

## That's The Way Love Goes Chapter 6

1994

*Raven*

"Where are we going?" Joe's excitement was rubbing off on me, and I sat up straight in my seat, looking at but not really seeing the familiar scenes of Boston as they whizzed past. I was thankful Joe had put the top up- my hair would have been a mess of tangles the second he stepped on the gas.

"You'll see." I could hear the smile in his voice without looking, but I looked anyway. I felt more comfortable observing him while he was driving- with his eyes on the road, there was less of a chance he would see me staring. Man, he was gorgeous! It was difficult to tear my focus away from his pouty lips, but his eyes quickly captured my attention. I felt like he was looking into me every time our eyes caught, like I could fall into the ocean of blue that they were. His hair was cut in a way to make it more wavy than curly, but was still unable to tame it completely. I liked that he didn't keep trying to push it back- the way it fell down onto his forehead was adorable. He reminded me of a 50's movie star, sitting in his car with his faded jeans and white t-shirt, sleeves rolled up. He had ditched his leather jacket before we ate, and I was drawn to his exposed neck. I was discovering that I was a 'neck' girl. And hands. My eyes traveled down his neck to his chest and shoulders, to his right arm draped casually on the steering wheel. His long fingers strummed a beat on his leg with one hand, and on the dash with the other. I again thought of the way they felt gripping my arms that morning, and I wondered what they would feel like on other parts of my skin. A strange knot began to form in my stomach, similar to what I had felt when Danny and I were kissing. I shivered.

Whoa! Where had that come from? Joe glanced at me. "Ya cold?"

I shook my head both in answer and to clear away my amalgamation of thoughts. I didn't want to think of Danny while I was with Joe. Well, it wasn't a date, though. But what was that feeling I just had about Joe, then? The conversation I had with Monsieur de Monteiro popped into my head:

*"So, you are the young lady to speak French, yes?"*

*"Yes, very little. I am studying French in school."*

*"Ah, and your friend, he is also studying French?"*

*"No."*

*"Maybe he would if he were studying with you, eh?..."*

*"I don't know..."*

*"You like him, no? And he likes you?"*

*"I don't know... I don't think so..."*

*"Yes, it's true!" his voice became softer. "I see the way he looks at you. He has stars in his eyes."*

Ugh! Why had he said that? He didn't know anything about either of us. Those damn French

people and their ability to make a romance out of any situation! I felt like huffing and crossing my arms in front of my chest; instead, I let out a huge sigh and returned my attention to the road.

"Are you okay?" Joe glanced at me again, and held his eyes on me for a second longer. I nodded once, told myself to stop acting like an idiot, and forced myself to return his gaze.

My eyes met his for what felt like the hundredth time that day, and I saw the genuine concern he held for me. Instinctively, I smiled; I seemed to do that a lot in his presence. I was having fun. And whether there was more to it or not, I told myself I wouldn't think about it. So I pulled my shoulders back, held his gaze, and assured him, "Absolutely."

His returning grin was mesmerizing, and before I knew it, he was reaching over to squeeze my hand. I ducked my head, but left my hand in his. His touch was soft and warm, and I relished the feel of his thumb gently tracing the back of my hand. I stared distractedly out the windshield and bit my lip. This was a good day.

We rode in silence for the next few minutes, before we turned onto Storrow Drive. I knew then we were headed toward The Esplanade. After we parked, Joe grabbed his jacket out of the back, and came to open my door. I climbed out, carry-out bag in hand, and we trekked our way across the park. The day was straight out of a proverbial fairy tale- bright green grass, sun shining, birds singing. Joe flung his jacket over his shoulder, and took my hand in his again as we strolled across the bridge to the other side of the park. Forgoing the benches placed sporadically under the trees, he led me down the bank until we were at the edge of the Charles River. He let go of my hand to spread his jacket open on the grass, and offered me a seat.

The view was spectacular. To this day, I cannot recall a time the Charles River ever looked so beautiful. [PICTURES] Dogwood trees lined either side of the river, their branches reaching out to touch one another across the water. The pale pink and white petals of their flowers dotted the fluid mirror, and I inhaled their scent as we stretched our legs out in front of us. Joe opened the bag and handed me one of the aluminum containers, along with a plastic spoon. Upon opening our desserts, we found that chocolate ice cream had come with our cake, and was melting into a milky sea around the layers of spongey chocolate.

"Mm, chocolate soup," Joe quipped.

"Did they give us straws?" I joked back.

"Nope, and no napkins, either."

I took a bite. "Oh, wow, I don't care!" It tasted like a small piece of heaven.

Joe followed suit, and groaned in appreciation. I felt another stir in my stomach at the sound.

"So," Joe started, after another bite and another groan. "How long have you been taking French?"

I licked the almond creme filling from my lips. "This is my third year."

"Three years? You acted like you were a beginner! I knew you were more advanced than that."

"Well, I'm hardly fluent! I would like to be, though. I want to go to France for a year as an exchange student, but it will have to be a couple of years from now."

A curious look passed quickly over his face, his eyes seeming to search inward, and I wondered what he was thinking. "Where in France do you want to go?"

"Paris, of course! Orleans. Definitely Lourdes." The desire to travel began to pull on my bones again, and I knew I was taking on that far away look in my eyes. I pulled myself back to the present and focused on the sound of crickets somewhere in the shaded distance. "Some small town in the south, I don't even care which one."

"How hard is that, to be an exchange student?"

"I have no idea! I am still trying to talk my mom and dad into it. My mom thinks it would be good, but she's worried about me being there by myself..." I almost slipped and said 'so young'. "My dad's worried about the money." I shrugged and chuckled bitterly. "So I have to wait."

I was aware of Joe watching me; oddly enough, it didn't make me nervous. The benefits of knowing someone for years, I guess, even if you didn't *know* them, know them. "You can do it," he encouraged. "You'll be just fine."

I said nothing, instead taking another bite of my cake. Ice cream dripped down my chin, and I rolled my eyes in good humor, reaching up with my free hand to wipe it off.

Joe's fingers stopped mine, and taking his thumb, he slowly wiped the drop away, upwards from my chin. My lips instinctively parted slightly, and he caressed my lower lip once when he reached it. Our eyes never left one another's.

"Raven, how old are you?"

My heart skipped a beat, then threatened to fall into my stomach. Not this again.

My voice faltered. "Fifteen," I managed.

Joe's expression remained neutral, but I could see his jaw tighten before he nodded.

Again, I had to ask. "Is that a problem?"

"No," he said to my surprise. "I just wanted to know how careful I need to be." He smirked playfully and returned to his dessert. I just stared at him. *What?* As I did on the way over, I told myself not to think about it. Easier said than done. I swallowed hard and returned my eyes to the trees and rocks on the opposite side of the river. Giddiness bubbled up in the back of my throat and I felt like laughing. I cleared my throat, and we finished our cakes in silence.

"Why French?" he asked after we had cleaned up and were relaxing again. I had toed my shoes off and settled my feet onto one of the large stones at the water's edge, and was now leaning back on my elbows. I tossed my head back and laughed.

"Why the obsession with my French lessons?" I countered.

"No obsession; just curiosity." He rolled over onto his side, propping his head up facing me.

I let my head roll sideways, pretending to scowl at him, then sighed, giving in. "I don't know-I've just always liked the sound of it. It's such a pretty language, so soft... romantic."

"Hm..."

"What?"

"Nothing."

I turned on my side, too, completely facing him, also. "What?!" I prodded.

"Nothing!"

That mischievous glint appeared that I had grown accustomed to over the years, and I narrowed my eyes at him, trying to figure out what he was thinking.

"So... Are you ever gonna tell me what Mon-sure What's-his-name said?"

Ah-ha! So there it was! "I knew it! I knew there was more to it than curiosity!"

"Hey! I'm just *curious* as to what he said." He paused, waiting for me to continue, then began motioning with his hand when I didn't. "Soo...?"

"Nope." I shook my head once.

"What?! C'mon! I know he said something about me, and I want to know what it was."

My eyes grew wide, but I continued to shake my head emphatically.

"Well, if you won't tell me what he said, tell me something else."

I looked at him puzzled. "Like what?"

He shrugged. "I don't know. I don't care, anything. Practice with me."

I chuckled nervously. "What?"

"Practice with me, speak to me in French," he persisted.

I was stalling. "But... you won't know what I'm saying."

He let his head fall back and rolled his eyes impatiently. "I don't cah!" He repeated.

"Okay!" I burst out, flustered. "I can't believe you're putting me on the spot like this."

"Aw, c'mon- like you said, I won't know what you're saying. I won't even be able to tell if you mess up. I just want to hear it." His eyes pleaded with me, and I couldn't look away. His eyes...  
*"He has stars in his eyes"...*

I closed my eyes to gather my courage. My heart was pounding furiously, and I felt light-headed. He was so close, I could smell his sweet and musky scent. I had never been dumb-founded with a guy before. But this wasn't just a boy I knew- this was Joe, and he was not a boy in any way, shape, or form.

I took a deep breath. "J'aime la façon dont je me sens quand je suis près de toi," I began softly, my eyes still closed. *I like the way I feel when I'm around you.* I felt his thumb touch my cheek.

"Tu me fais sentir différent... spéciale. Tu me fais sourire." *You make me feel different... special. You make me smile.* I smiled then, thinking about it, and leaned my face into his hand as he cupped my cheek.

"J'ai des papillons quand tu me regardes..." *I get butterflies when you look at me.* I opened my eyes, taking a chance that I could still breathe after seeing him. My stomach twisted, and I felt hot all over.

"Tes yeux me font fondre..." *Your eyes make me melt...* His eyes were a shade of blue I had never seen before, and my cheek was on fire under his palm.

"Mon cœur... bat comme le tonnerre..." *My heart... beats like thunder...* His fingers traced my skin down to my neck, then tilted my chin up.

"Tes lèvres... Je veux sentir tes lèvres sur les miennes..." *Your lips... I want to feel your lips on mine...* I was barely whispering now, and I wasn't even sure he could hear me, but it didn't matter. We were both lost in one another as I saw him lick his lips and lean into me.

"Embrasse-moi, Joe. Embrasse-moi..." I breathed. *Kiss me, Joe. Kiss me...* And then his lips were covering mine.