



SUNDAY
LIGHTS

Rough AND
READY

C.H. JAMES

Rough and Ready

C.H. James



Golden Storm Publishing

Contents

Copyright

Blurb

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1. Chapter One

2. Chapter Two

3. Chapter Three

4. Chapter Four

5. Chapter Five

6. Chapter Six

7. Chapter Seven

8. Epilogue

About the Author

10. Get a FREE Book!

Rough and Ready – Sunday Night Lights Series

eBook - First Edition

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Blurb

The coach's daughter is off-limits – even for the grumpiest quarterback in the league. But when her bright smile matches her curvy body, can he resist the forbidden fruit?

Sworn off love and focused on football, Caleb Hunter, the gruff and unapproachable star NFL quarterback, has never let anyone in. Until he meets Harper Cruze.

She's the coach's curvy daughter. The blonde beauty who is strictly off-limits and no one dare get close, even the star of the team. It doesn't matter anyway, she hates football.

But their instant connection proves irresistible and one accidental kiss changes everything.

Amidst the roar of the crowd and the clash on the field, Caleb can't resist. Determined to claim her innocence, Harper's plus-size body pulls him closer and closer... until passion explodes and there is no going back.

*Settle the score with this steamy sports romance book.
Featuring a confident plus-size woman and a grumpy, gentle
giant who will do anything for his woman, you're sure to fall
in love with Rough & Ready.*

**Get ready for a scorching summer! Join these hardened,
sexy footballers as they risk it all off the field, chasing
victory... and love. The bright Sunday Night Lights
illuminate their path, but the winning touch has these fiery
hearts racing.**

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Chapter One

Caleb

The football club is filled with people, all of them cheering and carrying on like we've won the fucking Superbowl already. Don't get me wrong, I love it, but after a big game, it's the last place I want to be.

Sure, sometimes I enjoyed celebrating the wins with my team but on days like this, after being kicked and punched, tackled to the ground and eating grass for three hours, all I wanted to do was go home, lock the door, blast some 90s rap, and play some video games.

No people, no annoying questions.

But today, our team had won a big game and I'd gotten the winning touchdown. I have to stay. There is no way the coach is going to let his star player duck out early.

I'm grateful for my career in the NFL. Football has been good to me. It was just a lot some days. The days can be exhausting. Training camps, long practices, taking blow after

blow on the field. It's not easy, despite what the fans who parade around the locker room think.

Mitsy drapes herself around me. I hear the clink of her shoes on the marble floor, the deep base from the subwoofer blaring as the boys celebrate a great victory.

"Caleb, you had a great game today," she says, running her hands up my chest. Mitsy's body curves up to meet mine, wrapping her arms around my shoulders, locking me in an embrace, but I break free from what feels something resembling a fucking chokehold. "We should celebrate tonight. You and me and maybe one of my friends?"

I know exactly what she is suggesting. If I took her up on her offer, it wouldn't be her first time in a threesome. And she wouldn't care if I told everyone about it. In fact, she'd probably beat me to it. It didn't matter to her or to her husband, Deezy. She was just a trophy to wear out like the newest pair of Nikes to him and he didn't look twice at her when they weren't in front of the cameras. He was likely getting busy with someone else's wife or girlfriend at this very moment, anyway. It's a weird world the football one. Relationships like Mitsy and Deezy's aren't unusual. I've been around long enough to see everything. And I mean everything. "My answer hasn't changed from last week, Mitsy." I eyeball her as I step back and collide with Tyson who's buck-ass naked screaming towards the showers with a beer in hand. "Look, Tyson is ready by the seems of it. Go get him."

I wink at Mitsy and those black lashes with a thick layer of mascara blink back at me. “Um... ew.”

Mitsy huffs off with a flick of her hair, glancing over her shoulder to make sure I'm checking her out as she walks off. I chuckle and roll my fingers in a slow wave, adding to the disappointment on her face when she sees my eyes remained fixed on her head the whole time she walks away.

It's no wonder I have no desire to settle down with anyone. The women I've known all my life were all like this. Easily bought. No respect for themselves. What I know of marriage is a complete gong show. A charade of happiness that doesn't exist. Even my own folks had messed around on each other and they weren't even part of my world. It was pathetic and I didn't want any part of it.

Unless, of course...

My eyes rip across the room. There she is. It's like an alarm bell is screaming inside my head. A smile spreads across my face, everything comes flooding back.

The feelings. The weird rolling of my stomach. The smell. Oh God... the smell. My feet take me across the locker room as if I'm floating on the dank humidity of sweat and pure testosterone that reeks out the room. Only now, seeing those eyes, those pink lips and tinted cheeks.

Harper Cruze. Her eyes meet mine and a smile briefly stretches her perfect mouth. I'm so close to her, but another step is cut short when her father, Coach Cruz, smacks an impatient kiss on her cheek.

Fuck.

I can't go there. I know I can't. Even as I watch her walk into the room, stunning blue eyes wide, sparkling and taking in the scene around her, I know that she is off limits.

Coach Cruz would kill me if he had even a hint about the thoughts I have about his daughter. Harper may be in her twenties, but he's protective about her. Really fucking protective. Even standing beside her, nodding but uninterested in anything she is saying, the mere presence of his hulking frame is a reminder of the unwritten law of this locker room.

Harper is off limits. Off limits. Off limits. Shit. It doesn't matter how much I tell myself those words, they never sink in. Coach catches me staring and holds his hand up in a wave. Fuck. If only he knew how many times I'd fantasized about pulling his daughters gorgeously thick thighs around my waist and grabbing a fistful of those long, dark waves of silky hair, he'd beat me within an inch of my life. And probably fire me from the team.

Of course, he didn't know about my crush, so I just waved back and leaned against the wall, biding my time as I watched Harper in the corner of my eyes. She licks her full pink lips and smoothes the soft folds of her dress over her full hips. Goddamn, those curves... Fucking curves. They're everywhere. Her ass and tits are enough to drive me insane, but the way her plump waist invites my hands to grab on, pulling her bountiful ass against me as I make her scream my name. At least that's how I see it. She's more than that, though.

She bites the bottom lips of her full lips and stares off into the corner. Her blue eyes move around the room, watching her father as he congratulates some of the coaching staff by the drinks stand. All I can think about is how much I would enjoy making her moan. Bloods starts rushing through my ears as she catches my gaze just as a man I don't know slumps in beside me. My eyes are fixated on Harper and I swear I can smell her perfume from here. I remember - a mix of pure vanilla and roses. "Our team is lucky to have you, son," the man beside me says with a deep voice.

I distracted myself by paying attention to the man beside me. Something needs to slow the flow of blood racing to my cock, and the hair poking out of his ears will do just the trick.

"Thanks, happy to be playing for the best team in the league," I reply, keeping an eye on Harper as she moves towards the wives of some of the players. "A lot of money has flowed into the franchise, you know," the man says. "And it's all because of you. Ever thought of asking for a bigger slice of the pie, my man?"

I finally recognize the man. He's a big investor, one of the biggest backers of the team. A lot of money flowed from his pockets so I'm fucking glad I didn't tell him to piss off while I daydreamed about all the naughty things I would do to the coach's daughter.

An hour or more passes and by the time I'm done with the pleasantries that are required for a man of my stature, I'm pretty sure Harper has left. I head to my locker and grab my

bag, swinging it over my shoulder as a swirl of sweet smelling perfume races by me. Shit. Its Harper. Her cheeks are glowing, her eyes sparkling, but not in the normal, beautiful way they do. No. She's crying. She heads for the door and I know I should just let her go. But fuck that. Hell no. I can't. Something is wrong with my girl and I have to make sure she is ok.

My girl? What the hell is that?

In seconds, I'm beside her.

"Harper, are you ok?" I ask abruptly, causing her to jump in the darkness of the stadium parking lot.

She looks up at me. Her eyes are glazed with tears, so when she says, "I'm fine, Caleb. I'm just going to call an Uber and get out of here." "Harper, are you-""Caleb, please. Just go."

Chapter Two

Harper

I shouldn't let him upset me so much. You'd think by now I'd be used to it, it's been this way my whole life.

My father is who he is. Coach of the year. Once in a generation. A Marvel. The Brain.

Blah, blah, fucking blah.

All I know of my father is that he's obsessed. Obsessed with his team. Obsessed with his staff. His football club. His one true passion.

It doesn't matter who his team is. Professional NFL or Friday Night college kids. When he was coaching (which was pretty much all the time) his team was his life. It could be worse, I guess. Dad says he loves me, and maybe I should just grow up and accept that my father is doing something he loves with his life. Unlike me.

Maybe I'm just bitter. After all, he really only paid attention to me when I asked him for something. Like back in high

school if I asked for an increase in my credit limit or money for clothes. He'd helped me with new furniture for my apartment when I moved in. I didn't need those things from him. But I asked him for them anyway, just so I'd have a moment of his time.

Damn. Come to think of it... maybe I am a sad case.

But all men are like that. At least in my experience. They either wanted to treat me like a child or they didn't see me at all.

Except that one person. The one who looks at me differently. Caleb.

Caleb treats me like a real person. In the few times we've spoken, Caleb looks me in the eyes with that stunningly handsome emerald gaze. Oh God, that gaze. I swear I'm drawn to him. He captivates me when he speaks. It's strange, like nothing else matters in that moment. Not only that, but he listens when I talk back. Like, actually listens. He hears me.

It feels that way, anyway.

Sure, he is kind of grumpy looking most of the time. But when he's around me, he softens. He has opened up to me in small ways - little moments of vulnerability that I don't think he's ever shown anyone else before. Like the time he shared with me that his parents got divorced when he was young. It forced him to grow up too soon, but it also helped him get to where he is because he had to take on adult responsibilities at an early age.

These fleeting moments make me feel like... Fuck. No, I'm being ridiculous. There is no way a gorgeous man, the star quarterback of the NFL is interested in a chubby girl like me.

But then again... he sure as hell hasn't exposed these things to anyone else. At least, not in the public eye, or I would have read about it on the forums.

Stop it. Stop it now.

Of course, being the sad sack that I am, I've started crushing hard on Caleb. I mean, it doesn't matter, half the country is in love with him anyway.

"I'm fine. I'm just going to call an Uber," I say.

It wasn't fine, but whatever. My father practically ignored me whenever I tried to talk to him tonight. As per usual, he was too busy celebrating the win to even consider taking me home like he promised. So I've decided to just go my own way. Ain't that a familiar story?

I hate Uber drivers, though. They are just so creepy. They always try to start a conversation about politics or religion or philosophy, all topics that make me break out in hives if I think about them for too long.

If my mom was still alive, maybe we'd leave together. She would have been like me... I'm sure of it. In my mind, we'd go home and watch a movie and eat popcorn or something. Maybe Caleb would like to do that?

"I'll walk with you," Caleb says, his chest defined by a tight white tee that hugs so close it shows off the definition of every

tense muscle. He looks like a fucking bear, only warm and inviting, especially with that musky cologne that's drifting towards me. "It's not safe to be out there alone."

Caleb makes me nervous whenever he's close. But as I move further into the darkness, I welcome his company. And his scent. "You played well tonight," I mumble, trying to break the silence if anything. He grunts, the sound of his voice cutting through me so fast my nipples harden. "Thanks, I did my best."

My heart thunders as we come to a stop. He stands close beside me as I roll my arms over my chest, pretending I'm cold but really, I'm trying to make sure my heartrate isn't actually rising to dangerously high levels.

We share a brief look and I wonder if he's thinking about wrapping one of the thick arms around me. Um, yes please? Perhaps I should lean in? Then i could see if those lips are as soft as they look.

"Well lucky for you your best has you perched at the summit of the conference ladder," I shrug and raise my brows.

Caleb glances sideways with a frown splitting his handsome features. "What the hell was that?"

I giggle like a small child, shrugging my shoulders lazily. "Coach's daughter, remember?"

His eyes snap towards the stars and I swear he exhales so deep I can smell the cinnamon scent of his breath. "Oh, I know exactly who you are, Harper Cruze." A few moments of

silence make me wonder exactly what that's supposed to mean. I can only sigh, allowing the hope that maybe he really does feel differently about me. Caleb isn't like the other football players who had make me hate the sport. Besides the fact that my father lives and breathes football, the players are pretty much all total assholes. There are exceptions, of course. But not many. I should give them some slack, though. I've never really been allowed a chance to get to know them. I'm off limits to them. My dad is the coach, and he makes it perfectly clear that no one messes with him, or his family. So... they see no point in talking to me. I'm invisible to them. Hell, I'm even more invisible to their wives and girlfriends. Tonight is the perfect example. They didn't want to be seen with a frumpy twenty-four-year-old that would mess up their chances of having fun.

Finally I pull my phone out and fire up the Uber app. Caleb shakes his head beside me and reaches across, grabbing my phone and sliding it back into my shoulder bag. "You're upset, Harper. Wanna talk about it?"

I shake my head. "It's really nothing," I lie, dodging the absolute killer look Caleb is giving me. How is he this damn perfect? "I was just hoping my dad would drive me home. Uber drivers are weird. I'm always afraid they're going to kidnap me or something."

Caleb smiles. "Ya. They are weird. Listen, I was just about to leave anyway. I'm starving. The food they bring to these things - the sushi and all the stuff with weird names - is not my

style. Why don't we grab a bite to eat and then I'll take you home. It's early."

"Well..."

I don't know why I'm pretending to think about it. If he could hear the screaming inside my head, my mind shouting 'Go with him, you idiot! Go with him! he would probably change his mind instantly. But Caleb couldn't possibly want to spend time with me. Shit, no one else does. Not my father, not the other women in the locker room.

"I know a place that makes a killer burger," he says. "It's close."

"Okay," I say, choking on the single word as my throat suddenly closes over. I couldn't say no to spending time with Caleb. Even if there was absolutely no chance that he sees me as anything but the coach's daughter, I can at least enjoy the view, can't I?

Twenty minutes later, I'm sitting across from Caleb on what feels very much like a date. But it's not a date, Harper. "This is a nice little place," I say, settling the menu down and sipping the tall flute of prosecco. Caleb glances around the room, the bright smile on his face shining brighter than the flashing neon signs in the windows.

Time flew by as I enjoyed the best meal I've ever had. The laughter that bubbled from my lips as Caleb spoke was like a long forgotten drug, sending sparks of elation through my veins. His stories and his wit were captivating beyond measure, and I felt something stir inside me. This man is so

much more than what you see on the field. So much more than what I've witnessed in the locker room. The conversations are intoxicating, he is intoxicating. I'm so far gone with this man I'm practically fangirling as badly as the other girls that I loathe so much. I throw that thought to the back of my mind as Caleb continues telling me about how bad of a cook he thinks he is. I'm lost in every single one of his words until I finally realize how late it has become.

“Shit! I should go home,” I say reluctantly, sliding my chair out. “My dad will kill me if he knew how late I kept you out...”

Caleb looks just as shocked at the time, and he rises to pay the tab before joining me outside. The temperature has dropped and a brisk wind blows across me as we step silently towards his vehicle. I reach out for the door handle just as Caleb does and our hands briefly collide, forcing the most embarrassing noise to burst from my mouth. My cheeks heat as Caleb chuckles and continues to open my door.

I step in and try to look away from the smile pointing down at me from Hercules himself.

“Oh, if it's all the same to you, Harper, maybe we could not mention this to your dad? That we went out? He'd kill me,” Caleb says, opening the door.

My chest collapses, even ounce of air collapsing so fast I feel myself deflate on the spot. “Oh... yeah... of course.”

Just as I go to step in, Caleb catches me and tugs me back. His eyes have darkened and he's shaking his head. With one

hand on my hip and the other hovering near my face, he moves in so closer. His touch is like a warm breeze, but his hand so strong I feel like I'm on fire.

I'm still nodding in agreement to his request.

"I won't say anything," I finally say, wondering if he'll release my hip now.

He smirks. A goddamn smirk that smacks me right in the heart. "And maybe don't tell him about this either." "Wh-what?" I can barely get the words past my lips as our faces moved closer together, Caleb's tender breath now mingling with mine.

My heart is pounding wildly as his lips press against mine. Oh yeah, they're soft. So fucking soft. Like some desperate manic, I devour them hungrily. Every ounce of me is melting into him as his hands move around me, pulling me closer.

"Caleb," I breathe, as if just checking to make sure this is all real.

"You taste exactly how I thought you would," Caleb growls, nipping at my bottom lip.

His hands squeeze, his grip possessive yet gentle as if refusing to let go of me even for a split second.

"You've thought about this?" I ask, the tips of my toes begging for relief as I rise higher, higher just for another taste of his mouth. I moan softly as he sucks my bottom lip into his mouth and growls again. Fuck, I love that. Deeply satisfied in pleasure. That's what that noise is. His warmth surrounds me

completely, lifting me off the ground as our kiss deepens further. Unfamiliar sensations taking over every inch of my body as our tongues touched, slowly Caleb backs away and turns without looking back at me.

I pile into the passengers seat and can't stop myself from holding my lips.

What is this? Did that kiss really mean something? Or am I just going to end up getting hurt again?

Fuck. At least this time, maybe it will be worth it.

Chapter Three

Caleb

The way she responded to that kiss - I knew without a doubt that she felt the same way as I did. There is some serious heat between us. And I'm not letting her go quite yet.

"I want to show you something before I take you home. Is that okay?" I ask, watching the way she's barely blinked since that kiss.

She nods slowly, allowing her smooth hair to fall either side of her gorgeous face, framing her beauty perfectly.

Eventually she glances sideways and asks, "What is it?"

I smile, reaching across to grip her wonderfully thick thigh.

I squeeze, sliding my hand slightly up her leg. "You'll see."

I drive for about twenty minutes, my mind racing the entire time. I want this woman. I want her so much. We zoom past restaurants and shops and into a suburban area. It's like my whole life is flashing before me. All the memories, it's like a past life as I speed through empty, dark streets. It'd weird,

though. My mind is clear, despite being unable to believe I was taking her here. Of all places, the most intimate piece of land I've ever known.

With my SUV howling in the pitch black silence, I come to a stop on a street of houses. Old houses with big porches and dark windows wink at us from the darkness.

“Where are we?” Harper asks, unhooking her seatbelt.

I slide out from behind the wheel and trudge around to her side and open her door. A gentle breeze makes her shiver, so I reach out for her hand. She grabs me and stares deeply into my eyes. “Trust me, I'll keep you safe and warm.”

Her voice is soft, laced with uncertainty and what sounds like hope. She's nervous, I can see the whiteness tinting her cheeks. But she takes my hand and I entwine my fingers with hers, gripping her tightly so she knows nothing can happen to her. I squeeze her hand a few times, reassure her as we take the first steps. I lead her down a path between two houses. Some feral dogs are barking nearby, their howling the only disruption to a perfect darkened sky that looks solid as stone in the distance. Just as I remember, some trees leads to the broken pathway where the old concrete all but disappears in amongst dirt and muck.

Finally, I give Harper hand a squeeze when we reach the place.

She tilts her head and breathes in deep before looking around again at all the things surrounding us: the old bench and

forgotten swing set. There isn't much else, but it's what it all represents.

Me. My life.

We sit on the bench and Harper allows me to curl an arm around her. I pull her close, loving the way her body heats mine.

“This is where I used to play when I was a kid. I lived down the block. Even then it was old and no one ever came here because, well, there's not much here. But I didn't have a lot of friends. None really. So, I came here to play with my imaginary friend, Dexter.”

I scoff and roll my eyes, shaking my head at how insanely stupid that sounds now.

“What? What are you laughing at?” Harper asks. “It just sounds so dumb. I played trucks in the grass and laughed, all with Dexter, my only friend at the time.”

“I don't think it sounds dumb.” Harper slides closer, her scent filling my lungs with pure bliss. “I didn't have many friends either, so maybe Dexter and me can get to know each other sometime?”

I chuckle. “I still come here when I need to think or have a big decision to make, you know?”

Harper's reaction is beautiful. Here, amongst the stars and the trees, a place where I used to find solace as a child only seems to grow more and more special as I grow older. Forget the fame and fortune being a NFL star brings. The riches and

million dollar checks don't bring real happiness. Right here, a run down old clearing with a rusty swing set... that's where I'm happiest.

Harper looks around, then slowly twists her body and wraps both arms around me. It's like she never wants to let go, she's holding me so tight. My stomach twists at the feeling. My chest is tight and I've never struggled to breathe so bad.

I keep talking, telling stories of my upbringing. Harper doesn't say much, but she doesn't need to. Her embrace speaks volumes, though, I swear I see a tear prick at the corner of her eyes when I tell her how hard my parents divorce hit me.

"It must have been hard. Being alone. Didn't you have siblings?" she asks.

I shake my head. "None. My parents worked a lot so I was what they called a latchkey kid. I hated being alone in the house. That's why I'd pack four PB&J sandwiches. Two for me and two for Dexter."

Harper raises a brow. "And I assume Dexter was never really that hungry?"

"What? You think two measly sandwiches would help me grow to this size? Of course I ate his, I needed it more than he did!"

Harper laughs and it sounds like heaven's gates opening.

"Anyway, I'd come up here with the sandwiches and escape. No one bothered me. They still don't when I'm here. In this place, I'm just Caleb. Not Caleb the football star. Not Caleb

the rich bachelor the magazines try to portray me as. Just Caleb.”

She’s quiet for a moment and I watch the branches hanging nearby sway in the moonlight. They whisper softly to each other, their leaves dancing around them. Peaceful and perfect.

Interrupting my trance, Harper’s voice catches me off guard and I jump slightly. “My mom died when I was little and my dad - well, you know my dad. He lives and breathes football.”

I nod, remembering that first night. When he had cheerfully pointed at my locker and winked slyly. *‘If you need anything son, just let me know...’* I can still see the man who’s made me feel at home ever since I was drafted at number one.

“You don’t like it though, do you?” I say with a laugh.

She shakes her head, her long curls falling over her shoulders and brushing against mine. Her fingers grasp tightly into mine as she says; “Football? No, not much.”

“Is that ok?” She looks concerned and I sigh inwardly. Does she really think that I would reject her because she doesn’t care about football?

“Of course it is.” Her hands find their way behind my neck and we are now inches apart from each other as I look down into those beautiful eyes of hers. “Harper...” I pause, trying to make sure I am saying the right thing. “You don’t care about football so you sure as hell don’t care that I’m a big star,” I say, bringing a smile to her face. “Maybe...maybe after all this time staring at the most gorgeous woman in the world from

across the room, I'm not that crazy after all," I run my hand through her hair and pull her closer again. "I feel it in that locker room every time you're in there."

As if on cue, our eyes travel down to her lips and then back up again once more before she leans in closer towards mine.

Our lips meet halfway, like two magnets finally coming together again. The kiss is electric, and I feel a rush of sensations coursing through my body. Her scent fills my nostrils, a heady mix of jasmine and vanilla, and I feel my resolve melting away.

My hands roam over her body, gripping her curves and pulling her closer. She moans into my mouth, and I deepen the kiss, my tongue probing her lips. Harper's hands wrap around my neck, holding on tightly as our kiss intensifies.

I feel a stirring in my loins, and I know that I need her now. Not just now, but forever. I break the kiss and just pull her close, our breathing hitched as we sink into each other. Sitting here, after all these years, I've never been more sure of anything. I need this woman in my life. Not only that, but I need to find a way to make her mine.

No. Matter. What.

Chapter Four

Harper

The next morning when I wake up, the first thing I think is, “*Holy shit, I kissed Caleb Hunter last night!*”

I can still feel his lips on mine. Soft, yet hard. Elegant, yet masculine and hungry.

Something inside of me warms and I beam with a huge smile. I’d been kissed before but not like that. Whoa... No way. Not like the whole world existed between our lips. Not like I could feel our future in the twinge deep in my belly.

Instantly, right after that kiss I changed the dialogue in my brain. I couldn’t let myself get caught up in this. Despite opening up to me more than I ever expected, I’ve prepared myself for the worst. After a lifetime of disappointments and heartbreak, what else is a girl to do?

Plus, there was no way in hell that Caleb was interested in me like that. Yeah, yeah... the kiss was incredible. And yes, I was sure I felt something. Actually, I felt more than something. It kept on jerking desperately in his pants every

time he shuffled in closer when we were sitting on the bench seat.

But I need to stop. I'd let myself think a guy was into me before and I know how that story ends. I'll just ended up getting hurt if I keep this up. Gino Rossi kissed me a week before prom and then he ended up going with Candy, the head of the cheerleading squad. Pretty much every experience I've had since then with guys has shown me that I'm just temporary, a distraction until the right woman comes along.

And the right woman for every man I've ever dared to think about in a romantic way is always prettier than me, skinnier than me, and more outgoing than me. Plus, no one is better positioned to know that this is just what footballer's do to girls anyway, right? I mean, I see it literally every day. They have their way with gorgeous women and then set them loose.

It doesn't matter. I accepted a long time ago that I'm never going to be the main woman in a man's life. I was just good enough for the moment.

And this will be no different.

I rise out of bed and prepare myself for the day. Catching sight of myself in the mirror, my lips tingle at the memory of last night.

My chest rises and falls with a deep sigh. It's a kiss, or two, that I won't forget in awhile. No matter how hard I try or how many times I tell myself it's not happening.

This will be no different.

This will be no different.

I put my make up on and scrunch down every desperate thought of Caleb.

This will be no different. Good enough for the moment.

I make breakfast and stare out the window. Caleb was likely just feeling down last night and needed a distraction - someone to remind him that he was a superstar football player and could have any woman he wanted.

But I want that woman to be me. So badly.



After work, my dad calls me and asks me to bring some food to the field. The guys had been practicing all day and he wants to reward them. Classic dad. He tells me I can stay and eat with them if I want to, and with the sunshine beaming down on this late-afternoon humidity, it's very tempting.

I hate when Dad treats me like his secretary or assistant, but it means that I might get to spend some time with him, I just suck it up and do it anyway. I always say yes, and he knows it.

But this time, I said yes because it would mean I'd get to see Caleb. I needed to know if I'd imagined the whole night with him after daydreaming all day to the point where I'm sure my colleagues heard me groaning our loud.

Even though I desperately hoped to find out otherwise, I was pretty sure Caleb would ignore me and everything would go back to the way it was. I'd be invisible again. That's my plan. Then I'd know for sure and I can start to move on with my life. If that happens and he ignores me like I suspect might happen, I'll know. And I'll gracefully accept the kiss and won't make the mistake of falling for his attention again.

You're ridiculous, Harper. Absolutely ridiculous.

In the club room, the guys are all changed and waiting for the food when I arrive. When I slump up the stairs and slam a tray of food on the table the players start gathering around the sushi, not one of them acknowledging me.

"Hands off!" I bite out, pulling the plastic wrap back over the box. "If you all want more than this, you'd better come help me get the rest out of the car!"

Caleb jumps up from behind a table set out with sports drinks and water bottles. He smiles at me, the sight making my heart flutter instantly. "We got this. Come on guys."

He grabs a couple of his teammates and they run down to get the food from my car. By the time they're back, it doesn't take long before the boxes of food are almost empty.

Everyone is dished up and the guys are devouring the food without a sound. Dad acknowledges me in his own way, a gentle bow of his head and a slight smile lifting on side of his mouth.

A few minutes pass and I'm completely caught off guard when Caleb moves in my direction, filling the air with his musky, sexy smell. I swallow hard when he plucks a chair out and sits down beside me.

Of course, my head goes into crazy-Harper overdrive. In case you don't know, that means one-billion-fucking-miles-an-hour.

Maybe I am overreacting? Maybe last night isn't just something footballers do?

Caleb could be different. I mean, there's always an exception to the rule, right?

We don't have a chance to talk though because now they're done eating, everyone else is yelling at each other and laughing. A typical locker room vibe if I've ever seen one. The normal crap that I'd grown up with so it never catches me by surprise.

I had to know though. I couldn't help myself. I had to know if Caleb's kiss last night meant anything. So, I move in closer and slyly reach across to touch him.

As the boys laugh at the linebacker flicking his jockstrap across the room with dead-eye accuracy, getting it to land into the team doctor's tuna egg sandwich just as he's about to take a bite, I slide my hand on Caleb's thigh, slowly rubbing to the point where his shorts end.

It's not like I jump in his lap.

You'd think I had, though.

Caleb jolts away from my touch and looked furtively around the room with the color in his face draining. Maybe I caught him by surprise, but when he shoots up moments later, I'm sure my darkest fears have just been confirmed.

He doesn't want me.

Okay, sure. He's just going to get more food, but I know that's just an excuse to get away from me.

My face burning hot, I jump up, throwing my full plate of food in the trashcan set by the door as I speed through it. I don't look back. I'm out that door fast. Before anyone can notice I'm gone.

Hell, like they would notice anyway.

Stupid. I'm so damn stupid.

Of course he doesn't want me. No one ever wants me, not even my own fucking father.

I'm downstairs at my car when heavy footsteps pound the concourse behind me. I wipe at my eyes and click the key for my car. It doesn't open, so I click again. And again.

"Unlock you fucking asshole!" I scream, hammering the button on my keys. "UNLOCK!"

"Harper! Where are you going?"

That voice can only belong to one person, but I can't look him in the eye right now.

I slam the keys another few times before a hand grasps my shoulder, pulling me around until I'm facing the most majestic

fucking eyes I've ever laid eyes on.

“What do you want, Caleb?”

He frowns and shakes his head. “Harper, I-”

I swipe my eyes. “Just go! I know you don't want me, so just-” My thumb continues pressing the unlock button on my keys, but the blinkers don't flash. “ARGH! Why won't this unlock?”

Caleb's hands reach out, applying a gentle pressure on either side of my head. He grips my shoulders, his thick fingers rolling over my collarbone in a way that instantly relaxes every muscle in my body.

“Are you calm now?” Caleb asks, dipping his head so his eyes meet mine.

I nod.

“Harper, why are you crying?” Caleb asks. He looks genuinely concerned. Dammit. How does he do it? I know I mean nothing to him. Why did he bother following me?

“Caleb, you don't have to pretend. I know what I am. Just go back to the team and leave me alone,” I say, trying to pull away from him.

He doesn't let me turn away again though.

“Pretend? I'm not pretending anything. What are you talking about?”

“Look, I don't know why you kissed me last night but I know you pulled away from me just now when I touched you.

If I'm so repulsive to you, why did you start up last night? You could have just dropped me off at home and I would have been fine. I know I'm not pretty and I know you'd never be with a chubby girl like me, so just go back and forget about me. I'll get over it, I have before."

The tears are streaming down my cheeks and I can't look at him.

Caleb tips my head up and, to my complete shock, he kisses me. Softly. Softer than the first kiss we share. So soft, I'm wondering if I imagined it.

"Do you think that's what I think of you?"

I don't know what to say. He was probably just trying to make me feel better.

I jerk away from his hands. "Stop it, Caleb. I can't do this. You're just making it worse. A little kiss isn't going to fix it when I know it means nothing to you."

Suddenly, Caleb's eyes darken and his face grows more serious than I've ever seen it before.

"Nothing? Do you think you mean nothing to me? I pulled away just then because I want the situation to be right when I tell your dad that I'm in love with you. I want it to be right when I tell him there's nothing he can do to make me stay away from you. You don't think I'm serious, Harper Cruze? Come with me and I'll show you how serious I am."

Without warning, he pulls me a little bit rougher than I expect, causing me to stumble. He doesn't slow, instead taking

me to his SUV. He opens the passenger side door and helps me in, reaching across my body and buckling me in.

“Caleb...”

Softer now, he grips my chin, planting a kiss on my lips before he says, “Hush, just let me show you.”

I don't say another word as he drives, a little faster than I would have liked, to his apartment. I don't speak as we ride up the elevator, my hand firmly in his. And I don't dare utter a word as he unlocks the door to his apartment, pulls me inside, and slams it behind us, turning abruptly with slits for eyes, roaming over every inch of my body.

Chapter Five

Caleb

The moment we're inside the door, I crush my lips to hers.

I feel her body calm in my arms.

“I want you and only you, Harper.”

She starts to pull away, “Caleb, we have to talk...”

I reach for her shirt and pull it over her head. She tries to cover herself, making a low growl form in the base of my throat.

Her hands flinch into protective fists over each breast. This makes me growl even louder.

Pushing her hand out of the way, I lean in and kiss her nipple through the fabric of her bra. My tongue rolls around the peak of her breast and licks her through the thin material. When she groans with pleasure, I kiss the other pebbled nub just as forcefully before pulling back slightly again. I go back and forth between breasts enjoying each high puckered tip until it

is wet with my saliva. Her nipples are a light rosy pink, so sweet against her milky white skin. I run my tongue down from the top of one breast to its yummy looking bottom, then repeat whole process on her other side one more time. These are breasts made for sucking on and there's no way I'm going to stop now.

So ready to taste what is below this deep neckline, I quickly unsnap her bra and toss it across the room. It lands on the floor somewhere near the dresser. Then my mouth comes hard against another set of beautiful orbs that has me swallowing deeply a few times before leaning closer for a taste of heaven.

I touch her upper body gently.

“...you are beautiful. And sexy. There is nothing to compare to anyone else because you are so gorgeous.”

She shakes her head, which only makes her look more beautiful because her long hair falls perfectly around her pretty face.

But it's clear words are not going to convince her. I can see she's heard these things before, only to be let down. No. Not this time. I have to *show* her.

I stop talking and roll her onto her back, hovering over her, my eyes locked on every perfect inch of her creamy skin.

For a moment, she looks up at me with doubt. Dammit. I hate she thinks that way about herself. I'm going to make sure she never doubts her beauty again.

I remove the last of her clothing, stopping to kiss her softness every few seconds. I kiss her lips, her collarbone, her cleavage, her stomach and I keep kissing until I reach her toes.

Satisfied, I rise up to evaluate the view beneath me.

“Perfect,” I say, scanning every inch of her body.

Harper is naked beneath me. Peachy, perfect smoothness as far as I can see. Warm. Gentle. Curvy as fuck.

I quickly removed the rest of my clothing until I was naked too, I can't hold back as my heart hammers against my chest.

Laying my body over hers, I kiss her neck and say, “I love your softness. I love your curves. I love you here,” I say, stopping to kiss her lips, “and here,” I whisper as I kiss one pointed nipple and then the other, “and here.”

Sliding down, I'm directly between her legs. I swear I can smell her musky scent and it's only driving the raging erection painfully reminding me how damn lucky I am right now.

I part her legs to kiss her pinkness, savoring the sweetness right on the tip of my tongue. She moans, her back lifting slightly off the bed. My hands run along the inside of her thighs and she opens up to me.

“Ohhh...” she moans.

I kiss her again, sucking her clit lightly into my mouth. She makes a sound like a kitten who's been starved for way too long. I lick up the full length of her, from her opening all the way up to that hard little nub, sending her into a frenzy of deep breaths and sexy-as-fuck whimpers.

“Caleb, I...”

“Shhh. Just let me show you, Harper,” I whisper.

Fuck. I don't know how long I can hold back from my own desire for her. It's throbbing so damn hard as I devour her pussy that I reach down and squeeze, hoping to stem the flow of blood to my cock.

I want to make her feel good, so I increase the pace of my tongue and focus on her clit.

“No, Caleb, I've never had...I've never had someone show me like this before,” she says.

I nod. I understand. “It's ok, Harper. I promise I'll make it good for you. I'm going to make sure everything is good for you, from now on.”

She's breathless as she opens her legs more for me. With my lips, tongue, and fingers, I bring her excitement to a peak.

She comes. All over my fingers, but not before she tries to rip my hair from my scalp. I let her calm down, right before I press my mouth against her dripping core again. I do it again and again until she was begging for a moment of relief.

“Not enough,” I growl when she plucks me away from her pussy. “Never enough.”

I raise my body over her and slide myself inside, giving her exactly what she needs right now. *Mine*. She's so wet I practically slide all the way in.

“Harper, you are the kind of woman I’ve been waiting for.” I pump my hips, hard. “I hope you don’t mind but I fully plan on fucking you into believing how incredibly sexy you are. I’m going to fuck you every single night until you know what a queen you are. I’m going to fuck you in every way imaginable until you understand that you are not less than anyone else. You are more than anyone else deserves. I know it and you will know it, too.”

I wrap my hands in her hair, turning her face to look directly at me. “Open your eyes, Harper.”

Those majestic eyes flicker at me, filled with lust and exhaustion.

With a smirk watching her enjoy every movement my cocks makes inside her, I say, “Tell me.”

“Tell you what?” she gasps as I drive my cock deep inside her.

“Tell me you are worthy,” I say, pulling her hair slightly.

“I’m...worthy.”

“Tell me you’re a queen,” I demand.

“I’m...a...queen!” Her breath comes out hard in between the words.

“Tell me you’re my queen,” I whisper, pausing. The head of my cock is barely inside her and she wiggles against me.

“Please, I need...”

“Tell me!” I growl, kissing her lips.

Harper looks me in the eyes and says softly, "I'm your queen."

I smile and then kiss her hard, driving myself into her wetness. Over and over. Until I feel her muscles clench against me, pulling me closer, bring *us* closer.

Only then do I give in to my desire and release my passion inside her.

Chapter Six

Harper

It's the middle of the night when I wake up and have to use the bathroom. I leave Caleb in bed, shirtless and breathing deeply. I wandered off to find the bathroom and when I return, Caleb is still sleeping.

I lie there in the dark, watching him. His chest rises and falls with each breath, and his features are softened in sleep. I can't resist the urge to touch him, to run my fingers over his arm and feel the warmth of his skin.

The minutes pass by, maybe it's hour - I'm not sure. Being with him is timeless. Like no other time in my life before this moment.

I climb under the covers and snuggle up next to him. As close as I can get without waking him. To my surprise, he reaches for me in his sleep, his body curving around mine, his hand lightly covering my breast.

Eventually, I drift off to sleep once again, with a beautiful man sleeping beside me. My mind is numb from thinking too

much about how crazy he makes me. This is supposed to be a fling. But I can't deny that I'm already getting attached to Caleb.

All this time, I thought I'd imagined that there was something between us. Even after he kissed me that night, I still thought I was getting carried away.

But this, everything that happened, was real. Caleb loved me.

I'm wearing one of his T-shirts when I walk into the kitchen a few hours later. Who knew NFL players slept so damn much? Caleb is in there still heavily asleep.

I've laid awake beside him long enough to plan out the rest of our lives together. That makes me sound crazy, but it's something I need to do to make myself believe this is real. He really wants me.

I find my way through his compulsively neat apartment, and step into a beautiful, modern kitchen. The sunlight illuminates the entire space, sleek granite benchtops reflecting every warm ray of pure morning bliss. I slept well, but every woman needs a good coffee to start the day.

I look around at the clean benchtops. Everything is immaculate. It's as if nothing has been used before. Fuck. He had to have some coffee in here somewhere, I mean, I realize professional athletes probably don't spend much time in their own kitchen, but still. It's coffee! The lifeblood of the human race.

I reach up to one of the upper shelves, feeling my way around. The cool morning air tells me the bottom of the t-shirt has moved up as I stretched up high, but the cool air quickly turns into a weirdly familiar heat.

“Coffee is here if that’s what you wanted,” Caleb’s deep voice catches me by surprise. He leans over me, reaching into the shelf I was searching with one hand and sneakily under the t-shirt with the other. “But that’s not what you need to wake up, my sweetness.”

His hand cups my mound and his other hand puts down the coffee cup and cups a breast. Caleb’s lips kiss my neck and then nip at my skin lightly. I gasp at the suddenness of his touch, but soon find myself melting into his embrace.

Caleb’s large, muscular frame towers over me, making me feel both protected and vulnerable at the same time.

His hands move with ease of my skin, teasing and caressing me in just the right place.

“What do you want to eat?” I giggle. “I could make you some eggs.”

“There’s only one thing I want to eat,” he growls,.

Caleb pushes me forward until I’m leaning over the counter. Giant, warm hands guide me legs apart, making me ready for my man.

My man?

I’m ready for him. Just like that.

No morning sleepiness. No hesitation.

I felt the heat of his breath against my thighs as he kneels on the kitchen tiles behind me. His tongue, oh God, his tongue.

I moan as he finds the sweet wet spot I didn't know existed until last night. Obviously, I did. But not like this. Nothing is like this.

“Oh...”

His knowing touch pulls me towards the back of the sink, until I'm pressed against the cold benchtop. I'm trapped and my moans fill the room.

Just like last night, he devours me, licking at spots I didn't know existed. I keep saying it, but it's true. This man is making me feel like I'm on the edge of a cliff, about to dive into the ocean. He keeps me on the edge, licking and licking, sliding all the way to my most private of openings, moving his tongue in and out as I reach behind to encourage further invasion of my rear door.

“Yes, there...”

Caleb grunts. “Tight little hole is perfect for me.”

A gentle spank awakens the nerves on my ass. I feel his hands on my ass, and I hope he does it again. Instead, he pulls my cheeks apart, exposing more of me to his mouth.

Caleb is torturing me, bringing my pleasure high and then killing it with the slow tease, licking my slit and nibbling at my clit, but never moving on to the prize that's soaking right through.

He keeps me right on the edge, so close, and yet, so far.

“Come for me, baby.”

“Yes...”

“Come all over my face,” Caleb says, moving between both holes.

This time, I do fall over the edge, though. It comes so unexpectedly, so powerfully.

He stands as my climax peters out, still gripping my hips as he nudges himself against me.

I watch as his cock disappears into the hot, wet depths of my ache. I can hardly stand as the need for release rises again, and when it finally comes, I can't stop shaking.

“Fuck,” Caleb says out loud as he releases inside me.

“Yes, Caleb, yes! Yes!”

“Oh fuck,” he says, gripped in the pleasure of his own release.

I scream out his name when he straightens, I feel him release hot, wet cum inside me. He thrusts deep, striking blows filling my completely. He falls down, leaning over my body as he regains his breath.

“Tell me again,” he growls in my ear as rises to his heels again. “Tell me how fucking beautiful you are.”

I turn and wrap my arms around his neck. “Only when I'm with you.”

He raises a brow, but I know what he means. He's not the only one who gets to be a tease, though.

“I'm your queen, Caleb. Only yours.”

Chapter Seven

Caleb

Harper and I spend every night together for the next few weeks.

Not only are they the best weeks of my life, but over those weeks, I see her change from the insecure, shy girl that hovered around the edges of the club room to a woman, confident in her beauty.

Unfortunately for me, the other guys on the team were starting to notice too.

It was after I heard one of them, Freyton, mention her to one of the other guys after the last game that I knew I had to do something. Mine. She's mine.

It was time, and I knew it. I hated hiding it anyway, but Harper wanted it to be like this until we knew it was for real.

She was supportive, but also, I think she was scared. Scared that our relationship could spell the end of my football career.

I knew I had to make it public, though. A lifestyle like mine, not so much what I do, but how I'm seen in the public eye, meant that anything I did doesn't stay private for long. No matter how hard I tried.

Harper was mine. And only mine.

And that meant I had to talk to her dad.

One night, after practice, I decide after all the other players have gone home, I'll wait for Coach Cruze in the parking lot. He'd been in a good mood all day, so I needed to capitalize.

The sun starts to fade and it feels like I'm waiting a lifetime. I feel foolish waiting for him in the parking lot, like I'm some kind of high schooler waiting for his mortal enemy to pounce.

This was the only way though. It was the only way I was going to get him alone. Plus, if he was going to try to beat some sense into me, or warn me off with violence, I'd rather he do it where no one else could see.

None of this makes much sense. But the only thing that makes much sense in the world right now is that I had to marry Harper. Sooner rather than later.

"Caleb, what are you doing here?" Coach asks when he finally arrives and sees me standing beside his car.

"I have something important to talk to you about, Coach."

"What? Wait..." His eyes shoot open. Here we go. "Did you get an offer from that coach in Florida?"

I had braced myself, long deep breaths trying to calm my racing heartbeat. I was ready for anything, even if that meant losing my place on the team.

“No... You’ve made it pretty clear I’m not up for trade, Sir.” He nods and grunts a weird noise. “Coach, it’s about Harper.”

The words fly out, along with every nerve and tensed up muscle in my body, Coach’s face darkens, his jaw clenching tight.

I keep going, spitting the words out before I lose my courage. “I’m in love with your daughter and I want to marry her.”

He laughs, rolling his eyes as a hand claps my shoulder. “Is that all? Oh shit, man... You had me worried there.”

I take a deep breath, trying to compose myself. I can’t tell exactly what his reaction is right now, his head is rolled back on his neck and he’s wiping a hand over his face with a scrunched expression.

After all this time, all those sleepless nights planning every careful word, prepping myself for the hardest conversation of my life... and now... this? A goddamn eyeroll?

“Coach, I promise I’ll take care of her and love her and treat her well and...”

He stops me there, a firm hand clasp my shoulder and giving a tight squeeze, simultaneously making me flinch and rendering my rehearsed speech useless.

“Caleb, you think I didn’t know? I’ve seen what’s going on between you two for a while now. I would have stopped it a long time ago if I had a problem with it. Any of the other players, hell ya. I’d kick their asses if they looked twice at Harper. But you - you’re a good man Caleb. I’ve always known that.”

“So... I have your blessing? I can marry Harper?” I ask.

He takes a moment, looking me up and down. He turns to the stadium, a slight breeze passing both of us before he looks at me again.

“On one condition,” he says, looking around as he moves in close, as if he’s going to whisper in my ear.

“Anything,” I say.

To my surprise, Coach’s one condition is that I propose to her publicly. Not just publicly, but in typical Coach Cruze style, it had to be all about the football.

A proposal on the field, in front of everyone would get my future father-in-law’s approval.

At first, I didn’t like it. And I wasn’t sold on whether Harper would like being proposed to on the turf she’s resented so much.

But what Coach Cruze wants, he usually gets. And if it means I get my girl to stand by my side for the rest of my life, no questions, no worries, then there’s nothing I wouldn’t do.

It’s the biggest game of the season and we’ve just topped the season off with a huge win. The crowd is buzzing and the

atmosphere is perfect. Coach Cruze is standing close by and he gives me a knowing look, winking at me as I begin the climb up the stands, working my way through adoring fans towards my beautiful girl.

The camera follows behind me and I know every set of eyes is watching. Nerves roll through my insides, but I push them aside when I see Harper's face light up. Her eyes sparkle with excitement and it's that moment that makes me know I'm doing the right thing.

I reach Harper and put my hand out, inviting her to hold my hands. The cameraman behind me reaches over my shoulder and places a microphone at my mouth.

“Harper Cruze, I've always known you were a queen. You are smart and beautiful and more than I deserve but there's only one thing I want from you. And that's to be your king.” A giant roar fills the stadium. It's bigger than the roar for the first touchdown. “Harper, if you'll have me, I will give you whatever kingdom you want. I'll go to war for you.”

Tears threaten to invade my eyes but I snort back and hold my shit together.

“Will you marry me, Harper?”

I bend down on one knee and pull out a ring box. An audible gasp rounds the stands as I open it for her.

The fans are going wild, chanting and cheering Harper to accept my proposal. I laugh and see the tears rolling down her

cheeks as they chant, “Harper, say yes! Harper, say yes! Harper, say yes!”

She says something but it’s so damn loud I can’t hear her.

I put my hand up, rising to my feet and the crowd quietens.

I pull Harper close, the agony of the unanswered question killing me. “Tell me, Harper... Will you be my wife?”

Raising the microphone to her lips, I wait. And then, very quietly, she grins. “I’m already your queen, so I guess I’ll have to make you my king.”

The stadium erupts. I can barely hear anything else as the fans cheer and jump around. Confetti starts flying all over the place and fireworks escape from the top of the roof. Coach has arranged a grand proposal celebration, but all that matters to me right now, is Harper’s lips hitting mine.

I have my queen in my arms and she said yes. That’s all that matters.

Epilogue

Harper

“**N**ow, Caleb, now!” I scream.

I came in wave after wave as he moves up from between my legs and starts pounding into me. My orgasm seemed to go on and on as he releases his desire into me. We’ve been fucking for hours, yet he’d held everything back for this moment.

He collapses behind me and rubs my belly.

“Beautiful,” he murmurs, yet again. I’ll never get sick of hearing it though. “You’re so beautiful.”

He kisses my cheek and then my neck. And then he raises himself to kiss my belly.

“Do you think our princess will be here soon?” he asks. Again.

“She’s not due for several more weeks, Caleb,” I say. “Let her come in her own time.”

It's been two years since we got married. Caleb wanted to have babies right away. I did, too, but this princess took her time.

"I've been patient. I can't wait to meet her," Caleb tells me.

"She'll probably come during a football game," I laugh, prodding him with my finger. "Seems like all the important events in our lives happen during football games."

"Well, if it was up to your dad, she would. It was everything I could do to convince him that we should get married in a church instead of on the football field," he laughs.

I laugh, too. "That is his church. But I'm glad you convinced him otherwise. And I'm sure he'd be thrilled if our princess came during a game but I'm going to do everything I can to make sure she comes in a hospital!"

Caleb snuggles against me and I put my hand over his. I can feel her moving inside my belly - I always can this late at night. I'll miss having her inside me, but I know she won't be the last. At least, I hope not. Being pregnant made me feel sensual and beautiful. And I crave sex with Caleb all the time. Not that I didn't always want him. But being pregnant is amazing.

Our princess is coming soon though. And I'm so looking forward to growing our family. Caleb and me and our little princess.

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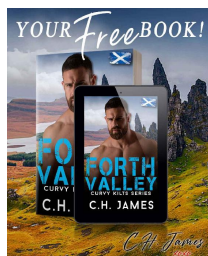
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