



Synopsis

The Ultimate Merger is the prequel to Second Chances, Book 4 of the Hot Latin Men series.

Two workaholics slow down long enough to find love when they least expect it.

Renaldo da Silva is on the verge of entering the U.S. market with the purchase of a hotel in downtown Chicago. After working hard for several days straight, he heads to a local bar and sees a woman who instantly makes him reconsider how to spend his evening.

When another one of her male counterparts unfairly becomes the lead on a project, Sabrina Porter leaves work intent on drowning her sorrows in wine and loud music at a local bar. Instead, she meets a sexy Brazilian who's intent on showing her a different way to unwind.

The Ultimate Merger

by Delaney Diamond

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Dedication

To the women below, who acted as beta readers by donating their time and offering me feedback on the story. Your assistance was greatly appreciated!

Belinda Green

Brooke Oliver

Jackie Wallace

Rahab Mugwanja

Sherika Williams

Tiffany Krepps

Chapter One

Sabrina Porter stormed in and slammed the door to her windowless office. She didn't give a damn if they heard. Slapping the sheets of paper in her hand onto the desk, she blinked back tears of anger.

It's so unfair, she thought.

She had worked harder on the Japanese project than her co-worker, Devin, but *he* was the one sitting back in his chair, smiling like a Cheshire cat, hoarding the accolades from the senior analysts. *He* was the one they decided would be the lead on the merger. And why? Because she didn't play golf?

Too wired to sit down, she paced the floor with a fist jammed into her hip bone.

A soft knock shifted her attention to the door. Before she could answer, Ernestine, the assistant she shared with Devin and four other analysts, poked in her head.

"Is it safe to come in?" she asked with a timid smile.

Sabrina gave a curt nod.

"How're you holding up?"

Ernestine pushed her gold-framed glasses up on her nose and clasped her hands in front of her. She'd been working at Global Investments, Inc. since the formation of the company fifteen years ago. Despite the difference in their ages and the fact that Sabrina was one of her supervisors, they'd become friends when the firm hired Sabrina two years ago.

"How am I holding up? You took notes in the meeting. They gave the Japan project to Devin. That fu—" She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, letting it out slowly. Then she took another deep breath and let it out slowly, too. "That *freaking* brown-noser. Apparently, you don't need any real skill or intelligence at this firm to handle a multi-million dollar merger. All you need is a penis!"

Ernestine's pale cheeks reddened to the same shade of her hair. She cleared her throat. "You might want to lower your voice. You don't want anyone to hear you, do you?"

Sabrina let her head roll back and stared up at the ceiling, knowing Ernestine was right. "No, I don't," she said in a heavy voice. She walked over to her desk chair and collapsed onto it. "It's just so unfair. I work twice as hard as Devin does—three times, even, and I produce good work. I've

been here two years, Ernestine. Two years, and every time a major deal is in the works, one of the male analysts gets it. Why am I even here? Did they have to fill a quota?”

Ernestine lowered onto the chair on the opposite side of the desk. Her sympathetic gaze connected with Sabrina’s. “Your work will be recognized eventually. You’ll see.”

“When? I thought that busting my butt would get me recognition, but it doesn’t seem to matter. As far as the senior analysts are concerned, I might as well have gone to Jane Doe University and not even bother to come in to work every day. I’d get the same amount of respect.”

Ernestine took a deep breath before responding. “You’re going to get even more upset when I tell you what I’m about to.”

Sabrina sighed. “Lay it on me.”

“They’re moving Devin into a bigger office. One on the same hallway as the senior analysts.”

Sabrina slumped back in the chair and stared in disbelief at her co-worker. “Are you kidding me?”

“I wish I were. I was told to start coordinating the move with the building facilities manager.”

“Unbelievable.”

Sabrina shook her head. She worked so hard, but it all seemed for naught. Two years ago she’d finished magna cum laude with an MBA from the University of Chicago. She’d hoped to land a job in a firm where she could work her way up in her specialty—mergers and acquisitions. However, even though she consistently churned out excellent work, she never received any of the exciting projects nor received the respect granted to her male counterparts.

“Why don’t we go out for a drink tonight?” Ernestine offered. “Seems like you need it. We’ll go to Giovanni’s and listen to music.”

“You won’t drink with me.”

“That doesn’t mean we can’t go out. I’ll have cranberry juice, and you can have one of those mojitos or whatever you like—on me. How’s that?”

Sabrina smiled genuinely for the first time all day. Ernestine was so sweet. Having someone in her corner helped to temper her unhappiness.

Normally, she didn’t drink much because growing up, she’d seen the adverse effects of drugs and alcohol on those around her, but she needed a drink tonight.

“Nah, go home to your hubby and kids,” she said. “In the mood I’m in, I’ll need more than a few drinks. It might be better for me to go straight home.”

Ernestine rose from the chair. “You need to get out more.”

“What? You’re the one who rushes home every day after work. I’m surprised you even offered to go out with me.”

“And you’re the one who hasn’t been on a date in months.”

Sabrina groaned and covered her face with her hand.

“You know it’s true. Why don’t you let me fix you up?”

“I don’t want any more hook-ups.” Last time her co-worker tried to set her up had been a disaster. The date ended in an argument with the guy calling her “you modern women” in a tone that clearly indicated it was not a compliment.

“Okay, I screwed up the last time, but I do have another man in mind for you. He’s more your type. You need someone with your drive and ambition and someone who appreciates it in you. Clark wasn’t the right person.”

“Yah think? He practically told me he wanted me barefoot and pregnant.”

“Don’t exaggerate.”

“I’m not.”

“The man I have in mind for you this time is different. He’s—”

“No.” Sabrina wagged her finger at Ernestine. “Just because he’s black, doesn’t mean he’s perfect for me. You need a better screening process, and because of that, you are not allowed to set me up ever again. Comprehend?”

“One more time. I promise you’ll like this one. He’s nice, but he’s the kind of man who could handle you.”

“No. I can find my own dates, thank you very much.”

“Fine.” Ernestine headed for the door. Before walking out, she said, “If you change your mind, let me know. The right man can help you relieve some of this work-related stress.”

“If I need to relieve stress, I’ll get a massage.”

“It’s been so long, you’ve forgotten how good it can be.” With a saucy wiggle to her hips, Ernestine reached for the doorknob.

Sabrina shook her head. “You have your husband wrapped around your finger, don’t you?”

Laughing, Ernestine said, “I’ll see you later,” before closing the door behind her.

Sabrina took a deep breath and swiveled in her chair to face the computer screen. She needed a man like she needed a hole in her head. Besides, if she wanted to get laid, she knew who to call. In fact...

She picked up the phone and punched in the number to her friend-with-benefits, Samuel. It had been a long time since they'd connected, but maybe she'd get lucky and he'd be free tonight.

"Hello, beautiful."

What a nice way to be greeted. "Hey, you busy tonight?"

"No. What did you have in mind?"

"Dinner and drinks at Giovanni's. My treat."

"Do I have to put out if you buy me dinner?"

She twirled the phone cord around her forefinger. "Yes."

He chuckled, and she imagined his coffee-colored eyes crinkling at the corners. "Rough day?"

Sabrina sighed. "Yeah, you could say that."

"I got you. Call me before you leave work and I'll meet you there."

"Thanks." Sabrina hung up.

Now she had something to look forward to at the end of the day.

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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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