



## Just Too Good to Be True: A Novel

By E. Lynn Harris

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**A New York Times Bestseller** Brady Bledsoe and his mother, Carmyn, have a strong relationship. A single mother, faithful churchgoer, and the owner of several successful Atlanta beauty salons, Carmyn has devoted herself to her son and his dream of becoming a professional football player. Brady has always followed her lead, including becoming a member of the church's "Celibacy Circle." Now, in his senior year at college, the smart and very handsome Brady is a lead contender for the Heisman Trophy and a spot in the NFL. As sports agents hover around Brady, a beautiful and charming cheerleader named Barrett enters the picture. Barrett is set on seducing Brady and getting a piece of his multimillion-dollar future. But is that all she wants from him? Is she acting alone? In a story that combines football, family, faith and secrets, **Just Too Good to Be True** is a sweeping novel that proves once and again why E. Lynn Harris is a bestselling author.

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## Editorial Review

### Review

“Steamy, funny, and real.”

—*The News & Observer*

“Harris is a great storyteller who knows how to tug on the heartstrings with wit and sensitivity.”

—*USA Today*

“Harris's books are hot, in more ways than one.”

—*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

“[E. Lynn Harris] tucks in plot twists bound to keep his readers turning pages late at night.” —*The Washington Post*

“The storyline involving the exploitation of star athletes—a hot-button topic to be sure—is excellent.”

—*Chicago Sun-Times*

“Electrifying.... Widely entertaining and heartwarming.”

—*Urban Reviews*

“What's got audiences hooked? Harris's unique spin on the ever-fascinating topics of identity, class, intimacy, sexuality, and friendship.”

—*Vibe*

“Harris is a wonderful writer. His romantic scenes...are always touching.”

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

“From naked cocktail parties to religious conundrums, Harris gives you just the right amount of raunchiness and redemption.”

—*Upscale*

“E. Lynn Harris is the Beach Read King. All hail.”

—*Fort Worth Star-Telegram*

“Harris has stimulated a dialogue within the African-American community desperately needed for so long about the complicated issues of sexuality.”

—*Southern Voice*

### About the Author

E. Lynn Harris is a nine-time *New York Times* bestselling author. His work includes the memoir, *What Becomes of the Brokenhearted*, and the novels *I Say a Little Prayer*, *A Love of My Own*, *Just as I Am*, *Any Way the Wind Blows*, *If This World Were Mine*, and the classic *Invisible Life*. Harris divides his time between Atlanta, Georgia, and Fayetteville, Arkansas, home of his beloved college football team The Razorbacks.

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## CHAPTER 1

## **Brady Drops the Ball**

Yeah, I guess I am almost too good to be true, I thought as I read the SPORTS: The Magazine cover story for the third time. That is, if you believe the hype. But the truth is I almost ruined my life one night, but I somehow managed to right a wrong and come out basically unscathed.

It was a cool October night and my football team, the Central Georgia University Jaguars, had just recorded our biggest victory in CGU school history over the Louisiana State University (LSU) Tigers. It was a beautiful night for football, with a crowd of over 80,000 fans. I remember the smell of the grass and how great my teammates and I looked in our green and gold uniforms under the lights in a nighttime atmosphere that only college football can provide. It was an incredible feeling when the team raced from the tunnel to the field surrounded by a thunderous roar from the CGU fans.

I was a redshirt freshman, and in this my first start I gained over 150 yards against a tough LSU defense. After the game, I decided to join my childhood best friend, Delmar, and some of my teammates for some postgame festivities. In the past, for me that would have meant reviewing film of that night's game. But I was getting tired of all my teammates ribbing me and saying, "Brady can't hang" and "Brady ain't down with that," so I surprised them and myself by going to drink my first beer with them at senior Teddy Miles's apartment.

After a couple of beers, I decided to call it a night and trek back to campus on foot. When I got to the parking lot of Teddy's apartment building, I saw a girl getting out of a car in a white dress and white stockings. When the headlights hit her face, I realized I knew her. Naomi Brasswell. A girl from the church I attend in Scarlet Springs.

Naomi was one of several people who said they were interested in being a part of Saving Ourselves when I tried to start the group at the church, but she was the only one who showed up for the first meeting. So I gave up the idea of starting the celibacy club, but still talked with Naomi several times about how tough it was playing football and trying to stay celibate.

Naomi was a local girl, was majoring in nursing at CGU, and lived with her mother and little sister near campus. Sometimes we attended Bible study on Wednesday nights and went to the movies on Sunday after church. A couple of times she invited me to her house for Sunday dinner. I always accepted that invitation, because her mother could throw down with the pots and pans.

I liked Naomi a lot, but I was trying to follow my mother's advice and stay focused on football and my studies. Still, I thought my mother might like Naomi because she was a virgin and went to church three times a week.

I approached Naomi, and she appeared nervous until she realized it was me. She flashed a beautiful smile and said, "Oh, it's you, Brady. What are you doing over here?"

"Hanging with some teammates, celebrating the big win," I said. "What are you doing?"

"Apartment-sitting for one of my friends who went home this weekend," she said.

"What apartment does she live in?" I asked.

"Up there," Naomi said as she pointed toward an apartment on the third floor, almost directly over my

teammate's place.

"Why don't I walk you up? Make sure nobody messes with you," I said, realizing that several of my teammates were now most likely drunk and ready to hit the prowl.

"That would be nice," Naomi said as she locked her car door. As we walked toward the apartment, I took notice of her beautiful bright eyes and black hair tumbling over her shoulders. The evening light accentuated her white uniform and outlined her body, making her look like a sexy, naughty nurse and not the church girl I was used to.

When we got to the apartment, I realized I was a little tipsy, so I asked Naomi if I could come in for a while, get some water and rest. She said yes, and minutes later I crashed on the sofa and fell asleep.

A couple hours later, I woke up and Naomi was standing in front of me holding a bottle of water and wearing an oversized white T-shirt with no bra. I could see the shadow of her nipples pushing into the cotton, the soft, heavy curves of her breasts standing out perkily in front of her. An image flashed through my head of me raising up her shirt, getting on my knees, and sucking those breasts. I felt a twinge in my jeans, but I tried to ignore it.

"I thought you might need this," she said as she handed me the water, leaning toward me as her overpowering but welcoming feminine scent washed over me. I found myself breathing deeply, wondering what her skin would taste like.

I took a sip of water, then put the bottle on the floor, stood up, and just looked at her. She stared back. I was nervous, and the bulge in my jeans grew tighter.

"Would it be all right if I kissed you?" I asked.

"Yes," she whispered.

I leaned in, put my arms around her waist, and pressed my lips softly against hers. They were sweet, like I always thought they would be.

Her body was tense at first, but then I parted her lips, slid my tongue into her mouth. She closed her lips around my tongue, and a shiver ran through my body.

I leaned out of the kiss. "Where's the bedroom?"

"Back there," Naomi said, pointing behind her. "What about your celibacy vow?" she asked.

I thought about the question for a moment, then said, "We don't have to go all the way."

"Are you sure?"

"We can just . . . you know . . . dry grind."

"Okay. I think that'll be okay."

I followed Naomi into the dark room. It took my eyes a minute to adjust before I saw that there wasn't a bed,

just a mattress on the floor, a flower-print bedspread over it.

“What should we do first?” Naomi said.

“Take off your clothes,” I said.

“No. You go first.”

“Let’s do it together.”

We slowly took off our clothes. I pulled off my sweater and she pulled her T-shirt over her head. I pushed down my jeans. I took off my boxer briefs, and she slid off her ivory panties.

Naomi lay across the mattress on her back.

I stood over her, my erection sticking out and slightly curving up.

“It’s so big,” Naomi said.

“It’s not that big,” I said.

“It looks so big and hard,” Naomi said, gently touching the tip.

I moaned, “You got me so brick, girl.”

I lowered my body onto hers. Her skin was soft, her hips wide; her nipples, pointing up, were thick and hard like ripe cherries. Her body seemed to cradle mine as I lay fully on top of her.

“I’m nervous, Brady.”

“I know. Me, too,” I said.

“I’m so wet, Brady. Do you want to feel me?”

“Yeah.”

She took my penis in her hand, rubbed it softly over her vagina.

I moaned.

“Do you feel it?” She moaned, too.

“Yeah.”

“Does it feel good?”

“Yeah,” I said as I started to push myself into her opening.

“We can’t do anything. We don’t have protection.”

"I know. We aren't going all the way," I said sincerely. But it was feeling so good, better than I ever thought it would. The tip of me was throbbing, pulsating. I started to glide in and out in short strokes. Then I went a little deeper with each one, and I felt like I was losing control.

"Brady, maybe we should stop," Naomi said.

"I'm sorry!" I said, pulling out. "I'm sorry. We can stop."

Naomi looked up at me, her thighs still open, her eyelids low. She looked so beautiful right then.

"I . . . I . . . don't want you to stop. I like the way it feels," Naomi stammered.

"Are you sure?"

Naomi didn't say anything, just nodded and grabbed me between the legs. She started stroking me, making my head spin. Then she put my tip back inside of her and said, "Don't push too hard and don't come inside me."

"Okay," I said, already starting slowly to grind on top of her. I moaned, and I heard her, too. She wrapped her arms around me, clawing my back.

"Oh, Brady," she whispered.

And then I started to feel what I never felt before. Like an impending explosion, racing through my body toward my groin. My muscles tightened, my head spinning. "I . . . I . . ."

It was too much. I couldn't handle it. And before I knew it, I was gripped so tightly by a pleasure so overwhelming that I couldn't move. My back arched, I cried out and pushed farther into Naomi and then started to explode while I tried to pull out. But I couldn't. I rolled off her onto my side, feeling exhausted. My first time, and I didn't even last two minutes.

All I could think about was how much better this was than my palms and Palmer's cocoa butter lotion.

A cloud of guilt followed both of us during the weeks that followed. I thought how disappointed my mother would be, but I couldn't forget how off the chain the sex had felt, and I now knew why sex was all my teammates thought or talked about. I called Naomi a couple of times, but our conversations were weird, like we knew that we both wanted to do it again but we couldn't live with the remorse.

At the end of the season, Naomi called me and said she needed to see me. It sounded like she was crying, and when I asked her what was wrong she asked me to meet her in the reading room at the school's library.

When I got there, I saw Naomi dressed in a green sweater and blue jeans, looking beautiful but nervous.

We exchanged polite hugs, and Naomi whispered, "I'm pregnant."

For minutes I maintained a stony silence before finally muttering to myself, "Damn, son."

In the days that followed, I spent long hours in my apartment thinking about God and how pissed off at me

He must be. Still, that would be nothing compared to my mother's disappointment and sadness.

I spent a lot of time praying. I spent a lot of time telling myself that I wasn't ready to be a father. The one thing my mother had warned me about, I'd gone out and done. Even though she didn't talk a lot about my father, she'd admitted that they were both too young when I was conceived.

I chastised myself for ever thinking I was better than my friends and some of my teammates because I wore a celibacy ring.

I thought about how this was going to affect something that I truly loved—playing football, which had always been a part of my life since the first time I put on my #2 jersey. Even though my mom wasn't in favor of my playing at first, I convinced her at age six that it was a part of my DNA. Something I had to do to feel whole. I remember putting on a helmet for the first time when I was playing Pee Wee football and how it made me feel important. I remember the first time I touched a football on a kickoff return and how I outraced all of the other guys for a touchdown.

Maybe God answers prayers after He gets your attention. A day before finals started, Naomi came to my apartment and told me she decided to get an abortion and transfer to Savannah State, but that she would need my help.

I didn't know how I felt about abortion, but I definitely did not want to become another statistic, a young African American man who'd become a father before he escaped his teens. I made a promise that if I could come out of this situation free and clear I would reclaim my vow of celibacy and maybe only God, Naomi, and I would know what I'd done.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Paula Mendoza:**

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#### **Karen Wilson:**

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