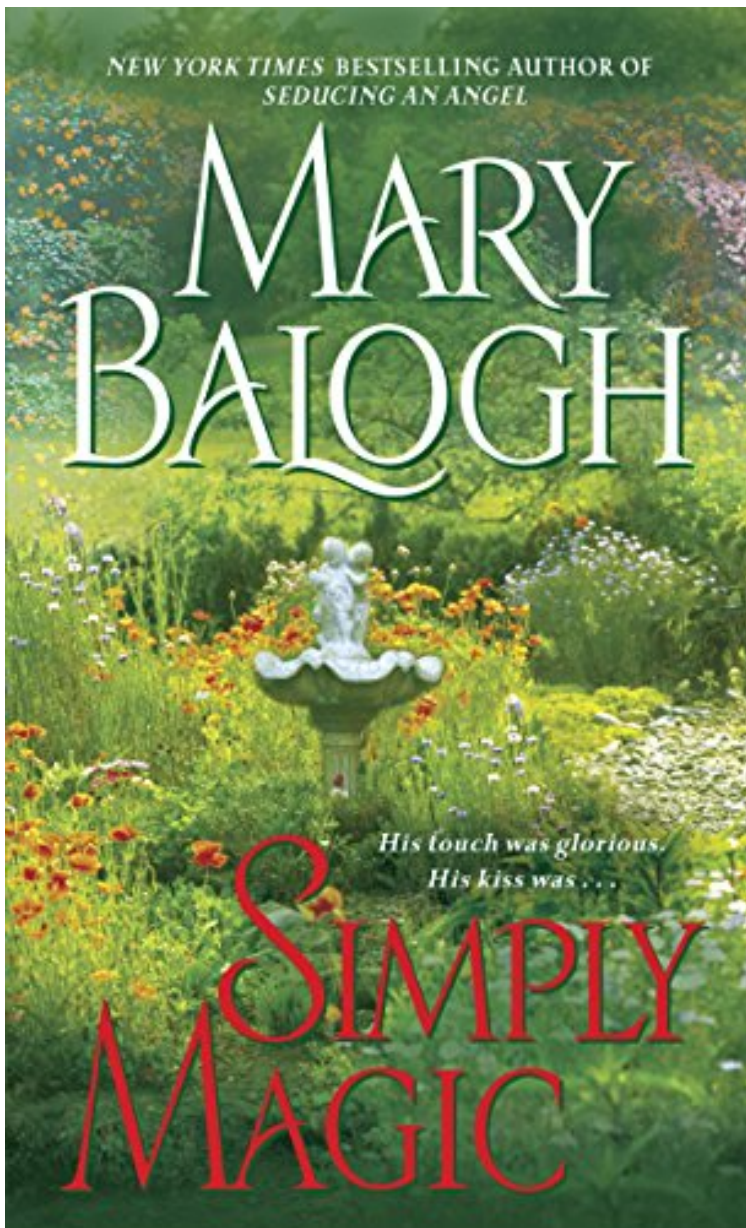


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Simply Magic



Par Mary Balogh
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurBONUS: This edition contains an excerpt from Mary Balogh's The Secret Mistress.On a splendid August afternoon Susanna Osbourne is introduced to the most handsome man she has ever seen . . . and instantly feels the icy chill of recognition. Peter Edgeworth, Viscount Whitleaf, is utterly charmingand seemingly unaware that they have met before. With his knowing smile and seductive gaze, Peter acts the rake; but he stirs something in Susanna she has never felt before, a yearning that both frightens and dazzles her. Instantly she knows: this brash nobleman poses a threat to her heart . . . and to the secrets she guards so

desperately. From the moment they meet, Peter is drawn to Susanna's independence, dazzled by her sharp wit which simply must have her. But the more he pursues, the more Susanna withdraws . . . until a sensual game of thrust-and-parry culminates in a glorious afternoon of passion. Now more determined than ever to keep her by his side, Peter begins to suspect that a tragic history still haunts Susanna. And as he moves closer to the truth, Peter is certain of one thing: he will defy the mysteries of her past for a future with this exquisite creature. All Susanna must do is trust him with the most precious secret of all. . . .

Extrait Chapter One "Hmm." Peter Edgeworth, Viscount Whitleaf, frowned at the letter he had been reading as he folded it and set it down beside his breakfast plate. John Raycroft, seated at the opposite end of the table, lowered the morning paper from in front of his face and raised his eyebrows. "Bad news?" Peter sighed audibly. "I have been really looking forward to going home," he said, "despite the fact that I have enjoyed the last couple of weeks here with you and your family and hate to drag myself away when the whole neighborhood has been so hospitable. I have been actually eager to go at last, dash it all. But I made the mistake of letting my mother know my intention, and she has planned a grand welcome home. She has invited a houseful of guests to stay for a few weeks, including a Miss Rose Larchwell, whoever the devil she may be. I have never heard of her. Have you? I tell you, Raycroft, this is no laughing matter." But his protest came too late. John Raycroft was already chuckling as he set down the paper and gave his full attention to his friend. They had the room to themselves, the rest of the family having breakfasted earlier while the two of them were still out riding. "Clearly your mother is eager to marry you off," John said. "It is hardly surprising, Whitleaf, when you are her only son and in the wrong half of your twenties." "I am only twenty-six," Peter protested, frowning again. "And five years older than you were the last time your mother tried something similar and failed," Raycroft reminded him, still grinning. "Doubtless she thinks it is high time she tried again. But you can always say no as you did last time." "Hmm," Peter said again, not sharing his friend's amusement. That was an episode in his life that had been far from funny. He had outraged the ton, which collectively believed that he had come far too close to betrothing himself to Bertha Grantham to withdraw honorably, even though no formal announcement had yet been made. And he had delighted the younger male members of the beau monde, who had thought him one devil of a fine fellow for thumbing his nose at the polite world by crying off from a leg shackle at the last possible moment. Dash it, it had not been funny at all. He had been at the tender age of twenty-one, innocent as a babe in arms, and cheerfully proceeding along the path through life his family and guardians had mapped out for him. Good God, he had even fallen dutifully in love with Bertha because it was expected of him. He had not even realized he possessed such a thing as a backbone until shock had caused him to flex it and put an end to that almost-engagement in a damnably gauche and public manner. It had been a very raw and painful backbone for a long time after that, though he had flexed it again only an hour or so later by sending his uncles and former guardians packing with the declaration that since he had reached his majority he did not need them any longer, thank you very much. Though he was not at all sure he had thanked them. "The thing is," he said, "that the girl's hopes have possibly been raised, or her mama's anyway, not to mention her father's and her sisters' and brothers' and grandparents' and cousins'.

Lord!" "Perhaps," John Raycroft said, "you will like her, Whitleaf. Perhaps she will live up to her name." Peter grimaced. "I probably will," he agreed. "I like women in general. But that is not the point, is it? I don't intend marrying her or anyone else not of my own choosing even if she is as lovely as a thousand roses combined. And so I will be in the impossible situation of having to be courteous and amiable to her without giving the impression that I am courting her. And yet everyone else at this infernal house party will know very well why she has been invited. My mother will see to that. I tell you, Raycroft, you can wipe that grin off your face anytime you like." John Raycroft laughed again as he tossed his napkin on top of the newspaper. "My deepest commiserations, old chap," he said. "It is a nasty affliction to be rich and titled and eligible and to have been known since the tender age of twenty-one as a breaker of hearts. That fact only adds to your attractions, of course, at least as far as the gentler sex is concerned. But you are going to have to marry sooner or later. It is one of the obligations of your rank. Why not sooner?" "But why not later?" Peter said hastily, picking up his knife and fork and tucking into what remained of his eggs and ham. "I am not like you, Raycroft. I cannot look upon a woman across a crowded ballroom one evening, recognize her as the one and only love of my life, court her devotedly to the exclusion of all others for a whole year, and then be content to betroth myself to her and wait for another year while she gallivants off to the ends of Europe." "To Vienna to be precise," his friend said. "With her parents, who planned the treat for her aeons ago. And not for a full year, Whitleaf. They will be back next spring. We will be married before the summer is out. And one of these days you will know why I would wait three times as long if I had to. Your problem

is that you are indiscriminating. You only have to look at a woman to fall in love with her. You fall in love with everyone and therefore with no one." "There is safety in numbers." Peter grinned reluctantly. "But I say, Raycroft I do not exactly fall in love with women, you know. I just like them." He did too perhaps fortunately.

It was only love or any other deep commitment that he had cried off. But his liking for women and for all people, come to that had saved him from moving from babe in arms to cynic in the course of one ghastly day. His friend shook his head. "What are you going to do, then?" he asked, nodding in the direction of the letter. "Go home and land slap in the middle of your mother's matchmaking party or stay here at Hareford House? Why not change your mind about leaving tomorrow and stay for the full month after all? Write and tell your mama that I was devilish disappointed when I heard you were planning to cut your visit short. Tell her my mother was brokenhearted. Tell her you feel obliged to stay for the village assembly the week after next. None of those facts would be an outright lie. In fact, the neighborhood will probably go into deep mourning if you do not make an appearance at the assembly. It might be canceled for lack of interest. It is a good thing I am betrothed to Alice and secure in her affections. Being with you is enough to plunge any unattached fellow into mortal gloom. No other male exists for the ladies when you are within a ten-mile radius." Peter laughed though he was still not really feeling amused. The thing was that after five years of floundering around with only his own very limited wisdom to guide him, leading meanwhile the empty, aimless existence of a typical young gentleman about town, he had finally made a few firm decisions about his future. It was time to go home to Sidley Park. For five years he had made only brief visits there before returning to his life in London or Brighton or at one of the spas. It was time to take charge of his life and his estate and the responsibilities that went with his rank. It was time, in other words, to grow up and be the man he had been educated to be and actually the man he had always dreamed of being, even if the dream had been interrupted for rather too long. He had grown up loving Sidley and the knowledge that it was his and had been since the death of his father when he was three. Aimless pleasure was not really for him, he had decided during the Season in London this year. Neither were wild oats, though he had sown a few. He had wasted five years of his life. Though they had not been wholly wasted, he supposed. He had learned to stand on his own feet even if he was still not as firm on them as he hoped to be. And he had learned to filter through everything he had been taught by a loving mother and five sisters, and by a host of strict guardians, to decide what was important and what was to be permanently rejected. They had let him down badly five years ago, those guardians not to mention his mother. But basically, he had come to realize, they had given him a sound upbringing. It was time to stop feeling sorry for himself and punishing himself as well as them. It was time to become the person he wanted to be. No one else could do that but him after all. It had felt enormously satisfying to put himself finally in charge of his own life. Of course, he had promised to spend a month at Hareford House with Raycroft after the Season was over, and he would honor that promise, he had decided, and go home afterward. But the closeness of the Raycroft family, the warmth of their dealings with one another and with their friends and neighbors, had only strengthened his resolve and his yearning finally to be master of his own home. And so he had decided to cut short his visit and go home to Sidley Park after only two weeks. It was already late August and the harvest would be ready soon. He longed to be home for it this year and to stay home. Now his mother's letter had put a dent in his dreams. It appalled him that she appeared to have been so little affected by the events of five years ago. Or perhaps she was merely trying to make amends in the only way she knew how. It was her dream to see him settled in life with a wife and a few children in the nursery. They were interrupted before he could reply to Raycroft's invitation by the arrival in the breakfast parlor of Miss Rosamond Raycroft, John's young sister, who was 1... *Revue de presse* Another exquisitely crafted Regency historical that brilliantly blends deliciously clever writing, subtly nuanced characters, and simmering sensuality into a simply sublime romance. *Booklist*