the hard length of his cock. It seemed so foreign to her at that moment that she'd ever had the courage to take him into her mouth.

“Everything I do is for you.”

A rush of anxious humor tickled her insides. “Okay, Bryan Adams.”

Thorn smirked and dropped to his knees, his hands skimming up her legs until he had his thumbs hooked under the elastic of her panties. “Funny.”

“I thought so.” More chest thundering. Her heart would soon run out of steam and stop from all the energy it put into pounding. “I have...another question.”

Thorn glanced up and favored her with a lavish grin. “Ask away, love.” He slipped her panties down her legs. His gaze immediately landed on her pussy, and he drew in a sharp breath. “Fuck, but you're pretty.”

A warm blush spread across her skin. “You saw me yesterday,” she countered, trying futilely to close her legs. His hands braced either thigh, leaving her bare and open to him.

“Doesn't make you any less lovely, sweetheart.” His fingers trailed down her abdomen, drifted through her curls, and settled on her clit. “What's it you wanted to ask?”

She worried a lip between her teeth, hips absently rolling under his touch in search of more friction.

“Why?”

“Why, what?”

“You said no,” Savannah replied. “When I asked you to be my first, you said no.”

Thorn blinked. “Of course I did.”

“But why? If you love me—”

“Sweetheart, you know why.” He turned his eyes back to her body. “Scooch up a bit.”

She blushed again but complied. Then her legs hooked over his shoulders, and his face dived between them.

“You really think I could do this”—his tongue licked up her slit—“and walk away? Think I could love your body once and be satisfied?” He sucked her clit between his lips and tugged gently, coaxing small whimpers from her lips, igniting sparks across her skin. “It killed me to see you every day without touching you, and I couldn't stand the idea of being in a world where I knew how you felt, how you taste, and watch you with other blokes. It wasn't about not wanting sex. Fuck knows I've fantasized about you until I drove myself nutty for wanting what I didn't have...but I couldn't have that without having you too.”

Well, when he said it likethat , of course it made sense.

“Thorn...”

“Mmm, yeah,” he purred, nuzzling her wet flesh. “Love hearing you say that. My name.”

“It's a dumb name.”

“Is not. It's a right sexy name. And you think so too.” He smirked, his tongue swirling over her drenched labia. “T...”

Her nerves ignited. “Ooohhh...”

More inventive strokes. “H...” The tip of his tongue balled at her clit and drew a circle. “O...”

“Oh my God...”

“R...”

“Thorn!”

“N.” With an ever-broadening smirk, he pulled away just far enough to favor her with a wink. “Sexy name, innit?”

Savannah was to a point she would have agreed to just about anything. Beads of sweat laced her skin, her buzzed nerves chirping at a rising crescendo that fell short of meeting its peak. Just a little more. Oh yes. She just needed a little more. Just a little more...

“No opinion?” Thorn replied, perking a brow. “See if we like Wesley any better...”

By the time he'd finished spelling out that name over her pussy, she was a twisted, panting mess, so close to the wonderful explosion she'd discovered yesterday, but not close enough. She just needed...

“Thorn, please!” Savannah twisted, fisting his hair and thrusting herself against his mouth. “I need...”

“Need what?” he replied, his tongue tapping her clit. “You need to come, love?”

Yes, yes, that sounded right. Unfortunately a gasp had strangled her throat, leaving her unable to do anything but nod.

“Good!” Thorn agreed cheerily, his thumb settling over her slippery pearl and rubbing her softly. “Cause, baby, I wanna drown in you. Want to make you cream so hard, I'll have your taste in my mouth for weeks.”

Her nose wrinkled. "That's gross."

"Oh is it? Better stop, then, I see—"

A sound remarkably like a growl rumbled through her throat. "Don't even think about it."

"Are you threatening me?"

"Uh-huh. I'm...lethal."

He chuckled and lapped at her sensitive flesh. "I'll say."

"Thorn!"

"What?"

"You know what!" Savannah writhed and reached for him, but he evaded her; her hands switched tactics and slipped down her belly to finish herself off, but he slapped them away with a task. Gahhh. She burned so damn close to it... If she could just...

"Say what you want me to do, precious. That's all I ask."

And then the words lived with her—on her tongue and spilling out. She had no idea what had taken them so long, perhaps defying her age-old conventions of what was or wasn't dirty, what words she could or could not say. She'd conquered the threshold, and need outweighed propriety.

"My clit. Suck it." Savannah gasped and bucked. "Make me come."

She heard a sharp intake of breath. "Oh, Savannah..."

"What?"

Thorn merely grunted, diving forward and slurping her clit into his mouth. He rolled her between his lips and loved her with his tongue, tugging gently and humming into her wet flesh. He caressed her softly but firmly, worshipping her, drinking her, slipping fingers inside to stretch and explore...and that was it...the definitive it. The sparks flying through her centralized and exploded, sending shock waves of pleasure across her skin and through her veins, wrapping her in bliss so profound, she would have sworn it was imagined had he not fallen with her back to earth. Every muscle in her body went slack, the rush between her legs embarrassingly liberal, but she felt too damn boneless to be ashamed. Even so, it seemed Thorn couldn't get enough of it. Every time she thought he would pull away, his tongue took another sweep of her pussy, and the pleasure burned so sweet, it nearly hurt.

"Don't go passing out on me this time," he warned her, smacking his lips. "Not nearly through with you."

Somehow she managed the strength to meet his eyes, blushing when she realized his mouth shone wet because of her. “I’m awake,” she volunteered weakly. “Though I can’t feel my toes, so as long as your plans don’t include my toes, I think we’re okay.”

He chuckled and climbed back to his feet, his cock bobbing hungrily at her as though to remind her he hadn’t yet had his jollies. “Feel buzzed, love?”

“Buzzed doesn’t begin to cover it. I think I’m dead.”

“You’re not dead; you’re just a little tuckered.” Thorn smiled and motioned for her to scoot back, something she managed, against the wishes of her lax muscles. He didn’t seem satisfied until she lay fully on the bed, her head on his pillow, and her legs spread wide in absent invitation. She didn’t realize she had herself on display until his grin widened and his hand patted her drenched opening.

“Oh God, don’t do that.”

“Can’t help myself. You’re so fucking pretty.” He tossed her a wink and took his cock into his left hand, casually stroking himself as he turned his attention to the nightstand positioned by the head of the bed. “I probably should’ve asked you this the other day...”

The vaguely serious note in his voice indicated this might be important. “Yeah?”

“You... Birth control?”

Savannah’s eyes widened, relaxation fading in place of reality. Oh yes. Yes. They were about to cross another threshold, the reason they were here to begin with. Why he’d licked her, why she’d just had another one of those earth-shattering moments... Those had led here. And though he loved her—though she knew that now—for whatever reason the emotional highs achieved in the hour had overshadowed the reality of what would happen. Even as he guided her to his bedroom, stripped her, and knelt between her legs, it had remained safe on a level with which she was comfortable. But things had progressed beyond that now.

So much had changed in just a few minutes. Thorn loved her. Thorn lived as Thorn now in her mind rather than Wesley, and that thing she’d set out to take care of this week would be very much taken care of within the next few minutes.

When she didn’t reply immediately, Thorn tossed her a curious glance, and whatever he saw on her face made his eyes flicker with understanding. “We don’t have to do anything, love,” he said softly. “I know I’ve said it before, but everything is different now. Everything. We’re not on anyone’s timetable anymore. We’re”—his lips quirked—“we’re together.”

Savannah exhaled deeply, relaxing almost immediately. It shouldn’t surprise her anymore when he managed to read her mind, but it did. There was something oddly comforting in that. “We’re together,” she repeated.

Thorn grinned like a loon. "You're my girlfriend," he said, his voice riding on an excited giggle. "We're dating."

"We can hold hands in public and make out at the movies and—"

"Plan where we're gonna spend our honeymoon?"

Savannah's breath caught in her throat. That she had not expected. "Our..."

He shrugged casually, though by the way his shoulders tightened and his gaze suddenly had no place to land, she knew he had betrayed more than he'd intended. "I figure... We're both staying here for college, yeah? We could...get a place off campus and—"

She sat up. "Thorn—"

"And wait until we get our degrees and make it official. 'Course that's—"

"You don't want this to just be a high school thing?" Again her voice burst with what felt like ridiculous hopefulness, but she couldn't help herself. With as quickly as things had progressed since she came over, she hadn't even given the future any thought...except an unacknowledged certainty that she and Thorn would end up together. The broader "where will we be ten years from now?" questions had remained obediently silent. They had just discovered they loved each other; there seemed no need for wondering what that meant.

Only of course there was, because of who they were. Savannah and Wesley. They weren't just together, they had always been together, and she'd always seen the future with him in it. She just hadn't known in which capacity until this week. Until she found herself in love with him.

Thorn swallowed hard, his eyes bright with vulnerability. "Do you?" he asked. "Want it to be just a high school thing?"

"Of course I don't," Savannah replied eagerly. "I love you. I want... God, I never thought I'd marry my high school sweetheart, but it's you, Wes. It's you. You're not my high school sweetheart... You've been my... Well, crap, what haven't you been in my life? I can't imagine anything without you, because you've always been with me. And now...you love me."

"I love you," he whispered ardently. "Since the beginning, I've loved you."

She shrugged a shoulder. "You've been with me from Barbies to boys, and that's something I want forever."

"Forever's a long time, love."

"Well, I'll settle for a lifetime, then."

The next thing she knew, Thorn lay between her legs and pressed her to the mattress, mauling

her with hungry, desperate kisses. God, he poured all of himself into his kisses. Every taste sang 100 percentThorn , flecked with just enough of the reverent Wesley to make him whole. She loved it, loved every whisper, every nudge, everything that made him what he was.

“A lifetime?” he demanded again when their lips broke apart. His hard cock rested against her drenched flesh, jarring her nerves back to life. “You mean it, love?”

“I mean it.”

“Gonna hold you to it, you know.”

She grinned. “Counting on it.”

“We're gonna drive each other loony.”

“No change there, huh?”

Thorn smiled and nudged her nose with his. “No,” he replied, his voice goofily elated. “No change at all.”

“And yes.”

“Yes?”

“Birth control. You asked.” Savannah let out a quick breath, the tingles coursing through her body making it impossible to lie still. “I...uhhh... Random change back to... Yeah, but I am on the Pill. Mom made me go on it after Cordelia's pregnancy scare freshman year.”

He arched a brow. “That long, eh?”

“I-it wasn't like a license to slut or anything. Just precautionary and realistic.” She sucked her lower lip between her teeth. “Did you use...ummm...protection? I mean, with—”

“Christ, yes.”

She exhaled harshly. “So you've never...without a...thing.”

“Condom?”

“Yeah.”

“I've never had sex without a condom, no.” Thorn licked his lips. “I mean what I said, love. We're not on anyone's timetable. You tell me you want to wait, and we'll wait. I'll have myself a nice wank—”

Her eyes narrowed. “A wank? When I'm here and have a mouth?”

A second ticked by—a fraction of a second—but the look that stole into his gaze could have held her captive for hours. “Do you have the slightest idea”—he all but growled, thrusting hard against her, his steely flesh sliding against her sex and hitting her in all the right places—“what you do to me?”

“Mahhh...”

“You liked doing that for me?” He paused. “You liked sucking me off?”

She nodded wildly, rolling her hips frantically. “A lot.”

“Oh, Savannah...” Thorn sighed, suckling her earlobe between his teeth. “Well, trust me, love... You'll get your chance. Again and again.”

“You're very generous.”

“I try.”

“Well, it'll have to wait...becauseI don't want to wait for the big thing.” A giggle tickled her lips at the wave of relief that washed over his face. “I'm all kinds of ready.”

“Thank Christ,” he professed, diving for her throat.

Savannah giggled again. “Didn't know you were religious.”

“m not. Just think it's polite.”

His mouth feasted on hers again before she could form another word, his wandering hands cupping her breasts and trapping her nipples between his fingers. It amazed her how quickly the simple sensation of his lips against hers caused her brain to short-circuit. Daniel's kisses had never turned her into jelly. On the contrary, they had done little more than make her very aware she served as nothing more to him than a commodity. Someone he could conquer rather than value, use instead of appreciate. She'd been a pledge, a challenge, and when she hadn't given him what he wanted, he'd tossed her aside.

Thorn's kisses made her aware of herself in ways she never recognized before. She didn't feel like justSavannah anymore; she'd become a woman. She felt desirable, yes, but above anything, cherished. When he touched her, kissed her, ran his hands over her skin, it thrived beyond the physical. He trembled when his skin met hers.

Savannah had something in her hands she'd wanted since she discovered fairy tales. She hadn't realized she believed in love at all until now.

“Mmm,” Thorn purred, smiling shyly when their lips parted. “Give us a sec, love.”

He reached for the nightstand, giving her mouth access to one of his succulent nipples.

“Mmm.” He aimed a grin at her. “Stop that.”

“No,” she replied, licking him again.

“That's right distracting.”

“Not my fault. You were moving away, and I want you to stay here.” She eyed the nightstand. “What are you doing, anyway?”

“Well, if you'd hold on a second...I grabbed some things for us.” His hand began rummaging blindly through the open drawer. “After I caved to your bloody brilliant plan—”

“Which got us here. Don't you forget it.”

Thorn snickered appreciatively. “Right. I got us some supplies.”

“Supplies?”

“Well, for you actually.” His grin turned sheepish. “And me. Condoms and the like. But mostly for you, love. I wanted to do right by you. Thought I could, I dunno...win you over with charm.”

Savannah giggled. “Charm?”

“Oi! I have loads of charm.”

“Uh-huh...”

“Well, if I'm gonna be honest, I was aiming more for shagging you until you fell in love with me.” Thorn winked as his fingers snatched whatever he'd been looking for. “But I also figured I couldn't be careful enough. Got us some lube.”

“L-lube?” That word inspired a slew of other ideas, most of which involved an area on her body she'd determined would remain virgin. “That...ummm...”

“Just to ease the hurt.” He rolled off her, uncapping the small bottle he'd retrieved. “Not for anything you're thinking, you naughty girl.”

Okay, blushing now. “I'm thinking nothing!”

“Somehow I doubt that.” Crystal liquid squeezed from the bottle's opening, pooling into his waiting palm. Then he took his cock into that hand and soaked his hardened flesh, and God, watching him stroke himself made her insides tingle. And before she could blink, she crawled over him, thought detached from action. Every second since that first fateful discussion had led

to this moment, but she felt so damn nervous, she could barely keep her mind on track with decisions her body had already made.

“Can I be on top?” she asked softly, blinking hard and looking everywhere but at him. “I...uhh...I've been thinking...and reading, and what I've read has... I think it could...be better. For me.”

Thorn smiled softly. “That's perfect, love.”

“It is?”

He nodded. “This is for you, and if you're steering, that means you're in charge.”

“That's what I was thinking.”

“And that's the way it should be.”

Savannah inhaled sharply and braced her hands on his shoulders. She still might as well have lived in someone else's body for as at home as she felt in hers, but with Thorn's hands steadying her hips and his eyes keeping her grounded, she managed to calm her raging nerves and merge herself with reality. The silky head of his cock brushed against her wet folds, slipping up against her clit once before aligning perfectly with her opening. And it felt real. They were really together, really here, and really about to cross a hurdle she only got to cross once.

“I love you,” Thorn whispered.

Every muscle in her body relaxed, a warm smile spreading across her face. “I love you too.”

She'd heard losing her virginity ideally compared to pulling off a Band-Aid: quick pain that rapidly receded rather than something long and drawn-out. And perhaps it should embody that metaphor for most women...but as she slowly sank onto his cock, as her vaginal walls parted, as a sweet ache split her in half, she would have traded nothing in the world for the look on her Thorn's face. The pain didn't matter; nothing save the wonderment of sensation mattered. He consumed her with awe and warmth, with light and love beyond anything she'd ever thought could exist. He swallowed her whole, numbed the hurt with adoration and wonder, and when he groaned against her, she knew she'd come home.

“Oh, Savannah...”

Her nails dug into his shoulders. “Ahhh...”

“So good. So fucking good...” He panted hard, hands tightening their grip on her hips. “You all right, baby?”

Her breaths were coming so hard, she wondered if her lungs would survive. Was she all right? God, her world had just been unmade.

“Any pain?” he prompted.

Savannah nodded harshly. “A little,” she replied. “It’s...ahh...feel so...full.”

Thorn’s eyes shone. “Yeah?” he prompted, swirling his hips almost involuntarily. “Take all the time you need. We’ve got all night.”

Her teeth scraped along her lower lip, the tiny pinpricks dancing across her skin overpowering the shy virgin once and for all. The barrier no longer existed, and now she needed more. More of what, she didn’t know, but from the way Thorn’s eyes drank every move she made, every flicker of every emotion that crossed her features, hesitation had no room in the face of need.

“Just tell me,” Savannah said softly, “if I do something wrong.”

Thorn laughed nervously. “Sav—”

She lifted herself off his erection, reveling in the way her flesh pulled at his, her body protesting and rejoicing all at once. Movement felt good. Oh yes, very good. Her muscles remained undecided whether to clamp or unwind, but even still, that felt natural. After all, she’d never before asked them to perform for her; she didn’t change pace or break away to spare herself the discomfort of newness. Her body wanted to do either at the moment: slow to allow time to adjust or speed to race past the pain, but those sensations appeared secondary to the wonder of being joined.

“Is this all right?” she asked, sinking down again. “It feels...”

“Wonderful.” Thorn sighed. His hands abandoned her hips in favor of her breasts. “Feel so hot. So tight. Gonna squeeze me till I pop, you are.” A pause, then he lifted himself off the bed to suck one of her nipples into his mouth, driving his cock deeper within her. “So wonderful...Savannah...”

“Ohh, that’s good.” Savannah’s eyes fell shut for a second before flying open with conviction. She didn’t want to miss a second. Every flash that seized his face, every time his mouth fell open, every shade of everything that clouded his gaze remained hers to treasure, and she didn’t want to miss any of it. “Thorn...”

His teeth scraped along her nipple. “So lovely. That’s it, kitten...” Without warning, his mouth released her breast, and he fell back to the mattress, hands bracing her back and taking her with him, so her breasts pressed against his chest. Then his fingers gripped her ass, subtly guiding her strokes until a steady rhythm developed between them. “Ride me just like that,” he encouraged softly, stealing a kiss off her lips. “So good. God, you feel so good.”

“Really?”

She hadn't intended to let the word escape, but it did somehow. Pain lived as a thing of the past; she felt nothing now but the steady drives of his cock into her body. He felt so slick and hard, large and consuming; she became blissfully unaware of anything that existed outside of this. The all-encompassing warmth burning from within, greedy, hungry for more more more of whatever he had to give.

"Never," Thorn swore. "I swear it; I've never felt anything like this. You're... God yes..."

Courage fueled her strokes, making them harder, more desperate. Savannah didn't push her boundaries; when something began to hurt, she drew herself back, retreating to a place where only pleasure lived. The muscles in her thighs might have been protesting, but she ignored them, ignored the familiar tingle of embarrassment at the warm flood between her legs, ignored everything but Thorn and focused on sensation. And yes, she felt the intangible as well; felt love in his fingers every time they brushed her flesh, every time his lips caressed hers, every time he moaned into her skin.

"Fuck." Thorn's head snapped back, his eyes wide. "Not gonna last."

"What?"

"Inside you. First time. So hot and tight, and I can't... Not gonna last." Without ceremony, he used his grip on her ass to lift her off his cock entirely.

"What?"

"Can't last. Need to feel you come." He pressed his lips hard against hers and broke away just as quickly; the next thing she knew, he'd flipped her onto her back and slid down her body, planting kisses as he went.

Savannah felt too startled to register the inner outcry—the need burning within that screamed its frustration at being left alone—and therefore didn't know how to vocalize her discomfort. How could she begin to convey what she needed when she didn't know it herself? Thankfully Thorn's arms slipped under her hips and lifted her pussy to his eager mouth before her confusing jumble of thoughts had her brain misfiring on overload.

"Sorry, love," Thorn murmured, licking her clit. "I was gonna lose it."

The all-consuming body tremors had started again. "I...thought...that was a good thing?" Savannah offered, before her voice rode out on a moan. Gah, it seemed difficult to think of anything with his mouth performing miracles against her flesh. The teasing hints and licks disappeared; rather, he drank her with desperation she didn't recognize. His fingers slipped inside her in a flash, stretching her, pumping into her, filling her... Oh yes... His lips and tongue took over her clit, sucking and pulling, doing that head-waggy thing that sent vibrations through her insides and fanned the fire burning within. A second ago, she'd been on a path toward something she couldn't yet name; now she practically sprinted for it.

“OhGod .”

“Mmm,” he agreed, releasing her with a wetplop . “Fucking right. You have any idea how hot you are? How fucking good you feel?” She managed to pry her eyes open, having not realized they had fallen closed. Thorn's attention was thoroughly taken with the wet plunges his fingers took into her pussy; he only glanced up to tell her, “Could spend all day here. Watching this. Watching you swallow me. You're so pretty. Stretching around me, taking me in, and you're all mine.All mine.”

“Mmmm,” Savannah murmured. “Why...why did you...?”

“Told you. I was gonna pop. Wanted you so long... Had you... Couldn't hold off. Need you to come first.” He dived for her clit again, drawing her into his mouth and massaging her with furious intent that betrayed his own need.

This time when her body unwound, he didn't wait, didn't ride out the waves with her. The second he felt her tremble, Thorn was on her, over her, nuzzling her throat and easing his cock inside her again.

“Oh yes,” he murmured, his hips beginning their dance. “Fuck yes.”

“Thorn...”

“Sorry, love.” He raised his head just enough to smile into her eyes. “Know you wanted to be on top. Just couldn't help myself.”

Words fell away the next instant, leaving her awash in sensation. Her body was on a high, ripples of pleasure splitting her apart and welcoming Thorn's desperate thrusts as he barreled toward his own release. The bedsprings whined and wheezed, the headboard banging recklessly against the wall only barely overwhelming the wet slap of their bodies smacking together. Savannah gasped and clawed, her nails raking down Thorn's arms, her hips rolling up against him every time he pulled away. Her body was exhausted but famished at the same time. For everything he gave, she wanted more.

“Yes,” she murmured. “Ohhh...God.”

“Savannah, Savannah, Savannah...” His fingers pried between them, settling on her swollen clit. It felt so good it hurt, but she couldn't bat him away. “So good.”

“Gahhh...”

“Wanna feel you come again. Think you can come one more time for me?” He played her slowly, his strokes featherlight. “Want you to strangle my prick.”

Oh God, he would to kill her, but she hadn't the strength or the will to fight him. “Thorn...”

“I love you.” He kissed her brow. “I love you.”

Some words were spoken. Those words lived.

And it served as all she needed to spiral again into orgasm. This one came from nowhere: no buildup, no burn, nothing but a spontaneous explosion of ecstasy, her vaginal muscles clamping hard around him, squeezing him so tight, he nearly became a part of her. She heard him roar but didn't follow the words, and when his body tightened, she threw her arms around him and held him against her breast as he spilled himself inside her.

The world stilled after that, leaving only their harsh breaths in the wake of what they had shared. Nothing mattered at the moment. The world would still belong when they returned to themselves. Pleasure had rendered Savannah a dizzy mess, Thorn's words inspiring her with giddiness that would have frightened her once—once, but never again.

“Oh God...” Thorn murmured, dropping a kiss upon her lips. “Savannah...”

She grinned and ran her fingers through his hair. “Was I worth the wait?”

A beat. Then he smiled one of his smiles, kissed her again, and whispered, “Sweetheart, you're worth anything.”

Pure, unadulterated happiness—happiness unlike anything she'd ever experienced or even thought she could experience—spread through her body. They would have no the end ; instead they had crossed one barrier, but a thousand others lay before them—things they would get to share, things they would experience together. And in looking at him, she believed his faith in the words he spoke. He gave her nothing but the truth.

It was enough to make anyone, jaded and youthful alike, burn with hope...and burn she did.

An adventure awaited them on the road ahead.

In the meantime, though, Savannah enjoyed the silence.

He was gentle with her, almost hesitant, so worried he would cause her pain. He massaged her thighs and back so long, she fell asleep and awoke her an hour later with a soft kiss, and letting her know he'd drawn her a hot bath to ease the soreness in her muscles. Around nine o'clock, they remembered Thorn's father would arrive home at any time and made quick work of gathering the appropriate things for a weekend of decadence at the abandoned Evans home.

There, they watched a movie, ordered a pizza, and fell asleep on the couch.

The next morning Thorn suggested they see what their friends were up to. He didn't necessarily want to; nerves commanded him. He refused to push for too much too soon. They

had, after all, only just arrived at this point. The future remained theirs to explore, and he felt no rush.

All that aside, he couldn't help but drown with relief, among other things, when Savannah took off her clothes and suggested they spend the day in bed...though she said she might want a massage first, which Thorn was more than happy to give. He should have known not to assume anything...not with Savannah.

She always had the best ideas.

Epilogue

Ten years later

They'd had many anniversaries, each celebrated in their own special way. Their first real date, their “coming out” to their friends and family, their engagement and wedding, but there was one that would always stand out against the others. One they celebrated with a bit more gusto and enthusiasm.

The eve of that anniversary loomed, and Thorn could barely contain himself. Perhaps his impatience would have seemed cute on other nights; tonight it just annoyed Savannah.

“What do we need?” Savannah asked, rolling out the shopping cart as they began their normal route around the grocery store. “I forgot to make a list.”

“Whipped cream.”

She rolled her eyes. “Thorn...”

“I'm serious, love.”

“That's not until tomorrow.”

He shrugged. “We can't be prepared?”

“I think between the new lingerie, the candles, the dozen roses you ordered that I'm not supposed to know about, and that video we made last year...” Savannah's head ducked; she had not realizing her voice had carried to the elderly couple currently surveying the medicine aisle. Her cheeks burned, and she quickly averted her eyes, directing the cart toward the produce. “I think we're prepared,” she concluded.

Thorn smirked appreciatively. “There's always room for whipped cream.”

“Right idea, wrong slogan.”

He shuffled. “Come on, love. If not that, then at least some chocolate sauce. I'll let you lick it off my—”

“Thorn!”

“That's the idea.”

Her blush deepened. “We're in public!”

“Can't help that.” He slid his tongue over his teeth in the way he knew she liked, and immediately Savannah shivered and pressed her thighs together. It seemed unfair how quickly he pushed her buttons, how he knew what looks or gestures could render her into nothing but a needy mess.

Damn man.

“Savan-nah,” Thorn whined, bouncing on his heels. “I want whipped cream.”

“We're here to get groceries.”

“Whipped cream's a grocery.”

“Real groceries, Thorn, real groceries.”

He paused and arched a brow. “Are you implying it doesn't exist in the real world?”

She huffed under her breath. “Well, that's just ridiculous. Come on. Stop pouting and help me pick out things we need.”

“Ten years is a big deal,” Thorn pointed out, selecting a head of lettuce and giving it a once-over before tossing it into the cart for good measure, as though to say, There, I contributed . “And here I was thinking we could make it really special.”

Savannah threw him a glance. “It is going to be special,” she said. “It's always special.”

“Special enough to last all tomorrow?”

She paused, frowning. “But you have that—”

“Canceled.”

“Canceled?”

He nodded. “And rescheduled.”

“You rescheduled your meeting?”

“Course I did.”

“Why?”

Thorn's eyes widened. “Why?” he echoed, then snickered and shook his head. “Because ten years is a bloody milestone, love. One I thought you'd want to celebrate in style. Figured we could”—his brow perked, his gaze roaming suggestively down her body—“when we get home.”

At once, Savannah's heart thundered. "Home? As in...home?"

"The place where we live, yes."

"Tonight?"

"And into tomorrow. All bloody day. Big anniversary and all." His eyes burned a second longer before he blinked and stepped back, hands coming up in mock surrender. "But if you wanna be all business, I understand."

Savannah sighed as she felt her defenses fall to nothing. He could undermine her so quickly, have her trading in rational thought for something spontaneous. But then, the little things like this only fed her love for him, had it growing by leaps and bounds every day they lived together. He was so considerate; his hunger never quenched; and with every second she spent with him, she wanted an eternity more.

Ten years later and he still stood at her side. At times, she still couldn't believe it.

"Whipped cream, you say," Savannah mused.

Beaming, Thorn nodded enthusiastically, plucking a package of cheese off the shelf and tossing it in beside the lettuce.

"And chocolate sauce."

"What my girl wants, my girl gets."

"And our anniversary starts..."

"Right here if you want. I'll whisk you into a corner."

Savannah licked her lips and shook her head. She would never say the thought didn't tempt her, but that phase seemed lodged in the past. Well, mostly. One recent indiscretion stuck out in her mind... Three weeks ago, when he'd looked way too yummy at the dance club. "Let's go get the stuff."

"The stuff?"

She nodded. "And hurry, 'cause I'm suddenly itching to get home."

Thorn pitched her a winning smile, moving forward and seizing her arm. Their cart stood abandoned, lettuce and cheese and all. They didn't need it to carry what they'd truly come to buy.

Even they didn't need that much whipped cream.

THE END

Rosalie Stanton

Rosalie Stanton lives in Springfield, Missouri with her husband. She has a degree in Creative Writing, and when she's not writing up a storm, she spends time with friends, enjoys brainstorming sessions, and does her best to live life to the fullest. Rosalie loves hearing from readers, so feel free to write her at rosalie.stanton@gmail.com .