



# GRIFF MONTGOMERY

## Quarterback

*Has Griff found the woman of his dreams in Lauren?  
Will she deny her love and hide the truth to avoid facing another tragedy?*

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*First & Ten Series*



# Chapter One

Griff picked up the last dinner plate and drew back his arm to hurl it against the wall when the doorbell interrupted him. It was the police. Two officers stood on his front step.

“Mr. Montgomery. We had a complaint about noise coming from here. Caller said it sounded like a fight.” The policeman looked apologetic. “Your family still here?”

“They moved to California two days ago.”

“Mind telling us what’s going on?” The cop shifted his weight, clearly uncomfortable.

“I dropped a stack of dishes. Made a huge mess, too. Would you like to come in, officer?” Griff stepped away from the door.

“No, sir. I’ll take your word for it. Would you mind signing an autograph for my boy, Billy?”

“Not at all.” Griff wrote on the paper the policeman provided. Then he smiled as the two men tipped their caps and returned to their squad car.

*Pays to be a celebrity in a small town.* He remained on the stoop, peering at the neighboring houses. He figured the sound must have carried. Folks would be home at four o’clock on a Saturday, too, out gardening and mowing the lawns. They would have seen his sister, her two kids, and her new husband drive away. *Hell, you couldn’t miss the moving van. Damn thing carried away half my house.*

So, what had the neighbors pushing their noses into his business? *Can’t a guy let off a little steam his own way in his own house?* Anger bubbled up again in his chest.

He had one more plate left, but now, he had no excuse for the crash. If the police returned, they wouldn’t believe his bullshit story a second time. He returned to the kitchen and cringed when he saw the size of the mess he’d made. Sharp pieces of china in all sizes scattered across the floor and into the dining room. He’d even managed to nick the paint on the wall in several places. And he was the only one there to clean it up.

He hated cleaning, a job his sister, Kathy, had taken on when she was living there. *Fuckin' A, Kathy. Why aren't you here?*

In his heart, Griff knew that he wasn't mourning the defection of his sister to Los Angeles. Sure, they were close, but he was glad she'd found Wes, her new spouse. It had been ten years since her first, Dan, had died in a fire in his office building. He'd left Kathy with two young children. She had needed a husband. Even with his helping out, Griff couldn't fill that role. His biggest gripe was the children, who had become like his own. He missed them.

When he was twenty-three, he'd moved in to help his sister. It was supposed to be temporary. The kids were little, Joey was five, and Missy, three. The grandparents were too old, they said, to take on the responsibility of such young children. So Griff had become their new father figure.

At first, he had been uncomfortable. He didn't know how to care for little kids. But the children hadn't known that. They'd loved him right away. It wasn't long before Griff had become a true family man, going to parent/teacher conferences with Kathy and reading bedtime stories. Joey and Missy were sweet and charming, like his big sister. He couldn't help returning their affection.

It had been the least he could do for the woman who'd helped raise him. Kathy was seven years older than Griff. A menopause surprise baby, she always teased. She had been there to shepherd him through the ins and outs of life when his parents had been too tired or preoccupied to find the time. He owed her, he'd figured. And this had been the perfect payback.

Griff made a boatload of money as the star quarterback for the Connecticut Kings. He paid the bills, and Kathy had signed over the house to him in return. At thirty-three, he was ready to think ahead to retirement, and increased family time, but his had flown the coop. Now, he was left alone with a big home and no kids. His life, brimming over with activity for ten years, had ground to a halt.

No more soccer games, little league tournaments, or scout troop overnights. No more camping out or playing catch in the yard. No board games on Saturday nights. No trips to Frosty Freeze for ice cream. No birthday parties. No kids' movies with popcorn and soda. He was not a happy man.

Griff pulled out the broom, but had to hunt for the dustpan. After several curses, he located it under the sink. *Who puts a fuckin' dustpan under the sink? It can get wet under there.* Sweeping took time. He was careful, not relishing the idea of ending up with tiny shards of glass in his foot. When he finished, he returned the dustpan to its home, frustrated he couldn't find a better spot.

Then came going over the floor with a wet paper towel to pick up the bits too small to see. When he was finished, he ripped off his now-sweaty T-shirt and hopped in the shower. Even the refreshing water on his body couldn't remove the thoughts from his head. His ready-made family, his neat, cozy, compartmentalized life was over. How could he fill the empty space in his heart?

Sure, he still had his women. A girl in every major city shared his bed after away games. And his local bed-buddy, Carla, the bartender at The Savage Beast, was still here. Griff took an occasional night at The Savage. Betty, a retired Broadway star, played piano and sang on Friday and Saturday nights. He enjoyed her music and the convivial atmosphere.

*Maybe Carla's ready to make it permanent with me. The sex is good. I'm sure we can find other common interests besides The Savage Martini, playing pool, and singing along with Betty.*

Stuffing his frustration down inside, Griff dressed in his casual best for a Saturday night at The Savage and his plan to get closer to Carla. After sliding his long legs into new jeans and pulling on a light blue T-shirt that hugged his muscles, he combed his mahogany-brown hair. He wore it slightly long, shaggy around the ears, at Kathy's suggestion. His smile was dazzling, and his dark eyes, sexy.

He plucked the keys to his silver Jaguar XK convertible off the dresser and roared into downtown Monroe, the small town that was home to The Kings.

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In an old Victorian house across town, Lauren Farraday lugged a suitcase to her small car. Her newly ex-husband, Bob Decker, stood on the front porch, watching.

“That's a big suitcase for a couple of days.”

“I don’t know how long I’m going to be there,” Lauren said, taking the steps one at a time.

“Linda doesn’t want the dishes, so I’m leaving them for you.”

“Good.” She returned to the porch, plopped down on the loveseat, and took a sip of iced tea.

“But she does want the vacuum. I thought that was a fair trade.” He took a slug of beer from a can.

“Whatever.”

“I want to be fair.”

“I don’t care.” She struggled to keep anger out of her voice.

“But I do. I don’t want you to feel dumped or anything.” He shifted his weight.

“I don’t,” she lied.

“Fine. You know we only got married because of...that and so, I mean, it’s only fair—”

“Shut up, Bob. I get it. I didn’t argue with you about the divorce. I didn’t fight you for stuff. Let it be, okay? It is what it is. I’ve accepted that.”

“It’s not like you were madly in love with me.”

She sat up. “Don’t go there.”

“I mean, just saying—”

“I know exactly what you’re saying. We’ve said it a thousand times in the last three months. Can you please let it go already?” She crossed then uncrossed her legs.

“Okay. As long as you’re all right.”

“I’m fine.”

“Sure got over me fast,” he mumbled.

“You can’t have it both ways, Bob. Me crying my eyes out over losing you and then being cool when we split up. Make up your mind.” Her brows knitted, as a note of irritation crept into her words.

“You’re right. I feel a little... Well, I left a few extra thousand in the savings, in case you need it.”

“Thanks.” *Guilty, maybe? Damn straight, you feel guilty. Bastard.*

“Linda and I’ll be shoving off in the morning.”

“Here’s a list of things you need to do before you go,” Lauren said, pulling a piece of paper from her pocket.

Bob glanced at it then balled it up. “Honestly, Lauren. Don’t be insulting. I know how to close up the house.”

“There’s more on there.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

“I hope you and Linda’ll be very happy.”

“I bet you do.”

Lauren couldn’t ignore his snide tone. “Trying to be civil here. At least it’s not like you’re leaving me for someone new.”

“That would be worse?”

“In a funny way, yeah. It would.” She took a gulp to moisten her throat.

“Guess there’s nothing left to say except...good luck.” He opened the screen door and went inside.

Lauren let out a breath. The barking of a small dog caught her attention. A pug slipped out the front, circled her legs, and jumped up. “Zander,” she whispered, bending down so the canine could lick her face. She smiled and muttered affectionate words to the enthusiastic pooch.

“Where the hell is that mutt?” Bob shouted.

“Out here. And he’s not a mutt,” Lauren said.

Bob joined her and fastened a harness and leash on the panting dog. “Little monster won’t stay inside.”

“He likes to ride in the car with me.”

“So take him to Rhode Island.”

“He’s not allowed in the hospital, Bob. Please close the door. I’ll be leaving in a minute, and he’ll be fine.”

Bob dragged Zander, straining at the lead to stay with his mistress, away and slammed the door behind him. She jumped at the loud sound and swore under her breath.

*Time to get on the road.* She pushed to her feet and picked up her cell. There was a missed call from her brother. She dialed.

“Don? I’m getting in the car now.”

“What time will you get here?” Her brother’s voice sounded edgy.

“Hmm, four thirty, now. Tell Dad I’ll be there by dinnertime.”

“Need directions?”

“What? No. I’ve been to the hospital plenty of times.”

“I hate hospitals.”

“Dad’s asking for you.”

“I’m on my way. I’ll be there in a little over two hours. Did you tell mom?”

“She’s in the Caribbean with her flavor of the month.”

“Nothing you can do, then. See you soon. Love you.”

“Love you, too.”

She took a deep breath and got behind the wheel. The moving truck was parked at the curb, awaiting her departure so that it could take over the driveway. She grabbed one last look at the house and spied Bob carrying luggage. She sighed as a shudder passed through her. Her eyes watered. *What am I getting sentimental for? I can’t wait to be rid of that bastard.*

For a split second, the image of what might have been in this wonderful old house danced before her eyes. Her vision, her dream of a loving husband and two kids, vanished like mist under a hot sun. A quick shake of her head returned her to reality. *Can’t change the past. Lose the dream and move on. Dad needs you.*

Lauren put the car in gear and headed toward the highway that would take her to Providence and the bedside of her ailing father.

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Griff wanted his own family. But where does a “player” go to find his ideal mate?

Having sworn off marriage forever, Lauren Farraday barely kept her life together after her divorce. With her career shaky and depression closing in, the last thing she needed was a courtroom battle with a sexy athlete.

Wary of Griff’s reputation with women, and hiding a secret, Lauren holds on to her heart. Can the quarterback handle the truth or will he walk away, like he has in the past?

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**GRIFF MONTGOMERY, QUARTERBACK, kick-off book in the First & Ten series, is available Feb. 11 on ebook at [www.secretcravingspublishing.com](http://www.secretcravingspublishing.com), Amazon, Barnes & Noble, iTunes/Apple Books, Kobo, where all fine books are sold. Coming soon in paperback.**



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