



### **Blurb**

As far as Sylvie Johnson is concerned, her ex-husband used her and left her and she cannot stand the sight of him. Fifteen years after their divorce, her feelings haven't changed. She wants nothing to do with him—no matter what her beating heart suggests.

Oscar Brooks has always assumed that his ex-wife hates him, but after an unplanned kiss, he's not so sure. Why does she always have such a hostile response to his presence? Is it love, or is it hate? He's determined to find out.

# **Passion Rekindled**

by Delaney Diamond

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## Chapter One

Sylvie Johnson stared at the sketches that one of her in-house designers had brought in. Holding them at arm's length, she examined the drawings of bold oranges and blues planned for next year's spring line. None satisfied her.

"No." She shook her head. "No, no, no." Sighing heavily, she tossed the sketchpads onto the neat desk, a uniquely modern creation she designed herself, made of a slab of glass on top of white concrete legs.

Sylvie glared at Roselle over black designer glasses. "These are horrid. I don't want to see you in my office again until you have something so exquisite I don't regret hiring you." She dismissed the young woman with a tight smile.

"Yes, Miss Johnson."

Roselle grabbed the pads and bowed her head in deference. The act grated on Sylvie's nerves, and she fought the urge to cringe. On more than one occasion she'd told Roselle to stop with the reverential bowing. She wasn't a queen, for heaven's sake, but she also knew that she intimidated the young woman.

Roselle lacked backbone but was sweet. Too sweet. The kind who'd get gobbled up by the vultures of the world if she wasn't careful. She created beautiful designs when pushed, but unfortunately did not dress the part.

Sylvie assessed the young woman with a critical eye. A purple shift dress hung off her bony shoulders, and her narrow face was—with a gray pallor beneath the cinnamon-brown skin—surprisingly gaunt. Roselle looked as if she was not taking care of herself and hadn't eaten in months.

"Roselle," Sylvie called out as the young woman rushed toward the door.

She turned, eyes wide, clutching the sketchpads to her chest.

"Have you eaten today?"

"I...um..."

"I will take that as a no." Sylvie removed her glasses and placed a fist on her hip. "We've talked about this, remember? You must nourish your body or your mind will suffer the consequences. Since I need your mind in tiptop shape—after all, that's what I'm paying for—I need you to take better care of yourself."

"Yes, ma'am," Roselle mumbled.

Sylvie shuffled papers on her desk. “Have Inez order you a meal from the restaurant across the street. Tell her to place it on my bill and order the usual for me, as well.”

“Thank you.”

In the quiet, Sylvie realized Roselle was still standing in the room. She looked up to find the young woman staring at her with a mixture of adoration and awe.

Sylvie glared at her. “Go.”

Roselle darted from the office.

Sylvie shook her head and sank into her soft white chair, the plush fabric molding around her hips and buttocks. She ran three profitable companies from this office, located in Atlanta atop a twenty-story building where she leased fifteen floors and part of the basement.

The entire office contained ultramodern pieces with a feminine twist, stylish but engineered for comfort. The shaggy white chair behind her desk was a very popular item she’d designed, made of ivory sheepskin resting on clear Lucite legs. It went well with the rest of the furnishings, which included white built-in shelves filled with books and awards, and a glass coffee table encircled by a sofa and two armchairs.

Her film development company funded documentaries, a line of office furniture offered high-end pieces made of hearty woods and vibrant fabrics for female executives, and she sold fashion and cosmetics products under the Sylvie brand. She was proud of her accomplishments, but particularly the makeup line, created for women with darker skin tones. Made from natural and organic ingredients, the line had won numerous awards. Reviewers raved that they often forgot they were wearing makeup and swore the products improved their complexions.

She found her notes and scribbled a few items onto her pad, and then went to work drafting a memo on her laptop. Approximately twenty minutes into the task, the intercom beeped.

The voice of her administrative assistant, Inez, came through the speaker. “You have a visitor.”

Sylvie lifted a brow at the guarded tone. Her eyes skirted away from the document on the computer to the phone on the corner of her desk. “Who is it?”

“Your ex-husband. Oscar Brooks.”

She stiffened.

What was Oscar doing at her office? She couldn’t recall the last time he’d been there. Certainly not since they’d divorced and she moved to this new location when her businesses expanded.

With all of their children grown, they had little reason to communicate with each other, and the last time she saw him had been a month ago. They had both attended a function in Miami where their daughter gave a speech. Oscar showed up with one of his young girlfriends, a slight Sylvie made sure he knew she didn't appreciate. They'd had another confrontation when they saw each other at breakfast in the hotel restaurant the next morning, and that had been the last time she'd seen him.

"Miss Johnson, are you there? Should I send him in or...?"

"One moment."

Sylvie went to the gilded oval mirror hanging on the wall and checked her appearance. Perfect. Her raven hair was pulled back from her face, covered in neutral-toned foundation and lipstick to match her dark brown skin.

She straightened the hem of her sleeveless royal blue peplum top and smoothed a hand down the front of the canary trousers before stalking over to the desk. She didn't really care what Oscar thought, but still wanted to look her best. "Send him in."

Sylvie stood behind the desk, posed with a hand on her hip, and took a slow breath, quietly easing air into her lungs as she awaited her ex-husband's entrance.

Oscar entered slowly, dressed in black loafers, jeans, and a dark pullover. His eyes took in the bright room, sun-drenched from the windows covered with sheer drapes at her back, highlighting the white, tan, and splashes of pale rose that filled the expansive room.

The patch of gray hair over his right temple hinted at his age, a man in his fifties. His mother was Brazilian, his father African-American. Some recognized his Latin roots; others mistook the curly hair and swarthy skin for someone of Middle Eastern descent.

He was the kind of person who did his own thing and didn't care what other people thought. One of the many reasons she'd been attracted to him in the first place. He'd been so different from the well-mannered young men she knew that he'd immediately intrigued her.

But right now Sylvie was not intrigued. In fact, she was annoyed because he had disrupted her day.

"You need to shave," she told him, casting a disparaging eye at the shadow of whiskers that covered his chin and jaw. *And a haircut*, she added silently, critically assessing the loose curls on his head. Her eyes avoided the hint of chest hair revealed by the three open buttons on his shirt, and she kept her body still to combat the faint flutter of warmth that seeped into her chest at the untamed virility of his appearance.

Oscar rubbed his palm across the hairs on his jaw, peppered with gray. "I'm my own man. I can do what I want. Have been able to do what I've wanted for fifteen glorious years." He sent a tight smile in her direction.

He crossed his arms over his chest, revealing defined biceps. According to the children, he stayed in shape by regularly going out on his boat. It was obvious he spent a lot of time out there. His face was weathered and sun-kissed from being out in the sun, but he was still very much the young man she had fallen in love with. With a sparkle to his dark brown eyes, and quite handsome.

And she wished she hadn't noticed.

Her nostrils flared. "What do you want?"

"I came to extend an olive branch." He came further into the room, and the skin on Sylvie's neck tightened upon his approach.

"Why?" she asked.

"No need to sound so suspicious. I'm worried about our children, and I want to talk to you about them. Mind if I sit?"

"I'm very busy—"

He dropped into the chair in front of the desk and crossed an ankle over his knee.

"Excuse me, but what are you doing?" Sylvie asked.

"Have a seat, Sylvie, and let's talk."

"Why should I talk to you?"

"Because the only thing you love more than money is our children. They're the only good thing that came out of our marriage, wouldn't you agree?"

The barb sent a razor-sharp pain through her chest, and Sylvie dropped her gaze to the glass top desk. Regrouping, she compressed her lips and recovered, steeling herself for the conversation with her ex.

She coolly looked at Oscar. "I agree. They're the only good thing."

She sat down across from him.

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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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