



Virgin and Other Stories

April Ayers Lawson

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Set in the American South, at the crossroads of a world that is both secular and devoutly Christian, April Ayers Lawson's stories mine the inner lives of young women and men navigating sexual, emotional, and spiritual awakenings. In the title story, Jake grapples with the growing chasm between him and his wife, Sheila, who was a virgin when they wed. In "Three Friends in a Hammock" the tension and attraction is palpable between three sexy, insecure young women as they tug and toe the rope of their shared sack. "The Way You Must Play Always" invites us into the mind of Gretchen, young-looking even for thirteen, as she attends her weekly piano lesson, anxiously anticipating her illicit meeting with Wesley, her instructor's adult brother who is recovering from a brain tumor. Conner, the cynical sixteen-year-old narrator of "The Negative Effects of Homeschooling," escorts his mink-wearing mother to the funeral of her best friend, Charlene, a woman who was once a man. And in "Vulnerability" we accompany a young married painter to New York City, lured there by an art dealer and one of his artists. Both are self-involved and have questionable intentions, but nevertheless she is enticed.

Nodding to the Southern Gothic but channeling an energy all its own, *Virgin and Other Stories* is a mesmerizing debut from an uncannily gifted young writer. With self-assurance and sensuality, April Ayers Lawson unravels the intertwining imperatives of intimacy?sex and love, violation and trust, spirituality and desire?eyeing, unblinkingly, what happens when we succumb to temptation.

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