

BATTLING

BECKETT

A Contemporary Sports Romance

T. Christensen

BATTLING BECKETT

T. CHRISTENSEN

Copyright © 2022 by T. Christensen

All rights reserved.

This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the Author except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

This is a work of fiction. Names of characters and events are the product of the author's imagination and do not represent any persons, living or dead. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

The following story contains mature themes, strong language and sexual situations. It is intended for mature readers.

Everything you want to know about T. Christensen

TChristensenAuthor.com

ISBN 9781089558934

Chapter 1

“Don’t talk to me and don’t tell anyone you know me.” Beckett Dawson’s cold demand scraped along her skin.

Greer Smith’s soon-to-be stepbrother usually spoke to her in an icy, monotone voice. The threatening edge was new and tightened the nervous knot in her stomach. Greer sat motionless in the passenger seat of Beckett’s truck.

Her head was lowered, her shoulder-length brown hair concealing the side of her face facing him. Greer’s first instinct was to bite back, but she took some breaths to quell that notion. She needed to think before she acted.

“Did you hear me?”

Beckett’s sneered question made Greer squeeze her hands into fists. She glanced at him out of the corner of her eye. His chiseled jaw was locked and his bronze eyes were hidden behind aviators, but they would be cold and indifferent—the same way Beckett had looked at her for the past two weeks, ever since she and her mom moved in.

She drew another breath, lifting her head to look out the windshield and concentrating on making her reply calm and steady. “Yes. We don’t know each other.”

Beckett’s response was to turn the music up to a bass-pounding, windshield-shaking level. Greer relaxed her shoulders, relieved they were back to ignoring each other.

The plan had been to have her mom take her to her new school. But her new fiancé, David Dawson, had stunned everyone in the kitchen last night when he announced, “That is ridiculous. Beckett is already going there. He will take Greer.” Then he continued to eat like he hadn’t just dropped a bomb.

Greer and her mom widened their eyes at each other before they swung them toward Beckett’s rigid body. Her mom turned back to David.

“I can take Greer. I really don’t mind,” she hastily assured her fiancé.

He looked up, seemingly oblivious to the tension at the table. David leaned toward her and cupped her cheek. “Honey, your work is in the

opposite direction. Beckett doesn't mind." He looked over, pinning him with a razor-sharp look. "Do you, Beckett?"

So here Greer sat in an amazingly comfortable and supple black leather bucket seat with white stitching. She'd thought all car seats were the same. Greer was wrong. Too bad she wasn't enjoying the luxury.

The barely veiled hostility radiating from Beckett had been present since she and her mom moved in. Being in his truck, a place she couldn't escape, was excruciating. Greer hadn't moved a muscle since she reluctantly entered the gleaming black pickup. Inside the confines of the truck, the tension was stifling.

Luckily, Greer's after-school job at The Coffee Shack was within walking distance of her new school. And since Beckett had football practice, there would be no forced ride sharing after school, even if she didn't have to work.

They were a couple of blocks from the start of the lush green Oak High School campus when Beckett pulled over to the curb and shut off the music. Looking straight ahead, he said in a deadly serious voice, "Get out."

Greer looked around the busy city corner. "Seriously?"

He turned in her direction, her incredulous face reflected in his aviator lenses.

"If we don't know each other, how would I explain you getting out of my truck?"

Greer didn't mind walking. It wasn't far. She was just stunned. Wordlessly, she undid her seatbelt and slid out of the truck. As soon as the door clicked shut, the glimmering Mercedes truck shot forward and was soon out of sight.

Beckett actually did it. He left without a backward glance. Greer slid her backpack over her shoulder and started the walk to her new elite private high school.

Ten minutes later, she was admiring the awning the big, old oak trees formed along the drive up to the school's wrought-iron gates. A week ago, Greer and her mom had entered the imposing gates for the first time.

They got out of the car in front of the administration building and slowly took in the school she would be attending. She'd lived in New Hampshire her entire life, but had never even gotten a glimpse of this school. What was before them was straight out of a movie.

If Greer hadn't known better, she would have sworn they were in London. The school had a distinct old royalty feel. The sprawling Tudor-style school had rustic red bricks, imposing arches, and intimidating doors. Ivy clung to the building. The grounds were covered in artistic bush

sculptures, colorful flowers, sprawling oak trees, and lush green grass as far as the eye could see. Off in the distance, Greer could make out the shape of a football stadium, and there were tennis courts just beyond the oak trees lining the road.

She turned wide-eyed to her mom and whispered, "How much is this costing?"

Her mom's awed look disappeared, replaced by determination. She looked over the top of her white Honda Accord and declared, "That is my job to worry about. All you need to worry about is taking advantage of everything this school offers. Being able to list Oak High on a college application gives you a leg up on other candidates."

Greer shouldn't have asked the next question burning in her, but she had to know. Ever since she could remember, her mom had preached the importance of taking care of herself and never depending on a man. Now, a mere two weeks after announcing their engagement, they'd moved into David's mansion and were at one of the top private schools in the country, which meant it had to be expensive. "Is David paying for this?"

Her mom never broke her gaze from Greer's. "No. David got you in. I'm paying for it."

She was a paralegal. Even with him paying all the other expenses, the tuition still had to be a stretch for her. "I don't have to go here, Mom. I'll be fine at Public Central."

Her mom's expression lightened and filled with love. "I know you would be okay, but I want this for you."

Greer wasn't sure she wanted it for herself. She'd never been the new kid at school, and she wasn't sure she wanted to start as a senior in high school. But this was important to her mom, and she was right. Going to this school would look good on Greer's college applications, so she pasted a smile on her face and said, "Okay, let's go make this official."

Now the first day was upon her, and the closer Greer got to campus, the more her nerves ratcheted up. With each step, more groups of students appeared. The lead ball in her stomach was gradually expanding and making its way up her throat. Her heart fluttered like a hummingbird, and she felt like she'd just run a marathon instead of walking a few blocks. It was like she was walking toward a death sentence instead of to school.

Heads turned Greer's way. She pretended to be oblivious and tightened her grip on the strap of her backpack. Conversations came to a halt as she approached and then resumed with hushed whispers as she passed. The school had an enrollment of a little over a thousand students, and Greer had a feeling someone new in their midst was rare.

The farther she walked, the more she realized she already stuck out like a sore thumb. It suddenly felt like it was a hundred degrees, and Greer subtly wiped the sweat forming on her hands down the sides of her skirt. The one thing she hadn't thought she'd have to worry about was what was making her stand out.

Oak High had uniforms, but hers looked nothing like those of the other girls. Greer had chosen an A-line black skirt that fell above her knees and paired it with a white polo. Her shoes were a simple black canvas.

Every other girl had on a formfitting micro skirt. The only thing their skirts had in common was that they were black. Some were so short that Greer wasn't sure how they could sit.

Both the girls and boys were required to wear collared white shirts. Greer had apparently missed the footnote that the girls had to wear sheer button-down silk shirts with the ends tied. They all had enough buttons undone to reveal a glimpse of their lacy, brightly colored bras.

Heels were the only shoes worn. They might have been ankle or thigh-high boots, stilettos, or any other type of shoe with a heel, but there were no other canvas shoes in sight.

Greer gratefully stepped through the door of the administration building, gradually easing her shoulders down from her ears. She lingered as long as possible in the office after getting all the paperwork done, grateful for the reprieve from the stares and whispers. Greer wasn't stupid enough to think she was done being the center of attention. Not only was she new, but she also stuck out like a fake diamond.

««« »»»

With each class that passed, Greer got fewer wide-eyed stares, but the whispers and glances were still rampant. She was tempted to hide out in the library for lunch, but eventually she would have to face the scariest place for any new student—the lunchroom.

Greer's strategy was to pick something she wouldn't have to stand in line for and quickly find a corner table. Hopefully it would be in a dark corner, but she wasn't going to be picky. As soon as she entered the dining hall, she understood why it wasn't called a lunchroom.

There wasn't one big line where everyone got the same food. It was like a buffet restaurant with different foods at each station. Greer spotted a station with fruits and vegetables and made her way over to snag a green apple. She stopped at one of the in-wall coolers and got a bottled water.

With her lunch in hand, Greer went around the corner to where the seating was and stopped. This was definitely not a lunchroom—it was fine dining.

Tall windows with arches lined three sides of the room, and the view was the picturesque campus. Plush burgundy carpet cushioned her feet. Wood tables with white tablecloths and upholstered, cushioned floral chairs greeted her. Someone brushed Greer's shoulder as they passed and awakened her from her slack-jawed awe.

She was scouring the rapidly filling room for an empty two-person table when her eyes slammed into Beckett's thoughtful bronze ones. Her breath came to a skittering halt. For once, they weren't radiating hostility, but this look was equally disconcerting. What was Beckett thinking? It was as if he were studying Greer and sizing her up. But why? Was she in some sort of test she didn't know about? Panic fluttered in her with his attention.

One of his friends elbowed him and his focus left her. Greer let out her breath in a whoosh as she headed toward the first empty table she found. Gratefully, she sank down into a chair facing the window. Once her heartbeat was under control and her hands weren't shaking, she put in her earbuds and picked up her phone. When her audiobook started playing, Greer closed her eyes and temporarily escaped her new reality.

Chapter 2

The huge load on Greer's shoulders magically disappeared as soon as she stepped on the other side of Oak High's wrought-iron gates. She had officially completed her first day. Only nine months to go. She walked behind the abundance of aged trees to escape the notice of the Porches, Maseratis, and Mercedes racing by her.

Her work at The Coffee Shack was familiar as she sank into the routine. It was comforting to be in a place where no one was staring at or judging her.

When Lexi and Jenn stepped through the door, Greer scrambled around the counter and threw her arms around her best friends. It had only been a week since she'd seen them, but it felt like years.

"Whoa, girl, it's good to see you too!" Lexi whispered in her ear.

Greer gave them one last squeeze and broke away. "Thank you for coming."

Jenn shrugged. "We said we would. Besides, we can't resist your caramel lattes."

She laughed for the first time all day. "I'm going to find Greg and see if I can take my break. Find a seat and I'll get our drinks. Iced or hot?"

"Iced. Thanks, Greer!" Jenn gave her a wink and went to snag a booth at the back.

"We can pay." Lexi was more reserved like Greer, both in personality and looks.

They had found each other in second grade. Neither one jumped up to find a partner for their math game. After everyone else paired up, they drifted together. They quietly worked, and ever since, the two had been inseparable.

Jenn had joined their duo in middle school. She was adventurous and outgoing, the exact opposite of Lexi and Greer. Jenn frequently talked them into things they normally wouldn't consider.

Greer squeezed Lexi's hand. "I know. I'm just so happy to see you! It's my treat. Sit!"

She got her break and quickly made the drinks. Bringing them over, Greer noted the time. She needed this job and didn't want to abuse her fifteen-minute break.

Jenn put her glossy pink lips on the straw and sucked down half the drink with one swallow. She moaned her appreciation. "I don't know what you do, Greer, but this is the best."

"Thanks. Any good gossip at school?" She wanted a dose of the familiar, but Lexi and Jenn weren't having any of that. They both shook their heads at her.

"Uh-uh, we don't want to talk about us. You're living with Beckett Dawson and going to Oak High. We want to hear it all!" Jenn leaned in and waited.

Greer looked at her and marveled at how fresh she still looked, even after a whole day of school. "It would have been better if I were you."

Jenn's eyebrows furrowed, and Lexi widened her eyes. She asked what they were both clearly thinking. "What are you talking about?"

Greer took in Jenn's beach-blond hair in loose curls, shiny brown eyes, high cheekbones, and lush lips. "You look like a model. How do you do that?"

"Greer, you know I love makeup and fashion. I'm prepping all day!"

Lexi looked at Greer. "And what does that have to do with your day?"

"Everyone was like Jenn, only on steroids." Greer shrugged, but the concern etched on their faces showed she wasn't fooling her friends.

"Greer, you're gorgeous!"

She smiled at Lexi's immediate defense because she wasn't gorgeous. Greer went on to explain how all the girls looked like they had just come off a runway and could have been at least twenty-three.

"Wow! Sounds like another world. All of them?" Lexi asked.

Greer nodded. "All of them."

"You know what you need to do?" Jenn's excitement made her scared to ask.

"What?"

"Fight fire with fire!" She was jumping up and down in her chair. "I'll be your makeup artist and stylist! I can teach you to be one of them."

Greer had flashes of endless makeup lessons, eyebrow plucking, and uncomfortable clothes. She didn't know if she had it in her, even if her brain was telling her it was a good idea. "Please, Greer! I know my blog would explode with your makeover!"

Jenn had both hands clasped under her chin, begging her. Greer weakened, but she had to set a limit or Jenn would go overboard.

“All right,” she gave in begrudgingly.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you!”

Jenn clapped and Greer could already see the wheels turning, so she quickly finished her thought before she got out of control.

“*But*”—Greer ignored Jenn’s downturned mouth and plowed on—
“within reason. I won’t be able to sustain getting up every morning and spending a couple of hours getting ready.”

The joy returned to Jenn’s face. “Of course! Can we start tonight?”

“Give me a week or two.” Greer felt bad at her crestfallen look, but she could only handle so much change in her life. She liked things to be consistent and predictable, so she needed a little time for her new school to be *normal* before there was more change.

“I need to settle in at school and figure out how much time I’ll have to carve out for this new look. Let me figure out my new life first.”

“Fine.” Jenn grouched, but then lit up. “But at least tell me how wonderful living with hunky Beckett Dawson is!”

“Ugh, he’s an asshole all the time.”

“What?” she screeched.

“I’ll have to tell you guys later. I need to get back to work.”

Reluctantly, Greer slid out of the booth and headed back to work for another hour and a half. Her boss had agreed she could work from 3:00 to 6:00 during the week, and whatever hours they needed her on the weekends. Her mom got off work at 5:00, but usually stayed a little longer to clear her desk. Picking Greer up at 6:00 worked for both of them.

As soon as she punched out, she went to the parking lot and found her mom waiting for her. Greer slid into the familiar front seat.

“Hi, Mom!”

“Hi, honey. How was your first day of school?” she asked as she merged into traffic.

“Okay. I’m just glad it’s over.”

“Okay meaning bad, or okay meaning okay?” Her mom kept looking out the windshield, but concern crept into her voice.

Greer laughed and kept her voice neutral. “Okay meaning nothing bad happened. Just the usual first day curiosity everyone has about the new girl.” She didn’t want her mom worrying about her.

Her mom had never seemed unhappy, but when she started dating David, she glowed. Greer stuffed the ideas on why that might be deep down in her brain. She took it at face value and silently thanked him for it.

Her mom had gone to a technical school and received an administrative assistant degree. At the young age of twenty, she was seduced by her first

boss. When he found out she was pregnant, he announced he was married and stated emphatically there was no way he could be the father of her unborn child.

Her mom, Greer's grandma, had taken the view that she was responsible for her own pregnancy, so she could figure out how to manage it herself. Since her mom had always wanted to visit the northeast, she decided to move there and make a new start.

Greer talked to her grandmother a couple of times a year, but had only seen her a handful of times. The conversations they had over the phone were stilted and awkward. She marveled at how her warm, caring mom came from someone so standoffish. Greer didn't even know her dad's name, and at this point in her life, she had no desire to know it or him.

David was a partner in a prestigious law firm and had pursued her right after the meeting she'd sat in on to take notes. Her mom resisted, but eventually he wore her down. Now they were engaged.

While they were dating, David came to their apartment for dinner several times and Greer liked him more each time. He didn't pretend to be her father or her friend. David spoke with her, listened to her, and respected what she had to say.

More importantly, he treated her mom like a queen and tried to spoil her rotten. She knew David got frustrated with her because he wanted to do more.

It took both Greer and David to convince her mom it was okay to move in together after they got engaged. She was determined not to take her relationship with him any further until Greer graduated. When she overheard part of a phone conversation between her mom and David, she sat down with her and made her feelings known. Her mom had put her first her entire life, but Greer wanted this for her.

"You'll tell me if you're having problems, right?" Her mom's concerned tone brought her back to the present and her first day of school.

She swallowed hard, and for the first time in a long time, Greer lied. "Yes, Mom. I'll tell you."

Greer was a big girl. She could handle nine months of Oak High and give her mom peace of mind. Besides, after a few weeks she would be old news. And with Jenn's help, she would blend in more rather than stick out.

