



More Than a Lover

a short sensual romance by Delaney Diamond

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La Chambre d'Or, the restaurant-bar of the newly renovated Marie Hotel, was filled to capacity with reporters and a camera crew who had all arrived to be the first to capture the opening of one of the newest and most unique boutique hotels in Miami. The hotel contained a limited number of suites, each one assigned a personal butler where no demand was too great or too small.

Mia Gates looked out over the sea of media. Whoever had come up with this idea must be a genius. To ply the media with delicious food and unlimited liquor was a recipe for success. Even though the reception could not be cheap, this amount of publicity couldn't be bought.

The reporters and news people jockeyed for position to speak to the owner as well as the marketing director and interior designer for the firm that had gutted and renovated the hotel. The noise of the festivities drowned out the sounds from the solo pianist playing a classical piece in the corner.

Mia sat with one leg crossed over the other on a barstool, her elbow resting on the gleaming surface of the bar. The flowing fabric of her knee-length black dress hung halfway down the legs of the chair.

She pulled absentmindedly at the spaghetti strap on her right shoulder. She hadn't worn the dress in a long time, but once she'd put it on, her confidence boosted and she'd felt rather sexy. It dipped low to give a provocative view of her back, and the skin there tingled when she remembered what happened the last time she wore it.

She uncrossed and recrossed her legs, then took a sip of her cranberry juice. Still, she couldn't shake her thoughts of over a year ago, at Pedro's parents' house during a party to celebrate the twenty-five years the Ramos family had been in business and the success of their restaurants. He'd caught up to her on her way out of one of the bedrooms.

“Where’ve you been?” he asked, his dark, hungry gaze leaving no doubt about his thoughts. His desire for her hadn’t diminished since the day they met.

“I had to use the phone,” she replied.

“You were gone too long,” he murmured. “You know I need you by my side whenever I’m around my crazy family.” He lowered his lips to hers and dragged her into a nearby bathroom.

“Pedro, we can’t,” she whispered, fearful the guests and his parents would know what they’d done as soon as they reappeared in the living room.

He didn’t, or couldn’t hear her, and she didn’t, or couldn’t resist him. Within seconds he had her up against the wall, his knee between her thighs, his lips pressing heated kisses to her neck and shoulders, setting her body on fire. He took her, just like that, palms flat against the yellow and green wallpaper, until she let loose a hoarse cry she prayed no one heard.

Mia gulped down the last of her drink in an effort to erase the erotic images. She refocused on her friend, Patricia. She sat a few stools down since they couldn’t find seats next to each other, flirting outrageously with the bartender. Mia couldn’t resist smiling. Patricia’s confidence never ceased to amaze her.

To say Patricia was plus-size was an understatement. She had poured her full-figured body into a black sequined cocktail dress with a neckline that exposed her cleavage and dipped so low on her ample bosom her breasts would probably pop out if she received a hug.

“What are you doing here, Mia?” a familiar male voice asked close to her ear. Mia’s thigh muscles clenched in response. The image in her mind was now here in the flesh.

She looked up at Pedro, who had his hand on the back of the stool in which she sat. His wavy, dark brown hair was brushed back from his forehead. He looked down at her with the same hungry stare she had reminisced about, yet a certain amount of disapproval appeared there too.

“What?” she asked, as if she hadn’t heard him.

Her eyes flicked momentarily to the top of his shirt, where a sprinkling of hairs showed against the tanned skin. Her breasts warmed with longing. It had been several days since she’d enjoyed the ticklish sensation of those hairs across her puckered nipples.

“You heard me. What are you doing here?” he asked again, the disapproval blatant in the hard set of his square jaw. His gaze ran down the length of her body. “How many men have approached you tonight?”

Three, at last count. Not including the man who’d sent the server with his business card and an offer to join him later, which she declined. Mia caught the bartender’s eye and held up her empty glass.

“Wouldn’t you like to know,” she answered.

She wasn’t vain, but she wasn’t falsely modest, either. She’d taken painstaking care with her appearance tonight. In addition to foundation and bronzer, which gave her skin a healthy glow, her already long lashes were brushed to double their volume and her lips painted a flattering coral color.

Her short hair, which just brushed her shoulders, had been pressed straight to a silky smooth texture and parted in the middle to frame her face.

“Four...five?” Pedro guessed, his accented voice hard.

“What difference does it make?” Mia demanded.

“You shouldn’t be here,” Pedro said through tight lips. “You should be at home.”

“Doing what? Waiting for you?” Mia slung back. The nerve of him. She could only blame herself, because she’d allowed her whole life to revolve around his. No more. That was all going to change. The bartender set down a fresh glass of cranberry juice. “What are you even doing here? Following me around?” She picked up her glass and took a sip, needing to find something to do with her hands.

“No, I’m here to offer moral support to the new owners. They’re friends of mine.” Pedro’s steady gaze didn’t waver under her glare. “What are *you* doing here? Teaching me a lesson?”

“For your information, Patricia invited me.” Patricia covered business news in the Miami area for a local paper.

“So why didn’t you come with me? We go everywhere together.”

“When you invited me to go out, I didn’t know you planned to come here.”

“You didn’t ask.”

“You didn’t tell me,” Mia snapped. The fuse on her temper was getting shorter and shorter.

“Let’s go somewhere and talk.” Pedro sounded exasperated. He looked around, seeking a spot where they could converse in private.

“About what?”

He rested his gaze on her again. “The other night.”

“We both said everything we needed to say.”

“And you’ve barely said two words to me since then.”

“What else is there to say? You made it clear marriage is out of the question for us, and I’ve accepted it.” She swallowed down a tremor of pain, unwilling to let him see how much their conversation still affected her.

For four and a half years they’d been living together, and as her mother had pointed out, “Why would he buy the cow when he can get the milk for free, Mia?”

Why, indeed.

When he told her they didn’t need a piece of paper to prove their love, her spirits had been crushed and her feelings hurt. It had been hard enough for her to broach the topic of marriage, but his response had dropped a death blow to her dreams.

The home pregnancy test she took several days ago had shown positive. She saw how he interacted with the children in his family, and she’d imagined them with a small brood of their own. Now she knew how he felt about marriage, her dreams of raising a family with him seemed like a cruel joke. She would only ever be his lover. With marriage off the table, she didn’t even know how to tell him she might be pregnant.

“There’s plenty to say, and I can’t concentrate with all this noise.” He took her hand into the warmth of his.

Mia carefully rested her glass on the bar. “Do I have a choice?” For three days they hadn’t touched, and now the heat from his hand made her pulse go berserk.

“Your choices are come with me now, or I make a scene by tossing you over my shoulder.” His face remained impassive, determined, and she didn’t doubt he would do it.

She followed him, her feet moving at twice the speed of his to keep up with the long strides he took. Outside the doors of the hotel and away from the noise, he turned on her and cornered her with one hand on the wall beside her head.

“You know I don’t like games.”

She eased back from the heat of his anger. “I don’t either, Pedro. We’ve been together for a long time, and I only just found out you don’t want to get married. How do you think that makes me feel?”

“How do you think it makes me feel that all of a sudden you’re demanding marriage? I thought we were happy.”

Demanding marriage.

She looked away from him, hoping to hide the pain his words inflicted. “I’m not forcing your hand. If you don’t want me—”

“Stop it,” he said. His voice had softened, and he edged closer. “You know I want you. It’s just...” He sighed. “There are so many unhappy married people, and we’re happy. Why fix what’s not broken? Hmm? Aren’t things good between us?”

With his forefinger he applied a gentle pressure to her chin and turned her face toward him. She stared at a button on his shirt. Any other time, his rich voice would have her melting in his arms. Not now, though. The pain was too fresh, and Mia had difficulty wrapping her head around the truth that they had completely different ideas about their future together.

“Yes, they are.”

“But?”

“But...”

“What’s changed?” he prodded.

She had to tell him. She took a deep breath and looked up into his handsome face. His eyes were filled with concern. “Pedro, I—”

“Pedro!” They both turned toward his friend who’d just come outside. “I’m sorry,” the man said to Mia, looking embarrassed. His gaze rested on Pedro again. “We need your help in here. There’s a problem in the kitchen.” He was wringing his hands nervously.

“All right, I’ll be there in a minute.” When the man disappeared, he turned his attention back to Mia. “What were you saying?”

“Nothing. Go. Help your friends. I’m going home. I’ll see you at the house.” She stepped away and wrapped her arms around herself.

He frowned. “Mia...”

“It’s fine, really. I’m tired.” From the look on his face, she knew the lie didn’t deceive him. The night was still young. She simply couldn’t stay any longer and pretend to have a good time. She would call Patricia from the car.

“Then I’ll take you home.”

“No. Stay and help them. They obviously need you.”

One muscular arm wound around her waist and pulled her close for a soft kiss to her forehead. The pressure of his lips heated her body and made her want to lean in closer to him. “And you don’t?”

“I can wait. We’ll talk when you get in.”

“You know I love you?”

She nodded.

“You’re not mad? You promise we’ll talk when I get home?”

She nodded again, unable to speak from the storm of emotions churning inside her.

Then she walked away.

The dark house was quiet. Too quiet, as if only occupied by furniture and appliances. No one greeted Pedro when he came through the door, excited and smiling that he was home. He locked the front door and dropped his keys in the basket on the table in the foyer. Having stayed out later than planned, exhaustion permeated every cell of his body.

He took his time up the stairs and used instinct to maneuver in the darkness. At the top of the staircase, he turned left and entered the second room on the right, the bedroom he shared with Mia. She'd been considerate and left on the lamp on his side of the bed.

Pedro moved quietly on the carpet. On his way to the bathroom, he removed his jacket and let it drop to the floor. The rest of his clothes followed swiftly behind: shirt, slacks, socks, and shoes.

The cold shower he took was supposed to do double duty: rid his body of the sweat and dirt of a long day and squash the hunger in his loins that had increased with each article of clothing he removed.

Freshly showered and feeling rejuvenated, he reentered the bedroom. He smelled better, but his body still craved release. As he stood at the side of the king size bed and looked down at Mia, he ran a hand over his damp hair. Even with her back to him, he knew she was awake.

Ever since their argument three nights ago, she'd hardly spoken to him. She was no longer satisfied being his live-in lover, and the ticking of her biological clock had grown louder. She was ready for marriage and wanted children, and how did he feel about that?

The thought of losing her tore through him. Despite the boisterous nature of his large Cuban family, she had fit right in. She was perfect, the opposite of his passionate, energetic personality. Her calming presence and her sense of humor had sustained him during some difficult periods over the years. He felt reenergized in her presence after long days on his feet

appeasing diners and tending to the day-to-day operations of the family business. She'd become such an integral part of his life he wondered how he had ever managed to have equilibrium in his world before she entered it.

He needed her.

He peeled back the covers to reveal the clinging pink negligee she wore. He loved her in pink, appreciated the contrast of the color against her chocolate-toned skin. Had she worn it for him?

He slid onto the mattress and glided his palm up her thigh. She inhaled sharply.

Pedro's heart leapt, and using hurried hands, he turned her onto her stomach. He pushed the sheer fabric up past round hips already lifting upward in silent invitation. She wasn't wearing any panties, and a growl of approval rose in his chest.

His fingers touched the warm spot between her thighs and found her already wet for him. He groaned and buried his face in the soft black hair gracing the back of her neck, pushing her legs farther apart so he could stroke the heaven between her thighs. Her labored breathing and the motion of her hips encouraged him.

Telling her how sorry he was would have to wait. He lifted her toward him, and as soon as his hardened shaft entered her willing body, she moaned, lowering her shoulders and tilting her pelvis higher to encourage deeper penetration.

In the semi-dark room, Pedro thrust repeatedly into Mia, her throbbing cries the only other sound besides his heavy panting. Without breaking their rhythm, his seeking fingers moved upward, where he filled his palms with her heavy breasts and squeezed.

Through the silk, he played with the hard peaks of her nipples, eliciting a deeper moan of pleasure from her lips. He got the response he wanted, knowing if he continued it would drive

her over the edge even sooner.

Alternating between squeezing her breasts and pinching her dark nipples, he pounded into her from behind. Soon, Mia's hips began to jerk faster, and her cries grew louder. Pedro forced her legs wider and increased his pace. His breathing grew harsher, and he pressed his lips into a thin line as he fought to hold his body in check.

They moved together in sync. Tossing back her head, she curled her fingers into the mattress and tugged at the sheets. Before long, he felt her shiver and heard her cry out. With Mia satisfied, he succumbed to the burning pressure in his loins. With two quick thrusts he followed behind, collapsing on top of her.

Seconds later, Pedro rolled onto his side, dragging her limp body with him into a spooning position. He placed a hand on her right breast, and her body spasmed, still sensitive after such an arduous quickie. Mia burrowed against him and tucked her butt in the vee created between his thighs and stomach. Feeling her settled, he placed a tender kiss at the base of her neck, enjoying the sweet smell of her skin, the softness against his lips.

He couldn't imagine living without this—living without her. Whatever she wanted, she could have. If she asked for the moon, he would find a way to lasso it from the heavens and drag it down to the earth for her enjoyment.

Finally, the heavy beat of his heart returned to a normal pace. "Marry me," he whispered.

Her fingers playfully brushed back and forth over the sprinkle of hairs on his forearm. "Why?"

His mouth traced the curve of her ear. "Because I know you're thinking about leaving me, and I can't lose you."

Mia remained silent for some time. Finally, she turned her head to look at him. Tears shimmered in her eyes.

“What’s wrong? Isn’t that what you want?”

“Yes,” she said in that familiar soft, husky voice which made him want to lay the world at her feet. “But is it what *you* want?”

“Of course.” She didn’t look convinced. “No one can coerce me into anything I don’t want to do.”

“Pedro—”

He cupped her cheek and stared into her eyes. “You know I love you, Mia. I want to marry you because you make me happy. I don’t want to live without you.” He shook his head in self-disgust. “I can’t let other people’s rocky marriages influence my decision about us and our future together.”

“We’re not them,” Mia whispered in agreement. “Our relationship is strong. It won’t change once we’re married.”

He nodded. “Agreed. We’ll work on it to make sure we’re always this happy.” He smiled down at her. “Now, I’m asking you again, will you marry me?”

She buried her fingers in the softness of his hair and dragged his head closer so she could plant a kiss on his lips.

“Is that a ‘Yes’?” he murmured against her mouth.

“Yes!”

He rolled on top of her and enjoyed the crush of her soft breasts against his chest. He plied her lips with hungry kisses.

When he let her up for air, she said, “I have something to tell you.”

“*Por favor*, can it wait?” He pushed his way between her legs, already hard for her again.

Mia sandwiched his face in her hands to capture his attention. “This is important.”

With effort, Pedro restrained his eager body from claiming her and forced his brain to concentrate.

“I took a home pregnancy test,” she began, “and we might be pregnant.”

He froze. “Pregnant?” He lifted off of her and stared down in shock at her waist. He laid a gentle palm against her stomach. “A baby?”

She bit her lip and nodded her head.

“When did you find out?”

“Three days ago.”

And three nights ago she’d come to him and initiated the subject of marriage. He couldn’t imagine how she must have felt when he said he didn’t want to get married. “And after what I said, you didn’t want to mention it.”

“I wanted to tell you, but since our conversation didn’t go as I’d hoped, I didn’t know *how* to tell you. Besides, I used a home pregnancy test. I have an appointment with the doctor tomorrow to find out for sure.”

“I’m coming with you.”

“Okay.” Her smile was filled with happiness.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered, pressing a soft kiss to her lips. “I’m an idiot.”

“You’re *my* idiot,” Mia teased. “And I love you.”

The End

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Delaney Diamond is the bestselling author of sweet and sensual romance novels. Originally from the U.S. Virgin Islands, she now lives in Atlanta, Georgia. She has been an avid reader for as long as she can remember and in her spare time reads romance novels, mysteries, thrillers, and a fair amount of non-fiction.

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. You can enjoy free reads and the first chapter of all her novels on her website.

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