

# SILKEN EMBRACE

*What a Drake wants...he usually gets!*

*Billionaire businessman and heir to a sprawling Northern California dynasty, Terrell Drake wants to make a difference. Mentoring fatherless young boys at Paradise Cove's new youth center fulfills that dream. However, passion of a different kind ignites when he meets Aliyah Robinson. The stunning single mother's manner reads strictly hands off. But the heat sparkling in her big brown eyes tells Terrell something else.*

*Aliyah learned about life the hard way. The up-from-the-streets anesthesiologist can't afford to trust the charismatic playboy, who is already winning over her son. But the desire Terrell arouses is too powerful to ignore. Just as their casual fling flames into something deeper, the lovers are hit with a double whammy: sudden celebrity and a blast from the past that could jettison their future together. But the promise of forever is too precious to give up without a fight!*

## Chapter 1

"Good morning, Terrell." The attractive Drake Community Center employee's eyes sparkled with admiration and interest while traveling the length of his body.

Terrell Drake returned her greeting with a smile and a wink, aware of but unaffected by the blatant flirtation. He wasn't cocky. At least not more than the average Drake man. He was simply used to it; he'd affected the female species this way his entire life.

"Hey, Tee, what's up, man?"

"It's your world, Luther, I'm just trying to navigate it."

He bumped fists with the community center's executive director and kept it moving. Months ago when his mother had asked him to volunteer at the center as one of its assistant directors, he'd balked at what he thought would cramp his style. He'd been wrong. The joy that came from seeing a struggling student solve a math problem, or properly knot his tie, or curtailing a would-be bully's antics and have him see reason was beyond anything Terrell could have imagined. He actually looked forward to the three days a week he spent at the center. Walking into this after-school and summertime haven for more than a hundred children always made him feel good.

He reached the T-shaped end of the hallway and turned right toward the gymnasium. What he saw next made his heart skip a beat and wonder who owned the booty that, like sunshine, had just brightened up his world.

"Wow."

The owner of said gluteus maximus stopped, paused for a beat, then turned to look at him.

*Wait, did I just say that out loud?*

If he were to judge by her reaction and the look at her face? That would be a *yes*.

But that his slip caused her to turn was worth whatever was about to happen. The woman looked as good from the front as she did from the back. Better even. Her heart-shaped face was almost totally devoid of makeup, natural, the way Terrell preferred. She had big brown eyes, a pert nose and pleasingly plump lips to match her generous cleavage. All kinds of sexy oozing through that frown. Time to turn on the Drake charm. Terrell whipped out a smile that could sell toothpaste and closed the distance between them with a confident stroll.

"Good afternoon."

Her perfectly arched brow raised a notch. "According to whom?"

He had the decency to look sheepish. "Sorry about that."

"You should be." Her voice remained stern but he noticed a spark in her eyes.

He determined that he could get lost in those eyes. Holding out his hand, he said, “Terrell.”

She paused just long enough to make him nervous, and then extended her hand. “Aliyah.”

“Like the singer?”

Her scowl deepened as she shook her head and pulled back her hand. “No. Like myself.”

“I meant no offense, was a real fan of her music.” Terrell could deliver spot-on compliments in his sleep. Not today. From the look on her face, he’d just added insult to injury. He shifted his position to regroup and was just about to unleash his arsenal of amorous acclamations when he noted that Aliyah’s weren’t the only eyes watching him intently. He looked to her right, and down.

“Hello there, little man.”

“Hi.”

“What’s your name?”

“Kyle.”

Terrell held out his hand. “Nice to meet you, Kyle. I’m Mr. Drake.”

The kid sized him up openly with a face that would do any poker player proud. “Are you my teacher?”

“I work with teenagers. How old are you?”

“Five.”

“Five? Are you sure?”

He looked at Aliyah, who nodded. “He’s big for his age.”

“You might be raising a football player.” She shrugged at his observation. “Are you here for the Progeny Project?”

“Is that what the mentorship program is called?”

“Yes, the Progeny Project.”

She nodded. “We’re here for that, and perhaps some of the activities the center offers. Kyle’s young, but he’s smart and easily bored. I’d like to get him enrolled in as many as are available to him.”

“I can help with that. Follow me.” He noticed that she hesitated. “Do you have another question?”

“I’m waiting to follow you.”

She said it with just the hint of a smile. Terrell nodded his understanding. Any other brother would have assumed her hesitancy was because of what had happened moments earlier. Terrell knew the truth—time for her to check him out.

He placed a hand on Kyle’s shoulders, encouraging the young boy to walk beside him. “Are you as smart as your mother says you are?”

Kyle nodded. “Yes.”

“Confident, too,” Terrell said with a laugh. “I like that.”

They reached the end of the hallway. He led her to a set of double doors, and followed her into the general office area, where registrants were enrolled and files were kept. This area also housed three offices, including the one Terrell used when he was at the center.

“Hello, handsome!”

“Good afternoon, Miss Marva.” Terrell walked around the counter and embraced the slight, older woman with graying hair tucked into a neat bun. The powder-blue pantsuit she wore was topped off with pearl earrings and a matching necklace. Very classy. “Thank you for the compliment.”

Marva laughed, entwining her arm with Terrell’s as she looked into his eyes. “I’d say you’re welcome if the compliment was meant for you. It wasn’t.” She looked at Kyle. “It was for this handsome young man standing by the pretty lady.”

This statement won smiles from both Aliyah and her son.

“Whoa!” Terrell grabbed his heart. “You wound me!”

“You know what they say about assumptions. You brought that on yourself.”

“I guess I did.” He looked at Kyle. “She was talking to you, handsome young man.”

Aliyah encouraged her son. “Say hello to Miss Marva, Kyle.”

“Hello,” he said shyly, before hiding his face behind his mother’s skirt.

“Aliyah is here to enroll her son in Progeny, and to learn more about what our center offers.” ”

“Wonderful! We’ll get this young man signed right up.”

“I will leave the two of you in Miss Marva’s capable hands.” He pulled out a card and presented it to Aliyah. “If you have any other questions about the center or our programs, anything at all, please feel free to contact me.”

She nodded curtly, then smiled as she returned her attention to Miss Marva.

Terrell reached the door and turned. “One more thing.”

He watched her shoulders rise and fall before turning sideways to face him. “Yes?”

Their eyes met. The air sizzled, all but crackled between them. An unspoken, as yet unacknowledged attraction existed in each gaze.

“Never mind. Have a nice afternoon.”

A little over an hour later, Terrell returned to the office. He walked behind Miss Marva, grabbed her by the shoulders and smushed her hair with his chin. “Get on away from me with that foolishness,” she playfully chided, swatting blindly behind her while Terrell dodged and laughed. With a final squeeze, he let her go and walked to a set of file cabinets. Opening one, he began browsing through folders.

“May I help you, Mr. Drake? I know you think you own the world, but this office is my domain.”

He retrieved a file, set it on top of the others and opened it. “You’re absolutely right about that, Miss Marva. I’ll soon be out of your way” Finding the desired document, he pulled out his phone. “I had to run earlier and just want to follow up on our latest registrant, Mr. Kyle—” a glance at the paperwork “—Robinson.”

Miss Marva folded her arms, her mouth now as twisted as her lovely chignon. “And just what kind of follow-up do you think is needed?”

“The general kind, you know, answering any questions his mother may have regarding our program.”

“Mmm-hmm. I’ve known you since you were crawling, Terrell Drake. And I am sure that the questions you want to ask that pretty lady have nothing to do with this center.”

He tapped a button on his phone, placed the paper in the folder and placed the folder back in the file cabinet. “They absolutely do.” He struck a professional pose—chin up, back straight. “And if those questions get asked over, say, a glass of wine or two, well—” he shrugged “—all the better, wouldn’t you say?”

Marva’s mouth untwisted into a lovely smile. “I’d say you’re full of it and then I’d tell you to take her out and have a nice time. She seems like a sweet girl.”

“Thank you, Miss Marva.” After a quick look around, he lowered his voice. “And...let’s keep this between us, okay?”

“I appreciate your stating the obvious, but this old trap has never sprung a leak.”

Terrell went into his office, closed the door and tapped the number he’d entered into his phone.

“Hello?”

“Hello, Aliyah. It’s Terrell, from the community center.”

There was a pause. “Yes?”

“I had to rush out earlier and wanted to call and make sure everything regarding your son’s enrollment went smoothly.”

“Oh.” Another pause. “Yes. The administrator, Miss Marva, handled everything just fine. Gave us a little tour and explained the program. We’re all set.”

“Good, that’s real good.”

A second ticked by. And then another.

“Is there...anything else?”

“Actually, Aliyah, there is. I’d like you to help me do something. Though it isn’t very difficult, it doesn’t happen often.”

Suspicion coated the words she delivered. “Like what?”

“I’d like you to give me a second chance to make a first impression.”

“That’s really not necessary.”

“I know. But I’d like to do it anyway—prove I’m not the cad my comment may have led you to believe. Something simple, say, dinner tonight. Casual. Jeans.”

“I guess I can do that.”

Terrell sat back with a satisfied smile.

“As long as regarding one thing we’re perfectly clear. The part of my anatomy you found so intriguing will not be on the menu.”