



First Step Forward

Liora Blake

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Pro-football player Cooper Lowry is off the field and into some trouble—in the form of a very alluring, very free-spirited apple orchard owner named Whitney Reed—in the first installment in Liora Blake's all new Grand Valley series.

After eight seasons playing pro-football, Cooper Lowry knows all the right answers.

Is he stubborn, short-tempered, and impatient? *Yes*. Are jersey chasers more trouble than they're worth? *Absolutely*. Has he ever imagined a life beyond the game? *Nope*.

Cooper has built an enviable career—the result of staying focused, working hard, and keeping his head on straight—even as his body takes the brunt. So when a hard hit during a Sunday home game leaves him in a dazed heap on the field, it's nothing more than another day at the office. The only thing that's different about this Sunday is a chance encounter with a certain fascinating, beautiful free-spirited woman. And some sternly-worded instructions from his coach to take a little time off and give his body the TLC it craves—before he does lasting damage.

Whitney Reed is a few months away from losing the organic fruit orchard she bought three years ago in the tiny town of Hotchkiss, Colorado. At the time, she was just looking for a place to get lost. Instead, she found a home, somewhere she could finally put down roots. Now foreclosure is knocking on her door—along with a grumpy, gorgeous football player who might be just what she never knew she needed.

A charming love story for romance and sports fans alike, *First Step Forward* is a sexy, heartwarming romp perfect for readers of Jennifer Probst, Kristan Higgins, and Julie James.

First Step Forward Details

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From Reader Review First Step Forward for online ebook

Sheyla ✍ says

Liora Blake blew me away with **First Step Forward**. I've been a fan of hers since the first moment I read **True North** which was fantastic. Her whole True series is awesome. It was a no-brainer for me to jump at the chance to start another novel by her.

As with True North, First Step Forward has an unlikely couple as the main characters.

What do a jock and Treehugger have in common?

At first glance, you'll say nothing and be completely wrong. I have no idea how Liora Blake comes out with her characters but I hope she never changes it. The chemistry between them is always there. The reader knows this couple is meant to be and there's nothing that can change that.

Whitney Reed is about to lose her apple orchard. She has been the owner of the Delaney Creek Orchards for the last three years. She bought the property after her father passed away. Unfortunately, mother nature has not been nice lately and she lost most of her apples to the weather. Whitney knows she's running out of time and she goes to the city in search of a bank loan. A chance encounter with Cooper makes her forget about her problems for the time being.

Cooper Lowry is a star football player. He has been doing it for almost a decade. He's good at it and the rest of the team respects him. After a bad hit during the last game, he develops a horrible headache/concussion and he goes to the store in search of bath salts. His body is in pain and his mind is muddled. The last thing he was expecting is the help of a beautiful woman in pj's and socks.

I love books that when I finish reading them leave a smile on my face or a sigh escapes me. This is exactly what happened with this novel. I love both characters.

At times, Whitney was crazy treehugger and a second later she would be in love with a diesel car as long as it provided heated seats (I understand, I love them too). She was a breath of fresh air. She was patient with Cooper and called him on his grumpiness.

I love that Cooper wasn't good at lying. He was a straight-forward kind of guy. No need to hide it. He had a reputation of quiet, stubborn and grumpy but he was also sweet, very lovable throughout the book.

There were some great secondary characters and I'm hopeful Tanner and Garrett get their own books too.

Cliffhanger: No

5/5 Fangs

A complimentary copy was provided by Pocket books via netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

Tanja ~ T's Book ~ KT Book Reviews says

Oh what an amazingly sweet and endearing read. From one of my favorite authors comes the first in a new series entitled Grand Valley. I honestly have a big smile plastered on my face after finishing this. I'm not even sure where to begin, I just wanna hug somebody and go get apples to make apple butter and chutney.

Okay, so – a chance meeting in a pharmacy leads to a crazy exchange of information and an even crazier connection. Pro football player Cooper Lowry is having some health issues in a profession that tends to have an early retirement age. He feels a need to find some direction and clarity in his world of grid iron craziness.

Whitney Reed has sunk all she has into an organic apple orchard. Seasons and harvests can be a precarious business and one bad season can end it all for her. She is struggling and doing all she can to figure out a plan to keep what she has worked so hard to get, but now her plans are a bit rattled when in walks a wonderful mess of a man that gives her pause. He needs to get away and reassess his life, and apparently he's decided the place he wants to do it is on her apple farm. As if her life isn't complicated enough right now. GAH! I loved it!

It's a sweet read with a tarty bite of flirty fun. I can't recommend it enough.

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Chris C - A Midlife Wife says

I love this book so much!! AGH! I'm gonna gush for a little while so be prepared.

This book is so very different than just a sports romance. The characters are quirky and fun with loads of anticipation and heat buildup. With delightful doses of humor, flirty banter, in-depth emotion, and insightful detail that truly makes this a must-read!

The amount of description that the author puts into this book makes a difference in how you read and appreciate the story. Told from two points of view, both Cooper's and Whitney's, you get an in-depth look at how this perfect romance develops just from a single look and casual meeting.

Hot and so steamy, this seriously is one book I hated to put down and I definitely hate it that it ended. It is so full of emotion and their personal thoughts and feelings, you just get sucked into the story and never want to let go. SOOOO Good!

Liora Blake is quickly becoming one of my favorites and I am looking forward to more from the series, especially if they're written in the same strain.

Full review on <http://amidlifewife.com/first-step-fo...>

Melissa says

This unlikely duo clutched my heart and wouldn't let go.

Liora Blake's writing has that elusive 'it' factor—that charm and charisma that manages to turn my insides to fairy dust*. I'm often awestruck by her wit and innate ability to create such lovable characters, all while spinning a story that feels sincere. Four books in and I have to wonder, how does she manage to pull it off each and every time?

This go-round, I found myself flying giddily through the pages, desperately consuming her words, leaving me completely lost to the world of adulting. Forgoing what I was supposed to get done, in favor of surrounding myself with two characters I couldn't seem to get enough of and wallowing in all of their delicious possibility.

So, what does a hippy chasing her dream of being a successful organic apple farmer and a professional wide receiver have in common? A case of opposites attract, *First Step Forward* is riddled with great banter, straight shots of humor, scorching hotness, enviable intensity and that crucial component of any memorable story - emotional depth. Honestly, *does it get any better than this?*

When I wasn't caught up in Whitney's impending doom at losing her orchard to foreclosure or watching Cooper struggle with the reality that it might be time to retire his football jersey, I was waiting with bated breath for these two to see, that despite their differences, what they needed most was one other. That their connection was more than a few fleeting moments thrown together. Mixing Whitney's quirkiness, Cooper's grumpiness and their mutual stubbornness, makes for an interesting and wholly delectable recipe, that's for sure. One I would personally order again and again.

"I was convinced that when you took your shirt off, I'd find a little blue thundercloud with raindrops, right here."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"Like Grumpy Bear. The grouchy Care Bear."

What strikes me, each and every time I pick up a book from Liora Blake, is how relatable her characters tend to be. Despite their fame, success, bank account balance or lack thereof, they all have heart and an intrinsic charm. It isn't about ego or flaunting their status to get attention. There's no sleeping around, over-the-top antics or the dreaded angsty-drama that plagues this genre. The focus of the story is *always* the genuine connection forged between the unlikely pair at the heart of the story and issues that feel reminiscent of many, here I go again with this word—relatable, relationship woes. Liora Blake doesn't rely on unnecessary drama to keep the plot moving or drag the reader through a tirade of breakups. She doesn't need to. Instead, through

Whitney and Cooper's eyes, she delivers a sincere and heartfelt love story that's **incredibly addicting**.

Have I mentioned Garrett, yet? Book two, Second Chance Season, is told from the adorable co-op employee's perspective. Suffice it to say, I might have a little bit of a crush on the redneck . . . *already*.

(*I have to note, Whitney's 'fairy dust' comment was just too great not to borrow.)

Jo says

DNF @ 11%.

The blonde ending up in my bed last night was Whitney's fault. Really, it was. There wasn't a single other reasonable explanation as to why I let a girl who would not shut up come home with me.

This rationale will make sense to only forty-nine percent of the population. Because a woman, no matter how hot she is for one specific man she can't have, will not take another replacement home with her just to take the edge off. Women don't think like that. But with men, our decision-making skills are often driven by irrational dick-based instincts. It's stupid. We know it, you know it, but there's the truth of it.

Why exactly does some authors think this is the kind of heroes we would like?? I do not want to read about a guy (someone I should be rooting for and liking) sleeping with another woman as a substitute to the heroine, while thinking about the heroine and still giving the other woman two orgasms. And it's sad because until this part I was liking the book :-(. This is my first book by this author and I won't be reading her again.

~Dawn~TUG says

This is the first time I have read this author, and I loved it! The nutty, granola crunching dirt dweller with a heart of gold and the bad ass, grumpy, hot as hell football star. Worlds collide and the smell of Hawaiian Tropics changes Cooper's whole outlook on what's important. I loved the slow build of friendship and love, the banter, ying and yang of their two worlds coming together and making one. Not use to someone not knowing who he is, or wanting more than he give is a whole new thing for Cooper, while letting someone help her and being a part of something bigger is a totally foreign concept for Whitney.

Wanting only the what is best for each other made this a simple love story to fall head over heels for. The realness of a dirt dwelling, namaste hippy and the truth telling of a hunk pro athlete with lots of everything, made this such an easy read for me to connect with. I will definitely be reading more from this author and this series. Cute, light, fun read with just the right amount of angst, I also feel like I can farm organically with the best of them now.

**arc received from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review from
<http://www.facebook.com/twounrulygirls> ** Thank you

Mandi Schreiner says

Favorite Quote: Fucking Hugh Grant movies. They're like the earworms of romantic comedies. I'm stuck in a place, half-hard, and all I can think is: I'm just a boy, standing in front of a girl, asking her to do something, anything, to make his cock stop hurting.

Seriously. Fuck off, Hugh Grant.

Cooper Lowry is a wide receiver for an NFL team in Denver. When he suffers a concussion after a big hit in a game, his trainer pleads with him to take a few days off and recover. Cooper is stubborn and would rather suck it up, than take a day off, but when he wakes us with his head pounding out of his skull, he realizes he may not be able to practice. Shuffling to the drug store to get some epsom salts, he runs into a woman wearing her pajamas.

After Whitney's dad died, she spontaneously bought a run-down orchard, with big dreams of fixing up the place and growing a ton of fruit. But with a bad winter, and a late frost, her fruit harvest is barely existent. Running into bill after bill, with no end in sight, she heads to the city to get a loan - but she gets denied. It's while she is here, she runs to the drugstore in her PJ's (it's right next door to the hotel she is staying in) and she meets Mr. Sexy football player. The next morning they meet again, and Cooper finds out what town her orchard is in. When his trainer tells him to spend a few quiet days to recover, Cooper decides to hunt down the sexy woman he met in the drug store and shows up at her house uninvited. (that sounds creepy but it's not in the book!)

A while ago I read Blake's, True series and it was good. I was excited to see she is starting something new and I really enjoyed this book. Good chemistry, super sexy, good banter and just a fun story. Cooper is a NFL player and he really felt like one. We get to see him play in some games and meet some of his teammates. I think he has been in the NFL for eight years, which is a long time for that profession. He is a little more on the bad-tempered side and can be a little stubborn and impatient - but who wants a perfect hero? He gets mad when he gets hurt, and is always living life on 100% full throttle ahead.

All Whitney wants to do is grow fruit and sell it. Simple really - but her orchard is a lot of work and when the weather doesn't cooperate, it's hard. She is so cute - a little unorganized in life in general. Hard worker but with bills piling up, she just can't dig her way out. This all leads to Cooper offering a loan, something Whitney does not want from him. Grumpiness from both sides ensue.

This book also has great sexual tension:

Voice lowered, she leans even closer.

"If you want me, Cooper, I'm right here. All you have to do is come get me."

Ah, Christ.

Fuck it.

Fuck waiting. Fuck savoring. Fuck relishing.

One rough yank and I've got her right on the edge of the dresser, off balance so she has to grab my shoulders. I press the tip to her opening and try not to pound right in on the first stroke.

A fun, sexy contemporary. I can't wait for another one.

Grade: B+

Stacee says

I loved the premise of this, so I was quite eager to get to reading it.

I loved Whitney and Cooper. Sure, she's a little too hippie and lecturing about the environment and he's a little too cocky and "I know best", but they truly work. I loved their banter and chemistry; plus there were loads of sweet moments. Bonus points for the conflict coming from outside sources and not from stupid miscommunication.

The angst was minimal and the ending was adorable. I wish there would have been an epilogue, but I loved what happened. I'll definitely be reading the next in the series.

Huge thanks to Pocket Books and NetGalley for providing the arc free of charge

Laurie says

Not going to lie, First Step Forward snuck up on me. I picked this book up expecting to be able to read a few chapters while I carried on with my day. Ahhhhhh, that was a big, fat no. This story and its characters were magnetic and with each turn of the page I was done for. Unfortunately, so was my to do list. #sorrynotsorry Where do I start? There are so many wonderful things about First Step Forward, I am afraid of missing something. This book is funny, sweet, smart and sexy. Being inside the heads of these two characters as they navigate the challenges in their own lives while moving toward each other is pure joy. Liora Blake's work is new to me and it makes me a little sad that I have been missing out, because I am a little in awe of her. (And by a little, I mean – OH. WOW.) This book is so perfect --- I need more. Her True series is now most definitely high up on my must-click list.

That joy I mentioned? It is all because of Whitney Reed and Cooper Lowry. At first glance, they were complete opposites, but their hearts were the perfect match. It was fun to be in their company and have front row seats as they fell helplessly for each other. But even more so, it was beyond a heart-eyes kind of fall – it was the understanding and the respect for who the other was outside their bubble, that really brought this story home for me.

Also, woven into First Step Forward, was Hotchkiss, Colorado. This town became more than a place on the map, it is an agri-community that looks out for its own. This town serves as reminder that no matter life's challenges, there are places that offer soft landings.

First Step Forward has a completely stolen my heart. Page to page, it is beyond delightful. Get your hands on the book and simply revel in it. Enjoy!

Tracie Payne says

So I gotta say, Cooper made this book. He was one of the best male hero's I've read. His inner thoughts and things he said, they were just total "guy" and I loved it. What bothered me a little was Whitney. She was funny and not as granola as I feared in the beginning. But she was just too stubborn and prideful. It was to the point of being obnoxious. I felt her lack of communication to Cooper at the end about her situation was annoying and I felt there needed to be some groveling or like a grand gesture or something. She was let off the hook too easily. I liked this book, but I LOVED Cooper. I'll definitely read more in this series.

Brandie says

Realistic dialogue and witty banter. Fantastic couple I fell in love with. Smoking hot chemistry. No cheesiness. This was my perfect kind of romance. I'm definitely a new fan of this author!

Farah says

Read this book, the main characters are funny, likeable, committed to each other and to the things that they absolutely love.

Cooper is a football player and he's in dilemma, whether to keep on playing or to retire. Whitney, our heroine, buys and runs an orchard, using the money that she received from her dad's death. She's facing financial problems managing the Orchard but she didn't not roll over and let anyone walk all over her, she fights till there aren't any punches more to throw. Cooper and Whitney despite their many differences are really great, they are absolutely non nauseating sweet to one another and there are plenty of scenes of them together. I can't choose who I like more as Cooper and Whitney are an unforgettable couple and I totally <3 them.

Paula says

Fantastic! One of the best books I've read this year!

If you are looking for a witty and romantic book with very little drama, a well developed, fun & sexy relationship, and light on the angst, this book is for you. I absolutely adored Whitney and Cooper's story. Whitney is a hippie and Cooper is a football player - these two are SO GOOD together. LOVED!

Looking forward to reading more from this series.

lebe.liebe.lese [Tina] says

Der Anfang der Geschichte hat es mir nicht leicht gemacht. Irgendwie bin ich nicht in einen Lesefluss gekommen und auch die ersten Einblicke in die Story konnten mich nicht 'catchen'.. Die Geschichte hat sich relativ gut entwickelt. Das Ende war leider auch vorhersehbar. Alles in allem gebe ich dem Buch 3 Sterne, was immernoch zeigt, das hier ein gutes Buch vorliegt.

MareikeUnfabulous says

5 Sterne

In meinem Kopf sprudelt es nur so vor Gedanken zu dem Buch! Ich habe bereits viele New Adult Bücher gelesen und hatte ehrlich gesagt keine hohen Erwartungen. Und doch wurde ich positiv überrascht. Es ist da erste New Adult Buch, in dem mir die Protagonisten in Bezug auf ihr Handeln nicht naiv und dumm vorkamen.

Whitney und Cooper waren im Umgang miteinander sehr respektvoll. Zudem stechen die beiden mit ihrem Charakter heraus. Whitney kümmert sich liebevoll und mit absoluter Hingabe um die Obstplantage ihres verstorbenen Vaters, die kurz vor dem Ruin steht. Sie gibt sich mit den kleinen Dingen im Leben sehr zufrieden. Sie trägt einen Nasenring und einen Zeherring. Das unterscheidet Whitney äußerlich wohl von anderen Frauen aus New Adult Büchern. Cooper dagegen lebt für Football. Und obwohl er damit gutes Geld verdient, lebt er nicht übermäßig im Protz. Kurz gesagt: er ist am Boden geblieben und hat das Herz trotz Geld und Erfolg am rechten Fleck. Bettszenen gab es natürlich auch. Diese wurden jedoch an den richtigen Stellen eingesetzt, was mir gut gefallen hat. Außerdem habe ich mit Whitney förmlich mitgefiebert, die alles tut, um ihre Apfelplantage zu retten.

Natürlich war das Buch in gewisser Weise vorausschauend. Welches New Adult Buch ist das nicht? Ich wusste ab einem bestimmten Zeitpunkt, wie die Geschichte ausgehen wird. Mir hat der besondere Charme von "Fair Catch" gefallen: sympathische Protagonisten, die sich wunderbar ergänzen. Keine teuren Geschenke. Stattdessen ein Eichhörnchen Pyjama. Eine tolle Kulisse rund um die Apfelplantage in Colorado bzw. mitten in Denver. Kein übermäßiger Sex, sondern gut gewählte Bettszenen. Das schafft nicht jedes New Adult Buch, weshalb ich mich dafür entschieden habe, volle 5 Sterne zu vergeben. Letztendlich hebt sich "Fair Catch" einfach klasse von der Masse ab. Einzig das Thema Football mochte ich selbst nicht so sehr. Dies hat der Story jedoch keinen Abbruch getan und ist schlichtweg Geschmackssache.
