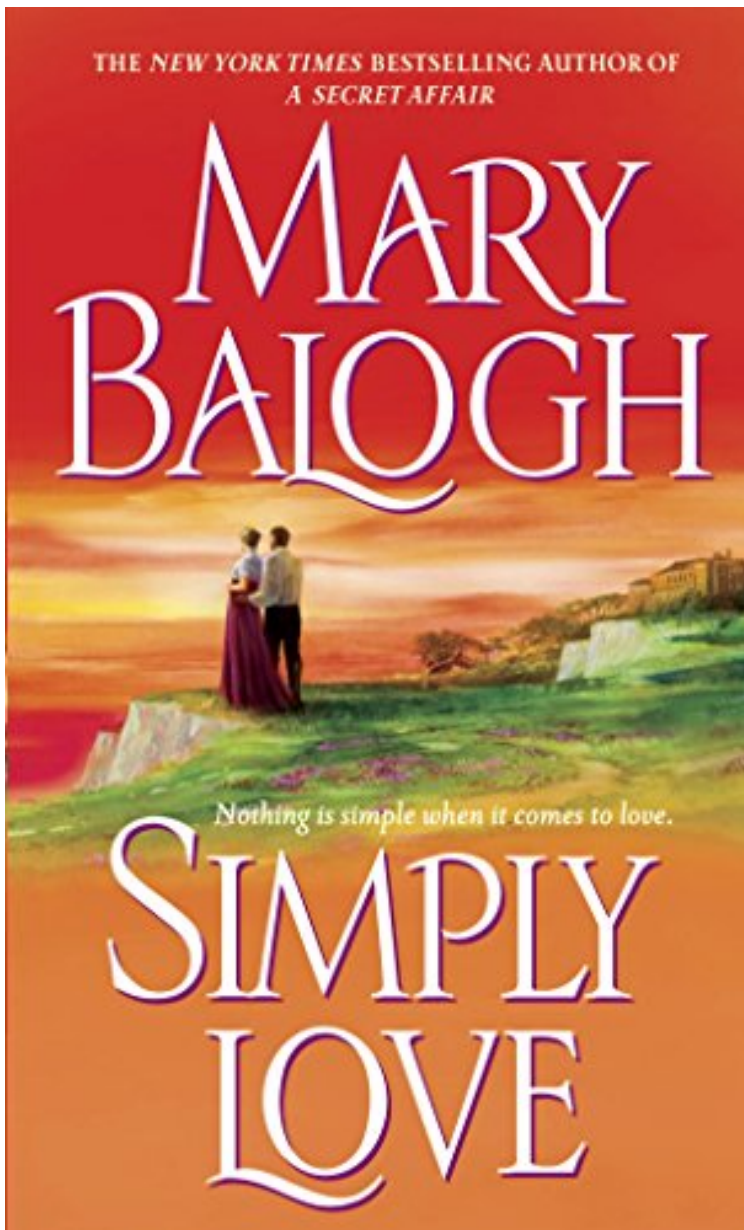


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# Simply Love



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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurBONUS: This edition contains an excerpt from Mary Balogh's The Secret Mistress.New York Times bestselling author Mary Balogh returns to the elegance and sensuality of Regency England as she continues the enthralling story of four remarkable womenfriends and teachers at Miss Martins School for Girls. At the center of this spellbinding novel is Anne Jewell, a teacher haunted by a scandalous pastuntil she meets a man who teaches her the most important lesson of all: nothing is simple when it comes to love. She spies him in the deepening dusk of a Wales eveninga lone figure of breathtaking

strength and masculinity, his handsome face branded by a secret pain. For single mother and teacher Anne Jewell, newly arrived with her son at a sprawling estate in Wales on the invitation of an influential friend, Sydnam Butler is a man whose sorrows and passions run deeper than she could have ever imagined. As steward of a remote seaside manor, Sydnam lives a reclusive existence far from the pity and disdain of others. Yet almost from the moment Anne first appears on the cliffs, he senses in this lovely stranger a kindred soul, and between these two wary hearts, desire stirs. Unable to resist the passion that has rescued them both from loneliness, Anne and Sydnam share an afternoon of exquisite lovemaking. Now the unwed single mother and war-scarred veteran must make a decision that could forever alter their lives. For Sydnam, it is a chance to heal the pain of the past. For Anne, it is the glorious promise of a future with the man who will dare her to reveal her deepest secrets before she can give him all her heart.

Chapter One

The crocodile of schoolgirls neatly uniformed in dark blue that was making its way along Great Pulteney Street in Bath at the spanking pace set by Miss Susanna Osbourne, one of its teachers, was proceeding from Miss Martin's School for Girls on the corner of nearby Daniel and Sutton streets in the direction of the Pulteney Bridge and the city itself on the other side of the river. The two lines consisted of only twelve girls, the others having gone home just the day before with parents or guardians or servants for the summer holiday. The twelve were Miss Martin's prized charity girls, supported at the school partly by the fees of the others and partly by generous donations from an anonymous benefactor. This benefactor had kept the school afloat when it would have been forced to close its doors several years ago for lack of funds and had enabled Miss Martin to achieve her dream of being able to offer an education to the indigent as well as the more well heeled. Over the years the school had acquired a reputation for providing a good and broad academic education to young ladies of all social classes. The charity girls had nowhere else to go during the holidays, and so two or more of the resident teachers were forced to remain in order to care for them and entertain them until school resumed. This summer all three resident teachers had remained: Miss Martin herself, Susanna Osbourne, and Anne Jewell. Miss Martin and Miss Jewell strode along at the back of the line of girls. Not that it normally took three teachers to accompany one group of twelve on an outing, since the pupils at the school were very well disciplined: at least, they were once they had been there for a week or two. But it was the first day of the summer holiday, and they were on their way to Sally Lunn's tearoom for the famous buns served there and for tea, a much anticipated annual treat that the paying pupils never enjoyed. Miss Martin and Miss Osbourne were going to Sally Lunn's with the girls. Miss Jewell was not, but since her destination lay along their route, she walked with them. Her son, David, was sandwiched between two of the girls, and chattered away merrily to them though they were both several years older than he. "Why would you give up a chance to take tea in the cramped confines of Sally Lunn's with twelve noisy, giggly schoolgirls in order to take it in the refined atmosphere of an elegant, spacious drawing room with the rich and titled, I do not know, Anne," Miss Martin said dryly. Anne laughed. "I was specifically invited for today," she said, "but you would not put off the visit to Sally Lunn's until tomorrow. It was very unsporting of you, Claudia." "Very practical of me," Miss Martin retorted. "I would have been strung up from the nearest tree by my thumbs if I had suggested any such postponement. So would you and Susanna. But really, Anne, taking tea with Lady Potford is one thing. She has been kind enough to you in the past. But to take tea with that woman!" By that woman she meant the Marchioness of Hallmere, the former Lady Freyja Bedwyn, sister of the Duke of Bewcastle. Miss Martin had once been governess to Lady Freyja, who had frightened away a whole string of governesses before her. Miss Martin had left too, but more in outrage than in fright. She had left in the middle of the day, on foot, carrying all her worldly possessions with her, having refused either severance pay or a letter of recommendation or transportation from the Duke of Bewcastle. She had figuratively thumbed her nose at the lot of them. Anne had been invited to take tea with Lady Potford on Great Pulteney Street because Lady Potford's grandson, Joshua Moore, the Marquess of Hallmere, was in town staying with her as were his wife and children. "I have been invited because of Joshua," Anne said. "You know how good he has always been to me and David, Claudia." He had been her friend at a time when the whole world had turned against her so it had seemed. He had even provided her with some financial support for several years when she was close to being destitute, giving rise to the very distressing and quite erroneous rumor that he must be David's father. To say that he had been good to her was markedly to understate the case. Susanna had started the girls singing a song in rounds, and they sang out lustily, heedless of any attention they might draw from passersby. Miss Martin, severe looking and ramrod straight in posture, did not blink an eye. "And if I had suspected for one moment," she said, "when you applied for the position of mathematics and geography teacher here four years ago, Anne, that that woman had suggested

this school to you, I would not have hired you in a million years. She came to the school a few months before that, snooping around with her offensive, supercilious air, noting every worn spot on the carpet in the visitors' parlor, I do not doubt, and asking if I needed anything. The nerve of it! I sent her packing in a hurry, I do not mind telling you." Anne half smiled. She had heard the story a dozen times before, and all of Miss Martin's resident teachers knew of her undying antipathy toward the aristocracy, particularly toward those unfortunate enough to bear the title of duke, and most particularly to the one who bore the title Duke of Bewcastle. But Lady Hallmere came in a very close second on her blacklist. "She has her good points," Anne said. Claudia Martin made a sound that resembled a snort. "The least said on that point the better," she said. "But lest you misunderstand, Anne, I am not one whit sorry that I did hire you, and so I suppose it was just as well that at the time I did not understand the connection between Lydmere in Cornwall, where you came from, the Marquess of Hallmere, who lived at nearby Penhallow, and Lady Freyja Bedwyn. Miss Osbourne." Her voice rose above all other sounds as the girls paused in their rounds, and Susanna turned a bright, laughing face and halted the line. "Lady Potford's, I believe," Miss Martin said, indicating the house next to which they had stopped. "I would rather you than me, Anne, but have fun." David detached himself from his position in the line to join Anne, Susanna grinned at her, and the crocodile continued on its way toward Sally Lunn's beyond the abbey on the other side of the river. "Good-bye, David," a few of the girls called, bolder than they would normally have been when out in public the holiday spirit prevailed. "Good-bye, Miss Jewell. Wish you were coming too." Claudia Martin rolled her eyes and struck off after her cherished girls. As Miss Martin had just indicated, it was not the first time Anne had called upon Lady Potford at her home on Great Pulteney Street. She had called herewith some trepidation with a letter of introduction four years ago when she first came to teach at Miss Martin's school and she had been invited to return several times since. But today was a special occasion, and looking down at nine-year-old David after she had rapped the knocker against the door, Anne could see the light of excited anticipation in his eyes. The Marquess of Hallmere was his favorite person in the world even though they did not often see each other. Joshua had been invariably kind to him, though, when they had met twice when Anne and David had been invited to spend a week of a school holiday at Penhallow, the marquess's country seat in Cornwall, and twice when the marquess had been in Bath and had called at the school to take David out in his curricule. And he never forgot to send gifts for birthdays and Christmas. Anne smiled down at her son as they waited for the butler to open the door. He was growing up fast, she thought ruefully. He was no longer an infant. He behaved rather like one, though, when they stepped inside and could see that the marquess was coming down the stairs to meet them, grinning cheerfully. David dashed toward him, all childish eagerness and voluble chatter, and was swept off his feet and spun about in a circle while he laughed joyfully. Anne, looking on, felt an almost painful constriction about the heart. She had poured out a mother's love on her son for nine years, but of course she had never been able to provide him with a father's love too. "Lad," the marquess said, setting David back down on his feet, "you must have a few bricks in the sole of each shoe. You weigh a ton. Or maybe it is just that you are growing up. Let me see now. You must be . . . twelve?" "No!" David chuckled gleefully. "Never tell me you are thirteen?" "No! I am nine!" "Nine? Only nine? I am speechless with amazement." The marquess ruffled David's hair with one hand and turned his smile on Anne. "Joshua," she said, "how good it is to see you." He was a tall, well-formed man, with blond hair, a handsome, good-natured face, and blue eyes that almost constantly smiled. Anne had always loved him with feelings that had occasionally bordered on the romantic, though she had never allowed them to spill over into passion. As plain Joshua Moore he had also been her friend when she was a governess at his aunt and uncle's house and after she had been dismissed. His friendship had been of infinitely more worth to her than any unrequited passion might have been. Besides, she had loved another man when she first became acquainted with Joshua Moore. She had even had an understanding with that man and considered herself betrothed to him. "Anne." He took both her hands in his and squeezed them tightly. "You are in remarkably good looks. The Bath air must suit you." ...Présentation de l'auteur **BONUS:** This edition contains an excerpt from Mary Balogh's *The Secret Mistress*. New York Times bestselling author Mary Balogh returns to the elegance and sensuality of Regency England as she continues the enthralling story of four remarkable women friends and teachers at Miss Martin's School for Girls. 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