

One True Love

Virginia is determined not to let anything keep Mathias away. Not their parents, not an ocean, and not even Mathias's own vow never to love again. First, she has to find a way to bring him home, and then she'll find a way inside his heart.

Mathias never wanted to leave Virginia behind, but his father demanded he go. He tried a new life and love that turned tragic, and he vowed to never love again. He's determined to keep Virginia at bay once he returns home. When he sees how she's grown into a beautiful woman, will his mind be able to resist her beauty and charms, knowing that his body and heart want her more than anything?

Note: This book contains dubious consent and forced seduction of the heroine by the hero.

Genre: Historical **Length:** 76,519 words

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EROTIC ROMANCE

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Prologue

Blackpool, England 1820

Mathias Alvcon was twelve years old when his father married a widow with a daughter just four years younger than himself. He wasn't happy with the thought of having to share his home and father with two strange women, even if one was only a little girl. His mother had only been dead for two years, and he was finding it difficult to think that his father would want someone to take her place, even though Richard swore to his son repeatedly that no one would ever take the place of his mother. Mathias didn't believe him anymore.

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Virginia Cunnings Marlowson was also finding it difficult to believe that her mother would marry so soon after her father's death. It had only been a year since his accident, and already she was getting married to someone new. At eight years old she thought there was no one like her father. She had been a daddy's girl for as long as she could remember.

Virginia did not like the thought of having to move into a new home. Not to mention there would be another man in their lives. Was he supposed to be her new father? Not only that, but now she finds out he also has a son around her age. Was he supposed to be her brother? She also did not like the idea of having to share her mother...she did not like it one little bit.

Their first dinner together as a family was awkward and quiet to say the least. Richard always sat at the head of the table, with Yolanda at the other end, leaving the children to sit opposite of one another. Every time Virginia dared look across the table, the boy would be giving her an evil look. It was going to be a long dinner.

Virginia was shown to her room by one of the maids who had a daughter the same age as herself. At least there would be someone there she could play with or talk to. The room was beautiful. It had been decorated for a young girl. Everything was lace and frills, just the way she liked it. Dolls everywhere her eyes could see. The wardrobe had beautiful dresses just her size. The dresses were beautiful and made to fit her, but this was not her home. Would it ever be her home?

Mathias's room was just down the hall from hers. She had noticed it one day when he left the door open. It was very much a boy's room. All blue and hardwood, nothing frilly there. She also noticed that he was very much a boy himself. He was hardly ever in the house. He was always off fishing or hunting or just out riding in the woods that surrounded their home. He was still yet to speak one word to her. She had a feeling that he never intended to. Every time he looked at her it was with disgust or something close to it. Maybe he resented them being there as much as she resented it herself. At least that's the way she felt until one day as she was walking in the woods. She was just beyond the rose garden when she became lost. Mathias found her there sitting on the grass crying her eyes out. She could remember his words and taunts exactly. He was being cruel to her at first.

"What's the matter, little baby, did you get lost?" he teased and taunted her as he stood there over her holding his fishing pole as if he was superior to her. "Well, do not just sit there crying. Get up and I'll show you how to get back to the house."

Virginia hated him at that moment for talking to her like she was just some stupid little baby, but she knew without him she wouldn't find her way back. She sat there looking up at him until he held his hand out to her. She accepted it and then followed him without saying a word. She still hated him, but she was beginning to warm up to the idea of having him around. At least if she ever got lost he could find her. There wasn't a place on their land that he didn't know.

"Mathias?" she said once they were back in the garden safe and sound. "Thank you for bringing me back."

"It's okay. I was on my way back anyway." He paused, looking down at her. "Why were you out there in the first place? Were you trying to follow me?"

"Don't be silly. Why would I follow you? You haven't even spoken to me until today."

"Well you haven't exactly spoken to me either," he grumbled.

"It wasn't you. I just don't want to be here. I miss my daddy. I didn't think my mother should be getting married so soon after my daddy's accident." She knew her pain was showing on her face as she tried her best to hold the tears back. She certainly didn't want Mathias to think she was a baby.

"How long has he been dead?" Mathias asked, seeing the pain in the little girl's eyes.

"Only a year." Her voice was quiet and sad when she answered.

"I'm sorry. My mother has been dead for two years now. I still miss her. I feel the same as the day she died. I didn't want my father to get married again. At first I didn't like the idea of having to share him with the two of you. I just didn't want you around, but you're not so bad...I don't suppose anyway."

“Neither are you...I suppose.” She was quiet for a moment as they stood there together. “Mathias, do you think you could teach me to fish and ride a horse?”

“Do you really want to learn to do those things? They’re really not for frilly little girls. You might get hurt or dirty.”

“Yes. I would like to learn. I detest sewing, but Mother believes every lady should know how to do it. It gives her something to do while her husband is away. I don’t need to know how to sew because I never plan to marry.”

Mathias laughed. “You’ll change your mind once you grow up. All girls want to marry and have babies.”

“Not me, and don’t laugh. I’m being serious.”

“I’ll teach you if you really want to know. Besides, it gets kind of lonely when I’m out there by myself. I will be going fishing in the morning if you really want to go. We’ll leave the house after breakfast...if you can do without a nap.”

She smiled up at him. “I would love to. I get lonely here, too. It will be nice to have someone to talk to. I thought I’d be able to talk and play with Traci, but she’s not allowed. She has too many chores to learn.”

“That’s the way it is with servants. It’s not their jobs to play with us, silly.”

“Do you think that you and I will become friends one day?” she asked, looking up at him.

“I don’t know. We’ll see how it goes tomorrow,” he said, walking away from her.

* * * *

Virginia was up early the next morning, excited about the fishing lesson she was going to receive today. Mathias didn’t talk to her at the breakfast table, merely looked in her direction a couple of times. She understood that he didn’t want their parents to know they were starting to like each other. He enjoyed torturing them with the thought that they would never be a true family. She also found the game fun to play. After all, they did deserve a little torture for forcing this on them.

They slipped off together after breakfast while Richard was in the study and Yolanda had gone to the sitting room to get ready to teach her daughter to sew.

“Well, are you ready to learn to ride a horse?” Mathias asked as they headed for the stables.

“I thought we were going fishing today?” she questioned as she followed him.

“We are. I want to go a little farther out this time, and you have to ride to get there. It’s too far of a walk. It would take us all day to just get there on foot.”

"I'm afraid. Are you just playing a trick on me? Are you going to leave me out there somewhere alone?"

"No. I promise I won't leave you out there anywhere. How about you ride with me today, and then I can teach you a little at a time."

"Do you promise not to let me fall, as well?" she asked with a slight tremor to her voice.

"Of course, you can ride behind me and hold on to me if you want. Or, you can ride in front of me and I'll hold on to you. Whichever you choose, it doesn't matter to me."

"I think in front of you," she answered, following him into the stables. "That way I won't fall off the back of the horse if I'm unable to hold on tight enough to you."

"You're probably right. I can hold on a little tighter than you can. I'll help you on the horse then I'll get on."

Virginia sat sideways, half on the horse and half on Mathias's legs. He started out slowly, his arms around her as he held on to the reins. This slow, casual pace was fine with Virginia until he kicked the horse into a gallop. Then she became a little frightened.

"Don't worry, I already promised not to let you fall off." He laughed.

She closed her eyes and turned toward him, wrapping her arms around him to hold on. She wanted to cry but was afraid he'd make fun of her again or just turn back and leave her at the house, so she just held on until the horse stopped.

Everything went fine after he hooked the worm to her pole because she wasn't about to touch the *yucky thing*. They were sitting on the bank, quietly watching the ripples in the clear blue water. It was a warm spring day, and she was happy for the first time since arriving at her new home. She was happy just being there with him.

He showed her how to hold the pole and wait for a bite, telling her she would have to stand up to pull the fish in if she actually managed to catch one. She was very excited when she finally felt a fish tug at the line. She held on a little tighter when it happened.

"Hurry. Stand up, Gin. You've got a fish!" He sounded as excited as she felt. He hadn't noticed how close she was to the water's edge until she accidentally slipped and fell into the water. He laughed at first until he realized she didn't know how to swim. He threw his pole down and jumped into the water to grab her. "Are you all right, Gin?" he asked once he got her out of the water. She looked like a drowned rat, and he would have laughed again if he wasn't so worried about her. He didn't know what he would have done if he'd been unable to find her.

"I think so," she said, looking up at him a little angrier that he would laugh. "That wasn't any fun at all, and how dare you laugh at me. I thought I was going to die." She felt hysterical with the

thought of all that water surrounding her. She hadn't even been able to see Mathias through the murkiness of it.

"I'm sorry. I thought you knew how to swim at least."

"Just because you know how to swim, doesn't mean that I do. I've never been this close to the water before. Look at my dress...it's ruined. What will Mother say?" she asked between choking and sobbing.

"Get in the sun. Maybe it will dry before we have to head back to the house."

"But it has mud all over it," she cried.

"Don't worry. Father can always buy you a new one, it's only a dress."

"I didn't even tell Mother I was coming out here with you. She never would have allowed it."

"I know. I don't think your mother likes me very well."

"She doesn't know you. You've never really spoken to her either, so how would she know if she likes you or not?"

"I don't have anything to say to her. I was going to try to be nice to her until she tried to tell me what to do and what I could wear." He shook his head. "And those stupid suits she makes me wear just to be able to eat at the same table with everyone else. She tried to act like she's my mother. She will never be my mother...not ever."

"Well, I like Lord Richard. He's been very nice to me since we've come to live here with the two of you. He will never be anything like my father either. I'm sorry my mother is so mean to you. That's just the way she is, I'm afraid."

"She'll really be mad when she finds out that I took you fishing and horseback riding. I hate to see what my punishment will be for it."

"We can't tell her. If she finds out, I'll never be allowed to go again. We can't let anyone know. I'll sneak in and change then throw my dress away. No one will ever find out. It will always be our secret."

"I like you." He laughed. "You're pretty sneaky for a girl." They both laughed, her freckled face smiling up at him.

* * * *

Virginia and Mathias had spent the last four years growing up and enjoying each other's company. The more time she spent with Mathias, the more she liked him. He told her stories about America and how someday he would go there to live. She didn't like the idea that he would be going

away and leaving her one day. Virginia wanted to be able to go anywhere that Mathias went. She felt closer to him than anyone else. She couldn't imagine ever being without him. They were becoming good friends, if nothing else, as the years went by.

He had taught her to swim, fish, ride horses, and to even shoot a gun. She went everywhere he went, even if she had to wait and sneak away. He never seemed to mind until he turned sixteen. He was becoming a man and didn't want to be bothered with a little girl all the time now.

She sat looking at him across the table. He had grown up so much over the last four years. He was built like a man now and was very handsome in the suits her mother still made him wear to the dinner table. Although to Virginia he looked better with only his britches. That was the way he dressed while fishing.

The problem was that other girls had started to notice how handsome he was, too, which didn't really bother Virginia too much, until it came to one girl in particular—Stephanie. Or, as Mathias liked to call her, Steph. Her voice was too squeaky, and she wore way too much face powder and perfume for Virginia's taste. But not only that, she clung to Mathias as if he was her prize possession. Stephanie hated when Mathias brought Virginia along each time they met.

"Must you bring your little sister every time, Mathias?"

Then, of course, Mathias would try to leave her at home. Virginia would throw a fit of her own, and he always gave into her. Each and every time she cried, she got her way. That was until the last day they were all three together. She sat there quietly until Stephanie reached over and kissed Mathias on the lips. Something inside of her was furious at the thought of him kissing this overly pampered tart. She grabbed his shirtsleeve and yanked hard. "I want to go home now, Matty."

"In a minute, Gin," was all he said to her at first.

"No. I want to go home right now! I'm not feeling well, and I would really like to leave, now."

They dropped Stephanie off and then headed toward their own home. She moved closer to him, leaning her head on his shoulder. "Are you sure you don't want me to take you by the doctor's house before we go home?"

"No. That's all right. I'm feeling a little better now."

"Did you fake being sick, Gin? Did you do it just so I would take Steph home?" he asked, leaning over to look down at her.

"Don't be silly. Why would I ever do something like that? I really wasn't feeling well."

"I don't know. That is why I'm asking you. So, did you pretend to be sick or not?"

“Fine, yes, I did. I don’t like her. She acts as if she owns you or something. Besides, I thought you were going to move to America when you got old enough. If you marry her, she will never let you leave England, and you know it as well as I do.”

Mathias laughed. “Who said I was going to marry her in the first place?”

“You know very well that’s what she wants. I’ve seen the way she looks at you. Sometimes she looks as if she could eat you, like you’re her dessert or something.”

“Well, you don’t have to worry. She doesn’t own me, and I am going to America as soon as I’m old enough for Father to let me go. Besides, I think it’s about time I started doing some things alone from now on. You’re getting too old to be tagging along with me everywhere I go.”

“Tagging along?” she questioned.

“Yes. You’ve become a little tag-along sister. Do you see anyone else bringing their sisters with them while they’re out with a girl?”

“I can’t believe you’re saying that to me. And just when did I become your sister? I thought we were friends.”

“We are friends, you little tomboy, but everyone else sees you as my sister, including our parents. That is the only reason they started letting you go places with me. If they knew you were dressing up in my old clothes, going hunting and fishing with me, what do you think they’d say?”

“I don’t believe Richard would care one way or the other. Mother, on the other hand, would simply throw a fit.”

“More like she’d probably have me horsewhipped.”

“Oh, she’s not that bad, Matty.”

“She is to me. She’s never given me a good word except when she’s around Father. I think it’s time for you to start learning more about your sewing and running a house instead of going everywhere with me. You’re not a little girl anymore.”

“Does that mean you won’t take me fishing with you in the morning?”

“Yes. That is exactly what I’m saying. It’s time you start staying home.”

“But, Matty. You know how much fun we have together,” she protested.

“It’s time for us to grow up, Virginia. No more of our ventures together.”

“That’s not fair. You know I hate to sew, and I already told you that I never plan to marry anyone.”

“Don’t worry, Father and Yolanda will find you a good husband. That’s what parents do, you know.”

“Then I’ll just go to America with you. I won’t let them force me to marry anyone.”

“No, you won’t.” He laughed. “Besides, they’d never let you go that far away.”

Virginia felt tears welling up inside as she turned to watch the landscape as the buggy rolled towards their home. It was one thing to cry to get your way and another when the tears were real.

“Don’t you start that crying either. It’s not going to work this time. You know what I’m saying is the truth, so you may as well get used to the thought and start acting like a lady. You’re thirteen, and it’s time you start acting like a young lady.”

“I don’t want to be a lady. Thank you very much,” she said sarcastically.

That was the last they spoke together as children.