

"Authentic and likeable . . .  
sweet and believable."

— Angel Jendrick,  
author of *Line Drive to Love*



# Setter UP

*Caelan Beard*

*Setter*  
**UP**



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*To Agnes*



## CHAPTER ONE

# *Bouncing*

“MACKENZIE — move!”

“GOT IT!” I yell, diving for the ball.

I get there just in time, bumping the volleyball to the teammate to my left, Soraya. She spikes it over the net, and the point is ours.

Our team lets out a small cheer, and Soraya, grinning, reaches down to help me up. I smile, taking her hand, but make sure I let go the second I’m up. I walk away, shaking it off, and get ready for the next rally. It’s the last day of volleyball camp for the summer and I want to soak in every moment of my final game.

I love volleyball. I’ve played since grade seven, and for the last three years, I feel like most of my life has been about this



sport: my schedule rotating around games, practices before and after school, and weekends spent hanging out with my teammates.

Last year, in grade nine, I made the varsity junior girls' volleyball team at school. The junior team is for grades nine and ten, but they don't take a lot of grade nine players, so it was a big deal. And I was so excited. I love everything about the game, and just stepping on court gives me a thrill, every damn time.

Then last year, in the middle of the school year and volleyball season, I came out as queer. It wasn't a big deal — I didn't have a big announcement, I sort of just started telling my closest friends and family, and it spread to everyone pretty quick.

Most of my friends and family were awesome about it. But I started noticing a lot of changes from my teammates. It wasn't much — it was small stuff, like the day I realized nobody was putting their stuff next to mine anymore in the change room. A few weeks later, nobody was coming within a ten-foot-radius of me in the change room, as if I had some invisible plague and they didn't want to get too close to it.

And when we were playing, things were different, too. Everyone used to high-five or hug after a good rally on the court, and if we won we'd all start hugging each other. But

after I came out, it was like everyone was trying to keep me at arm's length. If I went for a hug they'd hold their hand out for a high-five. If I went for a high-five, sometimes they'd pretend not to see it and turn away.

Nobody ever mentioned it, and no way was I going to bring it up. That would look so bad on my part — *gay girl complains that her female teammates aren't hugging her enough!*

I did talk about it with one of my best friends, Alexis, who's also on the team. But every time I mentioned it to her, she would brush it off and say she never noticed anything.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Alexis said. "You're exaggerating. Nobody is *avoiding* touching you."

All those subtle little things — my teammates avoiding me, nobody hugging me anymore, girls jumping out of the way in the change room — are microaggressions. It wasn't much — it was small stuff, but it hurt me.

And then there was my nickname. Our whole team has always had nicknames for each other — mine used to be Wilson, which is my last name and also a volleyball brand. After I came out, they stopped calling me Wilson and started calling me Gaykenzie instead. They said it was a "loving nickname."

"We're allowed to joke like this because we're allies!" Olivia, one of my teammates, would say.

Everyone would always laugh. I would laugh too, because if I wasn't laughing with them, it would have just felt like I was getting laughed at.

It still kinda felt like I was getting laughed at, though.

At the end of the season, our team captain, Meaghan, hosted a sleepover for the whole team to celebrate our second-place finish in the standings. I guess she and the co-captains discussed it and decided not to invite me.

The part that hurt most was that none of my teammates had mentioned it to me — not even Alexis. I learned about it later that night watching their Insta stories and a team TikTok.

I talked to Meaghan the next Monday in school, and she told me that she thought I wouldn't have wanted to come because she "didn't have enough space for me to have my own room. And obviously you wouldn't want to share with anyone, right?"

I had no idea what that even *meant*, but I walked away almost in tears. After that, I decided, I was done. If they were going to act like this, I didn't want to be on the team again next year. You still have to try out, at the start of each year, but if you were on the team in grade nine, it's almost guaranteed they take you back for grade ten. And I'm a good player. I'd be a shoo-in.

But I don't care. I've had enough.

When the buzzer goes for the final time, I find myself looking up with disappointment. We have a group hug, which I join in, my shoulders tense, and then we line up to shake hands with the other team.

It's a regional volleyball camp and we all come from different high schools in the area. We've been playing together for the last three weeks, but none of the people here know I'm gay. I didn't want to tell them, just in case they were weird about it.

But I've gotten increasingly paranoid that not telling anyone means that *I'm* being weird about it. Now, when people go for high-fives or reach to help me up, I'll accept their hand but duck away as fast as possible. Some of the girls have hung out a few times over the summer, and I was always invited. But every time, I found myself saying I was busy.

I don't know why, really. It just felt easier.

After getting changed, I walk to the gym's exit doors. Another girl, Sydney, happens to be leaving at the same time, and we walk together.

"Are you coming out tonight?" Sydney asks.

A bunch of the girls are hanging out, as a sort of celebration or goodbye or whatever. The plan for the evening is in our group chat. I think it's gourmet waffles and a movie at the drive-in.

“No,” I say, shaking my head. “I, um, have to help my sister with something.”

“Ah, too bad,” Sydney says, just as we reach the gym doors. “Well . . . have a good year.”

“Thanks,” I say.

She waves and walks off, getting into a car with who must have been her mum and two younger sisters.

I start scanning the parking lot. My own sister told me she’d pick me up today. A moment later Grace pulls up and I climb into the passenger seat.

“How was it?” she asks.

“You know . . .” I say, shrugging. “It was fine.”