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Opening Extract from...

A Perfect Heritage

Written by Penny Vincenzi

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Penny Vincenzi

A Perfect Heritage

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Prologue

So – this was it.

Goodbye, really, in a way. However it was dressed up, the Farrell's that had been her life's work, her life's love really, was no longer to be.

The brilliant, colourful, joyous thing that had been born that coronation year, that she and Cornelius had created together, was to change irrevocably, move out of her control. No longer her treasure, her comfort, her sanity. Most of all, her sanity; in the first months after Cornelius died, she had turned to it for occupation, distraction, support in her awful, empty grief. How wonderful she is, people had said, still working all the hours God sends, refusing to give in or give up, how amazing to carry on like this. But they were wrong, so wrong. It would have been amazing, indeed, not to have worked, to have given in, for then the grief and the loneliness would have engulfed her, and she would have had nothing in her life at all. She might no longer have Cornelius to temper her excesses, but she had his legacy, the House of Farrell, its creation and its success a bright, brilliant memorial to everything she and he had done together.

Wonderful that you have your children so close to you, people said, and she would smile politely and say yes, indeed, but what they could give her was as nothing compared to her work. What they felt for her could hardly be described as love; she had been a distracted, neglectful mother, over-critical of the dull little girl that had been Caroline and the timid little boy that had been Bertie. And

besides, like all children of a successful marriage, they remained outsiders, intruders even, on two people who would have been just as happy without them, however much they might deny it. Whereas the House of Farrell, *that* was worthy of the brilliant pair of them; it did not fail them, it was their pride and their joy.

They had been stars in the social scene at the beginning, she and Cornelius, acknowledged as clever, daring, inventive, their creative instincts rewarded by financial success; they had had money, style, grace. Their circle, embracing both the establishment and the new, creative aristocracy of the late fifties and early sixties, was fun, colourful, interesting. They had a house in Knightsbridge, a weekend flat in one of the regency terraces in Brighton; they moved from one to the other, and to Paris and New York, in pursuit of further inspiration and success, leaving their children with nannies and boarding schools.

It had been an absurdly early marriage – Cornelius twenty-three, Athina twenty-one, but from the outset, a success; and creating the House of Farrell had been a natural, almost inevitable result of that.

It had been Cornelius's idea in the first place. Fascinated by the new sciences of marketing and advertising and with a fortune inherited from his banker godfather and an undemanding job in the same bank, he was an entrepreneur in need of a project. Fate provided it, in the form of an eccentric ex-actress mother who mixed her own face creams because she didn't like those on the market, and spent an hour every morning and another every night transforming a nondescript face into a thing of great beauty, and he had suggested to the lovely girl he had married, also well versed in the wonders make up could work, that they might invest the legacy into a

cosmetic business they could run together. ‘You can develop it, my darling, and I will stay at the bank until it can support both of us.’ Neither of them had ever doubted that the House of Farrell could do that, and indeed they were right.

They had bought the basic formula for her creams from the now ex-Mrs Farrell, who had run away from her academic husband, and set-up production in a small laboratory where they employed a brilliant chemist who had trained with M. Coty in Paris, and had re-created not only The Cream, as it was christened which was (as the early advertising said) ‘the only thing skin really needs’, but some colour products, too, lipsticks and nail varnishes; adding face powder and a foundation product, ‘The Foundation’, a few months after.

Recognising that they couldn’t hope to beat the big boys at their own games, the Revlons and the Cotys and the Yardleys, and that they had to launch their business on a very different basis, they had transformed the Berkeley Arcade shop from a rather plain bespoke stationers into one of the prettiest shops in the row, installed the tiny salon on the first floor, and literally opened its doors to the world. They were lucky; they caught the eye and the imagination of the press, and the praise heaped upon it exceeding their wildest dreams. *Tatler* pronounced it ‘THE place to find true individual beauty’, *Vogue* as the ‘first stop for charm and beauty care’, and *Harpers Bazaar* proclaimed it ‘the place to find your new face’. Cornelius, who had a genius for publicity, and after flattering the latter’s beauty editor over a very expensive lunch at the Caprice, converted that into their advertising slogan. He also sold the shop to the public on posters and, more controversially, sent sandwich men to stand all over the

West End proclaiming the shop as 'The Beautiful Jewel in London's crown' and people flocked to it. It caught part of the great wave of optimism and creativity that was just breaking that summer, born of the coronation, the beautiful young queen, and the end, finally, of war-time economy. DeLuscious Lipstick, as their first great colour promotion was called, literally became part of the vernacular for a few dizzy months, and the rest swiftly became Farrell history.

It had faltered in the eighties, overwhelmed by the dazzling colour cosmetics and scientifically based skincare financed by the vast fortunes of large houses, had revived briefly in the nineties, and in the year of Cornelius's death, in 2006, had very nearly disappeared altogether, saved only by Athina's tenacity.

Now, falling behind helplessly in the money-fuelled marathon that was the beauty business, even Athina could see that they desperately needed help – financial to be sure, but creative also. For although she would have joined Cornelius in his grave rather than admit it, her own vision was no longer flawless. She disliked the pseudo science spawned by the huge laboratories of the cosmetics giants that were, as one journalist had remarked, the size of General Motors, and nor did she understand it. She felt out of step, just a little bewildered; and while deeply hostile to her new colleagues – she refused to think of them as masters – she felt also a grudging sense of relief at their arrival.

But – it was going to be a painful progress. She would have to sit, she knew, listening to different voices, new languages, speaking what would have once been heresies.

The owners of those voices would have no links with the House of Farrell; they would care nothing for what had

made it great, for what it had stood for. What would matter to them were the grey columns of profit and loss, the harsh facts of commercial life. And she would have to yield to them – to a degree.

But she would fight on at the same time, she would hold true to Farrell's, she would not give in. It had done everything for her – she would not fail it more than she had to now.

Chapter 1

Love at first sight that's what it was; heady, life-changing, heart-stopping stuff. It had happened to her only twice before, this sense of recognition, of something so absolutely right for her and what she was and what she wanted to do and be. She hadn't hesitated, hadn't played any silly games, hadn't said maybe, or I'll think about it, or I'll let you know, just yes, of course, of course she'd like to do it very much and then looked at her watch and seen she was already late for her board meeting and, after the briefest farewell, had left the restaurant.

The first thing she did now, in the taxi, was call her husband; she always did that, he needed to know, and she needed him to know. He was so very much part of it all, his life hugely affected as well as hers; and he had been pleased as she had known he would be, said he would look forward to discussing it over dinner. Only of course she was going to be late for dinner, which she reminded him of and he had only sighed very lightly before saying, well, he'd look forward to seeing her whenever it was.

He really was a truly accommodating man, she thought. She was very lucky.

'Well, that was very satisfactory.' Hugh Bradford sat back in his chair and ordered a brandy; he never drank at lunchtime normally, had gone through the whole lunch on water and one modest glass of champagne to seal the deal. He'd have liked to, had thought more than once that the superb beef Wellington he was eating really did deserve better than Evian to wash it down. But he'd resisted, and it was impossible to imagine Bianca Bailey allowing even the

smallest sip of alcohol – well, she had a very few sips of the champagne, but he could feel her reluctance – to blur the clear-blue-sky clarity of her brain.

He wondered – briefly and inevitably, perhaps, for she was very attractive – if she ever surrendered control, whether, *in flagrante* at least she might lose herself – and then returned to reality. Such meanderings had no place in his relationship or those of his colleagues with Bianca.

'Yes, it's excellent. I thought she would, but you never quite know … yes, thanks …' Mike Russell, colleague of many years, nodded assent to the brandy bottle. 'Now all we've got to do is sell her to the family.'

'The family don't have any choice,' said Bradford, 'but I think they'll like her. Or at least the idea of her. Better than some man – or so they'll think. Best fix a meeting for early next week?'

'Or later this? There really is very little time.'

'I'll get Anna to sort it.'

'So, I'm going to meet the family and board of Farrell's on Friday,' said Bianca to her husband that night, 'Friday afternoon. I can't wait. It's a fantastic set-up, Patrick, straight out of fiction. Or even Hollywood.'

'Really?'

'Yes. There's a matriach, of course – there's almost always a matriach in the cosmetic business—'

'Really?' said Patrick again.

'Well, yes. Just think. Elizabeth Arden, Estée Lauder, Helena Rubinstein … '

'I'm not sure that any reflection on the cosmetic industry on my part would be very rewarding' said Patrick. 'It's not a business I know a lot about, at the moment. But I suspect I'm about to.'

‘You could be. It’s an industry you have to live and breathe, just to understand it. Anyway, she – the matriach, Lady Farrell – founded it in 1953 with her husband who died five years ago – so sad, apparently it was a great love match, lasted nearly sixty years – and then there’s a daughter and a son on the board, neither up to much as far as we can make out, and another old biddy called Florence Hamilton, who’s been with them from the beginning and is also on the board, I presume for old times’ sake.’

‘My word. A completely family affair.’

‘Anyway, they hold all the shares at the moment and she’s not giving in without a fight, but she’s got to because the bank is about to pull the plug, so hideously in debt are they – anyway, I – well *we*, Hugh, Mike and I – think there is some magic there. I can’t wait to get to work on it. Going to be a long meeting, that’s for sure. That OK?’

‘Of course. I’m taking the children to see the Tintin film. You said you didn’t want to go …’

‘I don’t,’ said Bianca, ‘can’t think of anything worse.’

‘That’s all right then,’ said Patrick Bailey lightly.

Bianca Bailey was, in business parlance, a rock star. The stage on which she performed was not the O2 Arena, or even Wembley, but the platform of high finance, its success measured in balance sheets and company flotations. A high-flying, high-profile figure, a female Midas, with a dazzling record in turning businesses around, she was, at thirty-eight, a gift to whatever publicity people she was working with, being extremely attractive. She was tall (five foot ten in her stockinged feet) slim, stylish, and if not quite beautiful, very photogenic and telegenic, with her mass of dark hair, and large grey eyes. She was also highly articulate – an automatic go-to

when anyone wanted a quote on some deal or buyout – and charming. She was also happily married, had three delightful children, lived in a stunning house in Hampstead and also, almost inevitably, in a very pretty country house in Oxfordshire which she persisted in labelling, rather inaccurately, a cottage. As more than one of their friends had remarked, if they weren't so nice, the Baileys would be hugely dislikeable.

Bianca had been wondering what to do next, having been a crucial part of the very successful sale of the company of which she was currently CEO – a hitherto low visibility, almost downmarket toiletry brand – when Mike Russell of Porter Bingham, a private equity firm, had called her to say would she like to come in for a coffee and a chat. They had teamed up before so she knew what that meant – they had a challenge for her in the form of another unsuccessful company that needed her considerable powers.

The prospect they had laid before her was daunting – and Bianca liked daunting. Indeed, she found it irresistible.

'They came to us,' Mike Russell had said. 'Well, the son did, Bertram. Looks like a Bertram too, but nice enough. They're currently losing five million a year and don't know what they're doing financially at all. But there's a load of potential, especially with you on board, probably with a view to selling the company in five to eight years. Have a look at it and see what you think.'

And Bianca had looked, shuddered at the figures and the state of the brand, saw what they meant about the potential, and the result had been the lunch at the Caprice and the agreement between her and Porter Bingham to take things further towards an investment in Farrell's.

‘I think what’s possible is a turnaround from that five million pound loss into a ten million pound annual profit in five years,’ she said. ‘But I’d say you’ll have to make an overall investment of around thirteen million, say ten upfront and another tranche of two or three million to complete later development work, but yes, I think it can be done.’

She smiled at them: her wide, Julia Roberts-style smile. She liked them both, which was important; they were straightforward, decisive and could be great fun. And Hugh was extremely good-looking, in a conventional, establishment–style way. She often thought it was as well he wasn’t her type, or she might occasionally make some less than completely professional decisions. Knowing, however, that in her successful life she had never been swayed for an instant by personal considerations. It was one of the many reasons for her success.

‘I’m really excited about this,’ she had said to Patrick when she got home after that first meeting, ‘but I’d like your agreement. It’s going to be tougher even than PDN. What would you say to that?’

And Patrick said that if she really wanted to do it, then of course she must, resisting the temptation to ask her what she would do if he withheld his agreement. Bianca did what she wanted, always; anything else was just so much window dressing.

He knew what lay ahead of him; as with any new project of Bianca’s there would be a lot of lonely evenings, a commitment from her to the new company that amounted almost to an obsession, and a feeling, quite often, that the company under her command was situated, if not actually in the marital bed, then certainly at the family table. He

put up with it for two reasons: he found it quite interesting himself, observing it as he did from as dispassionate a vantage point as he could manage, and he loved Bianca as much as he admired her and he wanted her to do what made her happy. It required some unselfishness on his part, but on the other hand it allowed him to do whatever he wanted – like buying paintings – without too much interference from anyone.

He was not greatly given to tortured introspection – he was an only child, with all the self-confidence that condition trailed in its wake. 'We're not like other people,' Patrick often said and it was true.

Bianca had no siblings either and they often, in the early days of their relationship, discussed this and the bond it created between them. Indeed she produced some statistic – she was very fond of statistics – that onlies were drawn to other onlies – 'or eldests, much the same really'. She went on to say that only children were statistically highly successful and driven; Patrick was not sure that this could possibly apply to him, but he was flattered by the observation. The last thing he wanted was for the dynamic Ms Wood to regard him as some kind of amiable low achiever. Or indeed her father, the distinguished and highly esteemed historian, Gerald Wood. He sometimes wondered if Gerald knew any of them existed, so immersed was he in medieval constitution and literature, always far more immediate to him than the twenty-first century and more so than ever since Pattie, his beloved wife, had died when Bianca was only nineteen.

'Hello, Mr Bailey. Good day?'

'Yes, not bad, thanks, Sonia. You?' He wasn't going to tell the housekeeper that he'd been so bored he'd actually dropped off in his office after lunch.

‘Very good, thank you. I’ve done the menu for the dinner party for tomorrow week if you would like to look at it – so you can order the wine.’

‘Oh, thanks. I’ll take it up to my study.’

‘And I’ve made a bolognese sauce for tonight – Mrs Bailey won’t be home you said?’

‘No, she’s got a big meeting tomorrow so she’ll be working very late. I’ll eat with the children in about – oh, half an hour? But I’ll cook the spaghetti, don’t worry about that.’

‘Right. Well, I’ll just make a salad and then I’ll be on my way. Ruby’s in bed – Karen’s reading to her now and then she’s off.’

Karen was the nanny; Ruby was still only eight and some one-on-one care was still necessary and outside Sonia’s brief. Karen came in after school until Ruby was in bed and full-time in the holidays; a job, as she often remarked to fellow nannies on her social circuit, of unbelievable cushiness.

‘Fine. Thank you Sonia – oh, hi Milly, how was your day?’

‘Cool.’

‘That’s all right then.’

‘And how was yours?’

‘Oh, pretty hot.’

She reached up to kiss him.

‘You’re so funny,’ she said kindly

‘I try. Done your homework?’

‘Of course!’

‘Sure?’

‘Daddy! Don’t be horrid.’

‘She has done it, Mr Bailey,’ said Sonia, smiling at Milly. ‘She started as soon as she got in from school.’

‘See! Thank you, Sonia.’

‘What about your clarinet practice?’

‘Done that too.’

‘You’re too good to be true, aren’t you? Where’s Fergie?’

‘Playing on the Wii.’

‘Tut-tut. Not allowed before seven.’

‘Daddy! You sound like Mummy. See you later.’

She wandered off, her attention entirely on her phone. Patrick smiled indulgently at her back. Emily, nicknamed Milly at birth, was, at almost thirteen, tall and slender with long, straight dark hair and large brown eyes; sweetly bright and charming, not yet tarnished by adolescence, still affectionate, still chatty, and extremely popular – one of the girls everyone wanted at their parties and sleepovers. She was in the second year at St Catherine’s, Chelsea, a new and fiercely academic girls’ day school, that was giving both St Paul’s and Godolphin a run for their money. A talented musician as well – Grade 6 on the clarinet – her only failure was games at which she was hopeless.

Fergus, at eleven, had the family charm and good looks, was as good at games as Milly was bad, was in every first team at his prep school, and, being clever, managed to hang on to his place in the scholarship class by the skin of his teeth.

Patrick went up to his study on the first floor of the house, a large, detached Victorian and looked over the equally large garden. He loved the house, had spent his early childhood in a similar one only two streets away. The extremely large deposit had been a wedding present from his father; people always said that simple fact told you almost everything you needed to know about the Bailey family: that it was rich, happy, close, and generous.

Hugh Bailey had been a stockbroker in the golden age of the City, made a fortune, retired early in 1985, 'just before Big Bang, thank god,' he often said, and moved to a large country house with a considerable amount of land and some stables where he indulged in the life of a country gentleman, became a very good shot, and turned his lifelong hobby of antique dealing into a 'half-day job', as he put it.

Patrick had left Oxford with a respectable 2:1 in PPE and joined his Uncle Ian's chartered accountancy firm, based in the Strand. Here he was given a very nice office, earned an excellent salary, and was greatly liked by the staff and his clients alike; he did well, being charming and equable as well as clever. He would probably have left after a couple of years, finding the work at best uninspiring and at worst boring, but he had met and fallen in love with Bianca Wood, and in Patrick's world you didn't propose to a girl unless you could offer her a proper set-up, which translated as a nice house in a good area, and a handsome salary to support her should she wish not to work, or when she had children. He wasn't miserable at Bailey Cotton and Bailey; indeed he was very happy, he was just not very excited by the work. Which was not sufficient reason to keep him from proposing to Ms Wood in 1995 and marrying her in 1996.

He had met her at a dinner in the City and been immediately enchanted by her; she was sparkly and articulate, and clearly found him interesting too. She was, she said, a marketing manager at a toiletries company. 'Toothpaste and deodorant might not sound very exciting,' she said 'but last year it was washing powders, so a big improvement. And of course it's exciting because it's not

the product, it's what you can do with it. Sending the sales graph in the right direction is hard to beat!'

He asked her out to dinner that weekend and they talked for so long the waiters were piling chairs on to tables before they realized how late it was, and she invited him out the next Friday. 'My treat this time. No, that's how I operate, sorry, don't like spongers.'

Patrick found her signing the credit card slip extremely painful and said so; she replied that he was clearly very old-fashioned. 'Most of the men I know would be thrilled.' In the event, any discomfiture on Patrick's part didn't last very long because in three months they had moved in together.

By the time they were married in 1996, Bianca had moved jobs twice and become marketing manager of an interior design company. She continued to work until the week before Milly was born and was back at her desk in four months; when Fergie joined them two years later, she only stayed at home for twelve weeks. There was the nanny, she said, and she got very bored rocking cradles. Which did not mean she was a bad mother – she was intensely loving and passionately involved with her children. She just operated better maternally if she had something else to do and when Ruby made her embryonic presence felt, eighteen months after Fergie, unplanned and the result of a bout of bronchitis, a strong antibiotic and a resultant decrease in the effectiveness of the pill, she did not, as some women in her position might have done, opt for a termination, just welcomed Ruby determinedly and said she liked to keep busy. Which she did.

Her career trajectory had been impressive; Patrick, while being immensely proud of her, couldn't help wishing she would take more time off when she had the children;

but they certainly didn't seem to have suffered, they were all bright and charming and self-confident. He sometimes felt also that Bianca might take a little more interest in him and his work; but then, as he so frequently said, there wasn't anything much to take an interest in. He was a partner now, extremely well-paid, his hours were civilized – more than could be said for Bianca's – and on the whole he didn't mind being the ballast in their household as he put it. He was exceptionally good-natured. Then, when Milly was five, Bianca was made sales and marketing director of a fabric company. That was when her salary overtook Patrick's and Patrick did mind that – quite a lot. Bianca teased him about it.

'Darling! It's our money, just as yours is; it pays for our family, our life, what do the proportions matter?'

He once asked her, when he'd had a great deal to drink, if she would give up her job if he really wanted her to; she leaned across the table and said, 'Darling of course, if you really wanted it, but you wouldn't, would you? You're not like that – and that's why I love you.'

And she did: very much. As Patrick loved her. And when life was a little less than perfect, he would remind himself that a little boredom at the office and an occasional sense of resentment was more than made up for by having a clever and beautiful wife who loved him, three enchanting children, a wide circle of friends and a lifestyle most people would envy.