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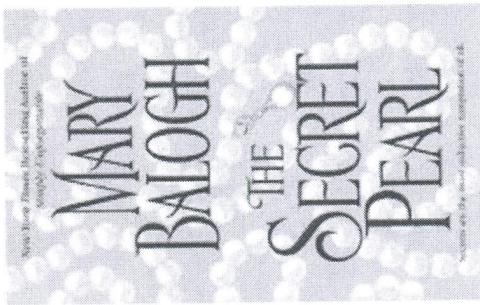
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by Mary Balogh (Author)



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Editorial Reviews

From Booklist

In this Regency tale of two tortured souls who find joy together, Fleur, on the verge of starvation after fleeing a lascivious guardian and murder charges, turns to prostitution on the streets of London. Her first customer is a scarred gentleman who pays her triple after discovering that he has taken her virginity. Then, to her great surprise, Fleur finds employment as the governess to Lady Pamela. How? Her sole customer was Adam Kent, the Duke of Ridgeway. Grievously wounded in war years ago and believed dead, Adam lost his estate and his fiancee to his brother. Finally, he was able to reclaim his position as duke and Sybil as his bride, but he never could regain Sybil's affection. Balogh puts two highly honorable characters into a seemingly impossible situation and keeps the reader guessing the entire time as she manages to finally create a -happily-ever-after ending. *Diana Tixier Herald*

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Book Description

Mary Balogh has no equal when it comes to capturing the complex, irresistible passions between men and women. Her classic novel, *The Secret Pearl*, is one of the *New York Times* bestselling author's finest—a tale of temptation and seduction, of guarded hearts and raw emotion...and of a love so powerful it will take your breath away....

He first spies her in the shadows outside a London theatre, a ravishing creature forced to barter her body to survive.

To the woman known simply as Fleur, the well-dressed gentleman with the mesmerizing eyes is an unlikely savior. And when she takes the stranger to her bed, she never expects to see him again. But then Fleur accepts a position as governess to a young girl...and is stunned to discover that her midnight lover is a powerful nobleman. As two wary hearts ignite—and the threat of scandal hovers over them—one question remains: will she be mistress or wife?

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Product Details

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74 of 76 people found the following review helpful:

★★★★★ **One of Balogh's very best; poignant and heartwrenching**, August 26, 2002

Reviewer: Dr W. Richards "wmr-uk" (Canada) - See all my reviews

TOP 500 REVIEWER REAL NAME™

There aren't many writers of historical romances - especially set in the English Regency period - who can make their heroine a prostitute, have the reader know about it right from the start of the book, and not only get away with it, but have the readers on the heroine's side from the beginning. But Balogh's done it, and more than once too. The Secret Pearl opens with Adam, Duke of Raybourne, emerging from the Drury Lane Theatre, parting from his friends, and seeing a sad-looking prostitute standing in the shadows. Something makes him approach her; despite the fact that she isn't throwing out any lures to him at all, he hires her. And, despite the fact that sleeping with prostitutes isn't something he makes a habit of, he takes her to a room in a run-down inn to use her.

This, we find, is Fleur's first night as a prostitute; having gone two days without food and unable to get a job, she has decided to sell the only remaining asset she has: herself. Her client, though, makes the experience almost as bad as it could possibly be: he is clinical and direct about what he wants, and - not knowing that Fleur is a virgin - he hurts her.

Afterwards, Adam does feel some guilt, and he feeds Fleur as well as giving her three times as much money as she asked for. And then he sends his secretary to ensure that she is offered a job - as governess to his daughter. His motives, he assumes, are simply philanthropic: he hates the thought of a gentlewoman down on her luck having to survive on the streets, and he feels guilty for not having realised before it was too late that she wasn't accustomed to her trade.

So Fleur takes up residence in the Duke of Raybourne's estate, delighted to have found a refuge both from her life in London and from the horrors from which she ran in the first place. Until the Duke of Raybourne comes home, and she discovers that he is the same man who fills her nightmares, the man who hurt her, the man who, in her dreams, rapes her nightly. And yet, as the days go by, he is also the man who comforts her, who protects her and who offers her a safe refuge.

And there are many more complications in what is already a complex story: Adam, of course, is married, and he is an honourable man who will not betray his marriage vows, despite his lapse in London - the only time he has ever been unfaithful. And Fleur is running from a murder charge. And her tormentor is even closer than she imagines.

Balogh creates a wonderful, believable portrait of what seems to be an impossible relationship. Adam, appallingly scarred both internally and externally as a result of Waterloo plus private torments, and who was cruelly rough with Fleur when he hired her as a prostitute, does not seem to be the ideal romantic hero - and yet he is, in every way. Fleur, a possible murderer, a prostitute, does not seem to be the ideal heroine, either - and yet she isn't at all what she seems, although she did certainly sell herself on the streets. But how is it possible that she could fall in love with the man who haunts her nightmares? How could a decent, married man fall in love with another woman? But Balogh pulls it off so convincingly that I could barely put the book down.

The Secret Pearl is a classic which will have you reading breathlessly, eager to find out what happens next. It's poignant, heartwrenching and utterly romantic, and it's a classic. I can't for the life of me imagine why Balogh's current publisher hasn't tried to reissue this; it would be yet another best-seller for her. As it is, the best you can do is to buy it second-hand, if you can get hold of it - and that's not easy, because those of us who do have it will NOT let go of it!

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30 of 32 people found the following review helpful:

★★★★★ **I know why this book won for best regency romance that year**, December 3, 2001

Reviewer: **Lee Haskell** (CHARLESTON, SC United States) - See all my reviews

REAL NAME™

The Secret Pearl is Mary Balogh at her best. The Secret Pearl is romance at it's best! I finished this book last night hours after I should have been asleep. When I can't put the book down like this, I know it's a 5 star read.

Adam is scarred from his battle in Waterloo but he is scarred on the inside too. When this Duke sees a quiet unassuming prostitute standing in the shadows of a theatre, he is drawn to her although he has remained faithful to his marriage vows since he married the current duchess 5 years before. He doesn't know why the prostitute stays on his mind after their fateful night but we find out as he eventually does that he was meant for her and she for him. The prostitute is Fleur, a lady down on her luck or so it would seem. Fate, it seems had let Adam and Fleur down for many years but smiles on Adam and Fleur on this fateful night. Of course Adam and Fleur would disagree then that fate was smiling on them. For that is the night that Fleur decided she was not going to go without food for the 3rd day in a row. She can live or die and she makes her choice to live knowing that the only thing she had to sell at that point was her body. The employment agency had all but laughed in her face when she sought employment without references. She tells Adam that she had been standing there for a day or so but noone else had wanted her. Adam doesn't wonder why as he looks Fleur over and notices her dull scraggly hair, her thin and drawn body, and her dried cracked lips.

Adam and Fleur are complex characters, much more than the usual two dimensional characters we get from your average romance that is churned out every month. Even the villians aren't just evil for the sake of being evil. They are also complex and most have their reasons for their weaknesses.

Adam is not a martyre. Nor is he perfect. He is simply an honorable man. (I don't want to spoil anything for those about to read the book but I don't like men who cheat so don't think you'll have to accept any less in this book if you're of the same nature. When I say honorable, I mean it in every way) Fleur has every reason to believe Adam is a monster based on her first impression of him. The romance is about how Fleur gets to know Adam and he her. But more than anything it's about two people who should have nothing in common but has one main thing in common: Neither have been loved nor cared for in a very long time although they are themselves loving and caring people.

I love it when the man shares his feelings with the love of his life. And I love the way the story is told. You get her side and then his side but it's done so smoothly you don't feel any interruptions or jerks in the telling of the love story. When he declared his feelings to Fleur and her vision became blurred, so did mine. I'll admit it. I cried. But I cried because it was such a well written book. But Mary always draws me in emotionally like that. And it's not the heavy depressing felt emotions, the kind that I can only handle now & then. (this is a true romance, not a tear-jerker docu-drama) This is light enough for a warm all over kind of feeling. But don't be misled about this being a complex book as far as reading it goes. There are no prerequisite readings, you don't have to recall your history lessons, you do not have to read the first 100 pages before you get to the real story. This book allows one to escape to a different world that Mary is so good at delivering and as usual, you're already involved in the story from Chapter one.

If you're a Mary addict like I am, then this is a must read for you. This book is definitely one of my top 5 Mary Balogh books from a list of 43 books I've already read of hers. If you're new to Mary, I urge you to get this book and catch up on your sleeping and chores before

you start THE SECRET PEARL because you won't be able to put the book down once you start!

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Customer Reviews

Average Customer Review:  Write an online review and share your thoughts with other customers.

 A good read..., April 30, 2007

Reviewer: **Trixie** (WI) - See all my reviews

This is a good book and the only problem that I had with it is that the two main characters fall in love even though one of them is married. But when I heard about the marriage he had with his wife I wasn't so mad even though it still doesn't make me too happy but all in all this is a good read.

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1 of 1 people found the following review helpful:

 An excellent story and a romance `out of the common way', January 5, 2007

Reviewer: **Auntie Helen** (Kent, England) - See all my reviews

Mary Balogh doesn't seem able to write a bad book, although some of her earlier books feel a little less rounded than the later ones (her "Slightly" series and "Simply" series). The Secret Pearl is an older book, written in 1991, but in no way does it fail to match up with her newer books - this is a brilliantly written and touching story, although it probably wouldn't appeal as much to the person who just wants to read a straight romance of the "wham, bam, thankyou mam" variety.

Tell me, when was the last time you read a book which had, as its heroine, a prostitute who is also a murderer? And when was the last time you read a book where the hero was ugly, scarred, used said prostitute (being unfaithful to his wife) and then, when she was terrified of him, contrived to keep her close at hand so that she got over her fear? Hmmm, takes a while but no, haven't read any other books like this one. And, having read what I've said there, our hero and heroine don't seem very heroic at all. Far from it!

But Mary Balogh's books always seem to delve deeper into the realities of life in Regency England - not just the gowns and balls and glamour but the seedier underside, particularly for those who have no money or have fallen foul of society in some other way. These