



The Cattle King's Bride (The Langdon Dynasty)

By Margaret Way

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Dev has returned to take his childhood sweetheart back to his family home—Kooraki Station—for only there can she finally lay her demons to rest....

In the heart of the sweltering Australian outback, Mel's guarded exterior begins to crumble....

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Margaret Way was born in the City of Brisbane. A Conservatorium trained pianist, teacher, accompanist and vocal coach, her musical career came to an unexpected end when she took up writing, initially as a fun thing to do. She currently lives in a harbourside apartment at beautiful Raby Bay, where she loves dining all fresco on her plant-filled balcony, that overlooks the marina. No one and nothing is a rush so she finds the laid-back Village atmosphere very conducive to her writing

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Amelia's first call of the day was at 8:00 a.m., just as she was about to leave for work. The ear-splitting din of three phones ringing simultaneously, the main line, the extension and the fax, resounded through the apartment, shattering the morning's silence. Difficult to continue on one's way with that call to arms and pressed for time, she decided to ignore the triple summons. It would go to message and she would attend to it when she arrived home.

Her hand on the doorknob, something—call it a premonition—urged her to turn back. She felt in her bones that this wasn't going to be her usual day. Dropping her expensive handbag, she moved with care onto the white tiles of the kitchen floor—she was wearing stilettos—snatching up the phone.

"Mel here." Her usual engaging tones emerged a bit on the impatient side.

"Amelia, it's me," said the dulcet, slightly accented voice on the other end.

Anxiety settled in. "Mum! Is everything okay?" Cordless phone in hand, she dropped into a chair. The news wouldn't be good. Her mother wasn't given to phone calls. Mel was the one who did the calling and the emailing while her mother rang once a month. It was as though she had precious little free time. This early morning call had to be urgent. "It's Mr Langdon, isn't it?" Gregory Langdon, legendary cattle baron, was seventy-eight years old. His lifelong vigorous health had been failing rapidly over the past year.

"He's dying, Amelia." Sarina made no attempt to hide her powerful grief. "His doctor has given him a week at most. He wants you home."

Even given that kind of news, Amelia found herself bristling. "*Home?*" She gave a disbelieving snort, descending to a familiar dark place. "It was never a *home*, Mum. You were a domestic until Mr Langdon elevated you to housekeeper. I was always the housekeeper's cheeky kid. I've begged you over and over to come live with me, but you've chosen your own path." It was a tremendous hurt. She loved her mother. She earned an excellent salary; she was in a position to make life a whole lot better for them both.

Sarina Norton answered in her near emotionless way. "As I must, Amelia. You must steer your own way in life. You don't need to be burdened with me. Mr Langdon was very good to us. He gave us shelter after your father was killed."

No one could deny that. Not even Mel, although over the years their long stay on Kooraki had been the source of endless humiliation, with her mother the butt of scurrilous gossip. Her father, Mike Norton, the station foreman, had been killed in a cattle stampede when she was six. It had been regarded as a huge tragedy by everyone on the station. Mike Norton, the consummate horseman, had been thrown from his horse and trampled before his fellow stockmen were able to bring the bellowing, stampeding mob under

control.

Such a terrible way to die. She had suffered nightmares for years and years, often waking with her own screams ringing in her ears. "Was that really so extraordinarily generous for a man of Mr Langdon's wealth to be good to us? He could have given you, a grieving widow with a small child, enough money to comfortably tide you over, before helping you get back to one of the cities. God knows Mrs Langdon hated us.

How did you tolerate that? I *never* did. Even as a child I used to rage at her. How could I not? The imperious Mistress of Kooraki Station took such pleasure in goading and humiliating you. Mrs Langdon hated us until the day she died."

"She hated us because Gregory loved us. You were a great favourite of Gregory's."

Amelia reacted. "Gregory? What's happened to the so-respectful Mr Langdon?"

Her mother remained silent. Her mother had long since turned silence into an art form.

Only silence wasn't Mel's thing. She liked everything and everyone up front. No secrets, no evasions. She had grown up with them hanging over her like a dark, ominous cloud. "So we're supposed to owe *Gregory* love and gratitude forever and ever. Is that it, Mum? That's ruthless old Cattle King Gregory Langdon getting in touch with his feminine side? He couldn't control his dreadful Mireille. She must have made him a totally lousy wife."

"Whatever, he *married* her. He must have loved her at one time."

"Reality check here, Mum," Mel said cynically. "She was the heiress to the Devereaux fortune."

"And she was the mother of his son and heir," Sarina retorted with no change of tone. She showed none of the fire of her Italian heritage. "There was no chance of divorce in that family."

"More's the pity!" Mel lamented. "Surely divorce has to be preferable to allowing lives to be damaged. Everyone suffered in that family."

"Divorce wasn't an option, Amelia," Sarina, reared a devout Catholic—or so she claimed—repeated. "And, while we're on the subject, Gregory couldn't control his wife when he wasn't there. So I suggest you be fair. Gregory was an important man with huge responsibilities, many commitments."

Mrs Langdon may have always wanted us out of the way, but she never got her wish, did she?"

"Now that's a tricky one, Mum," Amelia answered grimly. "We both know plenty of people thought, even if they didn't dare say it to his face, you meant more to him than his own wife." Why not bring it out into the open? Mel thought defiantly. The gossip that had had to be endured had left its indelible mark on her. So much bad history! Shame had been part of her life on Kooraki. She had grown up doubting herself and her place in the world. Dev had once said during one of their famously heated exchanges that her emotional development had been impeded. Easy for him to talk. He had the Langdon-Devereaux name. What did she have?

She had never been able to ask her mother questions. If someone gave every indication they didn't want questions raised, you never did. Even a fatherless daughter left in the dark. Yet she loved her mother regardless and had been fiercely protective of her all her life. Sarina, not that far off fifty and looking nowhere near it, was a very beautiful woman. What must she have been like in her twenties?

Pretty much like you.

"We meant more to him, Amelia," Sarina said. "Mr Langdon loved children. You were so full of life, so intelligent. He liked that. You were never afraid of him."

"Or of Mireille. I'm the definitive Leo, Mum. Surfeit of pride."

"I do know that, Amelia. You have to remember it was Langdon money that put you through school, then university."

"Maybe *Gregory* felt a tad guilty. Neither of us ever knew what exactly happened the day of the stampede. My father, from all accounts, was an exceptional horseman, an expert cattle handler. Yet he was thrown. For all we know, wicked old Mireille could have paid someone to spook the cattle and target Dad. Ever think of that? She was one ruthless woman."

She even went so far as to imply it could have been a David and Bathsheba situation, casting guilt on her own unfaithful husband. She was just so hateful."

There was another moment of utter silence as if her controlled mother had been caught off guard. "Amelia, I can't talk about it," Sarina said in a sealed off voice. "It's all in the past."

Mel inhaled a sharp breath. Her mother was in denial about so many things. She had long since faced the fact she only knew the parts of her mother Sarina was prepared to share. "The past is never dead, Mum. It follows us around. I *hated* taking Langdon charity."

"You've made that perfectly plain, Amelia. But you did take it. Please remember, beggars can't be choosers. Michael left me with very little. He hadn't been promoted to foreman long."

"Plenty of people told me what a great guy Dad was. I do remember him, Mum. I'll mourn him until the day I die. My dad!" She spoke strongly as though her claim was being contested.

"Do you think *I* don't miss him, Amelia?" her mother retorted, curiously dispassionate. "After I lost him I had to face the fact I had few employment skills. More significantly, I had a small child to bring up. I had to take what was offered. I'm glad I did, for all I suffered."

"For all *we* suffered, Mum. Don't leave me out. I don't know what would have happened if I hadn't been sent away to boarding school."

"Then please remember it was Mr Langdon who insisted you have a first-class education. You were *very* bright."

"I remember the way Dad used to read to me," Mel said with intense nostalgia. "Thinking back, I realise he was a born scholar in the true sense of the word. He craved knowledge. He was an admirable man."

"Yes, he was, Amelia," her mother agreed. "He had great plans for you, but I have to remind you, you wouldn't be where you are today without Gregory Langdon. Why, you were given access to one of the finest private libraries in the country right here on Kooraki."

"And wasn't dear Mireille savage about that?" Amelia did her own bit of reminding. Yet she had to consider the magnanimity of the gesture! A young girl, daughter of a servant, granted access to a magnificent library with wonderful books bound in gold-tooled leather with gilt-edged pages—the great books of the world, tomes on history, literature, poetry, architecture, the arts of the world. It was a library that had come together

over generations of book-lovers and collectors. "What a cruel woman she was, poisoning every relationship. She even distanced her own son from his father. No wonder the grandson took off, but he never did say why."

"Dev, unlike his father, resisted control," Sarina said. "Gregory was a mountain of a man."

"That's not i..."

Users Review

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