



Blurb

Julia Newman doesn't have time for love. Been there, done that, and she's got the scars to prove it. Instead, she's focused on her career. For the past few years, she has been living the life she wants. She drives a silver Mercedes, just purchased a four bedroom house in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia, and she's on her way to becoming the youngest female partner in the history of the venture capitalist firm where she works. Life couldn't be better. Or so she thought.

Frederico "Freddie" Mendoza is the owner of Mendoza Construction. He hasn't given up on love, but he is fed up with women who are fascinated by the fantasy of being with a blue collar man and then relegate him to a certain part of their lives. His newest customer, Julia Newman, is the kind of woman he's decided he'll avoid from now on. He needs to work on expanding his business. Besides, she's not his type. Or so he thought.

Worth Waiting For

by Delaney Diamond

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Delaney Diamond

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Chapter One

The sound of thunder rumbled across the sky and the heavy downpour increased in response, severe and unyielding in the attack of everything that failed to get out of its path.

“Great.”

Julia Newman cursed herself yet again for not taking the time to empty the two-car garage of all the furniture and fixtures stored in it from the last house. On a day like today, when she didn't have an umbrella, sliding into the garage would have been a welcome relief from being drenched by the torrential rain.

She hurried toward the front door of her house as quickly as her slim legs could propel her. Her favorite black purse slipped from her shoulder, and she grappled with it, trying not to drop the two paper sacks filled with groceries. Balancing one bag on her hip, she twisted her body, shoved the key in the hole, and pushed open the door. Inside, she rested the soaked bags and her purse on the table against the wall.

She stepped out of her pumps and moaned in relief, wiggling the toes on her aching feet. With her feet planted on the hardwood floor, she picked up the paper sacks and proceeded to the kitchen down the hall to the right.

She unpacked the groceries, making sure to leave out the small tray of vegetables and ranch dressing she'd picked up for dinner. Settling onto one of the stools around the island with a bottle of water from the refrigerator, she proceeded to return the ten texts sent by her subordinates in the time it took her to travel from the grocery store to home.

Checking voice messages was the next task.

“Hi, Sugar Plum, this is your Dad.” As if she wouldn't recognize his voice. Who else would be calling her Sugar Plum? Julia smiled as she rolled her neck to ease the tense muscles. “It's raining awful hard out there, so I'm spending the night at Martin's after our card game. It's too dangerous to drive in this kind of weather at night. I'll give you a call later and let you know if my plans change. Love you.”

Maybe I'll have a glass of wine and watch a movie, Julia thought.

With her father spending the night at his friend's, she would have the house to herself for the first time since they moved in three months ago. After her hectic day, she welcomed the thought of relaxing in front of the fireplace and watching a movie alone.

The next message started. "Hello, Ms. Newman," an unfamiliar male voice said. "I'm sorry I'm running late. My last appointment went longer than planned, and traffic is backed up on the highway. I'm on my way there and should arrive soon. If you prefer to wait until tomorrow, give me a call and I'll stop by first thing in the morning before I head to any of my other jobs." The male voice then rattled off a number.

"Dang it!"

Julia hopped from the bar stool and made a dash toward the master bedroom on the main floor. She'd forgotten someone from Mendoza Construction was coming by to give her an estimate on finishing the basement. Calling him to cancel was out of the question because she wanted the work to start in a couple of weeks. She stripped off her wet blouse and skirt and pulled on a pair of faded blue jeans and a button-down, long-sleeved green shirt.

Fortunately for her, the heavy rain, which had turned her normal thirty minute commute and Friday night stop at the grocery store into a two hour affair, had also forced him to be delayed. As always, whenever a heavy rain fell in Atlanta, accidents cropped up on the highway like weeds, and traffic slowed as rubberneckers ogled the collisions. If she hadn't gotten familiar with taking the back roads after she purchased the house, she'd probably still be stuck on the highway instead of being at home.

Julia brushed the sides of her damp hair, patting the tightly held French roll as if it was about to slip out of place. Moments later, the doorbell rang.

At the front door, she peered through the peep hole.

"Yes?" she called cautiously.

She couldn't see the face of the man standing outside. All she had was a distorted view of his chin and chest, and since night had fallen, she wanted to be sure it was Mr. Mendoza before she opened the door.

"Good evening. Ms. Newman? It's Frederico Mendoza, with Mendoza Construction."

Julia undid the lock and swung open the door.

She drew a silent, involuntary breath at his height. Behind him, big drops of rain sluiced down against the backdrop of the black sky. She stepped back to allow him space to enter.

Tall, lean, and wiry, Frederico Mendoza's shoulders practically spanned the width of the foyer. He certainly commanded attention. She guessed his height at six-foot-two or six-foot-three, giving him a height advantage of seven or eight inches over her.

"Sorry about coming by so late. It couldn't be avoided."

Warm brown eyes smiled into hers, and Julia lost her voice. When she caught herself, she offered a faint smile. "No problem."

It wasn't often Julia found herself robbed of speech. In her position as principal at her firm, she long ago learned to speak up in a room full of men. It was unsettling to have this man render her speechless.

"It's really bad out there," he said.

A musky combination of rain, sweat and dirt emanated from him. Rather than being repulsed by it, she found it somewhat appealing. Her gaze fell to the tattoo of a Puerto Rican flag on his sculpted right arm, revealed because the sleeves of his blue T-shirt were cut off.

His olive skin glistened from the layer of water coating it, and his wet shirt clung to his chest, hinting at more muscles underneath. While he politely wiped his feet on the rug, she continued her shameless perusal.

He was certainly good-looking, in a rough sort of way. A real man's man, with a rugged square jaw and big hands. His ebony hair, pulled back into a curly ponytail, had beads of water dotted throughout, as if someone had glued tiny diamonds to random strands.

Without warning, he lifted his gaze from the rug, and the heat of embarrassment coursed up her neck and into her cheeks.

"Um, well, thank you for coming despite the weather, Mr. Mendoza," she said, affecting a brisk tone.

She was irritated with herself. Her breathless response made her sound like a teenage girl trying to play grown up when encountered by her crush. Time to pull herself together.

She stuck out her hand. "I'm Julia Newman."

"Frederico Mendoza. But please, call me Freddie. Everyone else does."

When he took her hand, the rough texture of his skin suggested years of labor and hard work. Warmth which had originally settled along her neck and face transferred to the hand he held in his. Little sparks scurried toward her shoulder, setting off alarm bells that she was way too attracted to this man.

With an abrupt tug, she severed contact and freed herself from the invasive warmth activated by the innocuous touch. “If you’re ready, I’ll take you downstairs and show you the basement.”

Freddie nodded. His inviting, sensuous lips turned up in a smile. Julia moved to the basement door, determined to ignore the fluttering in her stomach.

Perturbed by her silly response to a complete stranger, her hand gripped the handrail on the way down the staircase. She shoved aside her feelings. She hadn’t been attracted to a man in a long time, and in walks a tall, strapping, blue collar type. It was the uniqueness of it all. That must be it.

She didn’t want to be bothered with men, choosing instead to concentrate on her career. Once she had been foolish, had placed her dreams on hold in exchange for being supportive of the man in her life and the certainty of a future together—which hadn’t been certain at all.

She brushed off her instant attraction for Mr. Mendoza and saw it for what it was: an abnormal occurrence best ignored. At this point in her life, she was happy. Men brought nothing but complications, and she didn’t have time for complications.

Freddie Mendoza followed the attractive black woman down the steep staircase into the heart of her basement. He had been working all day, and he smelled like it. Considering how dirty and unkempt he looked, it was a wonder she had even let him in.

The handshake had unsettled him. She had shaken his hand with a firm, confident pumping motion, yet incongruously, her skin was soft and her fingers delicate to the touch.

He tended to like his women with more meat on their bones, but something about her captured and held his attention. Maybe it was those dark brown eyes of hers, set in a vibrant face the color of an unshelled walnut. A man could lose himself in those eyes. He’d noticed them the minute he stepped through the door, framed by thick lashes that looked like they’d been brushed with charcoal, right under perfectly arched brows. Or maybe it was her immaculate coiffed hair, black except for the auburn highlights illuminated by the overhead light and pulled back from her heart-shaped face in a tight, neat style.

He studied her clothing. Her plain-looking shirt, buttoned to the collar, was tucked into the waistband of a pair of jeans painted on her small body. From his vantage point

behind her, he had a good view of surprisingly shapely hips and thighs on such a slim woman.

He smiled to himself. She was definitely easy on the eyes.

“This is the space,” Julia said.

They walked through the unfinished area, and she pointed out where she wanted to have the various rooms. Her vision included the creation of an office suite and kitchenette. One of the rooms could become a movie room with a large screen and surround sound, perfect for when her nieces and nephews spent the night or weekend.

Using a laser tool, Freddie took measurements and wrote everything down on a notepad. Periodically, he asked questions to be sure he understood her needs.

“What kind of work do you do?” he asked at one point.

“I’m a venture capitalist.”

He glanced over his shoulder at her with a quizzical expression. “I’ve heard of that, but what exactly do you guys do? You invest in businesses, right?”

“Yes, but not just any businesses,” Julia replied. “We invest in businesses with a potential to make a lot of money in a short amount of time. My firm concentrates on technology companies. Investors are taking a huge risk, and they expect a huge reward in return.”

Freddie nodded as he scribbled on his pad. His movements caused the muscles in his arms to bunch as he wrote, and Julia was overtaken by the insane impulse to smooth the tips of her fingers along the flexed tissue to see if it was as firm to the touch as it appeared. She wished now she hadn’t worn the long-sleeved shirt. She felt rather warm.

When he finished, they migrated back over to the staircase.

“Well?” Julia asked. “How long do you think this will take?”

“I should have the entire basement done for you in about six weeks.” He looked down at his notepad and wrote something, then looked up at her again. “When would you like to get started?”

His arresting dark gaze sent a tingle down the length of her spine. Goodness, she needed to get out more.

“I’d like to get started in about two weeks.”

Freddie nodded. “No problem. I’ll work up an estimate and email the entire package with sketches on Monday. You can put your email address right here.”

He moved closer, and Julia took the notepad. His scent—the scent of a man who had worked all day—crowded out her ability to think. Focusing proved difficult, and she almost forgot her email address.

“There,” she said, giving him the notepad once her memory returned. It was time to get him out of the house.

He looked at what she wrote. “Great. That’s all I need for now.”

Julia led him back up the stairs to the first floor.

At the door, he turned to her. “I’ll be in touch next week, Ms. Newman,” he promised, offering her another one of his warm smiles.

“Please, call me Julia.” Calling her by her last name seemed way too formal, and since he would be in and out of her home for at least six weeks, they could be on friendlier terms.

“All right...Julia.” It was the first time she’d notice any semblance of an accent. He made the “i” in her name sound more like an “ee” sound. In fact, her entire name sounded like music when he said it. It was different. She liked it. Too much.

Julia didn’t respond, choosing instead to close the door swiftly behind him once he stepped back out into the rain-filled night. She stood there for a moment with her hand on the doorknob after he left, trying to understand why her pulse was racing.

Freddie bobbed his head to the sound of the reggaeton CD blaring through the speakers of his charcoal gray pickup. For some reason his thoughts continued to drift back to Julia Newman.

She was attractive but not in an overt way. She wasn’t the kind of woman who would turn heads in a crowd, but she couldn’t be overlooked, either. Despite the hard as nails exterior, he couldn’t help feeling as if she needed protecting. It was odd, but that was his first impression of her.

Then his hormones took over. She may not be his type, but that didn’t prevent his imagination from running rampant with thoughts he shouldn’t have about a future client. He didn’t doubt her attraction to him, too. He caught her staring in the foyer.

Successful, independent women like Julia Newman often had a thing for men like him, which was the problem. It was only “a thing.” That’s why he didn’t date her type anymore. They liked the thrill of dating a blue collar man but when it came time for the friends and family introductions, they couldn’t go through with it.

He wouldn’t be going down that road again. He had more important things to worry about, like expanding his business.

Freddie cranked up the music even louder to drown out his thoughts.

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About the Author

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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