



The Temporary Wife/A Promise of Spring (Dell Historical Romance Book 4)

By Mary Balogh

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Mary Balogh is the *New York Times* bestselling author of numerous books, including *The Secret Mistress*, the acclaimed *Slightly* and *Simply* novels, and the five titles in her Huxtable series: *First Comes Marriage*, *Then Comes Seduction*, *At Last Comes Love*, *Seducing an Angel*, and *A Secret Affair*. A former teacher, she grew up in Wales and now lives in Canada.

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It being not quite the thing to advertise in the London papers for a wife, Anthony Earheart, Marquess of Staunton, eldest son and heir of the Duke of Withingsby, advertised instead for a governess.

He advertised in his own name, with the omission of his title and connections, to the decided amusement of his friends and acquaintances, who rose to the occasion with marvelous wit.

“How many children do you have, Staunton?” Harold Price asked him at White’s the morning of the advertisement’s first appearance. “Would it not be more appropriate to hire a schoolteacher? One capable of managing a full schoolroom?”

“What you should do, Staunton,” Cuthbert Pyne added, “is hire a full staff. For a whole school, I mean. One would not wish to jeopardize the education of the budding scholars by crowding too many of them into one classroom.”

“Are all their mamas to come and fetch them each afternoon, Tony?” Lord Rowling asked before inhaling the pinch of snuff he had placed on the back of one hand. “Do you have a salon large enough to hold them all while they wait? And will they wait amicably in company with one another?”

“Are you sure you wish to educate them all, Staunton?” Colonel Forsythe asked. “Do you have enough estates needing stewards and managers, old boy? Does England have enough estates?”

“You have forgotten Wales, Forsythe,” Mr. Pyne said. “And Scotland.”

“But it is hardly fair to everyone else’s by-blows if all the positions are filled by Staunton’s,” the colonel said, speaking with an exaggerated whine of complaint.

“I believe Tony is not in search of a governess at all,” Sir Bernard Shields said. “He is in search of a new mistress. I hear you dismissed the delectable Anna just last week, Tony--with rubies. You have decided to look elsewhere for her replacement than the green rooms of London? You have decided to search for someone who can provide conversation as a diversion while you are, ah, at work?”

“Or someone who can offer instruction,” Lord Rowling said. “It is said, you know, that one is never too knowledgeable to stop learning. And who better to learn from than a governess? And in a schoolroom with all its desks and tabletops on which to practice one’s lessons. The mind boggles.”

“I daresay,” the very young and very earnest Lord Callaghan said, “Staunton is hiring a governess for one or more of his nieces and we are slandering him by imagining otherwise.”

The Marquess of Staunton did not participate in the conversation beyond the occasional lifting of an eyebrow or pursing of the lips. He looked on as if he were nothing more than a mildly interested observer. He had no children as far as he knew. He had no estates--yet. He had tired of Anna after only six weeks and was in no hurry to employ a replacement. Mistresses, he was finding, were less and less able to satisfy his jaded appetites. He knew all their tricks and skills and was bored by them--Rowling was wrong about there being more to learn. He had no dealings with any of his nieces--or nephews either, for that matter.

No, he was not in search of either a governess or a mistress. He was choosing himself a wife, as he made clear to Lord Rowling when the two of them were strolling homeward later.

“Is that not usually done at Almack’s or in someone’s ballroom or drawing room?” Lord Rowling asked, chuckling as if he believed the whole matter was a joke devised for his amusement. “And without the necessity of an advertisement, Tony? You are Staunton, after all, and will be Withingsby one day. You are as rich as Croesus and have the looks to turn any female head even if you were a pauper. Yet you have advertised for a wife in the guise of a governess? What am I missing, pray?” He twirled his cane and touched the brim of his hat to a lady whom they were passing.

“I cannot find what I am looking for at Almack’s,” the marquess said, no answering amusement in his face. He had the grace to continue when his friend merely looked at him with raised eyebrows. “She must be a gentlewoman--I’ll not go lower than that, you see. She must also be impoverished, plain, demure, very ordinary, perhaps even prim. She must have all the personality of a--a quiet mouse.”

“Dear me,” Lord Rowling said rather faintly. “A quiet mouse, Tony? You? Do you feel such need to dominate the woman you will take to wife?”

“The Duke of Withingsby has summoned me home,” the marquess said. “He claims to be ailing. He reminds me that Lady Marie Lucas, daughter of the Earl of Tillden, is now seventeen years old--old enough, in fact, for the match arranged for us by our families at her birth to be elevated to a formal betrothal. He informs me that the eight years of my absence from home have given me sufficient time in which to sow my wild oats.”

Lord Rowling grimaced. “Your father is not displaying a great deal of wisdom,” he said. “You have amassed a sizable fortune during those eight years, Tony.” But he grinned suddenly. “As well as acquiring a well--deserved reputation as one of London’s most prolific rakes. You plan to marry your quiet mouse merely in order to embarrass his grace, then?”

“Precisely,” the marquess said without hesitation. “I did consider merely ignoring the summons, Perry, or answering it but refusing to wed the child who has been carefully chosen and groomed as the next Duchess of Withingsby. But this idea of mine will be infinitely better. If his grace is not already ailing in all truth, he soon will be. If he has not yet got the point of the past eight years, he soon will. Yes, I shall choose my wife very carefully indeed. I daresay there will be a number of applicants.”

Lord Rowling looked aghast, perhaps only now understanding that his friend was in deadly earnest. “But, Tony,” he said, “you cannot marry the dullest creature you can find merely to annoy your father.”

“Why not?” Lord Staunton asked.

“Why not?” His friend made circular motions in the air with his cane. “Marriage is a life sentence, old chap. You will be stuck with the woman for the rest of your life. You would find the situation intolerable.”

“I do not intend to spend the rest of my life with her,” the marquess said. “Once she has served her purpose she will be pensioned off--a governess could hardly ask for a better fate, could she?”

“And she might live to the age of ninety,” Lord Row-ling pointed out. “Tony, you will want heirs. If you get them on her, she will wish--and quite reasonably so--to be a mother to them. She will wish to live in your home while they grow up.”

“I have an heir,” the marquess said. “My brother William, Perry. And he has sons--or so Marianne informs me. One can only hope that they are sturdy.”

“But a man craves heirs of his own body,” Lord Rowling said.

“Does he, by Jove?” The Marquess of Staunton looked surprised. “This man certainly does not, Perry. Shall we change the subject? This particular one grows tedious. Do you go to Tattersall’s tomorrow? I have my eye on a promising-looking pair of grays.”

Lord Rowling would have liked to continue the original conversation until he had talked some sense into his friend, but he was soon conversing about horses. After all, he had known the Marquess of Staunton long enough to understand that he had a will of iron, that he said and did exactly what he wished to say and do, without reference to other people’s preferences or to society’s dictates. If he had decided to choose a wife in such an unconventional manner and for such a cynical, cold-blooded reason, then choose her he would, and marry her too.

The Marquess of Staunton, meanwhile, although he talked with enthusiasm about horses and then the races, inwardly contemplated with some satisfaction his return to Enfield Park in Wiltshire and the effect of that return on the Duke of Withingsby. It would be the final thumbing of the nose to the man who had begotten him and made his life miserable for the twenty years following his birth. For eight years, ever since he had left home after that final dreadful scene, he had lived independently of his father, refusing any financial support. He had made his own fortune, at first by gambling, then by reckless investments, and finally by more prudent investments and business ventures.

His father had clearly not got the point. But he would. He would understand that his eldest son was once and for all beyond his power and influence. Oh yes, marrying imprudently--and that would be an understatement for the marriage of the Duke of Withingsby’s heir to an impoverished gentlewoman who had earned her living as a governess--would be the best possible thing he could do. He longed to see his father’s face when he took his bride to Enfield.

And so he waited for replies to his advertisement, replies that began coming the very day after its first appearance in the London papers and kept coming for several days after that in even larger numbers than he had expected. He rejected several applicants, sight unseen--all those below the age of twenty or above the age of thirty, those with particularly impressive recommendations, and one young lady who so wished to impress him with her knowledge of Latin that her letter was written in it.

He interviewed five candidates before discovering his quiet mouse in the sixth. Miss Charity Duncan had been shown into a downstairs salon and had chosen to stand in the part of the room that was not bathed in sunlight. For one moment after he had opened the door and stepped inside the room, he thought she must

have changed her mind and fled. But then he saw her, and it struck him that even her decision to stand just there was significant. In addition, she was dressed from head to toe in drab brown and looked totally self-effacing and quietly disciplined. She was the quintessential governess--the sort of employee even the most jealous of wives would not object to having in the same house with her husband.

"Miss Duncan?" he asked.

"Yes, sir." Her voice was quiet and low-pitched. She curtsied to him without once raising her eyes from the carpet before her feet. She was on the low side of medium height, very slender, perhaps even thin, though her cloak made it impossible to know for sure. Her face looked pale and ordinary in the shadows. The brown of her hair blended so totally with the brown of her bonnet that it was difficult to know where the one ended and the other began. Her garments were decent and drab. He was given the impression that they were not quite shabby but very soon would be. They were genteel-shabby.

She was perfect. His father would be incensed.

"Please be seated," he said, indicating a chair close to where she stood.

"Yes, sir," she said and sat down, as he expected, with a straight spine that did not touch the back of her chair. She folded her gloved hands in her lap and directed her gaze modestly at her knees.

She was the picture of prim gentility. She was quite perfect! He decided there and then that she would do, that his search was at an end. He was looking at his future wife.

CHARITY DUNCAN SAT close to the window in order to make the best of the last of the daylight. It would not do to light the candle one moment before it became absolutely necessary to do so. Candles were expensive. She was mending an underarm seam of one of her brother's shirts and noting with an inward sigh that the cotton fabric had worn thin. The seam would hold for a while, but there would be a hole more difficult to mend sooner than that.

Her task was taking longer than it ought. Her eyes--and her mind--kept straying to the newspaper that was open on the table. Buying a paper each day was her one extravagance, though it could not exactly be called that. She knew that Philip liked to read it by candlelight after he got home from work, but in the main the purchase was for her own sake. She must find employment very soon. For almost a month she had been looking and applying and--all too rarely--attending interviews. She had even applied for a few situations more menial than a governess's or a companion's position.

No one wanted her. She was either too young or too old, too plain or too pretty, too high-born or too well-educated, or?..?..?Or prospective employers became too pointed in their questions.

But she would not give in and abandon the search. Her family--one sister three years younger than herself at home and three children considerably younger than that--was poor. Worse than poor. They were deeply in debt and had not even known it until the death of their father a little over a year ago. And so instead of being able to live a gentleman's life, Philip was compelled to work just to support his family. And she had insisted on working too, though there was precious little money a woman could earn that was sufficient to share with others or to pay off debts.

If only there were some way of making a huge fortune quickly. She had even considered some spectacular robbery--though not seriously, of course. She ought not to complain, she thought, her task at the shirt finished at last. At least they were not quite destitute. Not quite, but close enough. And there seemed to be no real light at the end of the proverbial tunnel.

But Philip was home, and she rose to smile her greeting, to kiss his cheek, to serve his supper, to ask about his day--and to draw his attention to the one advertisement in today's paper that looked like a possibility.

"It does not say how many children there are or what ages or genders they are," she said with a frown when they had progressed to that topic. "It does not say whether they live here in London or in the Outer Hebrides or at the tip of Cornwall. But it does say that there is a position available."

"You do not have to take employment at all, Charity," Philip Duncan said. It was his constant theme. Philip believed in taking full responsibility for his womenfolk.

"Oh, yes, I do," she said firmly. "It is the only suitable position offered in today's paper, Phil. And there was nothing at all at the agency yesterday or this morning. I must try for it at least."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Gary Stark:

Have you spare time to get a day? What do you do when you have more or little spare time? Yes, you can choose the suitable activity for spend your time. Any person spent their very own spare time to take a walk, shopping, or went to typically the Mall. How about open or maybe read a book titled The Temporary Wife/A Promise of Spring (Dell Historical Romance Book 4)? Maybe it is to become best activity for you. You already know beside you can spend your time with your favorite's book, you can better than before. Do you agree with it is opinion or you have different opinion?

Michael Parker:

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Ruth Zimmer:

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knowledge on it. So when you read this book you can get a lot of profit. The book was published by the very famous author. Tom makes some research just before write this book. This book very easy to read you can find the point easily after perusing this book.

Tommy Worm:

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