

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 oversized 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 a 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 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 at 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 exactly be 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.

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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 thing 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 ninety-five 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.