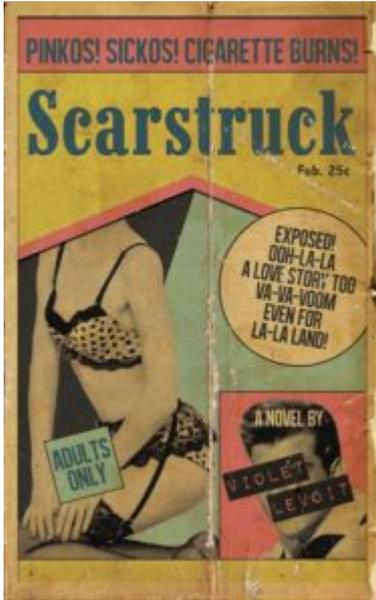


Review: Scarstruck by Violet LeVoit

written by John Yohe | April 29, 2019



Scarstruck by Violet LeVoit
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Ron Dash, in-the-closet movie star of the late 1950s, finds himself about to be outed and his career ruined. The only solution is a marriage-of-convenience to Lana Arleaux, three-time divorcée with an out-of-control drinking problem. Except Ron may have finally found real love with a young latino rising star Flaco Sandoval, aka Pace Hammond.

Writer Violet LeVoit is in her element with *Scarstruck*: An experienced novelist and movie critic, she knows her Hollywood history. Her novel is an homage to, and in the style of, 'pulp' novels from the 50s, when writers were sometimes getting paid by the word, and adjectives abounded: "A figure-eight blonde came down to the pool in a coral-red swimsuit and heart-shaped sunglasses, espadrille wedges tied with pink bows around her shapely ankles." But you can feel how much fun she had imitating the tabloid gossip mags of the time:

What hunk Hollywood heartthrob was seen having a cozy clink of the glasses with our favorite lovely lush Lana Arleaux? None other than A NIGHT IN NIAGARA star Ron Dash, that's who!! Shutterbugs caught the juicy twosome having a quick cocktail gab (her: Kir Royale, him: rye on the rocks) in the sweetheart booth at Delang's. Sweetheart, you say? Lana's had the love jinx ever since her smash-up divorce from pinko playwright Hyman Rabinowitz.

What lifts *Scarstruck* out of just an homage to Hollywood pulp is the sex, and

this is where indie publishers like King Shot dare to go where mainstream publishers won't. Most American literature sex-scenes stop about the point the bedroom door closes behind the main characters, leaving us to our supposed imaginations. LeVoit goes all the way, taking us through the juicy deviant details (I'm starting to sound like her tabloids), through, and past, the orgasms.

Mainstream publishers, and even mainstream readers, may sniff in disgust, even as they keep reading. I have always felt that the way a character behaves during sex is vital to our understanding of him or her (and him and her (or him and him)(et cetera) together). What they say to each other in bed matters, what they do to each other matters. The dirty little secret of literature, *especially* in America, being that most writers can't write a good sex scene without either sounding like a bodice-ripping romance novel, or a crude Hustler magazine letter ("I put my fuck log in her fuck tunnel"). Or, just awkward, with 'manhoods' and 'earths moving'. Not only can LeVoit write compelling sex scenes, but she writes kinky ones: Ron's deviance is not that he's gay (though 1950s America that's considered part of it) but that he likes his sex rough, with bondage, and pain. *Scarstruck* is up a notch from the tame (to some of us) *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

Although I love LeVoit's delving in Ron's deviant mind, and life, I found myself more attracted to Lana Arleaux. She too is a Hollywood star with her own secrets, though which ones, and what specifically, are somewhat of a mystery. She's definitely somewhat of a sexual deviant like Ron, though maybe not as extreme, and maybe just what Dan Savage would call GGG. She's definitely curious about what exactly Ron might be up to, but the first glimpse we get of her—and we only ever see her through Ron's eyes—is her fighting three men trying to sedate her, for sort-of medical purposes. Is she perhaps bi-polar? She's definitely a mean drunk.

LeVoit juxtaposes Ron's deviance with Lana's supposed communist sympathies, and remember this in the late 1950s, the Red Scare happening nationwide, and in Hollywood writers and actors are being blacklisted for supposed communist sympathies. Lana's first husband, a screenwriter, is one of these, though that's only mentioned in passing (in the above quote). She is quick with communist platitudes, describing herself as a "proletariat who earns bourgeois wages" and more than once mentions joining some kind of workers' *colectivo* down in Mexico. Does LeVoit want us to take these proclamations seriously? Lana otherwise seems pretty bourgeois and though she has become fairly fluent in Spanish, her interactions with actual Mexicans come off as a rich white woman enjoying her privilege. I would have liked more about this, and her, and the Red Scare hunts going on in Hollywood and the country.

The underlying idea of *Scarstruck* is that not much has changed. With a few tweaks, this story from the 1950s could be happening in Hollywood today. Yes, homosexuality is ostensibly viewed as ok now, but there are still leading-man actors in the closet, because, still, if they were outed, they would lose their appeal, and box-office pull. Also, we seem to have found ourselves in yet another Red Scare here in America. Not as extensive, I don't *think* anyone in Hollywood is going to lose their career over it (though who knows?), but we have a government, or at least would-have-been government of the last

presidential elections, along with deep state intelligence agencies, trying to tell us that every wrong in DC right now is Russia's fault, rather than their own, or part of a systemic problem.

Still, LeVoit isn't giving a political novel. This is, after all, as the cover design warns us, a love story. A romance novel for pervs, perhaps. And old-fashioned film buffs, with LeVoit suggesting that Hollywood, or at least its façade, offers solace and community to pervs, if you read the visual texts, and their clues, in a pervy way. As for whether Hollywood itself is "a place where you can be who you want to be," that may end up some kind of curse.