



## The Proposal

*Mary Balogh*

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## **The Proposal** Mary Balogh

Gwendoline, Lady Muir, has seen her share of tragedy. Content in a quiet life with friends and family, the young widow has no desire to marry again. But when Hugo, Lord Trentham, scoops her up in his arms after a fall, she feels a sensation that both shocks and emboldens her. Hugo is a gentleman in name only: a war hero whose bravery earned him a title, a merchant's son who inherited his wealth. He is happiest when working the land, but duty and title now demand that he finds a wife. Hugo doesn't wish to court Gwen, yet he cannot resist her guileless manner, infectious laugh, and lovely face. He wants her, but will she have him? The dour ex-military officer who so gallantly carried Gwen to safety is a man who needs a lesson in winning a woman's heart. But through courtship and seduction, Gwen soon finds that with each kiss, and with every caress, Hugo captivates her more—with his desire, with his love, and with the promise of forever.

## **The Proposal Details**

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Author : Mary Balogh

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# From Reader Review The Proposal for online ebook

## Olga Godim says

### 4.5 stars

After rereading this novel, I'm bumping the rating up and updating my review.

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I loved this book. I like most books by this author, so I wasn't surprised. Looking back though my reviews, I can see that I read and reviewed this novel before, when it first came out in 2012, but I didn't remember the story, so it felt like a fresh read.

The tale is a classic historical romance. Gwen and Hugo belong to different classes. She is a lady, with many generations of aristocracy behind her. He is a middle-class man, granted his title and land for his valor in the war against Napoleon. He doesn't much like nobility and he definitely doesn't feel like one of them.

Both have suffered in the past and bear scars, although those scars are not always visible. Both are mature people, over thirty years old, not naïve youngsters. When they first meet, there is an instant attraction, mixed with dislike—they are too different. The rest of the novel unfolds around these two trying to find a way towards each other, while simultaneously resisting the attraction. To paraphrase Hugo, "it would be daft" to tie their lives together, for various reasons, but love is a demanding mistress and wouldn't be denied.

Besides belonging to different classes, they also belong to different sexes (surprise!) and not always understand each other, or rather Hugo doesn't always understand Gwen. She, like many intuitive women, is much better in getting the emotional nuances straight.

Below is a wonderful quote—Hugo's baffled contemplation on the mystery of women.

~~~~~

Had she meant it? He had thought so at the time, but really, could women—ladies—be so blasé about sexual encounters? Men could. But women? Had he been too ready to take her at her words?

What if she was with child and would not write to him.

And why could he not stop thinking of her day or night... always she was there at the back of his mind—and sometimes not so far back.

Gwendoline.

He would be an idiot to marry her.

But she would save him from idiocy. She would not marry him even if he asked. She had made it very clear that she didn't want him to ask.

But had she meant it?

He wished he understood women better. It was a well-known fact that they didn't mean half of what they said.

But which half did they mean?

He would be an idiot.

~~~~~

So the two disparate partners play an ancient game of wooing and seduction, courting each other and retreating again. Almost like a chess game, although in the end, both are the winners.

The story grows gently: no mystery or danger is involved in the blossoming romance. Not many pages are devoted to sex scenes either, which I consider a plus. The bed time is there, when necessary, but the intercourse descriptions are kept to an absolute minimum. It's all very classy, and the suspense comes from within the protagonists, interspersed with faint but unmistakable humor. Would they finally accept their differences? Would they cross the line between classes and find happiness together? Would it work for

them?

Of course, in the best traditions of the genre, it does work, but the author doesn't deceive her readers. She and her characters know it's not going to be simple or easy. But it is doable.

I liked this novel so much that I already borrowed the next two novels in the series from my library. I'm starting the next one tonight.

Recommended for everyone who likes historical romance.

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#### OLD REVIEW (2012)

A gentle, low-key romance between two vastly unsuitable people, a man and a woman from different social classes. The author doesn't introduce a mystery or a thriller into her story to make it interesting. Instead, she delves deep into the thoughts and emotions of the protagonists: Gwendoline, Lady Muir, and Hugo, a former military officer. Both are ridden with guilt. Both harbor wounds of the soul, all the more painful for being invisible. The past hasn't been kind to either of them. But now, the past is over, and the present cheerfully reasserts itself.

For his valor in Napoleonic wars, Hugo was awarded the title of Lord Trentham, but he doesn't consider himself a lord. He is firmly middle class and proud of his roots. Now he needs a wife and he is set to look for her among his own social strata.

Gwen, a lady through and through and a sister to an earl, has been a widow for seven years. Her first marriage wasn't happy. Still feeling fragile, she doesn't wish to remarry.

They meet by chance, and both resent and resist their instant, senseless attraction to each other. In the beginning, they don't particularly like each other. Besides, both are realists. Whatever the demands of their bodies, they know that there could be no happily-ever-after for them: the social chasm between an umpteenth-generation noblewoman and a son of a self-made businessman is almost bottomless in Georgian England.

But love wouldn't be denied. It doesn't care for social conventions, and the arrows of Cupid catch both his targets square in the hearts.

Their story – a story of two damaged people searching for absolution and peace but finding love in an unexpected place – is infused with quiet dignity. No steam, no mad escapades. Just a man and a woman groping in the dark towards each other, finding forgiveness and understanding in each other's arms.

Tales of lovers from different classes or castes aren't too plentiful in fiction, maybe because such stories have rarely ended happily in real life. Everyone knows that it's much easier to adjust to a life partner, when you both have been raised with the same set of values and traditions. Common wisdom, often personified by families, invariable put obstacles into the paths of sweethearts from different social layers. But still, it's happened, in life and in fiction, more and more often these days. And among the fictional accounts of such occasions, this novel is probably one of the best.

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#### Crista says

When it comes to Regency Romance, Mary Balogh is really in a class of her own. The Proposal is another example, along with countless others, that prove why this statement is true.

I think what I have come to appreciate and expect from Balogh is a story that is filled emotion and characters that come to life. You won't find "edge of your seat action" but you will find a story that has the ability to capture your heart and engage your emotions. This is what I appreciate about this author.

Hugo and Gwen are both damaged and scarred from past traumas. Hugo has survived the war, but definitely carries some post traumatic stress from his experience along with survivor's guilt. Gwen is a widow with a painful marriage in her past. She walks with a limp and has no plans to ever marry again.

On paper...these two individuals have no business being together. There is a class difference, and both are wounded. However, Balogh weaves her familiar magic and these unlikely lovers come to find one another and find healing.

A truly heartwarming read.

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### **Carol \*Young at Heart Oldie\* says**

**I LOVED THIS BOOK! Mary Balogh weaves an intelligent and touching story of two people from different social classes who find love. It's an emotionally satisfying, character-driven romance written with her insightful glimpses into the human heart.**

This is the first book in the series about a group of survivors of the Napoleonic Wars, all left scarred (emotionally, physically or both) by their experiences, who form a close bond while convalescing. **THE PROPOSAL** tells Hugo Emes, Lord Trentham's story.

Hugo inherited his father's vast business and trading empire and is vastly wealthy but proud of his middle class roots. He is brusque and plain spoken, and frowning seems to be his perpetual expression. He likes to spend time at his country home where he can enjoy peace and privacy and share the company of his adored half-sister, Constance. Hugo also carries a heavy burden of guilt, blaming himself for the deaths of his three hundred men lost in battle. There is something endearing about Hugo because despite his fierce and dour appearance, I knew he was kind and caring as it is so evident in his love for Constance and his desire to see her happy.

Gwen is the perfect lady...beautiful, elegant, poised and charming. Since the tragic death of her husband, she has been happy to remain a widow, content in providing help and support to her family and friends. I loved her cheerfulness and sense of humour and the fact that she never lets her physical handicap define who she is. I admired her strength during the difficult times in her marriage and the way she cared for and supported her "sick" husband. She also carries a heavy sense of guilt over his death, believing that had she acted differently, he may not have died.

The romance between Hugo and Gwen developed slowly which I really liked. It allowed time for mutual trust to grow until they were able to confide their deepest secrets to each other. It allowed them both to realise they shouldn't feel guilt over their past actions. Both of them grow and change as they fall in love but it is Hugo who undergoes the most significant but subtle changes; doing things he'd never done before...

*He winked at her. Winked. He could not remember ever winking before in his life.*

things he found himself enjoying...

*He had never had a teasing relationship with any woman—or any sort of relationship, for that matter. It was all new and strange to him. And wonderful.*

I love how Gwen is accepted wholeheartedly by Hugo's family and the scenes played out against the background of the anniversary celebrations are some of my favourites – full of fun, laughter and lovely family moments.

We are introduced to the others members of The Survivors' Club and I know I will be reading their books too.

**MY VERDICT: A wonderful classic Regency romance. Highly recommended!**

**REVIEW RATING: 5/5 STARS**

*The Survivors' Club series (click on the book covers for more details):*

This review is also posted on my Rakes and Rascals Blog:

<https://rakesandrascals.wordpress.com...>

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**Dorothea says**

I went into this book with fairly low expectations. Here's why:

(1) This is the first of a new series, involving the members of a group called "The Survivors' Club". Here is Mary Balogh's description of that club, taken from her website:

The seven members of the club, six men and one woman, are survivors of the Napoleonic Wars, five of them former military officers. All seven were variously wounded during the wars and ended up spending several years at Penderris Hall, the Cornish estate of the Duke of Stanbrook, healing and recuperating. The duke was not an active participant in the wars, but his only son was. He died in the Peninsula. The one woman is the widow of a reconnaissance officer, who was captured as a spy in the Peninsula and tortured by the French. She was present during part of the torture and the death of her husband. The seven are all nominally healed, but they return to Penderris for a few weeks each year to spend time with one another, to draw strength from one another and help with any problem that might have arisen.

What worried me here is that this setup seems like it will give Balogh a lot of opportunities to write about characters with disabilities. She's often done so before and while she could usually have done it a great deal *worse*, she could have done better too. A recurring theme, especially among male characters who became physically disabled in an accident or war, is independent stoicism as a virtue -- these characters show that they're not crushed in spirit by viewing their disability as a challenge to overcome, e.g. someone with a painfully twisted leg forcing himself to walk as though nothing were wrong, instead of allowing himself to lean on a cane or roll in a wheelchair. Female characters with disabilities tend to be very sweet and compassionate to others. Nobody complains or expects that others should make accommodations for them (or if they do it's a sign of bad character). Also, I can't think of any of her disabled characters who know

anybody else with a similar disability -- they're all kind of isolated.

(The excellent blog Diary of a Goldfish has two recent posts on "10 Things Fiction Writers Need to Remember About Disability" (1-5, 6-10) -- some of these tips would really improve Balogh's -- and other authors' of course -- writing!)

(2) Gwen, the heroine of this story, was introduced to these many books ago as the sister of the Other Woman in *One Night for Love* (by the way, one thing I like about Balogh is that she doesn't really do the Other Woman. That particular character was the heroine of her own book, *A Summer to Remember*, which I've heard is many people's favorite Balogh novel). Gwen is one of those sweet and uncomplaining female characters with a disability; in her case she limps because of a badly-set broken leg.

(3) Okay, this is a silly reason, but since Gwen was this persistently unpartnered character in so many books, when Balogh started writing her *Simply* series about a group of schoolteachers in Bath (which overlaps with the two above-mentioned books and the *Slightly* series), I invented a really awesome conclusion to that series in which Claudia Martin, the stern headmistress of the school, ends up with Gwen. I actually persuaded myself that this good idea was apparent outside of my own head, and that Balogh might actually write that book and that her publisher might actually publish it as part of a mainstream historical romance series. Of course, that did not happen. Miss Martin ended up with some guy. But when I read that the first marriageable member of the Survivors' Club (*not* the lady with PTSD) was going to be inflicted on Gwen, Gwen of all people, my bitter disappointment at the heterosexism of mainstream romance novel publishing welled up again...

Well, Gwen is straight and that's that, I guess. I was able to shove aside that particular elephant in my reading-room long enough to pay attention to who Gwen is in this story, rather than in the story I'd told myself.

So, happily, I found that my #2 worry wasn't (at least, to my standards) really a problem. I think that Balogh did a pretty solid job of making Gwen a character *with* a mild disability -- it affects her life in a few persistent ways, but her character and her story are definitely not *about* her disability. (Balogh actually made her temporarily *more* disabled at the beginning of the story -- she twists her ankle going up a cliff and the hero rescues her; it turns out the sprain is bad enough that she has to stay at Penderris Hall with the hero for a few days. This is of course a pretty convenient way to throw the couple together, but I wonder if there's not more to be said about that particular accident happening to Gwen. However, this review is going to be long enough without going any further into that.)

Once Gwen and the hero of the story (Hugo) are friends and thinking about being more, he teases her a couple of times about her disability.

Hugo: Hey Gwen, I can't court you after all.

Gwen: Oh? Why now?

Hugo: Oh, you're not perfect. You limp!

Gwen: LOL.

That actually worked for me, because it seemed clear that Gwen knows that Hugo doesn't actually give a damn about her limp, and Hugo knows that most people either studiously avoid mentioning her limp or are very solicitous and pitying to her about it, so teasing her about it would actually be a nice change for a while.

Anyway, Hugo is not physically disabled at all; he just has a gigantic amount of survivor's guilt. (I think Balogh did a pretty good job of taking what could have been terrible manpain and turning it into Hugo

having the ability to empathise with and comfort Gwen when she reveals *her* dark secret past.) This means that the opportunities for disability fail did not follow Gwen and Hugo when they left the Survivors' Club, where the story begins.

The beginning of the story was really the problem with it, and why I'm giving *The Proposal* two stars instead of three. Balogh made what I think is a mistake by describing the Survivors' Club before introducing Hugo. I think perhaps she expected readers' interest to be heightened by the premise of the Club and, maybe, some kind of compassion stimulated by knowing that terrible things had happened to all these people. Sure, okay, but knowing that a fictional character has been hurt does not by itself make me want to read a book about him or her. There's a scene, later, after Hugo has shown up and started *doing* things, in which he briefly explains the Survivors' Club to Gwen. I think Balogh should have cut out most of the beginning and let this explanation do all the work. The Survivors' Club is more interesting as part of Hugo's character development than the other way around.

I think what really bothered me (apart from the beginning being simply *boring*) was that I felt that I was being expected to have certain reactions to the members of the Club -- so tragic! so noble! so good to each other! -- and that these reactions were supposed to make me like *The Proposal* et sequelae more. I wasn't having those reactions, so it felt a bit manipulative.

An even longer review would say more about one of the more important sources of conflict in Gwen and Hugo's relationship. He's middle-class and she's upper-class; they (especially Hugo) worry that if they marry, they'll feel out of place with each other's families and social groups. I like how Hugo tackled this problem head-on by inviting Gwen to a sort of family reunion. Of course, all the family members are so nice and friendly that the problem disappears and the reader never has to think too hard about class inequality... well, it's a romance novel. (Aside: Rose Lerner and Susanna Fraser are two new writers who are doing *fantastic* jobs of actually addressing class issues in historical romance, while writing really great stories.)

Hugo tackling things head-on might be my favorite thing about *The Proposal*. He is blunt, a bit tactless sometimes, and totally lacking in social graces, but really a very kind person. Introspection and explaining his feelings are not habitual to him, but he muddles through them with sincerity when necessary. I think Balogh did a very good job of writing the scenes from his perspective, making them rather charmingly his. In the end it was completely understandable that Gwen would like him, as well as love him -- even though he is not Claudia Martin -- bah!

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### **Wollstonecrafthomegirl says**

It's been a long while since I read a Balogh and, oh boy, this one hit a serious sweet spot for me. This, to me, is everything that's good about historical romance. Two well drawn characters, not too much drama for the sake of drama, lovely dialogue and the close examination of a growing romance. It's grown up, in the best way possible. I'll start with Hugo because he was great. I love that he spoke his mind and shocked Gwen so completely with it. His bluntness made me smile, even a passing comment about why Gwen would shorten her name when Gwendoline was such a lovely name, was just so unexpectedly honest. When he stripped off and went swimming in front of her, that was brilliant. That scene in a lot of ways captures the essence of this book, there's sometimes a paucity of words between these two characters but often it's what is not being said which is really important. Particularly for Hugo who covers his emotions and his inadequacies by not revealing his feelings - for example, agreeing with Gwen that she looked like a drowned rat and then later thinking to himself that she was beautiful no matter what the state of her clothing, or handing her into a

carriage and just saying 'have a good trip' despite all that had passed between them (at that point numerous kisses and passionate sex). It might seem as though there's a lack of passion there or love or romance but I think Balogh does a good job of conveying that his feelings and emotions towards Gwen are taking place in between all this plain speaking (it's a Knightley thing - "if I loved you less perhaps I could express it more" [Austen is rolling over in her grave, that's not the exact quote, but you get what I'm saying]). Then there's Gwen who tumbles into an affair and then love with this unlikely man despite swearing off marriage altogether. She's a little less strong as a character but I liked her very much. Both h/H make early judgments about the other and then they're forced to revise them. The sex is really, really great typical Balogh not too explicit and there's not too much of it, but what there was worked for me because I really like the characters. There's no dirty talk as such in this book but Hugo's desire for 'lusty sex' and his willingness to talk about that fact ("The next time" he said, "if there is a next time, I want you naked.") was great. There was one thing which keeps this from being a five star for me and it's only a hairs breadth away, in reality. I think the class differences point was hit a little bit too hard and could've been handled in a slightly subtler manner. Sometimes Hugo was overly judgmental of Gwen even when she'd proved herself not to be a snob or someone who would shy away from the confrontations he experiences because of his actions during the war, some of the inner monologue on this point could've been edited out without the book losing anything at all. This is me being picky though, Balogh is a genius of the genre and I suspect she can take it. I still recommend this book wholeheartedly, it's wonderful.

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### **Leona says**

Somewhat disappointing. It started out very strong with a great premise, but it just fizzled out and got very long winded in certain places. Just when I thought there was going to be a compelling conflict that would grab my interest and keep me turning those pages, things turned lukewarm. I actually fell asleep at one point, which is unheard of when reading an MB regency romance.

*2.5 stars*

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### **Jacob Proffitt says**

So it turns out this is my first by this author. It won't be my last. Yes, I enjoyed it very much. I'm not entirely sure what to say about the book, so this is likely to be a bit disjointed.

First, Balogh transplants some modern sensibilities into the Regency era, but does so in consistent enough ways that I didn't really mind. Yeah, group therapy and a man who is obviously fast-cycling bi-polar being described as "ill but not mad" are both rather modern constructs transplanted into that time. And other psychological constructs regarding love and acceptance are presented as obvious (if hard-won) wisdom learned through experience rather than the rather radical concepts they'd have been for their time. And, of course, religion is as present as it is in most Regency romances (i.e. completely absent).

Which sounds like a lot of bad things. And if you're a period purist they might just be. Still, if you're willing to bend with the period a bit, the story is good and the characters are kind of wonderful. I liked Gwen immediately, even as I worried she would turn out to be a doormat or pushover (she isn't—she's just kind).

And Hugo is a big teddy bear, if a somewhat lusty one.

And I liked them working out emotional space to connect with each other. I mean, you can see how attached they get rather early (that's not hard, what with the beach sex and all) but they have rather a long ways to go before being able to be together. They really are from functionally different worlds and they both have to work out how they're going to bridge the gaps (both separately and with each other). I like that Balogh doesn't shortcut the difficulties they'll face and that she gives the characters space and time to work things out—sometimes by actually *talking it over with each other*. What a concept.

And at least one reason I got over the anachronistic psych 101 is that Balogh has some interesting things to say about going through bad things and learning to accept both your own failings and the failings of those around you (even the ones that hurt deeply). There are moments of forgiveness that are true gifts, here, and I'm rather glad to see those explored, even if they were kind of displaced in time.

Which makes this a solid four star read all the way through. I bounced out of the story on some of the modern mental frameworks being discussed in rather modern ways, but the payload of the story was rich enough to dampen what might normally have tossed me hard enough to not come back.

**A note about Steamy:** This is the middle of my steam range. There are two explicit scenes of moderate length. I also liked that the characters maintain period concerns enough that threat of pregnancy is discussed as a realistic risk. Indeed, this is another point on the axis of "talk about actual relationship things" that I came to appreciate in the book.

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**Jessica's Totally Over The Top Book Obsession says**

### **3 Meh Stars**

The Proposal was my first Mary Balogh book, and it was just okay for me. The first half went very slow. I found myself very bored at times. The second half was much better, but still kinda slow. I really liked Gwen. I found her to be sweet, smart, and loyal. Hugo on the other hand was hard to warm up to. He was wishy washy, very dull, and at times flat. I think the author meant for him to be broody, damaged, and deep. Instead he came off one dimensional. Hugo drove me nuts with his.... should I court Gwen? Yes I will court her! I love her. No I will not court her she is upper class and I am middle class it will never work!, and around and around he went. I want a hero that knows what he wants and goes for it. Mary Balogh had a very old world writing style that reminded me of Jane Austen which I loved. However she was very long winded and wordy. At times she would have both Gwen and Hugo relive the same scene making it redundant. Still there was enjoyable moments to the book. So I gave it a middle of the road 3 stars. The second half really helped save this book for me.

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### **Tina says**

We first meet Gwen, Lady Muir in One Night for Love. She is the slightly lame sister of the hero, Neville, of that book. Although One Night For Love has spawned a metric ton of spin-off books (The entire Bedwyn

series being one of them), at no time did I ever suspect we'd be getting Gwen's story.

It took me awhile to realize the connection, but it was a fun aha! moment when it did. Gwen is long widowed with a lot of buried guilt regarding her marriage. She is visiting a friend who is newly widowed, when she sprains her ankle on the beach and meets the hero, Hugo Emes, Lord Trentham.

I have to say I simply fell in love with Hugo. What a great character. He is a war hero who came back from the war suffering from PTSD and his own incredible guilt. He formed a friendship a small group of survivors of the war who also carried their own scars, both physical and mental.

At heart Hugo is a decent gentle sort who comes from an upper middle class background. He has never had any great ambition, he only has ever wanted to live a quiet comfortable life. But his foray into war changed all that. He is feted and given great honors because of what he did on the battlefield, all the time he doesn't feel at all worthy of it.

When he rescues Gwen they are immediately attracted to one another. Although Balogh is very subtle in how she lets their attraction manifest. It isn't bolt of lightning and immediate lust, but it is an acknowledged attraction and Hugo speaks very frankly about how much he likes and wants Gwen.

The meat of the story is their courtship. They fall almost reluctantly in love with each other. Each one of them has internal issues that doesn't allow them to completely let go. And Hugo, although he has been elevated to a Lord, is conscious of a class divide between him and Gwen. But they talk to each other and get to know each other. The build of their romance is well done and completely sweeps the reader along.

There are nice bits of humor strung throughout. You smile as Hugo and Gwen get comfortable enough with each other to have inside jokes.

Fans of Balogh who have read all the books that have spun from One Night for Love will be treated to a who's who of walk-ons by various characters from those books. There is even a memorable scene that includes Wulfric Bedwyn (who remains my favorite Balogh hero ever).

When I finished the book I closed it with a happy sigh. A good book should always elicit that reaction.

*review is from an ARC through the Amazon Vine program*

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### **Diane says**

I reached for this novel the same way a drowning man reaches for a life preserver.

After a difficult month, it was a relief to lose myself in a charming historical romance. We meet the brave and scowling Lord Trentham, who fought in the Napoleonic wars and feels guilty about all of the men who died under his command, and the lovely widow Lady Muir, who is nursing her own emotional wounds after a difficult marriage. Trentham feels pressure to marry, but Lady Muir has vowed never to marry again. Oh no! And yet, they seem perfect for each other. If only those two got together maybe they could help each other heal...

This is the first of a new series for Mary Balogh, and it's delightful. I had previously loved her Bedwyn Saga

and her Simply Quartet, and based on this first volume, her new Survivors' Club is very promising.

I am in a bit of awe for how well-developed Balogh's characters are. Each novel references other families and back stories from different books, and I wish I could peek at her notes to know how she keeps it all organized. In my opinion, she is a queen of historical romance.

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### **Shawna says**

4 stars – Historical/Regency Romance

This is a nice start to a very promising new septet series by the refined queen of traditional, authentic Regency era romance, Mary Balogh. The relationship between Gwendoline, Lady Muir and Hugo, Lord Trentham was engaging, refreshing, and heartfelt. But what I loved most about it is the deep bond and earnest affection between the seven members of the "Survivor's Club", and I look forward to the other books, particularly Flavian, Viscount Ponsonby's and Vincent Hunt, Lord Darleigh's.

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### **MAP says**

Mary Balogh, in most of her books, follows a very specific, somewhat annoying formula: hero and heroine meet, they slowly realize they have feelings for each other, they have sex -- once -- he offers for her hand and she refuses it, and then they go their separate ways only to be thrown together again and eventually propelled into marriage. Except for a very very few of her books, this formula is a guarantee and it seriously pushes all my "wallpaper historical" buttons. **HOWEVER**, I read her books because she often has interesting and complex characters, witty and well-written dialogue, and explores situations that are deeper and more realistic than many romance novels, including having characters with developmental disabilities, having people who come from abusive homes, and psychological issues and struggles. And, unlike most romance novels, she doesn't hand wave it all with a "true love conquers all" mentality.

Except for this book. I bought this book when it first came out because the premise of the series seemed interesting, but abandoned it halfway through. I recently got an alert from Amazon that the next in the series was being released soon, had a vague memory of liking the character that would feature in it, and went back to this book to finish it since I couldn't remember why I had abandoned it in the first place.

Oh. Right.

All those things up there I brag on Mary Balogh about? NOT IN THIS BOOK. Oh don't get me wrong, the formula is there. Oh boy is it ever. But there are no interesting and complex characters, difficult pasts are handwaved, and while I usually, generously elevate Balogh 1 or 2 steps above wallpaper historical, the dialogue, especially between the hero and heroine, was SO completely bizarre, anachronistic, and just plain stupid that I cringed throughout the whole thing. 16 year olds on fanfiction.net could write something better than this. The books tries -- it really tries -- to pull itself together in the second half, but nothing doing.

So I'm going to try to next book because the main character in it is more interesting to me than the main

characters in this book were, but if it's along the same lines, Balogh may have lost a customer. No historical fiction tag for you!

PS: Does anyone ever feel that, sometimes, when they read an author enough, they learn more about the author himself/herself than any of the characters in the books? Sometimes they learn a little TOO much about the author? Mary Balogh has an outdoor sex scene in EVERY. GODDAMN. BOOK. and I do not know why. I'm starting to think it's a fetish of hers in her own life, and frankly, I didn't want to know that.

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### **Preeti ♥? (Romance She Reads) says**

Conflicted, very conflicted about the book and quite unsure how to rate it!  
And is it just me or are all tall, 'huge' Hs named Hugh or Hugo?

Conflicted not because it's complicated or deals with complex issues. Rather it's quite simple and straightforward in its premise – two people attracted to each other right from the beginning, have sex, are even halfway in love but not ready to take the final step forward to matrimony. Although the reason comes couched in many layers but it all boils down to class divide and in his case a bad case of inverse snobbery and inferiority complex. But wait even the H has some misgivings on marrying below her.

Sad as it starts so beautifully and you can't help but root for this 'opposites attract' couple. They are lost in their own way with the past weighing heavily on their souls. I like their characterizations- interestingly and strongly etched.

The initial hesitation and reservations seems valid and reasonable and I enjoyed their dancing around till it became tedious and I lost my patience with the round and round we go!

This is a sweet book with endearing characters, and with some really tender and sensitive moments but also tries one's tolerance severely with its slow burn. And I don't want to read about dozens of other people and their opinions/ lives – his friends first (from the series), then her family (another series) and then his family (middle class so don't really qualify for a series of their own!)

So in the beginning, I thought I'd stumbled onto a 5 starrer, then it slackens to a 4, then to a 3 and finally rounds off to 3-3.5 for some flashes of originality if not brilliance. The rating also corresponds to how I rated the H actually. He went from a perfect tortured and dour alpha war hero to a boring insecure middle class beta.

He read my thoughts I guess!

*"I am just an ordinary man, Gwendoline," he said. "Perhaps that is what I have been trying to say to you all this time."*

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### **Sarah says**

15/08 - This wasn't too bad, but I would have enjoyed it much more if Trentham had been less clinical during the sex scenes. I felt like I was reading a step-by-step manual - 1. put your hand here 2. now kiss her here, and so on. I felt like saying to Balogh "just because they're old (30s), doesn't mean everything has to feel rehearsed or choreographed, they can be just as spontaneous as the younger couples of other romance books." I enjoyed the relationship between Trentham and the rest of the Survivor's Club, and if Balogh writes

more about them I'll look forward to ???'s (the blind boy, can't remember his name) story.

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### **WhiskeyintheJar/Kyraryker says**

3.5 stars

This felt strangely dispassionate in its passion. Maybe too stiff upper lip for me? Not sure but I really started to enjoy the couple more towards the end when they began to warm up to each other, teasing and being a little feisty. Definitely keeping on with the series.

Thank you to all that recommended :)

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