



Blurb

Can true love be found after one night of passion?

Celeste Burton goes out with her girlfriends to celebrate turning thirty and winds up spending an unforgettable night with the man of her dreams. One week later, as a favor, she attends a wedding with a friend as his date and is shocked when she sees Roarke again.

Roarke Hawthorne despises cheating. Cheating tore apart his family years ago. When the physics professor sees the woman he spent the night with show up at his sister's wedding on the arm of his brother, he knows he should keep his distance. But because of the night they set fire to the sheets in his hotel room, he can't resist the urge to be close to her—nor can he resist the temptation to have her back in his bed.

The Temptation of a Good Man

by Delaney Diamond

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Atlanta, Georgia

ISBN: 978-0-9852838-0-3

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Chapter One

“You’re young. It’s okay to have fun every once in a while.”

Those were the words Celeste Burton’s mother had spoken about thirty minutes ago as she pushed her through the front door of their two-bedroom apartment.

Celeste knew that on a cerebral level, but it didn’t lessen the guilt, even if she did have reason to celebrate. Tonight she turned thirty, and her mother had stuffed some cash from her secret stash into her palm and pushed her through the door with a “Now get out of here and have some fun for a change!”

Celeste scanned the crowded space of Avery’s Juke Joint. Weekend nights always brought out an eclectic crowd of professionals. Customers dined at the bistro tables, hovered around the bar talking, and a number of them had created their own dance floor in front of the stage where a live band played popular funk and blues hits.

Despite its name, the establishment bore little resemblance to the ramshackle structures African-Americans used to visit to relax and socialize after a hard week of work. The renovated building had once been a retail store. It boasted high ceilings, flat-screen televisions, and framed contemporary paintings in a kaleidoscope of colors and geometric shapes. The large paneled windows faced Peachtree Street, one of Atlanta’s busiest roadways. Gyrating bodies moved in time to the music, and all around her people laughed, sipped on colorful drinks, and looked like they were having a good time. Her eyes searched the room for the familiar faces of her friends, Janet and Gwen.

Someone jostled her from behind. “Excuse me,” a contrite male said.

Instantly attracted to the whiskey-warm tone, Celeste turned her head to see if the face matched the sexy voice. A pair of espresso-colored eyes captured hers, sending a jolt of awareness through her body. A neatly trimmed beard, sideburns, and a mustache shadowed his face.

“No problem,” Celeste mumbled.

His warm gaze raked her from head to toe, lingering for a couple of heartbeats on her bare shoulders. The muscles in her belly clenched in reaction, and her heart skipped a beat at his bold perusal.

Surprised by her intense, immediate attraction to a complete stranger, she took a deep breath as another bump captured her attention and forced her to face forward. When she righted herself and looked back over her shoulder toward the sexy-voiced man, all she could see was his retreating

back. She stifled a confusing sense of disappointment.

Craning her neck, Celeste finally spotted her girlfriends and two men standing at a table across the room, near one of the windows. Janet waved wildly, and Celeste grinned, waving back. She began to wind her way through the crowded dining area.

As she neared where her friends sat on stools around one of the bistro tables, she couldn't help but notice they'd hit the jackpot tonight. Both men were good-looking and well dressed.

Janet gave her a big hug. "Happy birthday, Celeste!"

She was always in a good mood and seldom without a smile. Celeste bent down to her petite friend for a hug.

"Happy birthday," Gwen repeated, only she didn't offer a hug. She remained seated and with one gulp drained the martini glass filled with green liquid.

"Looks like the party started without me," Celeste remarked, raising an eyebrow. Gwen was the party animal of the trio. By the looks of it, she hadn't waited for Celeste to start having a good time.

The dark-skinned man chuckled and stuck out his hand. "I'm Lucas. Lucas Baylor. This is my buddy, Xander Dixon."

Xander was shorter than Lucas, with lighter skin. He was lean and wiry in contrast to Lucas's thicker, more muscular build. Celeste took notice of Xander's wedding ring when she shook both men's hands.

"I hope you don't mind," Xander said, "but your friends were nice enough to invite us to share the table with them. Happy birthday, by the way."

"You don't mind, do you, Celeste?" Janet asked, still grinning from ear to ear.

"No, not at all."

That wasn't entirely true. Normally she wouldn't mind, but it was her birthday, and she had hoped to spend it with her girlfriends. Instead, they'd invited two men to join them, and she felt like the third wheel at her own celebration.

"Oh!" Xander exclaimed, looking past Celeste. "Look who finally showed up. Dr. Roarke Hawthorne!"

"Tenured professor at UGA!" Lucas added.

"Booyah!" both men said in unison.

Celeste turned her head to see what all the excitement was about and looked right into the dark brown eyes of the least professorial-looking man she'd ever seen. The man with The Voice. For

six years she'd taken classes part-time, working toward a bachelor's degree. If he'd been one of her professors, she would have never gotten any work done in class.

He nodded as he stepped past her, and the sleeve of his purple long-sleeved shirt brushed her forearm, raising the hairs and making her skin tingle. She tried not to stare, but it was hard not to because of his smooth skin and the heart-stopping smile stretched across his full lips.

"Sorry I'm late," he said. "I hope my no-good friends have been treating you ladies well?" His words indicated he was speaking to all three of them, but his gaze remained on her. "And I sort of met you a second ago, didn't I?"

The nervous fluttering in her stomach made it almost impossible for her to get out the simple words, "Yes, we bumped into each other."

"We were about to order another round of drinks," Lucas said, gesturing for the waitress to come over.

Introductions were made, drinks ordered, and then Xander clapped his friend on the back. "Well, how does it feel?" he asked.

Roarke seemed to lapse into deep thought and stared down at the small round table they were all crowded around like sardines in a can. "It feels . . . amazing. I can finally relax. There's nothing like job security."

"What do you teach?" Gwen asked.

When his attention shifted to address her friend, Celeste studied him. She figured him to be a couple of inches over six feet. Attractive, with skin the color of a chocolate Hershey kiss, a man like Roarke didn't go unnoticed, not even in a crowd. A charcoal gray vest stretched over his broad torso and a multicolored tie with a predominant shade of purple.

"I teach physics at the University of Georgia in Athens. This week I received my tenure confirmation, so I drove all the way from Athens to come celebrate with my buddies."

"It's not that far. It's barely an hour," Lucas said. "And you should frame the letter."

"Don't be modest," Xander chimed, patting his buddy on the back. "*Dr. Hawthorne* is an astrophysicist. He wrote a popular article for the *Journal of Applied Physics* about . . . What was it again?"

"The statistical anomaly—"

"Yeah, yeah, whatever. Don't show off. You know that science mumbo jumbo is over our heads."

"You asked!" Roarke laughed. "Don't be modest; don't show off. I can't win with these guys."

He gestured with his thumb and returned his eyes to Celeste. She felt as if he spoke only to her. An invisible cord pulled her deeper under his spell.

“You’re the black Stephen Hawking. I smell a Nobel Prize,” Lucas said.

“Whoa, let’s not get carried away.” Roarke held up his hands to his friend in protest. They were large, masculine hands with long, slender fingers, which could undoubtedly offer all sorts of pleasure.

Celeste swallowed, shocked at the thought that zipped through her mind. Why was she thinking about the pleasure this man’s hands could offer?

“There he goes being modest again,” Lucas said. “Your research was groundbreaking. We should take out a full-page ad in the paper so everyone knows what you accomplished.”

“One day we’ll say we knew him when.” Xander sniffed and wiped a nonexistent tear. “Don’t forget the little people.”

“What are you even doing here?” Roarke asked him. “Your wife let you out to play tonight?” His attention turned to Lucas. “How many times has she called him?”

Lucas held up two fingers. Just then, Xander lifted his phone from his pocket. He smiled sheepishly. “I gotta take this.”

Lucas held up three fingers. Roarke groaned, and they both rolled their eyes as Xander slinked off to a corner with the phone pressed to his ear.

“Come on, Lucas, let’s dance,” Gwen announced in a loud voice. She moved her shoulders in time to the music. Celeste wondered how many drinks she’d had already.

“I’d be happy to do the honors.” Lucas helped Gwen down from the stool. “You, too,” he said to Janet, whose head bopped in time to the beat.

She stopped her movements. “Oh, I can’t. I’m engaged.” Holding her hand upright, she showed him the ring. Every time an opportunity arose to mention her engagement, she took it.

“What does your engagement have to do with anything? I just want to dance, and it’s obvious you do, too.”

“Well . . .” Janet seemed uncertain, frowning at Celeste.

Celeste waved her away in an effort to ease her conscience. “I’ll be fine. Go dance.”

“Are you sure you can handle those ladies by yourself?” Roarke called as the three walked away. Without turning around, Lucas shot him the finger and squeezed his way through the crowd with both women.

With her friends gone, Celeste racked her brain for something witty and interesting to say. She

glanced at Roarke and found him watching her. His gaze didn't waver, and she shifted uneasily from one foot to the next.

"Your wife must be proud."

She smothered a groan of embarrassment. Did the comment sound as bad as she imagined? She didn't want to seem like she was coming on to him. He stood with his forearm on the high table and his left hand tucked into his pants pocket, making it impossible to see if he wore a ring or not.

Not that it mattered. *I didn't come here to pick up a man.* Considering her history with men and the drama in her life, she had no interest in finding a man right now.

"I'm not married."

A tingle of satisfaction replaced the embarrassment and piqued her curiosity. Good-looking and educated but no wife?

"How about you?" he asked.

"No, I'm not married."

Divorced, but that was another story.

"In a relationship?"

His lips stretched into an innocuous smile. She suspected her answer to the question would determine how the rest of the evening went. The safe answer would be to say yes. She could tell him she was involved, and then he'd probably leave her alone, which was what she really wanted. But, she didn't want to lie, and all of a sudden, she didn't want to be safe.

"No."

The change in him was subtle, but she saw it nonetheless. There was a shift in his eyes, and then he crossed his arms on the tabletop and leaned forward, offering his undivided attention. "Thanks to my loudmouthed friends, you know why we came out tonight. What brought you ladies out?"

"It's my birthday."

He raised his eyebrows. "Well, happy birthday. I'm not even going to ask your age because I know better."

"Smart man." They both laughed. The tension in her shoulders lessened. "So . . . astrophysicist? I don't meet one every day. How did that happen?"

"You really want to know?"

"Yes, I really do."

"I'll give you the short version. My mother bought a telescope for my tenth birthday, and ever

since then I've been fascinated by astronomy. I became obsessed. At night, I would get up after I should have been asleep, pull aside the curtains, and watch the stars. I was in awe of the universe and amazed by its beauty. As I got older, I wanted to know more.

"I studied ancient civilizations, their take on astronomy and its relevance in guiding their everyday lives. I read every book I could get my hands on about Galileo. Imagine, we now see him as the father of astronomy and physics, but in the early part of the seventeenth century, they placed him under house arrest because he dared to contradict the geocentric view at the time that the earth was the center of the universe. He argued that it was the sun, and scientists back then—" He stopped, then grinned ruefully. "I got carried away. Boring, right?"

"No, not at all." Boring was the last thing she thought of him. He spoke so passionately about the subject, she practically felt his excitement. She could imagine him behaving the same way as a child. She'd never thought much about astrophysics, but she definitely wanted to know more now. "I think it's kind of . . . interesting."

He groaned and, making air quotes with his hands, repeated, "Interesting?"

Celeste nodded. "In a good way."

"Years ago it wasn't in a 'good way.' I wasn't the most popular kid in school, and I wore the Coke-bottle-lens glasses to match."

"You wear glasses?"

"No. Thank God for laser eye surgery. And puberty." They both chuckled.

Especially puberty.

"You guys kind of screwed up the whole Pluto thing, didn't you?" Celeste teased. "In elementary school I learned Pluto was a planet, now it's not. I'm so disillusioned."

Roarke hung his head. "No one cares about the 999,999 things we get correct," he said in a sorrowful voice. "Only the one thing we get wrong. Scientists are human, too."

Xander returned to the table. "Where is everybody?"

"Lucas took my friends onto the dance floor."

Xander glanced from one to the other. "You know, I think I'll go help him out." He winked.

"He's real subtle, isn't he?" Roarke shook his head. "Okay, so what's your story?"

Celeste shrugged. "There's not much to tell. I recently graduated from Georgia Tech with a degree in public policy."

"My younger brother and sister graduated from there. Congratulations."

"Thanks. Now I need to find a job." She took a deep breath. "And I have a six-year-old

daughter. My world revolves around her.” She liked to mention her daughter up front, which caused some men to run in the opposite direction. She watched his reaction, but he didn’t flinch.

“I understand.”

The vehemence with which he said the words prompted Celeste to ask, “Do you have kids?”

“No, but I raised my younger brother and sister from the time I was eighteen. I tell them all the time they’re my kids.”

“What happened to your parents, if you don’t mind my asking?”

The immediate transformation in his disposition made her regret the question. The smile on his lips evaporated, and his face became shuttered. Even though she’d tried to tread carefully, her question had obviously been too personal and made him uncomfortable.

“They’re both dead.”

“I’m sorry. I—”

“There’s nothing to be sorry about. You didn’t know, and they died a long time ago.” He seemed to force himself back into a lighthearted mood. “Are you having fun on your birthday?”

She pretended not to notice the abrupt change in conversation. “I haven’t been here long, but . . .” She let her voice trail off. “Well, to be honest, this isn’t what I wanted to do tonight. I would much rather go somewhere quiet and listen to a small ensemble play jazz or something.”

“Really? I wouldn’t mind doing the same thing.” He edged closer, and her skin warmed to his nearness. His voice lowered to a warm purr. “Xander and Lucas got me a room at the Ritz-Carlton for the night and invited me here. Since they’re paying for everything, I thought I’d better stick around, but . . . I think you and I may be victims of meddling friends. Am I right?”

Celeste nodded. His conspiratorial tone made her curious.

A speculative look came into his eyes. “You know, there’s a spot around the corner. They serve tapas and have a small band that plays jazz. Would you like to check it out?”

She hesitated. What did she know about him? He seemed harmless, but looks could be deceiving. The battle scars crisscrossed all over her heart served as a reminder.

He leaned closer. Their eyes locked, and she held her breath against the attraction that crackled across the short distance between them. His direct gaze and flirtatious half smile caused tiny pinpricks of heat to surface along the back of her neck.

“I’m one of the good guys. I promise.”

A good guy. Did they really exist? After years of disappointment, she had dismissed the thought of finding one, treating the idea like an urban legend, or a unicorn or some other mythical

creature.

Nonetheless, here was a man who claimed to be good, and the spicy scent of his cologne made him smell delicious. Real delicious. The manly fragrance coupled with the inviting sound of his voice made her second-guess herself. Maybe, just this once, she was correct in her assessment.

“What about our friends?” she asked.

“They’re welcome to come, too.”

That wasn’t what he was offering, and they both knew it. He knew she was attracted to him, and he observed her with unabashed interest.

Her mother’s words repeated in her head. “You’re young. It’s okay to have fun every once in a while.”

This could turn out to be a harmless flirtation. She wouldn’t go anywhere alone with him. They would be walking down a public street to their next destination, a public restaurant. She made a decision to shift into fun mode and closed the door on anything less.

“Okay. Let’s go.”

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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