



Mistress of His Revenge (Bought by the Brazilian)

By Chantelle Shaw

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Dressed in Delgado's diamonds

No longer the Brazilian boy born to the streets, Cruz Delgado is the renowned owner of a diamond empire. There is still one dent in his pride: aristocratic Sabrina Bancroft, the only woman to ever walk away from him.

With Sabrina's beloved home under threat, Cruz sees his chance for revenge—he will help Sabrina if she becomes his mistress. Having her at his beck and call, in his bed and wearing jewels from his own mine should satisfy him. But once he discovers why she left, he'll realize that of all the riches he's hunted, Sabrina is the most priceless...

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Chantelle Shaw enjoyed a happy childhood making up stories in her head. Always an avid reader, Chantelle discovered Mills & Boon as a teenager and during the times when her children refused to sleep, she would pace the floor with a baby in one hand and a book in the other! Twenty years later she decided to write one of her own. Writing takes up most of Chantelle's spare time, but she also enjoys gardening and walking. She doesn't find domestic chores so pleasurable!

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The Honourable Hugo Ffaulks—with two Fs—was drunk and being sick into a vase. Not just any vase, Sabrina noted, her lips tightening with annoyance. The vase was a fine example of early eighteenth-century English porcelain and had been valued at fifteen hundred pounds by an auction house that had recently catalogued the antiques at Eversleigh Hall.

Compared to the value of the hall's art collection, which included two Gainsboroughs and a portrait by Joshua Reynolds, fifteen hundred pounds was not a vast sum, but in Sabrina's current financial crisis she needed every penny she could lay her hands on and selling the vase would at least allow her to pay the staff's wages and the farrier's bill.

A frown crossed her smooth brow. If only horses did not need shoeing every six weeks. The cost of the farrier, plus vet's bills, feed and hay meant that Monty was becoming an expense she simply could not justify. She had spoken to a reputable horse dealer who had assured her that she should get a good price for a seven-year-old thoroughbred, but the thought of selling Monty was unbearable.

She turned her attention to Hugo, who was now leaning on one of the other party guests and trying to stagger in the direction of the bar.

'Take him to the kitchen and get some black coffee into him,' Sabrina instructed Hugo's friend. She wished she could phone Brigadier Ffaulks and ask him to come and collect his son, but Hugo's parents had paid her a sizeable fee to organise a twenty-first birthday party at Eversleigh Hall. Hugo and fifty of his friends had arrived the previous evening and would be staying at the hall for the weekend. Tomorrow after breakfast—if any of them could face a full English breakfast—they would be able to enjoy clay-pigeon shooting on the estate and fishing in the private lake.

Opening up Eversleigh Hall for weddings and parties was the only way that Sabrina could afford the huge running costs of the estate until her father returned. *If he ever returned.* She quickly pushed her fears about the earl to the back of her mind with the rest of her worries and smiled at the elderly butler who was walking stiffly across the drawing room.

'I'd better fetch a mop and clear up the mess, Miss Sabrina.'

'I'll do it, John. I don't expect you to clear up after *my* guests.' She could not disguise the rueful note in her voice. The butler was well aware that she hated seeing Eversleigh Hall being treated carelessly by the likes of Hugo and his friends, who seemed to think that having money, and in some cases aristocratic titles, gave them the right to behave like animals. And that was an insult to animals, Sabrina thought when she caught

sight of a female guest lighting up a cigarette.

'How many times must I repeat the "no smoking in the house" rule?' she muttered.

'I'll escort the young lady out to the garden,' John murmured. 'You have a visitor, Miss Sabrina. A Mr Delgado arrived a few minutes ago.'

She stiffened. 'Delgado—are you sure that was the name he gave?'

The butler looked affronted. 'Quite sure. I would hazard that he is a foreign gentleman. He said he wishes to discuss Earl Bancroft.'

'My father!' Sabrina's heart missed another beat. She took a deep breath and groped for her common sense. Just because the unexpected visitor's name was Delgado did not automatically mean that it was Cruz. In fact the likelihood was zero, she reassured herself. It was ten years since she had last seen him. The date their relationship had ended and the date a week earlier when she had suffered a miscarriage and lost their baby were ingrained on her memory. Every year, she found April a poignant month, with lambs in the fields and birds busy building nests, the countryside bursting with new life while she quietly mourned her child who had never lived in the world.

'I asked Mr Delgado to wait in the library.'

'Thank you, John.' Sabrina forced her mind away from painful memories. As she walked across the entrance hall, past the portraits of her illustrious ancestors, she tried to mentally compose herself. It was likely that the mystery visitor was a journalist sniffing around for information about Earl Bancroft. Or perhaps Delgado was one of her father's creditors—heaven knew there were enough of them. But in either case she was unable to help.

She had no idea where her father was, and since he had been officially declared a missing person his bank accounts had been frozen. Sabrina thought of the mounting pile of bills that arrived at Eversleigh Hall daily. Since the earl's disappearance she had used all of her savings to pay for the upkeep of the house, but if her father did not return soon there was a strong possibility that she would be forced to sell her family's ancestral home.

A week earlier in Brazil

'We have to face the facts, Cruz. Old Betsy is finished. She's given us the last of her diamonds and there's no point wasting any more of our time and money on her.'

Cruz Delgado fixed his olive-green eyes on his friend and business partner, Diego Cazorra. 'I'm convinced that Old Betsy hasn't revealed all her secrets,' he said with amusement in his voice. He could not remember now if it had been him or Diego who had christened the diamond mine they had bought as a joint venture six years ago Old Betsy, but the name had stuck.

'Your belief that there could be deposits of diamonds deeper underground is founded purely on speculation fuelled by rumour and the drunken ramblings of an old miner.' Diego lifted a hand to shield his eyes from the blazing Brazilian sun and glanced around the two-thousand-acre mine site.

The ochre-coloured earth was baked as hard as clay and lorry tyre marks criss-crossed the dusty ground.

Directly above the mineshaft stood the tall metal structure of the head frame, looking like a bizarre piece of modern art, and next to it were the huge winding drums used to operate the hoist that transported men and machinery down into the mine. In the distance, the glint of silver denoted the river, and beyond it was the dense green rainforest. An alluvial processing plant stretched along one river bank, its purpose to recover diamonds found in sediment sifted from the river bed. But the best diamonds, those of gem quality and high carat weight, were hidden beneath the earth's surface and could only be retrieved by men and machinery tunnelling deep underground.

'I believe Jose's story of the existence of another mine, or at least an extension of the original mine,' Cruz said. 'It confirms what my father told me before he died, that Earl Bancroft had discovered some historic drawings of tunnels that run far deeper than we currently operate.'

Cruz removed his hat and swept his sweat-damp hair back from his brow. Like Diego, he was over six feet tall and his muscular physique was the result of years of hard physical labour working in the mining industry. Both men were deeply tanned, but Cruz's hair was black while Diego's was dirty blond—evidence that his father had been a European, although that was all Diego knew about the man who had seduced his mother and abandoned her when she had fallen pregnant.

Cruz and Diego had been friends since they were boys growing up in a notorious *favela*—a slum in Belo Horizonte, the largest city in the state of Minas Gerais. When Cruz's father had moved his family north to the town of Montes Claros to find work in a diamond mine, Cruz had persuaded Diego to join them at a mine owned by an English earl. They had been excited by the idea of making their fortunes but it had been many years before they had struck lucky and too late for Cruz's father.

'The geological sampling and magnetotelluric surveys we commissioned showed up nothing of interest,' Diego pointed out. 'Do you really believe a story about an abandoned mine over modern scientific surveying techniques?'

'I believe what my father told me with his dying breath.' Cruz's jaw hardened. 'When Papai discovered the Estrela Vermelha, Earl Bancroft persuaded him that there could be other rare red diamonds. My father said the earl showed him and the old miner Jose a map of a forgotten section of the mine, which had tunnels running deeper than a thousand metres.'

'But Earl Bancroft sold the mine soon after your father died following the accident. If there *had* been a map, Bancroft should have given it to the prospector who bought the mine from him. When we raised the money to buy Old Betsy from the prospector six years ago, you asked him about an old map but he denied any knowledge of one.'

Cruz shrugged. 'So maybe the earl kept the map a secret from the prospector. It wouldn't surprise me. I remember Henry Bancroft was a wily fox who looked after his own interests at the expense of the men he employed. The roof fall was a direct result of Bancroft's cost cutting and failure to adhere to safety procedures. When he sent my father into an area of the mine that he knew to be dangerous he effectively signed Papai's death warrant.'

Bitterness swept through Cruz as he thought of the mining accident that had claimed his father's life. Ten years ago Vitor Delgado had been buried beneath tons of rock, but Cruz remembered it as if it had happened yesterday. Clawing at the rubble of the collapsed mine roof with his bare hands, choking on the thick dust as he had desperately tried to reach his father. It had been two days before they had brought Vitor to the surface—alive, but so severely injured that he had died from internal bleeding a few hours later.

Cruz closed his eyes and the years fell away. He was back in a hospital room, with the smell of disinfectant and the beep of the machine that was monitoring his father's failing heartbeat. His mother and sisters were sobbing.

'Don't try to speak, Papai. You need all your strength to get better.'

He had refused to believe Vitor would not recover even though the doctor had murmured that there was no hope. Cruz had put his face close to his father's and struggled to understand the injured man's incoherent mutterings.

'Earl Bancroft showed me a map of tunnels dug many years ago. He believes there are red diamonds as big as the one I found deeper underground. Ask him, Cruz...askhim about the map...'

Even as he was dying Vitor had been obsessed with diamonds. Amongst miners it was known as diamond fever—the desperate lengths men would go to in their quest for the glittering gemstones that could make them rich.

For Cruz and Diego the dream had come true.

After his father died Cruz had become responsible for his mother and young sisters. Mining was the only job he knew and he worked in a coal mine where the filth and sweat and danger were at least repaid with good wages, which allowed him to pay for college evening classes.

Three years later, armed with a business degree, he got a job with a private bank and quickly proved his brilliance in the boardroom. Other people were surprised by his ruthless determination to succeed but they hadn't seen the things Cruz had witnessed in the *favela*: the violence of the drug gangs, the drive-by shootings. They had never felt hunger in their bellies, or fear, and they had no idea that Cruz sought success and money because he knew what it was like to have nothing.

He was offered a position on the bank's board of directors and bought his mother and sisters a house in an affluent part of the city. Cruz was on his way up and his family would never be hungry again. But he wanted more. He didn't want to work for the bank—he wanted to be one of its millionaire clients.

He remembered the Estrela Vermelha—the Red Star diamond his father had found in the Montes Claros mine. The diamond had an estimated value of several million dollars, but it had belonged to Earl Bancroft, not to Vitor. It was mine owners who got rich, not the men who crawled through tunnels and risked their lives laying explosives to break through solid rock. So Cruz took the biggest gamble of his life and he and Diego bought the mine that had once belonged to Earl Bancroft. The prospector who sold it to them thought they were crazy—he hadn't found diamonds of any significant value in the mine—but he understood that diamond fever could turn sane men mad.

Six months later, kimberlite rock containing diamonds estimated to be worth something in the region of four hundred million dollars was discovered in Old Betsy. Cruz became the most valued client of the bank where he had once worked, and he established a prestigious jewellery company, Delgado Diamonds. Diego invested in a gold mine as well as various other business ventures, but both men remembered what it was like to be poor and hungry and they gave financial support to a charity set up to help Brazil's street children.

'If Earl Bancroft had really believed there was a deeper mine, why would he have sold up? Why didn't he open up the tunnels shown on the map?' Diego demanded.

'Perhaps he kept the map as a form of insurance policy in case he needed money in the future. He knew that whoever owned the mine would be likely to pay a fortune for a map of a second mine with the potential of containing more diamonds.'

Diego frowned. 'Are you suggesting we should offer to buy the map from the earl?'

'The hell I am,' Cruz growled. 'Legally the map, if it exists—and I believe it does—belongs to us. Any documents pertaining to the mine are the property of whoever owns it. Bancroft should have given the map to the prospector, and in turn it should have come to us when we became the new owners of the mine.'

'For the past five and a half years we have mined good quality diamonds, but now the supply is virtually exhausted. You're right—to continue mining Old Betsy makes no economic sense. But if there *is* a second mine then I want what is rightfully ours, and I intend to go to Eversleigh Hall in England and demand that Earl Bancroft hands over the map.'

Diego gave Cruz a speculative look. 'It's possible you'll meet Sabrina at Eversleigh Hall. How would you feel about seeing her again?'

Cruz gave a short laugh. 'After ten years I might not even recognise her. She was eighteen when she came to Brazil. I imagine she is married by now—no doubt to a duke or lord, or some other peer of the realm with an aristocratic pedigree as long as her own. The honourable Lady Sabrina made it clear that she didn't want a commoner for a husband,' he said sardonically.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kimberly Langdon:

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James Robinson:

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