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Mary Balogh and Grace Burrowes team up to create a pair of Regency novellas each set at a summer house party.

In "Another Dream" by Mary Balogh, Miss Eleanor Thompson has found satisfaction as the director of a respected school for girls. The life of a dedicated educator offers many rewards and much meaning--but also more loneliness than Eleanor anticipated. She accepts an invitation from her sister, Christine, Duchess of Bewcastle, to attend a Bedwyn houseparty, never dreaming the summer curriculum might include stolen kisses and true love.

In "The Duke of My Dreams" by Grace Burrowes, banker's daughter Anne Faraday is cast into the company of Elias, Duke of Sedgemere, at house party in the Lakes. Anne warms to the lonely man and conscientious father behind the title, and Elias becomes enthralled with the brilliant, burdened woman beneath Anne's genteel facade. Liking turns to love under the Cumbrian summer moon, but family obligations, secrets, and a prodigal duck conspire to thwart the course of true love.

Once Upon A Dream Details

Date : Published April 12th 2016 by Grace Burrowes Publishing

ISBN :

Author : Mary Balogh , Grace Burrowes

Format : Kindle Edition 193 pages

Genre : Romance, Historical Romance, Historical, Regency, Anthologies, Historical Fiction

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From Reader Review Once Upon A Dream for online ebook

Jess says

Once again, I hate something everyone else seems to love. But I swear I'm not nitpicking this time. The romance was just crap.

Let's start with the Mary Balogh, titled 'Another Dream'. This was... not good. The premise is a spinster, who regrets not getting over her first love sooner, meets a widower with lonely and charming children, which was promising, but then everything sort of got blurry and the romance was unconvincing and kind of awkward. They meet, have dinner, kiss, separate, meet again, barely talk, get engaged and have sex. Maybe I just don't understand the inexplicable notion of *having a connection*, but dear lord: the hero and heroine spoke roughly twice before declaring themselves in love. And yes, OK, that on its own is fine, because I appreciate it's a novella and a slow burn isn't really a viable option, but the conversation was so dull and formal that not only did I almost expire of boredom, but it was a bloody wonder that neither Michael or Eleanor did either.

Also, this contained just about the most painful-to-read sex scene of all time, so that killed the 'physical attraction over mental harmony' theory for their sudden romance. Though I did like the appearances of Wulfric, Christine and Michael's kids, so I would've given this a very reluctant two stars, had it been on its own.

Clearly my rating shows that that was not to be. The second novella, by Grace Burrowes, is called 'Duke of My Dreams'. I have never read anything by Grace Burrowes before, and maybe I caught her on a bad day, but this has made me very reluctant to ever try anything by her again. Briefly, the plot is: Anne, a banker's daughter, meets Elias (alas), Duke of Sedgwere. They have a conversation and realise that they're soulmates. Elias wants to marry her, Anne refuses because of reasons that he inevitably figures out, the reason gets figured out and he solves her problem, thereby allowing them to get married.

Mainly, the novella is confusing for two reasons: a) at the beginning I wasn't sure which duke (there are two, surprise surprise) Anne was going to end up with, because both were acting exactly the same towards her; and b) I think I must've missed the moment when they (Anne and Elias) fell in love, because it was so bloody insignificant, so I spent the rest of the book feeling cheated out of the Big Moment. Part of this is due to my sleepiness, but I do also think that it is the book's responsibility to not induce sleepiness on its readers.

I skipped the excerpts of two other Burrowes books because I didn't think I could face more of her characterless, humorless writing, but maybe if I hadn't this could've been a zero star. Or two star! But I'm not willing to find out.

Cherise says

Read Balogh's one only for now. It reminds me a bit of slightly dangerous where there is a heyette feel to it, with everything moving so slow. Though I can never fault Balogh's writing and I do enjoy visiting the old friends in simply and slightly series, it fell a bit short for me, namely because while both protagonists are very likeable and I adore the little ones, their romance is so short it is a bit incredible. Except for a brief dinner, these two really hardly interact. While it is still a very sweet read, and these two seem more to be having a companionable love that is more like a trickle than the combustive type, I just didn't buy it. The H

didn't even need to pursue much as his lil ones did all the work for him...the mention of past loves also kept coming up, and even though we are told they both finally made peace with this, I just felt like they are both second best for each other versus the grand passionate love they had before. Didn't like it too much.

I like Burrowes' story a lot more. It seems both authors brainstormed on the same circumstance then weave their magic into the story. Both protagonists as well as the little ones in this book are very likeable. I like how the H was pulled by our h and vice versa right from the beginning.

Our H in here doesn't dilly dally much, he knows what he wants and he gives a very good and sweet chase. Steadfast all along and he it shows he likes every aspect about her and she suits him beautifully.

Our h is a bit of a mystery all through the book. While it is obvious she is very attracted to him and would love nothing but to be with him and his adorable little ones, we were never given a satisfactory reason why she is holding back till the end. While she was the one to set up roadblocks to this relationship, she freely admits it isn't because she doesn't love our dear H, which helps mollify me quite a bit, and when her reason came out, I can even sympathise with her plight.

Both are frank with their feelings and they also spend a lot of times talking to each other. It makes it a very credible match even limited to a novella. I also adore how the little ones are more than just decoration here, as besides helping the relationship along, we also see the closer father sons bonds creating with our h's help.

All in all, I had a lot of fun reading this one.

Kamala says

short and sweet

Nani says

Lo leí, me gustó pero no me satisfizo.

Creo que el personaje de Eleonor se merecía una historia mucho más larga. Más completa y no tan, tan apresurada.

Es bonito, es gracioso (la hija es la caña) y es corto!!.

Lo bueno es que sale mi Wulfric. (suspiros, suspiros, suspiros).

OLT says

These are sweet comfort reads but there's nothing new in either story. Well, perhaps with the exception of the reason the heroine of Burrowes' story has for not being able to marry her duke. That was one that doesn't

come up much (if at all). Other than that, these two novellas, especially the Balogh story, are just reader-friendly, predictable, comfort romance reads. They make you feel the way a nicely-prepared bowl of mac and cheese does. They're comfortable, cozy and reassuring in their familiarity.

I was looking forward to the Balogh story because I knew the house party backdrop for that romance was to be the home of Wulfric and Christine Bedwyn, the Duke and Duchess of Bewcastle, of Balogh's *Slightly* series. (Oh, Wulfric! Sigh. Be still my beating heart.) But even touching base with old friends did nothing for me. Not only that, but what's with Wulfric? He's been married to Christine a few years now, has adorable children and an adoring wife, all his siblings are happily married with children, but the darned man still hasn't learned how to smile? What's up with that anyway?

But I digress. Back to the two stories. They're pleasant and if you are new to historical romance you'll probably like them a lot. All the characters are agreeable and likeable and family-oriented. And both romances have the romantic pairing of a commoner woman and a duke. In Balogh's she's the director of a school for girls in Bath (and Christine's sister, BTW) and in Burrowes's she's the daughter of a very rich and successful banker. So will love break down the social divide? Bet you can guess. Along the way we meet up with cutesy kids, lots of family interactions, and a duck named Josephine. Lord love a duck. Oh, lordy. That's just ducky.

So if you're in the mood for something sweet (but with some sex added in, especially in Burrowes's story), bland, and comforting and not too badly written, this could work for you.

Lynne Tull says

'Another Dream' by Mary Balogh

I just finished reading one of Mary's earlier books. What a difference 30 years makes. I was not engaged in its story or its characters. Fast forward to 2016 and this story. I laughed, smiled, and cried at all of the appropriate places. This is the love story of Eleanor, the sister of Wulfric Bedwyn's wife. All of the Bedwyn's appeared and brought back good memories of their love stories. I think I am going to read them again. I love the Bedwyn's. Recommend.

'Duke of My Dreams' by Grace Burrows

I do not remember Grace Burrows' stories being so humorous. But then again, it has been a while since I read one of her stories. This story is a delight. I loved the Duke, his friend Hardcastle, and most of all Anne, the object of his affections. Now, I have to find Hardcastle's story: 'May I Have This Duke' which is to be found in the anthology, *Dancing in the Duke's Arms*. Recommend!

Océano de libros says

Eleanor Thompson, hermana de Christine y cuñada de Wulfric se sentía satisfecha con su papel como directora de una escuela para señoritas y sabe que su destino es la soledad, lo que no sabe es que una fiesta en la mansión de los Bedwyn puede proporcionarle una nueva vida.

En este relato corto por fin podemos conocer lo que le depara a la hermana de Christine ya que en anteriores libros se quedó su historia suspendida. Eleanor es la típica solterona que cree que su tren ya pasó pero cuál será su sorpresa cuando conozca inesperadamente a unos niños la mar de adorables. La inquieta Georgette y el tímido Robbie que además son los hijos de Michael Benning, Conde de Staunton, un hombre viudo de la

misma edad que la protagonista y que harán que sus unan de una manera bastante insólita. El relato es muy adorable y más con esos niños que conquistan por lo únicos que son, sobre todo Georgette una joven muy vivaracha que nos regalará diálogos extensos, si algo he de destacar es esto último, la autora no es escueta, son bastante extendidos y creo que es útil más si cabe en un relato corto para conocer mejor a cada uno de los personajes más relevantes.

En fin, creo que el relato está aceptable y cumplidor por lo tanto tengo que darle tres estrellas.

Teresa says

I only read the Mary Balogh novella in this, and it was a nice wrap up to the series. It suffered in the way many novellas do...with the love story feeling too fast, but it seemed to work slightly better for being historical. And I found the aspect with the heroes children to be adorable.

Alba Turunen says

4 Estrellitas. “Another Dream” podría calificarse como un relato corto incluido dentro de la serie de los Bedwyn, pero también como un fabuloso epílogo, donde Mary Balogh nos muestra un después de la vida de tan variopinta familia, con sus cónyuges y retoños reunidos para una fiesta campestre en Lindsey Hall, la espléndida mansión del Duque de Bewcastle.

En Lindsey Hall van a celebrar el cumpleaños de Wulfric de una manera muy especial, con familiares y amigos de la rama tanto de Wulfric, como de Christine. Y entre esos invitados están nuestros protagonistas, Eleanor, la hermana mayor de Christine, y Michael Benning, Conde de Staunton y amigo de la pareja.

“Another Dream” empieza cuando Eleanor va en carroaje en dirección a la mansión, pero una espantosa tormenta la obliga a retrasar su viaje y hacer noche en una pequeña posada. En esa misma posada conocerá a Michael, un caballero viudo y con dos tiernos hijos muy necesitados de una madre.

Aquí hago el inciso sobre los hijos de Michael, Georgette y Robert, totalmente opuestos pero encantadores a su manera, y cuya intervención ha sido crucial para la trama de esta novelilla. Quizás lo que más me ha chirriado es el carácter precoz de Georgette para tener sólo diez años. Os aseguro que tengo una prima muy precoz de diez años y jamás hablaría de esa manera, así que no me gusta de ningún modo que se ponga en boca de los niños ciertas maneras de expresarse que no les pegan; al revés, los hace cursis, ridículos, repis y repelentes, aunque Mary Balogh ha intentado arreglarlo al final. En cambio, el pequeño Robert de sólo cinco años es un auténtico amor, un niño tímido, dulce y precioso de los que dan ganas de achuchar de lo ricos y entrañables que son.

Como estaba contando, Eleanor Thompson, que a sus casi cuarenta años, y acomodada a su soltería, dedica su vida a dirigir la que fue la escuela de señoritas de Claudia Martin en Bath; encuentra que su vida no la satisface tanto como pensaba, y ¿Quién sabe? Quizás ese viaje a Lindsey Hall le replantea cómo quiere continuar con su vida. Eleanor es una mujer dulce y madura que enterró hace muchos años al que fue el amor de su vida; puede que sea ese el motivo por el que no se permitió amar de nuevo, ni conocer a alguien con quien compartir su vida.

Por su parte, Michael Benning sabe que no quiere pasar el resto de su vida solo. Sí, quiere a sus hijos y es tan buen padre como puede serlo, pero también sabe que sus hijos necesitan una madre, pero debería ser una mujer especial, una mujer que lo quiera a él como esposo, y que también quiera a sus hijos. Cree que en la fiesta campestre de los duques de Bewcastle sus hijos serán felices con otros niños de sus edades, y también que con el tiempo podrá encontrar a una mujer especial, pero dicha mujer parece ser la hermosa criatura que encontró una noche en una posada, y a quien piensa que no volverá a ver... hasta que ambos llegan a Lindsey Hall.

Como relato corto no puedo contarte mucho más, pues sólo tiene 130 páginas, y como pasa en la mayoría de relatos, se intenta condensar mucho en pocas páginas, y aunque queda bonito, siempre tienes la impresión de que no ahonda lo suficiente en el desarrollo de la historia. A mí me ha gustado y mucho, pero es verdad que si hubiese sido una novela, algo más larga, quizás la habría disfrutado mucho más.

De modo que tenemos un relato precioso que cierra la historia de los Bedwyn, que le ha dado un toque anecdótico a la vez que es también un bonito epílogo. Sólo me ha chirriado la actitud insoportable de Georgette, y el hecho del poco desarrollo de la historia romántica. Pero en un relato de semejante longitud no se puede pedir mucho más.

Mención especial para mi queridísimo Wulfric Bedwyn, que pensé que no podría quererle más de lo que le quiero, pero si tengo que elegir entre todos los héroes de novela romántica, siempre, siempre, me quedaré con Wulfric; su frialdad, su snobismo y por supuesto su saber estar, su inteligencia y siempre sabiendo qué debe hacer y cómo comportarse. He encontrado pocos hombres como él tan bien caracterizados en éste género, pero Wulf siempre me llega a lo más hondo, y sólo por eso éste relato ha merecido la pena.

Como nota final, “Another Dream” se publicó en una antología llamada “Once upon a dream”, junto a otro relato escrito por Grace Burrowes. Lo cierto es que el relato de Grace Burrowes no lo he leído y no creo que lo haga, hace años leí un par de libros suyos y no me gustaron nada de nada, así que mi dedicación a ésta obra ha sido enteramente para Mary Balogh, y vuelvo a repetir, siempre es un placer leerla, pues sin duda para mí es la mejor del género, y este relato creo que debería leerlo y disfrutarlo toda lectora que haya leído a los Bedwyn y los tenga como sus imprescindibles de la novela romántica.

Lady Wesley says

Fair warning to our faithful readers: the following is a giddy fan-girl review.

Two of my favorite authors: Mary Balogh and Grace Burrowes. One of my favorite settings: country house parties. My favorite duke – the Duke of All Dukes: Wulfric Bedwyn, Duke of Bewcastle. No way was I not going to like these two stories.

I'm giving this book five stars, based upon how very much I enjoyed reading it. Some of my HR friends, whose opinions I respect, have been more critical, with one calling these two novellas “just reader-friendly, predictable, comfort romance reads.” Just?? After some of the stinkers that I have read lately, that sounds like exactly what I want.

Mary Balogh's story takes us back Bedwyn World, a place that I came to love when reading her Slightly and Simply series. Our heroine, Miss Eleanor Thompson, played a secondary role in Slightly Dangerous, when her sister Christine married the top-lofty Duke of Bewcastle. She appeared again in Simply Perfect, when

Claudia Martin married the Marquess of Attingsborough, and Eleanor took over Claudia's role as headmistress of a girls' school in Bath. (Although Eleanor is pushing forty, she was destined to marry well, as all of the teachers at Miss Martin's school went on to marry aristocrats.) On her way to a summer house party at Bewcastle's estate, she stops at an inn to wait out a sudden storm, and while enjoying a quiet cup of tea she is accosted by an overly precocious ten-year-old girl. Georgette Benning is traveling with her young brother and their father. Although it is slightly improper, Eleanor enjoys a lovely dinner with Mr. Benning, and the next morning the travelers go on their separate ways.

Eleanor is quite surprised, therefore, when the Benning family arrives the next day to join Bewcastle's house party. It turns out that "Mr. Benning" is in fact the Michael Benning, Earl of Staunton, and Christine has invited him with the expectation that he is on the verge of proposing marriage to another guest, a proper young miss with a dragon of a mother. The children have other ideas, however, and their antics help bring Eleanor and Michael together. Interestingly, Wulfric also plays matchmaker and there is a lovely scene where he counsels Eleanor after she confesses her unhappiness with running a school: "Sometimes our dreams lead us in the wrong direction and it would be foolish to continue pursuing them out of sheer stubbornness or the fear of disappointing others. There are other dreams waiting to be dreamed — the right dreams, the ones that will lead to contentment."

If you haven't visited Bedwyn World before, this novella probably will not appeal to you. Characters from almost all of the previous books are mentioned, along with the many children they have brought into the world. The plot is not particularly inventive. Indeed, it is very reminiscent of Ms. Balogh's 1991 story "The Best Christmas Ever" (recently republished in *Christmas Gifts*). Young Georgette is a bit too eloquent for a ten-year-old and there is a jarring scene where Michael asks Eleanor whether she is a virgin when it's clear that even if she is she won't be for long. But for me, the romance was lovely, and visiting with Wulfric and Christine and rolling down that infamous hill with the rest of the Bedwyns was a joy.

Purely by accident, Grace Burrowes's story bears some resemblance to Mary Balogh's. Both feature slightly older and quite independent heroines who fall in love with widowed fathers and in both stories, the children play pivotal roles in bringing the couple together. The respective fathers' attitude toward their children is quite different, however. Michael Benning is devoted to his, and his prospective fiancee's desire to send them away to school is his first clue that she may not be the one for him. I had the impression, however, that Ms. Burrowes' hero, Elias, Duke of Sedgemere, did not dote on his three little boys in the same way. He loved them, of course, but did not quite know what to do with them and frequently found himself apologizing for their behavior when they were just being typical little boys.

At first, Anne Faraday does not seem like the woman to bring this family together. She is the commoner daughter of an immensely wealthy banker, dedicated to taking care of her father. Although she moves among the ton, the ladies really do not like her and the men simply want to marry her money. Elias likes her, however, and when they are thrown together during the house party, he finds himself falling in love with her. She works magic with his little boys and teaches Elias how to let loose and enjoy their company. When they are caught in a compromising situation, however, she adamantly refuses to marry him, for she has a secret that she believes prohibits her from ever marrying. Elias figures out what it is, but this reader did not, and I can't think of any other historical romance heroine with this particular secret.

At times, it was hard to know whether Anne was falling in love or just in lust. I enjoy a little hotness in my historical romances, but I do think that the author got a bit carried away, what with Elias and Anne getting it on at every available moment and in places where they could easily be caught. I also found that the presence of the Duke of Hardcastle was superfluous to requirements. He is Elias's best friend and determined to dodge the matchmaking mamas. Other than that, he doesn't do much. There really wasn't much time for Burrowes

to write those long, heart-felt conversations between gentlemen that she is so good at. If, however, you have read her May I Have This Duke in the anthology *Dancing in the Duke's Arms*, you already know that he is going to meet his match when Elias and Anne throw their own house party.

Giving a rating to an anthology can be tricky unless the reader's opinion of each story is exactly the same. In this case, I give the Balogh story five-plus stars and the Burrowes a four. If, like me, you consider these ladies to be two of the very best historical romance authors publishing today, I am confident that you will enjoy **Once Upon a Dream**.

This review first appeared at Romantic Historical Reviews, "Where History Meets Passion."

Lit Reader says

Another Dream by Mary Balogh

This was a Bedwyn Saga installment (6.5), very cute story. Eleanor, spinster sister-in-law of Wulfric, meets a widower Earl at a summer house party. Love blooms with the aid of the Earl's children. Writing children is tough, making them sound true to their ages and experiences, plus the particular personal character the author intends for them; in this case it was not a 100% accomplishment, but the end result was fun and endearing anyway.

4/5 stars.

Duke of my Dreams by Grace Burrowes

This was a short novella introducing a different set of aristocrats, also in the setting of a two week house party. Anne, the heroine, is a commoner heiress from an impressive but in-elegant banking fortune. The hero is a widower Duke with three boys and a lack of prejudice against the burgeoisie. The main tension seems non-existent and rather silly, until we discover a rather interesting secret which would have been so satisfying to have it explored more thoroughly.

3/5 stars.

Lu says

Considering the limitations of a novella, those two stories were very sweet and satisfying. Mary Balogh and Grace Burrowes are two top authors, so I didn't expect any different.

The first story was special to me because it is related to the Bedwyn saga and shows the aftermath of my favorite Duke's wedding. It was wonderful to see him with his kids, still aloof and distant to the people outside his close circle, but happy and warm to those within.

The heroine is his sister in law Eleonor, who after spending a lifetime grieving for a fiancé killed in battle finds in a widow with two adorable kids the chance to grab back the train of life and finally move forward. The hero is sweet and so honorable. The kids are just adorable, smart, restless matchmakers.

An evil young lady and her unbearable mama bring some conflict to the plot.

Really lovely story!

The second novella is about a widow Duke with three hellion boys and a Commoner daughter of a banker. As with the previous story, they meet by chance on the road and find out they are guests of the same house party.

She falls in love with him and his boys (who are adorable) and he falls in love right back, but she cannot marry him.

Not as good as the first, but also a great story.

Janet says

A review is a'comin. Two exceptionally well-written novellas. And here's my review (which I wrote for Heroes and Heartbreakers): <http://www.heroesandheartbreakers.com...>

It's quite long ... be warned.

Mary Balogh and Grace Burrowes clearly enjoyed creating these charming summer sojourns.

Some of Balogh's most beloved novellas feature children who have lost a parent, and "Another Dream" likewise introduces a sister and a brother who want a new mother.

Burrowes is famous for plots that careen between hysteria (often animal induced) and pathos. Anne Faraday, the heroine of "The Duke of My Dreams" is a complex, capable woman who is desperate for the warmth and relaxation that a magical house party—and a special man—could provide.

While traveling to visit her sister Christine, the beloved Duchess of Bewcastle from *Slightly Dangerous*, Eleanor Thompson's trip is interrupted by a storm. At the inn where she takes shelter, she meets two children, Georgie and her younger brother Robbie. As an experienced educator and loving aunt, Eleanor is innately respectful of children's individual personalities. When precocious, talkative Georgette invades her tea parlor, Eleanor invites her to stay. Shy Robert also feels comfortable whispering a few words to Eleanor.

Their widower papa, Michael Benning, the Earl of Staunton, is touched by Eleanor's kindness to his children, and cognizant that a lady would not feel comfortable eating in a crowded dining room alone, when he invites her to have dinner with him in his private parlor. How many times has Balogh given us this scenario and yet it never pales. As he pours Eleanor a glass of wine, Balogh reveals his allure:

Why was it, Eleanor wondered, that handsome men seemed to become even more good-looking as they aged while the opposite was true of women? . . . His face, which had probably been purely gorgeous when he was twenty, now had the firmness of character and experience to make it all the more worth looking at. Or so it seemed to her. She had not known him when he was twenty. And she was not usually given to such analysis of a man's charms. She did not usually dine alone with single gentlemen either. The room seemed suddenly very quiet.

The earl toasts "storms and the unexpected pleasures they sometimes bring." How unexpected would the dinner companions find the conversation between two conspirators upstairs, Georgie and Robbie? The children instantly recognize that Miss Eleanor Thompson is "the one," their new mama. They note her smiling eyes, and her composure and kindness to Robbie. Georgie declares:

“I think she likes us. Even me, though I talked her head off this afternoon and ate her cakes.”

Unbeknownst to Eleanor, the Benning family has also been invited to the Bedwyn summer gathering. Matchmakers abound, from the smitten children to the experienced-at-match-making Bedwyns. Even the austere duke lends a hand, when he quietly gives Eleanor permission to set aside old dreams in order to embrace new ones. He tells her,

“Sometimes our dreams lead us in the wrong direction and it would be foolish to continue pursuing them out of sheer stubbornness or the fear of disappointing others. There are other dreams waiting to be dreamed—the right dreams, the ones that will lead to contentment.”

She turned her head to look at him in some surprise. She had never heard him talk thus before.

He met her gaze. “I am a happy man, Eleanor,” he said. “I want your happiness too, not your fear of disappointing me.”

Just as Balogh has a deft touch with these types of intimate moments, Grace Burrowes is a magician at the art of creating memorable vignettes. The opening scene of “The Duke of My Dreams” has the formality of a pastoral oil painting, with lords and ladies perambulating across the grass. The Cheshire sisters give Anne Faraday the cut direct, while setting elegant lures for the eligible dukes, Sedgemere and Hardcastle who have been friends forever:

They had known each other since the casual brutality and near starvation that passed for a boy’s indoctrination at Eton, and through the wenching and wagering that masqueraded as an Oxford education.

Sedgemere is a widower with three young boys, and Hardcastle is that *rara avis*, an unmarried duke. Hardcastle is naïve and well-mannered, making him an easy target for rapacious young ladies and their mamas; Sedgemere is the protective friend. Burrowes’s description of disappointed young ladies is glorious. They are deprived of the dukes’ company:

Amid much simpering and parasol twirling, the Cheshire ladies minced back to Park Lane, there to lurk like trolls under a bridge until the next titled bachelor came along to enjoy the fresh air.

All the characters are assembled—the games can now begin. Why is Miss Faraday ignoring the august gentleman? Why did the simpering debutantes dismiss her? Although she’s a “Long Meg”, she’s not unattractive, being “tall, unfashionably curvaceous, unfashionably dark-haired.” Hardcastle asks his friend about her.

“I don’t know her well, but I like her very much,” Sedgemere said. “She hates me, you see. Has no marital aspirations in my direction whatsoever. For that alone, she enjoys my most sincere esteem.”

Anne is the daughter of a phenomenally wealthy banker: a man who controls the financial destiny of everyone from royal dukes to aspiring viscounts. Her father’s wealth does not insulate her from insults and impertinence. Sedgemere wonders why.

“Your Grace will please refrain from making a scene,” Anne said through gritted teeth. “I am the daughter of a man who holds the vowels of half the papas, uncles, and brothers of polite society.”

Sedgemere has no need of money but people who speak truthfully to him are in short supply. Accidentally,

while he and Hardcastle are traveling to the house party, he encounters the blunt Miss Faraday again at an inn. He invites her to join him in the inn's cottage garden for an al fresco luncheon. Sedgemere is weary and disheveled.

His pale hair was creased from his hat brim. Anne riffled the duke's hair back in order, as she would have with her papa.

"Better," she said. "Can't have you looking like John Coachman at the end of a hard morning's drive, Your Grace. I must have a whiff of that lavender."

As they continue to talk, Anne assembles a casual lavender boutonnière for the duke, and gradually Sedgemere extracts why she is such a reluctant member of society and why she longs to retreat to the country.

"You have all the burdens of being a duchess," he said, "but none of the benefits. I know of this weariness you mention, Miss Faraday, and the longing to retire to the country, for it plagues me as well."

Well well well, how unexpected. Anne and the duke, arm in arm, while she ponders that he is "the only titled person to ever, ever offer her kindness and understanding rather than judgment and ridicule." Two intelligent isolated people, seeing each other in a new way. They are a puzzle to each other ... a puzzle that begs to be examined. Especially after they kiss in the garden, Anne can't stop thinking about it.

Sedgemere's kiss intrigued, offering contradictions and complexities, like a business opportunity in a foreign culture. His kiss was confident without being arrogant, gentle without being chaste, ardent but respectful, intimate without presuming.

That must have been some kiss!

These novellas are the Regency equivalent of a satisfying beach read, to be enjoyed under the shade of a leafy tree, with birdsongs in the air while the footman replenishes your lemonade.

P.S. If you're curious about the romantic future of Sedgemere's friend, the Duke of Hardcastle, be sure to seek out the anthology *Dancing in the Duke's Arms* where Grace Burrowes reveals all.

herdys says

What a lovely short story! I was so glad Eleanore got her chance at happiness. Balogh keeps tagging my heart strings with her quirky and lovable kids. Please never stop! I also LOVED that we got to see Lizzy making friends and everyone just being happy!

Sruthi says

I read the story by Mary Balogh, Only and Only because I could read more of Wulfric, Can you believe it ? I wanted to hate him so much when I first read his character and now I am head over heals in love with him. Oh Wulfric, Pls do meet me in real world.

It was short and sweet, I just wish Eleanor and Micheal had more between them rather than two matchmaking kids. It was just too short and I didn't get enough of my Wulfric .
