

The Secret Sinclair (Protecting His Legacy)

By Cathy Williams

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Editorial Review

About the Author
Cathy Williams is a great believer in the power of perseverance as she had never written anything before her writing career, and from the starting point of zero has now fulfilled her ambition to pursue this most enjoyable of careers. She would encourage any would-be writer to have faith and go for it! She derives inspiration from the tropical island of Trinidad and from the peaceful countryside of middle England. Cathy lives in Warwickshire her family.

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Caught in the middle of crouching on the ground, trying to get rid of a particularly stubborn stain on the immaculate cream carpet that ran the length, breadth and width of the directors' floor of the very exclusive family bank in which she had now been working for the past three weeks, Sarah froze at the sound of voices emerging from one of the offices. Low, unhurried voices—one belonging to a man, the other to a woman.

It was the first time she had been made aware of any sign of life here. She came at a little after nine at night, did her cleaning and left. She liked it that way. She had no wish to bump into anyone—not that there would have been the slightest possibility of her being addressed. She was a cleaner, and as such was rendered instantly invisible. Even the doorman who had been allowing her entry ever since she had started working at the bank barely glanced up when she appeared in front of him.

She could barely remember a time when she had been able to garner a few admiring glances. The combined weight of responsibility and lack of money had rubbed the youthful glow from her face. Now when she looked in the mirror all she saw was a woman in her mid-twenties with shadows under her eyes and the pinched appearance of someone with too many worries.

Sarah wondered what she should do. Was there some special etiquette involved if a cleaner come into contact with one of the directors of this place? She hunkered down. In her blue checked overalls and with her hair scraped back under a matching scarf, she figured she might easily have passed for a heap of old clothes dumped on the ground, were it not for the elaborate trolley of cleaning materials by her side.

As the hushed voices got closer—just round the corner— Sarah put her all into the wretched stain on the carpet. But with a sinking heart she was aware that the voices had fallen silent, and the footsteps seemed to have stopped just in front of her.

In fact, sliding her eyes across, she could make out some hand-made Italian shoes just below charcoal-grey trousers, sharply creased, a pair of very high cream stilettos, and stockings with a slight sheen, very sheer.

'I don't know if you've done the conference room as yet, but if you have then you've made a very poor job of it. There are ring marks on the table, and two champagne glasses are still there on the bookshelf!'

The woman's voice was icy cold and imperious. Reluctantly Sarah raised her eyes, travelling the length of a very tall, very thin, very blonde woman in her thirties. From behind her she could hear the man pressing for the lift.

'I haven't got to the conference room yet,' Sarah mumbled. She prayed that the woman wouldn't see fit to lodge a complaint. She needed this job. The hours suited her, and it was well paid for what it was. Included in the package was the cost of a taxi to and from her house to the bank. How many cleaning jobs would ever

have included *that?*

'Well, I'm relieved to hear it!'

'For God's sake, Louisa, let the woman do her job. It's nearly ten, and I can do without spending the rest of the evening here!'

Sarah heard that voice—the voice that had haunted her for the past five years—and her mind went a complete blank. Then it was immediately kick-started, papering over the similarities of tone. Because there was no way that Raoul Sinclair could be the man behind her. Raoul Sinclair was just a horrible, youthful mistake that was now in the past.

And yet..

Obeying some kind of primitive instinct to match a face to that remarkable voice, Sarah turned around—and in that instant she was skewered to the spot by the same bitter chocolate eyes that had taken up residence in her head five years ago and stubbornly refused to budge. She half stood, swayed.

The last thing she heard before she fainted was the woman saying, in a shrill, ringing voice, 'Oh, for God's sake, that's the *last thing we need!"*

She came to slowly. As her eyelids fluttered open she knew, in a fuddled way, that she really didn't want to wake up. She wanted to stay in her peaceful faint.

She had been carried into an office and was now on a long, low sofa which she recognised as the one in Mr Verrier's office. She tried to struggle upright and Raoul came into her line of vision, taller than she remembered, but just as breathtakingly beautiful. She had never seen him in anything dressier than a pair of jeans and an old tee shirt, and she was slowly trying to match up the Raoul she had known with this man kneeling over her, who looked every inch the billionaire he had once laughingly informed her he would be.

'Here—drink this.'

'I don't want to drink anything. What are you doing here? Am I seeing things? You can't be here.'

'Funny, but I was thinking the very same thing.' Raoul had only now recovered his equilibrium. The second his eyes had locked onto hers he had been plunged into instant flashback, and carrying her into the office had reawakened a tide of feeling which he had assumed to have been completely exorcised. He remembered the smell of her and the feel of her as though it had been yesterday. How was that possible? When so much had happened in the intervening years?

Sarah was fighting to steady herself. She couldn't believe her eyes. It was just so weird that she had to bite back the desire to burst into hysterical, incredulous laughter.

'What are you doing here, Sarah? Hell…you've changed…'

'I know.' She was suddenly conscious of the sight she must make, scrawny and hollow-cheeked and wearing her overalls. 'I have, haven't I?' She nervously fingered the checked overall and knew that she was shaking. 'Things haven't worked out…quite as I'd planned.' She made a feeble attempt to stand up, and collapsed back down onto the sofa.

In truth, Raoul was horrified at what he saw. Where was the bright-eyed, laughing girl he had known?

'I have to go… I have to finish the cleaning, Raoul. I…'

'You're not finishing anything. Not just at the moment. When was the last time you ate anything? You look as though you could be blown away by a gust of wind. And *cleaning?* Now you're doing cleaning jobs to earn money?'

He vaulted to his feet and began pacing the floor. He could scarcely credit that she was lying on the sofa in this office. Accustomed to eliminating any unwelcome emotions and reactions as being surplus to his finely tuned and highly controlled way of life, he found that he couldn't control the bombardment of questions racing through his brain. Nor could he rein in the flood of unwanted memories that continued to besiege him from every angle.

Sarah was possibly the very last woman with whom he had had a perfectly natural relationship. She represented a vision of himself as a free man, with one foot on the ladder but no steps actually yet taken. Was that why the impact of seeing her again now was so powerful?

'I never meant to end up like this,' Sarah whispered, as the full impact of their unexpected meeting began to take shape.

'But you have. How? What happened to you? Did you decide that you preferred cleaning floors to teaching?'

'Of course I didn't!' Sarah burst out sharply. She dragged herself into an upright position on the sofa and was confronted with the unflattering sight of her sturdy work shoes and thick, black woollen tights.

'Did you ever make it to university?' Raoul demanded. As she had struggled to sit up his eyes had moved of their own volition to the swing of her breasts under the hideous checked overall.

'I…I left the compound two weeks after you left.'

Her strained green eyes made her look so young and vulnerable that sudden guilt penetrated the armour of his formidable self control.

In five years Raoul had fulfilled every promise he had made to himself as a boy. Equipped with his impressive qualifications, he had landed his first job on the trading floor at the Stock Exchange, where his genius for making money had very quickly catapulted him upwards. Where colleagues had conferred, he'd operated solely on his own, and in the jungle arena of the money-making markets it hadn't been long before he'd emerged as having a killer streak that could make grown men quake in their shoes.

Raoul barely noticed. Money, for him, equated with freedom. He would be reliant on no one. Within three years he had accumulated sufficient wealth to begin the process of acquisition, and every acquisition had been bigger and more impressive than the one before. Guilt had played no part in his meteoric upward climb, and he had had no use for it.

Now, however, he felt it sink its teeth in, and he shoved his fingers through his hair.

Sarah followed the gesture which was so typically him. 'You've had your hair cut,' she said, flushing at the inanity of her observation, and Raoul offered her a crooked half-smile.

'I discovered that shoulder-length hair didn't go with the image. Now, of course, I could grow it down to my waist and no one would dare say a word, but my days of long hair are well and truly over.'

Just as she was, she thought. She belonged to those days that were well and truly over—except they weren't,

were they? She knew that there were things that needed to be said, but it was a conversation she'd never expected to have, and now that it was staring her in the face she just wanted to delay its onset for as long as possible.

'You must be pleased.' Sarah stared down at her feet and sensed him walk towards her until his shadow joined her feet. When he sat down next to her, her whole body stiffened in alarm—because even through the nightmare of her situation, and the pain and misery of how their relationship had ended, her body was still stirring into life and reacting to his proximity. 'You were always so determined.' she continued.

'In this life it's the...

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