

# Good With My Hands

## **GRAYSON**

I was known for a few things on the Oakland State campus, but they were easily summarized.

Simply stated, I was good with my hands.

Putting it that way made it sound conceited, but objectively speaking, it was the truth. Chopin's Etude in G sharp minor had nothing on me. If I was blindfolded and stuck in front of a piano, I would sure as hell end a glissando on precisely the right note just by feeling the keys. Fingering came naturally.

The same went for other string instruments--I was more than decent at the guitar. But it would never be my favorite, despite the fact that girls loved it. I just wasn't that much of a player, even though I loved the game. Especially football.

1,800. The number of receiving yards I racked up this season for Oakland State. And *zero* was the number of times the ball had slipped through my fingers in the endzone this year. But none of those stats, or my ability to find the right spot on the laces, could keep our season from going downhill right before my eyes.

I stood on the sidelines, letting the light drizzle wash away the sweat on my forehead as I watched our defense put up one last fight against UCLA.

They'd been a good team all year, but we should have been better. Hell, there were a lot of ways that we'd fucked with the game tonight. I'd personally messed up one of the plays earlier when I tried to cut hard for a crisp slant route, and my plant foot slipped out from under me.

I said I was good with my *hands*. My feet, well, they had their mind of their own sometimes. Blaming the rain was useless; it had been my fault.

But defense was shitting the bed, too. Our middle linebacker broke up with his girlfriend a few weeks ago, and ever since, *damn*, dude was out of it on the field. I could barely watch as the UCLA quarterback slipped past him to chuck the ball to the endzone.

But I watched anyway.

And there it was...*touchdown*.

Great.

One minute left in the fourth quarter, and I suddenly wished I was a kicker. Because god did I want to punt something. Quinton Reid's face would work. I wasn't usually one to blame shit on my teammates, but Quinton—the braindead middle linebacker—was a different breed.

Rumor was his girlfriend broke up with him because he abused the shit out of her. So yeah, his face would work.

I couldn't watch this trainwreck anymore. Dragging my fingers through my hair, I spun around to look at the crowds. They seemed about as defeated as I felt. Heads in hands, hands on heads—both were signs of exasperated fans.

My gaze wandered down to the front row, and I saw more of the same until I got to the very end of the bleachers, where a dark-haired girl laughed and clapped her hands together as she watched the field. A guy sat next to her, his head ducked as he said something that kept the girl's laughter rolling.

Hell, that was a happiness I really wished I felt right now. But honestly, seeing it in someone else lifted my spirits a bit. She wore an ugly mustard-colored beanie that somehow looked good on her with that long, dark hair. She exuded this radiant energy, too, and it wasn't like she was laughing *at* us for losing the—

The buzzer went off, and she jumped into the air, cheering and waving her arms around wildly.

Alright, maybe she was laughing at us for losing the game.

I sighed, watching as she jokingly booed at some of my teammates as they jogged off the field.

Yeah, definitely laughing at us.

I should be mad. Hell, I should be pissed. But a dry laugh slipped through my lips instead. She must have driven up here from Los Angeles to watch the Bruins win. That would explain the yellow hat.

Shaking my head, I nearly turned to greet the other players coming off the field when UCLA girl looked directly at me. Her eyes flicked over me with heated interest, and for a hot second—a very *hot* second—I completely forgot that we just blew the rest of the season.

But then her eyes moved over my shoulder, and the cold night began to seep into my bones.

It was time to pack it up and move on.

I loved football. I liked the rush, the adrenaline, and the pure physicality of it. But it wasn't my life, and I was thankful for that. Some of the other guys on the team would spend the next nine months wallowing until the start of the new season. But for me, it just meant that it was time to shift my focus.

Find other ways to put my hands to use.

That didn't mean I wasn't affected by the somber atmosphere in the locker room after the game or that it didn't follow me back to the dorms later. Losing still sucked, and anyone that said otherwise was a fake-ass liar.

But my shit mood was interrupted when I walked into the dorm lobby to see a dark-haired girl with a yellow beanie slouched in a chair by the window. *The* dark-haired girl with a yellow beanie. She scrolled through her phone while the same guy from earlier chatted animatedly in her ear. He had dark hair, too; it seemed to move on his head while he talked with his whole body.

My feet—because I wasn't good with controlling them—stalked over to them. Part of it was curiosity. What was UCLA girl doing in my dorm?

Part of it was an annoyingly impulsive *pull*.

"Hey," I said.

The guy's mouth snapped shut, and two pairs of dark eyes jerked up to look at me.

**God, I should have planned this out better.**

"I recognize you from the game tonight," I added.

She probably didn't recognize me. Why would she? On the field, sweat had soaked my hair, and pads covered my shoulders. Now I stood before her freshly showered, wearing sweatpants, and carrying my duffle bag.

Sure enough, she replied, "Oh? I don't recognize you."

Except, to my amazement, she did. She knew who I was. I could tell from the way she looked me over with those brown eyes. They grew wide, her eyelashes fluttering. It was coy, flirtatious. But I doubted that she even realized she was doing it. As quick as she was to turn on the heat, cold dismissal found its way into her expression.

"I thought you were from UCLA," I pressed.

She scrunched up her face. It was kinda cute.

"Why would you think that?"

"Well, you were cheering when we lost. That was kind of a giveaway."

"Oh. Well—"

"What's your name?"

As curious as I was about why UCLA girl wasn't from UCLA, I didn't want this moment to slip away without learning who she was.

But instead of giving me her name, she rolled her eyes at me. "I—"

"First name, *Nessa*," the guy to her right cut in, waving his hand around in front of him like he was conducting a symphony. Well, a lazy symphony. Maybe something by Dvorak.

UCLA girl elbowed the guy, but he kept going.

"Last name, *Elez*."

"*Beau*," she hissed.

"Class, *freshman*. And..." He drew the word out unnecessarily before finishing by saying, "Major, *undecided*."

UCLA girl stared at her friend, and I couldn't help but smile. It was a mad glare on her face, but it was a *cute* mad glare.

"What?" her friend said, shrugging. Then he pointed at me. "He's a football guy. Thought I'd give him the stats. Ya know, cuz sports and shit."

I laughed. Not like a dry laugh, but an actual laugh. UCLA girl—Nessa—turned her fiery gaze to me. And *fuck* if it didn't turn me on.

I could blame the game. All that adrenaline still coursing through my body or the emotional rollercoaster of the evening. I could blame the brisk walk back here—the way my skin tended to itch when I walked inside to warm up after being exposed to the cold air. I could maybe even blame the dry spell that I'd been going through ever since moving onto campus at the beginning of the year.

I could blame a lot of things, but they'd all be lies.

There was only one truth: Nessa Elez's gaze packed all the energy of catching a touchdown pass.

And all I really wanted was to show her how damn good I was with my hands.



*I had an author's note here earlier, and it disappeared! How annoying.*

*Anyway, as I was saying, I basically got my music minor so I could build up an arsenal of musician-related innuendos which I will now use to write this book lol*

*Thanks so much for checking out the story!*

*What do we think of Grayson?*