



Straight from the Heart

Kimberly Gardner

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College student Kyle diStefano is having trouble paying his tuition. So when he hears about a job as team mascot with the accompanying full scholarship it seems like the perfect solution. Except he knows nothing about football. But why should that stop him?

Known as the Big Cock on Campus, Dave Masterson never lets his antics with the ladies interfere with his true love, playing NCAA football. But when his coach suggests the team do some off-season conditioning at the ballet barre, most of the guys scoff. Only Dave takes him seriously.

With Dave's knowledge of football and Kyle's knowledge of ballet, it seems each has exactly what the other needs, except they play for different teams. Or do they?

Kyle knows one sure path to heartbreak is falling for the straight jock who's teaching him the rules of the game. Dave falling for another man is going to mean nothing but trouble. But neither man can seem to help himself.

When a public display of affection casts doubt on Dave's NFL dream, he is forced to make a choice. Stay with the game plan or call an audible straight from the heart.

Straight from the Heart Details

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From Reader Review Straight from the Heart for online ebook

Djenifer says

I have to give this 4.5 stars. I liked the dynamics of the relationship between the MCs. My problem came from how the story was a tad disjointed. In the beginning, I liked the idea of Dave learning ballet from Kyle. But after one class you never read anything more about it though it is mentioned later on that the classes did continue. Why even put it in if we went nowhere with it? The same is true for Kyle learning about the game.

But what I loved was the vibe between Kyle and Dave. It was sweet and I really liked them as individuals so that made me swallow some of the parts I thought were a bit much.

Elizabetta says

2.5 stars

(note: this book can be read as a stand-alone)

I admit it. The cover hooked me **wipes off drool** and the storyline-- ballet dancer and football player hook up-- well, that was a draw too.

Dave is the star quarterback for his college team; he's a hot contender for the Heisman Trophy and on his way to the NFL. When his coach informs him that taking some ballet classes will improve his playing, he grumpily goes along with the order.

Kyle is a dance major and is in serious need of help from someone knowledgeable about football. Kyle desperately needs to win the team mascot position. It'll also earn him a full scholarship and he really needs the help. But he knows nothing about football.

I've heard of football players studying dance to help with flexibility and agility on the field. Sounds like a cool idea. And the possibility of a romance between a jock and an artsy type sounds like fun, too. Dave and Kyle are two likable characters. In fact, their story is very sweet and light. There isn't a lot about Dave working at the ballet barre... Well, there is one funny scene with Dave trying to get the ballet moves:

(Dave) **"Arms on what?"**

(Kyle) **"En bas... Like this."**

(Dave) **"Like this?"...**

Kyle held his arms in low first position... considered how best to explain...

"Pretend you're naked and all you've got to cover your man-parts is a football. And a nun walks by."

Ha! Love Kyle, I think he's the best part of this story. He is sweet and has a ready wit and seems capable of

putting up with a lot from Dave. He's a patient guy, it seems. It's all fairly easy-going and mostly about how the straight Dave falls for the 'out' Kyle.

Of course Dave develops feelings for cutie-patootie Kyle. How can he not? And Kyle develops an instant crush on the hunky jock. There's the usual problem of how football and being gay don't mix and... what's a guy to do? Dave, of course, finds himself having to choose between his dream career in professional football and Kyle.

So, there's nothing really new or compelling here, it's a very familiar gay-for-you trope in a new adult setting. There is a trans character-- one of Kyle's friends-- but no sooner is this stated than that's the last we hear of it. I commend it not being an 'issue' but was hoping for some sort of play on the topic. That may have added more interest to the plot.

Needless to say, I really missed the lack of any real tension or turmoil-- it's all a bit silly, really. Everything seems to work out easily for Dave and Kyle, but, man-o-man, that story ending is so abrupt! What the heck? Readers looking for an easy, light and fluffy story with a little bit of football action thrown in will probably catch the appeal of *Straight from the Heart*. An extra ½ star for Kyle bumps this up.

A copy of this book was provided by the publisher/author in exchange for an honest review.

Gwendolyn says

I have a long and noted history of being upset about books which do not get a big time NCAA football program correctly. This had a few issues (going home on game day, not having classes all summer) but not enough to ruin the experience. I kinda had a feeling this was happening at my Alma Mater even if we are the NITTANY LIONS not the "Snow Leopards" but then the Epilogue let me know I was right!

This is a whole lot of build up and heart breaking with 10 pages of togetherness.

3.7 or so for getting NCAA D-1A almost right. A rare treat!

Ameena says

[we only get one each and they are short scenes too (hide spoiler)]

Tracy~Bayou Book Junkie says

Dave is the straight football player. Kyle is his best friends, girlfriends, roommate. Dave's coach recommends Dave take ballet lessons to help him be lighter and better on the field. Needless to say, Dave is NOT happy about this. When Kyle and Dave run into each other and Dave tells him about this Kyle offers Dave lessons.

Kyle and Dave start hanging out.. When Kyle helps a very drunk Dave home from a party one night, things take a turn beyond friendship.

I loved this book. Kimberly has a great writing style. This book kept me turning the pages to see what was going to happen next. Kyle and Dave had great chemistry. This is book 3 in the series, but can be read as a standalone. Even though Kyle's roommate and best friend is the MC from book 2, I never felt lost, having not read the 1st 2 books.

I will be reading those eventually though. This was my 1st book by Kimberly, but it won't be my last.

Debra says

3.5 stars

A mostly sweet, quick read, with just a bit of angst, about out and proud ballet dancer Kyle and football star and presumably straight BMOC Dave. I haven't read the other books in the series but this works as a stand alone story.

The story is told in dual POV's and both MC's were very likable. The secondary characters, Mark and Josie (who are apparently the subject of the prior book) were good, supportive friends and even Dave's girlfriend turned out to be better than the first impression she makes. What stopped me from giving it a higher rating is that the premise of the story, Kyle giving Dave ballet lessons, was quickly dropped and I felt like the scene where Dave talks to his parents about his future should have played out on page in light of prior scenes between him and his father.

I enjoyed the story overall. This was my first book by Kimberly Gardner but I will likely go back and read Mark and Josie's story, *His Fair Lady* in the future.

Mel Sparks says

This was pure fairytale fluff. Fodder for the romantics and dreamers alike. There's this movie called 'A Cinderella Story' or some such narrative and this book almost matches the idealism of that film to a T, only in this case I think it's a Cinderella story. I read 'Straight' knowing full well that I was being played, that I was being sold a very fictitious idea of gay romance, that I was being manipulated emotionally etc, etc and I enjoyed the lies anyway. Dave & Kyle had a weird chemistry that interested me and although I consciously decided to fall for their improbable tale I didn't regret giving Kimberly Gardener a try. So yes I liked this and I recommend. Nuff said.

Angela Goodrich says

While this is the third book in the series and characters from the previous two books do appear, *Straight from the Heart* can be read as a stand-alone book without issue. In this installment in the *Exception to the Rule* series we meet Kyle and Dave. Kyle is an out and proud dance student who needs to learn more about

football so that he can land the position of team mascot and get a full scholarship to finish paying for school. Dave is the big man on campus, straight as an arrow quarterback whose coach just suggested he take ballet lessons to improve his game. After a brief conversation, the two learn that they can help each other out and agree to share their knowledge with the other.

One of the things I really liked about this book was that Dave wasn't embarrassed to be seen with Kyle. Quite frequently in novels with this kind of storyline, the straight jock is too worried to be labeled gay by association to be seen in public with the other guy. However, Dave wasn't worried about it and not only met Kyle in public, he also took him to the football field to demonstrate different plays and invited Kyle as his plus one to a mutual friend's wedding. I was also surprised by the adolescent experience Dave related to Kyle prior to their first encounter – not at its occurrence, but rather that Dave shared it. I enjoyed the way in which Ms. Gardner developed Dave and Kyle's characters and their relationship in a gradual manner which added to the realism of the book. Their sexual encounters were hot, with the first one being even more intense when Dave admitted to Kyle that he really didn't know what he was doing. That admission showed Dave's vulnerability because he could have just as easily pretended to know what he was doing and hurt Kyle in the process, and that he did this just endeared his character to me even more. But even that paled in comparison to Dave's grand gesture at the end because he understood that he needed to be a man of action and knew that words alone would not help him to achieve his goal ... Kyle.

Straight from the Heart was a great read. I have read other books by Ms. Gardner and found her writing in this one to be just as enjoyable. I look forward to reading more of her work and plan to read the previous books in the Exception to the Rule series as I liked "meeting" their characters in this book and would like to read their stories as well – especially Josie's story.

I received a complimentary copy of the book in exchange for an honest review.
Reviewed by Angela at Crystal's Many Reviewers!

Joyfully Jay says

A Joyfully Jay review.

4 stars

This book is so very sweet and quite perfect. I loved His Fair Lady, so I was dying for Kyle's story. And I liked it so much. For all that it was angsty and emotional, it was also powerful and precious. I'm in love with Kyle and his struggle to remain himself, even when he knows he's following a path leading to heartbreak. His strength is beauty. Kyle is what makes this story so wonderful. He's so bright and shiny, yet real. He doesn't fool himself into believing he can turn the straight guy. In fact, he figures he'll moon from afar. Then when things happen, he doesn't let himself believe it's more than it is. No matter how much he wants it to be.

Now, Dave... he's another story. I like Dave, but I have some issues with him. First, I'll tell you what I like. He supports Kyle and boosts his confidence in ways that no one else could. Without thinking about it. Without even meaning to. His character is discovering who he is throughout this entire book. His growth is rich and thorough, which I found very refreshing. The one thing I didn't like about his character was his perceived cheating. And I say perceived, because I was never really clear if he and Lacey were truly together

together or if they were friends with benefits. But nonetheless, there is a scene where it gives the impression Dave is cheating on Lacey, without any guilt or regret on his part.

The author did a great job devising this story. Not only does Kyle find a new, unknown strength, but Dave finds himself. But it's the ups and downs of this book that kept me captivated. Gardner has a way to putting so much emotion and beauty into the written word. I am enthralled each time, especially this one.

Read Crissy's review in its entirety here.

Sandra says

[at the beginning he said all he ever wanted to do was play in the NFL, and then at the end he said he was gonna tell his Dad he didn't want to play in the NFL anymore. Huh? There were no conversations to lead up to this, no realization th

Samantha says

3.5 rounded up.

Click above for review!

***~*~*Hyperion & Interabang*~*~* says**

Train wreck. Almost finished the book but couldn't take it any longer. Bail. Hard NO!!

liz says

This was another so close, just not quite book for me from this author. I WANT to feel all the things. I know it's feel-worthy subjects and characters. It's just...not quite there. That indefinable thing that keeps me from getting to that place. It's really disappointing, because the stories I've read are so exactly my things. I REALLY want to have all the feels.

Overall, this is a sweet book with good characters and strong writing.

The spoiler is legit, so don't click if you don't want to be spoiler'd.

(view spoiler)

Mari Cardenas ~ Bayou Book Junkie says

Copy provided by the author in exchange of an honest review and crossposted to BayouBookJunkie

Five stars!!!

This book was such a fantastic read! I'm a sucker for both GFY and college stories and this combines both in an amazing way. This story is part of the Exception to the Rule Series but can be read as a standalone without feeling like you're lost out of your mind, trying to figure things out. I loved that about this book, but precisely because I adored it so much, I'll certainly go get the previous two books in the series as fast as I can.

I devoured this book, it is fast-paced and fun, with some not-so-light angst mingled into it and we get dual POVs that worked great to tell us this particular story. I particularly enjoyed watching both boys getting closer with each encounter and their chemistry was off the charts, and hot enough to melt an iceberg!

The author made me root for Kyle and Dave from the get-go, and I fell hard for them. They're such fabulously drawn characters. They feel as real as all the things they had to go through to get their HEA. They're likeable even when they're being difficult and making me cry. There's some angst woven into the story, but it never feels unsurmountable, which is a really good thing in my book. And I adored Dave's journey, he was such a boy and it nearly took him losing Kyle to finally realize what had been in front of him all the time.

The secondary characters were amazing as well, especially Mark and Josie, who are the main couple in book 2, and Lacey, who in the end had more depth than I gave her credit for at first.

I certainly recommend this book and I will check out other stories by Kimberly Gardner for sure. Her writing style is awesome and I had so much fun reading this book, that I didn't want it to end.

Ottilee B. says

Except for the whole gfy-trope, this was angst-FREE. Was the story probable? Yes as I can see in my mind's eye a gay man falling for a [so-called] straight man. The entire thing was probable!! (I learned a new word today. lol.) It's stories like this that I love/want more of and that give me hope for the future of Acceptance.

No homophobes were harmed in this story))).
