



The Matrimonial Advertisement

Mimi Matthews

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She Wanted Sanctuary...

Helena Reynolds will do anything to escape her life in London, even if that means traveling to a remote cliffside estate on the North Devon coast and marrying a complete stranger. But Greyfriar's Abbey isn't the sort of refuge she imagined. And ex-army captain Justin Thornhill--though he may be tall, dark, and devastatingly handsome--is anything but a romantic hero.

He Needed Redemption...

Justin has spent the last two decades making his fortune, settling scores, and suffering a prolonged period of torture in an Indian prison. Now, he needs someone to smooth the way for him with the villagers. Someone to manage his household--and warm his bed on occasion. What he needs, in short, is a wife and a matrimonial advertisement seems the perfect way to acquire one.

Their marriage was meant to be a business arrangement and nothing more. A dispassionate union free from the entanglements of love and affection. But when Helena's past threatens, will Justin's burgeoning feelings for his new bride compel him to come to her rescue? Or will dark secrets of his own force him to let her go?

The Matrimonial Advertisement Details

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Author : Mimi Matthews

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From Reader Review The Matrimonial Advertisement for online ebook

Jayne Fresina says

Review of an arc copy.

Helena Reynolds has something to hide; Justin Thornhill has a past he wants to escape. The solution? A marriage of convenience. He needs a respectable wife and she needs protection, but neither expect the passion and the love that follows.

Like a warm bath, a box of Leonidas chocolates, or a glass of wine after a hard day's work -- ok, actually all three -- The Matrimonial Advertisement is exactly what I want to sink into and enjoy greedily without interruption. This delightful Victorian love story took me away to another time and another place for a few blissful hours.

Mimi Matthews is a wonderful storyteller. She creates very likeable, memorable, layered characters that quickly feel like friends. Her style is naturally elegant and warmly flowing, full of historical detail and charm. I don't have a lot of time to read these days, so I really have to be tempted to pick up a book, but this is the second of her fictional works that I've devoured and I'm looking forward to more.

***Avonna says**

Check out all of my reviews at: <https://www.avonnalovesgenres.com>

Once again, upon opening a Mimi Matthews Victorian romance, I am completely absorbed into the era's mores, clothing and prose as well as a beautifully written, emotional romance. THE MATRIMONIAL ADVERTISEMENT (Parish Orphans of Devon #1) is the first book in a new historical romance series.

Helena Reynolds is desperate to escape London. Her last hope is to be picked by ex-army Captain Justin Thornhill after answering an advertisement posted for him by his friends for a wife. She prays the coast of North Devon is far enough away from London and the protection of a husband is enough to save her.

Justin Thornhill returned to North Devon from being tortured as a captive in an Indian prison. After working for several years to improve his fortunes, he now owns Greyfriar's Abbey and should be happy that his revenge is complete, but he realizes he wants a woman to help with the Abbey and occasionally warm his bed. He goes along with his friends' advertisement idea and is shocked when a beautiful, refined young woman responds. Justin knows she is hiding something, but he cannot resist the opportunity of having Helena as his wife.

Justin will do everything in his power to protect Helena, even as he learns the secrets she keeps, because what started as a marriage of convenience from a matrimonial advertisement is turning into more. Helena feels safe with her husband and is bravely willing to share her secret to free herself and help others, but will she understand Justin's own secrets that torture him and he has yet to share with her?

Ms. Matthews is my go-to author for historically accurate Victorian era romance. Her characters are so vivid

and true to their time. The romance grows from meeting, to friendship, to caring, to love without any sex scenes. The emotional depth of Helena and Justin's romance is portrayed in their pain, fear, ultimate caring and understanding. I always become emotionally attached to Ms. Matthews' heroes and heroines. This book also uses two significant historical issues blended with the romance to add depth to Helena and Justin's past and present decisions and actions. This is a story, romance and characters that will stay with me for a very long time to come. I cannot wait for the next book in the series!

K.J. Charles says

A highly enjoyable Victorian-sensation style romance. There's a Beauty and the Beast set-up--heroine fleeing terrible persecution meets ill-mannered scarred master of remote half-ruined house. However, Justin is about as cinnamon roll as beasts get, and is basically lovely to Helena from the start, albeit struggling with his own feelings of guilt and shame because of his background and past.

It's slightly odd because this is actually a very low-conflict book, both internal (the relationship is utterly sweet and angst-free except for an 'I'm not worthy' moment on the hero's part) and external. There are all the trappings of Victorian Gothic (Beast hero, threat of confinement in a lunatic asylum, storms, lurking villains) but the threat ends up pretty low. That's not a complaint--I really needed a low-angst romance and I enjoyed every minute of this warm, charming book. I just wasn't expecting that from the Gothic plot and trappings. Maybe sweet Gothic is a new genre, in which case sign me the hell up. Can't wait for #2.

Rachel McMillan says

I FREAKIN loved this book! Holy cupcakes!

Okay so, first, Marriage of Convenience stories = RACHEL CATNIP! Total Rachel Catnip! Just gimme all of them!

Second, the setting is all broody and craggy and totally kinda Thornfield and makes amazing use of the rain-swept hills and cliffs of Devon.

Third, you get some time in London, too! Just for extra measure! AS WELL--- you get throw backs to the Great Exhibition (one of the ways in which the hero and heroine nurture their VERY realistic and well developed friendship as it slowly unravels toward love).

Here's the deal, guys, when I was younger, I was all ROCHESTER FOREVER. Then I kinda grew up and I kinda think he's super problematic and controlling and manipulative. But, I still like the archetype. Justin Thornhill is the archetype redeemed. He is a caring and genuinely good human with a good soul despite his tragic past. Yes, he grew up an orphan and had some childhood tragedies that spun into his being tortured and scarred in an Indian prison. But he hasn't let that doom and gloom him. He allows himself to open up to the possibility of taking Helena under his protection. He genuinely cares for the people in his life and his

staff and his conscience and his willingness to sacrifice for the people he loves just make him the freakin bee's knees. He has such a tender way in approaching his growing attraction for his bride. He ensures she is comfortable, that they work in the realm of friendship. and and... just because they are legally married and such doesn't mean he demands that they become husband and wife in EVERY last sense. Not until she is with him on the same plain of affection and commitment beyond their recited vows.

"What sort of blackguard would have relations with a woman who hasn't chosen him of her own free will?"

Dude, as someone who has read about EIGHT TRILLION historical marriage of convenience stories, I can name dozens. GOOD on YOU!

Helena marries Justin to protect herself from a wily uncle and his henchmen who want her inheritance and to throw her back into an asylum to get it. I mean, this is kinda Gothic-y but who cares because the point is not HOW Justin and Helena are tossed together like the surf and crest of the Devon waves on a lugubrious day, just that they are.

Also, I freakin cried at the end because JUSTIN. He's a good soul. He loves her... he TREASURES her... he kicks into the commitment of his vows immediately and cherishes her even as he knows that their marriage is one borne of her need for security. But what makes him a genuine dish of a hero is that he makes that enough. Dedicates himself to her while still being broody and dishy and mysterious.

There's a bit of a beauty and a beast thing happening here and I especially love the small steps they take toward friendship.

Unlike a ton of M of C stories, this is not heavy on the bedroom scenes (mostly because, as you see above, Justin is a TOTAL gent and is just too good for that) but the kissage is all time awesome and the inference of marital relations is implied and lovely and specific to a time when both Justin and Helena take that final step toward their HEA.

(yes, they get together. if that is a spoiler, sorry.)

It is HOW they get together and what they learn from each other as they slowly bend and learn and trust that make this just a delicious story.

This, my friends, is the story you save for those chilly October nights when leaves are scuttling over the damp tarmac and the moon is hanging low and everything is dark and sumptuous and you want a gorgeous Gothic backdrop to a truly sweet love story with a super duper dishy hero.

thanks to Netgalley for the review copy.

Justin, you dreamboat! all the hearts for you.

Christina says

This is why I read historical romance! Mimi Matthews elevates her prose to incomparable heights through tight plot and an elegant hand. Her deft storytelling is sublime: subtle details that build from well intended words. A gothic Devon abbey is the setting for intrigue with no little yearning between our unlikely heroine and her roguish captain. Sensual from the first pages and left me breathless by the last.

Beautifully executed—should not be missed. I dare say this stand alone novel has set us up perfectly for the next in the series.

Delirious Disquisitions says

I received this ARC from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

You should read this if you like: atmospheric Gothic romances, historical settings, mail order brides, gruff/stoic war heroes, sweet romances, mysteries, stories about British occupation of India, trauma, etc.

I'll be honest, I requested this book based entirely on the beautiful cover and the plot description. Generally, I'm a stickler for only reading historical romances written by my favorite authors. I know what I like and not everything written in this genre agrees with me. I had never read anything by Mimi Matthews before and as such did not really have any expectations going in. I'm pleasantly surprised by how very well this novel was written and how much I enjoyed it.

The premise of *The Matrimonial Advertisement* is pretty straight forward. Helena Reynolds is faced with some mysterious and dire circumstances that forces her to flee London. In her desperation she answers a matrimonial advertisement. Travelling to a remote cliffside village, she meets and weds Justin Thornhill. Justin, a scared and traumatized army captain with some secrets of his own. But their pasts soon catch up to them and threaten to destabilize everything they have build between them.

Where this novel excels is its deeply atmospheric writing. Matthew's writing brings the Gothic setting to life, breathing life reminiscent of the classic stories like *The Woman in White*. The remote estate on the edge of a cliff, the incessant rain storms flooding the roads, the crash of the waves on the rocky outcropping: each detail so vividly described that I could almost smell brine in the air! Even the Greyfriar's Abbey with its Gothic stories of haunting added to the sense of mystery permeating the first half of the novel. It was all terribly exciting to read!

The characters themselves build on the mystery with enough hints to keep you invested till the reveal. Both Helena and Justin had traumatic pasts that they worked together to overcome. Their relationship was one built on trust and admiration for each other. Helena's quiet strength and resilience and Justin's kind disposition really made it very easy to root for them as a couple. Theirs was sweet, domestic kind of romance.

Matthews also draws attention to the women of Victorian England, from their sheltered lives to their limited freedom and their treatment as objects. Through Helena's character, Matthews addresses topics such as women's rights (or lack thereof), unfair laws that favor the patriarchy, confines of marriage, violence against

women, abuse, mental health, etc. It made for an interesting and unconventional character.

In addition to the characters, the historical events Mathews incorporated within the narrative itself was written particularly well. With Mathews background, I'm not surprised with the amount of research that's been put into the details. Certain historical events, like the incident in India, were seamlessly integrated into the novel without making it seem like a token mention. It's a pet peeve of mine when authors base their plot in India and try to insert random Hindi words here and there for flavor. Here, however, Hindi terms have been sparingly used and only to add something to the plot.

All in all, I really enjoyed the first half of the novel. There was romance, mystery, and an intriguing plot to boot. But it all kind of falls apart about 60% through once the setting shifts to London. It just seems like every other historical romance from then on and there really isn't much in terms of plot to really keep you reading. The characters too are suddenly hit with a bout of noble idiocy and refuse to actually communicate shit, preferring to dwell in unnecessary angst instead. All of that I really could have done without.

Overall, I really liked this book and would recommend it to anyone looking for a light historical romance with some Gothic elements thrown in. **3.5 stars**. I look forward to reading more of Mimi Mathews work in the future.

OLT says

While this may not be a perfect 5-star romance, it's close enough for me to want to round to 5. The author is perhaps the best new HR writer around as far as her attention to detail and historical accuracy. That's always a huge plus. And the second important component of a historical romance is obviously the romance, which I find she has also done very well here.

As I age but still continue to read romance, my preferences on how a romantic relationship is presented continue to change. Not so hot-blooded anymore and much more hormone-deficient, I'm not interested in titillation from sexual encounters. As a matter of fact, if an HR couple take more than 1-2 pages to go from pre-coital to post-coital in a sex scene, my attention has wandered off and I skip to the post part.

A romance novel has a limited number of pages. I want those spent on actual relationships, and character and romance development, and some interesting historical aspect. Mimi Mathews' new novel has the historical and romantic bits just the way I prefer in an HR.

Heroine Helena Reynolds of London has answered a matrimonial advertisement seeking a wife for a gentleman living an isolated life in Devon. This man is Justin Thornhill, former soldier in India. He needs a wife who can bear solitude, will run his household for him and warm his bed.

Helena wasn't the kind of woman he was expecting. She's too genteel, too pretty, too young, too well dressed and articulate. Why would she possibly want to marry a rather grouchy, gruff ex-soldier with physical and psychological scars?

Well, it's because Helena is looking for only two things: security and a little kindness. She wants to be kept safe. Why? Well, all will be revealed in time. And whatever you might be imaging, it's probably worse than that.

Whatever Helena may be running from, she certainly ran to the right man. "For Justin Thornhill wasn't only a handsome man...He was a good man. Unutterably kind and steadfast and fiercely protective of everyone in his care...Despite his growls and grumbles." Oh, be still my beating heart. I loved this man. I loved this romance. I loved seeing Helena and Justin together.

Bring on the next Parish Orphans book, please. My romance-loving heart is waiting breathlessly.

Brittain *Needs a Nap and a Drink* says

I've blown out my back and I am in excruciating pain but the idea of not being ahead on my reading challenge was enough to finally mark this book as read and write a review.

In a word: Heartfelt.

This book covers so many emotions and terrible situations. Abuse, gaslighting, forced imprisonment, mental illness and treatment, desperation, love, respect, friendship, endurance...it really is a lot to handle in a book but this one does it **really** well.

It is also beautifully researched with subtle mentions of the problems and virtues of the Victorian period. (My personal favorite is a woman refusing to call it chicken breast but instead referring to it as chicken bosom.) The book talks about gas, trains, new fashions, old rules for men and women, and social issues of the day without it being overbearing.

Ok, I lied. I cannot sit up anymore and finish this review but let me assure you that it is 100% worth the read.

Barbara Rogers says

Series: Parish Orphans of Devon #1

Publication Date: 9/4/18

*** 3.75 Stars ***

This first book in the Parish Orphans of Devon series is my first one by Mimi Matthews. The book is intelligently written and the characters are interesting.

Ex-army captain Justin Thornhill is tall, dark, handsome, and he takes care of those for whom he cares. He also has things in his past that, while they are not a secret, he'd just as soon everybody would forget them. He's finally reached his goal of purchasing Greyfriar's Abbey on the remote North Devon coast. He is a self-made man of modest means and his steward thinks he needs a wife. To that end, the steward placed an ad in the London papers advertising for a bride. The ad was very brief and to the point – a retired army officer needs a wife who is a spinster or widow near his own age, sensible, compassionate and capable of managing a remote country property. At first, Justin threatened to fire the steward, but then warmed to the idea since it was, after all, only a business arrangement with no love or affection expected.

Lady Helena Reynolds is in dire straits and must, absolutely must, escape London permanently because her

uncle will stop at nothing to gain control of her fortune. When her cousin sees a Matrimonial Advertisement in the paper, Helena thinks it might be her way out. If she marries, then her uncle cannot usurp her fortune, nor would he have control of her. She'd rather trust a stranger than her uncle. She manages to escape to North Devon and to marry Justin Thornhill.

I had a really, really, really hard time liking Helena. Yes, I understand that her predicament was of the very worst kind and I really felt sorry for that. However, all of her actions up until about the 80% mark were very selfish. She married Justin without telling him what her situation was – and that was a situation that could have cost Justin to be injured, etc. She never thought of the implications to anyone other than herself. By the time I was at around the 80% mark, she had had an epiphany and realized she loved Justin.

Justin was a real hero and I liked him very much throughout the book. He had things he preferred not to tell, but if Helena asked, he answered – unlike her. Then at about the 80% mark of the book, he gets altruistic and I just wanted to kick his rear.

This was a very nice story, very clean, but it was also just a bit slow-paced to me and I found myself skimming a bit in spots.

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"I requested and received this e-book at no cost to me and volunteered to read it; my review is my honest opinion and given without any influence by the author or publisher."

Frankie Reviews says

I really, really want to give this book more than five stars!

Oh, my word! I don't have enough words to say how unbelievably incredible this book is. I literally started this book and devoured it in one go, that first page hooked me right up until the last very last word. I am a huge fan of Ms Matthews, her writing is always flawless and articulate, but this simply is in a league of its own.

The Matrimonial Advertisement is book one in this new series; Parish Orphans of Devon, what a marvellous way to be introduced to this series. Judging by this, this series is going to be a cracking good one and I am now waiting with baited breath for the next instalment. I really am very impatient. ?

Lady Helena Reynolds is running away from London, running away from something worse than death. She answers a Matrimonial Advertisement in the paper, gets on a train and travels to Devon to marry a man she has never met. She is desperate, this really is the only way she can protect herself. The man himself and her soon to be home isn't exactly what she expected, he isn't exactly the knight on a white horse with a fairy tale castle on a hill, he is just as vulnerable and tormented as her.

Self-made man and Ex-military Captain; Justin Thornhill is reluctantly in search of a wife, not something he is looking forward to. But as his man-of-business took it upon himself to put an advertisement in the paper for a bride, he knows that if he is ever going to gain the trust and civility of the villager's instead of constant disdain towards him, he needs a wife to help him. He expects an older stern woman who will be able to manage a house and servants, what he doesn't expect is a young beautiful woman, who is terrified and secretive.

Both go into this 'Marriage of Convenience' with one purpose in mind, that this arrangement will benefit them both, him for the wife that he clearly needs and her for the protection she desperately needs. As each of their personal secrets are revealed, they soon learn that this arrangement is something more than either of them had expected. I love how they start bonding and getting to know each other over the likes of Charles Dickens, it brings a great realism to their relationship.

Anyone who has read my reviews, will know how much I love this lady's work. I am a massive fan of Mimi Matthews she is my go to author for anything Victorian, her brilliantly composed and stylish writing engages and entrances. 'The Matrimonial Advertisement' is a lot darker than what we have come to expect from Ms Matthews, but for me this is Gothic Victorian story-telling at its best. This is how this genre is supposed to be written!

The plot is solid and fresh it takes you on a journey that will have you reaching for the tissues, I can guarantee that you will be weeping like a baby. The characters are astounding, they develop throughout the story in a natural and wonderful way, not just as people but as their romance blossoms so beautifully. Ms Matthews has out done herself with this, by far one of the best books I have read -ever! I cannot wait to see what comes next in the series

Just breathtaking!

Judy Lesley says

Many thanks to NetGalley and to Perfectly Proper Press for a digital galley of this novel.

This is the second historical romance I've read by Mimi Matthews over a short time period and I am pleased to say I enjoyed this one as much as the first. It's becoming increasingly difficult to find historical romances that are so pleasingly presented with no profanity and no sex scenes. Yes, that's what I said. So if that isn't the style of book you are looking for, you can stop reading this review here. The name for this series is Parish Orphans of Devon and the orphan in question is (Captain) Justin Thornhill who grew up in this area of North Devon with three other orphan boys who were his friends. This novel nicely sets up what will most likely be other novels to feature the other boys after they are grown men. The story takes place in 1859, in Thornhill's isolated home on the coast, Greyfriar's Abbey. Thornhill's secretary and his attorney placed an advertisement in the London papers for a wife for him - without actually getting his permission to do it. The only answer is from Helena Reynolds, spinster, twenty-five years old with a whole slew of secrets.

This novel broke no new ground in the traditional Victorian romance novel. If you've read many of these books you can write out your own outline for what will happen in the story. But, what this book does have is great characters who come alive on the page under the pen of a talented author. I didn't get upset with Helena or Justin over their unwillingness to reveal their secrets instantly upon meeting each other. Helena only did

one foolish thing (which is almost the same as saying she didn't do any!) and that one happened because she was traumatized over her London experiences. I cut her some slack.

Some books I read and then want to share them with others. This one falls into that category. I would have no qualms about passing this book along to my daughters, my granddaughters or my friends who enjoy romance novels. Thank goodness for Mimi Matthews because passing books along is becoming more and more of a no-no.

Caz says

I've given this a B- at AAR, so that's 3.5 stars, rounded up

Author Mimi Matthews has been on my radar ever since the release of her début novel, *The Lost Letter* in 2017, but this is the first time I've read one of her books. **The Matrimonial Advertisement** is the first in her *Parish Orphans of Devon* series, and as the title suggests, the story is a variation on the mail-order-bride theme. I enjoyed the author's prose style; Ms. Matthews writes with elegance and precision, and she has created two sympathetic, engaging central characters, but the second half of the novel lacks any real sense of drama or romantic conflict – and what there is, is manufactured. Ultimately, the great first half isn't enough to compensate for the weakness of the second, and the story feels unbalanced as a result.

Former army captain Justin Thornhill has recently acquired the imposing and remote Greyfriars Abbey in the area of North Devon where he grew up. He fought in India where he was caught up in the Siege of Cawnpore, captured and tortured; and now he wants to live the quiet life of a country squire. But he's having trouble staffing the abbey owing to the rumours that continue to dog him about the part he may have played in the death of the estate's previous owner, an uncaring reprobate who drank hard, played hard and thought any female within his orbit was fair game. After the departure of the latest housekeeper, Justin's steward suggests he needs a wife and that perhaps he should place a matrimonial advertisement – and so he finds himself faced with the prospect of 'interviewing' possible brides.

Justin is clear about the sort of wife he wants:

"I have no interest in courtship... nor in weeping young ladies who take to their bed with megrims. What I need is a woman. A woman who is bound by law and duty to see to the running of this godforsaken mausoleum. A woman I can bed on occasion."

– and Helena Reynolds most definitely doesn't fit his idea of a capable, sensible wife. She's stunningly beautiful and is obviously well-bred – and right from the off, he can tell she's hiding something; why else would such a lovely young woman want to bury herself in the middle of nowhere and marry a complete stranger? When he asks her that question, she calmly tells him that she's been told he knows how to keep a woman safe; which tells *him* she's clearly frightened of someone or something, but a first meeting isn't the place to enquire. Besides, Justin finds he wants Helena very badly. And, he reflects, she isn't the only one keeping secrets.

Helena was desperate to get away from London, and knows that marriage is just about the only way she can protect herself. A married woman belongs to her husband in every respect, and Ms. Matthews does an excellent job of drawing attention, through Helena's character, to the very limited options and freedom of woman at this period of time, and commenting on the unfair laws that stripped married women of all rights and property and opened them up to all sorts of abuse. The solicitor in London with whom she'd communicated briefly has assured her that Justin is a good, decent man who will be able to protect her, and

now she has met him, Helena can judge for herself that those statements were true.

The first part of the story is beautifully done, showing the gradual development of love and trust between Justin and Helena as they bond over shared interests and gradually come to realise that their marriage of convenience has the potential to be something far more than either of them expected. They agree fairly early on that there should be no secrets between them, something I really appreciated, and both their stories are heart-breaking; Helena has been betrayed in the worst way by those who should have cared for her, while Justin carries wounds, both physical and mental, as the result of the torture he suffered in India, and his own survivor's guilt. The author's research is impeccable and she incorporates both characters' backstories seamlessly into the narrative. She also makes excellent use of the remote coastal setting, creating a brooding atmosphere reminiscent of the gothic romances of the time with her evocative descriptions of the remote clifftop house, the crashing waves and the incessant rain flooding the roads which isolates the Abbey even further.

The romance that develops between Justin and Helena is sweet and tender, and it proceeds at a gentle pace, thankfully devoid of the excessive mental lusting that appears in so many romances. There's a strong attraction between them, yes, but they're attracted to each other for more than looks; Helena's quiet inner strength and resilience, combined with a sensibility that seems appropriate for a young woman of her station makes her feel very much of her time, while Justin's crusty exterior hides a decent, kind man, and together, they're a couple it's easy to root for. Love is uncharted territory for both of them, and Ms. Matthews does a splendid job of showing, through their actions and words, that they're falling hard for each other. But then, just after the half-way point, things come to a stuttering halt, and all the tension the author has built up in the first part of the book just disappears. The focus shifts, pushing the romance into a secondary role while Justin and Helena are forced to return to London in order to save their marriage and save Helena from the clutches of those out to harm her. But the thing is that they don't really *do* anything; they have to show themselves in society to quash some of the rumours that have been circulating about Helena, but otherwise they pretty much wait around for things to happen, and the whole thing is very sedate with hardly any plot development. And then, despite their agreement that there should be no secrets between them, Justin pulls the 'I am not worthy' card – which is one of my least favourite plot devices of all time.

I enjoyed **The Matrimonial Advertisement**, and had the story continued as well as it began, I'd have awarded it a solid B, maybe a B+, but as it is, I can only offer a qualified recommendation. It has a lot to offer – excellent research, strong period feel, a tender romance and two well-rounded principals – but the second half doesn't live up to the promise of the first, and in spite of all the things the book has going for it, I came away from it feeling a little disappointed.

Stormi (Bewitched Reader) says

The Matrimonial Advertisement is such a wonderful historical romance. Thornhill totally gave me bad-boy-Mr. Darcy vibe, which made me immediately love him. He is gruff and stoic on the outside but that man has such a big heart and will do whatever he can to take care of and protect those he cares for. Not only is the hero swoon-worthy in The Matrimonial Advertisement, but the background characters and heroine are also well developed and easy to relate to. I didn't realize this book would be the first in a series and I am really hoping book 2 will be Mr. Finchley's story, because I am so intrigued about him and his "diabolical" mind.

I voluntarily received an ARC of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Joanna Loves Reading says

3.5 Stars

I thought this was an interesting and well-written story, and I would consider reading more by this author if the subject matter interested me. I think this book could not quite decide if it was a romance or a mystery/suspense story, and as a result, both aspects were underwhelming.

The heroine, Helena, is in desperate straits and answers a matrimonial advert as a last resort. The hero, Justin, is an ex-soldier who has recently purchased a remote estate and places the advert in hopes for companionship. Both characters have demons that haunt them, but Justin's are mostly in the past. Most of the novel revolves around conquering Helena's current demons.

With the theme of false insanity accusation to gain a large inheritance being central to the story, the resolution was unsatisfying to me, especially considering the romance development was set aside for much of the story in favor of its telling. The romance was not very sensual or passionate, and I was not totally sold on it.

There were some interesting characters that would make me consider reading further if this continues as a series. Overall, this was a mostly entertaining read though not entirely satisfying.

*I received an ARC from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Debbie Brown says

Fantastic book! It starts out appearing to set up the usual trope where a man and woman agree to a marriage of convenience and end up falling in love, yet it turns out to be far more than that.

A friend of Helena Reynolds places a matrimonial advertisement in the newspaper for her, as Helena is desperate to find "a man who will be kind" to her and "protect [her]." From what? That's just one of the secrets she and Justin Thornhill don't learn about each other until after they're wed, each certain the revelation would cause the other to refuse to go through with the wedding.

The story has many Gothic elements, starting with Greyfriar's Abbey, Justin Thornhill's very old, run-down estate high up on a cliff with a narrow, crumbling road leading to it. The author does a great job amping up the anxiety level, complete with a raging storm at a pivotal time in the story, yet it never reads like a hackneyed melodrama.

Helena and Thornhill are great characters. Life has dealt terrible blows to both these tortured souls, and they're trying to escape from their past--both figuratively and literally. There's a large assortment of supporting players in this stand-alone story and, since this is #1 in a series, future books will certainly focus on some of them. All are painstakingly drawn so they seem real, from the aloof Boothroyd and savvy Finchley looking after their friend Justin to the simple-minded Neville.

I've read other books by this gifted author, and all have been similarly excellent. I look forward to reading the rest of this series.
