

Marriage by Arrangement

Anne Greene

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Dedication

I dedicate *Marriage by Arrangement* to my precious Savior, Jesus Christ, and to my loving family.

Praise

Masquerade Marriage

Filled with rich Scottish language and descriptive passages, this book literally tosses you back in time to a land where men fought to be free from the tyranny of the English...I literally sat and read all day, pausing only to feed the kids, so compelling is the story. I laughed and even cried. The emotions run deep as Megan and Brody slowly see past the pretense of their marriage and fall for each other, only for fate to step in.

Definitely one to read, this will have you riveted to your comp/e-reader/book and one you'll want to read again. ~ Clare, Happily Ever After Reviews

English Peerage

DUKE. After the royal family, the duke ranks highest. The duke is always addressed as *Your Grace*, though familiars may address him as Duke. He will never be addressed by his family name.

MARQUESS. Next in rank is the marquess. He is also addressed by his *title* rather than his family name. If he is the Marquess of Queensbury, he is called Lord Queensbury, rather than Lord Churchill or whatever his family name. His wife is the marchioness. May be called Lady Queensbury.

EARL. Below the marquess is the earl. His wife is the countess. Addressed by his title, not his family name. Addressed as Earl of Spencer or Lord Spencer. Wife addressed as Countess of Spencer or Lady Spencer.

VISCOUNT. Below earl is the viscount. His wife is the viscountess. Never addressed as Viscount of Bradford. Addressed as Lord Bradford or Bradford.

BARON. The lowest inherited titled rank is baron. His wife is a baroness. Simply addressed as Lord and Lady.

SIR. Lower ranks simply addressed as Sir. As in Sir Richard Burton. Knights addressed as Sir, but the title is not inheritable.

DOWAGER. When a titled lady is widowed she becomes a dowager.

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Castle Drummond, home of Lord and Lady MacMurry, near the Village of Kirkmichael in Lowland Scotland—April 19, 1746.

“I won’t run.” A shudder skipped down Lady Cailin MacMurry’s spine, and she stared at her younger sister. “I’m committed.”

“No, it’s not too late for you to flee. You must, because I heard another scandalous rumor about Duke Avondale.” Lady Megan MacMurry grasped Cailin’s arm.

“I won’t listen to gossip.” Cailin pulled away from her sister and lifted her wedding bouquet to inhale the white rose fragrance. If only the sweet scent could overcome Megan’s words, and her own misgivings. Though many arranged marriages turned out badly, surely God would give her a loving one. After all, since her earliest years, she’d prayed for a happily-ever-after love.

“Ask yourself why such a grand noble would stoop to marry a Scottish lass whose Papa is but a Baron? Why did he not choose the daughter of an English duke or a marquess or even an earl and receive ever so much more dowry and prestige?” Megan tilted her head and lifted elegant brows.

Why indeed? Cailin clutched her enormous diamond engagement necklace. The thing felt heavy

with responsibility.

“The man’s an English duke. He owns palaces all over England.” Megan planted her hands on her slender, mossy-green silk covered hips. “Every noble lass in the land should be offering to give her right arm to be in your shoes. And yet they are not.”

New knots formed in the nape of Cailin’s neck. She held her finger to her lips. “Too late to turn back now. The wedding chorus has begun.” She forced her feet to take the first step, and then began the slow glide from the stone castle’s rear archway through the garden towards the rose arbor.

With a jerk, Megan lifted and straightened Cailin’s cumbersome satin train. “In truth, beyond his wealth and titles, our family knows little about the English duke.” She gathered up her own long skirts, and ran ahead to lead Cailin down the flower-strewn path.

Seven bridesmaids stopped giggling and chatting and moved to their places in front of Megan to head the procession.

Beneath her veil, Cailin smoothed her frown.

Papa had chosen to take this path in light of the violent upheaval following England’s latest battle with the Highlanders.

Her marriage to the duke would shelter her family with his great cloak of protection. Neither the English nor the Scots would dare invade a castle guarded by the powerful duke’s coat of arms.

More goose bumps shivered down her spine. Surely, jealousy fueled the flagrant tittle-tattle. She pulled in a deep breath, straightened her shoulders, and took measured steps in time to the music towards the loch gleaming in the late afternoon sunlight. She would not let whispers spoil her wedding. She laid her

hand lightly on her father's offered arm.

Their procession passed the scores of guests assembled on both sides of the flowered path. Ahead, her groom stood beneath the rose bower, sunlight from the loch gleaming on him, the pastor, and his groomsman.

Her heart fluttered.

The duke looked the perfect picture of manhood. He towered above his shorter groomsman and the pastor. Sun glinting off his iceberg blue satin coat, heavily laced with gold, almost blinded her. His chocolate eyes gazed past the dazzling crowd of guests and focused on her. Beneath those beckoning eyes, the straight bridge of his nose above softly smiling lips formed the most handsome face she'd ever seen.

Her pulse quickened. Butterflies flitted from her stomach to her heart and back. As she reached her groom and the chamber music died, her high-heeled slippers sank into the grassy moor, but her foreboding dissolved like fog before the sunshine.

The rose bower in the garden where she and the duke stood together and promised their fidelity was pure romance with its lush greenery, heavy scent of roses, and panorama of softly rolling, newly green glen. Though she didn't know the man she wed, she repeated with all her heart to love, honor, and obey him as long as she should live.

Marrying a man one had barely met happened more often than not to daughters of lords. So why were her knees shaking? Her attractive groom, with his mahogany hair, wide shoulders, and square jaw, held her hand gently in his warm, strong grasp. Rumors were just rumors, and, truth be told, if he was not perfect, neither was she.

A breeze loosened strands of brown hair from the gold band that tied the thick mass behind his muscular neck to dance around his face.

She was glad he had not powdered his hair. Her throat tightened. Loving him would be easy.

Oh God, please let him love me.

She would love him so greatly, with everything inside her heart. Surely, he would love her in return. She would work hard to make certain her marriage turned out differently from her mother's. There would be no coldness, nor violent arguments between her and her grand duke. No sleeping in separate parts of the castle. No making their daughters' lives miserable with the dislike they bore one another.

As the magnificent sunset painted him gold, the duke's chestnut eyes stared into hers with promise, his inviting lips tipped upwards at the corners, and his demeanor was affectionate and approving.

Joy burst through her chest, and she gave him a brilliant smile. Yes, her marriage would be happy. A storybook marriage, like Cinderella's.

The English parson the duke had brought with him raised a hand in blessing. "I now pronounce you man and wife. You may kiss the bride."

She handed her heavy bouquet of roses and lilies to Megan and tipped her chin up.

The tall, lithe, young duke stepped forward and lifted her expensive Brussels veil. She was so very fortunate he was not old.

She closed her eyes.

He touched his lips to hers.

Oh! Her eyes flew open. The bridal kiss had been so short...and disappointing. The pledge in his gaze had led her to expect so much more. She frowned.

Their first kiss was like melding lips with someone on stage, acting a part.

He dropped his arms and moved back.

Megan handed her the wedding bouquet.

Guests surged forward, surrounded them, and poured out congratulations.

She swallowed. So, in obedience to Papa, she had made vows to a complete stranger...vows that could not be broken.

Though the cold kiss dropped a mantle of heaviness over her heart, she shook off the shroud, smiled, and lifted her chin. She'd done her duty. Now the family was safe.

She had her whole life to discover what manner of man she'd wed, and her whole life to make him happy. She firmed her wobbly smile. And come sickness or death, she *would* make him happy.

Nearby musicians, seated next to the newly constructed dance floor, struck up the music for the traditional four-reel.

The duke took her hand, his groomsman took Megan's, and the four of them stepped onto the dance platform.

She draped her silky train over one arm and lifted her heavy skirts. As her new husband led her through the lively dance, his hand felt strong holding hers, and firm and sheltering on the small of her back. She smiled into his dusky eyes.

He smelled of manhood, expensive scent, and new clothes.

Her heart flip-flopped. Perhaps he'd been nervous and the impersonal kiss had no meaning. Heat warmed her cheeks. Tonight he would kiss her in a quite different manner.

Too soon, the dance ended.

Other guests stepped onto the wooden platform. The musicians slowed the tempo and glided into a Mozart minuet. The wooden floor filled, vibrating under the thud of many feet, and couples overflowed to the grassy glen.

Her husband bowed and left to claim Mums for the Parents' Dance.

Carried along by well-wishers, she lifted her skirts and stepped down onto the grass.

Megan slipped to her side. "Now, while all the guests are busy, I won't be missed. I must make my bid for freedom and escape." Her sister's whisper tickled Cailin's ear.

"I have a few minutes while no one is expecting anything of me." Cailin edged away from the swirling dancers. "The guests will think I left to attend to my personal matters. I'll see you off." She lifted her skirts and glided through the garden after her sister. They hastened around the garden maze, through the purpling heather thinly spread over the spongy peat moss, past the herb garden, and sprinted straight for the carriage house.

Four horses harnessed to Papa's carriage pawed the gravel path.

Her hand on the carriage door, Molly, Megan's maid, stopped frowning. Her booted foot quit tapping. A grin brightened her homely face. She handed Megan a white, folded gown, gathered high her ankle-length woolen skirts, hopped up into the carriage, and took up the multiple reins.

Cailin pulled Megan into a hug. "Do be careful."

Megan nodded. Green eyes sparkling, her wedding gown draped in her arms, she climbed the

step, and settled inside the open carriage.

Molly gave a chirrup and slapped the reins, and the vehicle lunged forward spewing gravel and dust.

Cailin watched, hugging her arms, pebbles pricking the soles of her thin slippers, until Papa's carriage clattered down the drive, and turned into the road leading to Inverness.

Oh, God, I pray Megan's doing the right thing.

She pressed her lips together. Despite her own wedding excitement, she must keep her sister's secret, or Papa would send an army of servants galloping after Megan and stop her.

Cailin turned and hurried back, her high-heeled slippers sometimes sinking into the grass. She held her veil in place, draped her cumbersome train over one arm, and rushed through the violet shades of descending dusk on a line to the candle-bright castle. She drew a deep breath as a stiffening breeze blew in scents of moor and wood.

People would gather soon inside the ballroom and expect to see her.

She panted so, she could scarce hear the crickets chirping as she rushed over the rough ground and onto the stone walkway leading to the front door and the entrance hall.

She hadn't soiled her wedding dress, but she brushed a clinging straw from her skirt and straightened her satin-clad shoulders.

Already she missed Megan. All her life she'd counted upon her sister to hold her hand before she entered her bridal chamber. She'd expected her sister to help shoo away the butterflies that swooped through her stomach no matter how often she tried to talk them away. She had scarcely been around men,

and the duke was a stranger. She frowned. And his kiss had held so little promise.

Another terrifying thought swirled through her brain like a ghost. Since Papa had betrothed Megan to a cruel man, what type of man had he selected for her? Were safety and titles and lands more important to Papa than both his daughters' happiness?

She shivered.

Gasping for breath, she nodded to the full-liveried doorman who opened the door for her and entered the stone castle, glad to be inside, away from the promise of rain. The servant knew better than to gossip about where she might have been.

Her quick footsteps clacked against the polished granite of the long entrance hall. She had stayed too long with Megan.

Already the guests assembled in the ballroom.

She glanced at the vaulted ceiling where daylight was fast fading through the thick-paned windows.

Oh God, please take away my fear.

"Cailin, come in. Everybody's waiting." Several of her bridesmaids stood at the open double doors to the ballroom, eyes dancing, faces flushed, and beckoned.

Clutching her bouquet, she choked down the lump in her throat, lifted her white skirts, and entered the ballroom. Just inside the doorway, she stopped and caught her breath.

Flowers lined every nook and cranny. The sweet scent of English roses almost made her dizzy. She blinked. The ballroom was a fairyland, with tall candles, white bows with flowing ribbon tails, and flower garlands tucked into every possible space. The floor-to-ceiling mirrors that lined all four walls reflected candlelight, guests, and gaiety.

Papa had gone to great expense on the decor.

Joy bubbled over her anxiety like fresh water cascading down a dangerous cliff. Surely if Papa had done all this for her, he had secured a worthy man as her groom. She glanced into one of the mirrors to adjust her veil, and then faced the festive scene.

Tall beeswax candles cast a warm glow throughout the guest-clogged chamber perfectly reflecting the rosy luminance growing inside her heart. How could she be so happy one moment and so uncertain the next?

The lilt of music from the string quartet surrounded her. She and her bridesmaids swept past three white-draped tables laden with elegant food and five more overflowing with beautifully wrapped gifts.

As formally attired men and beautifully gowned women gathered around her, she smiled in response to their congratulations.

Mums rushed to her side and spoke in a low voice with her sweet Lowland burr so different from Cailin's own boarding-school English accent. "My dear, though we had but a few days to prepare, your wedding couldn't be more exquisite."

She kissed her mother's smooth cheek. "Thank you for a truly wonderful day. Yours was the tasteful hand guiding Papa's iron gauntlet."

Knowing Papa, Mums had no voice in Papa's choice of a husband for her, but Mums planned the wedding and reception.

Mums beamed.

"And Mums, you look splendid. That lavender silk is absolutely perfect."

Above her mother's low-cut bodice, a heavy diamond necklace twinkled against her ivory skin.

Diamonds sparkled in her ears and in her shimmering blonde hair that barely showed strands of gray.

"Thank you, dearest." Mums's soft, gloved hand felt warm under Cailin's chin. "You positively glow. His Grace cannot help but be pleased."

Warmth banished some of the butterflies flitting inside her stomach. "Oh, Mums!" She slid her arm around mother's narrow waist. "Thank you."

The clatter of feet on the polished parquet floor shifted her attention to the athletic, debonair man approaching like a royal ship with all flags flying.

Insignificant, less colorful vessels followed the duke's wake.

Was His Grace always surrounded by so many attendants?

A splash of contentment washed over her. How lovely to be an important part of her new husband's dazzling entourage.

"Your Grace." A shy flutter ran through her heart. She dropped a curtsy to the duke.

Beside her Lady MacMurry dipped even lower.

"Oh, the both of you, do address me as Avondale." Her new husband awarded her a stiff smile. "After all, we no longer need stand on formality."

Perhaps he was nervous.

"Thank you, Avondale." She leaned closer to the elegant duke and gazed into his eyes, but found his attention focused on the stringed quartet. Moths swooped into her stomach.

Was the flesh and blood man she had pledged herself to somewhere inside this handsome façade? Or was this stranger playing the role of the real man? Who was this person to whom she was bound for life?

"I say, Cailin. These Scottish tunes please me not. Don't your musicians know any good English melodies?"

"Why, yes...Avondale. Mums, would you see to it?"

Of course, her groom must think of his English guests before he could concentrate on his bride. The thought returned the smile to her heart, but didn't banish all the alarm peeking around the edges.

With the Highlanders defeated just two days past at Culloden, even Lowland Scottish tunes seemed no longer in vogue, though their Lowlanders, unlike the Highlanders, remained ever faithful to England and King George. Thank God, they'd taken no part in The Rising.

Mums nodded. "Certainly, dear. I'll make my way over to the musicians presently." She strolled off in a swirl of lavender silk, leaving her flowery scent behind.

Cailin slipped her arm through her husband's and couldn't keep her gaze off the muscular sword-wielder wrist that emerged from the lace edging his jacket sleeve.

Today she would not let thoughts of wounded and dead Highlanders intrude on her happiness. She would celebrate her Wedding Week in the best English tradition. With God's help, she would see this arranged marriage overturn the norm. No matter what she had to do, she would make Avondale happy and pray God he would return the blessing.

As they continued their circuit of the room, her new husband pulled away. So she stepped closer and rested her hand lightly on Avondale's arm. He bowed and spoke pleasant words to each person he

encountered.

Apprehension curled like wisps of fog through her heart. Avondale's manner towards her seemed so very...remote. As if she were only another member of the fawning company surrounding him. Barely noticing her, he seemed intent on making each person he met adore him. Where had the affirmation gone that she'd seen in his eyes as they pledged themselves to each other?

To gain his attention, she squeezed his satin-encased arm. A trill rippled up her spine. Avondale's bicep felt tight with muscle. What other surprises had he in store for her?

Rather than turning his attention to her, he sniffed with apparent dissatisfaction the new smoke, called a cigar, which he'd plucked from his gold satin vest and rolled beneath his patrician nose. He slid the offending brown oblong into the breast pocket of the portly groomsman who hovered over him. "Get rid of this."

"Avondale," a high-pitched voice called from the entry.

Her husband instantly pivoted to face the front-hall, bronze eyes twinkling above a wide smile. "Ah, finally appears my royal mother." He raised his cultured voice. "Over here."

A hush settled over the room, leaving the music sounding loud.

Tightness gripped her throat, but she would not pant for breath.

Last evening when the duchess arrived, Cailin had a momentary meeting with the intimidating woman. The encounter had not gone well. The woman had barely acknowledged her.

Cailin blinked rapidly and raised her chin. With

time, she would surely grow to love Avondale's mother. How could she not when the lady looked a petite, though much older image of her aristocratic son?

"My mother's pleasure is of utmost importance." Avondale's gaze was flinty and compelling. "You must make her happiness a priority."

Her heart twisted. "Yes, of course," she murmured.

But not because the duchess's good graces had been ordered, but because her own duty as a wife included bringing harmony to the House of Avondale. She gave the approaching duchess her most heart-felt smile.

The dowager stopped a few feet away and gazed at her with lifted brows and narrowed eyes. The tiny woman's cool expression made Cailin feel as if she was interviewing for a position as lady-in-waiting rather than being welcomed as a daughter-in-law.

Unable to keep her smile from wavering, she bit her lip. Would the dowager accept her love? She tightened her hand around Avondale's bicep. Regardless, she would strive to be an obedient, dutiful daughter-in-law.

The duchess thumped a ribbon-decorated rosewood cane on the floor. The hard tap of her folded fan stung Cailin's arm. "I'm sure you'll be a great asset to my son." The plump, long-widowed dowager's low-cut gown of black silk with silver stripes accented her fair skin and elaborately coiffed white hair. She held herself stiffly straight and made flabby arms and a ponderous bosom appear high-fashion.

Duchess Avondale's retinue of dandified aides and sparkling ladies crowded around the short woman