

Nina Winthrop knows exactly what she wants from life: to help the less fortunate, to get married, and to have a family. She's certain she's found the perfect man to help her achieve all of those goals. They want the same future, and best of all...he's not Reese Brooks.

Reese knows he screwed up when he broke Nina's heart, and he's lived with that regret for the past ten years. Now that she's back in town, he's determined to show her he's the man she should be with. But does he have what it takes to change her mind? Or will he lose her for good to another man?

Deeper Than Love by Delaney Diamond

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Chapter One

Reese exited the shower, rubbing a towel vigorously over his damp hair and padding naked across the cool tile and onto the thick, sumptuous carpet in the bedroom of the hotel suite. Casting his eyes around, he searched for his shirt and pants in the piles of clothes strewn across the floor and on top of the armchair near the window.

Chelsea, one of the two young women in the bed, rolled in his direction, her dark brown skin making a striking contrast against the starkness of the white sheets. She brushed long hair out of her face and squinted at him.

“You’re leaving?” Her hoarse voice was filled with disappointment.

Reese nodded. “Afraid so. Much as I’d like to stick around, I’ve got to get out of here. It’s almost noon, and I have plans.” He didn’t have plans. He was just ready to go after a long night and late morning.

He tossed the damp towel on a chair by the window and pulled on his underwear, a pair of washed-out jeans, and the dress shirt he’d worn the night before to a party that started in one of the other suites. After lots of flirting, he’d booked a room for Chelsea and her brunette friend, who was still fast asleep on the other pillow, one lovely breast and nipple revealed by the lowered linens. It had been a good night indeed.

He sat on the end of the bed and started putting on his shoes.

Chelsea crawled over and draped an arm over his shoulder. “When will I see you again?”

“Not for a while. You go back to New York tomorrow, don’t you?”

He met her at a friend’s book launch and signing, and they hooked up that night. From their conversation the next day, it was a revenge tactic against her on-again/off-again boyfriend, with whom she was currently off. When they spotted each other at last night’s party, she’d told him she and her boyfriend were done for good and had been more than willing to take another tumble in the sheets. He’d been pleasantly surprised when she invited a friend along.

“I do. When are you back in New York?” she asked.

“Don’t know. But when I am, I’ll be sure to call you.” Reese stood and rolled up his shirtsleeves to his elbows. “The two of you are welcome to stay as long as you like. Have lunch on me before you leave. Good seeing you again.”

She pouted, but he ignored her and patted his pants pockets to make sure he had his wallet and phone and headed toward the door.

“Bye. See you next time,” she called.

He didn’t respond because he didn’t know if there really would be a next time. Having sex was not the same as starting a relationship, and unless they ran into each other again, he wouldn’t call her and was fairly certain she wouldn’t call him, either. In the end, the way their night ended suited them both just fine.

Reese took the elevator to the first floor and walked over to the registration desk. After waiting in line for a few minutes, he approached the young woman behind the counter.

He gave her the suite number and added, “I have two guests who are still in the room. They can stay as long as they need to, and anything they want can be billed to the card on file.”

“No problem, Mr. Brooks. Did you enjoy your stay?”

“It was excellent,” he said, flashing his first smile of the morning.

“We do hope you’ll join us again,” she said, blushing and lowering her gaze.

“I’m sure I will.”

He walked away and stepped onto the sidewalk, squinting into the glare of the summer sun. He pulled out his phone to call a car when a flash of yellow and blue down the street at The Winthrop Hotel caught his eye, but the woman disappeared behind a column.

He gaped when she reappeared. Were his eyes deceiving him? No. It was Nina Winthrop. His girl was back. His baby. He’d missed her like crazy. The bright day suddenly became brighter.

She entered the hotel, and Reese took off through the stream of cars that packed the road. Drivers irritably honked their horns as he wound in between the vehicles, focused on getting to her.

“Sorry,” he said, lifting a conciliatory hand but not slowing down.

Reese flew past the doorman and rushed into the cavernous foyer. He spotted Nina standing in the middle of the tiled floor and rushed over to where she stood, staring down at her phone with an embroidered bag over one shoulder. He intended to grab her from behind but never got that far. A tall white man in a suit, who he hadn’t noticed because he only had eyes for her, stepped between them and shoved Reese hard, forcing him to stumble backward.

“Son of a…” Startled, Reese stared up at the giant.

“Stand back,” the bigger man said in a stern voice, his eyes narrowing.

Nina stepped around the burly bodyguard, and when she saw Reese, she placed a calming hand on the big man’s arm. “Stan, it’s all right. I know him.”

As Stan eased out of the way, Reese glared at him. Then he focused his attention on Nina. Too long had passed since he'd seen her in the flesh, and she looked better than any photo or video she'd shared over the past few years.

With a wide grin, he rushed over and swooped her into his arms.

“Reese!” Her surprised laughter swept into his ears.

Goosebumps broke out on his skin. He loved the way she said his name—even when she was angry and turned it into two syllables by placing emphasis on the first e.

He squeezed her tight and kissed her cheek, reveling in the achingly sweet scent of her skin. She smelled so good. Familiar and sweet.

He set her back on her feet and took inventory of her appearance. She wore a blue and yellow halter-topped sundress that exposed her back and shoulders and a matching head wrap. Thick gold hoops hung from her ears, and a nose stud glinted in her left nostril.

“Damn, you look good.”

He'd forgotten how beautiful she was. The fullness of her lips, the ripe curves of her sexy frame, and the husky sound of her voice. Did he really forget, or was it that he didn't want to remember because he would miss her so much he'd get on a plane to wherever she was in the world? He should have.

“Thanks. You look great, too,” she said softly.

“Why didn't you tell me you were back?”

“If I'd known I'd get such an enthusiastic greeting, I would have called you right away.”

He took a good look at her bright eyes and smiling face. “You should've called me right away anyway, but I forgive you.”

“Now I can sleep better tonight,” Nina said.

Reese chuckled. “It's been too long,” he said in a low voice, biting his bottom lip.

Nina had glowing chestnut-brown skin, long thick lashes, and the prettiest, sexiest rosebud mouth any woman had ever been blessed with. She was so damn beautiful, she looked like a doll—completely unreal. The crazy thing about Nina was that she didn't even try, and when she told him she was going to become a nomad and travel around the world, he'd been worried about all the men she'd meet who would certainly fall for her stellar looks and great personality.

On more than one occasion he'd been tempted to join her overseas, but not only had she never invited him, he got the distinct impression that she'd wanted to be alone. And he understood. After her father died, he recognized that leaving was part of her process of healing.

The bodyguard was her mother's way of making sure that her daughter remained safe while traveling, but Nina hated having a shadow, and Stan's days were numbered now that they were stateside.

"So what are you going to do after the wedding? You going back on the road, or are you back for good?"

Her older sister Lindsay was getting married to his cousin Malik.

"I'm back for good."

That's what he hoped she'd say.

"Perfect," Reese said, wanting to hug her again. Now he'd have a chance to make up for lost time and correct the mistakes of the past. Dumb mistakes he'd made at nineteen years old—mistakes that to this day he still berated himself over.

She looked around. "What are you doing here at my hotel?"

"Actually, I went to a party at the Ritz last night and stayed overnight to...to sleep off my buzz. I saw you as I was leaving."

One of her eyebrows shot toward the edge of the head wrap. She knew him well enough to know that was a BS answer. "So, what's her name? Or their names?" she asked.

"There you go, thinking the worst of me, as usual."

"But I'm right, aren't I? I see nothing's changed."

It bothered him that she thought he remained unchanged when, in reality, he was simply killing time with other women until he won her back.

He moved on to another subject. "Soon as you get settled in, we need to get together and catch up. I want to know everything about your trip."

An expression of unease flitted across her face. "I don't know if I'll have a lot of time. I have a million things to take care of with The Winthrop Hotel Group. Next week I'm going into the office for meetings and—"

"Make time." A thread of tension surfaced between them. "You and I have unfinished business."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"You know what I'm talking about. You gonna make me spell it out?" This wasn't how he'd anticipated their first meeting going upon her return, but he'd had enough of her running from him. They needed to address the issue head-on. "The kiss, Nina."

She made a big show of placing the phone in her large bag. “I already told you, it was nothing.”

“It didn’t feel like nothing.”

“That kiss was a moment of weakness. I was emotional because it was the anniversary of my father’s death.” She faced him with defiance in her eyes, daring him to contradict her.

“I know you were hurting, but there was more than pain in that kiss,” he said quietly.

He continued to be haunted by that night, the way her body molded to his, the softness of her lips. To this day, he didn’t know how he managed to control himself and simply offer comfort instead of indulging in the lust that raged inside him. He deserved an award for exhibiting such a Herculean act of restraint.

Even now, the urge to lift her in his arms and kiss the lies from her lips overtook him, but he silenced the beast within and exercised a level of patience he didn’t usually display when he wanted something.

Reese prowled closer, and her body stiffened, but she didn’t step back. He almost smiled at her stubbornness. That was the Nina he knew—defiant, proud, not willing to back down.

He bent his head to whisper in her ear and heard the shaky breath she took. “You can’t keep running from me, Nina. One of these days, I’m going to catch you.”