



Blurb

They can't stand each other...or can they?

For years, hard work and perseverance have been the tenets by which Santiago Vila lived his life. As such, he's achieved everything he's gone after. Except Abena Dubango. She's the total package of brains, beauty, and a sense of humor. Even though she wears another man's ring, he's never forgotten the moments they spent together. And he'll make sure she doesn't, either.

Abena has plans. Get married, have children, and live happily ever after. She even has a fiancé to achieve her goals. But two things stand in her way: Santiago Vila, and her undeniable attraction to him.

Undeniable

by Delaney Diamond

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Prologue

Two years ago

He's just a man, Abena Dubango thought, smoothing a hand down her turquoise dress and straightening her shoulders. So what if she'd had an intimate encounter with him?

She picked up the ten folders she'd pulled from the cabinets in the file room and walked to the end of the hall. Taking a deep breath, she balanced the stack in her arms and knocked on the office door.

The voice of her boss, Esteban Galiano, called from inside. "Come in."

She entered the office. "Good afternoon, Mr. Galiano. These are the files you wanted." She deposited them on a small round table in the room. "Will there be anything else?" She made sure to keep her eyes averted from Santiago Vila—the other man in the room, seated across the desk from Esteban.

"Good afternoon, Abena," Santiago said, without glancing in her direction. He studied Esteban's desktop.

Abena stiffened. "Hello, Santiago," she said with difficulty. Then, unable to keep herself from needling him, added, "Having a nice stay in Miami?"

"Better than the last time. Last time it was unbearably hot." He turned his head, searing her with his lethal gaze. There was subtext upon subtext in those words. Last time he'd been here, they'd had a huge argument.

"If you can't stand the heat, you should stay out of the kitchen." She didn't know why she chose to antagonize him, poking at his wounded pride when she knew better.

"Good advice. I've given up cooking. It wasn't worth the trouble," Santiago said in a low voice.

Damn him. Abena's hand trembled with unchecked rage. She took a deep breath, ready to blast him, when Esteban interrupted.

"Excuse me." She and Santiago swung their heads in his direction. "Would the two of you prefer if I leave so you can hash out whatever the hell is going on in private? Or we could set up a boxing ring outside and see who's left standing at the end of the match."

She'd been so consumed that she'd forgotten she was standing in her supervisor's office and behaved in a less-than-professional manner. She prided herself on her decorum.

“Excuse me, Mr. Galiano.” Abena intertwined her fingers before her. “Is there anything else?”

“That will be all. Thank you.”

She nodded and walked across the carpet, closing the door quietly on the way out. On the other side, she took a cleansing breath and berated herself for her behavior.

No more slip-ups. She needed to keep herself under control in his presence—particularly since she might well be seeing more of him, if the rumor was true that Esteban was considering offering him the position as head of North American operations. She couldn’t let Santiago get under her skin.

Again.

Chapter 1

Present day

Santiago Vila was an arrogant prick.

Abena stalked down the hall, nodding briefly at one of her co-workers on the way to the break room after an early morning meeting between her, Santiago, and his admin that lasted a full hour and a half longer than it should have because, apparently, he enjoyed hearing himself talk. Having him at headquarters had turned out to be an utter nightmare—one which she had not fully anticipated when she learned of his move to Miami.

As the newly-installed vice president of North American operations for the restaurant division of Galiano Holdings, he was essentially the man in charge while the real man in charge—the owner, Esteban—visited Europe and tended to his restaurants and real estate holdings there. Unfortunately, Esteban had used those exact words to him: *You're in charge while I'm gone.*

But the newfound responsibility came with a caveat. Santiago was on a ninety-day probation, in order to prove he could handle the additional duties of managing the largest portfolio in the company. So for the past week he'd criticized her work, micromanaged every task, and been nothing but a pain in the rear. Of course since he *knew* her—in a very intimate way—that brought its own kind of tension. That night with him had been an ill-advised lapse in judgment she regretted with every fiber of her being. She should have never allowed him to put his head between her legs, though there were moments...

Her palm sweated as she poured coffee grounds into the pot.

There were moments, like in the midst of the meeting during one of his sharp critiques, when she didn't know if she should slap him or kiss him.

Abena groaned and shook her head. Slap him, of course. The only logical choice, because he absolutely infuriated her.

She'd take a few minutes to drink coffee and meditate on the coming day, as she did each morning, to get her mind right for her demanding job as the personal assistant to the owner, made even more demanding during the coming weeks because he'd left a tyrant in charge.

Tapping her feet as the pot percolated, Abena went over everything she had to get done for the day. Send out invoices, get in touch with the west coast team about supplies to give Esteban an

update, and discuss the progress on the renovations to his home in the Caribbean with his wife, Sonia. No two days were the same; exactly the way Abena liked it.

The machine stopped and Abena opened the cabinet to search for a mug. Once again, the cleaning crew had placed her favorite on the top shelf, out of reach. She wondered if they did it on purpose to mess with her because she'd criticized the way they cleaned the bathrooms. She couldn't help that she paid attention to detail. That skillset had served her well in her career.

Lifting onto her toes, she stretched toward the cup, and when she couldn't reach it, seriously considered climbing up on the counter.

Awareness flickered across the back of her neck, and Abena froze with her fingers reaching toward the high shelf. A tan hand in a blue suit sleeve reached over her. The body attached to the hand moved close enough to brush her backside, and she tensed.

Not breathing, she watched as the hand easily lifted the ceramic cup from the shelf and placed it on the countertop in front of her.

"There you go."

Santiago's smooth, accented voice filled Abena's ears and tiny shivers of alarm popped up along her arms. His voice had a texture all its own—like some rich fabric dragged along her skin—smooth and silky, almost decadent.

Her jaw tightened. "I didn't ask for your help."

"You're welcome." He was standing too close. The man didn't understand the concept of personal space and carried enough arrogance in his little finger to fill the Atlantic Ocean to overflowing.

She watched him from the corner of her eye. "Why are you in here?"

"I came to get coffee."

"I'm sure Crystal would be happy to get your coffee for you," she said, referring to his administrative assistant.

"But then I would have missed out on spending more time in your charming company. And you know how I love spending time in your...company."

His insolent gaze swept her body, suggestively shining a spotlight on the slight pause in his words. A wave of heat swept her neck and shoulders. She hated how he managed to get under her skin.

Abena swallowed her unease at his proximity and wished the scent of the coffee were stronger than the lure of his minty-fresh cologne. "You like to annoy me, don't you?"

“It does fill me with inexplicable pleasure.”

With some difficulty, she kept a steady hand and filled her cup with the rich, dark liquid. “You clearly have too much time on your hands.” She stalked off, conscious of his eyes on her.

“Do you have any suggestions on what else I can fill my hands with?” he called after her.

Outside the break room and out of sight, Abena stood in the brightly lit hallway and briefly closed her eyes to regain strength in her wobbly knees.

Finally, she continued the trek to the safety of her office.

The spacious room was only second in size to the one Esteban occupied down the hall, although she’d heard Esteban and Santiago toss around the idea of knocking down the wall between Santiago’s office and the one next to it to give him more room, which would make Santiago’s office larger than hers.

Her workspace included a sitting area and was decorated in warm hues with comfy-looking, business-grade furniture. Her bookshelves were filled with foreign language dictionaries and nonfiction reference material related to the restaurant and real estate industries, because of the areas her boss specialized in. There was also an *Employee of the Year* plaque, which she proudly displayed on a shelf at the top, all by itself.

She set her mug on the edge of the desk before opening the floor-length blinds to expose windows that occupied almost the entire back wall.

This end of South Beach was quieter, but by the middle of the day, she could walk a few blocks and be in the thick of all the activity and photo-snapping tourists Miami’s most famous avenue was known for.

She sat down and logged into the computer network. Eyeing the screen, she sipped the coffee, her mind wandering once again to the six-foot-tall pain in her side. Six weeks ago, in mid-June, Esteban had married his live-in girlfriend, Sonia. The following month, Santiago had moved to Miami to assume his new role, a move she’d been dreading since she learned of the decision. His very presence in the building made her anxious and fidgety.

Speak of the devil...

Santiago came to the door. She tried not to pay him any attention, but ended up lifting her gaze, against her own will. He stood with his shoulder casually resting against the jamb. Sans coffee, of course, which confirmed what she’d already known—that he’d only come into the break room to pester her.

The pink shirt he wore under the blue jacket was open at the top, revealing his throat and the flash of a gold necklace with a cross pendant, which she couldn't recall ever seeing him without. On his right hand, currently tucked into his trouser pocket, he wore a gold rope bracelet and a gold pinky ring. Santiago was all about flash, from his impeccable grooming to the tailored clothes covering his lean body.

In contrast to his bronzed skin and black hair, his eyes were a captivating color—gray and pale, with hints of blue—appearing soft at times when he was in a good mood, but easily turning cold in anger or frustration.

Without a tie and coupled with his dark Latin features, he fit right into the Miami scene, looking like a man on vacation instead of a top executive for one of the most successful restaurant groups in the country. Quite an accomplishment for a man only thirty years of age. Abena couldn't argue he was good at his job, but she wished he'd stay away and let her do hers.

She set down her cup and glared at him, arching a brow. "Yes?"

"Have you heard from Martina Esposito's people yet?"

The Argentine pop star would be in Miami next week for two nights, on the last leg of her world tour. In the past, she'd arranged a farewell dinner for her assistant and other close members of her entourage. This time, she'd expanded the number to include her dancers, drivers, and others traveling with her—which resulted in her renting out the entire restaurant for over three hundred people.

"Emilio and I have everything under control," Abena said, referring to the general manager. Normally, the GM would have handled the entire booking, but everyone understood the importance of this engagement. With the assistant manager out on leave, and because of Esteban's exacting standards, Emilio had pulled Abena in to help as a second pair of eyes.

"There's nothing wrong with me asking questions."

"Then maybe you should direct your questions to Emilio."

"I'm directing them to you."

"Your questions are completely unnecessary. This is not how Esteban works. He does *not* micromanage us."

"I'm not Esteban."

"You've got that right," Abena muttered.

"I get the feeling you don't want me here." Santiago's eyes hardened, but managed to be enticing with their long-lashed, sultry appearance.

She sent him her best fake smile. “You must be psychic.”

“If I were psychic, I would have known what a sneaky little liar you are.”

So he wanted to fight. The inflection in his voice didn’t change a bit. He used the same pleasant tone while lashing her with his words.

“The only liar in this room is standing at the door.” Abena crossed her legs and affected a pose of relaxed indifference.

“What exactly did I lie about?”

Nothing. She was the one who’d lied to herself, convinced she was ready for a casual affair, when clearly she hadn’t been.

Santiago laughed softly. “Just as I thought, you’re projecting.”

“I really don’t care what you think. Please run along. I have work to do.”

“*Run along?*”

He laughed softly again, which meant he was extremely aggravated. It was a trick he used to calm his anger, because Santiago was all about calm and charm. Charming workers. Charming business associates. Charming women with commands like “*Take off your panties.*”

“Is that how you talk to your fiancé?” he asked. “The poor man doesn’t get any respect, does he? Or maybe he doesn’t know how to handle a woman like you.”

“He knows how to handle me just fine. Every. Night. As many times as I desire.” She flashed him a disingenuously sweet smile and hoped he didn’t see clear through to the huge lie she just told.

His mouth lifted at one corner, but his eyes turned to gray steel.

“You like doing that, don’t you? You like rubbing my fucking face in it.” The smile disappeared as quickly as it arrived, and his mouth tightened with the same tension that arced through the room.

“Much as you hate me reminding you of my relationship, you keep bringing it up. Don’t you have someone else to bother? I’m busy.”

Abena shifted her gaze to the computer screen and double-tapped the spreadsheet on her desktop. Seconds later, she became conscious of Santiago moving away from the door and walking toward her.

Her gaze snapped to him. “What are you doing?”

He rounded the corner of her desk.

“I said, what are you doing?” Abena asked, louder this time. She scooted back in the wheeled chair and bumped into the wall. Her stomach tightened in panic as she looked up at him.

Santiago slammed his hands on the armrests and brought their faces within inches of each other. He leaned in, that sinfully delicious mouth of his close enough to bite.

The pit of her stomach trembled at his nearness, while his aftershave filled her nose and made her nostrils quiver. The fragrance held remnants of mint and notes of pine. Masculine, very male, and pure Santiago.

Abena stopped breathing as his gaze dipped to her bosom and stayed there so long, a faint ache blossomed between her thighs. He couldn't see anything—she was completely covered by the silk blouse—yet she felt bare. Naked, as if he'd loosened every button and revealed her lace-covered breasts.

His gaze slid back to her eyes, and a smirk emerged on his sensual lips. “Oh Abena, *querida*,” he purred, intensifying the ache in her loins. Swallowing, she kept her face expressionless, staring right back at him. “Why do you hide behind your diamond, pretending you're happy?” His lip curled in distaste as he glanced down at the ring on her finger.

Abena curled her hand into a fist on her lap. “I'm not pretending.”

One large foot slid between hers and forced her knees apart, his eyes boring into hers. She drew in a sharp breath, reminded of the position she'd been in on his desk two years ago in Argentina. When he'd spread her legs and put his mouth right *there*. The flesh between her thighs quivered at the memory.

“Not pretending? We both know that's a lie. Sadly, you're in denial. You accepted his ring, but we know the truth, you and I, don't we? When you wake up next to Dr. Appiah, you're filled with regret and disappointment, no? And you know why, don't you?” He paused, his eyes glinting into hers. “You're going to make me say it? Okay, I will. You're filled with regret and disappointment, *mi amor*, because no matter how perfect he looks on paper, when you're lying next to him, the only thing you can think about, is me.”

Santiago straightened and looked down at her for one long, charged moment before he walked out of the room with a confident stride.

He left Abena behind to deal with his scent lingering in the air and a deafening but telling silence filling the room. Silence that exposed the fact that she hadn't denied a single word he'd said.

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