



## Daring to Trust the Boss (Harlequin Romance)

By Susan Meier

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The magic of the Mediterranean...

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But soon Olivia begins to see there is far more to her boss than meets the eye. And on a business trip to Italy, she sees straight through Tucker's hard and proud exterior to a man with a far more vulnerable edge....

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## **Editorial Review**

### **About the Author**

Susan Meier spent most of her twenties thinking she was a job-hopper – until she began to write and realised everything that had come before was only research! One of eleven children, with twenty-four nieces and nephews and three kids of her own, Susan lives in Western Pennsylvania with her wonderful husband, Mike, her children, and two over-fed, well-cuddled cats, Sophie and Fluffy. You can visit Susan's website at [www.susanmeier.com](http://www.susanmeier.com)

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"I'm Olivia Prentiss, here for my first day in Accounting."

The gray-haired Human Resources director glanced up with a smile. "Good morning, Olivia. Welcome to Inferno." She happily flipped through the files in a box on her desk, but when she found the one with "Olivia Prentiss" written on the tab, she winced. "I'm afraid there's been a change of plans."

Vivi's stomach dropped to the floor. "I'm not hired?"

"No. No. Nothing like that. You've been reassigned temporarily."

"I don't understand."

"Tucker Engle's assistant was in an accident last week."

"Oh. I'm sorry." She knew Tucker Engle was the CEO and chairman of the board of Inferno. Before she'd interviewed for this job, she'd researched the company and his name had popped up. But the company's annual statements had said little about the reclusive billionaire. When she'd searched the internet, she'd only found an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* and a Facebook rant by a former employee who had called him the Grim Reaper because the only time he came out of his ivory tower was to fire someone. Still, none of that information gave her any clue what his assistant's accident had to do with her.

"As the newest employee in the company, it falls to you to stand in for Betsy."

Her already-fallen stomach soured. *She* had to work directly with a guy called the Grim Reaper by his staff?

She gulped. "An accountant stands in for a personal assistant?"

"You won't be a *personal* assistant."

Following the sound of the deep male voice, Vivi swung around. A tall, dark-haired man leaned against the door frame. Her gaze crawled from his shiny black loafers up his black trousers and suit jacket, past his white shirt and sky-blue tie to a pair of emerald-green eyes.

Wow.

"Or even an administrative assistant. You'll be an assistant." He pushed away from the door frame and walked over to her. "The assistant to the chairman of the board. The assistant who must be able to read

financial reports and change things I need to have changed. An assistant who has to be able to keep up." His lush mouth thinned. "Do you have a problem with that?"

Intimidation froze her limbs, her tongue, and she could only stare.

"Good." Obviously taking her silence for acceptance, he headed for the door. "Spend the twenty minutes you need with Mrs. Martin to get your ID badge and fill out your paperwork then report to my office."

He strode out and she stared at the empty space he left in his wake.

"He's a whirlwind."

Obviously, Mrs. Martin was paid to say nice things because Vivi wouldn't call him a whirlwind. He was more like a bully. A really good-looking bully, but still a bully.

Bile rose to her throat, but she shoved it down again. She'd dealt with bullies before. "I take it that's Tucker Engle."

"In the gorgeous flesh."

"He demoted me even before I started."

Mrs. Martin shook her head. "It's not a demotion. That's what he was telling you. The assistant job is a lot more than you think it is."

"But I need to start my real job now. I have to keep my skills sharp to take the CPA exam. I don't want to fall behind."

"You'll be working with *the* Tucker Engle. The man who leads Inferno. You'll see everything he does-learn everything he knows."

That didn't mesh with the picture painted in the Facebook rant, but it sounded promising. Like something she could cling to to force herself to be able to work with him. "So he'll teach me things?"

"I don't know about *teaching*, per se." Mrs. Martin motioned for her to sit in the chair in front of her desk. She pointed to a little camera attached to her computer monitor. "Take a seat so I can get your employee picture."

Vivi sat.

"Anyway, I don't know about him teaching you, but you'll learn a lot working with him. He built this company-"

"With help."

"Help?" Mrs. Martin laughed. "You think he had help? Everybody who works here supports *him*. He's the idea man. No one else."

That *did* mesh with what she'd read. In the interview he'd given the *Wall Street Journal*, he'd bragged that he

used only accountants, lawyers, PR people-support staff. He didn't want, or need, an equal.

"Fantastic."

Mrs. Martin smiled sympathetically. "I understand you're disappointed. You see this as a setback. And I probably can't talk you out of that." She paused and sucked in a resigned breath. "So, I'm going to stop the sugarcoating and be totally honest with you. Tucker Engle is a suspicious prima donna. He gives assignments piecemeal so that no one can figure out what he's working on. He's so demanding that none of our employees would volunteer to replace Betsy-even for a few weeks."

Her heart stuttered. "And you think *I* can?"

"I didn't pick you. We gave Mr. Engle the files of the accountants starting today and he chose you. Like it or not, you're stuck. But Betsy won't be out forever. Eight weeks—"

Her eyes bulged. "Eight weeks?"

Mrs. Martin grimaced. "Twelve tops."

"Oh, my God!"

"But you still get your accountant's salary. And your time with Mr. Engle counts in your seniority with the company. It's not as if you'll be starting over when Betsy returns."

"No, thanks. I'll just keep my job in Accounting."

Mrs. Martin sighed. "How good do you think it's going to look on your employee records if you refuse your first assignment?"

"It's not the position I was hired for."

"Nonetheless, it's your first assignment and if you don't take it, he may tell us to fire you."

She was really, really sorry she'd found that Facebook rant because she couldn't even argue that. "Of course he will."

Mrs. Martin's face fell into sympathetic lines. "The other option is to quit."

\* \* \*

*"The other option is to quit."*

Vivi muttered those words under her breath as she made her way through the maze of red-, orange- and yellow-walled corridors, looking for the private elevator to the executive office. She finally reached it and inserted the magic key card that would start the plush car, giving her access to the inner sanctum of Inferno. Which, she was beginning to think, had been named appropriately since this company really might be the pits of hell.

The doors swished closed and she shut her eyes. She was the toughest person she knew. She had survived an

attack at university that had nearly ended in her being raped and the bullying that had resulted when she'd tried to prosecute the boy involved-the son of Starlight, Kentucky's leading family. One grouchy, narcissistic CEO would not stop her from reaching her dream of being somebody. Somebody so important that the people back in Starlight would see that despite all their attempts to break her, she had succeeded.

They had failed.

And Tucker Engle wouldn't break her either.

The elevator bell pinged. The doors opened again. Like Dorothy entering Oz, she stepped out, glancing around in awe. Contrasting the slick, ultramodern red, orange and yellow "fire" theme of the public areas, this space was superconservative. Ceiling-high cherrywood bookcases lined the walls. The antique desk and chair could have been in a museum. Oriental rugs sat on luxurious hardwood floors.

"Don't just stand there! Come in!"

She pivoted around, following the sound of Tucker Engle's voice. He stood in a huge office behind the one she had entered. A cherrywood conference table sat on one side, a comfy brown leather sofa and recliner grouping filled the other. A desk and chair fronted a wall of windows at the back of the room. The view of the New York skyline took her breath away.

She walked to the desk she suspected was hers, removed her jacket and dropped it and her backpack to the chair. Then she gingerly made her way to the grand office.

Standing behind the carved desk, Tucker Engle removed his black suit coat and carried it to a hidden closet. His back to her, he slid it onto a hanger, and her gaze fell to his butt. Perfect butt. His trousers were cut with such precision that they all but caressed him. His simple white shirt outlined a swimmer's back. She could virtually see the ripple of his muscles through the silky fabric. If he didn't do laps in a pool every day, he did something.

She swallowed just as he turned.

"What?"

She swallowed again. Add what appeared to be a perfect body to his dark hair and chiseled features, and he had to be one of the most handsome men on the planet. And he'd just caught her staring at him.

"Nothing."

"Good. Because we have lots to do." He sat and motioned her to one of the two captain's chairs in front of his desk. "Anything you hear in this office is confidential."

She bit her tongue to stop the *duh* that wanted to escape. Not only was that immature, but she had to work with this guy. For weeks...maybe months!

"I'll need more than a dumbfounded look, Miss Prentiss. I'll need a verbal yes."

"Yes. I know about confidentiality. I took ethics classes."

He leaned back. His shirt stretched across his muscular chest. "Lots of people take ethics classes. Not everybody has ethics."

Her eyes narrowed. After two years of being called a liar-a girl who "claimed" she was attacked, most likely in the hope of extorting money-she hated having her integrity questioned. Fury surged through her, but she stopped it. Anger had never gotten her anywhere. A cool head and resolve had.

"I have ethics and I'll keep your secrets."

"Great. Then let's start by filling you in on my latest project. It's the reason I couldn't muddle through the next few weeks with the help of only secretarial support staff."

"Mrs. Martin said you wouldn't tell me your project. That you'd give me assignments piecemeal so I wouldn't be able to guess what you were doing."

"Mrs. Martin is ill informed."

"Maybe you should correct that impression."

His eyebrows rose. "Maybe you should remember with whom you're speaking. You don't get to tell me what to do. Or even make suggestions. Your only job is to perform the tasks I give you."

Embarrassment flooded her. Damn her defense mechanisms for clicking in. She might be proud of the confidence and courage she'd developed to deal with the bullies who'd pushed her around after Cord Dawson attacked her, but Tucker Engle wasn't pushing her around. He was her boss. He was supposed to give her orders.

"Are we clear?"

She didn't hesitate. "Yes."

"Good." He rose, came around to the front of the desk and rifled through some files sitting in the corner. "Constanzo Bartulocci is looking to retire. Do you know who he is?"

"No." The spicy scent of his aftershave drifted to her and her gaze ambled along his torso, down the neat crease of his obviously expensive trousers to his shiny, shiny shoes. If this guy hadn't grown up with money, somebody, somewhere had taught him how to dress. "I don't know who Constanzo Bartulocci is."

"Of course you don't. The uber-rich have ways of keeping themselves out of the limelight."

Well, that explained why she hadn't found much about Tucker Engle on the internet.

He located the file he was looking for and returned to his chair. "He never married and he has no children. But he has two nephews and a niece, all three of whom claim to speak for him. Our first job is to weed through the baloney and see who really does know his plans. Our second is to get that person to give us the inside scoop so I know exactly what to offer him for his entire operation."

"You're going to buy a whole conglomerate?"

"Not your place to question, remember?"

"Yes. Sorry." She drew in a breath. How was she going to deal with this guy? Rich, successful and good-looking were bad enough. But she wasn't accustomed to corraling her tongue. Sometimes she even prided herself on being sassy-never letting anybody push her around, condescend to her, make her feel less than.

It would be a long eight weeks if she didn't soon figure out how to keep her place. That is, if he didn't fire her for insubordination.

He handed a file across the desk to her. "Your first assignment is to check the financial reports and records of all of our Bartuloccis."

She glanced up into his bright green eyes and her stomach fluttered. The assignment was pretty much what she'd expected to be doing in the accounting department. So part of the flutter was relief. But the other half came from those striking emerald eyes. He really was one gorgeous guy.

One gorgeous, *difficult* guy, she quickly reminded herself. The difficult canceled out the handsome. And even if it didn't, she'd gone this route before. Cord Dawson had been rich and smart. And in the end, he'd attacked her, nearly raped her. No matter how gorgeous, she wanted nothing to do with another rich guy. She wasn't in their league. Didn't know how to play in their world. It was a lesson she'd never forget.

Taking the file, she rose. "Okay."

He returned his attention to the papers on his desk. "Shut the door on your way out."

She gladly left his office. Closing the door behind her, she squeezed her eyes shut in misery. Even if she learned to hold her tongue, it would be a long eight weeks.

## Users Review

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