



## Blurb

Who doesn't love a bad boy?

Lorena Vega knows better than to have anything else to do with Matthew Hawthorne. Then he comes to her and asks for her help in writing a proposal for a grant to benefit the community center where he volunteers. She agrees to do the work, but she has her guard up, because having Matthew in her life again is a problem she doesn't need.

Matthew still carries some guilt from when he hurt Lorena. Seeing her again for the first time in months makes him realize what a huge mistake he made, and he wants another chance to be the kind of man she deserves. He's determined to win her back and prove he's not the player he used to be, and nothing will stand in his way.

Not even the new man in her life.

# Here Comes Trouble

by Delaney Diamond

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## Chapter One

The phone rang in Lorena Vega's office. By the double ring, she knew it was Rahab, the receptionist. Seated at her desk, she answered.

"Hi, Lorena." The Kenyan transplant's accented voice came over the line. "Matthew Hawthorne is still waiting out here. What should I tell him?"

Lorena shoved her black wire-framed glasses higher on the bridge of her nose. "Tell him I'm still on a conference call." She hated asking the receptionist to lie, but she had no interest in seeing or speaking to Matthew. She never wanted to see him again, and he knew that, but he'd still shown up uninvited.

Rahab agreed and hung up.

With a sigh, Lorena rested her forehead in her hand. She'd leased this office in a building east of Atlanta, in Decatur, where she lived. Not only was she happy because she could walk to work, but the offices were conveniently located near restaurants and public transportation. She and her office mates shared the costs of a receptionist and meeting rooms, which turned out to be at a fraction of what it would cost her to lease space on her own.

Now, without notice, Matthew had arrived to disrupt her day. She'd put off talking to him for weeks, but she'd listened to every voice mail and read every text and e-mail in his constant efforts to try to reach her. She'd been somewhat amused as, over time, the tone of his communication changed from polite to cajoling to irritated. Ignoring him had given her great pleasure. After the way he'd dumped her, he was lucky that was all she had done.

She'd really wanted to key the paint off his precious Lexus SUV, or smash a brick through one of the tinted windows. Instead, she'd kept her fiery temper under control and worked out her frustrations on her regular runs.

Getting involved with him had been a huge mistake, and she wished she could go back in time and erase her actions. It wasn't as if she hadn't known he was no good for her. She simply hadn't cared. Unfortunately, there were no do-overs in life, and she had to live with the consequences of her behavior.

If she could have a do-over, she would have steered clear of him at the holiday party late last year where they ran into each other. She wouldn't have had so much to drink that he felt obligated

to see her home safely. She wouldn't have let him help her get into bed, and she wouldn't have suggested he stay, wrapping her arms around him so he couldn't leave. She wouldn't have woken up the next morning, with their bodies entwined in an intimate embrace, skin touching skin and heated flesh practically melting the clothes off of their bodies. And she definitely wouldn't have let him make love to her, even though she'd secretly pined after him for years.

The phone rang again.

"I think he's gone."

Lorena frowned. "What do you mean you think?"

"He asked me where the restrooms were, but I never saw him come back out to the lobby. He must have slipped out while I was on the phone or my back was turned."

Lorena worried the inside of her lip with her teeth. Matthew knew where the restrooms were because not only had he helped her move into this office, he'd returned numerous times. She turned 180 degrees in her chair and peered out the white horizontal blinds to the parking lot below. His SUV still sat outside. She pursed her lips and frowned. "I'm sure he's gone. He should've gotten the hint."

"Of course you know you have to tell me what the story is between the two of you."

Rahab Mugwanja had been working there only a few weeks. She and Lorena hit it off right away. Compared to the last receptionist, Rahab was a godsend. She was professional, efficient, and always had a bright smile for visitors. Her infectious laugh could often be heard as she chatted with the other business owners in the halls.

"Maybe one of these days I'll explain. But do me a favor—if he calls or comes by again, make up an excuse for me, okay?"

Rahab tutted her disapproval. "Okay, but what did he *do*? He's so fine. It couldn't have been that bad."

Lorena smiled wryly. "Trust me, it's bad. And forgiveness, well...right now, I don't have it in me."

After she hung up, Lorena stood and walked over to the single window in her office. Through the blinds, she saw Matthew's black vehicle in the parking lot, glimmering from its most recent wax job.

She folded her arms across her chest and waited. She was over him, of course, but foolishly, she wanted to see him, looked forward to a glimpse from several stories up. He should make an appearance soon. Anticipation built inside of her as the seconds dragged by.

“Looking for me?”

Lorena’s heart leapfrogged into her throat at the familiar voice. She whirled around to see Matthew standing with his left shoulder resting against the doorframe.

How unfair, he looked amazing—as usual. At a few inches over six feet, he towered over the average woman and was taller than the average man. Because he regularly worked out, his hard, muscular body hadn’t changed since his college days when he played football.

He always took great care with his appearance. From his weekly barbershop visits to make sure his Caesar haircut stayed low-cut and finely trimmed, to picking out the right clothes and sending them out to be cleaned and pressed. Almost everything he did was for one purpose: to capture the attention of the opposite sex.

“What are you still doing here?” she asked. “Rahab thought you must have slipped out when she wasn’t looking.”

“She was wrong. I know you see my truck is still out there. That’s why you’re standing at the window, isn’t it? To see when I leave?”

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Patches of color tinged her caramel cheeks. “Don’t flatter yourself. What do you want?” she demanded.

His body had tightened the minute she turned her brown gaze on him. He’d missed her, but he hadn’t realized the extent until he saw her again. He’d been enjoying the view from behind, the tailored slacks hugging her trim waist and covering what he knew to be toned runner’s legs. Her lean body was muscular, but managed to be soft and feminine at the same time.

*Damn, she looks good,* he thought. Why had they broken up again?

She was all buttoned up in her very proper silk blouse with pearl buttons down the front. She’d pulled her curly hair away from her face and pinned it up, bringing attention to her features—a button nose, full lips painted a becoming peachy color, and the biggest, prettiest brown eyes he’d ever seen on a woman. Those eyes had once been filled with hope and trust whenever they looked at him, until he snuffed it out of them.

Almost breathless at the sight of her, he managed to maintain a nonchalant demeanor leaning against the doorframe. If he didn’t get his thoughts under control soon, she’d have a pretty good idea of the images running through his mind, which included bending her over the desk, as he had when she first moved into this office space. The memory of her hoarse cries as his fingers bit into her hips still made his gut clench.

They'd made use of every flat surface in there—the wall, her desk, and the floor—on more than one occasion. He almost smiled as he recalled one particular time kissing her skin to ease the sting of the carpet burns on her back.

Reluctantly, he came back to the present. "You've been avoiding me."

"I haven't been avoiding you. I've been busy. I have a young business, and it takes a lot of my time." Her eyes challenged him, daring him to disprove what she'd said.

"Did you bother to listen to any of my messages? I have a job for you."

"I'm too busy to take on new clients."

"You're not that busy."

"I don't need your money."

"My money's green and spends the same as everyone else's."

"Well, I don't like you. Is that better?" she snapped.

"Now we have that out of the way," Matthew began, straightening, "do you think you can put aside your feelings for a minute and hear me out?"

"No." She waved her hand toward her cluttered desk. "As you can see, I'm *very busy*. So, if you don't mind..."

"I do mind."

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Lorena watched in dismay as Matthew closed the door. Her first instinct was to run and hide since being rude to him hadn't worked as she'd hoped. Of course, that was impossible now that he'd set his eyes on her. She reminded herself she had nothing to fear from him. He was, after all, just a man. A giant of a man with a powerfully muscular physique, a strong jaw, beautifully broad nose, and smooth skin the color of espresso, but still a man. He couldn't cause her any more pain than he already had. She wouldn't let him.

He came forward with a slow, rolling walk, as though he had all the time in the world. She wanted to be immune to him, but she'd had a crush on him ever since they met four years ago, and he'd been the object of many fantasies since then. Their relationship, though short-lived, had impacted her greatly.

Right now he looked like every woman's fantasy, despite what he wore. Who else but Matthew could wear a pale-gray-and-pink striped shirt with a pink tie beneath a sweater vest and still look so masculine?

Swagger. That was the only way to describe his walk and his appeal. He had an abundance of it.

He came to a standstill a few feet in front of her, next to her desk, making the one-window office seem more like a broom closet. He'd been in her office two minutes, and she was already heating up. Her nerve endings trembled with awareness because he looked at her with those dark-brown eyes as if he was mentally undressing her. Knowing Matthew, he probably was. It made her feel naked, and it made her think of the other times he'd looked at her in the same way and what they'd ended up doing right here in this office.

"I don't need your money."

"We both know that's not true," he said in a low voice. When he lowered his voice to that pitch, she could hardly think. "I haven't seen you around in a while."

His sister, Cassidy, who happened to be Lorena's best friend, was the wife of her brother, Antonio. Normally, their families interacted on a regular basis, but ever since she and Matthew had stopped seeing each other, she hadn't participated in any more get-togethers she knew he'd attend.

"Like I said, I've been busy."

"So busy you can't hang out? I miss you."

Lorena laughed, shaking her head, pushing away the spurt of joy that filled her chest. They were empty sentiments from a smooth-talking player who wanted to get his way. She had to remember that, no matter how much pleasure the words roused.

"I don't believe you for one minute."

"I need your help."

"I don't care. I don't want to have anything to do with you. Not on a business level or on a personal level. I wouldn't have anything to do with you if you were the last person on earth and I needed your money so I wouldn't lose my business."

"That's a bit extreme, isn't it? The last person on earth?" His boyish grin made her heart flutter.

She had to hold it together. "That's what I said. The last."

"Look, I know you hate me, but could you set aside your anger for a minute and listen to what I have to say?"

"Why should I? I don't owe you anything." She crossed her arms over her chest, but when his eyes lowered to how the movement plumped up her breasts, she unfolded them and dropped them back down to her sides.

“I know you don’t, but—”

“Well if you know, why ask?”

He rubbed the back of his neck in frustration, the movement flexing his biceps, bringing them into more prominence beneath the dress shirt. “Nothing I say will make any difference, will it? I’ve already apologized for what I did, but it doesn’t matter to you.”

“You’re right, because you’re an insensitive jerk.”

He had the gall to roll his eyes toward the ceiling. “Yes, I know. I heard the message you left after we broke up.”

“After you broke up with me via text, you *ass!*” Lorena said between gritted teeth. “A day before my birthday, after your little rendezvous with one of your other women. Now you walk up in here and think I’m going to help you? No way. Get out of my office, and find someone else to help you with your grant proposal.”

She placed both hands on her hips and glared up at him. At least he had the decency to grimace with embarrassment after her outburst. What he’d done had destroyed her, sending her through three stages of grief as if she’d lost a family member.

The denial stage had been first. She’d texted him back in disbelief, asking him if she’d done something wrong, practically groveling to figure out how she could fix whatever had happened, although she’d suspected the reason. Their relationship had changed the night they lay in bed together and she whispered her dreams about sharing a future with him. It had slipped out after a particularly tender bout of lovemaking.

Right away she’d sensed his withdrawal. “I’m not the settling down type,” he’d said, and even though she’d been crushed by the words, he’d only told her what she’d known already. She was one of many notches on his bedpost. She’d lasted longer than most—three whole months. That knowledge had lulled her into a sense of contentment. But while she’d been secretly picking baby names, he’d been contemplating the next conquest in his love-’em-and-leave-’em lifestyle.

So she hadn’t been surprised he’d broken up with her, but the way he’d done it had been particularly ugly. He hadn’t even had the guts to tell her to her face. A text. Right before her birthday, within days of her smelling another woman’s perfume on him. Lilacs. She couldn’t forget the cloying scent.

After the denial stage had come the period of wallowing in self-pity and the pain of rejection. She’d been particularly good at it, cutting off her friends, including Cassidy. Especially Cassidy, because being around her reminded Lorena too much of Matthew.

She was in the third stage now—anger. And she loved it because it energized her and got her out of bed every morning. She would not go to the fourth stage. She would not get depressed. She refused to let him have that much power.

“I’m sorry, Lorena. How many times do I have to say it? I’ve said it a hundred times. Yes, you’re right, I’m an ass. I’m an insensitive jerk. I’m a *pendejo* and all those other insults you yelled at me in Spanish that I don’t know the meaning of, but I’m pretty sure they all mean ‘jerk.’”

Lorena had lived in the United States most of her life, but having been born in Puerto Rico, Spanish was her mother tongue and the language she spoke with her parents. From time to time, when she got very angry, she resorted back to it.

“What do you want from me? Do you want me on my knees?” he asked.

“I don’t want anything from you. I’m over you. I’ve moved on.”

“Well if you’ve moved on, why won’t you communicate with me?”

“Because I don’t want to. I don’t have to do anything I don’t want to. If you want a grant writer, find someone else to help you.”

“I don’t want someone else. I want you.”

Her heart jolted. Did he have to use those words?

“You can’t have me.”

He threw up his hands. “Come on, Lorena, you can’t be this bitter. I’m practically begging. This is important. The community center really needs some help. Funding has been cut, and people aren’t giving like they used to. I want to make sure they keep this place open, and I want you to work on it for us. What will it take?”

She narrowed her eyes. “You want to know what you can do? Tell them to pay me double what I charge my other clients. Then I’ll do it.”

“You can’t charge them double,” Matthew said patiently. “You’d be discriminating against a minority organization.”

“I’m not discriminating against them because it’s a minority organization. I’m discriminating against them because I don’t like you. There’s a difference.”

With glee, she internally turned cartwheels, watching as his nostrils flared with aggravation. However, she stopped the inner acrobatics when he took two steps toward her, forcing her to back up into the window, crushing the blinds. The temperature in the office plummeted with the level of icy calm he exhibited.

“You can hate me all you want to. I get it, and I accept it, but you’re going to help me get this grant for these kids, or I’m going to contact your buddies down at the Foundation Center and strongly suggest they reconsider sending you any more referrals because you won’t work for people you don’t like.”

“You’d better not.” She should have never told him her old coworkers sent her referrals.

“Think I won’t?”

Furious, their brown gazes locked, both of them refusing to look away. Perhaps if they had, the frigid tension in the little office wouldn’t have mutated into something familiar. The air became charged, and insidious warmth, slow and sneaky, crept through her limbs.

“For someone who’s over it, you sure are mad at me,” Matthew whispered. “Makes me wonder if there’s something else behind all the anger.”

“There is. Hate.”

“Nah. I don’t think so.”

Without warning, he reached out and removed her glasses. Lorena grabbed at air as he lifted them above her head. “I need those.”

“You only need them for reading. You can see me just fine.” He stepped closer again, and this time she could feel the heat from his taut, hard body.

“Stop. Right now.”

“Don’t look at me like that,” he said.

“Like I hate you?”

He didn’t even flinch. “No. Like you want me.”

“It’s your imagination.”

He lowered his gaze to her lips. “I wasn’t lying when I said I miss you.” His voice had dropped lower, deeper.

He was doing it again. Making her weak. Melting her bones, her muscles, her willpower to resist him. Three months wasn’t enough time to get past her feelings, and they were so easily reignited by him.

*I hate him. I hate him.*

She internally chanted the words in vain. Because she could smell him now. His drugging masculine scent, overlaid by the subtle tone of sandalwood in his cologne, had her stomach bunched up.

His pupils expanded, and she couldn't look away. "God, I miss you," he said, as if to himself.

He lowered his head to hers, and his thick lips came within centimeters of her own. If she raised up a fraction, their mouths would connect.

"Get back."

"I miss you, baby," he whispered, his voice rough and dark. His warm breath swept lightly across her lips, and he reached up and gently traced her jawline.

Sparks flared on her skin where he touched, and her heart constricted as she struggled against the awakening of feminine desire. He still had the same effect on her. Slowly but surely, he was hypnotizing her, and if she didn't do something fast, she'd be lost. He'd gain the upper hand.

How dare he? How dare he do this to her?

With his mouth positioned temptingly above hers, she did the only thing she knew to do. She did something drastic—sure to break the spell and drag her back into sanity.

She brought her leg up and kneed him in the groin.

## About the Author

Delaney Diamond is the USA Today Bestselling Author of sweet, sensual, passionate romance novels. Originally from the U.S. Virgin Islands, she now lives in Atlanta, Georgia. She reads romance novels, mysteries, thrillers, and a fair amount of nonfiction. When she's not busy reading or writing, she's in the kitchen trying out new recipes, dining at one of her favorite restaurants, or traveling to an interesting locale. She speaks fluent conversational French and can get by in Spanish.

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