



**SOLOMON'S  
WHISPER**

FIFTH IN THE LIV BERGEN MYSTERY SERIES

**SANDRA  
BRANNAN**



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*Lot's Return to Sodom*, 2011

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*Noah's Rainy Day*, 2013

*Solomon's Whisper*, 2014



*For Recie and her family  
and everyone like them  
who have served in the military.*

*Thank you for protecting my freedom of speech  
and so many other freedoms  
I enjoy as an American.*





# CHAPTER 1

**I SUCKED IN A** breath, enjoying the odors unique to newly constructed buildings: tile glue, fresh paint, potent PVC adhesive, and the freshly fried coatings of wiring elements. It had taken weeks to move our equipment and furniture out of the office in downtown Denver, out toward old Stapleton International Airport, and I was glad when Calvin Lemley, our special agent in charge, announced Friday that we would report to the new FBI Denver Division offices after the weekend.

But what a long weekend it had been without Jack Linwood, Evidence Response Team supervisor for the FBI.

I loved Mondays. Lonely weekend over and excited about walking into this gorgeous, state-of-the-art federal building, I was more exhilarated about coming to work than ever. My eyes scanned the expansive lobby, the steel and glass capturing the early light of another Rocky Mountain sunrise. And I thought to myself how much had changed in the past five months, since Christmas. New career, new apartment, new office building. Oh, and a new love.

Unfortunately, I'd realized this only after Jack left for his annual fishing trip last Friday. And with his ridiculous rule of remaining completely incommunicado for two weeks, that meant I wouldn't get a chance to tell

him for a long time. We'd been dating for months and I always enjoyed our companionship, but it wasn't until I spent this weekend alone that I realized I might just be falling into more than "like" with my coworker.

I smiled at the two security guards as I passed through the high-tech screening device just inside the entrance. "Good morning, Paul. Hi, Tanner."

"Morning, Liv," said the aging guard with gray hair. He waved his thick fingers to greet me. "Smart girl, coming in early. Did you get yourself a close parking spot?"

Same Paul, different location.

"Came in early to find my way to the office. What do you guys think of this place?"

I didn't let on that I knew Paul was a retired FBI special agent, who I assumed had taken this security guard job to earn a few extra bucks. I'd seen his name on some case files. And I figured he didn't want to advertise his past, since he hadn't mentioned it when I first met him.

Born and raised in the Black Hills of South Dakota, I'd been a limestone miner most of my life—family business in the mountain states of the West—but my inclination to problem solve led me here as a special agent. And after what happened to my nephew this past Christmas right after I'd gotten back from Quantico, I wasn't so sure I'd made the right choice.

"It's great," said the younger security guard with the shaved head, who was acting cooler than usual.

"Will take some getting used to, with all the fancy monitors and gizmos and all," Paul added.

"Post-nine-eleven world," I said, collecting my belongings off the belt and continuing through the lobby. "See ya."

As I walked to the elevators, I could see the guards' reflection in the metal framing around the bank of elevators and could feel their eyes scanning my backside. I wondered what they could possibly find interesting about the formless dark pantsuit I was wearing. Ever since Christmas, when I'd worked the high-profile Williams abduction case and had been caught off guard wearing nothing but jeans and a sweatshirt—and at one point had worn Special Agent Phil Kelleher's custom-fit Italian suit pants—I vowed never to be caught dead wearing anything but a bureau-approved,

genderless pantsuit. Dark, conservative, professional, and unfashionable garb that was sure to please Special Agent Streeter Pierce—the guy who convinced me to become an agent—and my SAC, Calvin Lemley. But as far as appearances went, might as well sew “vanity-free” labels on these off-the-rack suits of mine. Maybe even “man-repellant.” Or “100 percent guaranteed effective birth control.”

Since the ensembles cost only a hundred bucks each, I bought enough to have spares: one wadded up in the bottom drawer of my desk and one tucked under the backseat of my SUV. Prepared. Streeter had warned me to do that my first day at work, suggesting that eventually I'd work a crime scene with rotting carcasses and would need a change of clothes, but I'd figured I would have plenty of time to buy some over the holidays.

Now I finally had the suits, but I refuse to give up my steel-toed boots. Something about taking the girl out of the mine but not the mine out of the girl came to mind.

So here I was, wearing one of the half-dozen identical suits hanging in my closet and nevertheless attracting the ogling stares of these guys. All I could figure is that they must have the most uneventful job in the universe if staring at behinds in shapeless pants is what they do for excitement.

As I walked toward the bay of elevators, I apparently wasn't as far from the guards as they thought. I heard the younger one mumble, “Those eyes. So green.”

“Ask her out,” Paul said.

I could see the men's reflections in the shiny silver facing near the bay of elevators, and I resisted a smile as I watched Paul reach for a donut. I lifted my head to watch the lights of the elevators and assess which would arrive first.

“Like I'd have a chance. Look at her,” Tanner answered as he jerked his head in my direction. I continued to pretend not to hear or see them.

Paul chuckled and took a bite out of the jelly-filled donut, crumbs cascading off his rotund belly. From my perspective, it would seem that anyone standing at the elevators was out of earshot of the screening station. But as I scanned the structure, examined the carefully crafted bomb-resistant, bulletproof steel and glass construction, I spotted the flaw in the

“green” design—it captured energy, but it also captured and rebounded sound in every direction.

I made a mental note of this.

“Nothing ventured,” Paul said, motioning for another employee to move through the screening device and down one of the maze of halls on floor one.

“What do you know about her?”

Before Paul could answer, another federal employee arrived and passed through the screening station, holding up the identification badge that hung around his neck. The man mumbled greetings and the guards mumbled back.

Once the man was making his way toward me, Paul said, “Twenty-nine. Maybe twenty-eight.”

Thirty, I thought. Turned the big three-o on April Fools’ Day. What a birthday! Thoughts of my wicked celebration with Jack, who was determined to make me forget I was aging, were interrupted when I heard the elevator arriving and the man next to me clearing his throat.

“Morning,” I said to the man, who nodded. I hoped the guards had heard me and realized we could hear them.

Apparently not. “Never been married,” Paul continued. “Workaholic. A real looker. What more do you need to know?”

I saw the young, fit guard shrug his well-toned shoulders and spread his fingers across his shiny black head. I practiced a quick response to use in case Tanner did ask me out.

“Listen,” Paul said as he lowered his belt slightly below his belly. “I’d be all over her in a minute if I were your age.”

“You’re married.”

Both guards quieted down as yet another early arrival passed through the fancy screener. I felt grateful as the elevator doors opened and I stepped quickly inside, the other federal employee following me.

Before the doors closed, I heard the younger guard ask, “Maybe she’s not married because she spends so much time working.”

Awkward, hearing speculation about my love life. To make things worse, for some reason the elevator doors weren’t closing. Nothing was blocking them, and the third employee had taken the stairs. I pushed the

button for my floor several times. The other man hit the third-floor button a few more times. Nothing.

I could still hear Paul's voice. "Never know 'til you try. No guts, no glory."

The man beside me sighed, looking quite irritated as he continued to press the elevator buttons in vain.

"Stop with the stupid clichés," Tanner said. "Why Liv? Her badge says Genevieve Bergen."

I sighed and stepped out of the elevator to wait for one of the other cars. I noticed Paul greet another employee who was making her way through the glass entrance doors. Again, their eyes immediately fell to her backside as she moved through the scanning device. Consistent, I'll give them that. Once the woman was standing at the elevators with us, Paul answered, "Her real name is Genevieve. Liv's a nickname. An Irish-Norwegian thing."

I deeply regretted not piping up earlier when I had the chance.

"Genevieve. Beautiful."

The man standing next to me glanced down at my security badge for the first time, which caused the other woman to do the same. "Do they not know we can hear them?" she said.

"Apparently not," the man going to floor three answered.

I wanted to bolt for the stairs.

Paul shrugged. "Seventh-born of nine kids. You know how older siblings can be. Your brother's an ass, right?"

"God forbid they know this much about all of us," the woman mumbled, staring up at the lights of one elevator ticking its way to ground floor.

I was going to the top, fourth floor. Could easily walk, even though the floors were abnormally spacious and it would be more like taking eight flights of stairs. The problem was that I'd have to walk by the guards again to get to the stairwell.

"I shouldn't say those things. Can't call your brother an ass. Can't say Liv's got a nice ass. Have you been to those sexual harassment classes yet? A guy pays a beautiful lady a compliment and look what it gets him? Makes you nervous to say anything anymore. Times have changed," Paul commiserated before taking the last bite of his donut.

I wondered if he'd been pushed into early retirement because of his firm hold on beliefs like this. I watched his reflection as he dusted the powder from his fingers by gently slapping his hands together, and then as he wiped his palms clean on the seat of his uniform pants.

With white lips and a mouthful of half-chewed donut, the older guard added, "But Liv's not like that. When I first met her, I told her she was a looker and asked about her name. She just thanked me and said, 'My Irish Catholic mother gave me that name, but I prefer to be called Liv. What's your name?' That girl's a combination of classy girl-next-door and someone to drink beers with, you know?"

The two federal employees standing on either side of me chuckled. I hung my head and buried my face in my hand. Thankfully, the elevator arrived.

As he swallowed the last of his coffee, tossing the Styrofoam cup in the waste receptacle and wiping away the remnants of his breakfast from his mouth, Paul added, "She's one of the few who take the time to get to know you. Most of the employees around here are stuffy. Some are downright rude. They treat us security guards like we're scum or something. Never say good morning, never even look us in the face."

The man headed to three said, "Make it stop."

The woman hummed an agreement. I was the first to step into the elevator, doing so before the doors opened completely. I pressed the button for my floor.

Just as the doors began to close, I heard Paul say, "On second thought, Tanner, maybe you shouldn't ask her out. I think she has her eye on the big dog, Pierce."

I shoved my arm out to reverse the closing doors, marched out of the elevator, and stomped back over to the security area.

A faint call came from behind me: "Go get 'em."

A bell sounded as the elevator began its ascent.