



Sadie Jackson's trip takes an interesting turn the night before she leaves Chicago. A chance encounter with a handsome stranger awakens her desires and just might change the entire course of her life.

Until We Meet Again by Delaney Diamond

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Chapter 1

He'd been staring at her for the past twenty minutes. Not in an impolite way, but definitely noticeable. Almost every time Sadie looked up, the man at the other end of the bar held her gaze until she averted her eyes. Other times, he seemed to study the glass of dark liquor cradled in one hand.

She looked at him because, well, he was a very attractive man. Neatly cut blonde hair, slightly darker facial hair, and no doubt a nice body beneath the powder blue dress shirt.

He looked about the same age as her son, in his late twenties or early thirties. For that reason, she couldn't understand why he was even looking at her. She certainly wasn't the most attractive woman in the place and was one of the most covered in her dark pants suit. Plenty of other women cast hungry glances in his direction and were closer to his age. So why her?

Ready to pay her tab, she waved over the bartender. Time for her to head back to the hotel. The conference was over, and this late-night drink had been a way for her to relax before going back to the room and getting ready for the trip home the next day.

"That'll be all for you?" the bartender asked.

Sadie nodded. "I'd like to close out my tab." It wasn't much of a tab. Only two drinks, but that was enough to make her feel good and warm and relaxed enough to have a good night's sleep.

The bartender drifted away and came back a few minutes later. "You're all set." He handed her the receipt and Sadie signed it.

She stood from the barstool and straightened her clothes, grabbed her purse, and came to a full stop. The younger man was standing right beside her.

"You're not about to leave, are you?" His voice held a deep timbre, and now that they were closer, she saw his eyes were powder blue to match his shirt.

"As a matter fact, I am." She couldn't explain her reaction, but she immediately felt an electric connection to this man. He was much taller than her and much broader. About six-four, she guessed. Compared to her five-ten in heels, she felt as if she had to crane her neck back to look up at him.

"Are you saying I missed my chance?" A half smile lined the left corner of his mouth.

"Your chance for what?" Energy buzzed through her as she realized he had actually come over there to speak to her. He really had been checking her out.

“A chance for me to figure out where I know you from, because I do know you.”

She hadn't heard a line like that in a long time. It was flattering that he would choose that way to approach her, but certainly not original. She was a little disappointed he didn't have a much better line.

“You can do better than that, can't you?” she asked, tilting her head to the side.

His smile broadened all the way across his lips this time. “I promise you it's not a line. I feel like I've met you before.”

“Well, we haven't met before. I think I would remember.” Sadie tucked the purse under her arm, signaling her desire to end the conversation and leave.

“You're probably right. I like to think that I'd never forget a face like yours. Had I met you before, I would have remembered every single detail. Your voice, your style.”

His gaze ran over her from head to toe and the energy surged between them.

“My style? You mean the executive woman style, covered from neck to ankle?”

“You can't deny that there's something different about you when compared to the other women here. That's another reason why I wanted to come over and talk to you.”

“Yes, there's something different about me. I'm almost twice the age of every other woman in here, and you as well.”

His eyebrows shot to the ceiling. “You're kidding.”

“I have a son your age, sweetie.”

“Is that supposed to mean something to me?”

“You would be better suited to one of the young ladies who've been eyeing you all night.”

“I think I'm old enough to know what I'm better suited for. I know what I like when I see it, and I definitely like you. If you won't have a drink with me, can I at least walk you out?”

“You're serious?”

“Very. I hate to think that I was slow to move and missed my chance to get to know you better. I'm Mark, by the way.”

Sadie opened her mouth to say her name, but at the last moment decided to exercise caution. She didn't know this man. She didn't get a creepy vibe from him, but one could never be too careful. The most charming man could be the most volatile under the right circumstance.

“Olivia,” she replied.

Amusement filled his eyes, as if he knew she'd given him a fake name. But what did he expect? She didn't know him and had no intention of getting to know him better. No reason for her to give him her real name, although she suspected that he'd given her his.

"Are you ready to go, Olivia?"

"Yes. My hotel is a few blocks from here."

"Hotel?"

"I'm here for work, and I leave tomorrow morning."

"That's too bad," he said, with what sounded like genuine disappointment.

He made her feel quite special. She hadn't felt that way in a long time. Not since the love of her life, her husband, passed away five years ago. Perhaps that was why she'd kept herself closed off since then. Bradley had been good at making her feel wanted and loved. Since his death, the efforts of other men came across as paltry substitutes, where they tried too hard or not hard enough. But this man—this younger man—displayed close to the right amount of effort.

They walked around the bar, and Mark fished a few bills from his wallet and slid them beneath his glass.

Like a gentleman, he opened the door and let her exit first. Definitely a plus, in her opinion.

Then they were walking down the street toward her hotel.

Chapter 2

“You said you’re here for work. What type of work do you do?” Mark asked.

They strolled down the sidewalk, abuzz with activity, as usual. Pedestrians passed back and forth from late night dinners or exploring the city on foot from one of the many hotels along the side streets. Chicago contained everything anyone could want—all sorts of entertainment, sporting events, diverse shopping options, and plenty of places to dine. To top it off, you got the big city feel but with a mid-western flavor. It was one of her favorite places to visit.

“I work in administration, at a university.”

“We have a little something in common, then.” He glanced at her.

“We do? Are you in administration, too?”

“No, but I’m an English professor at a small liberal arts college in California. I’m visiting my parents for the summer as I try to figure out where I want to teach next.”

“A man who knows his way with words. I better be careful around you. You’re not correcting my grammar as we speak, are you?”

“You don’t have a problem with grammar at all,” he said, giving her a sideways glance.

“How long have you been teaching?”

“Not very long. Only a couple of years since I earned my PhD.”

“In that case, you’re Dr. Mark.”

He chuckled. “Yes, and my mother is very proud, and after I earned my letters, she made sure to tell all her friends, everyone at church, even the people at the supermarket know I have a doctorate.”

They were both walking very slowly, as if neither of them wanted the conversation to end. As they neared the hotel where she stayed, Sadie experienced a sense of loss, as if they’d already parted ways. She already missed him, even though they’d only been chatting for a little while.

She stopped in front of the building, bright lights spilling from the doorway. “This is my hotel.”

He looked up at the brightly lit entrance, his face transforming into a thoughtful frown. “Would it be too much to ask you to continue walking with me, for just a few more minutes. I’ve been enjoying our conversation.”

The sincerity in his eyes moved her, but she also experienced another sensation. Doubt.

“Mark, let’s lay our cards on the table. What’s going on with you? Do you have some kind of older woman fetish?”

“Older woman fetish? Is that a thing?” Once again he looked amused.

“You’d be surprised what kind of fetishes there are. Look, this is all very flattering. And you’ve made me feel as if I’m quite the catch this evening, but this is where the game ends.”

“I don’t consider spending time with you a game, Olivia. I would like to get to know you better. I would even like for us to stay in touch, after you leave, if you’re willing.”

“You don’t even know where I live.”

He stepped closer. “Then why don’t you tell me.”

It was hard to ignore the chemistry between them, like a force of some kind, making her skin prickly and alive. “You could be a very dangerous man,” she whispered.

“What I feel is very dangerous,” he said, following her lead and speaking in a low tone. There was an earnestness in his voice and determination in the set of his square jaw. “There are charges going through me, and I can’t say that’s happened very often, can you? Do you feel any of what I feel, at all?”

Sadie swallowed, unsure how much to admit. After all, she barely knew Mark. She’d lied about her name, but didn’t see any point in lying about her attraction to him. “I know what you feel. I feel it too, and it hasn’t happened to me in a very long time.”

“When was the last time you were drawn to another person in the same way?”

“A long time ago when my husband was alive. He passed away five years ago.”

His brow wrinkled. “I’m sorry.”

Sadie looked down at her fingers. She continued to wear her wedding and engagement rings for two years after her husband passed away, but they were ringless now. “The time we had together were the best years of my life. Because of him I have two beautiful children, a boy and a girl. And he took very good care of me. I can’t complain.”

“He was a lucky man. I can already tell.”

Sadie laughed softly. “You must be quite the charmer at your college.”

“Like I said, when I see something I want, I tend to go after it.”

“And you want me.”

“From the minute I saw you at the bar, although...I feel like I’ve known you before. Maybe that’s part of why the attraction is so deep. Maybe we met in another life...?”

“Then why didn’t you approach me sooner at the bar?”

“Because I knew when I approached, I couldn’t give you any old line. And to be honest, I didn’t expect you to leave so soon.”

“So I messed up your plans.” She laughed. “Okay, Dr. Mark. You want to keep talking for a bit, let’s walk down to the waterfront.”

“I like that idea.”

He extended his arm and without hesitation, she took it. They strolled on past the hotel to continue their walk.

The power and strength of his muscles beneath the dress shirt sparked a thrill of excitement. Sadie smiled to herself. She sensed that before the night was over, she’d do something wicked and out-of-character, but anticipated the bad behavior nonetheless.

Chapter 3

Sadie's heart tripped over itself when the door closed behind them and she was ensconced in the dark hotel room with Mark—a sexy stranger she no longer considered a stranger.

She's never done anything like this before in her life. Inviting a man up to her room after meeting him in a bar and knowing him for less than two hours, was completely unheard of. But Sadie realized this was exactly what had been missing from her life. Spontaneity. A sense of excitement. Something that made her want to breathe again. Because the truth was, for the past five years, she been going through the motions. Stopped breathing. Stopped living.

For so long she'd been worried that maybe she wasn't ready to start dating again. Worried she didn't even understand the rules of dating. Yet here she was, standing in her hotel suite, body humming with desire, and a virile, younger man, looking at her as if he would tear her ass up in that bed. This was exactly what she wanted, needed. To be tossed around, to be made to feel beautiful, even if only for one night.

They removed their clothes and fell onto the bed, limbs entangled around each other in sudden urgency. His mouth plied her with a sensuous kiss as he cupped the back of her head, fingers curled into a gentle cradle against her thick hair. His skin was amazingly soft over the hard muscle. She grated her nails along the curve of his tight bottom and smoothed her palms over the hard deltoids of his back.

His mouth moved with delicious intensity over her skin, and she arched her neck into the kiss of his lips, letting out a soft moan when his hands filled with her aching breasts. Sadie twisted and turned, nipples hard, skin on fire.

Mark rolled over so that she lay on top of him, and she kissed his hairy cheek and nipped at his neck. She loved how a man smelled and missed how they tasted. Mark smelled indescribably good—a mixture of cologne and the natural scent of a man, and the taste on the tip of her tongue was salty yet sweet. The differences in textures aroused her even further, and she smoothed her hand down over his hair-sprinkled chest and over his abdomen to the tuft of hair surrounding his enlarged shaft. He gasped when she grasped him and groaned, rolling her suddenly onto her back.

His mouth and tongue moved roughly against hers. Devouring. Consuming. He traced a moist circle around a nipple before sucking it into his mouth and squeezing the other with his fingers.

“Yes,” Sadie purred, arching into him. Her hands climbed into his soft hair and cupped the back of his head to keep him in place. She could scarcely breathe. Her entire body ached so much she became one tightened mass of hunger in his arms.

The urgency in his hands increased as he grabbed her bottom and squeezed, tugging her hard against his stiffened length. Their grinding hips created a friction that made her tremble to her core, eyes shut tight as she buried her face in his neck and moaned his name like an incantation.

She watched with relief as Mark slipped on a condom. When he entered her body, the swift movement made her gasp and sink her nails into his shoulders.

“You feel incredible, Olivia,” he gasped.

Regret, for a moment, that she hadn’t heard him say her real name when the softly spoken words fell from his lips.

“So do you,” Sadie whispered, her voice trembling.

She shoved her fingers into his short, silky hair, gripping his head, and undulating her hips as a frenzy of sensation buffeted her body from head to toe. His kisses didn’t stop just because he was inside her. His rough beard feathered over her skin as he drizzled affection on her lips, her eyes, her mouth, her jaw, her throat—everywhere. Even her shoulders. Increasing the impression of absolute possession. She drowned in his touch. She drowned in *him*.

Like riding a bicycle, her body remembered everything she needed to do. She bound his waist with her legs and held him close. She bit his ear and licked his neck. She let her hands coast down over his shoulder blades to the middle of his back, over the firm, muscular flesh like someone reading braille.

She closed her eyes and memorized every contour as she rode out the powerful strokes delivered by his thrusting hips. His hard length plowed into her, sliding through her wetness. Without ceasing, their bodies moved continuously against each other, their movements becoming frenzied as her groans shifted into high-pitched whimpers.

When at last the orgasm came, it rippled with unexpected force through her hips and exploded in a cacophony of sensation that dragged a hoarse cry from the depths of her throat.

Perhaps it was the sound of her own release, or perhaps he was already very close, but Mark immediately let out a low growl, a guttural sound that filled her ears. His body tightened above hers as he let loose, gasping like a man whose breath had been snatched from his lungs.

Afterward, as they lay together, her body touching his from chest to toes, he kissed her closed lids.

Brushing back the hair from her face, he whispered, “Wow.”

Overwhelmed but satisfied, Sadie snuggled closer. She smiled. “Yeah. Wow.”

Chapter 4

Mark insisted on breakfast, and Sadie agreed. She buttered toast across from him in the suite, having ordered breakfast for two up to the room instead of going downstairs. That was a selfish act on her part. She'd wanted to spend more time with him and not get distracted by servers and other diners.

Even though she knew she'd never see him again, she didn't want the interlude to end. She wished she had met him when she first arrived in Chicago so they could have those few extra nights to enjoy each other's company. To talk. To have sex.

Mark had reawakened her sexuality, and she'd never be the same moving forward. She'd always enjoyed the act with her husband. He was, however, the only man she'd ever had intercourse with. But Mark was good. Gentle and considerate, but giving her intensity and roughness when she needed it.

They made love twice last night. She'd initiated the second time. Waking up to his warm body next to hers, she'd immediately become aroused and woke him up with kisses and her hands stroking over his firm body. In the dark, their bodies had joined together again, hard rubbing soft, hairy against smooth. Until another orgasm had soared within them both, leaving them once again gasping and laughing at the pleasure they'd experienced.

"Why were you in the bar last night?" Sadie asked.

"Trying to get away from my crazy family for a little bit." Mark laughed softly. "I come from a big family, and I needed time alone from them. I love coming to visit, but they can be a bit much."

"I understand. I don't have a very big family, but they can be a bit much, too."

They both laughed.

They ate in silence for a few minutes before he broke it.

"When can I see you again?"

Sadie sipped her coffee and then set the cup carefully in the saucer. "You can't."

"Olivia—"

"This was a one-time thing."

"Did you not enjoy yourself?"

"Yes. Absolutely. I enjoyed myself much more than I expected." Fortunately, her dark complexion hid the heat that rose in her cheeks. "But realistically, we both know there's nothing

that's going to come from this. You go back to California and your job search, and I'll go back to my very sedate life as a mother and administrator."

He rested his forearms on the table, angling his body toward her. "It doesn't have to be that way."

"It does. You're young, you have your whole life ahead of you. I've lived my life."

"You talk as if you're dying. You can't be much older than fifty, and I'm only saying that because you told me you have a son my age."

"I'm much older than fifty." Sadie clasped her hands on the table. "Listen, I don't do casual. At my age, I want something more, something more meaningful. A relationship. Companionship."

"And you think you can't have a meaningful relationship with a man my age. Period." His eyebrows arched down over his nose and he sounded offended.

"Like I said, you have your whole life ahead of you. You should marry someone your own age, have your own kids."

"I didn't say anything about marriage. I just want to get to know you better."

"Isn't that part of the problem? At my age, I'm thinking about marriage. I'm thinking long term."

Mark let out a harsh breath. "I enjoyed myself with you and our conversation, and I want to see you again. I want to make love to you again. I want to be *inside* you again. If you enjoyed yourself, why wouldn't you want to do the same?"

"I do want to do the same."

"Then..." Exasperation laced his voice.

What was the hesitation? They couldn't work.

"You live in California. I live in Georgia. We live on opposite sides of the country. If that's not enough, the age difference is a factor. I know it doesn't mean much to you," she said, holding up a hand as he opened his mouth to object, "but it is a problem for me. I have to be realistic, and I know myself. I don't want to get my emotions tangled up in a man I don't have a future with. What happened last night was special to me, yes, because I've never experienced anything like that before. You have no idea what you've done for me, and I appreciate it. You've lit a spark that makes me realize I can go back out there and start dating again."

"I suppose I should be happy I made such a difference in your life. But in all honesty, I'm jealous of the man who gets to be with you after me. I feel as if I've paved the way, not for myself,

but for someone else to slip in. That doesn't make me very happy." He tossed a crumpled napkin onto the table.

Goodness, he was charming. She was almost tempted to give in. But she knew she couldn't. It didn't make sense. *They* didn't make sense.

"Can we at least exchange numbers?" he asked.

"No," she said softly. She stretched her hand across the table and held his. He squeezed her fingers.

"I have to admit that I'm extremely disappointed, but I understand," he said.

"Thank you."

They finished breakfast. When they went downstairs, he helped her put her luggage into the taxi. They then held hands for long seconds, staring into each other's eyes.

"Thank you," he said.

"For what?"

"You were just what I needed, too. Now I know what to look for in the next woman I date. I need the same spark. I believe it can happen again, but the next woman has a tough job making me feel the same way I did with you."

Sadie stroked his jaw and raised up on her toes. They kissed gently before pulling apart.

"Until we meet again," Mark said, his gaze holding hers.

How sweet. He believed they would see each other again. Maybe. As far as she was concerned, if it was meant to be, then they would.

"Until we meet again," she repeated.

Sadie climbed into the taxi and waved goodbye as they pulled away. The visit had turned into a much better trip than she'd ever expected, but as she settled into the seat, a smile of regret touched her lips and an ache settled in her chest.

Should she have at least exchanged numbers with Mark? Had she made a mistake?

Chapter 5

Sadie sipped coffee looking out the kitchen window of her little ranch house in a suburb of Atlanta. Outside, her son, Bradley, Jr., was washing her car. He'd become protective ever since his father passed away, taking over the tasks Senior used to do when he was alive.

Her daughter lived in New York, but she suspected Bradley remained in the Atlanta area because he wanted to stay close and worried about her being alone. Not just being alone in the house, but being alone in general. In fact, a year ago he suggested she start dating again, something that had seemed out of the question before. Over thirty years with the same person could do that to you. It seemed as if no one else could compare, but six weeks after her one-night stand in Chicago, she knew that wasn't true.

She still relived those moments with Mark. The conversation, the sex. Mind-blowing sex that still made her body pulse with heat at the memory of it. She hadn't told a soul. Not even her best friend, Gail, who would probably yell at her for keeping such a juicy secret. She might tell her one day, but not yet.

Sadie poured the rest of her coffee down the drain and stepped away from the window. One of Bradley's friends was coming over in a little bit. Someone from his college days. They hadn't been particularly close, but they'd lived in the same dorm and run in the same circles. Apparently the young man had recently moved to the area. They ran into each other at one of the hardware stores.

She pattered around the kitchen, doing a little cleanup for the company that was to arrive, and then went into her office with a fresh cup of coffee. Donning glasses, she sat behind the desk and started to read essays written by her summer students. As the chair of the African-American Studies department at Emory University, she taught one summer course, not out of obligation but out of a desire to share the history and culture of African peoples with her students. So many students, of all races, had a limited knowledge of the roles blacks played in the building of this country. She took great pleasure in sharing stories about the statesmen, entrepreneurs, laborers, extended families, and brave soldiers that lay hidden in the annals of U.S. history.

Thirty minutes after she began to work, she heard her son's voice. "Mom! My friend's here. Where are you?"

"In my office. I'll be right there."

Sadie removed her glasses and stood, grabbing the now lukewarm leftover coffee before walking down the hall into the small kitchen. When she saw the man standing behind her son, she

froze. Heat flushed her skin and her lips parted in surprise. The cup dropped and splintered into pieces on the tile.

“Mom!” Bradley rushed over. “Don’t move.”

Sadie stared at the man in the doorway, who also stared back at her, surprise in his powder blue eyes. Mark, looking just as impressive as the day she’d left him on the steps of the hotel. His blonde hair was cut a little short, his beard trimmed neater, but it was him. Tall, handsome, and very fine looking in a chest-hugging T-shirt and worn jeans.

She edged out of the way as her son quickly mopped up the spilled drink with a towel and swept up the shards of glass with a dustpan and broom. By the time he was finished, Sadie had managed to fix her face into an expression that no longer registered surprise, and so did Mark.

Her son took a deep breath. “Okay, now that’s out of the way.” Grinning, he looped an arm around her shoulders. “Mom, this is Mark Sullivan--*Doctor* Mark Sullivan. We went to school together. You probably don’t remember him, but when you and dad dropped me off at college, Mark was one of the people hanging out in the main sitting area. You know, where students were huddled together eating pizza and playing cards and all that? Anyway, after you and Dad left, I hung out with him and a few other guys. That’s how we met.”

“Y-you were there when I dropped off my son?” Sadie asked.

“Yes,” Mark answered.

That explained why she looked vaguely familiar to him. But she hadn’t seen him or she would have remembered his face, his body. Or maybe she did see him, but he’d been much younger then, probably without a beard, maybe leaner. She barely remembered that day, it was so long ago, but she did have a distinct memory of the heartache and worry she experienced leaving her eighteen-year-old behind. She’d even cried a little on the way home.

“Mark, this is my mother, Dr. Sadie Jackson, chair of the African-American Studies department at Emory University.”

Would he out her? Would he disclose to her son that not only had she lied about her name, but that they’d spent the night together?

“Nice to meet you. Your son has said so many good things about you, I feel as if I already know you.”

“It’s nice to meet you, too.”

They shook hands like strangers, but there was nothing strange about the pulse of electricity on her skin when they touched. She stifled a moan at the way her body came alive. Her palms heated and a gentle throb emerged between her thighs as if he'd touched her there.

Overwhelmed, Sadie pulled back and curled her fingers into a fist at her hip.

"Mark, let me take a run to the bathroom real quick, then we can head out," Bradley said.

"Where are you going?" Sadie faced her son in an effort to beat back the uncontrollable way she'd reacted to Mark.

"He just moved here, so I'm going to show him some of the sights. Oh, Mom, you could probably help him get acclimated to his new job. That's why I wanted you to meet. He just accepted a position in the English department at Emory. You guys are going to be co-workers." Bradley grinned. "Be back in a second."

Sadie waited until she heard the door close before she ventured a look at Mark.

"So we meet again, *Sadie*," he said, a soft smile coming over his face.

She didn't miss the emphasis on her name. Meeting him again was incredible. What were the chances?

"I was right. I did recognize you. I knew I could never forget a face like yours," Mark whispered.

Sadie put a hand to her throat, unable to digest that he was really standing there, in her kitchen, looking as if he wanted to sweep her up in his arms. "It seems you were right. So, you'll be working at Emory?"

"Yes."

"And you're friends with my son."

He nodded.

She didn't know what to think about any of this. She certainly couldn't tell her son about the night she spent with Mark. That would be too awkward. What would the conversation be like? *Oh honey, by the way, I had a one-night stand with your friend, Mark.*

But at the same time, she knew her life was about to change drastically. In the weeks since she'd slept with him, she'd been on a grand total of two dates and neither had been as fulfilling or interesting as the night she spent with Mark.

And now, here he was before her again, their lives somehow intertwined. Could it be Fate, bringing them back together again?

This time she couldn't escape. This time, she didn't want to.

Sadie allowed herself a smile. “I’m...very happy to see you again. Welcome to Atlanta.”

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