



Purchased: His Perfect Wife (Wedlocked!)

By Helen Bianchin

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Lara's beloved restaurant is in crisis.

There's only one man who can help—Wolfe Alexander, her tall, dark, brooding stepbrother. Wolfe lives up to his name: he demands that, in exchange for his money, Lara must become his convenient wife!

With no choice but to accept Wolfe's terms, Lara is soon swept into his world of high-society glamour beyond her wildest dreams—and into the passion of his bed. But there is just one thing missing—her husband's love....

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Helen Bianchin was encouraged by a friend to write her own romance novel and she hasn't stopped writing since! Helen's interests include a love of reading, going to the movies, and watching selected television programs. She also enjoys catching up with friends, usually over a long lunch! A lover of animals, especially cats, she owns two beautiful Birmans. Helen lives in Australia with her husband. Their three children and four grandchildren live close by.

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Damn it.

The despairing oath emerged as a barely audible condemnation as Lara checked her watch and cast the empty train-tracks a despairing glance.

The train was late. Not exactly a surprise, given the Sydney rail-system rarely kept to its timetable.

There was a general restlessness among the passengers lining the station platform, waiting to board.

An irritated feminine voice demanded querulously close by, 'Does anyone have any idea how inconvenient this delay is?'

Like you wouldn't believe, Lara answered silently.

'I have an important appointment!'

Oh my. As if you're the only one?

A bubble of hysterical laughter rose and died in her throat. Her own appointment was akin to life or death... figuratively, but almost equally as dire.

Help; the financial magnitude of it was hopeless.

Impossible, she perceived, unless a miracle occurred.

And she no longer believed in miracles. If she ever had. She spared the still-empty train tracks another anxious glance. Oh, *come on*, she silently begged, and barely refrained from uttering something incredibly unladylike.

Don't do this to me. Especially not today.

Silent prayers and unexpressed angst made not the slightest difference as the minutes ticked on, and she took a steadying breath and resigned herself to being late.

Alerting anyone to her delay wasn't going to happen, as she no longer possessed a mobile phone. She could access a phone booth, although the chances of finding one that actually worked in this particular station were minimal.

Several waiting passengers began to pace restlessly along the platform, their impatience matching her own,

until collective sighs of relief heralded a train's arrival.

Lara boarded an overloaded carriage and was forced to stand. Worse, as the train cleared the station, it met torrential rain slanting down in wind-driven sheets that didn't show signs of ceasing any time soon.

Great. She hadn't brought an umbrella.

A sign the day...and the power of the Deity...wasn't done with her?

Somehow it seemed appropriate, given she was due— make that *overdue*—for an appointment with a prestigious firm of lawyers in order to be apprised of the contents of two wills, as a result of the tragic accidental death of her mother and stepfather in France.

Emotion welled up inside, and she willed herself not to cry. The shedding of tears in public wasn't going to happen.

Caring, affectionate Darius Alexander had provided the happiness sorely missing in her mother's first marriage, accepting and treating Lara as if she'd been his own.

Not so his son Wolfe, who ten years ago had viewed Suzanne and her seventeen-year-old daughter Lara predominantly as fortune-hunters planning to live the high life at his father's expense.

Something so not true it was pathetic, given Suzanne had insisted on signing a pre-nup prior to her marriage to Darius. A fact Wolfe would be forced to accept when the contents of both Darius and Suzanne's wills were revealed. Together with the addendum, citing Lara's welfare was Suzanne's financial responsibility.

Within a year of the marriage Wolfe had declined Darius' offer to join his conglomerate's directorial board and had taken up a lucrative offer in New York, choosing instead to forge his own path in the business arena.

Lara had completed her studies, qualified as a chef, and spent time in France and Italy for a few years, honing her skills before returning to Sydney.

Two years ago she'd formed a business partnership with Paul Evans, sunk all her savings into a restaurant in a trendy suburb, and had worked long hours to make it a success.

Something she'd achieved, providing fine food at reasonable prices for a steadily increasing clientele.

Life had been good... until Paul had fled the country after clearing out their business bank account, and her own, because she'd foolishly trusted him.

Not coincidentally, the theft had been timed to occur the day after Darius and Suzanne had embarked on a lengthy European tour, ensuring lack of hands-on parental support. The police were called in, lawyers consulted, charges laid, but the wheels of justice had moved slowly.

Pride had ensured the resultant mess was *her* problem, and in an effort to conserve funds she'd given up her leased apartment and downsized to lodgings, sold her car and resorted to public transport.

However, the financial damage had been acute, and minimizing staff by personally working long shifts had done little to ease the situation. Bank assistance was withdrawn, and she'd dealt with lack of funds as best she could with a short term high-interest loan from a less than desirable source.

A man who'd spelt out terms in cold hard facts.

Pay on time, and everything will be fine.

Followed by a succinct and frightening, *don't...and it won't.*

The implications had been vividly clear, and only a fool would have failed to recognize them.

Borrowing money in such circumstances had not been a wise move, she reflected grimly. The reality of missing a payment had provided a vivid reminder of just who she was dealing with.

Not a bank-loan officer trained to provide a psychologically couched response with seeming regret.

Instead, a ruthless man who dealt with desperate people who were denied access to normal lending-institutions and who accepted the terms, aware of the risks.

Something he'd revealed in chilling detail, elaborating precisely on what she could expect if she failed to pay on time.

Apprehension didn't begin to cover it.

All-consuming fear barely came close.

She'd been barely able to function. She'd rarely eaten, and she hadn't been able to sleep.

At which point she'd put aside pride and appealed for Darius' help, verbally given without hesitation. He would, he'd assured, attend to it as soon as he accessed a fax machine.

Lara's relief had been short-lived. Reduced to mere hours, before she'd been alerted that a road accident had claimed both her mother's and stepfather's lives.

It was Wolfe who'd relayed the shattering news, taken immediate control, flying from New York to France to attend to formalities before jetting in to Sydney, then conferring with her over arrangements and providing support at the funeral service.

Days during which she'd functioned on auto-pilot and lost track of time as she hid her grief in public and succumbed to it in private.

Tracking down her biological father had resulted in a curt dismissal at being involved in any way.

Lara recalled a host of kaleidoscopic memories... an alcoholic father whose rages had been volatile and many, the bitter arguments and physical abuse her mother had endeavoured to shield from her daughter; the day Marc Sommers had beaten Lara, Suzanne had gathered a few clothes into a suitcase, taken hold of Lara's hand and fled to another city in another State.

There was no difficulty in picturing their rented two-room flat, the long hours Suzanne had worked, or the school Lara had attended in a less than salubrious inner-city suburb.

Tough beginnings, which Suzanne had toiled hard to change...and succeeded, gradually carving a better life for them both, enhanced by Suzanne's chance meeting with Darius, his persistent courtship and their marriage.

The subtle change in train speed brought Lara back to the present, and she stifled a grateful sigh as she alighted at the inner-city station.

Several minutes later she took the escalator and reached street level, only to dash to the intersection to catch the lights at a nearby traffic-controlled pedestrian crossing.

Rain pelted down. She stepped into a huge rain puddle, which sent water splashing fountain-like over her black trousers. By the time she reached the opposite pavement she felt, and probably looked, like a drowned cat.

Could the day get any worse?

Don't even *think* about it, a mischievous imp taunted silently, whereupon Lara promptly banished it elsewhere. The address housing Darius' prestigious firm of lawyers was two blocks away, and she dodged the rain and fellow pedestrians at a fast pace, entered the marble-tiled foyer, then paused a few moments to extract a handkerchief to dry off her hair.

A wasted effort, which she discarded with a sense of hopeless fatalism as she crossed to the bank of lifts, pressed the arrowed 'up' button and stood waiting for any one of several electronic cubicles to descend to ground level.

The melodic ping announcing the arrival of a lift caught her attention, and she rode it with some trepidation to the designated floor.

Any minute soon she'd face her inimitable stepbrother.

In his late thirties, Wolfe Alexander's interest was purported to focus as much on women as it did on business. With immense success in both areas, according to Darius, who'd begun to despair of his son marrying and providing an heir... or returning to Sydney to take up a rightful position on the board of directors.

Darius' son... a man who was a force to be reckoned with on every level. As he'd proven with an incident during her eighteenth birthday party which Lara had chosen to obliterate from her memory... and thought she had, until she'd stood silently at Wolfe's side two days ago at the formal burial of his father and her mother.

The lift slid to a smooth halt and Lara emerged into the open foyer, where Darius' legal firm occupied the entire floor, hosting an imposing reception area with an equally soignée receptionist who could, Lara perceived with unaccustomed cynicism, moonlight as a model... and possibly did.

Exceedingly damp and bedraggled wasn't a good look, Lara conceded as she identified herself, apologized for her lateness... and requested direction to the bathroom.

What did another few minutes matter?

'Of course.' The receptionist rose to her feet and extended a hand. 'Would you like me to take care of your coat?'

'Thanks.'

It didn't take long to sweep the wet length of her blonde hair into a loose knot, secure it with a large hinged clip, touch colour to her lips and smooth her black top.

A deep calming breath, and she returned to Recepti...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Gloria Lentz:

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