

Chapter 1

“Savi, Savi, Savannah! Could you stare any harder?”

“Oh, sorry. I didn’t realize I was staring, but look at him. He is gorgeous!”

Josalyn had been giving Savi a hard time about Eric Matthews since the 6th grade. Josalyn and Savi became inseparable when Josalyn’s family moved to McClellanville to join the church. Josalyn was of Native American descent and she had a nice olive skin complexion to go with her emerald eyes. She was only about five feet tall, but her attitude was much bigger.

Savi hadn’t realized that she was staring at Eric, and she hoped that he didn’t notice her doing it either. She had always had a crush on Eric, but no one ever noticed her, especially not him. Now she vowed that things were going to be different, things were going to change this summer. She knew she was ready for a change; she was ready for a relationship. She knew that she wanted it to be with Eric, he was honestly the only man that had ever left an impression on her.

Eric was sitting at The Beach Shack waiting for his food to arrive. Savi had seen him approach The Beach Shack from the distance. He was the most amazing man she had ever seen. With his brown wavy locks and green eyes, he could steal any woman’s heart. Eric worked at the local beach as a lifeguard; he had been doing it since he was a sophomore in high school.

Savi was home from college for the summer, and had just finished her freshman year at the state university. This would be her first summer as an honest to goodness real adult. She was going to make sure that this summer would be one to remember. She no longer wanted to be the goodie two shoes, who was afraid to stand out. She had discovered makeup, and clothing that wasn’t bought at the local thrift store. She was no longer the gangly, brace-faced, plain blonde that everyone walked past. She was going to be noticed. Savi had finally developed into a woman and she’d learned how to accentuate her eyes with makeup. Her daddy had always told her that she had exotic eyes, and now she could see that.

Josalyn had tried to talk Savi into speaking to Eric for years, but she had never been ready. Now Savi had decided that she was finally going to do it. She was ready to get herself noticed, but was unsure of what that might mean. Holding her breath, Savi approached Eric; but

too nervous to speak, she just stood behind him panicking for a few moments until Josalyn started speaking for her.

“Uh, hey Eric”

“Huh, what?” Startled, Eric turned around quickly to see who was talking. His blank stare told Savi everything she needed to know. Eric couldn’t place her. He had no idea who she was. But, of course, he did recognize Josalyn.

“H-hi,” Savi stuttered, standing there dumb struck and too scared to speak. The minute Eric turned his emerald green eyes on her, all her insecurities instantly came flooding back to her.

Josalyn jabbed her elbow hard into Savi’s side, and Savi realized that her friend was waiting for her to say something, but she was frozen on the spot. So again, Josalyn spoke for her. “Hey Eric what’s up, are you off?”

“Not yet, I’m just on my lunch break. What are you two ladies doing?” Although Eric was responding to Josalyn, Savi noticed that his eyes were on her.

Josalyn shot her a pointed glare, as if she could will Savi to respond. There was a slight giggle from Savi’s lips, but other than that just an awkward silence. Josalyn smirked at her, and continued the conversation with Eric. “Savannah and I are just spending the day at the beach, hoping to find a party tonight. Have you heard of anything?”

Savi and Josalyn shared a giggle at the look of shock on his face when Josalyn said her name. It was obvious that he had now made the connection between the woman in front of him, and the shy awkward girl that used to sit behind him in English.

“Hey Savannah, I didn’t recognize you.” Eric made a smooth recovery from his shock, and smiled at her.

She was still having a hard time speaking, but a jab in the ribs from Josalyn forced her to spit out a reply. “Um, it’s Savi. I go by Savi now.”

“Okay, Savi it is. Yeah, there is a party at my friends’ tonight. Eight o’clock. I’ll text you directions.” Eric received his food and walked towards the lifeguard tower. He yelled back, “See ya!” And gave the girls a little wave over his shoulder as he retreated.

Savi was shocked, Eric invited her to a party, her! Of all people! As soon as they were certain that Eric was out of earshot, Savi and Josalyn looked at each other and start to scream and jump up and down and Savi started to worry. What was she going to wear? What was she going

to say to people when she got there? She had never been to a party before, but she knew that if she wanted to change, if she wanted to be noticed, she would have to go. It was all part of her plan for this summer.

After Savi arrived back at her parent's home, she immediately ran up to her room to figure out what she was going to wear. Before she even started looking in her closet, she grabbed her journal from under her mattress and started writing about the day's events. She had spent her whole high school experience writing her sorrows in the journal, and now she would finally get to write about her dream come true – Eric had noticed her!

She decided to wear a pair of high-waisted denim shorts and a light yellow crop top to show off her midriff, and to enhance her breasts. She wanted to make sure that Eric's eyes would be on her all night long. She wanted to make sure he no longer saw her as the skinny geeky preacher's daughter from his English class.

Savi that knew her parents wouldn't approve of her outfit, or the fact that she would be going to a party. But Savi no longer cared what they thought. She was nineteen and she was a college student, she could do what she wanted. She knew a fight would ensue if her mother saw what she was wearing, so she decided that a little white lie wouldn't hurt. Pulling a hoodie and sweat pants on over her outfit, she headed downstairs. She told her mother that she was going to the beach with some friends to watch the sunset and that she wouldn't be back until late and not to wait up for her.

Savi got into her car and drove to Josalyn's. She then ran inside to change and apply her makeup. Josalyn didn't live with her parents. She attended the local community college, and lived in an apartment across town with three roommates from school. This made it easier for Savi to hide what she was doing from her mother and father. Being the preacher's daughter meant that you couldn't wear or do whatever you wanted. Savi had lived her whole life following their rules, and she was bored with it. She desperately wanted to spread her wings and be her own person.

Being raised in a strict Christian home Savi had been brought up with exacting rules and values. Women were to dress modestly and be respectful. They were to put no one and nothing before God, including themselves. Her father was the pastor at the local Pentecostal church, and Preacher's Daughter was not a title she had relished having.

When Josalyn and Savi arrived at the party, it was in full swing. The music was so loud that they couldn't even hear each other speak. There were people playing beer pong and some were dancing, while others were making out on the couch. Josalyn saw her boyfriend, Danny, waiting in line at the keg. She gave Savi a little nod, and then ran off to be with him. Without Josalyn by her side, Savi was completely out of her element, unsure of what to do next. She was a little annoyed that Josalyn had ditched her so quickly, but now that she was on her own, she was determined to make the best of it. All she had to do was to find Eric.

Savi wandered around until she noticed Eric in the living room chatting with a couple of girls. Sipping on a bottle of water that she had gotten from her purse, she watched him nonchalantly for a while before she got up the nerve to walk over to him. Once she started walking, Savi noticed that all eyes were on her. She saw that Eric had looked to see what everyone was gawking at, and that was when they made eye contact. Her soul told her that this would be the first night of their journey together.

"Wow." That was all Eric could spit out. She blushed at his reaction, pleased that her outfit had made an impact on him.

The music was so loud that Savi couldn't think straight, and they both strained to hear what the other was saying. But they still couldn't hear each other, so Eric eventually asked her if she wanted to go somewhere a little quieter, somewhere that they could have a real conversation.

Savi and Eric left the party together, and went for a walk on the beach.

"I can't believe your parents let you leave the house looking like that," Eric remarked.

"They didn't know. I changed at Josalyn's," Savi said quietly, not sure if Eric appreciated her outfit of choice.

After hours of small talk, Savi and Eric really started to get to know each other. She told Eric all about how she was going to school to become a teacher, and how she hoped to work at the local grade school once she graduated. She explained that her love for children had developed because of her help teaching Sunday school at her father's church.

Eric spoke about why he chose to be a lifeguard. When he spoke about wanting to help people, she could see the passion in his eyes, and her feelings for him deepened the more she learned about him. She couldn't have imagined a better time with Eric. She enjoyed every minute she had with him; they talked until the wee hours of the morning.

Savi awoke the next morning in her own bed alone, but she couldn't have been happier about it. The events of the night before still felt like a dream. She had spent the entire evening with Eric. They talked about everything from what they liked to eat to what their goals for the future were. He mentioned that he thought she was beautiful and couldn't believe that she didn't catch his eye before. She knew why, she knew she was awkward and flat chested and that none of the guys ever knew that she existed. But she didn't say any of that; it didn't matter now. She had Eric's full attention and that is all she had ever desired.

Rolling over in bed, she immediately grabbed her journal to jot down all the details of their wonderful night together. Hopefully it would be the first night of many. She was deep in thought when her momma walked in.

Savi's mother, Sarah, was a plain, yet beautiful, woman who never wore makeup and never dressed up, either. Sarah did her hair and dressed the same way every day, except for Sunday. Sarah always wore a dark colored knee length dress with black high heels and a white apron. She wore her hair in a French twist, the same way she had done Savi's hair when she had lived at home. On Sundays, Sarah would spruce up her outfit a little by removing the apron and adding a pearl necklace, saying that a lady should always dress up for God.

"Savannah, how was the sunset?" her mother asked in a quizzical tone.

"The sunset?" Savi faltered for a minute, almost exposing her lie before she remembered and caught herself. "Oh yeah, it was great, Momma. I haven't seen one that pretty in a while."

"I just wanted to come in and see how everything went last night. I wanted to make sure you didn't put yourself in an unsafe situation. I know how you kids can be. I can't believe you still write in that old thing," her mother said, pointing to her journal. Sarah reached for it, and Savi quickly pulled her hand to her chest.

"You can't read this Momma, it's personal," Savi gasped.

"You shouldn't keep secrets, Savannah. You know you can tell me anything, right?" her mother said with a smile.

"Momma, I go by Savi now," she reminded her mother, frustrated that her parents wouldn't stop calling her by her God given name.

Sarah gave Savi a wink and left the room. That was the moment that Savi knew things would have to change. Savi wanted a new life, a different life – a life that she knew her parents wouldn't approve of. She wanted to party and drink, she wanted to be fun and outgoing. She

wanted to have normal college experiences. She knew that this would be a feat, but she was determined to make sure that nothing would spoil her summer or the experiences she was looking forward to having.

She knew that the choices she was going to make would cause her parents distress. She had been very close to her mother growing up, but she had known that things wouldn't always be that way. If she ever wanted to be her own person, she would have to let her mother be her mother, not one of her best friends.

Savi's parents were very strict, yet they were still kind. Sarah was an old-fashioned and quiet woman, but she hadn't always been that way. When Savi was a little girl, her mother would play dolls with her for hours. One of their favorite things to do with each other was to sing into hairbrushes, pretending that they were rock stars.

When Savi was about three years old, things in her home had started to change. Sarah had given birth to a stillborn baby, after four healthy deliveries. The traumatic delivery caused Sarah to slip into a deep depression. Savi had watched her mother change from one person into another, from one extreme to the other.

After a few months, Joshua, Savi's father had started to change things, in the church and at home. Sarah had stopped crying all the time and started to act like a mother again. When Joshua had first implemented the changes in the church, membership had fallen, but then it quickly picked up. As the church grew, the city of McClellanville grew with it. People were moving from all over to attend their church.

Bethel Pentecostal church had grown at a slow pace, but it was now bigger than they ever imagined. Savi's father, Joshua had changed some of the practices at the church about three years after becoming the pastor. The church transitioned from a traditional Pentecostal church to one that preached and counseled in the ways of implementing a domestic discipline lifestyle. The congregation was not forced into practicing domestic discipline. However, it was highly suggested that members at least look into it before passing judgment.

Glancing at the clock, Savi groaned. The church was setting up for its big seminar today. Savi was uninterested in going, being one that had never cared for the church's views on domestic discipline. Why would she want to sit through hours of lectures on the right and wrong ways to go about it? The only bright spot was that Josalyn would be attending too, since they had

grown up in the same church. Josalyn's parents, like Savi's were big proponents of a domestic discipline marriage, and would also be speaking at the seminar today.

After high school graduation, every graduating senior and any returning college students were encouraged to attend the seminar if their families were members of the church. They were not required to join the church or practice domestic discipline, but it was required for them to at least learn about it. Savi really didn't have a choice on whether or not she attended. She was living with her parents, so she had to go. With a sigh, Savi got out of bed and began to ready herself, taking care to dress in church appropriate attire.

As she sat in the sanctuary waiting for one of her parents to start the lecture, she scanned the room looking for familiar faces. After a few moments, she noticed Josalyn and Danny walking hand in hand through the sanctuary doors. Standing up to wave them over, she let out a sigh of relief that she won't have to endure this alone.

"Can you believe we really have to sit through this?" Savi whined.

"I think it will be interesting," Danny replied with a smile, wrapping his arm around Josalyn.

"Of course you do, you're a man. You aren't the one having to be submissive," Savi remarked with a hint of sarcasm.

"Don't take your issues out on Danny," Josalyn snapped. "He didn't do anything to you."

Irritated at her friend's interest, Savi sat back down and waited for the lecture to start. She was already annoyed with the whole situation and couldn't wait for it to be over. She knew what was coming and really didn't want to be a part of it.

Just as her father stepped up to the pulpit to begin the opening prayer, the doors to the sanctuary opened and someone attempted to quietly sneak in. Curious, Savi turned to see whom it was and was shocked to see Eric. What is he doing here, she wondered. She knew that she hadn't mentioned it to him. He was not obligated to be here, as far as she knew; his family didn't attend the church. She was going to get to the bottom of this and find out what Eric was doing at the seminar.

Recovering from the interruption, Pastor Joshua started the seminar with an opening prayer. Then he and Sarah took turns speaking, covering topics such as when and where the correct time for discipline was and different methods that could be used for discipline in different situations. Savi's parents got into great detail on what was acceptable discipline and what was

not. They both explained the difference between abuse and discipline, reprimanding and humiliating, love and anger.

Sarah began talking about why many women feel that they need the structure of domestic discipline. She explained that not every relationship practiced the same way. She clarified for the congregation that domestic discipline is where the husband lovingly corrects his wife, whether that be with a spanking or a time out. It must be done respectfully.

Savi listened to her mother justify what she saw as an act of humiliation. She listened, growing more and more angry as her mother told everyone how domestic discipline could build a marriage or make one's marriage stronger. As Savi listened to her mother talk about how it was an equal partnership and not a one sided situation, she became more and more determined to no longer be a part of any church that held those kind of beliefs. She had always known the core of her parents' beliefs, but hearing personal details spelled out so blatantly to the public made her sick to her stomach.

She couldn't believe that grown women were actually okay with being treated like a child. She was bothered that Eric was there willingly. She knew why Josalyn and Danny were there, but why was Eric?

After four hours of listening to her parents and other members of the congregation give advice and tips on how to live in a domestic discipline marriage, she was more than ready to get out of there and get on with her day. Savi figured that Josalyn, Danny and Eric would feel the same way too.

After the lecture was over, Josalyn invited Eric and Savi to join her and Danny for lunch at The Beach Sack. Savi and Eric both accepted the offer.

Savi wanted to know why Eric was there. She wanted to know what he thought of the whole spanking and time out thing. She also wanted to know how Josalyn felt about it. There was no way that Josalyn could be okay with the thought of being disciplined as an adult.

"So... that was an awkward time. What did you guys think?" Savi mumbled.

Danny immediately piped up with, "I think it's great! Who wouldn't want a love and respect relationship like that?"

"Yeah," Josalyn jumped in, "I think it can be a good thing, it sets boundaries and teaches both partners how to love and respect each other. My parents have practiced my whole life, I really didn't get it until now."

Savi was shocked and disgusted at how her friends could be okay with anyone treating someone that they supposedly loved that way. What gives a man the right to put his hands on another person? Savi couldn't understand why her mother would let her father treat her that way, she would never let a man do that to her. Never!

Eric hadn't said a word, and Savi wondered what was going on in that head of his. She still didn't know why he was there to begin with, she had never heard of anyone going willingly, well, no one their age anyway. Savi sent a text to Josalyn, asking her to ask Eric why he was at the seminar.

Shooting her an odd look across the table, Josalyn took a sip of her milkshake and then blurted it out, looking annoyed, "So Eric, why were you even there? It's not like you attend the church?"

"I have been going for a few months now," Eric said calmly, taking a bite of his sandwich.

Savi was stunned to hear that Eric had been attending her family's church. Her parents never mentioned to her that he had started going there, but why would they? They had no idea about her feelings for him. Savi had only ever shared that secret with Josalyn. Savi looked to Josalyn and Danny to see if they knew anything. They had a look of surprise too, that's when she realized that Danny and Josalyn hadn't been attending as regularly as she would have to as the preacher's daughter. Savi envied them the luxury of that freedom to choose. After what she had heard today, she had no desire to ever set foot in Bethel Pentecostal again.

"Why?" Savi said bluntly.

"Why not? You all attend," Eric stated, scanning the table with raised eyebrows and a look of confusion.

"Why not? Why not! Because who wants to freely go to a church where they think it's okay to treat a grown woman like a child? That's why not!" Savi cried, running out of The Beach Shack as fast as she could.

Savi was so upset, being forced to attend the seminar had left her an emotional mess. She was so embarrassed that she had acted that way in front of Eric, just when he had finally started to notice her. After listening to Josalyn and Danny talk about how great they thought domestic discipline was, she had become full of anger. Eric being indifferent about the church was just the icing on the cake. Savi just hadn't been able to take anymore.

Savi was shocked that Josalyn and Danny would be okay with women being treated that way. She was even more upset that the man of her dreams could be all right with it, too. Savi was so annoyed that her friends could have no sense of right and wrong. Not only were her parents into this sick and twisted act, it seemed as though her friends were now also on board.

Savi spent the evening on the beach, trying to figure out how to change her friends' minds. She desperately needed to make them see how wrong this all was. It was essential to Savi that not only her friends see how wrong it was, but now, also her parents. She found herself determined to come up with an argument that would show them all how wrong they were.

That afternoon when Savi arrived home, she went directly to her room and wept into her pillow. She heard her bedroom door open, and her father, Joshua, stuck his head in.

"Savannah, what's wrong my dear? Why are you crying?" Joshua asked with great concern.

"I just don't get it!" Savi blubbered, with her face still stuck in her pillow.

"What don't you get Savannah?" her father asked, sounding perplexed at her strong emotion.

Savi sat up and looked her father in the eye, with tears streaming down her face. "What kind of woman lets her husband hit her? Why do you hit her, Daddy?"

"I don't hit your momma, Savannah, I would never hit your momma. I love her." The look on her father's face was one of utter confusion, and Savi gave a weak laugh. Was he really that deluded, that he couldn't see what he was doing?

"Yes. Yes, you do! You told everyone at the church today that you do!" She couldn't help herself; she lost it for the second time that day. It was all too much.

"Savannah, calm down, let me explain it to you."

But, Savi didn't want to listen to a thing her father had to say. She stormed out of her room, down the stairs and out of the house, slamming the door behind her. She got into her car and sped away, with no destination in mind.

As was her way, Savi eventually ended up at the beach, the one place that always made her feel safe. She had no idea what she was going to do or where she was going to go. The only thing she knew was that she couldn't go home, not right now at least. She couldn't handle another conversation with her father about the supposed love he had for her mother.

While Savi sat on the sand at the beach, she tried to reason with herself, she tried to make herself understand why the church thought disciplining women was okay. Why did everyone around her think that it was an acceptable act? No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't see their point of view. Actually, she didn't want to, all she wanted was for someone to hear her out.

Savi felt all alone in the world, like no one would ever understand her. She was deep in thought when her cell phone rang, startling her. Even more startling, the caller ID showed that it was Eric. What, did he want to make more excuses for the church? If so, she didn't want to hear it. She contemplated not even answering the phone, but her feelings for Eric won out over her stubborn anger. She could never deny him.

"Hey. Eric, if you're calling to tell me how wrong I am, I don't want to hear it," she answered with an attitude, not wanting to make things easy for him. He certainly wasn't making them easy for her.

"I wasn't going to say a thing, I was just wondering where you are. Everyone is pretty worried about you." Eric's voice was calm and cheerful, as if she hadn't screamed at him in a crowded restaurant only hours before.

"It doesn't matter," Savi whimpered, her resolve breaking.

"It matters to me," Eric assured her. "Where are you? I'll come to you. We can talk."

"I don't want to hear any more excuses," Savi snapped at him.

"I won't talk, I'll just listen," Eric whispered.

Giving in, she told Eric where she was, the same spot on the beach that she had been all evening.

It didn't take Eric more than a few minutes to get there; he must have been close by. When Eric arrived, he didn't say a word, just sat down next to her in the sand. Savi didn't speak either; she was all talked out. They sat there for hours in silence just watching the waves crash against the shore, eventually falling asleep together on the beach.

When Savi awoke, she noticed that Eric had stayed all night. She smiled. It made her feel like she truly mattered. She finally had Eric's attention and it had nothing to do with the clothes she was wearing. It had to do with her heart; it had to do with who she really was.

Eric awoke to Savi looking down at him, he couldn't believe someone could be that beautiful in the morning, but she was. He had enjoyed his time with Savi even though neither of them spoke; he truly enjoyed just being near her.

Eric knew that somehow he would have to make Savi understand that domestic discipline was done out of love, not anger. He would have to show her what love was and how domestic discipline bettered a marriage, if only she would give him the chance to make that happen. Eric had fallen in love with Savi that night. Not only was she beautiful on the outside, he saw the fire in her soul.

Eric knew that if he were going to show Savi that discipline wasn't a bad thing, he would have to earn her trust first. He knew he would have to show her compassion and listen to her. Savi had become the most important person to Eric, and he needed to show her that.

"Savi, would you like to come with me to get some breakfast?" He knew breakfast wouldn't really solve anything, but it was a start, and he wasn't ready for their time together to come to an end.

"You want to go with me, looking like this?" Savi asked, looking doubtful.

She had a red blotchy face from crying all night and sand in her hair, but Eric thought she was beautiful. "Yes, I do," he replied honestly.

Eric took Savi to the local diner. Trying to be nonchalant, Eric ordered for both of them. He wanted to show Savi that he could be the head of their relationship without it causing her any harm. He knew that he wanted to ease Savi into this lifestyle, but not until she was emotionally ready for it. Eric believed that domestic discipline was good for a relationship, especially a marriage, and he knew that one day he would be able to get Savi to see his side.

Most of breakfast was eaten in silence, Eric watched as Savi moved the food around on her plate instead of eating it. Eric recognized that this could be a great opportunity to be assertive with her, without her realizing what he was doing.

"You know, there are starving kids in Africa, Savannah." He noticed that she was still staring at her plate. "Savannah, hello? Anyone there?" Eric quipped.

"Sorry, what was that?" She looked up at him, but her eyes were blank.

"I said that there are starving kids in Africa; I noticed that you hadn't touched your food." Eric was hoping she would take the hint, that she would understand where he was coming from.

At that moment Savi took a bite of her eggs. Eric smirked, knowing that by getting her to eat, he had asserted himself in an obscure way.

After Savi had finished her breakfast she decided that she didn't want her time with Eric to end. She had to think of a way that they could spend more time together. She wasn't ready to go home and she definitely wasn't ready to face her parents.

Luckily, Eric seemed to feel the same way, and they made their way back to the beach. Savi finally started opening up to Eric about her feelings towards domestic discipline in a way that she hadn't been able to the night before. Eric listened as she talked about how hitting wasn't love and neither was humiliating someone you loved. Savi went on for hours about her disgust. She noticed that Eric wasn't saying a word, that he was just taking her feelings in, and with that she had never felt more respected.