



The Secret Woman

Victoria Holt

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Will she find love at sea, or is she getting herself into deep water?

Anna Brett is a governess to a wealthy English family, a role she's convinced she'll be doomed to live the rest of her life. But when she meets Redvers Stretton, the dashing captain of a ship named The Secret Woman, and she's whisked from the bleak British coast to the sunny South Seas, she quickly realizes that things will never be the same. But with a murder dogging her steps and the mystery of a missing treasure haunting her dreams, Anna is forced to confront the clever captain-a man who may have just as many secrets as his ship.

The Secret Woman Details

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From Reader Review The Secret Woman for online ebook

Sara says

gripping.... one word to describe this book.... very amazing would read it over and over again

The Lit Bitch says

3.5 stars

Lately I've been on a old school Gothic romance kick. I recently read The Mistress of Mellyn and the India Fan both by Victoria Holt. All of her novels follow a similar formula but for me, that formula never gets old.

This book had an exotic feel. I loved the setting and the high seas adventures. The South Seas is such a romantic and enchanting setting for a novel like this. I thought it worked well! It made the reader feel like they were on an adventure as well.

Comparatively, the house where Anna is living at in Langmouth is dingy and unexciting. Since Anna's life before she accepts the post is so drab, the South Seas adventure seems even more colorful and exciting.

The characters were likable enough. Anna was the sensible heroine which I always have a soft spot for. Captain Stretton was dashing and wonderfully charming...though I was a little creeped out that he was into Anna even when she was a child, that was a little weird but I could justify it as more of a connection versus as sexual attraction.

Chantel on the other hand I never liked her. I never trusted her and I just could never warm up to her. I couldn't stand how Anna adored her, that was beyond annoying for me.

The mystery was interesting, though at times predictable, I still found it worth reading. This book was a little slower than some of the others I've read by her. It took a little while for the 'adventure' to begin and I didn't always feel that Anna was in 'danger'.

The murderer was obvious, but the real mystery was more about the 'why'. The motives of the murderer weren't exactly clear for me. The motive was clear but the overall plot wasn't quite as clear as I had hoped....I still wasn't sure how Aunt Charlotte tied into it all.

Overall the novel held my interest and it was a nice lighthearted read. Enough substance and mystery to keep me guessing and wondering what the big 'secret' was.

This wasn't as Gothic as some of her other novels but it certainly had Gothic influence....the deranged wife and a shocking family secret, not to mention a femme fatal! So over all this book had a lot to love.

If you are a Victoria Holt fan or a fan of the romantic/Gothic suspense genre then I am sure you will find lots to enjoy in this exotic novel!

See my full review [here](#)

Robin Reynolds / October Woman says

It's been a very long time since I read a Victoria Holt book. I was a big fan of hers back when I was in my twenties, but don't remember now what I've read and what I haven't. Anyway, once I started this, I remembered why I loved her so much. However, towards the end the story began to drag for me, and when it was over I was glad to be able to move on to something else. I don't remember feeling that way about Holt before.

Cari says

Although *The Secret Woman* is only my second book by her, I must say that Victoria Holt is one of the **queens** of Gothic romance. I love the old English mansions and good old fashioned murder mysteries mingled with very conservative, yet somehow still passionate, romances. In this particular novel, I felt like us readers were given some pretty awesome bonus features on top of the typical recipe for gothic romance...

Not only did we get the cool old mansion full of antique furniture and collectibles (seems perfect for a haunting, right?) and a castle built by a family of great wealth and power with dark secrets in excess; but we also got a voyage across the seas to an exotic island. There's just something about stolen moments with a handsome (and unavailable) captain on a ship out at sea that makes a girl feel a little whimsical. While I enjoyed the parts of the book that were set in England, I must say that the island alone could have made the book a success with its witchy natives, malevolent curses and superstitions, and foreboding atmosphere. I also found the romance between Captain Stretton and Anna Brett to be more suspenseful in itself than what is found in most romance novels, but that actually really added to my enjoyment of the book overall. As many readers pointed out, it was extremely easy to identify the "villain" of the story, but that's really my only complaint.

If you're craving gothic romance, this is sure to hit the spot!
????

Obsidian says

So maybe I should stop reading Holt? Cause the last few books have been underwhelming to the extreme. I had high hopes for this one, but when it turned into Chantal's journal entries (alternate title) I lost interest in this book. Holt or her publishers should have pushed forth this book is focused on two main characters (Anna and Chantal) and that most of the book is told by Chantal's point of view. I guessed some of what was ultimately revealed. And as Moonlight said elsewhere, this book really isn't Gothic. It's a messed up romantic suspense with barely developed characters besides Chantal.

Holt follows her formula of a main character left orphaned cause of reasons. The main character of Anna is thrust upon her aunt who makes Voldemort look cuddly. Anna's aunt is something of a big deal in the antiquities and starts to teach Anna cause apparently she has no prospects besides taking care of her aunt and her home called the Queen's House.

When Anna is 12 she meets a young man named Red who she finds is the half brother to the heir of the Crediton fortune. Anna for no reason falls in love with Red and can't wait to see him again. She doesn't til years later when he randomly shows up for reasons. Eventually it comes out Red is married and was probably playing with Anna's affections, she becomes resigned to taking care of her increasingly ill aunt til a nurse comes along named Chantal. Chantal is everything Anna is not, lively, pretty, and intelligent. The two become friends and Chantal gets them to both write journals in which they exchange for the other one to read. Chantal demands they be honest with each other in all things and seems interesting t on knowing Anna's every thought.

When Anna's aunt dies leaving suspicions on Anna, Chantal has to find more work which leads Chantal to become employed by the Creditons.

The whole book is mostly Chantal's thoughts on the Creditons and her increasingly affections for the heir, named Rex. Anna at more than the halfway point cause of even more ridiculous reasons is employed as a governess to Red's child and goes on a voyage back to Red's wife's island home.

The writing really wasn't great. It didn't seem written in the correct time period. How Chantal and Anna speak feels wrong. The reactions Chantal has to things reads wrong too.

The flow is awful. I got sick of reading this at the 50 percent point. I was tempted to skip to the end cause I honestly didn't care for anyone and despised Red and Anna and their bs love story. He's still married and you're making excuses. Bah to you both.

The ending which reveals all was kind of a joke. I mean I read the letter and shook my head. It doesn't make a lot of sense, but whatever. This book had way too much going on. I think when we get to the end with Anna, I thought her HEA was tainted as anything. Holt seems to think Gothic books were just terrible men and women who loved them. There is nothing that screams Gothic to me in this book.

Caro says

When I first started reading this book, I was somewhat dissapointed by how predictable the murderer's identity is (at least for those who have read other VH's books and are aware of her formula). I expected this person's reasons to be exactly the same as those I've found in some of her other novels. I took pride in myself for getting better and better at solving this type of mysteries. Then, I reached the final pages and became humble again. In other words, I was completely astonished.

Wow. Seriously, wow. Victoria Holt does an amazing job at developing the characters' personalities and inner thoughts in "The Secret Woman", making everyone's (including the killer) motives perfectly clear and believable. As always, the historical references are accurate and interesting; and the plot in general is marvelously written.

Anna is a young woman who has been living with her tedious Aunt Charlotte in a cluttered old house since her parents' death. Her plain and uneventful existence changes one night, when a blue-eyed stranger comes into her life; he tells her the story of a ship- The Secret Woman. The events behind that ship's name establish the background for a mistery that has been put in motion years ago and will hunt Anna and particularly Redvers (the hero) for a long time.

If you enjoy reading about strong, independent heroines and heroes who can rescue the sexy-and-romantic-ship-Captain cliché, all mixed with an amazing suspense... don't think any longer. You will love this book.

Theresa says

This Gothic romance/mystery was a best seller the year I graduated from high school. I found out that Victoria Holt is actually one of several pseudonyms used by the author depending on the genre of her novels. The story is about a young woman who was orphaned as a child and raised by an eccentric aunt in a decaying mansion. She becomes a close friend to the nurse hired to care for her aunt. She falls in love with a sea captain whom she later discovered was married to a rather unbalanced woman from a South Sea island. She later becomes the governess for his child. With many plot elements that seem to be borrowed from *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*, this novel was a quick, but rather predictable read.

Felicity says

Ya know, when Victoria Holt went to write a Goth Rom in 1970, she didn't mess around. Brooding architecture? Check. Native curses? Check. Swapped at birth twins? Check. Long sea voyage? Check. Evil adventuress? Check. Costume ball leading to nefarious deeds? Check and checkmate. There are only 2 real problems here - 1: If you can't figure out who the eeeeeevil doer is by about, oh, page 30 then you need more help than gothic romance can give you and 2: The denouement. Or, um, the lack thereof. It's kind of anticlimactic, you know, when you've got the whole set up and the diamonds have been found and the crazed sickly wife is raging around with her evil crazed native servant and the collapsing house in the tropics is still collapsing and the dashingly handsome sea captain has just returned from his voyage and . . and. . then, just as you're expecting a riot and the curse to come true and at least a shark attack, it all just ends. The eeeeevil doer drinks poison by mistake, which fortunately leaves her time to write a three page letter detailing her deeds and give it to the somewhat dim but loyal and true heroine and then expire in a pale and glamourous way. And that's all she wrote. Damn. I was hoping for at least the house falling in or something.

Misfit says

I am just too bored (nothing is happening) and there are too many patrons waiting behind me for library copies.

Cphe says

I've always been a great admirer of the novels of this prolific author. Victoria Holt wrote some wonderful historical romantic suspense but there were no surprises in store with this offering.

This book fell short of the mark for me. It took a long time for the story to gain any momentum. There was a lot of information given to Anna Brett's childhood and how she came to be in possession of the Queen's House.

I knew early on who the culprit in this story would be as I had read a similar story a few years ago. It had

been done before. I didn't feel any emotional chemistry between Redvers Stretten and Anna Brett. To my mind what he had done to Anna years previously (can't say more without spoilers) wasn't completely explained away satisfactorily for this reader.

The author has a distinctive voice and I normally love the stories that she wove but I was quite disappointed in this one.

AJ says

4 volumes

23 chapters

355 pages

First let me begin this review by saying that I read this book back in 2012. However, after I read a book, I always try to write out my feelings on the story when I finish. Sometimes, I'm moved to write a great deal to type up later. Other times, I just feel up to writing a very basic review. I never intended for it to take me almost six YEARS to get it on my GoodReads account, but it has. Obviously, by now, I don't really remember much about the story, though sometimes my notes help jog my memory. So, if the following review doesn't really say much or deal too much with the story or plot, that's probably because I wasn't moved by one or the other or both to write more than I did. However, such as it is I give to you.

My Review—Intricate weave to a very good tale. The heroine, Anna Brett, is thrust into an orphan's life with a dour old-maid aunt, even though, for several years, her parents are alive and well and living in India. But her mother was too silly to be an unselfish mother and her father too doting on the mother to care about his plain daughter. So, she lives with her aunt and learns her aunt's trade: antique sales. It's at her aunt's house she has the chance to meet Redvers, who turns out to be the hero of the story and her love interest, though he's married to a woman with whom he'd had a "moment of indiscretion" and then was obliged to marry her, two-months pregnant. As if the love triangle weren't complicated enough, Victoria Holt throws in suspicious deaths, blackmail, a mystery surrounding missing diamonds, a patriarch who seems to've had a problem keeping out of other women's beds and siring half of England (a bit of an exaggeration, I'll own, but not much), a jealous wife, and an overly helpful nurse with beauty and brains (that prove to be a very bad pairing, especially when combined with ambition, greed, and the selfish audacity to do anything to get what she wants).

All in all, an excellent story and a good love story fraught with drama and suspense but delivered up at the end with a happy finale. (Though this was my second time reading this story, it was long enough between readings that I didn't remember how it ended. I was pleasantly surprised. As I read, bits and pieces would come to me ("didn't she do this?" or "wasn't he married?") and then, a couple chapters later, I'd learn my recollection(s) was (were) right. But the ending still remained elusive and caught me by surprise.)

Grade: A

Katie says

This was excellent! I love the twist ending. This was a page turner and so much about the characters was not

so obvious.

Neja says

Books written by Victoria Holt are so cheesy, but sometimes that's exactly what you need. I've read a looooot of her books when I was 14/15 years old..that was the last time I've read them. I absolutely loved them at the time. I'm thinking of reading one of her books just for the old times sake! =)

Moonlight Reader says

First published in 1970, *The Secret Woman* was written by the prolific Eleanor Hibbert under her Victoria Holt pen name. While this book was published in "Holt's" early period, it was actually published in the middle period for Hibbert. There were a total of 32 books published under the "Holt" name, and of those 32, approximately 23 of them were published after *The Secret Woman*.

Victoria Holt tends to be very hit and miss. This one is a miss.

I think that, perhaps, Holt was going for an homage to *Jane Eyre* with Redvers as the Rochester character, the conveniently orphaned Anna as Jane, and Redver's wife, Monique, as the ill-fated Bertha. Like Bertha, the mildly mentally ill, consumptive Monique comes from an apparently fictional island named Coralle. Bertha, of course, is from Jamaica, and is the daughter of a wealthy family.

The issues with this book start with the pacing. The plot summary is misleading in that most of the elements referenced in the summary do not appear until the 50% mark of the book. The first 50% of the book felt relatively superfluous, focusing on Anna's childhood and young adulthood, being first sent to England without her parents, later being orphaned, and then being raised by her unpleasant, unloving, bitter Aunt Charlotte. This, again, may be an ill-advised attempt to copy *Jane Eyre*. Few writers have the skill to write a *Jane Eyre* character, and Holt fails completely.

The "meet cute" between our hero and heroine also fails. Redvers and Anna meet when she is 12 and he is 19. I can understand her romanticizing him, since he is a dashing young man. I cannot understand, and am entirely grossed out, by his apparent romanticizing of her. She was twelve. There is nothing at twelve to attract a young man of nineteen.

It isn't until around the 55% mark that Red & Anna end up in one another's company consistently. From there, the book devolves into a shipboard travelogue. Way too much of the narration is delivered through the diary of the third-wheel Chantel, which ground the story to a halt. The suspense/gothic elements don't appear until around 75%, and by that time, I am done. That section could've actually been pretty interesting, if it had been expanded to be more of the book, and if Holt hadn't decided that the best way to deliver the reveal was through a letter.

Note to authors: telling us why and how something happened through a letter written by the perpetrator is generally not an emotionally resonant method of storytelling. Again, the tension, the suspense, the drama grinds to a freaking halt while I read a three page letter written by the villain/ess (no spoilers here) as he/she is in his/her death throes.

The romance is also not very romantic. Redvers is basically a manwhore who gets himself into trouble and knocks up Bertha, and then he is afraid to leave her because reasons so he marries her and treats her like shit. This is exactly the sort of person that I am looking for in a romantic hero. Right? I'm still trying to figure out what was wrong with alternative hero, Dick Callum, because he seemed like a fairly decent guy, even if his hotness quotient was not quite so high as that of Red.

As an Eyre retelling: fail. As a gothic/romantic suspense: fail. As a period drama: fail.

If you aren't a Holt completist, don't bother with this one. First you'll be bored, then you'll be irritated. And you'll probably hate everyone.

Julie says

My review for this book will be posted on Romancing The Book Blog soon!
