



Once a Rake

Eileen Dreyer

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All he wants is her help . . .

Colonel Ian Ferguson may be a rake, but he's no traitor. Accused of trying to kill the Duke of Wellington, the disgraced Scotsman is now a fugitive--from the law, the army, and the cunning assassin who hunts him. Wounded and miles from his allies, Ian finds himself at the mercy of an impoverished country wife. The spirited woman is achingly beautiful . . . and hiding some dangerous secrets of her own.

All she needs is his heart . . .

She was a child nobody wanted. Now for Lady Sarah Clarke, holding on to her vanished husband's crumbling estate is her final chance to earn respectability. She knows that hiding the devastatingly handsome Ferguson will jeopardize her home. Common sense demands that she turn him in. But a single, delirious kiss shatters her resolve . . . and awakens a passion that neither of them can escape.

Once a Rake Details

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From Reader Review Once a Rake for online ebook

Susan says

This continues to be a very exciting series. Ian and the rest of the Rakes are still trying to figure out who is behind the attempts on Wellington's life. This time he has been caught in the middle, and in attempting to stop an assassin has been shot and is now on the run, accused of the deed himself. He ends up at Sarah's farm, feverish and in danger of being captured.

Sarah takes him in, hides him and cares for his injuries, for the sake of his sisters. She was friends with them at school and while she disapproves of his neglect of them, for their sake she will do her best to save him. She doesn't expect the intense attraction to him, an attraction that can't go anywhere. Sarah is illegitimate and shunned by many because of it. I loved her strength of will as she cared for her land and her husband's relatives as best she can.

As Sarah cares for Ian, their attraction to each other grows. Sarah starts out mistrustful of Ian and anxious to get him healed and gone. She soon realizes that he is innocent of the charges, and begins to see the man that his sisters described. He is kind and protective, loyal and honorable, and she soon finds herself falling for him. Ian is conflicted because he is falling for her too, but he has no way of making her part of his life. There are things that conspire to keep them apart and seem impossible to overcome. I loved the way their relationship developed. Sarah wasn't a pushover by any means, and has no trouble standing up to him about what she intends to do and what she expects from him. She does admit to herself that her attraction to him can make it difficult to stay focused. I loved Ian's protectiveness and how he saw her vulnerabilities. He also discovered that she was everything he always wanted, even though he didn't know it until he met her. All he has to do is figure out a way to make it possible.

This was an intense story from the beginning. Ian's attempt to save Wellington, then his need to save himself, started the story with a rush. Then there is Sarah's need to hide Ian and nurse him back to health. Sarah is also in danger of losing her home. Her husband went off to war and hasn't returned, leaving her to fend off her cousin's attempts to claim her land. He is involved in some less savory activities himself, including participating in the continuing manhunt for Ian. Ian, once he has started to heal, knows he has to get to the other Rakes for their help in saving Wellington and clearing his own name. There are betrayals and dangers that nearly cost them their lives before they are able to resolve the immediate problem. The final confrontation kept me riveted until I was sure everyone would be safe. Then all that had to happen was for Ian to find a way for he and Sarah to be together and I thought that he did a marvelous job with that.

The secondary characters were all wonderfully done. Sarah's mother-in-law, with her overly dramatic attitudes, was both frustrating and funny, and had some scenes that had me laughing and shaking my head. There was enough information about and exposure to the cousin who was trying to take Sarah's land that I was quite happy to see what happened to him. I loved seeing her half brother have to face some consequences of his own, and loved what that ended up meaning for Sarah. I also loved seeing more of Chuffy and am looking forward to more of him. But my favorite of all the secondary characters had to be Willoughby the pig. He was wonderful.

While part of the mystery that has been present in all of the books has been resolved, it is still not over. The assassin is still at large, and there is someone very highly placed who is still pulling the strings. Ian's sisters are also missing, and someone is going to have to find them. I expect that the next book will be another nail-biter and I can't wait to read it.

Mary Gramlich says

Can one single moment change everything?

Lady Sarah Clarke is keeping everything running until her husband returns from battle. She tends to the lands and the animals fighting off a blood thirsty relative looking to take it all away. The last thing Sarah needs is any more complications so find a traitor in her barn is really turning things in a negative direction

Colonel Ian Ferguson has been accused of an attempted assassination for which he had no part and was in fact wounded himself. He has been keeping under cover and now finds himself in Sarah's clutches because the luck has run out he thinks. Sarah is always one to do the right thing but that is not as clear cut as usual and deciding to help Ian may cause a ripple effect that will ruin everything. However, Sarah looks into Ian's beautiful eyes and sees the truth he is telling and knows she is making the right decision to help him. The upside is everyone believes Ian is deceased and with Sarah's ability to convince the hordes coming to prove otherwise maybe they will get out of this alive.

Fighting for her home, her way of life, alongside a man she has come to love makes Sarah think fate is dealing her an interesting hand. Does she tell him about why she is free to love him, what her true lineage is, or why when dreams come true they are not the ones you have always looked for.

Eileen Dreyer is such a brilliant writer she transports the reader to a time and place with such accuracy you are spellbound with the love and drama one couple is sharing.

Tin says

Ian Ferguson is on the run after being accused of attempting to assassinate the Duke of Wellington. He's injured and is far from London and his friends.

Lady Sarah Clarke is the sole caretaker of her husband's estate, and of her mother-in-law and her young sister-in-law. Funds are scarce and Sarah cannot afford to make a mistake as her husband's heir circles about them like a buzzard waiting for the kill. When a wanted man appears at her door, Sarah's first instinct is to protect herself and her family, but when she realises that he is the older brother of her dearest friends from Last Chance Academy, she knows she must help him at all costs.

The heroine, Sarah Clarke, is admirable in her devotion to her husband's family. She's had to bear the responsibility of being the head of their household because her mother-in-law is too flighty and her sister-in-law is too young. It isn't the happiest situation, but, for Sarah, it's the happiest she's been. She was born a bastard and has longed for acceptance, recognition and love from a family. When she married, Boswell, she knew it wasn't a love match, but she was content because her marriage came with the life she has always dreamed of. Here, in this tiny corner of Fairbourne, in this rundown farm with her pig and chickens, she belongs. But her life also teeters at a balance. If her husband does not return from the war, he would be declared dead and their cousin, Martin Clarke would inherit the farm. She and her in-laws would be turned out from the farm and have no place to go. It's been four months since the war ended, and, with each day that passes, the chances of her husband returning home becomes slimmer and slimmer.

When she finds Ian, she is torn between her loyalty to her family and loyalty to her dearest school friends. She knows who Ian is and had, as a young girl at the academy, listened to his letters being read by his sisters and imagined his adventures in distant lands. In fact, Sarah was secretly infatuated with the idea of Ian. And, now, the man himself is the stuff of her daydreams ... and more.

Ian's character isn't as clearly defined in this story. The title implies that Ian is a rake, but he doesn't really exhibit rakish tendencies. Dreyer also puts a lot of emphasis on Ian's size, often referring to him as being very tall and with having very broad shoulders and with being broad and big all over.

His hips were so wide, she could barely straddle him, but she managed ...
- pp. 285-286

I am amazed by his physical prowess, considering how long he has survived wounded -- with an infected wound, at that! I think what overshadowed his character development and the romance between Sarah and Ian is Ian's own backstory and his relationship with his sisters (Fiona and Mairead). Despite his reconciliation with his sisters, there's a lot of things left unspoken and unresolved between them -- and it's what takes center stage in this story. (This and Ian's strained relationship with their grandfather.) Ian's conversations with Sarah are almost always about his sisters (or about the sinister plot he is involved in), and there's actually more emotional pull in the scenes with Alex and Ian's grandfather. I didn't really see a way for Sarah and Ian's relationship to flourish with so many other things happening around them. The relationship seemed one-sided for the most part of the story: it is clear that Sarah was infatuated with Ian from the beginning, whereas Ian seems to just *depend* on Sarah. I did like how he tried to protect Sarah at the risk of his own life and he was willing to go away, even though he hadn't fully recovered to save Sarah.

My second problem is the intrigue itself. The initial premise is clear: Did Ian try to assassinate the Duke of Wellington? Dreyer's recounting of the events in the Prologue is a bit vague and confusing and I wonder if that was deliberately done.

Later, no one would be able to agree as to exactly what happened on the HMS Reliance that night. The witnesses were too many and the action too sudden to gain a coherent story.
- p. 1

What is clear is that Ian has a flask and the villains want it back at all cost, including calling in one of their most ruthless assassins, Madame Ferrar, a recurring character. While her reappearance is meant to tie Ian's story to the rest of the series, I could not help but feel that she was acting with her own agenda and her scenes, while gory and compelling, did not seem as a cohesive part of **Once a Rake**.

I had expected this story to be about how Ian would clear his name and it all seemed link to the flask -- but, even the role of the flask isn't that clear. It contains an image? It implicates someone they already know to be involved? The best part of the intrigue is how Ian manages to send messages to his compatriots -- and then the plot goes downhill from there. The resolution is just as vague and confusing as the beginning: it was a house party at the Duke of Ripton's house and the tone of atmosphere at the party is a strange mix of light and sinister -- it seemed to house the dangerous criminals who were after Ian. Another of Sarah's school friends, Lizzie, is the sister of the Duke and she has a room in the house. Another friend, Pippin, the younger sister of Alex Knight (one of Drake's agents) is also at the house party and those scenes felt very much like what a house party should be, but they abruptly jump to scenes of lurking around hallways and danger being

present everywhere. Where were the footmen? The maids? The other guests?

Reaching another hallway, obviously the guest wing, Pippin tiptoed to the third door on the right and scratched on the door. There was no answer. Taking another look over her shoulder, she turned the knob and pushed the door open. Sarah wasn't surprised to see that she was grinning. Pippin adored high adventure.

"Huh," Pippin breathed, striding across the room to where a canopied bed rose before them. Empty. "Why, that sly dog. I wonder whose bedroom he *is* in?"

"There was a light in the library," Sarah suggested, staring at the tidy line of the untouched bed linen.

"We don't have time," Pippin said. "We'll have to breach the defences of Chuffy's sanctuary." She flashed another grin Sarah could barely see in the dark. "Gird your loins, Lady Clarke. We are about to do something quite scandalous."

Sarah scowled. "Pip, I have been kidnapped by a man wanted for treason, hidden with him in a barn, and climbed a wall in a dress. I think I left scandalous back at Fairbourne."

Only Pip would giggle.

- p. 319

* * *

Well, Ian thought, testing the ropes that held him to the chair, at least he'd been smart enough to hide the flask back in the tunnel. If only he knew where Sarah was. If only he knew she was safe.

...

"I don't think you appreciate your situation, Colonel Ferguson," the silky voice insisted beside him. "We can do anything we want to you, and no one will care. When your body washes up on the beach in a few days, they will shake their heads and think how a traitor had met his just fate."

Ian laughed, even though it hurt. Hell, by this time, everything hurt. He could no longer see out of his right eye, his nose was broken again, and at least one tooth was loose. He didn't even want to think about his ribs.

- p. 329

Another plot twist that took my attention away from the resolution was the relationship between Lizzie, Sarah and the Duke of Ripton -- though the author hints about this early on, when she finally reveals the details, it took away the momentum from the Ian/traitors conflict. Was Ian able to prove that he didn't try to

kill the Duke of Wellington? Yes -- but it seemed like a secondary thing ... something incidental that just happened as they confronted Madame Ferrars and her cohorts.

I'm a big fan of Dreyer's Drake's Rakes (Three Graces) series and I was very excited to read about Ian Ferguson after encountering him in the previous books. I was also very excited to read about the ladies from Last Chance Academy after reading the e-novella, **It Begins with a Kiss**. Sadly, **Once a Rake** was a bit of a disappointment for me: it isn't the best romance I've read from Dreyer and not the best intrigue either -- I will still continue to follow this series, despite the slow start -- there's a lot of electricity in the scenes between Alex and Fiona and Pippin is such a fun character as well. ^_^

N. Kuhn says

Typically I read 1-3 books A DAY. It took me 3 days to get 60% into this book. The beginning was very long winded and to be honest, boring. The plot, premise, all of it sounded great, but getting to the action, the interesting parts took forever. Once you hit that 60% mark, the book begins to pick up. Things get exciting and enjoyable. If you can make it through the slow half of the book, I think you'll enjoy the rest of it. It's just hard to make yourself push through it.

Jennifer says

ARC received for review

3.5 stars

I realized the other day I have some really old books in my ARC "pile" and decided this year I would try to read one a week. That's a good resolution to have.

I read the first three books in this series a long time ago and didn't really remember them, but that's okay cause I wasn't lost reading this one. Immediate attraction between Ian and Sarah plus an adventure along the way.

Farrah says

Thrilling and romantic, Once a Rake was a lovely historical romance. I really enjoyed reading this wonderful book. Really a lovely read.

Sarah was a great heroine. She was the kind of heroine that had a quiet strength. She wasn't overly bold and constantly sassy, but she was a tough woman who would do anything to survive and protect her family. I really liked her. I thought she was a wonderful character.

Ian was also great. He wasn't polished and charming, but he definitely had his own char. He was brutally honest, very loyal, incredibly brave, extremely determined, and super sweet when he wanted to be. I really liked him. He was strong, honorable, and adorable.

The romance was lovely. Sarah and Ian were sweet together. They were really a perfect match. Their feelings for each other were obvious and they didn't bother denying them. As for the spice factor, I would describe it more as sensuous than outright steamy and I thought it was well done. There were a few roadblocks along the way, some that Sarah and Ian created for themselves, and they caused some annoyance but these two got through them all. I thought they were a lovely couple.

The plot was fast paced. I wasn't entirely hooked, but I was kept interested the entire way through. I just wasn't completely drawn in. But, I still really enjoyed the story and the ending was perfect. There were thrills along the way as Ian ran from those who wanted to arrest him and tried to clear his name. That provided for some excitement, which made me enjoy the story all the more.

Once a Rake was a wonderful historical romance. It was thrilling and romantic and I really enjoyed reading it. Lovers of romance, you should definitely check this book out.

*I received a free copy from the publisher in exchange for an honest review

Lizzie says

i did not like it sam i am.

I had the misfortune of picking this up as an escape from The Wicked Deeds of Daniel Mackenzie. Unfortunately, I found that Once a Rake eerily suffered from the same sins as Wicked Deeds: distasteful othering of Scottish men, incoherent plots, and ever-changing character motivations. I did not like it *at all*.

If the heroine of the book thought of Ian one more time as a "berserker" this would have become a wallbanger in truth.

Dreyer's plots are always choc-full of douchey heroes and stale romance tropes, but I've always been compelled to buy and read them nevertheless because of the sublime angst she can sometimes wring out- Grace literally watching her husband screw around for God and country being a prime example- but Once a Rake lacked even a heavy lashing of decent angst. All tropes no love.

Caz says

Just finishing up with the next book in this series Sarah is tired of the weight of the burdens she carries – which we soon discover consist of more than just trying to support her small family – and tries to tell herself that she's so strongly drawn to Ian because she is lonely and he's the first man who has seen that or offered her a shoulder to lean on.

When Ian is well again, he begins making preparations to leave. Sarah knows this has always been his intention, but she can't lie to herself and deny that his leaving won't also leave a big hole in her life and in her heart. Ian finds himself similarly affected – and asks Sarah to accompany him, both for her own safety and to act as a guide. They have discovered that several of the Rakes will be at a house-party at nearby Ripton Hall, the seat of Sarah's half-brother. Ian can meet them there, pass on his information and clear his

name.

Although reluctant to accompany Ian, Sarah travels with him as a guide and they make their way to Ripton. A rendezvous has been arranged and their goal is within sight – but there are still dangers ahead in the form of the beautiful but deadly Minette Ferrar, a French spy and assassin who surely owes much to Dumas' Milady deWinter.

Sometimes, in books which feature an adventure story alongside the romance, I find that one (sometimes both) of those elements is underdeveloped. That isn't the case here, however, because I thought the balance between the spy-story and the romance was just about right. The emphasis is firmly on the romance, but the secondary plotline feels just as well thought-out, possibly because it has been running through several books already and will obviously continue in future stories.

The characterisation throughout is strong, and is particularly so in the case of the two protagonists. Both have had to overcome adversity, but they don't mope or dwell on it; they have got on with their lives as best they could, doing what needs to be done. Sarah is a particularly engaging heroine, someone who has been continually put down and cast aside, yet has the strength to keep going from day to day. She is innately kind and selfless without being priggish – she asks only for the strength to keep her small family together. Ian is an attractive hero, a strong, honourable man who is trying to do the best for his sisters (who were at school with Sarah) and to keep the promises he has made to the grandfather who barely tolerates him (and that only because Ian is his heir).

I had a couple of minor issues with the book – such as the author's preoccupation with the description of Ian as a "beserker", and the fact that his unseen fiancée existed only as a road-block to the romance – but overall *Once a Rake* was entertaining, well written and emotionally satisfying. There's a teaser at the end for the next book in the series, and I'm certainly intrigued and impressed enough to want to read it.

Melanie says

Lady Sarah Clarke, "born on the other side of the blanket," is the wife of Lord Boswell Clarke, who has recently signed up to join up with the military and fight in the war. As she has not heard from him in months, many assume that he has been killed. Sarah's day consists of working to care for her husband's crumbling estate, Fairbourne, along with his self-centered mother and sister. With very little money to be had, this is a constant trial that has fallen completely on Sarah's shoulders. Her husband's cousin and neighbor, Martin Clarke, believes that Boswell is dead and wants Sarah out so he can claim the estate for his own.

Colonel Ian Ferguson is a Scottish man who has distinguished himself in the war but now stands accused of trying to assassinate the Duke of Wellington. Wounded, he is on the run and finds himself at the Clarke estate. When Sarah discovers him, she cannot help but hide him and treat his severe wound.

As Sarah and Ian get to know one another, attraction follows and they realize they cannot be parted.

Eileen Dreyer has written a story of love and commitment that completely tests all the mettle that the characters possess.

I loved this book and the story of Sarah and Ian will leave you sighing.

Connie for b2b

*ARC provided by the author.

MEL'S THOUGHTS: Here's another book that deserves our two reviews,

I'm a huge fan of this author and this series. I'm probably the only one that liked Diccan, one of Drake's Rakes in 'Never a Gentleman'. The reason behind it was the great characterizations this author does. Her heroes are complex. They're not one-dimensional and there to 'look and act macho' but each one is unique in looks, his specialty and his background. They are a diverse group of men that are loyal to their King, Country and family.

And as for the heroine of this book, Ms. Dreyer did an outstanding job in paring this strong, willful and independent woman with one of her best heroes, Ian Ferguson.

Once more Ms. Dreyer gave me a well written plot, sensual romance and fast pace. Loved it!

*ARC provided by the publisher through NetGalley.

Susana Ellis says

Loved this book! Haven't read any of the other books in this series, but I think I'm going to have to if I want to hear more about Ian and Sarah's happy ending!

Mandi Schreiner says

This one was okay. I think the pig was my favorite character. lol

Review to come

Jacqueline says

This book started off a bit slow but once I got twenty or thirty pages in it really held my interest. The writing was nicely done and the author did a good job of making me believe these were persons living in the regency era rather than people with modern sensibilities dropped into an historical setting.

One of the strong points for me was that there was sufficient conflict to carry the book. They were falling in love but there was plenty to keep them apart until the end of the book. Lately I've been reading regencies that were rather dull because of lack of conflict. Here we had two sorts of conflict. There was danger to all if she was found harboring the hero who was accused of treason and also he was engaged to someone else when they met. In this period in history breaking an engagement could lead to serious legal action. Plus it really could ruin reputations. Also she was illegitimate which could present a problem. So all this conflict led to

some lovely angst when it seemed that the hero and heroine could not be together.

The characterizations were good. The heroine especially was well developed. The hero was a lovely man but he was written as believably male. And the romantic tension between them was intense and believable. I liked the earthiness of their relationship.

All in all I recommend this one to regency lovers.

I received this book for review from GR First Reads and thank you very much.

(Tori-Smexybooks) smexys_sidekick says

Eh, this one was okay. Rather boring in my opinion.

Ash says

2.5 stars

Janga says

4.5 Stars

Eileen Dreyer is dividing her Drake's Rakes series into trilogies. Once a Rake introduces the second trilogy, the Last Chance Academy series, which was introduced by a novella, It Begins with a Kiss (July 2012). Readers who have followed the series will recognize Ian Ferguson and his plight. I confess to a weakness for red-haired heroes. I was already fascinated by Ian, and I have been looking forward to his story. It does not disappoint. Ian has all the necessary qualities for a romance hero—intelligence, honor, strength, a sense of humor, a capacity for tenderness, and sufficient biography and personality to make him an individual rather than a type with a name.

Sarah broke my heart from the beginning with her blend of quiet strength and aching vulnerability. She is one of the loneliest characters I have encountered. Early in the book, Dreyer describes her: "She had spent her entire life seeking inclusion. Envyng her four friends that they were wanted for no other reason than their existence. A feeling Sarah couldn't comprehend. emotionally" Once she is separated from her school friends, her closest tie is to a pig. But despite the emotional deprivation she has known, Sarah is a woman of grace and generosity. She treats those who see her as inferior because of her birth with kindness and understanding, and yet she is human enough to admit her longing to exact revenge. Plus, how can anyone resist a heroine who dreams of Oxford and names a pig Willoughby? Sarah and Ian not only have incredible chemistry but they also share their status as outsiders who know what it is to fight for survival.

Readers who prefer romances that focus on the hero and heroine and keep them together for most of the story will appreciate Once a Rake. And yet Dreyer accomplishes this and still creates substantial contexts with a host of characters whom she sketches in sufficient detail to give them all—from the absent Bromwell to the substantially present pig--individual reality. The assassin Minette Ferrar frightens me beyond description and

her heinous behavior lingers in my mind far too long for comfort.

I'm a reader who generally prefers quiet books with the focus on relationships, but I have discovered a few authors who write what I term "romantic adventure" whose books unfailingly engage me fully. They create characters in whom I believe wholly and plots that keep my heart in my throat. Mary Jo Putney is the historical romance author who has best exemplified these qualities for me for decades, and Eileen Dreyer's skills rival those of MJP. I am also intrigued by the way Dreyer is creating a heroine-centric series on the foundation of a male-bonded society.

If you are already a Drake's Rakes fan, you will be pleased to know that tendrils of the overarching plot of treason continue to entangle even as other tendrils are severed and the romance is as satisfying as it was in the first trilogy. If you have never read Eileen Dreyer's historical romances, *Once a Rake* is a great starting point. Or if you want a brief sample of her style first, the digital edition of the prequel novella, *It Begins with a Kiss*, is available for \$.99. I've been recommending this writer since I first read her Kathleen Korbel categories years ago. I'm delighted that I can recommend her historicals with as much enthusiasm.

See full review at:

<http://justjanga.blogspot.com/2013/10...>
