

*His
Guilty
Secret*

HÉLENE FERMONT



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hélène Fermont was born into a bilingual family and enjoyed an idyllic childhood on the outskirts of Malmö, Sweden. Growing up in the 1970's, she enjoyed a brief musical career on Swedish TV and radio prior to pursuing a career in teaching and eventually as a child therapist. She has lived in London for over twenty years but regularly returns to her native Sweden where the unspoiled scenery and tranquility aid the creative process. His Guilty Secret is her third novel after *Because of You* and *We Never Said Goodbye* and she is currently hard at work on her fourth novel, *Error of Judgement*.

*For everyone whose lives are turned upside down.
Transitions are hard yet necessary to move forward.
Stay true to yourself and good things will come your way.
With much love, HF*

CHAPTER ONE

EVERYONE QUEUING IN the spacious foyer at Hilton London Gatwick Airport hotel could barely take their eyes off the striking couple at the front desk. The handsome, tall, dark-haired man's Air France uniform and matching cap, and the beautiful woman's Yves St Laurent blazer, white satin blouse and black pencil skirt, accentuating her petite frame, jet-black hair and dark blue eyes, were reminiscent of Hollywood stars in their heyday.

What no one knew was how much the stylish couple had been looking forward to that moment before they had to return to their respective lives. He to London and his wife of a decade, and she to Paris and the only person who mattered to her as much as the man at her side.

Is it possible to love two women? the man wondered for the millionth time, his thought disrupted by the woman asking, "Did you check us into the same room as last time, mon chéri?"

"Oui, you liked it, n'est-ce pas?" The man had kept his French

accent although, after many years in London, his English vocabulary was better than hers.

“I will stay with you wherever you want me to as long as we’re together,” she replied, holding his gaze.

Feeling her standing so close to him, the only thing he wanted was to make the most of their time together. “We’ve only got one night. After that we must be patient until we can meet again, my darling.” As he held her close, it was evident to the people standing behind how much in love they were.

“Welcome back, Madame and Monsieur Bouchard,” said the young girl behind the desk. “I hope you enjoy your stay with us as much as you did last time.”

“Bien sûr, of course, it feels wonderful to return to your hotel,” the man replied, taking the key card and draping an arm around the woman’s shoulder as they followed the tall, blond porter to the lift down the hall, and stepped inside. “It’s good to see you again, Tom,” the man said in a friendly voice.

“You too, M. Bouchard, and your wife, it’s been a while since your last visit.” Smiling at them, Tom remembered how appreciative they’d been the first time he’d assisted them, leaving him a generous tip when they checked out. The doors opened and as he carried their suitcases into the luxurious room, Tom asked, “Will you stay a while longer than last time?”

“Regrettably, no. We will check out in the morning.” The man’s eyes clouded over.

“You’d better make the most of your short time here with us. Would you like me to serve breakfast in your room like last time?”

“Oui. Black coffee, croissants and fruit will be fine.” The woman’s voice sounded subdued, as she tried not to focus on how

miserable she would be leaving the man she loved the following day.

“With pleasure. I wish you a great day and look forward to seeing you tomorrow.” Tom was almost out of the door when the man stepped over to him and gave him a £50 note.

“You must treat yourself and your girlfriend to something nice, Tom, perhaps a movie and bottle of wine? It’s wonderful to see you again.”

“But it’s too much...I can’t accept it,” Tom said, only too pleased to be of service to them without the generous tip.

“We insist, you must take it or we’ll be upset,” the woman said, smiling at him.

The young porter beamed, bowed and reminded them he would return in the morning with their breakfast, before wishing them all the best and closing the door behind him.

Alone at long last, the man’s eyes lingered on the woman seated on the bed. “Je t’aime...you will never know how much I love you. Promise me one thing: when it’s time to leave, you must start to look forward to our next meeting.” His voice was hoarse with emotion.

“I can’t! My heart breaks each time we say goodbye. Why can’t we be together all the time?”

“You know the answer. I can’t leave her...Patricia loves and relies on me, just like I do with her. You and I made a pact that we’d never leave our marriages no matter how hard it is for us to be apart. What’s changed since then?” He sounded as sad as they both felt.

“I don’t love him anymore, I don’t think I ever did...not after I met you. I’m only with him for one reason, as you know.”

The woman burst into tears and lay down on the bed, covering her face with her hands. She’d agonised over whether to put an end to their relationship but it was too painful to imagine he would not

continue to be a part of her life. They were soul mates, regardless of the others who shared their lives.

“You are the love of my life. I’m lost without you,” she cried, feeling his arms around her as they lay together, gazing into each other’s eyes.

“I feel the same about you...And her. Patricia is my wife. I’d never have asked her to marry me if I didn’t love her.” Imagining her eagerness to see him after weeks apart, he felt the same turmoil as if he’d betrayed her trust. But the woman he was with meant just as much to him. And he knew he would never be able to choose one over the other. “We’ve got too much to lose. I hate to see you so upset, have you told him how you feel?”

Whenever they were apart, he often wondered if she was happy with the man she had been married to for longer than he and his wife. But long ago they had agreed to never mention their respective lives and spouses while together, except for the one thing that meant everything to both of them.

“What’s the point? You will never leave her; I may as well continue as I am. If it weren’t for what we treasure most, I’d have left him a long time ago.” Closing her eyes, the woman let out a deep sigh then turned to her lover, their eyes, mouths and bodies expressing their desire for each other.

Hours later, their bodies entwined and her face buried deep in his hair, she whispered, “I wish we could stay here a while longer. Must you really leave in the morning? Please say you will get someone else to cover your shift, *pour moi*?” Her eyes pleaded with him to say yes.

Kissing the nape of her neck, the man sighed and shook his head. “I’m so sorry but I can’t do it, I can’t let her down with such

short notice. She loves me. It wouldn't be fair."

Nodding her understanding, the woman disentangled herself from his arms and slipped out of bed. Walking towards the large window at the other side of the room, she looked down at the people outside in the street. Most of them were on their way home, some pulling luggage behind them. As he took in her naked body and delicate features, the man felt a sharp pain inside his chest. It wasn't the first time. He vowed to bring it to the attention of his GP as soon as he returned home.

He joined her at the window, a big white towel around his waist. "I love you just as much as her, you know? Perhaps things would have been different if it was just the two of us, you and me... but I've no regrets. Most people never get to meet one person to love and who loves them back. I'm extremely fortunate to have met and fallen in love with two such extraordinary women. If things weren't as they are, you and Patricia would have enjoyed spending time together as friends. Of that I'm absolutely certain."

Pushing his comment to the back of her mind, the woman took his hand as they returned to bed and made love a second time.

Much too soon it was time to get up and pack their things. They hadn't brought much with them; both were acutely aware they never had the opportunity to spend more time than the bare minimum. She'd lied to her husband for years, saying an old school friend wanted to meet up with her at their home in Marseille.

Thank God for Milou, she thought. Without her I'd have no one to confide in and cover for me in case I'm found out or something happens to my precious...our precious gift. Reluctantly, she willed herself to focus on what little time they had left together.

She was in the shower when she heard him shout, “Tom’s arrived with our breakfast, it smells delicious!” She joined him soon after, having applied subtle makeup to hide the sorrow she carried in her eyes each time they parted.

The man reached for her hand. “We’ll find a way to meet again soon, just like we always do. Meanwhile, I rely on you to look after our special gift. Can you do it for us both? I’ve two regrets in life: one is that I’ve caused you much pain by refusing to divorce my wife; the second is that I never got to spend enough time with what matters most to us.”

Together they sat at the small table by the bed, drinking coffee and eating croissants, pretending they were okay and already looking forward to the next time they’d meet, usually in Paris after he finished a shift with Air France or in London before he returned home to his wife.

As he gazed into her eyes, he repeated the same words he always said when preparing to leave: “Call me on your secret mobile if you want to talk. I will return your messages as soon as I can, wherever I may be at the time.” Standing up, the man felt the same sharp pain in his chest, but said nothing, not wishing to cause her more distress than their imminent separation. Still, he couldn’t mask the pain on his face.

“What’s wrong? You look ill...Is there something you’ve not told me, something you’ve been hiding from me?” The mere thought of losing him nearly crushed her. He had to be alright. How else would she survive, living for the brief moments they shared and putting her life on hold when they were apart? “Answer me, please! I can’t leave unless I know you’re okay.”

“You mustn’t concern yourself with me. I work too hard,

constantly flying to and from Paris and London. I can't wait to retire; it's been years since I had a holiday. My doctor keeps telling me I must slow down, but how can I? I love flying and at fifty-two I'm too young to retire...Plus, it is what enables us to meet and spend time together..." As he spoke, the man felt increasingly unwell. His face drained of colour and he knew something was seriously wrong. Still naked with just the towel around his waist, he stumbled towards the edge of the bed and gasped for breath.

"Mon dieu, you're ill! I can't leave you when you're like this! I'm calling reception to ask them to send a doctor to our room... What's wrong with you?"

She was dialling the number when the man said, "Please hang up! No one can find out about us, we've checked in under a false name. What if some doctor gives out my details to Air France? They will pension me off! What's more, they will discover your details from the hotel. No, I will not take the risk, it's bad enough that my sister and colleague know about us. My wife and your husband must never find out about us and our secret. You must leave immediately... Please..."

They'd covered their tracks well, but the man knew he wouldn't be able to protect her unless she complied with his wish.

Slamming down the receiver, the woman rummaged through her bag and pulled out her mobile. Frantic with worry, she dialled 999 and waited for someone to pick up.

Reading her mind, the man staggered up to her and pleaded with her to not continue with the call.

Her eyes welled up with tears. "But I can't lose you! Please let me call reception and ask them to send someone...anyone!" Her intuition told her something terrible was about to happen. Yet, unless

he allowed her to help him, there wasn't a thing she could do to prevent it.

Struggling to talk now, the man whispered, "You must leave: we must think of the people in our lives. Someone will find me after you've gone. Take good care of yourself; no one can find out about us..." He collapsed on the carpet next to the bed where only a few hours ago they'd made love.

The woman ran over and sat down beside him, sobbing hysterically while holding him in her arms. "Please let me help you, we can't end like this!" Flashbacks of everything they had shared mingled with regret he'd never been part of the most important thing.

As she held on to him for dear life, the woman heard him whisper, "I was wrong to deny what matters to me the most. You must find it in your heart to forgive me for my mistake. Promise me you will always be there when it's required of you...I will always love you and Patricia..." The man knew his life would soon be over. As he took a final look at the woman he'd loved for so long, his last words were barely audible. "Forgive me...Tell Patricia I never...meant to hurt her..."

Tears blinding her vision, the woman gently kissed his mouth and closed his eyes. He was gone. Everything they shared ceased to exist and she had no idea how to survive without him.

Just before noon, the woman took one last look at the man, praying he didn't have to be on his own for much longer. She couldn't bear the thought of some stranger discovering him like that. *But it's what he wanted. Even at his death, no one knows about us and the secret we've been hiding.* "Goodbye, my love, I will carry you in my heart until the day I die."

Gathering up their suitcases and the mobile he'd been hiding from his wife, she ran downstairs to reception and out of the main doors, grateful he'd settled the bill for the room and breakfast last night. She caught a cab outside, and asked the driver to take her to the airport, where she disposed of his case and phone in a dustbin on her way towards her gate.

The young porter made his way upstairs to the nice French couple's luxurious suite, wondering why they had left without saying goodbye. It wasn't like them to forget about him. The sight of the man lying in a heap on the floor next to the bed made him shout out so loudly that a cleaner came running to his assistance.

Tom watched in a blur as the cleaner took in the scene before them, then dashed back out into the corridor and called reception. Soon people would arrive to inspect the room and the body, and the man's next of kin would be notified.

Tom wondered if he'd meet the woman again yet somehow doubted their paths would cross a third time.

I hope you enjoyed the first chapter of
His Guilty Secret.

The title is now available for pre-order here:

<http://amzn.to/2yFFyyB>

Thank you, Helene x