

The Sheik's Mysterious Mistress

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e-book ISBN13: 9781940134130

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Chapter 1

Dana stared at the elderly chief of staff with growing horror. "But...I really don't want to be promoted," she said through stiff lips that could barely move from the fear caving in on her, the metallic taste of terror overwhelming the sandalwood and strong coffee scents that normally permeated this man's office. "I'm perfectly happy in my current role." Even the normal low hum of office noises from the surrounding employees faded as the blood pounded through her brain, blocking out everything but the panic.

This was really bad. Her current position as an office assistant was perfect, keeping her in the background and giving her the anonymity she craved, a state of being she hadn't had in a long time and something she desperately needed.

Forget the extra pay, Dana thought anxiously. She wanted to be invisible. She needed to be just a face in the crowd that no one noticed, no one looked at twice. Her assistant's position was challenging, interesting and, what was more important, it didn't give her any visibility.

Being promoted to a senior assistant's role was a much more obvious position. Because of the previous year, being noticed meant danger, something she'd traveled halfway around the world to avoid. She wasn't going to give it up without a fight. Unfortunately, the chief of staff wasn't a man one could argue with. He laid down the rules and the rest of the staff followed without question. That had been fine before but she had to really think hard to come up with a good reason to not accept that promotion.

"I'm really not qualified for this role, sir. There are so many people more deserving of this promotion that..."

Omar Suleiman, the Sheik of Odar's Chief of Staff, interrupted her impatiently, waving his hand in front of him as if the conversation were over. He'd made his decision and he rarely allowed arguments, much less discussion from office personnel. "You've earned it. Your work is excellent, your attention to detail has been noticed not to mention your fluency in Arabic, English and French, an important asset to His Highness. The role comes with a significant increase in salary, of course, not to mention prestige and a great deal of travel."

Her head was spinning, and not from excitement but from the overwhelming urge to run and hide. "What happened to Mr. Kingsley? He's been doing this job for the past twenty years. I thought he was happy in the role."

"He has done an excellent job for the kingdom. But he has requested retirement and since he is now over seventy years old, we have granted this request." This was said as if to inform Dana that she too would be expected to remain in the role until well after her expected retirement.

Her mind swam with the various possibilities or arguments against this promotion, anything that would get her out of this role. "I really don't think..."

Omar's eyebrows went down in irritation at her continued resistance to his plan. "Enough," he said emphatically. "I know this is a bit much for you, but you will take the role if His Highness agrees that you fit the requirements. And you will continue to do an excellent job

because I believe it is in your nature to be meticulous in your responsibilities. If you have any questions about anything that comes up, you may come directly to me for assistance." He stood up from behind his desk, his long, white robes flowing behind him. "Come with me," he ordered and walked out of the well appointed office, expecting Dana to simply follow because he'd ordered it.

And of course, she followed. One simply didn't ignore the sheik's chief of staff.

That was, until he started to lead her into the sheik's office. "Why would we be going in there?" she asked, her voice choked and she hesitated before entering the room where decisions were made that could change the economy of massive countries. She peered inside, half expecting to see....well, she wasn't sure what she was expecting. Maybe a throne or perhaps even a group of people bowing down in front of an all powerful being. But it certainly wasn't an innocuous office setup.

Since the office was empty except for Omar, she entered and looked around, amazed at how gorgeous the office was. There were tall windows that let in sunshine and bookcases along one wall that went from the floor to the ceiling with a ladder that swung along a rail so a person could select books on any shelf. The furniture was dark and heavy, very masculine but it fit the man who ruled this oil rich, powerful country.

She'd seen the sheik many times of course. Who hadn't? He was one of those men that women did internet searches on just to gaze at his rugged, handsome looks. She'd never seen him close up though. He was much too powerful for anyone at her level to get close to but she knew him to be tall, was rumored to be charming and he worked out regularly with his guards, although she had no idea what that meant. Perhaps they all just competed to see who could lift the most weights or maybe they battled each other until someone was bloody. She didn't care, and didn't want to know. All she wanted was her tiny office in the back hallway where she could do her work and remain safe and unnoticed.

"His Highness will be with you shortly," the chief of staff said, before walking out of the office.

Dana stared after him for a long, terrified moment before she started pacing. Her mind worked frantically, trying to come up with reasons why she wasn't the best candidate for the position. She just couldn't risk having that kind of spotlight but she also didn't want to leave her current role. She loved her job, but more importantly, she loved the security of the palace. No one was getting to her while she worked within the palace walls, especially not to see a lowly secretary. The role of assistant to the sheik would require her to work outside the palace much more often, to be at his side during travel, official visits and various other events. Possibly even social events that would be publicized although maybe she could remain hidden in the shadows during those functions. Dana had no idea what the protocol might be and the lack of knowledge made her even more frantic.

No, she'd just have to be brilliant and come up with a fabulous, valid, irrefutable reason for why she was completely inappropriate for the job.

She spotted a pad of paper on the corner of the desk and picked it up, selecting a pen as well. She paced back and forth in the office as she thought about different reasons why she wasn't right, writing them down in a list. Some of the ideas were ridiculous and she crossed them out, but others were very valid.

Of course, she didn't write the main reason. No, that one would have to remain a secret since it might get her fired from her current role and probably tossed out of the country.

Sheik Hassan Bin Faisir-Al-Takar watched in fascination as the lovely woman walked back and forth across his office, mumbling something under her breath before scribbling on his note pad. She also had his favorite pen but since she looked so earnest in whatever she was trying to think of, he didn't want to disturb her. Besides, she was definitely a sight to behold. She was wearing a wrap around dress that hugged her in all the right places and he enjoyed it both when she was heading towards him so he could see her lush breasts that tapered to a tiny waist, or when she was walking away from him and he was presented with her cute derriere that moved underneath the fabric with each step she took, drawing his eyes to the enticing flesh underneath. He wondered how long her brown hair was since it was contained in a neat chignon at the base of her neck but her eyes were a warm, sexy brown that seemed to dance with whatever was on her mind.

This woman was so intent, she didn't even realize that he was there, leaning in the doorway watching her. But after several moments, his curiosity got the better of him and he wanted to know what could possibly be troubling a woman as lovely as this little one.

He knew this was the woman he was supposed to be interviewing for the role of his executive assistant but she was completely inappropriate for the role. Her porcelain skin and her rosebud lips, not to mention that knockout figure, meant she would be too much of a distraction. Beautiful women were lovely to have around, but not during business hours. The work of the kingdom had to be accomplished and with this one flitting in and out of his office and meetings, he would be hard pressed to concentrate. Omar must be getting old if he thought this little beauty was the perfect candidate.

Dana turned around, trying to come up with at least three more reasons why she wouldn't work out when she spotted the man standing in the doorway. Goodness he was tall!

And getting taller as he came closer! The top of her head barely reached his shoulder and she shrank back slightly as he approached.

At his dark, intent look, she cringed slightly, intimidated despite herself. When he was a few feet away, she remembered palace protocol and dropped her pen and note pad while she dipped into a deep curtsy. "Your Highness!" she gasped and looked down at the ground, wondering how one was supposed to gracefully curtsy and then pick up a stolen pen and pad of paper without looking like a fool.

Probably too late for that, she thought with an inward grimace.

He smiled slightly at her genuflection, done with enthusiasm, but very little practice. "You're here to interview for the role of my executive assistant?" he stated, moving to a seating

area away from his desk that contained two large, brown, leather chairs and an enormous brown, leather sofa. "Please, have a seat and let's discuss the possibilities."

Dana smiled gratefully, glad that he wasn't going to sit behind that massive desk and look even more daunting. She thought it would be less intimidating if they were sitting away from a symbol of his absolute power in this country. But as they sat down, his long, muscular legs coming much too close to her own, she realized that she'd been wrong. This man wasn't intimidating because of some external symbol of power. He was just terrifying as a man!

As his intelligent, grey eyes looked at her, she had to glance away or get lost in their sensuous depths. She'd always thought of those lines as a crock when she'd read them in books but now she understood what it meant when a man had "bedroom eyes". She literally couldn't focus when he looked at her like that and once again, the idea of running and hiding someplace was very tempting but for completely different reasons now.

First things first, she reminded herself. Get her old job back and then she could worry about all these silly little feelings she had for a man she'd met thirty seconds ago.

"About the job," she started to say, "I think that your chief of staff might have been a bit too hasty about submitting my name for the position."

"Why do you say that?" he asked, already confused by her approach. He'd been expecting her to immediately begin listing all of her experience and how she would be perfect for the role. After which, he would have to gently tell her that she wouldn't work out, but that he would see what other options might suit her better within the palace. The opposite approach to this interview certainly had his attention.

"Well, for one, I'm definitely too young and inexperienced. I certainly don't have all the skills necessary to be your executive assistant."

He tried not to show the surprise on his face as she stated the first thing that had come to his mind. But with her comment, he was somehow forced to challenge her assertion. "It's my understanding that you've already met all the skills requirements for this role and they've been amply demonstrated. Otherwise, Omar wouldn't have suggested you for the position."

That stumped her. "I can't imagine that my experience could surpass the skills of your last assistant. He'd been with you for years."

"You've been helping my previous assistant for the past six months, is that correct?"

"Yes, but..."

"So you have the requirements." He stated that with emphasis and a slight shrug that told her he wasn't going to argue her skill set any longer.

"But..." She scrambled and looked down, focusing her mind to regroup and quickly go over the notes she'd scribbled minutes ago. "I don't know palace protocol well enough. I could make some pretty horrible errors and offend someone. Even my curtsy is pretty pathetic and that's just the beginning of my lack of knowledge."

He nodded his head, about to say something, but she stopped him again with what she considered another mark against her. "I don't know all of the personnel who would be useful so if something needed to be done quickly, I might go to the wrong person to ask for help,

thereby slowing down the efficiency of everyone in the office. The things you do for this country are much too important to be delayed simply because you have an assistant who asked the wrong person or question. Not to mention the security risks associated with asking someone a question that might be outside of their clearance area. The work you do is completely confidential and revealing something to the wrong person, even accidentally, could be a serious breach in security." She was really getting into the swing of this, she thought. That last comment was on the fly, not from her notes, but it sounded really good.

Hassan sat back, amused but trying to hide it. He'd never interviewed someone who was trying to dissuade him from hiring them. "Please continue."

She glanced down at her notes, looking very earnest and confident that she shouldn't do the job. "I don't know the first thing about diplomacy. You work with so many people and my honesty might slip out and ruin a plan you've been working hard to develop." She realized that he was listening to her and not getting angry. Was she convincing him? "I really don't get out much, I'm a horrible introvert and you need someone who is good around people, someone who prefers to be surrounded by others and gets energized by being around people. I actually avoid crowds, preferring a good book. Or even a not so good book," she said with complete honesty and a grimace because most of the books she read were what she called "brain candy" and Dana was unapologetic about her reading preferences. "So all the parties and functions you need to attend, well, I'd be trying to get out of them as much as possible not to mention being unable to converse intelligently on the latest best seller or cerebral tome of which the media thinks is the next best mind game to success."

"Is there anything else?"

"My language skills are only passable," she explained lamely, worried about the amusement she was starting to detect in his voice and those damnable grey eyes that kept luring her out of her focus. "I'm pretty good in French and English and of course I can speak Arabic," she admitted. "But other languages I struggle with."

Hassan nodded, paying more attention to her dancing brown eyes than her words, although he was still amused by her approach. "Anything else?"

"Well..." she couldn't think of anything else. Glancing down, she read through all of her notes and nothing else made sense. She glanced up at him, wishing this were true but it was all she could think of. "I don't really like you."

Hassan was stunned at first. Then threw his head back and laughed, delighted with her refreshing attitude.

Dana grimaced and thought quickly. "Okay, so it isn't that I don't really like you so much as I disagree with several of your policies. Number one is the fact that your country's wealth is resting on the oil underneath your ground and that's a fossil fuel that is changing the whole weather pattern of the earth and I'd much rather drive an electric vehicle than damage the environment any longer..." she knew she wasn't getting through to him and her voice slowly faltered to an awkward halt.

“You start immediately,” he said and stood up. “There are several meetings this afternoon. You will sit in on them and take notes. Talk to Omar about the other issues with the meetings and he’ll fill you in,” he replied.

With that, he walked over to his desk, picking up several documents and handing them to her with instructions on what to do with each. Dana listened, stunned and horrified for several minutes before she realized that she should be writing down everything he was telling her. She’d already missed the first few instructions but scrambled quickly to turn things around, writing as fast as her fingers could move.

Ten minutes later, she walked out of his office with her arms filled with files, contracts and instructions that she dumped onto her already crowded desk in her miniscule office. As she stood back and looked at everything, she was stunned that the man had so much to do. Okay, so he ran a country. Literally ran a country. But doesn’t he delegate anything?

And why in the world had he hired her? Hadn’t he listened to anything she’d said? She was completely inappropriate for the job. Good grief, she’d more than convinced herself that she was an idiot so why hadn’t he even blinked at the problems she’d presented to him about her taking on the role.

With a sigh, she started with what she thought were the highest priority items and worked her way through each, referencing his instructions over and over again, unsure what to do in several situations but since she couldn’t find anyone to ask, apparently everyone was in some important, private meeting, she was on her own. She’d have to catch him when he’s thinking more clearly and then maybe he would let her step back into her previous position.

Dana did the best she could but knew that she was probably missing the mark on several issues. Lunch time came and went and she didn’t even realize that it was almost dinner time until Hassan came out of the meeting. With barely a nod in her direction, he disappeared once again into his office with his advisors and she clenched her teeth in an effort to not scream out that she hadn’t asked for, nor wanted, this job that was now making her stay late to get through all the work he’d piled on top of her narrow shoulders.

By nine o’clock that night she finished the last of his instructions. As she turned off her computer, she poked her head out of her office and looked at the other desks, wondering when everyone else had left the office.

“You’re here very late,” Hassan said from the doorway to his office. He slowly walked down the hall until he was standing in front of her. “I hope you had dinner.”

Dana glanced down at her watch and sighed, all her hunger suddenly appearing now that she wasn’t frantically trying to get the work accomplished. “I’ll grab something when I get home.”

He pushed away from the doorway and shook his head. “One of the perks of this position is having the kitchen on speed dial.” He looked down at her phone and lifted the receiver, pressing a button. A moment later, he instructed that a sandwich be delivered immediately to her desk.

She tried to protest, not wanting to hang out here any longer, especially if he was going to be here as well. All she wanted was to go home, curl up on her soft bed and fall asleep. She didn't even care if she had dinner, because fatigue was her overwhelming issue right at the moment.

"Tell me what you've accomplished today. Where are you on all the items we discussed this morning?"

Dana picked up her notebook and glanced down at her notes, with all the additional scribbles she'd notated throughout the day and accepting that she wasn't getting out of here very soon. She went through the issues, describing what she'd done for each. When she was finished, she took a deep breath and set her notepad back down on her desk, then glared back up at him, daring him to tell her she'd done something wrong after all that.

She saw the surprise on his face but wasn't sure what it indicated. "You finished everything from this morning?"

She blinked, confused. "Of course."

He smiled slightly and shook his head. "The deadline for most of those items was the end of the week."

Her mouth dropped open, shocked at the news that she'd worked this hard for nothing. "Are you kidding me?"

He laughed softly. "I never joke about work."

A knock on the door revealed a man with a tray and Dana's mouth immediately started watering at the sight of food. "That looks delicious," she sighed happily.

The man set the tray on the desk and Dana ignored the gorgeous man standing there watching her eat. She was too hungry to care at this point. "Why didn't you tell me that stuff didn't need to be done by the end of today?"

"You'll start to understand the deadlines a bit more as you gain experience."

"In the meantime, I'm just going to have to guess?"

"Or ask."

"Who was I supposed to ask? No one was here."

"You are my personal assistant now, Dana. Feel free to interrupt me for further guidance."

She watched him carefully, wondering where that interruption line would be drawn.

Her cell phone rang and she glanced down at the number but didn't recognize it. She tucked it back into her purse, then wrapped up the rest of the sandwich after eating only a few bites. "Thank you for dinner. That was delicious." It really had been a crazy day and although the sandwich hadn't filled her up yet, it at least pushed the hunger pains away until she could create some space between herself and this man who made her body tremble slightly.

As she stood up, she was struck again by how tall the man was. She'd wear her highest heels tomorrow just so she could reach the top of his shoulder. She really hated feeling short. It made her feel somehow inadequate and powerless. "I'll try very hard to do a good job."

"Even though you don't like me."

She blushed and glanced down. "Okay, so maybe I don't really know you and I admitted that it isn't you that I disagree with but some of your policies." She grimaced and shook her head again. "And maybe I'm just too tired to realize that this is one of those moments when I really shouldn't speak out loud because I'm too tired and worn out and I'll probably say something I shouldn't. I apologize Your Highness. I was out of line."

He smiled, watching the soft pink blush stain her porcelain cheeks. "I'd like to hear what you disagree with besides burning fossil fuels. We'll discuss those and other topics another time. You look exhausted from today's efforts but I'm impressed that you finished an entire week's worth of work in one day. Just goes to show that Omar was right in selecting you for the role," he said and chuckled at her grimace as he started walking out the door.

When her phone rang again, she glanced at the number and frowned, pressing the "ignore" button. It was the same number as before.

She looked up nervously and stuffed her phone into her purse.

"Boyfriend wondering why you are so late in coming home?" Hassan asked.

Dana shook her head. "I don't have a boyfriend," she said and started walking down the hallway, hoping her new boss would drop the subject.

Hassan had probably twenty things he needed to do, but instead of doing them, he followed her down the hallway, drawn to her on many levels and not simply because she was a beautiful woman with something mysterious hiding in her soft, brown eyes. "Why not?"

She stepped around someone's desk, pretending to be busy looking for something in her purse. "I was just promoted and my boss is a slave driver," she joked.

He didn't laugh. "You're a beautiful woman. I can't believe that a man hasn't captured your attention."

Another blush, she really wished she could stop doing that. If it were anyone else other than this man with his dark, dangerous eyes, she might be able to brush off the questions. But this man made her nervous, which made her mind clumsy. "Oh, I've dated in the past."

"Just not anyone special right now?" Hassan was both intellectually and personally intrigued that some man hadn't already snatched up a woman with Dana's spirit and beauty, not to mention her intelligence and integrity.

"No. Definitely not," she replied, thinking of all the men who were chasing her, unfortunately not for the reason she wanted. "I'd better get home. You start work pretty early each morning."

Hassan watched her leave, his eyes appreciating her slender waist and enticing bottom once again. There was just something about her that bothered him. He could tell she was hiding something, although what that was, he had no idea. He wasn't concerned that she was doing something illegal or unethical. In order to work in the palace, all employees had to go through a rigorous background check so if there was a criminal or even questionable past, she never would have been considered for employment, much less allowed to enter the palace grounds.

Shrugging away the mystery for now, he called the front gate. "Make sure Dana Miller is escorted home safely," he said. Then as an afterthought, "She might not like the interference so make sure she's unaware of the escort."

He had no idea why he'd done that. Employees and guests left the palace late all the time and he never ordered an escort for any of them. Why he'd chosen to do that for his new assistant was yet another mystery he was too tired to figure out at the moment.