



Master of Her Virtue

By Miranda Lee

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Shy, cautious Violet has always kept herself hidden away from the world. And she's had enough of life in the shadows. Her resolutions?

1. To accept every party invitation going.
2. To find a man who will steer her away from purity.

Enter Leo Wolfe: internationally renowned film director who is power, wealth and attraction personified. If there was ever a man to lead Violet from the path of virtue, it's him....

But is Violet ready for where he wants to take her?

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Editorial Review

About the Author

After leaving her convent school, Miranda Lee briefly studied the cello before moving to Sydney, where she embraced the emerging world of computers. Her career as a programmer ended after she married, had three daughters and bought a small acreage in a semi-rural community. She yearned to find a creative career from which she could earn money. When her sister suggested writing romances, it seemed like a good idea. She could do it at home, and it might even be fun! She never looked back.

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'All packed and ready to go, Violet?' her father called out to her from the kitchen.

'Coming,' she called back, relieved that Christmas was over for another year and she could escape back to her life in Sydney.

She'd once loved Christmas, Violet thought as she gave her bedroom one last glance. As she'd once loved this room. But that was when she'd been twelve, a whole year before puberty had struck and her carefree little girl's world had changed for ever.

Soon after that her room had become her prison. Admittedly, a pretty prison, with pink walls, pink bedspread and pink curtains, not to mention her own television and DVD player. But a prison all the same.

'Time to go, Violet,' her father said, this time from her open bedroom door. 'You don't want to miss your plane.'

Lord, no, she thought, suppressing a shudder as she slung her carryall over her shoulder then grabbed the handle of her small suitcase. Four days at home was more than enough. It wasn't just the memories it evoked but the endless questioning from her well-meaning family—usually around the dinner table on Christmas day after her sister's children had abandoned the grown-ups for a swim in the pool. How was her job going? Her writing? Her love life?

Oh yes, it always came back to her love life. Or lack of it.

When she'd said—as she'd said every year—that she wasn't dating anyone special right now, Gavin, her wonderfully tactful brother, had asked her if she was a lesbian. Fortunately, he'd been howled down by the others, especially her brother-in-law, Steve, who was married to her sister, Vanessa, and was the nicest man. Everyone had laughed when he'd said if Violet was a lesbian then he was gay. Most unlikely, given he was a big, brawny tiler with a wife, two children and a Harley Davidson.

The subject had been dropped after that, thank heavens. But the following day, when she and Vanessa had been alone in the kitchen clearing up after their traditional Boxing Day barbeque, her sister had given her a long sideways glance and said quietly, 'I know you're not gay, Vi. But you're not still a virgin, are you?'

Violet had lied, of course, claiming she'd lost her virginity when she'd been at uni. Vanessa hadn't looked entirely convinced but she'd let the matter drop, for which Violet was grateful.

They'd never been all that close; had never confided in each other as some sisters did. Vanessa was eight

years older and had never been on the same wavelength as Violet.

Still, it seemed incredible that anyone in her family would ever think that she would find relationships with the opposite sex easy. Years of suffering from severe cystic acne had blighted her teenage years, turning her once-happy, outgoing personality into a shy, introverted one. Going to high school had been sheer torture. It wasn't just her brother who'd called her 'pizza face'. She'd been teased and bullied to such an extent that she'd come home crying most days.

Her distressed mother had bought every product known to mankind to fix the problem but nothing had worked, often making her skin worse. The one thing her mother hadn't done was take her to a doctor, her father having insisted that she'd grow out of it. But she hadn't, not till a wonderfully wise counsellor at school had taken Violet to her own doctor a few months before her graduation.

The lady GP had been very sympathetic and knowledgeable, prescribing an antibiotic lotion, as well as putting Violet on a particular brand of the contraceptive pill which was famous for correcting the hormone imbalance causing her acne in the first place. The ugly red pimples had gradually gone away, but unfortunately by then comfort-eating and constant picking had left Violet with two equally depressing problems: scars and obesity.

No, no; that wasn't true. She hadn't been obese. But she'd definitely been overweight.

Okay, so she'd finally fixed both those problems with a healthy diet, regular work-outs and endless sessions with a miracle laser which had cost her every cent of a ten-thousand-dollar inheritance she'd fortuitously received from a great aunt who'd died around that time. But the emotional scars left behind by years of low self-esteem at a crucial time in her life could not be so easily fixed. She still lacked confidence in her appearance; still found it hard to believe that men found her attractive. The mirror told her one thing, but her mind told her another. She *had* been asked out this past year a couple of times, but she'd always said no.

In her defence, neither of the two men who'd invited her out had possessed any of the qualities which she secretly desired in a man: they hadn't been wickedly handsome, sinfully sexy or even remotely charming. One caught the same bus as she did every day and was as dull as ditch-water. The other worked in the supermarket where she shopped. Despite not being totally unattractive, he was not the kind of chap who was ever likely to make manager of the store.

Neither man had been anything like the irresistible heroes who strutted their arrogant selves through the pages of the romance novels she'd once devoured during the long, lonely hours she'd spent in her pink prison.

Her gaze flicked to the book case which still contained a large number of those romances, all of them historical, favourites that she couldn't bear to part with. She hadn't read any of them for ages, however, her reading habits having changed over the years.

At uni she'd been obliged to read Shakespeare and the classics as well as lots of modern literary works—she'd majored in English literature—leaving little time for reading romances. Any spare reading time she had had been spent reading the unpublished novels emailed to her by Henry, a literary agent whom she'd worked for as a paid reader. Most of those books had been thrillers.

Now that she was Henry's full-time assistant, Violet was also obliged to read a lot of the best sellers published around the world so that she was always up-to-date with the current market. And, whilst some of these books did have romantic elements, none were anything like the raunchy historical romances she'd once

been addicted to.

Suddenly, she had the urge to see if they still held the same fascination for her that they once had; if they could still make her heart race. Dropping the handle of her case, she crossed the room to the book case where she began searching for one particular favourite, about a pirate who'd kidnapped an English noble woman then fallen in love with her, and vice versa. It was all total fantasy, of course. But Violet had loved it.

'Violet, for Pete's sake, come on,' her father said impatiently when she bent down to check the bottom shelf.

'Won't be a sec,' she replied, her gaze quickly scanning the row of books.

And there it was, dog-eared and with the pages yellowing, but the cover still as shocking as ever, with the heroine's clothes in disarray and the handsome pirate hero looming over her with lecherous intent. Wicked devil, she thought, but with a jolt of remembered pleasure.

'Just wanted something to read on the plane,' she said as she quickly shoved the book into her carryall.

Saying goodbye to her mother was the only difficult part in leaving. Her mother always cried.

'Don't wait till next Christmas to come home, love,' her mother said, sniffing into a wadful of tissues.

'All right, Mum,' Violet said, biting her own bottom lip.

'Promise me you'll come home for Easter.'

Violet searched her mind for any excuse. But couldn't find one.

'I'll try, Mum. I promise.'

Her father didn't talk during the drive to the airport. He wasn't much of a talker. A plumber by trade, he was a good but simple man who loved his wife and his family, though it was clear to both Vanessa and Violet that Gavin was the apple of his eye. Admittedly, they were like two peas in a pod, with Gavin having become a plumber as well. Vanessa was closest to her mother, both in looks and personality, whilst Violet.. Well, Violet had always been the odd one out in the family in every way.

Aside from being the only one to be plagued by acne in her teenage years, she'd looked totally different as well. Where both Vanessa and her mother were blue-eyed blondes with small bones and were less than average height, Violet was taller and curvier, with dark brown hair and eyes. Admittedly, her father and brother had dark-brown hair and eyes, but they weren't big men, both a good few inches less than six feet with lean, wiry frames.

She'd been told, when she'd once questioned her genes, that she looked like her great-aunt Mirabella, the one who'd died and left her the ten grand. Not that she'd ever met the woman. Apparently, she'd died a spinster. It suddenly occurred to Violet that maybe no man would marry her because she'd had a face covered in pimples and scars at a time when there'd been no miracle pill or miracle lasers.

But it wasn't just in looks that Violet was different from the rest of her family. Her brain was different as well. Measured with an IQ of one hundred and forty, she had a brilliant memory, as well as an analytical mind and a talent for writing—though not creative writing so much, she was beginning to suspect. She'd

finally abandoned her attempt to write her first novel this past year when she hadn't been able to get past the third chapter.

Her writing ability, she'd concluded, lay more in being able to put her analytical thoughts and opinions into words which were original and thought-provoking. Her English essays in high school had been so good that her teachers had been stunned. They'd encouraged her to enter an essay competition on the subject of Jane Austen's books, first prize being a scholarship to study for an arts degree at Sydney University, where all her fees and books would be paid for.

She'd won it before she'd also noted the scholarship included two thousand dollars a semester towards her living expenses. It was not quite enough for her to live on, but she'd been fortunate to find board with a widow named Joy who'd charged her only a nominal rent provided Violet did some of the heavy cleaning and helped her with the shopping.

Another plus had been the location of Joy's terraced house. It was in Newtown, an inner-city suburb within walking distance of Sydney University. Even so, her father had still had to give her some money so that she could make ends meet. That was till she had landed the job as one of Henry's readers, after which she'd been able to survive without outside help.

Violet had quickly found she liked not being beholden to anyone for anything; had liked the feeling of being responsible for herself. As much as she still lacked confidence in her appearance, she did not lack confidence in other areas of her life.

She knew she was good at her job as well as quite a lot of other things. She'd learned to cook well, thanks to helping Joy in the kitchen. She was a good driver, again thanks to Joy, who'd lent her a car and bravely gone with her whilst she clocked up the numbers of hours driving that she needed to secure her licence. She would have bought herself a car, if she'd needed one, but Henry worked out of an apartment in the CBD and it was much easier to catch a bus than drive into the city and find parking.

Violet supposed that, if she had a social life with lots of friends dotted all over Sydney, she would definitely have to buy herself a car. But she didn't. Occasionally, this bothered her, but she'd grown used to not having friends; grown used to her own company. Not that she stayed home alone all the time. She often went out with Joy, who was still a real live-wire, despite being seventy-five now with two arthritic hips, which gave her hell in the winter. Every Saturday night the two of them would go out for a bite to eat—usually at an Asian restaurant—before going on to see a movie.

Violet could honestly say that she was content with her life, on the whole. She wasn't unhappy or depressed, as she'd once been. It was a big plus to be able to look in the mirror each morning and not shudder with revulsion. Of course, if she were brutally honest, she did secretly wish that she could find the courage to enter the dating world and eventually do something about her virginal status. She hated to think that next Christmas would eventually come around and she'd make the same tired old excuse over her lack of a love life.

A wry smile pulled at the corners of her mouth as she thought of the book in her bag. What she needed was a wickedly sexy pirate to kidnap her and not give her time to think or to worry before he ravaged her silly.

Unfortunately, that was highly unlikely to happen in this day and age. It was an exciting thought, though.

Suddenly, Violet couldn't wait to get to the airport where she could start reading.

'Don't get out, Dad,' she said once they arrived at the departure drop-off point.

'Okay. Give us a kiss.'

Violet leant over and pecked him on the cheek. 'Bye, Dad. Keep well.'

Twelve minutes later, Violet was sitting in the departure lounge, reading the story of Captain Strongbow and his Lady Gwendaline. By the time she boarded the plane, she was halfway through the three-hundred-and-fifty-page book, having become a speed reader over the years. By the time the jet began its descent into Mascot airport, she was on the last chapter.

The story had been pretty much as she remembered—the plot packed with action, the hero thrillingly sexy, the love scenes extremely explicit and, yes, exciting. Her heart was definitely racing once more.

There was one difference, however, which she noticed on second reading: the heroine was a much stronger character than she'd originally thought. Of course, the first time round Violet had been focusing more on the hero, who was the epitome of macho attractiveness.

On second reading, however, she saw that Lady Gwendaline wasn't as dominated by the dashing but rather decadent Captain Strongbow as she'd imagined. She'd stood up to him all the way. When it was obvious he was going to have sex with her with or without her permission, her decision not to resist his advances had not been done out of fear and weakness but out of a determination to survive. She'd faced her ordeal with courage. Faced it head-on. She hadn't whined and wept. She hadn't begged. She'd lifted her chin, stripped off her clothes and done what she had to do.

That she'd found pleasure in having sex with her captor had come as a shock to Lady Gwendaline. It was blatantly obvious, though, that she had decided to go to bed with the pirate *before* she discovered what a great lover he was. There was nothing weak about Gwendaline. Nothing of the victim. She was a survivor because she was a decider. She didn't just let things happen to her. She decided, then she acted. Sometimes foolishly, but always with spirit and courage.

Violet smothered a sigh as she closed the book then slipped it back into her bag. She wished she had that type of courage. But she didn't. She couldn't even find the courage to go out on a date. God, she was pathetic!

Users Review

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