

## Chapter One

### Vanessa

*Meow.*

“I know, Miss Kitty, I know. Just give me a second,” I tell my three-year-old emotional support cat. She has been with me since the second semester of my first year of college. She was cute back then. Don’t get me wrong, she is still the cutest thing in my life— don’t tell Nigel I said that— but as these three and a half years passed, Miss Kitty’s neediness has only grown.

*Meow.*

Sometimes I like to pretend what she is saying to me: one of four things. “*Pet me, Vanessa,*” or “*Feed me, Vanessa,*” or “*Change my litter, Vanessa,*” or “*I need to be stoned Mother, give me more catnip.*” I already fed and changed the litter. Petting her isn’t stopping her, so it has to be the catnip, but before I do that...

I pick Miss Kitty up and she squeals a bit. She pretends to be grumpy with me as I hold her as a baby. Her body stays stiff, but she quietly purrs in my arms. I give her several kisses, earning me more meows before I let her down and go to the counter to pour her some catnip in her cat tree. She rewards me with one exciting squeak, races to the top of her tower, and chows down on her little kitty drugs. She’s lucky. She can get high. I’ve tried everything, but no matter what, my body wants to stay the same. Illness? Never. Injury? What is that? Under the influence? Never influencing. I am the healthiest person ever to exist, no matter what I do. I’m perfect. Too perfect.

I take a look at myself in the mirror before heading out. Yep, I look the same. I don’t think I look necessarily memorable. I have one of those looks where people stare and think, “What are you?” I could be anything but white or Asian. I don’t think I have any identifiable ethnic features. A light brown tint in my skin, some freckles, light brown eyes, and black hair. I could be anything, and it isn’t like I could necessarily ask my parents because... well, I don’t have any and I never have. My birth certificate says African-American, with a faint question mark behind it. My driver’s license says “Mixed.” I didn’t even know a driver’s license could say that. It makes paperwork difficult because everything always asks about your ethnicity. Your tests, your job applications, any general applications, etc. I would do one of those DNA tests, but there are two issues...

1. My body can’t seem to bleed for longer than ten seconds before healing itself.
2. If someone has access to my DNA, skin, and saliva— they would probably realize how much of a freak I am.

*Freak.* What my second foster home parents called me right before telling my social worker I belonged in a group home because I am not a family home type of person.

*Mixed. Freak. Me. What am I? Who am I?*

I have let those thoughts bother me for my full twenty-two years. I have kept it all to myself for so long, but I will keep doing it. No one will know. Not even my best friends. They just think I have the immunity of a god.

I can't let those thoughts bother me now.

Instead, I let my Fairy Godmother do her magic before going to work.

Work. I would rather be in Professor Benner's bio lab studying my DNA some more, but I have to make a living somehow. Why not work with a bunch of athletes? I never wanted to be a doctor or physical therapist or any of that. My life goal has always been to understand myself, but I have to understand others to do so. I get to study the musculoskeletal structure, prevention strategies, and rehabilitation techniques. And most importantly, injuries. The male anatomy is different from the female anatomy, but the basic mechanism of physical healing is mainly similar.

So, I put on my silly polo with the yellow and black colors, with the giant logo and the back saying "Go Calmont Cobras," and then go to work looking at the fantastic view of mountains.

My boss, Gerald Oliver, greets me as he typically does. Loud and obnoxious. The man is a genius, I must admit, but he is a talker for sure, "There she is! How is everything?" He doesn't let me respond, "I had a long night last night. I watched one of the old Calmont games a couple of decades back. Those plays were really something. I think I should talk to the coach and tell them to bring some of those moves back. We don't see a ball like that anymore. Jenson, who graduated in '93, was probably the best wide receiver of all time. They made it all the way to Nationals that year. Everyone always talks about the quarterback, but they couldn't have done it without Jenson. That man can run. He's on ESPN now. Did you know that?"

"No, I did not," I tell him politely. Foster care sucks. We all know that, but there are one or two lessons it can teach you. One, stand up for yourself. This is something that my best friend Zoey took to heart. Two, keep your mouth shut and observe. Something that Sebastian and I took to heart. So, I don't say much as Gerald goes on his rant. I pretend to listen, saying "oh" and "of course" when I believe it is necessary to. To be honest, I'm not sure, but I'm sure Gerald doesn't notice.

"So there is this play called Freedom Rush, and Jenson was the star of it all. It's a distraction play. The wide receiver and running back are the lookouts and distraction. The ball is handed off to the quarterback and into the endzone! It's a genius play. All thanks to Jenson. He basically created it."

My job isn't so bad. I spend the majority of it outside, which might be annoying for most people, but it doesn't bug me. It isn't like I have to worry about a sunburn. All I have to do is sit and watch sweaty, sexy men run around and tackle each other. Sometimes I fantasize about them tackling each other naked. Fucked up, I know, but I can't help it. I know some of their names. Some of the titles. I know that there are linebackers, kickers, quarterbacks, apparently something called a wide receiver, and... well, I guess that is the extent of my knowledge. I don't watch the sport for the sport. I watch for work and something to picture for my late-night play with

Cum-quito. College football players only practice around three hours a day, five times a week. Not bad, especially when they make basically a hundred a year while I make around seven hundred and fifty every other week and a bit more on game days. Which is more than most people working only just thirty hours bi-weekly.

Andre Baker is one of my favorite players. He has a bad knee. I see him frequently. I tape his knee and he talks to me about whatever jocks talk about. He has such pretty lips. He winks at me every time he takes off his helmet. Each time I practically orgasm. Today is no different.

He runs up to me pre-practice and sits his knee up for me to tape, "You're looking good today, Supergirl." Supergirl. One of his many nicknames for me.

*You don't look so bad yourself, Andre.*

"Thank you," I say with a smile.

"One of these days I'm going to make you say more than a few words. Maybe on our date this weekend," he gives me his famous wink.

I wish I could date, but I am too busy. He knows this. It is a game we play. He asks me out. I shake my head. Then we do it all the next day, "Just you wait. I'll make you my wife one day," he winks. This is our private joke. He always jokes about me being his wife one day. We joke a lot together... I guess he does most of the joking, and I laugh. As depressing as it is, he might be my only friend here. He speaks to me, and doesn't seem to mind it if I don't say anything back. If anyone can make me talk, it's him. All he has to do is mention my major and my hopes and dreams, letting me rant on about those things and seem genuinely interested.

I have no idea what Andre's role is in the game. He tackles a lot. He is really good at pinning men down. He's large and fit. Tall, big, dark, and handsome. The type of man women only dream about. He is a player though, on and off the field. I do think, if I said yes to him one day, he would give up on other women and be a faithful boyfriend. He's kind that way. Genuine and honest. Although I have seen him with multiple women on multiple occasions, he is so sweet with eyes are so kind. A deep chocolate to match his skin. If sex were a person, I think Andre Baker would be him.

I finish taping him up and he blows me a kiss. It's another part of our daily ritual. Practice is quiet today. Of course, there is yelling and whistle-blowing, but not many men getting injured.

The coach—whose name I keep forgetting—blows his whistle again. All the players huddle. I don't know why it is necessary, since the coach's voice is as loud, if not louder than Gerald's, "I want to put Leo in. Pete takes a breather."

Leo. I know Leo. Well, I know of him. His full name is Leo Wilder Calmont. Yes, Calmont. He is the great-great-grandson of the founder of this school. He's handsome. He has tan, white skin like an Italian and beautiful dirty blond hair. His eyes pop with a pale blue. I heard that it is odd he continues to play college football when he's busy getting his Master's, but I don't see why. I've learned that he doesn't play often. He mostly stays on the sidelines. Last year, he was the quarterback. Now... he is backup, I think? He works out with the other players, but not as much. I'm sure his studies are keeping him busy. I doubt him rarely playing is hurting his earnings, but I am also sure it isn't hurting his bank account either, since his family makes

multi-millions with the school. He is royalty, from what I hear the cheerleaders say. The Prince of Calmont. Former fuckboy, now quiet quarterback. Yes, I know of him—just the rumors. I do know for a fact that he tore a ligament in his ankle last year in the final game and kept playing until the game was over. I've seen him play. I watched him a lot during my junior year. He's fast and bossy and good. It doesn't take a football fan to know how good he is.

For another twenty minutes, Leo works his magic on the field like he belongs there. There is a subtle limp that is almost unrecognizable to the naked eye. Even though he is injured, he is faster than all the undergraduate boys.

The coach blows one final whistle. The teammates hit each other on the back with love and support. I heard once that a team is like a family. I have listened to enough romance novels to know that it is only true some of the time. These guys, they are the real deal. A real family. Not by blood, but by heart. Same as my friends and I. Leo is the only one that stands out from the group. The quiet backup quarterback. Too cool for anyone else.

Once almost everyone is on the field, Leo looks at me with his blue eyes. Then limps to me. For a second, I imagine him kissing me. I don't know why. I have never had those thoughts before. Maybe it is the way he carries himself. I have never seen him this close in person. He is thinner than the rest of the players. Leaner, I should say. I know he is toned underneath his number 23 jersey. And taller. Much taller. He is so tall that it is surprising how fast he is. I say he's what... six-foot-five-inches? Maybe taller than that. I'm definitely more than a foot shorter than him.

"Hey," he says. Somehow I zoned out and into my fantasies, I didn't realize how close he had gotten. I see his dark stubble and his eyes sparkling in the sun, "I'm Leo." His voice is as smooth as butter. He has a South Carolina accent. It's charming and Southern and adorable. I grew up in Georgia, but I never really had an accent. I don't know why. Sebastian and Zoey have one, but I happen to sound posh compared to them.

I nod at him without saying a word. I don't know if I am capable of it. Does he make me speechless? Or am I just listening and observing like I was taught many years ago?

He continues, "I was wonderin' if you could look at my ankle."

Before I open my mouth, Gerald is to my side, loud and obnoxious as ever, "Hey, my man! Number 23 QB. I saw you out there. You still got it! Listen, how about I look at your ankle, and Vanessa here sets you up with a nice ice bath. Complimentary, of course." Gerald laughs at his own joke. If it needs to be said, the players don't need to pay for their health. Our job is to serve their needs.

Leo gives me an awkward smile, before leaving with Gerald who is now talking about the game of '93.

I go inside and pour a few bags of ice before I hear heavy footsteps approach. There he is, Leo Calmont. The Prince. Standing there in all his glory, well, except the black briefs he unfortunately keeps on. He has the most beautiful tattoos. I love tattoos. I wanted some myself, but my body rejects them. *I would get Medusa, I think.* He has color on his. Different symbols

and artworks are plastered on his beautiful body. A line of hair going down to his V. I don't really like body hair, but he makes it looks good.

Finally finding words to say, "Here you go." I awkwardly point to the bath as if I'm saying *ta-da* like a magician, "The towels are on the counter over there." I clear my throat and then begin to leave.

Before I walk by him, he gives me the gentlest touch, "Actually, I was wonderin' if you could look at my ankle."

I look at him confusedly, "Didn't Mr. Oliver already do that?"

He chuckles, "I wish. He just started talkin' about the good ole days when he did high school rugby. Then he gave me ibuprofen and sent me on my way."

I find this interesting. Not the fact that Gerald gave him ibuprofen and a mediocre conversation. It is the fact that it took almost thirty minutes to do so. I smile at Leo and gesture towards the medical table we keep. He sits in it.

His ankle is swollen. Usually it takes a few hours for this amount of swelling. No, his swelling was large and pink and concerning. Which makes me think it was swollen before coach put him on the field. Playing just made it worse. I pressed my fingers on the injury. He doesn't say anything, but his face is full of pain. I then take his foot and point and flex it, to see his mobility. His ankle is stiff. There is no way someone with this pain and mobility issues should be able to run as fast as he can, "Hmm." I mutter.

"Hmm?" He repeats, but is a more concerned and questioning tone.

*Oh, right. I have to speak out loud, don't I?* I smile at him, "Well, it is definitely swollen. Honestly, there is nothing much I or you can do about it. It isn't broken. I would say you sprained it, but it doesn't look or feel like it. Mr. Oliver giving you ibuprofen is the best form of medication you can do. That, icing and resting for a bit is all you can do." I let go and step back, "Maybe Mr. Oliver can wrap your ankle next practice. That way you can reduce the swelling, stabilize the muscle tissue, help with the circulation, and alleviate the pain."

He stands up, showing me once again how tall he is. He's huge and strong. The type of man that could throw you on the bed with no struggle, or throw you into a wall. Athletes are unpredictable that way. So much power, money, and strength. They could easily hurt someone and get away with it. Horrifying and intriguing.

"Actually, could you tape me up? Before all the practices? And maybe the games, too? I trust you more than Gerald. Don't tell him I said that."

I giggle. I actually fucking giggled like a grade school girl, "Your secret is safe with me."

He raises an eyebrow, "Well?"

"Yeah, I can do that. I don't mind. Try to get here a little early though. I have other teammates that also need my specialties."

He shakes my hand gently. Gentleness you would not expect from such a large man, "Thank you." I try to leave again before I hear a "Wait!" I turn my head around to see him again, "I actually have a brace in my locker. Could you maybe get that for me?"

I eye him, “You want me to go to the locker room?” The thought of naked men makes a tingle down below, but also a bit of anxiety. I’m too little to be surrounded by naked, hormonal giants. As much as I can fantasize about them, there is still a chance they could hurt me... well, not necessarily hurt, but that’s not for lack of trying.

“Yeah, the guys should be gone by now,” clearly reading my face.

I shake my head, “I still don’t feel comfortable about that. How about you enjoy your ice bath, I tape you, and then you get the brace yourself.”

“You’re not too busy?”

I shake my head again.

Without hesitation he gets in the ice bath, soaking his beautiful body, “Deal. But you have to keep me company.”

I gulp, sigh, and then nod.

## Leo

I didn’t need her to stay. Hell, I didn’t even need her to get my brace for me. I can muscle up and go to the locker room myself. It is literally just a hallway down. The truth is, she’s fascinating to me. She’s absolutely stunning. Shorter than the girls I typically go for, but there is nothing wrong with that. And her ass. She has such a nice ass. It’s round and curvy. Her body is the perfect hourglass. I made a pact to myself a year ago that I wouldn’t be so superficial, but I can’t help it sometimes. This beautiful girl with light brown skin and freckles makes my body do funny things. I had to get inside the ice tube just so I could calm down my growing erection. *It’s fucking cold.* Of course, I decided to play macho and play it off but this frozen hell of a bath makes me want to squeal like a toddler.

“So what’s your name?” I give her the smirk that had several college girls in my bed within the hour. I see her blush, but hide it. It’s adorable.

“Does that matter, your highness?”

*Your highness.* Ugh, I hate it when people call me that. That’s the issue if you go to the school your family founded. I didn’t even want to go to Calmont. I wanted to be invisible. I wanted to go to a school across the country in California and maybe start a book club or something. I love football. I’m really good at it. I was probably made for it. I’m *the best*. That’s what my dad says anyway. My dad is a very passionate man. A good man, but a passionate one. So when he saw me running past kids years older than me when I was just seven years old, he knew that’s what I was meant to be. I applied to fourteen colleges and was rejected by all. He has never confirmed or denied it, but I know my father made a few phone calls.

I try not to roll my eyes. She doesn’t need to know my childhood trauma. Or the fact that I’ve been in therapy and medicated for my anger since then. Instead, I carry on the conversation, “Just making conversation.” She nods. I noticed she does that a lot. It is a little annoying. What’s also annoying, she hasn’t looked me in the eyes at all. She lets her dark curls cover her. Andre talks about her a lot. He calls her the hottest girl on campus. He isn’t wrong. She’s beautiful. I

already know her name but I continue this charade, “You know me. I think it is only fair for me to know you too.” Still quiet, “Or I could just call you, Mouse.”

“Vanessa,” she finally looks up at me. Her eyes are brown, but not dark brown. More like the color in between honey and oak. I bet they are golden in the sunlight.

Wow, her freckles. So many freckles on that beautiful face. I can’t seem to get an idea of her ethnicity, but I guess that’s not really important, “Well it’s nice to meet you, Vanessa.”

“You too.”

I also remember Andre saying she isn’t much of a talker, “You don’t say much, do you?”

She shrugs, “There’s never much to say.”

“Oh, come on! You must have something stirring in that beautiful head of yours.” *Fuck. I didn’t mean to say that.* She tenses at my compliment, “I don’t know. Tell me something fun. We can banter and become besties.”

She visually relaxes, “I unfortunately might be the most boring person you’ve ever met.”

“What? You didn’t have a crazy childhood or something. Are you always the good girl?”

She tenses once more. I realize I am making her uncomfortable. I need to take a different approach to get this girl to talk to me. Maybe less flirting. Yeah, maybe she doesn’t like flirting.

“Nothing much I can say,” she shrugs again. She sits down a bit closer to me, “I have a cat.”

“A cat, huh? I love cats,” and I do. I am more of a dog person myself, but there is something comforting about a cat purring, “Girl or boy?”

“Girl. Her name is Miss Kitty. Super spoiled and super into drugs,” she hides her face again along with a smile on her face, “Catnip, I guess. If that wasn’t obvious.”

“Yeah, I got it.”

Her voice reminds me of a purr, and her words are pretty and quiet, like a gentle hum—a little sing-songy but calm.

She goes quiet again. So I ask another question, “So what are you studying?”

Her face lights up. She has such a beautiful smile. It fits her freckles and eyes so perfectly. She is like a piece of artwork. She is what lovesick poets write about. I could write a poem about her. I *am* good at poetry.

“Biochemistry.”

So she’s smart. Very smart. It makes sense. Calmont has an excellent science program. A few of the teammates came to the school just for that reason. They want to be doctors, microbiologists, manufacturers, pharmacologists...

“Studying genetics. I want to be a researcher. I’m a senior.”

Science is not my strong suit. I know genetics have something to do with DNA, blood stuff, and some other things. “I’m studying literature.”

Her eyes widen. This happens a lot when I tell people what I’m studying. My major was English, and now, my Master’s will be in Literature. Most people seem to think that I’m studying business or something. That’s what my father wants. No, I’m not smart enough for that. I’m kidding, I’m plenty smart, but numbers aren’t my thing, “You like Shakespeare, Calmont?”

I have heard that one before, but I chuckle as if it's the funniest thing I have ever heard. My body burns from the ice, "Ah," I hiss. Indicating I am in more pain than I originally let on. She shows a look of concern, and bends down to check on me. She's so close to me. I can smell her shampoo. Roses and coconuts. Also, when she is bending down, I realize how large her breasts are. They aren't big, but they aren't small either. C cup maybe? I can't tell with that polo, "I'm good. I'm good." I am not good. I have to get out of the bath from hell.

So I do. I stand up and step out. Vanessa looks me up and down. She's checking me out. I know she is. I can tell by the way she bobs her throat that she notices me noticing her noticing me. She clears her throat and hands me a towel, "Here."

*Vanessa. Vanessa.* Such a beautiful name for such a beautiful woman. I had a crush on the *Phineas and Ferb* character Vanessa. This woman in front of me is ten times more beautiful. I want to smell her again.

I dry myself off and lay on the bed half-naked and my balls shrunk. I should have thought this out more. She is going to think my dick is lacking while taping me up. Fuck, I should have put on some sweatpants or something. She makes her way to the end and silently tapes my ankle. It's secure and comfortable. Better than any doctor or nurse has been able to do. I watch her as she admires her work. I figure this is just a part-time job for her, but you can see that she is fascinated by the human body. During my bath, she avoided my gaze the entire time. Instead, she looked at my body. Not in a sexual way, but as if she was giving me an examination. Analytical. She has that same face right now. She's talented.

Suddenly her mouth gaps open, which worries me for a second. Then I realized, maybe my dick wasn't too cold, because my dick is girthy and up and ready to go, "I'm so sorry." I say awkwardly and put the wet towel in front of my hardening cock.

She adverts her eyes before saying in her mousey, purring voice, "It's okay. It happens. Completely natural male response."

This is so fucking awkward. I have never been this awkward. Old me would say, "Want to take a ride?" Or something stupid and clever as that. Now, I'm embarrassed. Why am I embarrassed? Maybe it is because she didn't seem interested in riding my cock at all, but she was blushing. I have no idea if that was from arousal or mutual embarrassment.

I will not be writing a poem about this.