



### **Blurb**

She offered everything he never knew he needed...

Ivy Johnson is stunned when Lucas Baylor makes an appearance at her family's event in Seattle. She hasn't seen him in nine years and never expected to again. Avoiding him is a must. She can't let him uncover her secret, but Lucas won't be denied. When her deception is revealed, it throws his life into a tailspin and forces them to face the truth of their feelings for each other—feelings they've both tried in vain to forget.

# **Unforgettable**

by Delaney Diamond

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## Chapter One

“You can’t make him love you. When the right woman comes along, he’ll do all the things for her you wish he’d do for you. And do you know why? Because she’s the one for him. Sorry darlin’—if he hasn’t changed after three years, you’re not the one.”

Enthusiastic applause followed Lucas Baylor’s latest advice to another woman struggling in her relationship. Seattle was the last stop on his multi-city tour to promote his book, *The Rules of Man*. Men were present, but the audience consisted mostly of women. The majority of them sought his advice, but a small percentage found his abrasive commentary appealing and were attracted to him because of it. They wanted to be the ones to tame him. While he had no intention of succumbing, he appreciated their efforts.

From the corner of his eye he saw his pregnant publicist, Brenda, in the shadows offstage, signaling he needed to wrap it up.

“We only have time for one more question,” he said. A wave of groans filled the auditorium.

The moderator handed the mic to a middle-aged woman in the crowd who had no business being there with that man-hating scowl on her face. He readied himself for whatever scathing remark she would make.

“Mr. Baylor,” she started, her eyes filled with anger. No doubt a man had hurt her at one time. He knew the type. “On page one-oh-five of your book, you said a man is only interested in one thing when he meets a woman. I think that’s a sexist thing to say, and it’s not only an insult to men by making them appear to have no depth, but it’s an insult to women. We have much more to offer than our bodies. We have brains and we have feelings, Mr. Baylor. Something I wonder if you know anything about.”

Catcalls, groans, and boos filled the audience.

Lucas lifted his hand to quiet them down. “Listen darlin’,” he said, slathering a thick layer of Southern accent onto his words, “when a man first meets you, he’s only interested in sex. He’s not interested in your personality. He don’t care how many degrees you have or that you’re passionate about saving the whales. He don’t care about none of that, because he don’t know you.” Chuckles of acknowledgement came from the men. “Everything he does, from opening the door to buying you dinner to pumping your gas, is an investment in time to the ultimate goal of getting in those panties.”

The men in the audience barked their agreement.

“Well, what if I just want sex?” the woman demanded, lifting her chin to a defiant angle.

“Well, if that’s all you want, go get it, then. Let me be the first to beat the other men in here to the punch...can I have your number?”

The crowd roared, and several of the men stood on their feet and started calling out to her. She actually blushed.

“I don’t get it. Are men really that shallow?” she asked.

“Shallow has nothing to do with it. We’re simple creatures. Do you want the truth or not?”

“Of course I want the truth. One of my friends—”

“Ahh, here we go. One of your friends. Let me guess, this friend is a woman, right?”

She nodded. Murmurs filled the room, and the woman looked around, her face confused. His regular fans knew he covered this topic in the book and on his blog—the danger of taking advice from other women about men instead of listening to what a man had to say for himself. She needed to hear the truth. After all, that’s why she’d come to his show.

“Women need to stop listening to their girlfriends. Am I right?” Audience members nodded their heads and clapped. When he’d received enough encouragement, Lucas lifted his hand to silence his fans. “All we ever hear from women is that we don’t talk and you want to know about our feelings. What are we thinking? And then we tell you what we want and think, but you don’t listen. You say you want to know, but you don’t, because you want to do things your way.”

He walked to the edge of the stage and looked her in the eyes. “First of all, men aren’t shallow. We just don’t complicate every little damn thing the way women do. We need two things in life, and two things only. Notice I said need. Sure, there are other things we enjoy, but we only need two things. Write this down: sex and food. That’s it. So when your man comes home from a hard day of work, don’t greet him at the door whining and complaining. Meet him at the door wearing your sexiest lingerie and a pair of stilettos so high you can barely walk in them. Give him some sex so good it blows his mind. And then fix him a damn sandwich.”

The men jumped to their feet, barking and pumping their fists. A wide grin spread across Lucas’s face, and he pumped his fist right along with them. The woman who had

spoken out flushed bright red, probably from a combination of anger and embarrassment. He winked at her and then exited the stage.

Brenda had her hands on her hips as Lucas approached her. “I can’t believe you’re still reciting the same tired line. That’s all men need, huh?”

“That’s right. Have you learned nothing hanging with me the past few years?”

She looked heavenward and shook her head. “What am going to do with you?”

“Leave your husband and run away with me?” he asked with a wolfish grin.

“Are you going to help me raise my baby?”

“Of course.”

Brenda laughed. “Coming from a man who might literally be allergic to kids, I have my doubts.”

“I’ll make an exception in your case.” He wiggled his eyebrows.

Brenda had been an early follower of his blog, and they’d met at a meet-and-greet years ago. They’d become good friends and got along so well, he couldn’t imagine having anyone else by his side during this period of success.

“Whatever.” Brenda shook her head again.

“Don’t act like my advice doesn’t work,” he said. “I helped you land your husband, didn’t I?”

“You’d like to think so, but I don’t play games.”

“It’s all games, until someone gets hurt.”

Brenda cocked her head to one side. “One day you’ll have to tell me who she is.”

“Oh brother, here we go.”

She hit him lightly on the arm. “Don’t deny it, Lucas. I know there’s a juicy story about a woman in your past. One day I’ll get it out of you.”

“There’s no story, Brenda. I just happen to be a very wise man.” He tapped a finger to his forehead.

“Mhmm.” She looped an arm through his. “Come on, you’ve got at least another hour and a half of work before we can get out of here.”

They’d set a table at the front of the auditorium with copies of his book. Though his blog had been popular, sales of *The Rules of Man* performed better than his publishers had anticipated. Lucas had found success by offering a mixture of shoot-from-the-hip honesty

and humor that resonated with males and females around the country. His popularity gained traction from his blog, *Why He Won't Marry You*, where he gave advice to his female readers.

In addition to the table with his books, several more were covered with shirts, mugs, and other items for sale. Three young women wearing black T-shirts with *Marriage Material*—his bestselling product—written in white cursive font across their breasts manned the tables.

Lucas sat down and greeted his fans, autographing books and any other items they brought over for him to sign. By the end of the night, his cheeks ached from smiling so much, and his hand had developed a slight cramp from the number of times he'd had to write his name.

Hours later, after saying good night to Brenda, a hired car took him to the Four Seasons. The hotel sat in the heart of downtown on Union Street, within easy walking distance of the waterfront and the city's other tourist attractions.

He crossed the tiled floor of the brightly lit lobby to the bank of elevators and thought about his plans for the rest of the week. He didn't have much time to rest before his flight to California for more promotional work.

He stuck his hand in his pocket and fingered the cards slipped to him by five different women who'd attended the event. He smiled to himself. He'd call one of them tomorrow. He was too tired now. His shoulders ached and his feet hurt, but tomorrow was a new day.

The elevator doors slid open, and he stepped in. He punched the number for his floor then rested his head against the wall. He closed his eyes. A radio spot first thing in the morning, a local TV show, and then the speaking engagement had made for a long day. He couldn't wait to fall into bed.

The sound of a woman's laugh made his head snap forward. He froze as the sound carried around the corner. The familiar giggle jump-started his heart and hurtled him back in time.

The laughter reached him again, this time from farther away. At the same time, the elevator started closing and shook him out of his trance. He lunged away from the wall and shoved his hands between the doors, almost crushing his fingers in his haste.

Was his mind playing tricks on him? It couldn't be her, could it? After so much time, the sound of her laughter was so familiar, as if he'd heard it just yesterday.

Unsure of the origin of the sound, he hurried in what he thought was its general direction. His heart raced as he rounded the corner and looked wildly around the lobby. At this time of night it was almost empty. A few guests were checking in, but he knew with certainty none of them owned that voice. He rushed over to the front desk.

“Excuse me, was there another woman here just now? I think I know her.”

The female clerk looked up. “Two women headed toward the front of the—”

Lucas took off before she finished, racing toward the front. He pushed through the glass doors. A family exited a taxi and two cars idled nearby. He scanned them frantically, quickly dismissing the passengers in each one.

Where was she? Had it been his imagination?

He spun in a half circle.

Just because they were in the same city didn’t mean he’d run into her.

At the end of the driveway, a black sedan waited to merge into traffic. He couldn’t see the occupants, but he made out the outline of two women. That had to be the car, but as he approached it took off. He sprinted after it and watched in dismay as the vehicle accelerated down Union Street.

“Hey!” he hollered. “Hey! Wait!” He waved his arms.

The tail lights grew smaller and smaller as the sedan drifted away. Panting, Lucas slowed to a stop and tried to catch his breath. What in the world had possessed him to chase after that car, as if he could catch it?

A car horn honked behind him and he jumped out of the way. He stood there, breathing heavily, watching the vehicle disappear from sight. His racing heart felt ready to burst out of his chest.

He wasn’t certain she was in that car or even that the voice belonged to her. Maybe her laugh wasn’t as unique as he remembered, and it *had* been nine years since he’d last heard it. Still...something inside of him said it was her. Deep in his gut, he knew.

Still slightly out of breath, Lucas trudged back to the hotel, significantly more deflated than he’d been earlier, not even sure why he’d wanted to see her so badly.

He re-entered the hotel and noticed a marquee he hadn’t paid attention to before. He walked right up to the signage and read the words announcing an anniversary reception for Full Moon beer, the popular brand of beer her family brewed. It had to have been her. She must have gone there instead of outside. His heart rate tripled again.

It didn't take him long to find the ballroom and the remainder of the party. When he arrived, two empty podiums sat on either side of the open door where greeters must have stood and checked in the guests. No one stood there now; the festivities were clearly winding down. Four people sauntered out of the ballroom and a couple chatted on the outside of the door. They paid him little attention when he walked up.

Inside the room, he ambled around the perimeter, his eyes searching, his heartbeat still abnormally fast. Then he saw her.

He almost overlooked her because her shoulder length hair was much longer now. The vision in front of him stalled his footsteps and suspended his breath for an eternity. He couldn't stop staring.

It was Ivy.

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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.

Enjoy free reads and the first chapter of all her novels on her website. Join her e-mail mailing list to get sneak peeks, notices of sale prices, and find out about new releases.

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