



Hired

BY MY RICH

Highland

Husband

BEATRICE BRADSHAW

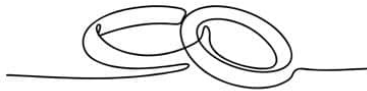
A novel by...

BEATRICE BRADSHAW

Hired

BY MY RICH

*Highland
Husband*



Love was never part of the deal...

Whisky heir Max Drummond needs a wife – fast. If he doesn't marry by his thirtieth birthday, he'll lose his Highland inheritance.

Freelance journalist Rowan MacKay is out of options. With her grandmother's care bills piling up, she needs cash.

When she stumbles onto Max's Scottish estate for a story, she never expects him to offer her a deal that solves everything: one year of marriage in exchange for financial security.

No emotions. No entanglements. Just cold, hard practicality.

But life at Dunmarach isn't as simple as a contract. Rowan's fire clashes with Max's control. And what starts as an arrangement soon turns into heated looks, slow-burn tension, and nights that break every rule of their deal...

Content Note

This romance is written in British English ('realise' instead of 'realize'). There's also a bit of a Scottish accent here and there – the story is set in Scotland, after all.

Please be aware: this book contains several explicit / smutty open-door sex scenes and a good sprinkle of profanity.

It also touches on topics that could trigger certain audiences, such as parental neglect, an accident, cognitive decline, grief, and divorce. It's best to be prepared.

Your mental health matters. <3

Contents

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14.](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19.](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24.](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Love in the Scottish Winter Highlands](#)

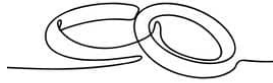
[Glossary](#)

[Author's note](#)

[About the Author](#)

To all the girls who've been told they're too much: never let anyone dim your light. The world needs it.

Chapter One



Maxwell Drummond had faced billion-pound mergers, hostile takeovers, and raging CEOs, but nothing had prepared him for this. It wasn't so much the ultimatum that bothered him. It was the fact that he hadn't seen it coming.

And knowing his late father, he should have.

Outside, a rare burst of late-July heat pressed against the ancient stone walls, but inside the castle, the study remained cool, heavy with shadows and the scent of leather and paper. Max stood with his cold hands clasped behind his back, shoulders rigid in his tailored suit, and watched the Highland landscape stretching before him. After years of absence, the backdrop of his upbringing felt like a noose around his neck.

'I trust you understand the clause?' Richard Blackwood's voice grated against Max's patience like sandpaper, setting his teeth on edge.

Max turned and fixed the solicitor with the same stare he used to intimidate boardroom opponents in his capacity as CEO of M.A.D. Capital Partners, one of London's most formidable private equity firms.

His firm.

'Perfectly. Though, I can't see what my marital status and place of residence have to do with me inheriting Dunmarach. I can manage it from

my London office.'

'Your father was clear in his wishes.' Blackwood shuffled the papers on the massive oak desk. 'Marry by your thirtieth birthday and live in Scotland, or the estate passes to the trust.'

His thirtieth birthday – in one week.

Outrageous.

Max fought the urge to loosen his tie, refusing to show any sign of discomfort. Of weakness. 'And what of the distillery?'

'The same applies. Everything – the castle, lands, and Drummond's Finest – will all come under trust ownership. We've maintained operations with the trustees' appointed team handling day-to-day matters. Your involvement hasn't been required thus far. Though it would have been welcomed.'

Max barked an empty laugh. 'Spare me.'

'We ensured the estate's stability when you were...otherwise occupied. The trust exists to safeguard the Drummond estate. Should you fail to meet the conditions, it will come under trust ownership. The trustees would have the authority to sell assets, restructure operations, and make decisions in what they deem the estate's best interests.'

Max set his mouth in a hard line.

So they'll gut the place for profit. What do I care?

He had built his own life far away from here for a reason. His jaw went rigid as memories surfaced. His father's voice, clipped and cold. The weight of silence between them.

His parents couldn't even bear to look at him.

All they wanted was their favourite son back, Dunmarach's original heir. But they had lost Martin. And it was all Max's fault.

Thirteen years after the accident, he still heard the sickening crunch of metal. Felt the darkness. Blue lights strobing through the rain. The sharp tang of blood and hospital disinfectant. Drifting in and out of consciousness, nurses murmuring. Max hadn't been able to move. Hadn't been able to attend his brother's funeral.

One month in hospital. And the day after he got out, his parents sent him away to university in England.

That old cocktail of rage, guilt, and inadequacy churned in his gut. He had spent over a decade building walls around these memories, treating emotion like a sinking venture to be shut down.

He had turned himself to stone.

Yet here he was, reduced to that seventeen-year-old boy again by wood panelling and stale air. The ruthless financial genius Maxwell Drummond, brought low by a dead man's parlour tricks from beyond the grave.

Two years after his death, no less.

Max still tasted the bitter coffee from that morning two years ago when his secretary had interrupted his 9 AM meeting with news of the boating accident. A rented yacht, a Caribbean storm. His parents had been mediocre sailors at best. The Coast Guard had searched for two weeks before declaring Murdoch and Charlotte Drummond lost at sea, leaving him to arrange a funeral for nothing but air and regret in mahogany boxes that would never rot. The fresh dirt on his parents' graves had matched the decade-old soil on Martin's.

Max had left the next day without a backward glance. That was the only time he had visited Scotland in thirteen years.

Until now.

His father had created the trust after Martin's death. As a failsafe, one more reminder that Max had never been the heir his father wanted. The message had been clear: the trust was to protect Dunmarach *from* Max, not *for* him.

So he had buried himself in his company and let the estate be managed in his absence, refusing to engage. Refusing to look back.

Now he was trapped in his father's fortress of dark wood and disapproval again. Murdoch Drummond's presence, a blend of Highland peat and patrician judgement, had followed Max through every boarding school dormitory, Cambridge lecture hall, and London boardroom. It was still here in these walls.

‘I see,’ Max said. ‘Is that all?’

Blackwood’s mouth contorted into what might have been meant as a sympathetic smile if he had been capable of that. As the trust’s managing trustee, he had mastered the art of delivering bad news with just enough regret to make it seem like he cared.

‘Your parents believed marriage would provide stability,’ Blackwood said. ‘Help you embrace your responsibilities here.’

‘Rather than living large in London?’

This wasn’t about stability or structure, it was about fixing him. About replacing what they had lost. They might have thought a wife and a home could make him more like the son they had buried.

‘One week to get married.’ His fingers tapped against his thigh. ‘You’ve waited until I have *one week* before my thirtieth to mention this rather crucial detail.’

‘The trust’s timing isn’t my responsibility. The trustees believed that if you were serious about Dunmarach, you would have returned before now. Your parents...well, they hoped that time would lead you back here without the need for ultimatums. Clearly, that hasn’t been the case.’ Blackwood straightened his wire-rimmed glasses. ‘Their will granted the trust temporary control of the estate following their passing. It stipulated that you could inherit on your thirtieth birthday, provided you fulfilled the conditions. The trust wasn’t legally required to disclose those conditions until now. Although I did advise your parents and the trustees to inform you sooner.’

‘Did you now?’ The whisky decanter clinked against the glass as Max poured. He was sure Blackwood was lying. But he wasn’t sure why. ‘How conscientious of you.’

Blackwood accepted the offered drink with a curt nod. ‘The trustees saw no need to rush matters. They preferred to wait until...the time was right.’

‘Don’t bullshit me, Richard. I’m not a boy anymore.’ The crystal tumbler threw shards of light as he raised it. ‘The right time? You mean the right time

to make it impossible for me to fulfil the conditions. The trust is doing this on purpose. You obviously want me out.'

'We'll do what's necessary to ensure Dunmarach's future.' Blackwood sighed and set his untouched drink aside, unable to suppress his smug 'game-over' face. 'And your parents wanted you back home where you belong.'

'Is that so?' Max stalked back to the window, the floorboards creaking beneath his Italian leather shoes. His father's mounted stag head seemed to mock him from above the fireplace. 'Funny how "belonging" wasn't a priority when they shipped me off to uni the day after I got out of hospital.'

'Your brother's death affected them profoundly.'

'Don't.' The word cracked like a whip.

'They lost a child. They were grieving.'

'Were they? And what about me? Believe it or not, I was grieving, too. I lost my big brother, goddammit!'

'You chose to stay in London after Cambridge.'

'And my parents chose to pretend their surviving son didn't exist.' Max's attention fixed on the worn line of carpet where his father had so often paced.

Who was Blackwood trying to fool? This was a coup. The trust wanted to cut Max out, and his parents had handed them the knife. Maybe they had actually thought they were safeguarding the estate with this clause, maybe this was another punishment. One last reminder of everything he wasn't. Impossible to tell now.

'The stipulations are clear.' Max straightened his cuffs, a habit he had developed in boardrooms when preparing to deliver a killing blow. 'One week to secure a bride or lose everything. No need for this performative concern.'

His reflection skewed across the dusty glass of Martin's old trophy case. Academic awards, rowing medals, rugby trophies. A shrine to the golden son. Max's own achievements were absent, though he had matched every one of his brother's accomplishments.

Not that it had ever mattered.

‘They wanted—’

‘What they *wanted*,’ Max cut in, ‘was a reliable, pliable successor. What they *got* was me. Now, if we’re quite finished with this touching family retrospective, I have calls to make.’

‘Maxwell...’

‘Thank you for your time. I’ll have my team review the documentation.’

The solicitor gathered his papers. ‘Of course. Good luck.’

‘Save it.’

Once alone, Max crossed to the antique globe bar, lifting the lid to reveal a collection of decanters. He poured himself another generous sip of the family’s single malt. The tumbler was cool against his palm as he inhaled the notes of peat and oak.

One week to find a wife or he would lose everything.

‘Fucking hell.’ He tossed the drink in one burning swig. He had spent years building his private equity firm, crafting an identity separate from the suffocating weight of family legacy.

Laird.

The study walls seemed to close in, heavy with portraits of Drummond ancestors who had managed what he couldn’t – maintaining the family line, protecting the legacy, being worthy of the name. But what made him furious – no, ready for war – was being played by the trustees, a bunch of backwater bureaucrats led by Blackwood. They thought they had him cornered.

And no one put Maxwell Drummond in a corner.

If he were to lose Dunmarach now, this would prove his father right. It would mean letting Martin down.

He couldn’t let either of those things happen.

Max had made himself into a winner, took what life offered and gave nothing in return. He had made himself untouchable. Not by chance, but by choice. Insecurity, vulnerability – those were weaknesses he couldn’t afford, chinks in the armour. In his world, survival belonged to the calculated, not the sentimental.

Watching Dunmarach fall into the trust's hands? Not on his watch. If he had to marry to keep it, then so be it. Marriage was nothing but a contract, and contracts he understood.

He traced the boundaries of the study, cataloguing potential candidates among his London acquaintances with the same precision he applied to takeovers and mergers. There must be someone who would grasp the practical nature of such an arrangement. Someone who wouldn't expect more than he could give.

Grace, the barrister? Too sharp for the inevitable divorce. Nadia from the tech company? Too much like him, married to her work. He let out a dry chuckle. Who was he kidding? They would all laugh in his face. What would such a conversation even sound like? 'Lovely weather. Fancy getting hitched, so I don't lose my ancestral pile to a scheming trust?'

Another harsh laugh echoed off the oak-panelled walls.

Over the years, more women had come and gone from his bedroom than he could count. And none of them gave a shit about him. He had well taken care of it. His thumb flicked over his phone screen. A decade of affairs left him with plenty of numbers, but not a single person he would trust with his legacy.

Not a single person he would trust, period.

He had designed it that way, hadn't he? Keep them at arm's length, never let anyone close enough to see the fractures and shadows.

Martin's old rugby scarf still hung on the coat rack, blue now faded to grey. Max's hand caught on it as he passed, and the soft wool seemed to taunt him. Perfect Martin, who had never struggled to connect, to belong. Who had filled this office with laughter instead of grim silence. Who could do no wrong. Always perfect. Flawless.

If only they knew...

The alcohol burned in his empty stomach. Seven days to find a wife. He hadn't even shared breakfast with anyone, let alone contemplated sharing a life, business or otherwise. Relationships had never been his style. Affairs, yes, countless, but he had always made sure to leave while it was still dark.

A sudden gust rattled the windows, and the old house groaned around him like a ghost. Everything in this room belonged to the dead. Martin's awards, his parents' disappointment. And now he was expected to conjure up a bride and bring her into this mausoleum of morbidity – or roll over and hand it all to the trustees, making a joke of himself in the process?

The glass clinked against his father's desk as he set it down. Piled clouds hunkered over the hills in the distance. He loosened his tie at last. Losing the estate would be a heavy financial blow, but it wouldn't break him. His investment company had made him wealthy in his own right.

But the thought of watching smug trust managers taking away the Drummond legacy sent a bracing pressure through his chest. The distillery his ancestors had built, the castle that had sheltered eight generations of his family. All that made a Drummond a Drummond – stripped away. He could already imagine the whispers in the private clubs, the knowing looks at industry events. The great Maxwell Drummond, who had conquered Britain's financial sector but couldn't keep hold of his own heritage.

The heir who lost it all.

Such a tasteless cliché.

He had spent years trying to forget this place. Martin had loved Dunmarach with a passion that Max had never understood. But standing here, watching twilight creep across the hills their family had stewarded for centuries, he felt the weight of what his brother had always known: this wasn't just property to be managed. This wasn't a random business he could rip to shreds and sell for parts. Dunmarach was more than land or legacy. It was the core of who they were.

And Max was the last of them.

He owed it to Martin's memory to preserve what his brother had cherished, what should have been his to protect if fate hadn't had other plans.

If he hadn't...

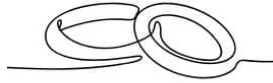
The irony wasn't lost on him. Max had spent years running from this place, only to find himself struggling to keep it. He lifted the glass in a mock

toast to his reflection in the window. 'Happy early birthday, idiot.'

Outside, the Highland dusk unfurled over the estate like a shroud. A distant rumble of thunder echoed across the hills, and, for a moment, he could have sworn he heard Martin's laugh in it. That generous sound that had always filled these halls before...everything. His brother would have found this situation hilarious.

Max would find a solution. Discuss this with his legal team. Discover a loophole. But as the darkness gathered and the whisky dwindled, even Max Drummond couldn't convince himself it would be that easy.

Chapter Two



The ceiling fan wheezed above Rowan MacKay's head, stirring the stagnant July air without cooling it. She slouched over her laptop in the faux leather armchair. Highland midges battered themselves senseless against the B&B's grimy window. On the screen, her bank balance glowed like a neon sign advertising her failures.

'Fuck's sake.' She jabbed at the calculator app again, as if the numbers might rearrange themselves into something less terrifying. The extra fees for her gran's care were due next week, and her last freelance payment was still 'processing'.

The springs gave a loud screech as Rowan flopped backwards onto the bed. The tiny room's musty air carried hints of damp and decades-old cigarette smoke.

Her phone blinked to life, and her gran's face lit up the screen.

'Hello, ma wee treasure! Just checking ye're all sorted up there.'

Her grandmother's voice loosened the knot in Rowan's chest. The familiar childhood endearment felt especially precious now, knowing how her gran's world was shrinking. Moments and faces fading into shadows she could no longer reach. It wasn't the forgetting – like taking her medication or the fact that her husband had passed almost two decades ago. Although

that was part of it, too. She'd only been in the care home for four months, but it already felt as though everything was slipping away too fast. For now, she could still press the right speed dial on the phone in her room and be cognisant of who she was talking to.

God only knew for how much longer.

'I'm fine, Gran. The room's...' She glanced at the suspicious brown stain on the ceiling, '...rustic.'

'And the story? That castle?' There was a pause, then, 'Did I ask ye that already? These days ma mind's like one of those puzzle boxes.'

The casual mention of those memory lapses made Rowan's throat constrict. Three years ago, the early-onset dementia diagnosis had hit like a sledgehammer. As if the small stroke hadn't already been enough.

'What are ye writing again?'

'A feature about the castle, the distillery, and the new heir. Or so I hope.'

'And any luck wi' that?'

Nope, not really. Rowan glanced at the battered folder next to her laptop, crammed with material about Dunmarach Castle. It was the perfect hook for a young journalist hustling her way into the good graces of *North By Scotland's* editor. Possibly her shot at a stable job. Real exposure. Even if it was only for a Highland lifestyle mag.

Dunmarach. A castle with a distillery on the brink of releasing its new 30-year-old single malt. Industry whispers hinted it might knock any *Glenwhatsitnot* off its pedestal. A new Highland malt with a pedigree so pristine and a backstory so secretive, it practically sold itself.

Supply and demand, two of the apocalyptic horsemen of capitalism.

And the timing couldn't have been juicier.

Not that it mattered much to her personally or the wider world, but whisky geeks were dying to know what Maxwell Drummond planned to do with the distillery when he took over. Insiders suggested that his thirtieth birthday marked the day he'd officially take control. It was all rumours, though. He hadn't made a single public statement since his parents' deaths

two years ago. Or before that. Nobody knew the man. No interviews, no press releases, not even a token nod to PR.

For a journalist with half a brain, that kind of silence was catnip. Who wouldn't want the inside scoop on that?

'Still in the planning stage,' Rowan hedged. 'But I'm getting there.'

She'd tried playing nice for weeks, had gone through all the proper channels. Emails, polite calls, even the odd grovelling voicemail. But the distillery's management wasn't interested in press. The Drummond brand was thriving on exclusivity. No open days, no advertising, no comment. She'd have to dig out whatever she needed for the article on her own.

'I've got a good feeling about it, Gran. Something will come of it.'

'That's ma lass.' Her gran's voice brightened. 'Always landing on yer feet, like yer maw. Have tae have yer wits about ye.'

The comparison twisted something in Rowan's gut. Her mother was still pulling double shifts at the hospital. A quarter of a century spent treating wounds, dispensing medication, administering infusions, and raising a child on her own – and what did she have to show for it? A dodgy back and a daughter who'd gone to uni but still couldn't afford decent accommodation in Glasgow.

Well, Rowan would find a way to give Gran the care she deserved and her mum a nice wee vacation. Even if it meant scaling castle walls to do it.

That was the reason she was here.

'Oh, did I tell ye? Yer grandda Joe called. Said he'd be round the morn. I've been waitin' on him.'

Rowan's heart cracked. 'Och, Gran... I'm not sure if...' Then she forced cheer into her voice. 'You know what? I think you *did* tell me. That's great news! Now, have you had your tea already?'

After saying goodnight, Rowan returned to her research.

Of course, tracking down a millionaire wasn't as simple as sliding into his DMs. Officially, the estate was managed by a trust. They'd stonewalled every email, dodged her calls, and made it clear they weren't taking media

inquiries, either. The trust might have been keeping everything running, but the castle – and its true secrets – belonged to Maxwell Drummond.

The castle's website was sparse, but she'd dug up a few old articles. One rare society photo from a couple of years ago showed a stern-faced young man in his mid-twenties, all angular cheekbones and brooding intensity. Dark hair, grey-blue eyes, and a face that looked like it had never cracked a smile but could probably crack marble. The tailored suit framed his broad shoulders. Even staring the camera down as if it had challenged him to a duel, the man was strikingly handsome. City-boy polish with a hint of Highland warrior lurking underneath.

The kind of man who had his trousers ironed but still carried you into his castle for a nice round of ravishing.

Jeez, girl. Hormonal much?

It was an older article that caught her professional eye. Thirteen years ago a mysterious car accident. Maxwell had survived, his older brother hadn't. The details were frustratingly vague, cloaked in that polished language posh families used to cover their secrets. And then, as if the universe hadn't kicked his balls hard enough, his parents had vanished in some freak storm near Antigua two years ago.

She chewed her lip. 'No wonder you prefer to stay down in London, looking all scowly and frowny.'

No time for sympathy for the devil, MacKay!

Her credit card balance was creeping ever closer to the limit. And her gran's weekly physiotherapy and private dementia care sessions weren't going to pay for themselves.

'Sorry about your tragic backstory,' she said to his glowering photo and tried to squash her guilt. 'But I need a story more than you need your privacy.'

Principles are for those who can afford them.

One good story was all she needed. One piece to finally prove she could hack it in journalism.

Dunmarach castle stood empty most of the year. Perfect for her plans.