

[PDF] The Temporary Wife/A Promise Of Spring

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Description:

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 Tilden, 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 Rowling 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...

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