

K I M A N I <sup>TM</sup> R O M A N C E



*Places*  
*in my*  
*Heart*

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THE GRAYS *of* LOS ANGELES

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SHERYL LISTER

Sheryl Lister  
**Places In My Heart**

«HarperCollins»

## Lister S.

Places In My Heart / S. Lister — «HarperCollins»,

He's got all the right moves Omar Drummond is a pro football superstar with a body that's a pure work of art. But Morgan Gray is forbidden to act on their chemistry, or repeat their impulsive kiss. Proving her worth as a sports agent means securing the notorious celebrity as a client, not a lover. Yet between flowers, sweet notes and heady hotel interludes, Omar is shamelessly seducing her... Other agents—and exes—have tried using Omar as a meal ticket, and he's closed himself off from emotional entanglements. With Morgan, it's a whole new playbook. Smart and tough, she can negotiate a contract and turn him on all in one go, and he craves more. But in matters of trust, he's just fumbled badly. To win her, he has to show her the man he can be away from the pitch and the limelight, and hope that this time they're both playing for keeps.

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Their eyes met. "Stunning."

What have I gotten myself into? Morgan didn't see how she would be able to resist him for the next two months. She didn't know if she'd make it through the night. "Thanks. You clean up pretty well yourself." Instead of all black, he had opted for a white jacket. His tuxedo caressed his tall, lean frame, and she had visions of undoing—

Abruptly halting her erotic fantasy, she chastised herself again. She had never lost her mind over a man before and had no intentions of starting now. "I'm ready." Morgan slung the thin strap of her silver evening bag over her shoulder and started for the door. Omar caught her hand. The contact sent an electric current up her arm.

"Morgan, I just want you to know how much I appreciate you taking a chance on me." He bent and placed a soft kiss on her cheek.

She ignored the potency of his cologne and the sensations flowing through her that his kiss invoked and said, "You're welcome. I could say the same for you." They shared a smile. The intensity of his stare made her pulse skip, and she turned away.

Dear Reader,

I had a blast writing Morgan and Omar's story! Morgan loves all things football (as do I). So of course she couldn't resist Omar Drummond's offer or the man himself. But he's having a little trouble keeping things professional, too. Any guesses as to who succumbs first?

In this story, I also touch briefly on PTSD and its effects on Omar's family. In my research, I came across many stories from veterans and their family members, ranging from heartbreaking to hopeful. I also had an eye-opening conversation with my army veteran sister, who graciously shared part of her story. I hope you will consider donating to your local veterans organization.

Thank you for all of your emails and messages. I love hearing from you!

You all have asked about Brandon's story. He's up next and I can't wait for the woman who can take his mind off work.

Much love,

Sheryl

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Places in My Heart

Sheryl Lister



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**SHERYL LISTER** has enjoyed reading and writing for as long as she can remember. She writes contemporary and inspirational romance and romantic suspense. She was nominated for a 2015

Emma Award and a 2015 RT Reviewers' Choice Best Book Award, and was named BRAB's 2015 Best New Author. When she's not reading, writing or playing chauffeur, Sheryl can be found on a date with her husband or in the kitchen creating appetizers and bite-size desserts. Sheryl resides in California and is a wife, mother of three daughters and a son-in-love, and grandmother to two very special little boys.

For my sister, Sgt. Ramona L. Robinson, US Army veteran.

[Acknowledgments](#)

My Heavenly Father, thank you for my life.

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I appreciate and love you!

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[Contents](#)

[Cover](#)

[Back Cover Text](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Dear Reader](#)

[Title Page](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Extract](#)

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Chapter 1

He couldn't take his eyes off her. His gaze traveled from her small feet in bright pink tennis shoes, up her long, smooth honey-brown legs and lingered briefly on an apple-round bottom that would make a grown man lose his mind. He continued upward to the grass-stained oversize T-shirt tied at the waist, giving him a glimpse of the gemstone in her belly ring. A ragged ponytail sat at the top of her head with bits of grass and weeds littering the strands that flowed in disarray around her mud-smudged face. Omar Drummond edged closer to the woman. She smelled like...dirt. She was stunning.

A dull thump in the center of his chest jarred him out of his thoughts.

"Yo, Drummond. Get your head in the game," one of his teammates yelled.

"Yeah, Drummond. The object of the game is to catch the football with your hands, not your chest."

He shifted his gaze back to the woman speaking, the focus of his musings. Morgan Gray.

"If this is any indication of your skills," she continued, "the Cobras are in for a long season."

"This is just a backyard scrimmage," Omar said mildly. "My game on the field is just fine. I'm always in the zone. Check last year's stats." He was one of the best tight ends in the league, but his LA Cobras team had lost the conference championship game by one point last season, costing them a coveted trip to the national championship. The loss had nagged at him for weeks, and he vowed that next season they'd bring home the trophy. "Better yet, ask your brother." Morgan's twin brother, Malcolm, was the team's star running back.

Morgan merely smiled while several of the guys snickered.

He moved into his position. "Are we playing or not?"

The game ended a short time later with Omar making the winning touchdown for his team. More good-natured ribbing ensued as everyone traipsed over to recover and relax in the chairs and loungers set up in Malcolm's yard. Malcolm hosted the barbecue for his teammates and their significant others every year before the new season began.

Malcolm handed Omar a beer and lowered himself into the lounge next to him. "You redeemed yourself nicely at the end of the game."

Omar chuckled. "Yeah. Couldn't let your sister call me out like that."

"Morgan has no problems speaking her mind, especially when it comes to football. She's been critiquing my game since I was eight." They laughed. "Your contract is coming up soon, isn't it?"

"In about six weeks."

"Well, with the way you've stepped in as receiver after Colin's injury, Roland should be able to negotiate one hell of a deal." Colin Rush had gone down with a torn ACL, MCL and meniscus two games into last season.

Omar's stomach rolled at the mention of his current agent's name, and he set the beer aside. "We'll see," he murmured. Roland Foster had come highly recommended by several athletes as someone who could secure the best contracts around. After two disappointing experiences with agents, Omar had counted himself lucky when the man had offered representation. True to his reputation, Roland had hammered out a deal that topped the news for weeks. But that was then.

Omar scanned the yard and saw Morgan laughing with another player's wife. They were the only two women who had joined in the otherwise all-male football game. She had impressed him with her offensive and defensive skills. Not many women—and none he'd dated—would subject themselves to a light tackle football game and not care about being dirty or having messy hair. But Morgan was different, and that turned him on.

"Man, you don't have anything to worry about," Malcolm said. "Roland will make sure you stay with the Cobras as long as you want." When Omar didn't comment, Malcolm leaned forward. "What's up, Drummond?"

“I can’t go into details, but I think it’s time for a change. And this time, I want to steer clear of anybody involved in league politics. I need somebody else, Mal.”

Malcolm studied him for a moment and then said, “My sister is looking to get into the business.”

“Is that right? She’s an attorney?”

“Yeah. And she’s about as far away from league politics as you can get.”

“So, she knows the game well, huh?”

“As if she’s played it all her life,” Malcolm said.

Omar had thought that was the case, but hearing Malcolm confirm it solidified in his mind that she might be exactly the person he needed to help him.

“Food’s ready,” Omar heard someone say.

He came to his feet, eager to end the conversation. Omar got in line with the rest of the guests, filled his plate and crossed the yard to where Morgan sat with her food. His intention had been to talk to her about a business proposition, but as soon as he sat and opened his mouth, two other women joined them and started a conversation about some popular television show. He promptly tuned out and dug into his meal.

“What about you, Drummond?”

His head popped up, and he met Morgan’s expectant gaze. “I’m sorry. What did you ask?”

“I asked which show was your favorite—Scandal or How to Get Away with Murder?”

“I don’t watch either show.”

Morgan slanted him a look. “Let me guess. You only watch sports or sports news.”

“No. I enjoy a good comedy or action movie, but I prefer reading to television.”

Surprise lit her eyes. “Reading?”

“Yeah, you know...books.”

“Wow, really, Omar? I would’ve never figured that out,” she said teasingly and rolled her eyes. The group laughed.

Omar smiled. She’d called him by his first name, something she had never done before. Their easy rapport gave him hope that she would be receptive to his plan. They finished eating while talking, and afterward, three other guys convinced Omar to join them in a card game. He kept one eye on his cards and the other on Morgan, waiting for a chance to get her alone.

His opportunity came three hands later when he saw her go inside. It took some serious patience to finish the game, especially since his partner seemed to contemplate every round. In Omar’s mind it was simple—you either had the card or you didn’t.

Marcus Dupree, wide receiver, threw up his hands. “Grant, do you think we could finish this game before the season starts? We only have a month.”

“My thoughts exactly,” Omar mumbled.

“Patience, my brothers,” Lucas Grant said. “I have to get my strategy together.” The middle linebacker employed the same tactics when watching plays develop and stopping runs between the tackles. Though effective on the field, today it only irritated Omar.

Omar shook his head. Minutes later, he tossed out his last card and stood. “Somebody else can take my spot. I’m done.” Without waiting for a reply, he headed for the sliding glass door that led to the kitchen and stepped inside. The sight of Morgan’s long bare legs stopped him in his tracks. She had changed into another pair of shorts that stretched taut over her backside as she reached for something in a cabinet. If he could just get one touch... Omar shook himself and quickly dismissed the notion.

“I see you changed.”

Morgan whirled around. “Oh. Drummond, you scared me.”

Back to last names again. “Sorry.”

She set the glass she had gotten on the counter and went to the refrigerator. “That’s okay. I had to shower. I can only take feeling grimy for so long.”

It took him a moment to realize she had commented on his previous statement. “I hear you. But you played a good game.”

“Are you referring to the interception or the touchdown?” she asked as she poured what looked like iced tea into the glass.

“A little cocky, aren’t you?”

She leaned against the counter, wrapped one arm around her middle and took a sip of her drink. “My game speaks for itself. Yours, on the other hand, can use some work.”

Omar closed the distance between them and braced his hands on the counter on either side of her. “Is that a challenge?”

She tilted her chin and stared at him intently. “You tell me.”

Their faces were inches apart. Common sense told him he should back up, but he couldn’t. Not when her full, gloss-slicked lips were calling to him. Without thinking about the ramifications, he crushed his mouth against hers and slid his tongue inside when her lips parted on a startled gasp. She came up on tiptoe and met him stroke for stroke, causing him to groan.

A second later Morgan stiffened and tore her mouth away. She pushed against his chest. “Move.”

Omar dropped his arms. “Morgan, I—” She brushed past him, and he reached out to stop her. She slapped his hand away and kept walking.

“Morgan, wait. I need to talk to you.”

“I think you’ve said enough,” she called over her shoulder.

He stared at her retreating back as she stormed out of the kitchen. He cursed under his breath and slammed his hand on the counter. “Brilliant, Drummond. Just brilliant,” he muttered. After that stupid move, she most likely wouldn’t listen to a word he had to say about his contract now. What had possessed him to kiss her? He had never been able to resist a challenge, and when she got in his face, her sexy, full lips and intoxicating fragrance had stripped him of his good judgment. As much as he wanted a repeat of one of the hottest kisses he’d ever experienced, he needed her expertise more. His desire would have to take a backseat. For now.

\* \* \*

Morgan Gray jogged up the stairs, entered the bedroom she always used when she came to her brother’s house and closed the door. She slumped against it, closed her eyes and willed her trembling body calm. She couldn’t believe Omar had kissed her. Or that she’d kissed him back. It had lasted mere seconds, but the man had managed to unnerve her, something not easily done. And what a kiss. She reached up to touch her lips and then snatched her hand away. The man was fine as all get out, and she had seen the legions of women falling at his feet. If he was expecting her to act the same way, he had another think coming.

Morgan jumped slightly when she heard the knock on the door behind her.

“Morgan?”

She opened the door. “Hey, Mal.”

Malcolm’s brows knitted together. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. Why?”

“I don’t know. I just felt something.”

She waved him off and started past him. “I think you make up half this stuff so you can be nosy.” No matter how much she tried to discount the whole psychic twin thing, her brother always knew when she was upset or bothered.

He caught her arm. “You know better than that.”

“There’s nothing wrong. I came up to shower and recover from my awesome game.”

Malcolm scrutinized her a long moment, then nodded. “If you say so.”

“I say so.” Morgan preceded him out of the room and back downstairs, where everyone still sat relaxing and chatting. She walked over to a small group engaged in a domino game and asked to play.

Several times during the rest of the afternoon and into the early evening, she caught Omar staring her way and did her best to ignore him. He'd said he wanted to talk to her, and for a split second Morgan contemplated going over to ask about it. However, memories of that kiss kept her away. She'd have to be dead not to be attracted to him, but she wasn't in the market for a relationship. Especially with another athlete.

Finally the guests trickled out one by one, and she busied herself with retrieving purses and bags, hoping that Omar would be among the first to leave. But he stayed around until only he and one other teammate remained. She went to the kitchen to put away the food and begin the long cleanup process that always followed these gatherings. Not hearing any noise coming from the family room, she ventured out, thinking everyone had gone.

"Oh, I thought everybody was gone," she said upon seeing Omar and Malcolm engaged in a seemingly serious discussion. "I didn't mean to interrupt."

Omar stood. "You aren't. You're more than welcome to join us."

"Um...that's okay. I'm going upstairs." Their eyes met, silently communicating that they had unfinished business, but she'd had enough for one evening. Morgan turned toward her brother, who slowly came to his feet and divided a speculative glance between her and Omar. "Malcolm, I put away most of the food, but you'll have to tell me where you want the rest when you two are done. Come get me when you're ready."

Malcolm nodded. "We shouldn't be too long."

She tried to keep her eyes focused solely on Malcolm but failed.

Omar smiled. "It was good to see you again, Morgan."

"Same here," she mumbled and fled. She didn't stop until she reached the safety of her bedroom. Once there, Morgan flopped down on the bed and blew out a long breath. Though she shouldn't even have let her mind go there, the only thing she could think about was kissing him again. The demanding way his mouth moved over hers came back with vivid clarity—pillow-soft lips, scorching hot tongue—and every inch of his lean, muscular body had been pressed against hers while his strong hands caressed her back. She wanted to wrap her hands around his sexy locs and keep right on kissing him.

She sat up abruptly at the sound of knocking on the door. Malcolm poked his head inside. "Did I wake you?"

She swung her legs over the side of the bed and stood. "No. Drummond gone?"

"Yeah. It's getting kind of late, so you should stay the night. We can go riding tomorrow."

"Okay." She hadn't planned to spend the night, but Malcolm knew the offer of going for a ride on his motorcycle would definitely make her stay. And clothes weren't a problem since all five siblings kept a stash at each other's houses. All three of her brothers were protective of Morgan and her sister, Siobhan, and didn't like them to be out at night alone. But since Siobhan had gotten married last weekend, responsibility for her safety now fell to her new husband.

She followed her brother back down to the kitchen. "I took care of the side dishes, but wasn't sure what you wanted to do with all this meat." There were trays of ribs, chicken, hot links and salmon.

"I'll freeze some of it for sure, but Brandon and Khalil are coming over tomorrow, so it won't go to waste."

Morgan laughed. "You know Brandon's going to be happy, especially since we aren't having a family dinner tomorrow." Brandon was the second oldest, after Siobhan. Morgan and Malcolm were the youngest. Their tight-knit family still got together at their parents' house for dinner at least one Sunday out of the month.

"Yep. He'll probably take home leftovers. Khalil, on the other hand, will just eat the salmon and vegetables." They both laughed. Khalil was third in line, and the model turned fitness buff ate healthy at least 95 percent of the time. "A couple of guys from the team said they might stop by, too, so I'll send some stuff home with them. Grab some Ziploc bags and let's finish."

She wanted to ask if Omar was one of the guys, but refrained. She was not supposed to be thinking about him. Reaching into the drawer, she got the bags and began filling them.

They worked in silence for a few minutes and then Malcolm asked, “What’s up with you and Drummond?” He came around the island to where she stood adding hot links to one of the bags.

“Nothing.”

“So, all that heat the two of you were generating in my family room was nothing. I’m not blind, Morgan. He’s usually one of the first to leave, and I couldn’t figure out why he stayed longer than usual. Until you came into the room.” He angled his head. “Did something happen between you earlier? Like when I found you upstairs?”

Malcolm didn’t miss anything when it came to her. “We spoke briefly when I came in for a glass of tea. If this is the part where you tell me he’s got lots of women and I should stay away from him, you can save your breath. I know what kind of man he is and I’ve read the headlines.”

He folded his arms and continued to study her. “Actually, I wasn’t. But seeing as how you’re all on the defensive, maybe I should be concerned.”

Morgan zipped the bag and pushed it over with the others. “Please. Now, I’ll admit the man is fine and has a body that’s out of this world, but I have no interest in seeing my face added to his long list of groupies. Been there, done that. And I have enough problems as it is dealing with this lawsuit.” She worked as an attorney in her family’s home-safety company and had just been appointed the lead on the suit that alleged one of their bathtub safety rails broke and resulted in someone being injured.

“How’s that going?”

“I’m not sure yet. We’re still waiting on a couple of reports, but it doesn’t look good. We could use a miracle right about now. I’m only two years out of law school, and this is my first big case. I don’t want to let Daddy down.”

He slung an arm around her shoulder and kissed her temple. “Just do your best. That’s all you can do.”

She leaned into his embrace. “I know. Thanks.” Morgan glanced around the kitchen. “Do you need me to do something else?”

“Nah, I’ll take care of it.”

“You could hire someone to do this kind of thing.”

Malcolm shook his head. “You know I don’t like a lot of strangers in my house. Having the housekeeper here twice a month is enough.”

She smiled. “What time are we riding?”

“I’m sleeping in, so we can go around eleven. Night, sis.”

“Good night.”

Morgan went upstairs, showered and climbed into bed. She tossed and turned for hours, unable to get Omar’s kiss out of her mind. Then she recalled him wanting to talk to her. She could probably ask Malcolm for his number. No way. As curious as she was, she knew the best thing would be to forget all about that conversation. And the kiss.

## [Chapter 2](#)

Morgan sat at her desk Monday morning, poring over the information she had been given on the lawsuit. “Not good, not good,” she muttered. A sixty-one-year-old woman had suffered a fractured hip, a broken wrist and a multitude of bruises and contusions. She groaned and lowered her head to the desk. Why me, Daddy?

“You okay, Morgan?”

Her head snapped up. “Hey, Brandon.”

Her brother Brandon entered and folded his tall body into one of the chairs in front of her desk. “What’s wrong?”

She pointed at the stack of papers in front of her. “This doesn’t look good for us. Did you see the list of all Mrs. Sanderson’s injuries?”

His lips settled in a grim line. “I did, but this has never happened before. We tested and retested those rails before they went to market, and I can’t believe one just...just broke.”

“Me, either, but until I can get a look at it, this is all I have to go on.”

“What do you mean? You haven’t gotten the rail yet?”

Morgan shook her head. “I requested it and the original packaging, as well as the purchase receipt. As soon as I get it, I’ll know more. Of course, their lawyer is insisting a neutral third party be present to make sure I don’t tamper with the evidence.” Clay Porter reminded her of one of those slick attorneys only out to make money for themselves.

Brandon’s brow lifted. “He said that to you?”

“Yes. He’s a pompous ass. At our first meeting, the first thing he said to me was, ‘Can you bring everyone some coffee, honey?’ I told him I’d ask my secretary to handle it. He had the nerve to laugh when he found out I was handling the case and mumbled something that sounded like it would be his easiest case. It took everything I had not to slap that smug smile off his face.”

“I can make sure one of the more experienced attorneys attends the next meeting if you want.” Brandon headed up the home safety division of the company and was in line to take over as CEO once their father retired. The company had a smaller division that focused on gym equipment that her brother Khalil designed to make his fitness center more accessible.

“I thought about that at first, but no, thanks. I’ll take care of it myself.” No way would she let that old weasel intimidate her. “Are we still getting a lot of negative press?”

“Not as much as in the first couple of weeks. But I’ll be glad when Siobhan gets back.” Siobhan was the PR director and had a way of handling the press unlike anything they had ever seen.

“Me, too. She left Melvin Wilkins in charge, didn’t she?”

“Yeah. And Gordon has been in my office four times in the last week complaining since she’s been gone.” Gordon Samuels worked as a media specialist and had expected to be promoted over Siobhan when the previous director retired. He had been a thorn in Siobhan’s side ever since.

Morgan laughed. “I know he was pissed that she didn’t leave him in control, especially since Melvin is what, twenty-five, twenty-six, and has been here only two years. Well, if Gordon wasn’t still stuck in the nineties, he might’ve had a chance at the job.”

Brandon smiled. “Yeah, right. We all knew that Vonnie would get the job.” He stood and walked to the door. “Let me know if you need anything.”

“I will. Thanks.” Left alone again, she smiled. Her brothers could be a pain in the butt sometimes, but she wouldn’t have traded them for the world.

She studied the case for the rest of the afternoon, making notes and flagging the spots where she had questions. She couldn’t put her finger on it, but something didn’t add up. Glancing up at the wall clock, she frowned. “I can’t believe it’s almost five already.” Morgan leaned back, rotated her chair toward the window and stretched. Her brain was fried and she wanted to go home. But she had to meet with her friend Brooke tonight to finalize their dance production. Brooke Alexander had been Morgan’s best friend since ninth grade, when they both had parts in the school’s spring dance production. While Morgan had changed directions and opted for law school, Brooke had pursued a successful dance career until injuries from a car accident forced her to quit. With her family’s backing, she had opened a thriving dance studio two years ago.

“Somebody’s here to see you.”

Morgan counted to ten then slowly turned her chair to face the woman standing in her door. The thirty-something administrative assistant had not been happy when she’d been reassigned from one of the senior attorneys to Morgan and, unless the two men were watching, took every opportunity to disrespect Morgan. Like entering the office without calling on the intercom or knocking.

“What can I do for you, Evelyn?”

Evelyn’s jaw tightened at Morgan’s irritated tone. “There’s someone here to see you.”

“Who is it?”

“He didn’t say, and it’s time for me to leave,” Evelyn said impatiently.

Morgan slowly rose to her feet and braced her hands on the desk. Leaning forward, she said with a controlled tone, “Let’s get something straight. You don’t have to like me, but you will respect me. Before entering my office, you will use the intercom or knock. I’d hate to have to report you to Mr. Klein. Are we clear?” The woman visibly blanched. Mr. Klein headed the legal department. Morgan smiled. “Now, please show the gentleman in and have a nice evening.”

Evelyn gave Morgan a frosty glare and exited.

She lowered her head and drew in several calming breaths.

“Morgan?”

Morgan went still. It couldn’t be. Yet when she lifted her head, her gaze collided with the one man she hadn’t been able to stop thinking about.

\* \* \*

Omar knew he had taken a risk showing up at Morgan’s office, but he was desperate. It had taken a lot to persuade Malcolm to share his sister’s information, especially since Omar had declined to say what had happened between them. He’d toyed with calling first, but changed his mind because he didn’t want to chance her refusing to see him. The woman seated outside Morgan’s office, whom he assumed was the assistant, greeted him with a wide smile and an exaggerated sway of her hips as she led him to the office. Omar ignored the not-so-subtle brush of her breasts against his arm when she turned to leave. In his peripheral vision, he noticed the slight rise in Morgan’s eyebrow and knew she’d seen it, too. He waited until the woman closed the door before turning to face Morgan.

Morgan folded her arms. “What are you doing here?”

“Hello to you, too,” he said.

An embarrassed expression crossed her face. “Sorry. Have a seat.”

Omar took the chair opposite her desk. “I apologize for stopping by without calling, but I figured you wouldn’t see me otherwise.”

“You were probably right. How do you know I won’t call security to throw you out now?”

“I don’t, but I’m counting on your love of football to work in my favor.” They engaged in a stare-down for several seconds until she looked away first.

“How did you know where I worked?”

“Malcolm.” She frowned and he added, “If it’s any consolation, he adamantly refused to divulge your home address.”

“Well, maybe I won’t kill him, after all.”

He chuckled.

“Since you went through all this trouble, I guess I can spare you five minutes.”

Omar knew the mention of football would rouse her curiosity. “I’d like to talk to you about a business proposition.”

“What does that have to do with football?”

“My contract is up for renewal in six weeks and—”

“Don’t you have an agent? If memory serves me correctly, you have one of the best agents around.”

“Things aren’t always as they seem.”

She sat up straight. “What are you saying?”

“I’m saying it’s time for a change, and I’d like you to negotiate my upcoming contract. You’re an attorney and, according to your brother, you know football like you’ve played it all your life.”

Her eyes lit up and her mouth fell open. “Are you serious? Wait a minute.” She sat back again and angled her head. “What about your current agent? Did he dump you or something?”

Omar sighed. “No.” There was more to it, but he would only tell her if she agreed to represent him.

Morgan narrowed her eyes. “There are dozens of sports agents out there, and I’m certain any one of them would be happy to take you on, especially with your numbers from last year. Yet you’re in my office.”

He smiled. “You checked my stats? So, you’re admitting I’ve got game?”

A rush of color darkened her face. “Why me?” she asked, ignoring his questions.

“You want to be an agent, and I need one.” He leaned forward and whispered, “And I know you passed the sport’s agent certification test. It’s a win-win situation for both of us.”

“On second thought, I am going to kill Malcolm,” she muttered.

“I need your help, Morgan. I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t.”

“I have to think about this.” She turned slightly in her chair and stared out the window, and then back at him. “You realize I already have a job. And I’m working on a case.”

Omar nodded. “I understand, and I have no problems working around your schedule.”

“Even on weekends or late evenings.”

“Anytime.”

“I see.” She went back to staring out the window.

He could almost hear the wheels turning in her head. She bit down on her lip, drawing his attention and reminding him how much he enjoyed kissing her.

Finally she angled her head his direction. “I’ll agree on one condition.”

“What’s that?”

“You keep your hands and lips to yourself. No more kisses.”

Omar groaned inwardly. There was no way he could go without kissing her. In fact, it had been the first thing on his mind from the moment he saw her today. “Morgan—”

“No. More. Kisses,” she repeated.

At this point, he needed her expertise more, he told himself. Not having any other choice, he said, “Fine.”

“Good. Then I’ll draw up the necessary documents, and we’ll meet so you can sign.” Morgan picked up a business card, scribbled something on it and handed it to him.

A measure of relief spread throughout his chest. “There’s one other thing,” he added hesitantly, reaching for the card.

“What’s that?”

Rather than give her an extensive explanation up front, he handed her a large envelope.

She took the envelope and removed four stapled sets of papers. She skimmed the documents and frowned. “Two of your endorsement contracts?”

“Yes.”

“Why do you have two copies of each one?”

“Go to the flagged pages and you’ll see.”

Morgan flipped to the pages and compared the two contracts. She did the same with the second contract, and he saw the moment comprehension dawned. She lifted her head. “Are you telling me your agent...?”

He nodded. “I need you to represent me—”

She held up a hand. “No. I can’t do both. That would be a conflict of interest.”

Omar’s jaw tightened. “I don’t care. I need someone who’s not affiliated with the league to handle this.”

Morgan ran a hand through her long curls and sighed impatiently. “Look, Omar. I’ll be happy to work with you on your contract, but I cannot represent you in a lawsuit against your current agent. Do you know what people would say? They’d think I was trying to get rid of him for my own purposes. And since my big-mouth brother told you about my desire to be in sports management, you have to know this would kill the slim chance I’d have.”

He blew out a long breath. “I know, and I’m sorry. You’re probably wondering why, with all the money I’ve made, would I be concerned about a hundred and fifty thousand dollars.” If his hunch was correct, that dollar figure would increase significantly.

“I’m not wondering at all. It’s your money. You earned it, and no one has a right to take it from you. What about Marcus Dupree’s brother, Jaedon? I heard he and another guy opened a law firm a year ago. And from what I understand, he’s ruthless in the courtroom.”

Omar had met Jaedon and chatted with him a few times, but because Jaedon handled Marcus’s contract, Omar assumed the man was just another sports agent. “He’s not a sports agent?”

“No. He worked at a prestigious firm at one time, but after winning some big case, he decided to strike out on his own.”

“Maybe I’ll look him up.” He pushed to his feet. “I appreciate you not tossing me out on my butt and hearing me out.”

Morgan stood, extended her hand and chuckled. “Yeah, well, you caught me on a good day.”

Something about the way she smiled made his heart beat a little faster, and the one thing he wanted to do, he couldn’t. He’d made a promise. “Thanks, Morgan. Let me know when and where you want to meet.”

Morgan looked at her watch. “I will.”

“I’m sorry. Am I keeping you from something?” It had never occurred to him that she might have a boyfriend. And he didn’t like the idea one bit.

“It’s fine. I’m just meeting my friend Brooke. I’ll send her a text to let her know I’ll be a few minutes late.”

Omar should not have been so happy to hear she didn’t have a date, but he was. “If you’re leaving, I’ll walk you down to the garage.” She seemed to weigh her options. Even though they had been focused on business, the heat between them still simmered, and being alone in an elevator might not be the best choice. For either of them. But he didn’t care. “It looked like everyone was leaving when I arrived, and I’d rather you not walk down alone.”

“Fine. Just give me a minute.”

He waited as she shut down her laptop and then stuffed it along with several file folders into a bag.

She glanced over her desk once more. “All right, I’m ready.” She slung the bag over her shoulder, then a purse she’d pulled from the drawer, and came around the desk. “Oh, wait. I need to send Brooke a text.” Morgan dug out her cell phone and typed something quickly, her fingers moving rapidly on the screen. When she was done, she dropped it back into her purse. “Okay. Let’s go.”

The outer office was quiet when they passed through and, thankfully, the secretary was gone. Neither spoke as they walked down the hallway, boarded the elevator and rode it to the ground level.

Omar followed Morgan to her car and let out a long whistle. “Muscle car,” he said of the Dodge Challenger. “Reminds me of Dom Toretto’s car in the Fast & Furious movies.”

Morgan laughed. “I’ve always loved fast cars and motorcycles, and this right here,” she said, running her hand across the car’s black matte finish, “is my baby.” She slanted him a look. “You have a problem with women driving fast cars?”

The tone of her voice gave him pause. It was as if she had faced disapproval for her choice in car. “Not at all. I admire a woman who knows what she wants and goes after it, no matter what anyone else thinks.” She unlocked the door by remote, and he opened and held it while she got in. “Give me a call when you’re ready to go over the contract.”

“I will. See you later.”

He waved as she drove past him. There was something downright sexy about a woman in a fast car. It made him curious about what else she liked. Cutting off his train of thought, he reminded himself about their agreement. He could make it. It was only a few weeks. But after the contract

negotiations, he planned to do his best to show her that they would be good together, professionally and personally.

### Chapter 3

“Sorry I’m late,” Morgan said, rushing into the dance studio and dropping her duffel bag on a chair.

Brooke Alexander continued her stretching exercises and smiled. “No problem. I know you’re working on a big case.”

She lowered herself to the mat across from Brooke. “Yeah, but that’s not what kept me at the office.”

Brooke stopped midstretch. “No?”

“Omar Drummond showed up at my office unannounced.”

“Omar Drummond, as in End Zone Drummond? The pro football player we were all drooling over when he did that men’s body wash commercial wearing only a towel, with his locs flowing all around his shoulders?”

“The one and only.”

“I can’t decide which part of that commercial I liked more, him in the shower with the water streaming over every sculpted ridge of his chest and abs or the full-body shot of him in that skimpy towel.”

“The shower,” they both said and fell out laughing.

“I wish he’d show up unannounced here...and wearing only that towel.”

“I bet you do,” Morgan said, still chuckling. Then again, she wouldn’t have minded seeing him in that towel once more, either. Every part of his deep bronze six-foot-six-inch, two-hundred-fifty-pound body was a pure work of art, all muscle and not one ounce of fat anywhere.

“Well, what did he want?”

“He wants me to negotiate his upcoming football contract.”

Brooke sat straight up and her eyes widened. “He’s been in the league for a good while, hasn’t he? I would think he’d already have an agent.”

“He does, but said he needed a change.” She kept the other details to herself.

“That’s all you used to talk about when we were in high school—being a sports agent. You’re finally getting your chance, and without the headache of trying to get the good old boys to take you seriously. Athletes, too, for that matter. Most people starting out have to work their way up to the more established players, but if Omar trusts you, that’ll make your road much easier. Are you going to do it?”

“I said I would, but I’m having second thoughts.” With all the chemistry flowing between them, it would be too easy for a repeat of Saturday. And she couldn’t let that happen.

“You must be out of your mind. The opportunity to live your dream literally drops in your lap, and you get cold feet.”

“It’s not that.”

Brooke folded her arms and waited.

“We had sort of like a...”

“A what? Please don’t tell me you and that smart mouth of yours said something crazy.”

Morgan lay back on the mat and closed her eyes. “No,” she huffed. “He kissed me when we were at Malcolm’s house on Saturday.”

She pumped her fist in the air and let out a whoop. “Is that all? You go, girl.”

Morgan skewered Brooke with a look.

Brooke shrugged. “What’s the big deal? You kissed. If you weren’t attracted to him, I’d be worried about you.”

“Really, Brooke? The big deal is it’s a conflict of interest. Besides, you know as well as I do that he has more women than Solomon did in the Bible.”

“The right woman will make a man settle down. And how did you two end up in a lip-lock?”

Morgan rolled her eyes and told her what happened in Malcolm’s kitchen and the details of his visit earlier. “I said that I would only work with him if there were no more kisses,” she finished.

“And he agreed to it?”

“Yes.”

A slow smile crept onto Brooke’s lips. “I can’t wait to see who will be the first one to break that rule. And it will be broken. Mark my words.”

And that was the crux of Morgan’s problem. “Enough about that,” she said, changing the subject. “We’re supposed to be discussing the dance production.”

“Whatever you say,” Brooke said, her smile still in place. “Okay. I’m loving your Michael Jackson theme, and the kids are definitely enjoying it. I think they’ll be more than ready by showtime. There are a couple more pieces I want to add for the advanced students.”

“We need to get my brother-in-law and brothers to do the dance they did at the wedding. I had no idea they could dance like that.” Siobhan loved Michael Jackson, and her husband, along with Siobhan and Morgan’s brothers, did a dance presentation at their wedding reception from “Smooth Criminal.”

“I wish I could have seen it.”

“Oh, I recorded it,” she said, going over to retrieve her cell from her purse. She found the video and handed Brooke the phone.

“Wow, I didn’t know your brothers could move like this. Your brother-in-law is one good-looking man.”

“Justin is a great guy and perfect for my sister.”

Brooke handed the phone back. “Do you think they’d be willing to do a special presentation for us?”

Morgan shrugged. “I don’t know, but I’ll ask. We’ll be cutting it kind of close for Malcolm, though. Preseason starts at the end of the month. Since the show is scheduled the weekend before, he might be able to do it.” They discussed the logistics of the added dances, as well as having a couple of Brooke’s friends who were dancers to help with the choreography.

“I still want to do the instructor feature again, and this time, Morgan Gray, you will be dancing. You can do tap, jazz, hip-hop or whatever, but you will be dancing.”

Morgan groaned. “Come on, Brooke. I haven’t been on a stage in years,” she protested.

Brooke rose gracefully to her feet. “No time like the present to get back out there. You’re good, Morgan. I’ve watched you practice, and you haven’t lost your edge. It’s time the world knows that the dance teacher can dance. I’ve already reserved the hotel for the after-party. It’s going to be fabulous. Oh, and this year, I want the dress rehearsal to be a private performance for the families of our students,” she added.

“That’s fine.” Morgan was still a little unsure of being onstage again, but truthfully, she missed the excitement of performing for an audience. However, between getting her students prepared, working on the lawsuit and now writing Omar’s contract, she didn’t see how she would manage to learn a routine in less than a month’s time.

\* \* \*

Three nights later, Morgan sat at her kitchen table, reading over the contract she’d drawn up for Omar one last time to make sure she had included everything from general principles to the term of the contract. Compensation would be the standard 3 percent, but the only thing she needed to clarify was whether he wanted her for any other services, such as endorsements, or just the football deal. She reached for the card that had been included in the envelope of information and stared at the number. She took a glimpse at the microwave clock and noted it was past ten.

“You can do this, Morgan. It’s what you’ve always wanted.” Before she could talk herself out of calling, she took a deep breath and punched in the number on her cell.

“Hello,” came the warm baritone.

Why does everything about this man have to be so sexy, including his voice? “Hey, Drummond. It’s Morgan. I wanted to see when you’re available to go over the contract.”

“What are you doing tomorrow night?”

“I have something until eight, but I’m free afterward. I can meet you somewhere.”

“I’d rather not meet in public.”

Morgan’s pulse skipped. She was counting on the buffer that a public place would provide. “I’m sure we could arrange a private room or something.”

“That won’t work,” Omar insisted. “We can meet at my house, and I’ll explain why when you get here.”

His house? This had disaster written all over it. If they couldn’t contain themselves at her brother’s house, where almost two dozen people were, how would they manage with the two of them alone?

“I need you to trust me on this, Morgan. You’ve already set the rules, and I said I’d abide by them,” he added softly.

“Okay.” She wrote down the address he rattled off. “I should get there around nine.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” Morgan disconnected and banged the phone softly against her forehead. “What am I getting myself into?” True, she had set the rules, but it would take everything within her not to break them.

The next evening, butterflies danced in Morgan’s belly as she rang Omar’s doorbell. A measure of excitement filled her with the prospect of being able to break into the world of sports management. At the same time, she couldn’t help but wonder what her family would think. Her dad had been dropping hints about her taking a more prominent role in the company, but so far she’d been able to dodge the questions. She hadn’t told anyone aside from Brooke and Malcolm what she was doing.

Morgan turned to look at the beautifully manicured lawn and gave herself a pep talk about keeping her attraction under control. She whirled around at the sound of the door opening. She worked hard to keep her eyes on his face. Even wearing a T-shirt and basketball shorts, the man was temptation personified.

“Hey. Come on in.” Omar waved her inside.

“I took the back roads and managed to avoid some traffic, so I’m a little early. I hope that’s not a problem.”

“Not at all. I’m fixing something to eat. Are you hungry?”

She followed him through the foyer with marble flooring and an elegantly furnished living room to a large modern kitchen. The smells wafting from the oven hit her nose, and immediately her stomach growled. She had eaten only a small salad before her dance class and was starving.

He laughed. “I’ll take that as a yes.”

Morgan smiled. “I didn’t have time to go home for dinner. Whatever you’re cooking smells great.”

“Well, when your parents own a restaurant, everybody learns to cook.”

“I didn’t know your parents owned a restaurant or that you could cook. Somehow that didn’t come up with the jock and playboy descriptions I’ve read.”

He shifted his gaze from the pot he was stirring to her. “There’s a lot about me you don’t know. And don’t believe everything you read.”

Morgan felt properly chastised, because she had believed much of what had been printed in the newspapers about him. “Fair enough. What are you cooking?”

Omar took a spoon from a drawer, scooped a portion of what she realized was chili from the pot and handed it to her. “Taste and tell me what you think.”

She blew on it a couple of times to cool it, then tentatively slid the spoon into her mouth. The thick, spicy concoction made her taste buds want to dance. “This is so good. Your parents taught you well.” He removed a pan of cornbread from the oven and placed it on a trivet. “That’s from a box, right?”

“Of course not,” he said with mock offense. “My mother would have my head if I made cornbread from a box. Besides, this tastes much better.” He cut a few pieces, placed them on a plate and handed it to Morgan. “Can you take this to the table?”

“Sure.” The perfectly browned bread made her mouth water.

“Have a seat.” He took two bowls out of the cabinet, filled them and took them to the kitchen table. “I made a pitcher of iced tea. I noticed that’s all you drank last weekend.”

“Great.” Had he been paying that much attention to her? Maybe she needed to reassess her original assumptions about him.

\* \* \*

Omar sat across the table, concentrating on his food and trying to ignore Morgan’s seductive fragrance and how good she looked in those snug jeans. He was still a little put out by her judging him as a womanizer. He didn’t claim to be a saint, and he’d dated his fair share of women, but he’d never cheated on one or bed-hopped as the media alleged.

“You’re a really great cook, and this cornbread is to die for,” Morgan said.

“Thanks. You can take some home with you. I don’t need to eat it all.”

“Probably not, since preseason is coming up.”

“Speaking of football, you said you wanted to go over the contract.”

“I do, but I have a couple of questions first.”

“You want to know why I insisted you come to my house.” When she nodded, he said, “You know as well as I do how intrusive the public can be. If we were spotted together with papers in front of us, it would be all over the media before we finished dinner.”

“True, but it wouldn’t be unusual for a client to meet with his agent.”

“Unless he hasn’t formally cut ties with his current agent yet.”

“What?” Morgan moved to stand. “I can’t play these games.”

Omar placed a staying hand on her arm. “Hear me out, Morgan.” He waited until she sat. “I haven’t said anything to Roland because I’m still waiting for more information.”

“You think he’s embezzled from more of your endorsements?”

He nodded grimly. “At least one or two more. I need to keep this between us until I can get all the pieces.” Just the thought made his blood boil. He wanted nothing more than to wring the man’s neck, but that would ruin Omar’s future plans.

“Okay. Were you able to contact Jaedon Dupree?”

“I’ll be meeting with him on Tuesday.” He paused. “I can’t tell you how much I appreciate you helping me out.”

“Yeah, well, don’t thank me yet. I’ve never done this before.”

Omar smiled. “But I’ve seen you play and heard you yelling in the stands. You know this game well, so I’m not worried. We’re going to be good together.” He realized what he’d said as soon as the words left his mouth. Clearing his throat, he pointed at the folder on the table. “You said you had some questions.” Morgan eyed him, wiped her hand on a napkin and pushed one folder in front of him. She spoke with the clarity and confidence of someone who had done this several times over, and he found himself even more impressed by her intelligence.

“The biggest question I have is contract services. We never discussed whether it would include endorsements, but I propose we focus first on getting you a good deal with the Cobras for the next few years, then decide the rest later.”

“That sounds like a good idea.” He was ready to jump in with both feet but appreciated her wisdom. He already had two endorsement deals, and Roland had been calling for the past two

weeks, trying to pin Omar down to a time to meet with another company. Omar had been ignoring his messages. Many players were envious of Roland's tenacity when it came to securing product endorsements for his clients, and now Omar knew why. Chances were Omar wasn't the only one the man had stolen from.

"That covers everything. Do you have any questions for me?"

He had quite a few. Did she have a boyfriend? If not, would she go on a date with Omar? And when was she going to let him kiss her again? But none of those was appropriate, so he answered, "No." He penned his signature in all the right places on both copies, pushed the folder back toward her and waited while she did the same. She gave him a copy and stood. Omar followed suit. He wasn't ready for her to leave and tried to think of a reason to make her stay, but it was getting late.

"I'd better go."

He wrapped her some food to go and led her out to the front through the family room.

She stopped abruptly, and a huge smile blossomed on her face. "You have 'Madden'?"

He followed her gaze to the television, where the popular football video game was frozen on the screen. "You want to play?"

"Maybe some other time."

His insides smiled. That meant she would be coming back to his house. Outside, they stood next to her car, and he clenched his fists at his sides to keep from reaching up to push the hair out of her face and stroke a finger down her satiny cheek.

Morgan held up the bag. "So, um...thanks for the food. I'll call you on Sunday to set up another time for us to talk."

Omar nodded. "You're welcome." They stood there for several charged seconds before she slid in behind the wheel. "See you later." He closed the door quickly to keep from pulling her out and into his arms. He shook his head as her taillights disappeared. There's no way I'm going to make it for the next month and a half without kissing her.

#### Chapter 4

The next Monday morning, Morgan checked and double-checked to make sure she had all the files needed for her meeting with the Sandersons' attorney. Brandon, her father and Mr. Whitcomb, her father's best friend and a minor partner in the company, would be joining them. Mr. Whitcomb—whom they affectionately called Uncle Thad—and Morgan's father had served together in the military, where Mr. Whitcomb sustained a serious injury. Disappointed by the lack of services for his disabled friend, her dad and started designing accessibility products in their home garage. Now their in-home safety company was one of the largest in the country.

Walking to the outer office, she stopped at her assistant's desk. "Evelyn, can you make sure the coffee and tea is set up in the small conference room, please?"

Evelyn came to her feet in a huff. "Yes, Ms. Gray," she said with a sarcastic smile.

Morgan silently counted to ten. Something had to give with this woman, and soon.

Brandon was already in the conference room when she arrived. "Hey, big brother."

"Hey. Ready?"

"Yep. I just hope Mr. Porter keeps his smart-aleck comments to himself this time." Several minutes later, she went over to the table where Evelyn had set up the coffee service and made a cup of mint tea. Whenever she felt nervous or stressed, the tea always calmed her.

"Well, I'm sure with Dad, Uncle Thad and me here, he won't try it today."

"It shouldn't have to be this way in the first place."

"True, but you already knew the kind of opposition you'd face when you decided to become an attorney."

Before Morgan could reply, her father and Uncle Thad entered the conference room. "Morning, Dad, Uncle Thad."

"Morning, baby," her father said.

Uncle Thad rolled his wheelchair over to where Morgan sat and smiled. “Good morning, Morgan.”

Moments later, Mr. Porter was escorted in by one of the assistants. The fifty-something-year-old attorney had a slight build, a few gray strands peppering his short, dark brown hair and still wore that self-righteous smile.

“Good morning, Mr. Porter,” Morgan said and made introductions. “You’ve met Brandon already. There are coffee and tea on the table if you’d like to pour yourself a cup before we get started.” She gestured to the table. Obviously the man hadn’t expected her show of authority, if his expression was any indication. She smiled inwardly.

Mr. Porter got coffee and came back to the table. “Good to see you here this morning, Mr. Gray. I’m certain we’ll be able to make some real progress this time.”

Brandon slanted Morgan a look that said, *Is this guy for real?*

“As I told Ms. Gray at our initial meeting, and I’m sure you all will agree, it would be in the best interest of your company if we settled this matter out of court. I don’t have to remind you of the injuries my client suffered and the long-term care she’ll require. The stress is wearing on the Sandersons, and they’re anxious to have this settled.”

“With all due respect, Mr. Porter, we will make a decision once we review all the evidence,” Morgan said. “I’ve left messages at your office three times requesting the defective shower rail and packaging and have yet to receive a return call. Since you’re here, we can schedule a time right now. I’m free next Wednesday at nine or Friday at eleven, or the following Tuesday at three. These are also the available dates provided by the third-party company you suggested. I took the liberty of hiring them in anticipation of our meeting today. Which one works best for you?” She pulled up the calendar on her iPad. “Either of those dates works for me.” Morgan glanced at Brandon.

“Works for me.”

Both her father and uncle nodded their agreement.

Morgan shifted her attention back to the lawyer. “Mr. Porter?” She smiled. “You mentioned that your clients are anxious to have the matter settled, and we agree.”

“Well, I... I need to check with my secretary first.” He looked downright uncomfortable.

“By all means.” She rose and slid the telephone in front of him. “We can wait.”

Mr. Porter reluctantly picked up the receiver and made the call. “Wednesday at nine,” he muttered after hanging up.

“Great. Once we inspect the rail and run some tests—”

Mr. Porter leaned forward. “Tests?”

“Yes. Your clients claim that the rail broke. We want to know why, as I’m sure you do.”

“Ah, yes, yes. Well, if there’s nothing else, I have another meeting. I’ll see you on Wednesday.”

“Dad, do you have anything you want to add?”

“No. I think you’ve covered everything. Thad?”

“I’m satisfied.”

“As am I,” Brandon said.

“Then we’re adjourned,” Morgan said, rising to her feet. She walked around the table and extended her hand. “Thank you for coming, Mr. Porter. I look forward to seeing you next Wednesday.”

He stood and gave her hand a brief shake, then gathered up his papers and made a hasty exit.

Morgan closed the door behind him and turned back to the table. “Well?”

“I’m proud of the way you handled yourself, baby girl,” her father said. “Excellent job. I think Mr. Porter will think twice before he underestimates you again.”

Uncle Thad chuckled. “Nolan, I think you’re right.”

“Thanks,” she said. After the two men left, she turned to Brandon. “I expected you to say more.”

“I didn’t need to. I enjoyed that little show. Girl, you grilled him with a smile. I’m proud of you.”

“Thanks. The way he’s trying to rush this through makes me think something isn’t right with their story.”

“I was thinking the same thing.” Brandon pushed to his feet. “But I know you’ll get to the bottom of it. Been meaning to ask how you like working for the company.”

Morgan shrugged. “It’s okay. I’m just not sure this is where I want to work long-term.”

“But you’re good at it. You’re not still thinking about that whole sports agent thing, are you? If you are, you might want to get a few years of legal experience first.”

She didn’t comment. No way would she tell him about Omar or the fact that she’d taken and passed the certification test to become an agent earlier in the year.

“Look, I know you love football, and I’m not saying you couldn’t make it as a sports agent. I just don’t see a lot of male athletes taking you seriously, and I don’t want you to get your feelings hurt.”

“Well, we’ll just wait and see. Right now I’m concentrating on this case. See you around.” She gathered up her folders and walked out.

Later, Morgan sat at her desk checking Omar’s stats and salary from the previous year. As a tight end, his salary cap was much lower than that of a wide receiver. But when one of the receivers was injured last season, Omar had stepped in and played the position so well, that he’d earned the nickname End Zone Drummond. His numbers were second only to those of the team’s star receiver, Marcus Dupree. Colin Rush was still questionable for the first half of the upcoming season, which would leave the team weak on the left side. She smiled. She’d just found her negotiating point.

When she talked to Omar tomorrow evening, she would share her thoughts. Automatically her mind went back to the kiss she couldn’t seem to forget. She shook her head. “No kisses. Just the contract, Morgan,” she muttered under her breath. The headache she’d gone through with her pro basketball boyfriend should make it easy to keep things strictly business with Omar, especially since his reputation with women mirrored that of her cheating ex. So no matter how delicious she thought his kisses were, there would be no more.

\* \* \*

Tuesday, Omar first had a meeting with the group of people who had been selected to assist him in opening a mental center for veterans and their families. With so little resources, the service was sorely needed. Nine people sat on the board—veterans, family members of veterans, a psychologist and medical doctor. By the time the meeting ended, he had been talked into serving as the keynote speaker for the upcoming fund-raiser this weekend to replace the original woman who needed to leave town to take care of her ailing mother.

Afterward Omar had to rush to get to his appointment with Jaedon Dupree. Once there, he took the elevator in the Wilshire District office building and exited on the fifth floor. He crossed the plush carpet to the receptionist desk and greeted the woman sitting there with a smile.

“Good afternoon. My name is Omar Drummond. I have an appointment with Jaedon Dupree for two-thirty.”

She pushed a button, spoke through a headset and then nodded. “Go through these doors, turn right and you’ll see his assistant’s desk at the end of the hallway.”

“Thank you.” Omar followed her instructions and was greeted by another young woman.

“Hello, Mr. Drummond. Mr. Dupree is finishing up with a call. Please have a seat and he’ll be with you in just a minute.”

He nodded and glanced down at her nameplate. “Thank you, Ms. Ford.” He sat in one of the three chairs, picked up a food magazine and flipped through the pages. Omar made a mental note to stop by his brother’s house later to check on him. Rashad had been working in their family’s restaurant helping out with stock since his discharge from the Army, and Omar hadn’t talked to him in almost two weeks.

“Mr. Drummond?”

His head came up.

“Mr. Dupree will see you now.”

Omar tossed the magazine on the table, stood and followed her into a large office.

“Thank you, Yvonne.” Jaedon Dupree bore a startling resemblance to his brother, Marcus, and matched Omar in height and size. He came around his desk and extended his hand. “End Zone Drummond. Good to see you again, man.”

He grinned. “Same here.”

Jaedon gestured to a leather chair. “Have a seat.”

He lowered himself into the offered chair. “Thanks for seeing me on such short notice. I know you’re busy.”

“No problem. What’s going on?”

Omar handed Jaedon the large envelope. “I need you to represent me in a lawsuit against my agent.”

Jaedon narrowed his eyes and pulled out the stack of papers. “Your agent is Roland Foster, right?”

He nodded.

“These are the same contract.”

“Until you get to the flagged pages.” He leaned over and pointed. “This is the copy Roland gave me to sign, and this one,” he said, indicating the other copy, “is the original one from the watch company.”

“So he siphoned seventy-five thousand off the top, plus his percentage.”

“Exactly. He did the same thing with two others of my endorsements. Another seventy-five off the body wash one and half a mil from the sports drink.” When Omar first saw that seventy-five-thousand-dollar difference, it had taken every ounce of his control not to storm over to Roland’s house and beat the man to a pulp. He’d found out about the alteration when he ran into one of the executives he had met with at the watch company. The man congratulated him on the multimillion dollar contract with a number considerably higher than Omar remembered signing. And when asked, had provided Omar with another copy of the original contract.

Jaedon shook his head. “When’s your contract up?”

“A month and a half. But he won’t be negotiating it.”

“I haven’t seen anything in the news about you firing him, and I know that would’ve made the news.”

“Because I haven’t yet. I wanted to talk to you first and see if you would take the case.”

“I will. Do you need some references for another agent? I know a few reputable guys.”

“No. I already have one. Morgan Gray.”

“I’ve never heard of him.”

Omar chuckled. “That’s because he’s a she and I’m her first client. She’s Malcolm Gray’s twin sister.”

Recognition dawned. “The attorney working for their family’s company?”

“Yes.”

Jaedon frowned. “Isn’t she kind of young? If I remember correctly, she’s only two or three years out of law school.”

“She is. But she knows football, and I don’t want to deal with anyone connected to league politics. My first agent negotiated a one-year deal so bad I probably could have made more working in a fast-food restaurant. After that, when my ex-girlfriend forged my name on some reality TV deal she was trying to get, my second agent was nowhere to be found. He didn’t back my claims of not knowing anything about the deal and tried to get me to consider doing the show. My guess, it was because of the dollar amount he figured he’d get. And now Roland.” He shook his head. “I’m done.”

“I didn’t know all that. Do you think Morgan will be able to handle herself with team management?”

“I admit that it has crossed my mind, but I’m not too concerned about it.” In fact, that was the least of Omar’s worries.

“But...” When Omar didn’t respond, a slow grin made its way over Jaedon’s face. “But you’re attracted to her.”

“Yeah.”

“It might not be—”

Omar held up a hand. “She’s already set the ground rules.”

He laughed. “Which means it’s not one-sided. I’ve met Morgan. She’s a beautiful woman. Let me know how that works out for you.”

“Sounds like you’re in the same boat. Someone in your office?”

“No. The personal chef I just hired. Anyway, when are you going to call Roland?”

“As soon as I leave here.”

“Good. I’ll get the ball rolling. I’ve met Roland, and I don’t think he’s going to take this lying down. Are you prepared for media?”

“I am.” In reality it was the last thing he wanted, especially with the fund-raiser coming up this weekend. But he’d deal with it. He stood. “Thanks for everything, Jaedon.”

Jaedon followed suit. “No problem. I’ll let you know when he’s been served so you can be prepared.”

“I’d appreciate it.”

“By the way, Marcus told me about the mental health center you’re trying to open. It’s a good thing. I’ll be there on Saturday.”

“I’ll be glad for the support.” The two men shook hands, and Omar headed back down to the garage where his car was parked. He slid behind the wheel, pulled out his cell and called Roland. Just the mere thought of the man spiked Omar’s anger all over again. But the sooner he ended the relationship, the better he’d be, mentally and financially.

“I’ve been trying to call you for the past two and a half weeks,” Roland started in before Omar could say a word. “We need to jump on this deal with Apple. I can’t keep putting them off.”

He knew that deal would most likely net a lucrative contract, but Roland wouldn’t be handling it. If Apple was serious and things worked out with Morgan, maybe he’d ask her to negotiate the contract. He felt certain she would be honest in her dealings.

“So I need you to get over here and—”

“Roland,” Omar interrupted. “I won’t be coming by your office tonight or ever. We’re done.”

There was a slight pause, then Roland said, “What the hell do you mean, we’re done? After all I’ve done for you. You would’ve never been able to negotiate a deal to become one of the highest paid tight ends had it not been for me. You need me, Drummond.”

“Are you sure it’s not the other way around?”

The agent went silent for a moment. “Exactly what are you implying?”

“I’m not implying anything. I’m opting out of my contract.”

“You can’t do that to me,” he yelled.

“Sure I can. Remember that clause that says either of us can terminate the contract if the other doesn’t live up to the agreement? You haven’t, so I’m exercising that option. You’ll be hearing from my attorney.” Roland’s curses filled Omar’s ear as Omar ended the call. He blew out a long breath and felt a weight being lifted off his chest. He smiled, started the engine and drove across town to his brother and sister-in-law’s house.

He was relieved to see his brother’s truck parked in the driveway. Every so often something would trigger some sort of flashback for Rashad and he’d disappear for hours, sometimes days. And when he returned, looked as if he’d been sleeping on the streets. Six months ago, after much discussion, Rashad had allowed Omar to buy him a small trailer where he could go when he needed

time alone. So far it had worked out and made it easier on his wife and children, as well as the rest of their family.

“Uncle Omar!”

His twelve-year-old niece, Brianna, flew off the porch and across the grass before Omar could close the car door. It seemed like she had added another inch or two to her slender frame since he’d seen her last and, with her smooth mocha skin, dark eyes and wide smile, was a mini replica of her beautiful mother. She launched herself at him as soon as he rounded the fender, and he scooped her up and swung her around. Setting her gently on her feet, he placed a kiss on her temple. “How’s my favorite niece?” he asked with a grin.

“I’m your only niece,” she answered with a playful roll of her eyes. “I’m good.”

“You enjoying your summer break?” he asked as they strolled up the walk.

“Yes and no.”

“What’s the problem?”

“There’s nothing to do...except the stupid report Mom makes us write. I want to take a dance class, but she said I’d have to wait awhile.”

“Well, that report is important.” His librarian sister-in-law made his niece and nephew write a Black history report every summer, saying they couldn’t know where they were going unless they knew where they’d been. “As far as the dance class, you keep doing what you’re supposed to and I’m sure your mom will let you take one.” Omar held open the screen door.

Brianna pouted and mumbled, “I guess.”

He shook his head and followed her into the house. His ten-year-old nephew, Rashad Jr., was in his usual spot in front of the television, playing some video game. Omar playfully rubbed his head. “What’s up, little man?”

“Hey, Uncle O,” Rashad Jr. said without taking his eyes off the screen.

“Where’s your mom?” he asked Brianna.

“In the kitchen,” she called over her shoulder and veered off down a hallway.

He continued to the kitchen. “Hey, Serena.”

“Omar,” she said, drying her hands on a dish towel and coming over to hug him. “How are you?”

“Good. What about you?” He studied her pained expression.

“Yesterday, not so great. But today is better.”

He nodded, knowing she was talking about his brother. “Anything you need me to do?”

“No. But you’re welcome to stay for dinner if you want. Rashad asked for fried chicken, so that’s what I’m making.”

“You know I never turn down your fried chicken. Where is he?”

“Outside in the backyard.”

Omar went out the sliding glass door off the kitchen and spotted his brother sitting on the grass beneath a large shade tree.

“Hey, little brother,” Rashad called.

“Hey.”

Rashad smiled. “Serena call you because I had a bad day yesterday?”

“No. I didn’t know you had one. How’s today?”

He shrugged. “Better, I guess.”

“What happened yesterday?”

“Had one of those stupid shrink sessions. The man acted like he had somewhere he needed to be. Kept checking his watch every five minutes, then asked if we could call it a day.” He slanted Omar a glance. “Fifteen minutes into the session. Made me upset. I’m not going back. Tired of being treated like I’m nobody.”

Omar sighed inwardly. This was the second psychiatrist Rashad had seen. It had taken several months for him to receive the service. The first one only wanted to prescribe medication, to which

his brother was adamantly opposed, and the current one had a habit of canceling or shortening appointments. It was even more reason why he wanted to open the center. He started to speak and his cell rang. Not wanting to interrupt his brother now that he was opening up, he let it ring.

“You going to answer that?”

“I can call whoever it is back later.”

Rashad shook his head. “Answer your phone, Mr. Psychologist. This isn’t a counseling session.”

Omar chuckled and dug the cell out of his pocket. He went still upon seeing Morgan’s name on the display. “Hey, Morgan.”

“Hi, Drummond. Is this a good time to talk?”

“What’s up?”

“I just wanted to see how your meeting with Jaedon Dupree went.”

“It went well. Can I call you later? I’m talking to my brother.”

“Of course. Why didn’t you say so in the first place?”

“Your call is important.”

“Drummond, I thought we—”

“Relax, Morgan. I just meant as far as our business is concerned.”

“Oh. Sorry,” she mumbled. “I’ll be home around nine, if that’s not too late for you.”

Omar smiled. Back to business. “No. I’ll call you around nine-thirty.” Rashad was staring at him with a silly grin on his face when Omar hung up. “What?”

“Baby brother’s got a new girl. It’s been a while.”

This was the brother he remembered and grew up with. At thirty-four and six years Omar’s senior, Rashad had taught him everything he knew about women. Omar had idolized his big brother and tried to emulate his every move, from his walk and the way he talked to his smooth reputation when it came to the ladies. “I don’t have a new girl. Just a new agent.”

“This I have got to hear.”

They shared a smile, and Omar filled him in on what had led up to him firing Roland and hiring Morgan.

Later, after arriving home, he decided to shower first. Then he’d call Morgan to let her know about his conversation with Jaedon and invite her to be his date for the fund-raiser. Now that he’d fired Roland, he was free to be seen with her in public and wanted to introduce her as his new agent. He only hoped he’d be able to keep his hands off her.

## Chapter 5

Morgan added the finishing touches to her makeup Saturday evening and surveyed her look. The navy off-the-shoulder floor-length gown dipped modestly in the front and had a front slit to the knee. Nothing too revealing. She didn’t want to give Omar or anyone else the impression that their relationship was anything but business. The fluttering increased in her stomach. Ever since Omar had asked her to attend a benefit dinner with him—their first public appearance together—her nerves had been on edge. Though this was supposed to be business, somehow it felt like a real date. What would people think? And what would her family say? Outside Malcolm, she hadn’t gotten up the courage to tell the rest of them. Siobhan was due back to work next week, so she’d talk to her.

Her mind went back to the benefit. Omar had mentioned it being held for a mental health center, but he hadn’t been specific about the details. Morgan’s curiosity was piqued, and she wished she knew more. The intercom sounded and her heart started racing.

“Yes?”

“Omar,” came the warm baritone.

She buzzed him in and drew in a deep, calming breath before opening the door. Her breath caught at the sight of him looking as if he’d just left a photo shoot for GQ magazine.

“So...can I come in?” Omar asked with a knowing grin.

Morgan wanted to kick herself. No way would he take her seriously about keeping things strictly professional if she stared at him like a starstruck groupie every time she saw him. “Of course.” She stepped back, waved him in and walked over to the end table where she’d left her purse.

“You look stunning.” His gaze made a slow tour down her body and an even slower one back up. Their eyes met. “Stunning.”

What have I gotten myself into? Morgan didn’t see how she would be able to resist him for the next few weeks. She didn’t know if she’d make it through tonight. “Thanks. You clean up pretty well yourself.” Instead of all black, he had opted for a white jacket. His tuxedo caressed his tall, lean frame, and she had visions of undoing—

Abruptly halting her erotic fantasy, she chastised herself again. She had never lost her mind over a man before and had no intentions of starting now. “I’m ready.” Morgan slung the thin strap of her silver evening bag over her shoulder and started for the door. Omar caught her hand. The contact sent an electric current up her arm.

“Morgan, I just want you to know how much I appreciate you taking a chance on me.” He bent and placed a soft kiss on her cheek.

She ignored the potency of his cologne and the sensations flowing through her that his kiss invoked and said, “You’re welcome. I could say the same for you.” They shared a smile. The intensity of his stare made her pulse skip, and she turned away. “We don’t want to be late.” Morgan locked the door behind them and hurried down the walk. He led her to a newer-model silver BMW and held the door open. She slid in and leaned back against the butter-soft leather.

Omar stepped in on the driver’s side and got them underway. “I’ve never seen your hair straight like this. I didn’t know it was that long. I like it.”

“Thank you.” She unconsciously brought a hand up and smoothed down the sleek, straight strands. Most times she left it curly. “It started as a bet between Malcolm and me two years ago to see who could grow their hair the longest—mine straight and his with locs.” Malcolm’s locs had reached his shoulder blades before he trimmed them to just below his neck. Morgan had continued to let hers grow, and her hair now reached the middle of her back.

“I guess you won, huh?”

“Yes. But, I’ve been thinking about cutting it.”

“Don’t do that,” he said quickly. Omar’s eyes left the road briefly and found hers. “It’s beautiful.”

Although they shouldn’t have, his words pleased her. He smiled over at her, and she felt the heat rising between them. To distract herself she asked, “So tell me about the center. How long has it been open?”

“They just broke ground, and it’s projected to open next March.”

“Do you know the people who will run it, or are you just going to support it?”

“Both.”

She waited for him to elaborate, but he said nothing else. Silence slipped between them. A moment later, soft music filled the car’s interior.

“Is there too much air on you? I tend to run hot and I’m usually the only one in the car, so I forget to turn it down.”

Morgan was running a little hot herself, and it had nothing to do with the ninety-degree July weather. “It’s fine.”

“How are you feeling about tonight?”

Her brows knit together. “What do you mean?”

“Dealing with the questions and comments.”

“I’ll be fine. I’m sure there will be at least one person who has something negative to say, but as a lawyer, I deal with it all the time. I have two strikes against me—I’m a woman and I’m only twenty-seven.”

“Well, I’d better not hear one disrespectful comment.”

She chuckled. “Before you go all caveman, remember, I’m your agent. It’s my job to protect you, not the other way around. Save that for your girlfriends.”

“I don’t have any girlfriends. I haven’t dated anyone seriously in almost four years.”

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