

Her Secret Submission

By

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Chapter 1

“And there’s no possible way I can get out of this, I take it?”

It was the genuine reluctance in her voice that had him looking up at her from the papers he had been shuffling absently through while talking to her. It struck him as odd in several ways, not the least of which was the fact that his sturdy, dependable, blend into the scenery, gal Friday of a secretary had rarely exhibited even this relatively mild amount of emotion about anything to do with her job. Much less, coming dangerously close to balking at the idea of something as mundane as going on a business trip with him.

She’d been with him for, what, more than seven years now? It had to be. Bryce frowned. Hadn’t he dragged her along with him before now? But as he thought back, he realized that he hadn’t. Life and work were so seamlessly interconnected nowadays that it hadn’t really been necessary, he guessed. And, if he was pushed to admit it, she really didn’t have to come this time, either. He had just remembered that she was a military brat – her dad had been in the Air Force, if he remembered correctly – and she had lived all over the United States and Europe. Since this contract would be the biggest they’d ever landed, and it involved the Air Force in particular, he intended to take advantage of every possible edge he could.

Perhaps that was the reason why she obviously preferred not to travel now, having had enough of it as a kid. It was the only explanation he could come up with. Not that he was going to let her get out of it that easily, regardless.

Or at all, if his crotch had anything to say about it. That thought startled him even more than her unusual reaction intrigued him. There had never been even the slightest whiff of attraction between them. Lia Keene was an excellent, highly competent secretary. Sometimes he swore she could even read what little was left of his mind at this point, almost always anticipating what he wanted before he asked, and, he knew, discreetly doing her best to make sure that he was as comfortable as she could make him in the process.

All purely platonically, of course. She knew all of his preferences and peccadilloes; she knew that he took his coffee unadulterated, that he liked rooms colder than was comfortable for most people, hated breakfast meetings and that he was allergic to shellfish. She knew his hat,

shirt, suit and shoe sizes, along with all of his business and most of his personal financial account numbers, as well as the pins to all of his credit and debit cards. And she knew that his family nickname – which he absolutely detested and, of course, his younger brother Ian used at every possible opportunity – was Bubba.

And yet he couldn't really remember ever having specifically told her any of that information. She just seemed to absorb everything she was told and remember it, even if it was only mentioned once, offhandedly, in the most casual of remarks.

But what did he know about her, really, beyond the small amounts of pat information that her job application and resume revealed about her? Precious little, especially in comparison. He knew she had graduated from college summa cum laude from the University of Vermont, with a degree in something liberal artsy, if he remembered correctly – history, he thought. The only way he'd know her birthday would be if he looked it up in her file. He had no idea how she even took her coffee – or if she drank it at all, for that matter – and he certainly didn't know any of her clothing sizes.

The rogue thought of what his prim Ms. Keene might look like in just her bra and panties as she stood in front of her closet and decided what woodwork-shaded suit she should don that morning hit him like a bolt of lightning that touched down right at the base of his genitals, immediately setting them swelling to a most uncomfortable point. Somewhat disconcerted by his reaction, Bryce pulled himself forward a bit, so that his raging erection couldn't be detected and asked casually, "Why would you want to?"

He'd never seen that particular expression on her face, however fleeting. It reflected discomfort and disconcertion, as well as a touch of sheer annoyance before she brought that perfect mask back down over her equally perfect porcelain skin.

Another new facet revealed, however reluctantly. Bryce found his interest piqued, even against his better judgment. He knew better than to indulge in office romances. They always ended badly, and he certainly didn't want to lose the woman who was his right arm. And, besides, she knew too damned much about the business – to say nothing of him, personally – to let that happen, anyway.

He was as much of a xenophobe as his job allowed him to be. And, with his success, he'd found that it was becoming easier and easier to just surround himself with really capable people and turn them loose on the crap that he used to hate doing, but which they seemed to thrive on.

The last thing he wanted to do – especially with negotiations being as delicate as they were – was to have to break in someone new.

Bryce hated to admit it – okay, no, he really didn't – but he wasn't the easiest of people to work for, and that was another of the things that made Lia so blasted irreplaceable – she was damned near unflappable. When he stormed around the place – which, granted, he didn't do too often – she didn't duck under her desk or up and resign, as some had before her. She remained a calm, soothing influence, usually making soft, pithy suggestions about what could be done to rectify whatever snafu he was annoyed about. But she was always able to gage his reaction well enough to know when to retreat before that famous temper turned his attentions from whoever had screwed up to the person who was standing in front of him.

Wait a minute. Bryce had been so preoccupied with his thoughts that the deep rose color that had risen in those apple cheeks had nearly gone by unnoticed. Had his innocent question made her blush? And why?

It was Lia's turn to shift uncomfortably. She didn't know why it was that this subject seemed to lend itself more readily to embarrassment on her part. He certainly had no idea why she was blushing suddenly, although she would have given a year's salary to be able to turn it off. The man in front of her was a well seasoned hunter, and she had been very careful for the past almost eight years to make sure that he had never scented her.

Until now. She had inadvertently engaged his interest by challenging him about the trip, and although that was the last thing she wanted to do, she couldn't really see any way around it. She felt cornered, no matter the innocence of his request, but then she knew it really wasn't a request, anyway, and maybe that was the problem.

He would expect her to acquiesce to his wishes. *Bend to his will, you mean*, her dirty little mind supplied with entirely too much pleasure. He wanted her to *submit* to him.

And the mere thought had her spasming in her chair – alarmingly so. All of the calm, quiet reserve she had so carefully cultivated around him over the past almost decade was in real jeopardy, because this was the first time she'd even come close to challenging him about much of anything. There hadn't been a need to until now. She'd worked late when he needed her to, but thankfully, since he was the head of the company, those instances were few and far between, and had happened not to conflict with her... extra-curricular activities. And, although he had mentioned occasionally that he might have to have her accompany him on a business trip, it

hadn't happened. Besides, the plans for those trips would have been made well in advance, allowing her more than enough time to rearrange what she needed to in her private life.

Unfortunately, things were moving much more quickly than expected in regards to this government and municipal contract, and their most serious rival had caught wind of the project that Tanner, Inc. had just begun to think they might have all wrapped up. So it was all hands on deck. Everyone who was anyone in the company was going down to Albuquerque tomorrow to make sure that this project – along with its tidy amount of money – didn't slip through their fingers, including the Big Man himself, her boss, Bryce Tanner.

And that wasn't just a casual referral to the fact that he owned the whole circus. It was the perfect description of him physically, as well. Not many men could fill his shoes – they were a positively ridiculous size 14EEE. She'd once thought that he might have better luck in clown shoes, but she'd wisely kept it to herself.

And, according to the scuttlebutt around the office, that shoe size was no lie, in more ways than one. Not that he made a habit of dipping his wick into the secretarial pool, or the boardroom or anywhere else around the company. In fact, he had a strict personal rule against that kind of thing, and although he encouraged that others adopt the same attitude, he didn't insist upon it.

But he wasn't the one to come running to when things got messy. He expected his employees to expend all of their considerable energies working for the company, not working through a failed relationship.

Not that he was a saint in the least, either. He just kept his dalliances well away from the office, for which Lia had been eternally grateful. She'd been wet for him from day one, and that was bad enough in and of itself. Having to watch a slow parade of women – this one took his time; no wham bam thank you ma'am for him – in various stages of involvement with him would have driven her right past the bottle to some sort of dramatic and ostentatious way of offing herself, she was sure. Perhaps draping herself, nude over his desk while impaling herself on his letter opener, or something equally as messy and histrionic.

And she knew that, whatever she might have done, he would probably have simply worked around her, especially if they were under any kind of a deadline.

And there was *always* a deadline.

“Lia?” He sounded less than patient, and more than a little surprised at her inattention.

She was barely able to drag her thoughts away from the stark idea of being displayed for his delectation on that big desk that was right in front of her – fully alive, of course – and dripping inconveniently onto the expensive finish. Would he ask her to move and simply use a Kleenex to mop up the evidence of her desire for him, or would he put his face between her open legs and lean down to nip it at its source?

She was staring at the spot right in front of where he was sitting. At first he wondered if he had a stain on his shirt; her gaze was so intent, but then he realized that she wasn't looking at him. "Lia!"

That seemed to snap her out of whatever funk she'd gotten into. She was acting very strangely, and he didn't like it one bit.

Oh dear. He never yelled, and, in truth, he really hadn't this time, but he certainly did sound more impatient than he ever had before with her. "Sorry, Sir. I was thinking about the arrangements I'll need to make. This is awfully short notice, and I'm not sure that I'm going to be able—"

He didn't bother to apologize for interrupting her, but he wasn't going to take no for an answer. "Whatever it's going to cost you, charge it to the company – change your dental appointment, board your cat, whatever." As far as he was concerned, the subject of whether or not she was going to accompany him was closed.

But it wasn't as far as Lia was concerned, apparently. "I don't own a cat, Sir, but I do have... other considerations."

He glared up at her from the papers he'd already returned to, saying, "Like I said, Lia. Charge it to the company, whatever it is. I don't care."

To his surprise, he'd made her blush again – twice within less than ten minutes, when he couldn't recall her ever blushing around him before. What was her problem?

"It's not the expense, Sir, it's—"

Bryce pushed himself away from his desk and turned his full attention back to his secretary, who sat there as stolidly as she always had, except that he had never seen that slender neck and those rounded cheeks quite so vibrantly red, nor seen her twisting the small silver ring that had appeared recently on her right pinky finger. Lia never fidgeted and never blushed, and for some reason a business trip was making her do both. "All right, Lia. What's the problem

here? Surely the words ‘some travel required’ appeared in the job description when you applied? If not, then I’m sure ‘all other duties as assigned’ would cover this situation.”

Sarcasm noted, she thought to herself. “Yes, but you’ve never had me go in seven and a half years.”

“And it might be another seven and a half before I ask you again.” Bryce wasn’t much bothering to hide his annoyance at how she was making what should have been a routine situation into a big thing. It was very unlike her. “But this time, I want you with me. What’s the roadblock? You have a sick mother who needs round the clock care? Hire a nurse and charge it to the company. Temperamental iguana? Charge the pet sitter to the company. Jealous boyfriend?” He tossed it at her with a bit of a smile, as if they were going to have a small laugh about the possibility of her having a boyfriend at all, much less a jealous one.

“Not exactly,” she murmured, deliberately looking away from him. But then she continued with a tone that he did not appreciate, that was dangerously close to annoyed right back at him, “But as hard as it might be to imagine, I *do* have a life outside this office. And traveling on such short notice is going to be... inconvenient for me.”

He’d never had to do this before with her, but he came out from behind his desk and stood next to her, arms folded across his chest, not making any attempt at being anything other than what he was – a physically imposing sight. “And I trust that I pay you more than enough to cover any such *inconveniences*, Miss Keene?”

He never called her that. She’d been Lia from day one. She, on the other hand, despite his admonishments that she should use his first name, had insisted on calling him Sir, and he had found that he had grown to like it. It added a certain something he couldn’t put his finger on, however old fashioned.

Lia knew her blush had just deepened to an alarming proportion. She couldn’t help it. He had a deep, growly tone some times – one that heretofore she hadn’t been on the receiving end of – and it sounded so quintessentially dominant that she was practically orgasming in her chair while he stared angrily down at her.

She knew how he expected her to answer him. He expected her to acquiesce. And she knew she didn’t have much choice about it. He was right; he paid her an exorbitant amount of money to do what she did – more than enough to put up with a bit of inconvenience.

But she didn't have to like it, and when she said, "Yes, Sir," she did it with a sigh loud enough to let him know, in no uncertain terms, that she wasn't happy that he was insisting.

Bryce didn't much care whether she was happy. Well, that wasn't quite true. He wanted her to like her job, and so far she had always seemed to. What bee had gotten into her bonnet today? But when it came down to it, he needed her on this trip and that was that.

"Where are we meeting tomorrow morning? Here?"

As he settled back into his chair, he said, "Oh, I'll come by and pick you up in the company limo. We'll ride to the airport together. That way you don't have to bother with parking and all of that hassle."

"No, that's okay. I can meet you there." She did *not* want to run the risk that he might somehow end up in her apartment. He might not know exactly what he was looking at, but there were clues about her... interests – some more blatant than others – all over her place and she didn't want to have to run around trying to vanilla it up. She knew she'd miss something, somewhere along the line, and there were things in her house that she really didn't want him seeing. He was much too smart a cookie; he'd figure her out in about five seconds, and she'd have to find another job. She couldn't imagine working for him if he knew her tastes. It would be too squicky for words, especially since she'd been massively turned on by him ever since they'd met.

And he'd starred in the majority of even her nastiest fantasies.

But there was no way anything like that was ever going to happen in real life – not that it ever would. She knew who she was, and where she came from, and there was no way that someone like him – who had grown up with money and prestige – was ever going to be interested in someone like her, except for maybe some quick roll in the hay that they'd both regret later.

But it was his company; she knew that she would be the one who would have to leave the best job she'd ever had when it came to its inevitable conclusion.

Nope. Not going to happen.

She had been so lost in her thoughts and worries about his potential discovery of her more prurient pursuits that she hadn't realized that he hadn't responded to her flat denial of his offer. And when she came out of her reverie, it was to realize that he had been staring at her the

whole time with his chin tucked down just a bit, eyebrows raised, in that classic Dom look that had her insides melting even more than they already were.

“What?” she asked, preferring to play dumb.

“I’m not going to play games with you, Lia. I’m going to pick you up tomorrow at seven. Be ready.”

She opened her mouth to argue, but closed it again when that look darkened considerably.

“Say ‘Yes, Sir,’ ” he prompted.

Her eyes widened. He had never before commanded her to do anything like that. She knew that he didn’t necessarily like her formality in addressing him, but it was yet another way to keep him at arms’ length, and to pander – just a little – to her own fantasies without anyone being the wiser.

“Yes, Sir,” she whispered softly, getting up and casually glancing at the cushion of the chair she’d occupied, gratified to know that there wasn’t a giant wet spot there, like she had been quite sure there would be.

“...and when did I tell you this report was due, Lia?”

The dream really had no beginning, but then, that was not necessary for it to achieve its goal, either. She had transitioned from a surprisingly pleasant dinner with her dead parents to the office, where she was standing in front of his desk – dressed, but not quite fully. She detected an immediate lack of underthings – no bra, no panties, as he required of her while they were in the office alone – and that inherent vulnerability made her want to cover herself, somehow. She wanted to shield herself from his gaze, as if he had x-ray vision, although she knew that that action would only make things worse for her if she followed through and did it. And, since it appeared that she was already in some sort of trouble, she wisely kept her hands at her sides. He would never allow her to get away with trying to be modest around him, no matter what her instincts said. She felt horribly exposed, although the clothes she was wearing were as prim and proper as ever. She just didn’t feel that they managed to cover her in the least, as if they were sheer to him, but not to her.

The usual comfy chairs were conspicuously absent, as if he intended that the miscreant not be offered any sort of succor prior to the time she got what was coming to her for giving him the document late.

It was a trite excuse for a punishment, but then, Bryce was a stickler for getting things done on time and on budget. He was fond of calling his employees “internal clients,” so that they would think of themselves as just as responsible to each other as they were to any paying customer.

She couldn't help it. She found it hard to wait and began to fidget from one foot to the other, as if her dream self knew – and dreaded – what was coming.

And she did. Dream Lia had quite a different relationship with Bryce Tanner than real Lia did, and in some ways – if he was anything like dream Bryce in real life – she was damned glad of it!