



Blurb

She's just what he needs...

What happens in the Bahamas should stay in the Bahamas. That was the plan, until the woman Ransom Stewart hooked up with made an appearance at his law firm. He knows he should stay away from her. He knows he should leave her alone. But for some reason, he can't.

Revenge sex. That's what Sophie Bradshaw told herself the night with Ransom was all about. One night, to punish her boyfriend for years of neglect that culminated in a painful betrayal. She knows she should stay away from Ransom. She knows she should leave him alone. But for some reason...she can't.

The Right Time

by Delaney Diamond

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Chapter One

Ransom Stewart didn't move fast enough.

The green drink landed in his face and splashed down the front of his Armani suit, dousing the white shirt, striped tie, and the undershirt. Conversation in the restaurant screeched to a halt amid surprised gasps and startled glances.

Using a cloth napkin, he wiped away the apple martini dripping down his face and mopped the excess from the damp hair hanging across his brow.

"You're a shitty person. You want a break?" Lisa hissed at him, green eyes flashing with anger and hurt. "Let's take a break. How about we make it permanent?" She shoved back the chair with such force it toppled with a crash behind her. She snatched her purse from the table, and after one last death glare, marched away. Brunette hair swinging across her back, she stalked out of the restaurant with her head held high.

So much for going to a public place to have "the talk."

With a heavy sigh, Ransom walked around the table, picked up the chair, and then returned to his seat.

He'd been wanting to have this conversation with Lisa for some time, ever since she started talking about babies and marriage. When they initially met two years ago, she'd been just as goal-oriented as he, but over the past few months, a change occurred. Words like *biological clock* crept into their conversations more frequently, and she made a point of mentioning which of her friends got engaged or married.

He enjoyed her company when she came to Chicago from her home base in New York, but the strength of their relationship rested on the beauty of living in different cities, where they could go about their own lives however they wanted. As an attorney, he worked eighty-plus hours a week, per the norm. She herself, as a principal in a consulting firm, worked long hours as well. Lately, though, her visits had become more frequent, just like talk of marriage and clocks.

The final straw came a few weeks ago when she visited and mentioned the possibility of moving to Chicago. That's when he recognized the situation had gotten out of hand.

He'd brought her to one of the best restaurants in the city to let her down easy, and hopefully save himself the drama that he expected to come. Unfortunately, the drama played out in public, rather than private. A miscalculation on his part.

The waitress came over, a twenty-something-year-old dressed in a white shirt and black slacks, hair pulled back into a single long braid. She cleared her throat. “Are you all right, sir?”

“Yes, I’m fine.” Ransom dabbed the stained shirt with a napkin. Hopefully it wasn’t ruined.

“I could get you some club soda to help with that.” The waitress clasped her hands in front of her, appearing at a loss at how to handle the situation.

Ransom smiled to put her at ease. “Thanks. You can remove my date’s plate, bring the check when you have a chance, and a refill on the wine, please.”

Lucky for him, the tossed drink missed his meal of steak, scalloped potatoes, and bacon-wrapped asparagus. Only a few drops had landed on the edge of the white plate, which he swiped off with the napkin. He picked up his fork and knife and cut into the meat. No point in letting a perfectly cooked prime rib go to waste, particularly one as tender and costly as this one.

“Yes, sir.” The waitress nodded and deftly lifted Lisa’s plate and empty glass from the other side of the table. The hum of restaurant conversation restarted.

Ransom could be embarrassed about the way the night had ended, but he’d been called names before, and this wasn’t the first time he’d had a blowup in a public place. Though it was certainly the wettest.

He finished his meal with the extra glass of wine, occasionally checking stock quotes and email on his phone. He returned a few messages and made a note to himself about a case he was working on. All in all, the evening had turned out to be productive, despite the disastrous encounter with Lisa.

Later, he stepped out into the night and buttoned his jacket. The noise of the city surrounded him—cars going by and the sound of a siren tearing through the night air. More than ever, he looked forward to his trip in a few days. His coworkers, Giles and Stephanie, were getting married in the Bahamas, and the time off in a warmer climate would be a welcome change of pace.

He didn’t usually do vacations. A day or two here and there was all he could manage. His hectic schedule simply didn’t allow the luxury of downtime, but he had scheduled an extra day at the beginning of the trip to relax on the beach and work on a tan. One day of relaxation wouldn’t hurt.

Ransom handed the valet the numbered card to retrieve his car, and soon the metallic-gray Porsche Cayenne eased up to the front door. After handing the young man a hefty tip, he hopped in and took off toward his condo in the Loop, Chicago’s business district.

Since he had the rest of his Saturday night free, he might as well get some work done. He pressed the recorder on his phone. “Prepare summary judgment for the Standcomp case.” Ransom pressed *End* and saved the reminder.

Thinking about Lisa as he cruised down the highway, he sighed. The timing was all wrong for them to move into a more permanent relationship, but it was hard to explain that to her.

Having her move to Chicago would be distracting, and so would having them move into a more permanent relationship, such as marriage. He envisioned them as a power couple—both ambitious and successful—and knew they could be really good together...eventually. But she wanted to move too fast. He still hadn’t made partner, a goal he saw within reach—this year, for sure.

Besides, he was only thirty-seven. He had his whole life ahead of him. He simply wasn’t ready to settle down yet.

Ransom eased his vehicle into the underground parking garage of his building. No point in crying over spilled milk. He had work to do. He took the elevator up to his condo and within minutes, he was in his home office, hard at work.

Days like this made it hard for Sophie Bradshaw to remember why she enjoyed being a flight attendant, for nine years, despite meeting crappy passengers like the man in 2B.

Matthias Ditka thought the entire crew was there to do his bidding. Each time he asked for a refill of vodka, he yelled the request and rudely yanked the small bottle from their hands with an ungracious utterance of “About time.” The obnoxious behavior only increased with the length of the flight.

Sophie groaned when the call light came on again. “What does he want now?” she grumbled.

He’d managed to spoil her anticipation of the trip to the Bahamas, an arrangement she’d maneuvered by calling in a favor to swap routes with another flight attendant.

“Probably wants us to rub his feet.” Jalinda, one of the other flight attendants, rolled her eyes.

This was Sophie’s first time working with Jalinda, but she liked her a lot. Their similar temperament and the other woman’s sense of humor made the trip much more enjoyable.

“You take him this time, or I may end up punching him in the face,” Jalinda added.

Sophie laughed out loud and slammed a hand over her mouth. “I would love to see that.”

Taking a deep breath, she squared her shoulders and walked down the first-class aisle. She stopped at the seat where a burly bearded man sat holding an empty mini vodka bottle.

“I need another one of these, pronto,” he said, way too loud.

Sophie leaned forward and spoke quietly. “I’m sorry, sir, but I’m going to have to cut you off.”

“Cut me off?” he bellowed, causing heads to turn and Sophie to wince. “This is first class.”

“I understand. However, we can’t simply—”

He grabbed her hand and yanked her forward. The fingers around her wrist tightened so much, pain shot up her arm. “Listen here, missy. Either you or the other waitress can bring me something else to drink. I don’t care who does it. Do it now, or I’ll go back there and get the drink myself.”

His breath reeked of the liquor he’d consumed since takeoff, and she suspected he’d been drinking before then.

“You’re hurting me. Let go.” Sophie fisted her right hand, prepared to land a solid punch across the side of the man’s face if he didn’t release her by the time she counted to five in her head.

One.

“Are you going to do as I ask? I am a customer and paid a small fortune for this damn seat.”

“Please let go of my arm.”

Two.

“I’ll let go when you give me the answer I want.”

Three.

“Let her go.”

The low tenor came from a few feet in front of her. Sophie had been completely oblivious to anyone moving toward them, and her gaze collided with that of a tall male, the hottie from a few rows back. His large frame dominated the aisle.

He smelled inviting. She detected a fresh, almost minty fragrance coming from him, and he looked liked he’d just stepped out of the pages of *GQ*, with a clean-shaven face, thick, dark hair neatly combed back from his face, and a powder-blue shirt that clung to his trim physique. A navy tie with black trousers, and black oxfords completed the look.

Despite his civilized appearance, he exuded an underlying roughness as he glared down at the grip the passenger had on her wrist, his body obviously tensed, jaw set in an inflexible line.

“Who’s going to make me let her go?” Matthias stared up at the younger man.

Thick, dark eyebrows snapped together. “I am. Believe me, I’m itching to let off some steam, and it would give me great pleasure to use you to do it.”

Matthias quickly dropped Sophie’s hand, and she gladly stepped back from him, rubbing her wrist.

“Are you okay?” The man searched her face.

He had nice lips. She seldom noticed a man’s lips, but his were thin with an appealing curve. Then there were his striking blue eyes, bright and clear, almost see-through, like glass. An empty hole in his right earlobe suggested he wore an earring, which was interestingly incongruous with his otherwise preppy appearance.

She nodded. “I’m fine, thank you.”

“I just want another drink. Is that so wrong?” the irate passenger hollered.

“She said she was cutting you off, and from the looks of it, you definitely don’t need anything else to drink.”

“Who are you, her daddy?” the wider man growled.

Her savior bent at the waist, getting right in the face of the burly passenger, and said, “I’m the guy who’s going to stuff that empty bottle up your ass.”

“Thank you so much, sir,” Sophie interrupted quickly. While she appreciated the assistance, the last thing she wanted was an incident on the plane. Despite her desire to punch the prick in the face herself, flight attendants must maintain their cool at all times.

She placed a restraining hand on her savior’s shoulder. His hard, muscular shoulder. Tempted to rub her palm up and down his arm, she snatched away her hand. “I can take it from here.”

He straightened, and the way his gaze traveled over her face sent her pulse beating faster and out of control. This man rattled her.

“Thank you,” she said, settling into a cool, professional voice. She fixed a smile on her face. “Please have a seat.”

He didn’t move, his body still taut, as if ready to spring into action at her command. His gaze lingered on her a little longer, dragging from her eyes down the vest and skirt of her cranberry uniform. She straightened her back, skin tingling under the blatant inspection.

Then she saw it—a softening of his features. Interest. He blinked. Mutual attraction shimmered on the air between them. Then he leaned closer, and her body tensed, tightening like the string pulled taut on a bow.

“He shouldn’t have put his hands on you.”

His breath hit the corner of her mouth, and he held her gaze to punctuate the statement. Neither moved. Time halted.

Then, as if none of that had happened, he turned and walked the few rows back to his seat. Sophie let the trapped air out of her lungs, releasing the tension from her shoulders and back.

A round of applause went up through the cabin, and Matthias’s face flushed a bright shade of crimson. Sophie smiled reassuringly to the applauding passengers and then walked briskly toward the galley.

“What happened?” Jalinda asked, filling a glass with ice to complete another drink request.

Sophie rubbed her red wrist. “Mr. Dickhead grabbed me.”

Jalinda’s eyes widened. “What? You need to write that up.”

Protocol dictated that any disturbance had to be written up and reported.

“I will.”

“Are you all right?”

“I’m fine. 5A came over and stopped him.”

Jalinda shot a look around the dividing wall and then wiggled her brows at Sophie. “Oh yes, I remember him when he came on board. He is *bot*.”

“I guess,” Sophie said, pretending to be uninterested.

“What are you, blind?”

“He’s all right.”

“Oh, come on. He is H-O-T.”

“Don’t you have a passenger to take care of?” Sophie asked.

Jalinda rolled her eyes and went to deliver the drink.

As soon as her back was turned, Sophie checked the passenger manifest and saw the name of the passenger who’d come to her aid.

Ransom Stewart.

An unusual, but strong name. Brash. Commanding. Just like him.

Peeking around the dividing wall, she took another look at Ransom. He seemed absorbed in whatever he was writing, head bent over a spiral-bound notebook, brow furrowed as he concentrated. He'd been writing since he came on the flight.

Idly, she wondered what he did for a living. Something corporate, like banking. Of that she was certain.

Jalinda started down the aisle and Sophie hurriedly replaced the manifest and began prepping for the lunch service.

She had work to do. Enough drooling over a man she'd never see again.

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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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