



In this sexy page-turning tale of unexpected love, Zuri Day introduces the Morgan men, three fine brothers who have it all—except what their mama wants most for them: wives. As the eldest, it's up to Michael to pave the way. If only he'd stop running from love...

In the world of sports management, Michael Morgan is a superstar. But his newest client, Shayna Washington, may be his most lucrative catch yet. The record-breaking sprinter with the tight chocolate body has a talent and inner light Michael knows he can get the world to sit up and notice. She's definitely got his attention. But while Shayna may be physically strong, she's also vulnerable. And when a frightening chapter from her past catches up with her, Shayna needs someone to lean on. Now, it's Michael's turn to be the strong one—and suddenly the sworn bachelor finds his focus changing from races and endorsement deals to a finish line called love.

Chapter 1

On a warm, overcast day in late September, the forever-grooving-always-moving female magnet Michael Morgan found himself spending a rare day both off from work and alone. After sexing her to within an inch of her life, he'd sent his latest conquest—all long hair (still tangled), long legs (still throbbing), and . . . well . . . perpetual longing—on her melancholy yet merry way. As usual when his mind had a spare moment, his thoughts went to his business—Morgan Sports Management Corporation—and the athletes he wanted to add to this successful company's stable. At the top of the list was former USC standout and recent Olympic gold medalist Shayna Washington, a woman he'd been aware of since her college days who he'd learned had just lost the mediocre sponsor who'd approached her two years prior. When it came to business, Michael was like a bloodhound, and he smelled the piquant possibility of this client oozing across the proverbial promotional floor. Along with his other numerous talents, Michael had the ability to see in people what others couldn't, that indefinable something, that "it" factor, that star quality that took some from obscure mediocrity to worldwide fame. He sensed that in Shayna Washington, felt there was something there he could work with, and he was excited about the possibility of making things happen.

The ringing phone forced Michael to put these thoughts on pause. "Morgan."

"Hey, baby."

Michael stifled a groan, wishing he'd let the call that had come in as unknown go to voice mail. For the past two months, he'd told Cheryl that it was over. Her parting gifts had been accompanying him on a business trip to Mexico checking out a local baseball star, a luxurious four days that included a five-star hotel suite, candlelight dinners cooked by a personal chef, premium tequila, and a sparkly good-bye gift that, if needed, could be pawned to pay mortgage on LA's tony Westside. Why all of this extravagance? Partly because this was simply Michael's style and partly because he genuinely liked Cheryl and hadn't wanted to end their on-again off-again

bedtime romps. But now, several years into their intimate acquaintance, she'd become clingy, and then suspicious, and then demanding . . . and then a pain in the butt.

Michael could never be accused of being a dog; he let women know up front—as in before they made love—what time it was. Michael Morgan played for fun, not for keeps. Fortunately for him, most women didn't mind. Most were thankful just to be near him. (his . . . clock.) He loved hard and fast, but rarely long, and while it hadn't been his desire to do so, he'd left a trail of broken hearts in his wake.

Broken, but not bitter. A little taste of Morgan pleasure was worth a bit of emotional pain.

But every once in a while he ran into a woman like Cheryl, a woman who didn't want to take no for an answer. So when entanglements reached this point, the solution he employed was simple and straightforward: goodbye. But sometimes the fallout was a bitch.

“Cheryl, you've got to quit calling.”

“Michael, how can you just dump me like this?”

Heavy sigh. “I didn't ‘just dump you,’ Cheryl. I've been telling you for months to back off, that what you're wanting isn't what I'm offering. This has gotten way too complicated. You've got to let it go.”

“So what did that mean when we began dating ‘officially,’ when I escorted you to the NFL honors?”

This is what I get for being soft and giving in. If there was one thing that Michael should have known by now, it was that mixing business with pleasure was like mixing hot sauce with baby formula. Don't do it. *Any minute she's going to start crying, and really work my nerves.* As if on cue, he heard the sniffles, her argument now delivered in part whine, part wistfulness Michael correctly deduced that she was sad, and very pissed off at his making her that way. “You've been my only one for years, Michael—”

“I told you from the beginning that that wasn't a good idea—”

“And I told you that I didn't want anyone else. There is no one for me but you. I can't forget you”—Michael heard a finger snap—“just like that.” Her voice dropped to a vulnerable-sounding whisper. “Can I please come over just for a little while, bring you some of your favorite Thai food, a few sex toys, give you a nice massage . . . ?”

Michael loved to play with Cheryl and her toys. And when it came to massages, he gave as good as he got. And then there was the sincerity he heard amid her tears. He almost relented. Almost. . .but not quite.

“Cheryl, every time you've asked, I've been honest. Our relationship was never exclusive. I never thought of us as anything more than what it was--two people enjoying the moment and each other. I'll always think well of you, Cheryl. But please don't put us through this. You're a good woman, and there's a good man out there for you who wants what you want, the picket fence and all that. That man is not me. I'm sorry. I want the best for you. And I want you to move on with your life.” He heard his other cell phone ringing and walked over to where it sat charging on the bar counter. *Valerie.* “Look, Cheryl, I have to go.”

“But, Michael, I'm only five minutes from your house. I can—”

You can keep it moving, baby. I told you from the beginning this was for fun, not forever. Michael tapped the screen of his iPhone as he reached for his Blackberry. “Hey, gorgeous,” he said into the other phone.

“Hey yourself,” a sultry voice replied.

“Michael!” *Oh, damn!* Michael looked down at the iPhone screen to see that the call from Cheryl was still connected. “Michael, who is that bit—” Michael pressed and held the End button, silently cursing himself for not being careful.

“Michael, are you there?”

“Yes, Valerie.”

“Whose was that voice I heard?”

“A friend of mine. Do you have a problem with that?” Michael had never hidden the fact that when it came to women, he was a multitasker, especially among the women he juggled. But the situation with Cheryl had him very aware of the need to make that point perfectly clear, up front and often. If a woman couldn’t understand that when it came to his love she was part of a team, then she’d have to get traded.

“Not at all,” the sultry voice pouted. “Whatever she can do, I can do better.”

That’s how you play it, player! “No doubt,” Michael replied as his iPhone rang again. *Unknown caller.* He ignored it. *Sheesh! Maybe I’m getting too old for this.* Just then, his house phone rang. “Hello?”

“Hey, sexy!”

Paia? Back from Europe already? “Hey, beautiful. Hold on a minute.” And then into the Blackberry, “Look, Valerie, I’ll call you back.”

“Okay, lover, but don’t make me wait too long.”

“Who’s Valerie?”

The iPhone again. *Unknown caller.* Michael turned off the iPhone. *Cheryl, give it a rest!* “Look, Cheryl—”

“Ha! This is Paia, you adorable asshole. Get it straight!”

Michael inwardly groaned. How could he have forgotten his rule about keeping his women separate and him least confused? Rarely call them by their given name when talking on the phone. *Baby* was fine. *Darling* would do on any given day. *Honey* or *dear* based on the background. Even *pumpkin* or the generic yet acceptable *hey you* were all perfectly good substitutes. But using names, especially upon first taking a phone call, was a serious playboy no-no. *Yeah, man. You’re slipping. You need to tighten up your game.* He’d just promoted this beauty to the Top Three Tier--those ladies who were in enviable possession of his home number. He and Paia were technically still in the courting stage--much too early for ruffled feathers or hurt feelings. At six feet tall in her stocking feet, Paia was a runway and high fashion model, an irresistibly sexy mix of African and Asian features. They’d only been dating two months and he wasn’t ready to let her go. He even liked the way her name rolled off his tongue. *Pie-a.* No, he didn’t want to release her quite yet. “Paia, baby, you know Mr. Big gets lonely when you’re gone.”

“Uh-huh. Because of that snafu you’re going to owe me an uninterrupted weekend with you and that baseball bat you call a penis. You’d better be ready to give me overtime, too!”

“That can be arranged,” Michael drawled. “Where are you?”

“I just landed in LA. But we have to move fast. I’m only here for a week and then it’s back to Milan. So whatever plans you have tonight, cancel them.”

“Ah, man! I can’t do that--new client. But I’ll call you later.” Michael looked at the Caller ID as an incoming call indicator beeped in his ear. “Sweet thing,” he said, proud that he was back to the terms of endearment delivered unconsciously. *That’s right, Michael. Keep handling yours.* “This is my brother. I’ve got to go.”

“Call me later, Michael.”

“Hold on.” Michael toggled between the two calls, firing back up his iPhone in the process. “Hey, bro. What’s up?” Just four words in and his iPhone rang. *Jessica!* Unbidden, an image of the busty first-class flight attendant he’d met several months ago popped into his head. *Was it this weekend I was supposed to go with her to Vegas?* “Darling,” he said, switching back to Paia, “we’ll talk soon.” He clicked over. “Gregory, two secs.” He could hear his brother laughing as he fielded the other call. “Hey, baby. I’m on the other line. Let me call you back.” He tossed down the cell phone. “All right, baby, I’m back.”

“Baby?” Gregory queried, his voice full of humor. “I know you love me, fool, but I prefer *bro* or *Doctor* or *Your Highness!*” Michael snorted. “You need to hone your juggling skills, son. Or slow your player roll. Or both.”

