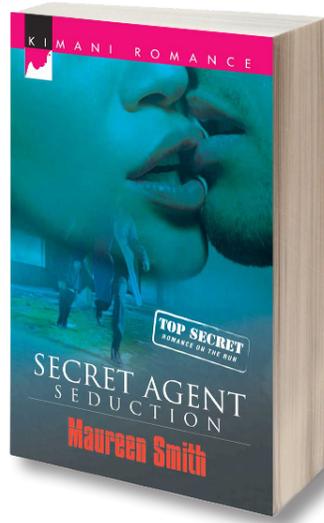


MAUREEN SMITH



AN EXCERPT FROM **SECRET AGENT SEDUCTION**

“Welcome to your home away from home for the next ten days,” Lia said.

Armand Magliore cast an appraising glance over the cozily furnished living room, then looked back at her. “You mean we’re to share this cabin...alone?”

Lia’s pulse reacted to the low, velvety timbre of his voice. She cleared her throat briskly. “The other agents will be less than fifteen feet away in the next building. You’ll be more than safe.”

Magliore chuckled low in his throat. “Believe me, Miss Charles,” he drawled, trapping her in the smoldering beam of his gaze, “that was never my concern. No man in his right mind would protest forced confinement with such an exquisitely beautiful woman as yourself.”

Lia’s heart thudded.

She was losing control of the situation, of herself. In the six years she'd worked for the Secret Service, not once had she ever crossed the line with a protectee. She'd never even been tempted. But Armand Magliore, with his dark good looks and raw animal magnetism, was the living, breathing embodiment of temptation. This was a man who could persuade a nun to cross the line into sin with one little crook of his finger. Lia doubted he'd ever met a woman he couldn't bend to his will.

But Lia wasn't just *any* woman. She was a highly trained Secret Service agent who'd been assigned to protect him. To do that, she needed to remain focused, professional. Detached.

And the first step would be to establish some ground rules.

Magliore was watching her, his eyes alight with keen interest. "Is something wrong, Miss Charles?"

"No. *Yes.*" Exasperated, Lia blew out a deep breath. "Look, Mr. Magliore—"

"Armand."

"Excuse me?"

His mouth twitched. "After everything we've been through in the last twenty-four hours, don't you think we've earned the right to be on a first-name basis with each other?"

Lia gave him a cool, measured look. "What I think, *Mr.* Magliore, is that I'm not here to amuse or entertain you, or to keep your bed warm at night. I'm here for one reason and one reason only. To keep you alive until the date of your hearing before the United Nations. I don't expect you to like the fact that your life has been entrusted to a woman. I think you made your feelings known back in Muwaiti. You

may not respect my qualifications, but I *do* expect you to respect my authority and judgment—as well as my boundaries—for the duration of our stay here. *Comprenez vous?*”

Magliore held her eyes for several long beats, as if deciding whether to even answer her.

“Do you understand?” Lia repeated in a deceptively soft tone.

After another moment he inclined his head. “*Oui*. I understand perfectly, Miss Charles.”

“Good.” Lia nodded briskly, then glanced at her watch. “If you’d like to shower and change before dinner, you’ll find everything you need in your bathroom. Towels, soap, toothpaste, shaving cream—whatever you need.”

Again he nodded, already starting toward one of two doorways that opened off the living room. Suddenly he stopped, looking expectantly at her over his shoulder. “Aren’t you coming?”

Lia stared at him, nonplussed. “Where?”

He frowned a little. “I was under the impression you would be guarding me at all times.” He paused. “Even when I’m taking a shower.”

Lia felt her cheeks grow warm at the thought of herself posted outside his shower stall, trying not to peek through the steamy glass door as ribbons of water sluiced down his hard, sculpted chest and taut abdomen before rolling down those long, powerful legs.

Her mouth went dry. “I, ah, don’t think that will be necessary. I’ll be right outside your bedroom door if you, ah, need me.”

Magliore nodded, a ghost of a smile playing at the edges of his mouth.
“I won’t be long.”

“Take all the time you need,” Lia muttered after his retreating back.

When the bedroom door had closed firmly behind him, she let out a long, shuddering breath.

At that moment, with her pulse hammering wildly and her knees shaking, she realized that extracting Armand Magliore from the dark, treacherous jungles of Muwaiti had been the easy part.

Resisting her attraction to him would test the very limits of her endurance.