



Arranged

By Catherine McKenzie
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Introduction

Anne Blythe is very fortunate. She's got a brand new book contract, a great newspaper job, a steadfast best friend, and can land just about any man she sets her sights on.

Problem is, the men she chooses never last. Shortly after yet another relationship goes down in flames, Anne comes across a card for what she believes is a dating service, and pockets it. If she's so unlucky in love, maybe it's time to admit she could use a little assistance. Then her best friend, Sarah, announces she's engaged, and envy gets the better of Anne. Now's the time, she decides, to give the service a try - and is shocked to discover that what the company specializes in are exclusive, and pricey, arranged marriages. After learning of the company's 95% success rate, however, she overcomes her reluctance and signs on. After all, arranged marriages are the norm for millions of women around the world, and she's not done so well selecting a mate on her own. So why not use a

professional service that claims it can produce the perfect match?

Some time later, Anne is travelling to a Mexican resort, where in one short weekend she will meet and marry Jack, the man they have chosen for her. And against all odds, it all seems to be working out, until Anne learns that Jack, and the company who arranged their marriage, are not what they seem at all.

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you know anyone who has had an arranged marriage? Do you think you would ever consider it if faced with a choice (and a Blythe & Company) like Anne's? What images of arranged marriages are common in our society? Arranged marriage is often associated with lack of choice - how does freedom of choice, like Anne has, change your feelings on arranged marriage?
2. One of Blythe & Company's rules is that people who are married thanks to the company must lie and tell others that they met on vacation in Mexico and married on a whim. After Ms. Cooper tells her this, Anne reflects, "Apparently, it's more acceptable in our love-obsessed society to spontaneously marry a complete stranger while on vacation than to have deliberately married one." Do you agree?
3. How would you react if a friend told you that s/he had entered into an arranged marriage? If s/he told you that s/he had married someone s/he barely knew on vacation? What, in your opinion, makes one situation more acceptable or palatable than the other?
4. Blythe & Company operates on the assumption that good marriages are founded on friendship rather than love. In the end, Anne comes to realize that this does not satisfy her and that she was looking for love all along. What are your feelings on the roles of friendship and love in a marriage? Is it possible to have a strong marriage without friendship? Without love? What kind of marriage do you think that Jack and Anne have, and what do you think the future holds for this marriage?
5. Before Anne meets Jack, she gets a slip of paper containing some basic information about him - name, age, profession, height, hair and eye color, family information, brief relationship history, feelings on children, and education. If you were in charge of matching people together at Blythe & Company, what information would you want them to have about each other? If you were being matched with someone, what information would you want to have about your match? What kind of information do you think is necessary to a decision like Anne is being asked to make?
6. According to Dr. Szwick, Anne's problem is that she thinks love should be easy, like in a fairytale, and doesn't think she should have to work to fall in love. What do you think of his analysis? What do you think about the idea of having to work for love as opposed to the idea that love should come naturally, or as Anne's ex-boyfriend thinks, that it is as simple as meeting the right person and settling down?
7. Throughout the book, Anne criticizes herself for being too superficial and choosing partners based on their appearance. Do you think Anne is superficial? What role do you think appearance should play in choosing a partner?
8. Sarah and Anne clearly have a very strong relationship as best friends, and over the course of the book they make it clear that they expect each other to be honest about each other's partners and decision-making. However, when Sarah is honest with Anne when it comes to Anne's shotgun (or so she thinks) marriage to Jack and its relationship to Sarah's own impending marriage, Anne becomes furious with Sarah. What do you think about their disagreement? Who, if anyone, is in the wrong in this situation? Is it a best friend's role to tell painful truths, or does one simply have to make mistakes to learn?
9. Why do you think Jack kept writing his book even after marrying and beginning to fall in love with Anne?
10. Do you think Anne made the right decision by forgiving Jack in the end? Why or why not?
11. Anne is named after Anne Shirley of *Anne of Green Gables*, and indeed Lucy Maud Montgomery's fictional universe seems to surround her in her life. Although you are likely not named for a fictional character, do you feel a particular affinity for any fictional character in your life? Which one and why?

About the Author

Catherine McKenzie was born and raised in Montreal, Quebec, where she now practices law. An avid runner and skier, she also sits on various boards and professional organizations, and teaches part-time at the McGill Faculty of Law.