



The Marriage Betrayal (The Volakis Vow)

By Lynne Graham

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He doesn't do country weekends, either. Pitching up at Westgrave Manor is a favor to his father and a bore...until he sees Tally Spencer, so pretty and voluptuous that he can't resist her. Sander's looking forward to casually seducing her, not knowing that one night with the innocent Tally could end his playboy existence...

Sander and Tally's story continues next month in *Bride for Real*.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Lynne Graham lives in Northern Ireland and has been a keen romance reader since her teens. Happily married, Lynne has five children. Her eldest is her only natural child. Her other children, who are every bit as dear to her heart, are adopted. The family has a variety of pets, and Lynne loves gardening, cooking, collecting allsorts and is crazy about every aspect of Christmas.

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'Of course you should go and take the opportunity to get to know your sister better,' Binkie pronounced, beaming at the prospect of Tally being treated to a luxury weekend in a stately home. 'You could do with a break after all the studying you've been doing.'

Unsurprised that the older woman had taken only the most positive view of the invitation, Tally swallowed back the admission that her father's phone call and request had come as an unwelcome surprise. She pushed her honey-blond hair off her brow with a rueful hand, her green eyes wary. 'It's not quite that simple. I got the impression that my father only wants me to go so that I can police Cosima's every move—'

'My goodness,' Binkie cut in with a frown of dismay. 'Did he say so?'

'Not exactly.'

'Well, then, aren't you being a bit too imaginative?' Binkie asked in gentle reproof, her kindly brown gaze resting on the younger woman's troubled face. 'Granted your father rarely gets in touch but why immediately assume the worst of his motives? Maybe he simply wants his two daughters to get to know each other.'

'I'm twenty years old and Cosima's seventeen—if that's what he wants why would he have waited so long?'

Tally responded wryly because, after a lifetime of disappointments and hurtful rejections, she was a dyed in the wool cynic when it came to either of her parents.

Binkie sighed. 'Perhaps he has seen the error of his ways. People can mellow as they get older.'

Reluctant to parade her bitterness in front of the woman who was the closest thing she had ever had to a loving mother, Tally stared a hole in the table because Binkie was always an optimist and Tally was reluctant to make yet another negative comment. Binkie or, to be more formal, Mrs Binkiewicz, a Polish widow, had looked after Tally since she'd been a baby and had soon graduated from childcare to taking care of her employer's household as well. Anatole Karydas was a very wealthy and powerful Greek businessman who had done his best to ignore his eldest daughter's existence from birth. He hated Tally's mother, Crystal, with a passion and Tally had paid the price for that hostility. Crystal had been a well-known fashion model, engaged to Anatole at the time that she'd fallen pregnant...

'Of course I planned it!' Crystal had admitted in a rare moment of honesty. 'Your father and I had been engaged for over a year, but his precious family didn't like me and I could see that he was going cold on the idea of marrying me.'

As, in the midst of that delicate situation, Crystal had been caught cheating with another man, Tally could only feel that her father had had some excuse for his waning matrimonial enthusiasm. Indeed, her parents

had such different outlooks on life that she did not see how they could ever have made each other happy. Anatole, unfortunately, had never been able to forgive or forget the stinging humiliation of her mother's betrayal or the embarrassing interviews she had sold to magazines maligning him in the aftermath of their break-up. He had also questioned the paternity of the child that Crystal was carrying. Ultimately, Crystal had had to take her ex-fiancé to court to get an allowance with which to raise her daughter and although her father had eventually paid his dues Tally had reached eleven years of age before he finally agreed to meet her. By that stage, Anatole had long since married a Greek woman called Ariadne with whom he'd also had a daughter, Cosima. Tally had always been made to feel that she was on the outside looking in and surplus to paternal requirements.

In fact she could count on two hands the number of times she had met her reluctant father. Currently a student in her last year of a degree course in interior design, however, Tally was conscious that Anatole *had* paid for her education and she was grateful for that because her spendthrift mother never had a penny to spare at the end of the month.

'You like Cosima,' Binkie pointed out cheerfully. 'You were really pleased when you were invited to her seventeenth birthday party last year.'

'That was different. I was a guest,' Tally pointed out ruefully. 'But my father made it clear on the phone that he was asking me to accompany Cosima this weekend to keep her out of trouble. Apparently she's been drinking and partying too much and seeing some man he disapproves of.'

'She's very young. Naturally your father's concerned.' 'But I don't see how I could make a difference. I doubt very much if she would listen to me. She's much more sophisticated than I am and very headstrong.'

'But it's heartening that your father trusts you enough to ask you to help, and Cosima does like you.'

'She won't like me much if I try to interfere with her fun,' Tally retorted wryly, but she was far from impervious to the sound good sense of Binkie's reasoning.

In truth, after a couple of brief encounters, organised mainly to satisfy the younger woman's lively curiosity, Tally was the one still intrigued by her beautiful ornamental half-sister, who regularly appeared in the gossip columns rubbing shoulders with the rich and famous. The two young women had nothing in common in looks or personality and lived in different worlds. Cosima was the much loved and indulged daughter of a very rich man. She wore designer clothes and jewellery and was only seen out at the most fashionable social venues. The tougher realities that had shaped Tally and formed her attitudes had never touched Cosima, who had been co-cooned in privilege from the day she was born. Cosima had never had to deal with unpaid bills or bailiffs or a mother who, when the cupboards were bare, would buy a new dress instead of food. Only the roof over their heads remained safe because the terraced town house in London where Tally lived with her mother and Binkie was an investment property belonging to her father.

It was there that the limousine called just over a week later to collect Tally. Having handed the driver a small weekend bag to stow away, she scrambled into the rear seat where her half-sister subjected her to a pained appraisal. 'You're dressed all wrong,' Cosima complained, viewing Tally's colourful raincoat and jeans with a grimace.

'I have a typical student wardrobe and two business suits bought for my work experience last year and that's pretty much it,' Tally told her frankly, studying Cosima who was an extremely pretty girl with long black hair and big brown eyes, her slim figure beautifully set off by a fashionable mini dress and perilously high heels. 'You look like you're about to go out on the town.'

'Of course. Some of the most eligible young men of my generation will be staying at Westgrave this weekend,' Cosima remarked and then her vivacious face split into a huge grin. 'You should see your face! That was me quoting Dad. He'd love to marry me off to some filthy-rich guy so that he could stop worrying about me. But I've already got a man.'

'Great. Who is he?' Tally enquired with interest and the lively enthusiasm that was the mainspring of her personality. She was grateful the attention was off her clothing deficiencies, because that so-visible difference between them had embarrassed her.

'His name's Chaz and he's a DJ.' Cosima veiled her gaze, her reluctance to share any more personal facts palpable. 'Are you seeing anyone?'

'Not right now, no,' Tally fielded, her face warming when she thought about how long it was since she had gone out on a date. But then she loathed it when men she barely knew tried to paw her and was even more turned off when the same men were drunk. Finding a comparatively sober male on a night out, she had learned, was a challenge.

Being raised by a devoutly religious and moral woman like Binkie had put Tally rather out of step with her contemporaries. But having lived through the constant turmoil caused by her mother's colourful love life, Tally had embraced Binkie's outlook with gusto. Although now in her forties, Crystal remained a very beautiful woman. But none of her relationships had lasted, most of them being based on the most superficial male attributes and desires. Standing on the sidelines of such shallow affairs, Tally had long since decided that she wanted something more than just lust, a good laugh or an open wallet from a man, and she told herself that she was quite happy to sleep alone until she found it.

Cosima answered her ringing mobile phone and babbled in a torrent of Greek. Tally, who had attended evening classes in the language for several years, only to have her self-conscious efforts dismissed as 'an embarrassment' by her critical father, sealed her ears to the content of her half-sister's chatter, aware that the younger woman had assumed that she spoke no Greek at all.

The limo was purring down a wooded lane by the time that Cosima ceased chattering. She slid her phone back into her bag and shot Tally a guarded look. 'You know I'm not planning to tell my friends who you are. I'm sorry if that offends you but that's the way it is,' she declared. 'If Dad had wanted to acknowledge you as his daughter you would have been given his name. That you don't have our name says it all really.'

In response to that deeply wounding little announcement, Tally lost colour and before Cosima could add anything else, she said hurriedly, 'So, for your friends' benefit, who am I?'

'Well, obviously, you're still Tally Spencer, because that won't remind anyone of anything—I mean, these days people don't even remember Dad was ever engaged to anyone but *my* mother. But I certainly wouldn't want all that dirty washing brought out. I think it would be safest to say that you work for me.'...

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