

Is it supposed to hurt this much?

I know it's normal for it to hurt a little your first time, although Cassie says that's a false message enforced by the patriarchy and actually there's no reason why it needs to be so painful, but Cassie lost her virginity on the beach to a beautiful Italian boy on her family's European holiday.

We cannot all be so lucky.

It's approximately 35 degrees and I'm currently trying to subtly blow away a stray hair that's stuck itself to my damp cheek while simultaneously trying not to fall off Brayden's single bed. I gripped his shoulders as another shot of pain vibrated through my body, although I think he interprets that differently. He picked up speed and I'm sorry, but I can't. If this is sex then take me to a nunnery. I tapped him on his sweaty back, oddly polite behaviour for someone who is currently holding that person inside them.

"Brayden." I tapped a little harder. He paused and looked down at me. I'm cushioned between his two arms, bra still on. He wanted to take it off, but I had a horrifying image of my two boobs, untethered, bobbing crazily around to our rhythm and insisted on keeping it on.

"Mhm?" His eyes seemed a little dazed.

I don't know exactly what to say. Please kindly remove yourself from my person?

"It's not..." I gestured in the general direction below us, "I don't think..."

His eyes lit up, finally understanding. "Oh."

He shifted his weight back and I let out a small sigh of relief.

"Am I hurting you?"

"No. Well, yes."

"What do you want me to do? Should I go slower?"

"Yes, I think so. I think that will help."

He smiled at me, a little nervous. He wanted me to enjoy this as well.

"Okay." With the same level of concentration reserved for parallel parking, he slowly re-enters. I held my breath in anticipation, and then all of a sudden it's like he's hit a wall, and that wall has a giant 'do not enter' sign stuck onto it.

"Nope, nope, nope." I squirmed out from underneath him and sat up against the headboard. He put his hands up slowly, trying to calm me like I do when my dog Rosie spots a possum on the verandah.

"It's okay," he placed his hand softly on my knee, "we don't have to do this if you're not ready."

I nodded. He's right. I shouldn't do it if I'm not ready. Absolutely. That's Sex Ed 101. The thing is, I want to do it. So badly. Honestly, it's a danger to my grades if I don't have sex soon. I lost 15 precious minutes on my Maths test last week just thinking about it because I saw a flash of Brayden's snail trail when he took off his school jumper. For some reason though, my body, who up until this point has been flooding me with hormones, has decided to close up shop.

My indecision and lack of enthusiasm must have been clear, as Brayden got off the bed and turned away from me. I heard a little 'pop' as he tried to discreetly throw the sticky plastic in the bin. I looked away, becoming increasingly aware with every passing moment that I was very naked. It's all very well and good when you're in the moment, but it wasn't even dark. It was 4pm. It was the only window we had before his mum came home after picking his little sister up from school and my parents thought I was still at band practice. Not that my parents would care that much. My mum gave me a packet of condoms a year ago and they have embarrassingly stayed hidden at the back of my underwear draw ever since. Still, it's the

principle of the thing. They don't need to know when I'm losing my virginity. Or be disappointed my sexual awakening has taken this long.

I pulled the twisted sheet over my body as Brayden joined me back on the bed, cupping himself. I focused my gaze on his face. There is little dignity in your manhood fitting inside your palm. I racked my brain for a conversation topic that didn't involve our current situation. "I'm thirsty. Do you want a cold milo?"

It was left of field, but met the brief. "Yes, please."

As soon as he left, I flopped back down onto the bed, staring morosely up at the ceiling. Of course I couldn't do it. The thing human kind has been doing since the dawn of time, so easy even the birds and the bees have figured it out, but me? A little too difficult. I was one of the last kids to get their pen licence, so I guess this tracks. I picked up a pillow and let out a muffled scream of frustration. Where there's a will, there should be a way.

In my dreams, which have increased in frequency in the past few months, sex was really good. Sometimes it was with Brayden, sometimes with a handsome stranger with a brooding brow, and there was that one weird one with my dentist, but the point is, I'm ready. Or so I thought.

Cassie would say that this is the natural effect of my Catholic school upbringing, that the constant glorification of the Virgin Mary has brainwashed me with ideas of purity, which have now physically manifested themselves in my body. Mary had a miraculous womb; I've got a miraculous hymen.

When Brayden came back into the room, two mugs full, I put my clothes back on. The collar of my St Helen's uniform scratched my neck, and I felt another bead of sweat roll down my back. It really was hot in here. And it smelt. Of failure or of sex, who is to say. Regardless, I got up and opened another window, conveniently allowing my back to stay turned to Brayden. I can't face him. God, it's too embarrassing. The one reason he's even interested in me, and I get spooked and ruin it.

Brayden and I had a mutual understanding. We met once a week after school in either an empty rehearsal room, or I hung back after his footy training and sneaked into the change rooms. The smell of Lynx was strong, so I preferred the music wing even if the doors didn't lock. No one knew. Not even Cassie. She would have an absolute field day if she knew. She would hate that I was giving into the high school hierarchy by falling for a football player. She wouldn't get that it wasn't like that though. Did I think Brayden was attractive in his short shorts? Yes. Obviously. I wasn't blind. Did I fantasise about what was underneath them? See my current situation. Had Brayden and I exchanged more than five words outside of the necessary "meet me in ten" or "year 9s practising Mozart (badly) in our space" texts? No. When we were together, our main focus was not on talking. Our 'relationship' was based on hormones and proximity. It had started in a classic round of spin the bottle during last term's school camp, but later that night when we had bumped into each other in the dark on our way to the shower blocks, we both knew that wasn't the end. I know it's probably not something I should say about myself, but what I've discovered is that I'm easy. In the dark against the cinder block walls, I let his hands roam wherever. What's more, I enjoyed it. I find it hard to believe that more women aren't as easy when it feels that good. Why would I want to stop? Maybe I'm just a freak who gets off way too much from the feel of someone's hand on my neck, and everyone else has an appropriate, moderate reaction to such a sensation. Like the feeling of a breeze on a mild warm day. Sure, it's pleasant. People like it. But it doesn't make most people want to strip down naked. After a week passed and I hadn't been outed as a loose woman to the entire school, I thought perhaps our arrangement could continue.

And everything had been good up until today. Up until my body betrayed me, and now Brayden would move onto someone else who didn't have an impenetrable hymen.

"Hey."

With a final look out the window and a deep breath, I turned to Brayden. I already had most of my clothes back on, so it was a matter of trying to look as dignified as possible while I searched for my odd sock and got myself out of there. His deceptively open smile couldn't fool me. Better to leave on my own terms rather than him making up some sort of homework excuse to get rid of me.

"I should be going."

"Oh." His smile dropped. "Are you sure? My mum texted to say she's taking Izzy costume shopping for book week. She won't be back for another hour at least."

"I have homework."

"Right. Okay."

God. Why was he making this more difficult than it needed to be?

An awkward silence settled over the room.

"I'll see you at scho-"

"- I can do better."

I paused, halfway to the door, his hand holding onto my wrist. I looked down at the soft circular motion of his thumb over my pulse.

"I shouldn't have had that meat pie for lunch. Coach Ruiz is always telling me to be more conscious of what I'm putting into my body before an important game, but I was really hungry today and I thought it would be fine, but I know I could have been more focused. I was a little sluggish at the start and I'll work on that for next time, just..."

It was like hearing a match report after losing to Caulfield Grammar.

He managed to lift his head up to finally look at me. His eyes were soft.

"Just. Say we can try again." His eyes followed mine towards the bed, and he rushed in to clarify, "not today. But maybe next week?"

It was sweet of him to take on the onus of responsibility. Really, it was. But what would happen when we tried again in a week and got the same results? Brayden might switch it up with a different strategy, but if the outcome was the same, then I would unquestionably be the recurring problem. Right now, I had my dignity - and my hymen - intact. If we met up in a week's time, I would only have one and it wouldn't be my dignity.

"I... I'll think about it."

Once again, my mind and body seemed to be out of sync with each other. I silently cursed myself, even when Brayden smiled in relief. It was the opposite of the answer I intended to give, but I always seemed to say yes around him, which is how I got myself into this situation in the first place.

I gave a tight lipped smile back. I had exactly a week to figure out what the hell was wrong with me, become a sex goddess, and thus ensure I got to keep kissing him. Jesus might not approve of my plan, but that wouldn't stop me praying to him come Monday morning Mass. Feeling my panic start to bubble up, I opened the bedroom door. It was time to go.

"Hannah. Wait."

Before I could fully comprehend or stop him, Brayden closed the distance between us in one step and gave me a quick kiss.

"Good luck with your homework. I'll text you tonight to check in."

I nodded stiffly, face frozen as I manoeuvred past footy cleats and out the front door. Only when I had rounded the corner did I lean against a browning shrub and remember to breathe.

Never, in all our secret trysts, had we exchanged a goodbye kiss. We had kissed a lot, sure, in a variety of styles and places, but a goodbye kiss wasn't required for purely physical relationships like ours. No. A goodbye kiss was *girlfriend* territory.

I whipped out my phone and shakily started scrolling for Cassie's number. I wasn't sure if I would survive her wrath of being kept in the dark up until now, but this was serious. I needed her critical eye and expert advice honed from juggling three boyfriends simultaneously at last year's school fete to help discern whether Brayden Towers, full forward on the footy team, thought we were dating. This was bad. This was not part of our arrangement.

I turned crimson as I remembered all the things we had done together, that I had done to him, and enthusiastically enjoyed doing so. Good God, I had only done those things because we weren't dating! I had never intended on being Brayden's girlfriend, and so had thrown social decorum to the wind. I clasped my legs with sweaty hands to try and calm down, but I had to stifle a scream when my phone buzzed against my thigh.

*4pm tmrw @ band room?*

I wish I had never noticed Brayden's muscular arms back at the start of term. I wish my body had never developed a mind of its own and an uncontrollable libido. I wish I could squash the spark I felt at the thought of being more.

I texted back:

*See you then :)*

Cassie was going to have a field day with me.