



VIOLET BY DESIGN

The girl next
door is going
places...

MELISSA WALKER
author of *VIOLET ON THE RUNWAY*

fun, fashion-filled, fast-paced read! Violet is a hero for all of us wallflowers."

—Carolyn Mackler, author of *Gyaholic*

violet

BY design



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Praise for the Violet Series

"A story for any girl who ever wondered what it would be like to have her wildest dream come true."

—*New York Times* bestselling author Sarah Dessen

"A fun, fashion-filled, fast-paced read! Violet is a hero for all of us wallflowers."

—Carolyn Mackler, bestselling author of *Guyabolic*

"Violet is wonderfully witty and sweetly sensitive. She's not your typical top model; she's more like your best friend—only prettier."

—Kristen Kemp, author of *Breakfast at Bloomingdale's*

"For every girl who's ever looked at a glossy magazine and wanted to know the story behind the picture. Melissa Walker creates fiction couture—unique and beautiful. On the runway or off, Violet shines."

—Ally Carter, bestselling author of *I'd Tell You I Love You,
But Then I'd Have to Kill You*

Praise for Violet on the Runway

"You know it rocks."

—ELLEgirl.com

"I couldn't put it down! You're kind of rooting for her to make it big, and kind of rooting for her to just go home before the biz ruins her."

—Glamour.com

"Teens will love this fun fashion read."

—OK! Weekly

"This novel, about the ins and outs of the fashion business, is a perfect read for teens who want to see what lies beneath the glossy veneer of what seems to be a picture-perfect life."

—Family Circle

Berkley JAM titles by Melissa Walker

VIOLET ON THE RUNWAY

VIOLET BY DESIGN

*For Johnny, Tim, and Kristi,
who made it fun to be the baby sister.*

acknowledgments

My family and friends deserve big hugs for making me feel like a rock-star author at all times. I'm grateful to Kate Seaver, my editor, and Doug Stewart, my agent, for their ever wise book-world advice. And huge thanks to Kristin Mahoney, who is always up for reading and responding to my work, even in its very roughest form.

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"What do you think, Violet—dark purple?"

Julie asks.

"Uh, sure," I say, not turning to look at my best friend's DIY pedicure setup. I'm leaning back in a plastic lounge chair at my neighborhood pool, trying to relax during my last week at home in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Unfortunately, I'm not that good at relaxing because I'm also trying to look cool in my new, psychedelic-colored Dona Pink designer bikini. In one week I'll be walking down a runway in Brazil to model his bathing suits, so why do I feel like I can't even pull this one off at my local swim club?

Even with my Chanel sunglasses and my jeweled flip-flops and this \$1,000 bikini, I have to admit that I still feel like the gawky girl by the side of the pool. The one who never even took her T-shirt off to swim before this summer, the one who knew being six feet one and a size 2 was a crazy liability in the high school world where fitting in is all that matters, the one who once longed to be part of the popular clique—the BK, short for the Bee's Knees. But all that

seems so long ago. And even though it's only been like ten months since I was that girl, so much has changed.

When I signed with Tryst Models last year, I hoped it would make me popular at Chapel Hill High School—and I guess it kinda did—but I was missing the big picture. You know, the one where I'd move to New York, live in a model apartment, make out with a club promoter, have a drug-addicted bulimic roommate, and then quit modeling altogether—only to be enticed back into the madness by the promise of a trip to Brazil for São Paulo Fashion Week (that would be the fashion show I'm supposed to be doing in, oh, seven days). I have a weakness for international travel, especially since I've never been off the East Coast. Wow—when I run through the last year in my head like that, it seems more like a clichéd TV movie than my actual life.

"*Vioooleet! Focus!*" snaps Julie, who probably knows that I'm still thinking about how nervous the prospect of the Brazilian runway is making me. "This is important. So. Purple or black polish for my toes?"

"Why don't you just wear . . . *Brown*," says a voice behind us. Julie turns to roll her eyes at the third member of our best-friend trio, Roger. Brown University is exactly where Julie will be starting college in a month.

"Funny, Roger," says Julie. "Seriously, Violet, I need your opinion. Soon I won't have my international runway star around to advise me on fashion choices—and I want to make the best impression possible during freshman orientation."

I smile. Knowing Julie's type-A personality, she's probably already plotted her first week of outfits for the Brown campus, complete with trendy belts and boots and tights that will look great on her petite frame, plus dresses and sweaters in intense fall blues, which will be stunning next to her long, dark hair and her eternally tan skin. I, on the other hand, am leaving in less than a week but haven't packed a thing. It's winter in Brazil, and I have no idea what to wear.

"I'll tell you what *not* to wear to orientation," Roger chimes in, pulling up a lounge chair next to mine.

"Do tell, fashion boy," says Julie.

"Giant logo sunglasses," says Roger, nodding his head in my direction.

"Oh shut up!" I laugh. "These were free! And I thought they would be fun to wear, like, in Brazil."

"Or, say, at the Heritage Hills neighborhood pool?" says Roger. "Yes, you fit right in with the Wal-Mart bathing suits. Of course, if there's someone here you're trying to impress . . ."

I see Roger look over to the other side of the patio, where the BK girls—Shelly Ryan, Jasmine Jostling, and Tina Geiger—are ordering french fries from the concession stand. I roll my eyes to convey that I'm so done with working to impress them. "Please, Roger," I say. "High school is over."

"So true," says Julie, putting on a mock serious face. "We're college students now. Well, two college students and one will-be Vassar girl, at least."

I smile and fish my digital camera out of my bag, pulling Roger and Julie in for a self-taken close-up.

"Adorable," pronounces Julie as she grabs the camera to check out the photo. "Now, can we get back to my toes here?"

"How about sparkling navy?" I say, pulling a L'Oréal sample out of my bag. "Veronica just sent me some swag from her last beauty shoot—this color is going to be huge in the fall."

"See, that's what I'm talking about," says Julie, grabbing the bottle from my hands.

"So how *is* Veronica?" asks Roger. Veronica was one of my roommates last year in the model apartment—the one with the, um, nose candy problem as well as a nasty eating disorder. But she's also a pretty famous model—and, after a lot of hard work and a few knife-in-the-back moments, I consider her a friend.

"She's good," I say, and I think it's the truth. Veronica got out of

rehab in June and she has her own apartment in Brooklyn now. “I think she might even be coming to Brazil, but I’m not sure yet.”

“So is this one of the bikinis you’ll be showing off down there?” asks Roger, glancing at my orange-and-yellow-swirled bathing suit.

“Uh, no,” I say, feeling my face flush. “This one’s from last year. They just sent me a few samples.” I can’t help the blushing, and I have to fight the urge to pull on my oversized T-shirt. Things have been weird with Roger lately. Not bad weird, exactly, but just . . . different. He and Julie have been my best friends since we were five years old and got placed together for “centers”—where you move around from cooking station to math station to art station in kindergarten. And they still are my best friends, but something has changed between me and Roger since he surprised me in New York last year with a visit and then took me to the prom, which was a lot more fun than I expected.

I’m probably just being overdramatic. I mean, this summer has been weird in general, which makes sense since it’s the last summer before we all split up—Roger’s heading to the city to attend NYU and Julie will be in Providence, Rhode Island. I’ve got this Brazil trip—I deferred my admission to Vassar until the spring semester so I can try to book some of the fall fashion shows in Europe. My agent, Angela Blythe, told me that after I make my São Paulo debut I might even be able to book something in Milan or Paris. Honestly, I’m more excited about seeing the world than stomping down runways, but if that’s what gets me the plane ticket, I’m game.

The fashion scene seems far away when I’m here, though. Thank God. All summer I’ve been with Julie and Roger—hanging out at the pool, dropping in on my former job at the Palace movie theater (for free movies, of course) and riding around in Julie’s old VW Rabbit. I’ve been working on a guaranteed tearjerker playlist for the past month on iTunes so I can make sure my two best friends both have the perfect musical soundtrack for how much I’m going to miss them.

"So what do you think?" Julie lifts up her freshly painted midnight-blue toenails. "Runway ready?"

"No doubt, Jules," says Roger, putting his hands behind his head and leaning back in his chair. "Now do mine. Just the big toes, I think. That's very fashion forward." A normal eighteen-year-old guy would be joking, but since Julie and I know Roger is totally up for blue toenails ("The better to fit in at NYU," he says), we both grab a foot and start painting. Roger's been a hipster long before any of us even know what that term meant. He was never popular in high school, but he had his own nerdy-chic style going on. He is actually pretty cute, I admit, as I glance up at his face, blue eyes forever framed with thick, dark-rimmed glasses and a mop of fully pomaded black hair. He smiles at me and winks. *He's totally going to rule NYU with that grin*, I think to myself.

When I get back to my house, which is just down the street from the neighborhood pool, Dad is cooking dinner. "Did you have a good swim, Violet?" he asks, turning away from the putanesca sauce he has simmering on the stove. "Yes, Dad," I say, giving him a kiss on the cheek before I head upstairs to my room. I kind of love how he still talks to me in the same voice he's used since I was eight years old.

I glance in the full-length mirror on the back of my door as it closes. It's true that I've always been freak-tall and über-thin—to the point where people made fun of me almost all through junior high and high school, until this whole modeling thing came along. But I still find it hard to believe that the Violet Greenfield I see in *Teen Girl* magazine fashion spreads (April issue, thank you very much) is the same Violet Greenfield in the mirror of my childhood bedroom. Sure, I shed the wire-frame glasses for contacts or way-cooler reddish-black frames, but I still see the same dishwater-blond hair (now stringy from that overchlorinated pool), big

Mickey Mouse ears, and knobby knees that I've resented since sixth grade.

I lean in to examine my pasty, freckled face. Last year I learned how to do a smoky eye really well so that my pale green eyes seem more brilliant jade than faded gray (which is how I always saw them growing up). I look down at the note Julie taped on my mirror—a tactic her life coach is fond of. It reads, "THE WORLD SEES A SUPER-MODEL." It's supposed to remind me to let go of the insecurities that plague me and embrace my destiny as a queen of fashion. That's how Julie put it anyway.

I grab a towel and my bathrobe and head down the hall to the shower. Before I leave my room though, I take one more glance in the mirror. I even flash myself a smile. I don't see a supermodel, but I've come a long way from last year when I saw a capital-L Loser.

"Violet, honey, Angela called today," says Mom as I sit down at the dinner table. I sigh. I'm glad Mom is handling my agent's requests, which come fast and furious—especially as the Brazil dates approach. Last week Angela asked if I couldn't just pop up to New York City to get my highlights done, her treat. Julie was jumping up and down and asking if she could tag along, but all I wanted to do was scream, "No!"

I haven't been back to the city since I left the model apartment in May—that was after Veronica's drug overdose and my breakup with Peter Heller, nightclub promoter/NYU student/Class A dickweed. I found out that Peter wasn't even really a student at NYU—he just took some continuing ed classes. His family's super rich, though, so that got him in with every club in the city. So lame. I just don't want to go back there—at least not for a while.

I told Mom to tell Angela that Brazil was where I'd see her—I'm only getting back on this crazy modeling merry-go-round for the travel perks. You know how you read interviews with models in

magazines (which are inevitably super boring) and they always say what they like most about modeling is “the travel”? Well, there you go. I guess I’m a stereotypical model.

“Does Angela want me to just hop up to Soho for a manicure tomorrow?” I ask sarcastically as I dig into Dad’s pasta. “Mmm, good!” interrupts my brother Jake through a spaghetti-filled mouth. I have a feeling he’s sick of Tryst Models talk at the dinner table. Until recently, he was the star of mealtime conversations since he plays on the varsity basketball team in high school. This year he’ll be a junior, and I’m sure he’s glad I’ll be out of the house so he can reclaim our parents’ full attention. Jake and Julie were dating this summer, but she’s trying to distance herself since she’s leaving for college now, so I have a lot of sympathy for my brother these days.

My mom, however—though loving and kind—has never tapped into the nuances of her children’s emotions. “No,” she says, addressing my question and ignoring Jake’s food critique. “Angela says a crew from *Teen Fashionista* wants to follow you around for a day. You know, in your home environment.”

“And I guess you told her there’s no time for that?” I say, eyes widening. “I mean, I’m leaving here in like five days and I have a million things to do. When could they possibly come?”

Mom smiles sheepishly. “Honey, Angela was really insistent that this one was important,” she says, looking at Dad for support as he tucks into his pasta and avoids eye contact. “You’ve been putting her off all summer, and she is giving you this big trip to Brazil and all.”

My parents don’t understand that my agent doesn’t “give” me anything. It’s all about making money and raising the profile for Tryst—it’s not like she’s some generous cousin who’s lavishing me with gifts. But I know this argument is lost on them.

“So . . . what are you telling me?” I ask, afraid to hear the answer.

“A reporter and photographer will be here in the morning,” says Mom. “At eight A.M.”

My alarm goes off at seven fifteen A.M., which is completely crazy for a summer morning. I washed my hair last night and I know it's not good to overshampoo, so I jump in the shower for a wake-up rinse-off. Back in my room holding a towel to my chest, I stare blankly at my closet, unable to form thoughts about what to wear. *Teen Fashionista* is the most stylish of the teen magazines—it's actually pretty flattering that they want to spend a day with me, and I have to admit that I got a little excited last night as I IMed with Julie about what we could do today to seem cool. We decided that we'd stop at the Palace for a free movie (and free popcorn, if we bring our own bowl), then go eat at Allen and Son's, this great, rustic restaurant on the edge of town that serves amazing barbecue and hush puppies—not to mention sweet tea. Finally, we'll end up over at Roger's, because he's got the nicest house. His parents are loaded.

Ding-dong.

Julie's at the door wearing a cute Marc Jacobs dress that I *know* she bought on eBay. I don't have the heart to tell her that I bet the *Teen Fashionista* people will notice it's from two years ago. But she looks really pretty and I'm annoyed with myself for even *knowing* it's from two years ago, so I stay quiet.

"Cute!" I say as she rushes in, a complete ball of energy even at this ungodly hour.

"Violet, you're not ready!" she gasps, grabbing my hand and pulling me up the stairs to my room.

"We have half an hour," I say, realizing as I take a closer look at Julie that not only has she straightened her naturally wavy hair, but then she curled it to make extra-smooth waves. And her makeup must have taken an hour. "Good Lord, Jules," I say. "You look like you're styled for a cover shoot."

"Hello!" she shouts, way too loudly for this time of day. "It's *Teen Fashionista*! Get excited. Besides, they may want some friend shots, right?"

I guess my nonchalance must be kind of exasperating, since Julie is completely ecstatic about the day. *Have I really become jaded?* I wonder. I pull on a black-and-white striped cotton minidress. Julie shakes her head. "Not special, Violet," she says. "*Semi Factory Girl*, but kind of boring."

"I'm not done yet," I say, reaching into the back of my closet for my magic-feather Prada boots. Black-and-brown leather, knee-high, with a platform heel. I got these as a present from Angela last year on my first trip to New York, and I swear they helped me book runway shows. I walk taller in them—and not just because the heel is crazy high.

Ding-dong.

They're early? Magazine people are never early. Julie and I freeze and listen to my dad pad down the stairs—probably in his robe and slippers, I realize in horror. But before I can race to the