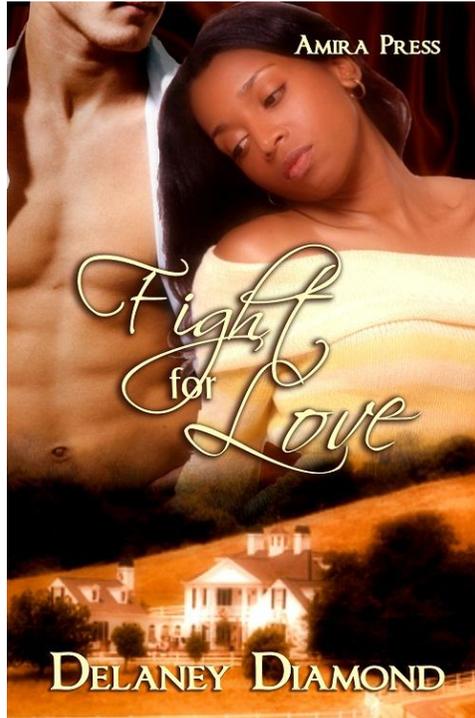


Fight for Love



Copyright © May 2011, Delaney Diamond
Cover art by Anastasia Rabiya © May 2011

Amira Press
Charlotte, NC 28227
www.amirapress.com

ISBN: 978-1-936279-86-9

No part of this e-book may be reproduced or shared by any electronic or mechanical means, including but not limited to printing, file sharing, and e-mail, without prior written permission from Amira Press.

Chapter One

Rebekah Jamison wiped sweat from her cheeks with the back of her forearm so she wouldn't scratch her face with the rough, dirty gloves she wore. The edges of her headscarf were damp. The cut-off denim shorts and loose-fitting tank top had seen better days, but they were comfortable, and she preferred to wear as little clothing as possible when she worked in the yard. The vegetable garden was a treat, but it could also be quite taxing in the Georgia heat.

"Mom, look!" her eight-year-old called from a few feet away. He was grinning broadly, holding a worm in his palm for her to see.

"Sweetie, put that down," Rebekah scolded from her position on her knees.

She had encouraged him to help her plant the fall vegetables, but he was turning out to be a distraction she didn't need. Every so often he would wander away from the task, digging in the dirt where she didn't tell him to dig and chasing after wasps and butterflies that flitted around the small, privacy-fenced yard.

She probably would have been farther along if he weren't "working" with her, but she enjoyed their moments together. Nine months out of the year she taught middle school kids about conservation, alternative energy, and green living as a science teacher in metro Atlanta. The biggest perk of working for the school system was that she could spend the summers with the favorite man in her life.

Rebekah rose to her feet and dusted off her knee pads. "Maybe it's time for a break," she announced. She removed the large straw hat providing protection from the scorching sun.

"Can I have some sweet tea?" His brown face looked up at her expectantly. He was overdue for a haircut. The loose, dark curls on his head were thick and unruly. With his cute, angelic face and big gray eyes staring up at her, she couldn't refuse him the indulgence this time.

"Yes, but only if you drink a glass of water right after."

“I will, I will,” Ricardo promised, racing past her toward the back door of the kitchen.

She would make sure he drank water the rest of the day. He had developed a sweet tooth of late, and she wanted to break him from the habit of sugary drinks. Besides, he needed to stay hydrated since he spent so much time outdoors.

Rebekah removed her knee pads and gloves and circled the small area where this year’s crop of summer vegetables was planted. She smiled. Last year she’d had enough squash, tomatoes, cucumbers, and green peppers to share with her parents and a couple of neighbors. This year’s crop appeared just as healthy and bountiful.

The ringing of the doorbell brought her head up.

“I got it!”

“Ricky, don’t open the door unless you know who it is first.”

He knew better, but it didn’t hurt to remind him. She hoped it was the delivery she was expecting from her sister, Samirah. They were souvenirs for the family from her latest jaunt overseas. She often sent them nice gifts from her travels. Rebekah sometimes envied her younger sister’s carefree lifestyle. Samirah had a culinary degree from Le Cordon Bleu, and she traveled the world, earning her keep as a cook in restaurants or private residences.

“Mom, come quick!”

Rebekah dropped everything in her hands and raced into the kitchen, uncertain if Ricardo’s tone expressed excitement or anxiety.

He stood in front of the open front door, staring at someone outside. As she came closer, he caught sight of her and began to hop up and down excitedly, pointing with his hand to the still-invisible person on the other side of the threshold.

“Look! Look! It’s *La Sombra*, Mom! It’s *La Sombra*!” he screamed excitedly.

Rebekah skidded to a halt, her feet no longer sure what to do since her brain temporarily ceased to function. Heavy knots piled up in her stomach, and her broken breath shivered past her suddenly parched lips.

It couldn’t be him.

Ricardo's face was alight with glee, and his uncontrolled excitement was a comical contrast to the heavy dread pressing down on her. She moved slowly toward the door, closing her hands into tight fists to calm their shaking.

When the person came into view, her stomach muscles clenched into even tighter, more painful knots.

There was no doubt who the man was at the door. It had been nine years since she'd last seen him in person, but his image appeared on the occasional magazine, and she'd read articles about him online. Even if he weren't a public figure and she had wanted to forget him, it would have been impossible because of the pint-sized, darker version of him bouncing up and down like a rubber ball just a few feet away.

La Sombra had been the alias he used when he was a professional wrestler. The nickname, which meant "the Shadow" in Spanish, had stuck because of his dark complexion. His real name was Rafael Lopez, and he was her ex-husband.

His gaze lifted from the small boy before him and settled on her. From the firming of his sculpted mouth and the hard glint that came into his gray eyes, she knew he'd already deduced the obvious.

The young boy whose excited reception he had just received was the son he had never known existed.

Continue reading the bonus excerpt on the next page.

Bonus Excerpt

Alone in the house with Rafael, Rebekah's pulse hammered a warning, alerting her she was at a disadvantage.

"Was there anything else you wanted to ask me?"

"We were discussing how tense you were." His voice was dangerously low and inviting.

"And I told you, I'm not tense. I'm fine."

"Turn around." The words conjured erotic images of him behind her. Her body moistened at the thought of doing what he asked and lifting her bottom against his hips. "Let me give you a massage."

"Oh." The erotic image dissipated. "*I'm fine*. Really."

"You used to like my massages." His voice lowered even more.

Magic hands, she used to call him. Once he'd eased the tension in her shoulders and back, he would ease the aching in her loins with firm, sure strokes.

"Relax," he said, taking matters into his own hands and turning her around so she faced the table. His long fingers began to move in a soothing motion across the knotted muscles. "You're really tense, *amada*."

The initial touch of his hands sent jolts of electricity darting across her skin. Despite his size and strength, his fingers moved gently across her shoulder blades, kneading the tight tissue with the skill of a professional masseur. Having been an athlete for years, he'd mastered the technique of manipulating the various muscles. He applied the right amount of pressure, and her eyes drifted closed. She had no choice but to let go and soften to his touch.

"That's better," he whispered.

The warmth exuding from him caressed her skin, making the back of her neck tingle. The slow ascension of arousal began somewhere deep inside her and climbed at a steady pace through her body.

He abandoned her shoulder to encircle one wrist and brought the back of her hand to his lips. Her eyes flew open.

The other hand slid down the length of the A-line skirt, smoothing over the roundness of her hip. She heard him take a deep breath. “Now I remember.” His voice rumbled close to her ear. “Pomegranate Orchard is the name of the scent you wear.”

“Rafe, I’ve already warned you.” She retrieved her hand with a firm twist. A pulsing awareness thrummed through her, making her breathless and needy, wanting him with every fiber of her being. She turned to face him.

Bracing a hand on either side of her, he trapped her between him and the round table. “I’m not good at following directions.”

“Keep your hands to yourself.”

“You didn’t mind a moment ago.”

“I mean it.” She didn’t sound as harsh as she wanted to.

A crooked, unconcerned smile appeared on his face. “Well, if you don’t want my hands on you,” he said, “maybe my mouth is more to your liking.”